

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
THURSDAY 22 NOVEMBER 2018

VULNERABLE PERSONS' RESETTLEMENT SCHEME
REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES
(Contact: Keith Butler Tel: (01993) 861521)

1. PURPOSE

To update the Committee on the meeting of the Working Party appointed at the last meeting.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the report be noted.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1. At the meeting of the Committee held 20 September 2018, Councillor Rosa Bolger requested the inclusion of an agenda item on this matter. The Committee decided to establish a Working Party to consider the matters raised, and the relevant draft minute is included in the [Appendix](#) to this report.

3.2. This report is intended briefly to update the Committee on the meeting of the Working Party which took place on Monday 15 October.

4. MEETING OF THE WORKING PARTY

4.1. The meeting was attended by all five Councillors appointed by the Committee, with officer attendance from Jon Dearing (Group Manager, Customer Services), Kerry Wykes (Client Support Lead) and myself. Councillor Duncan Enright sat in as an observer.

4.2. The Group Manager gave a detailed summary of the programme, specifying the key members of the original project team and explaining the use of partners including Connections and Asylum Welcome and translators in the period since the first family arrived.

4.3. He went on to explain: (i) the steps taken to house each of the families, and the reasons for those; and (ii) the subsequent and continuing support available to them, including with learning English. In relation to language, this had proved challenging because of difficulties in securing providers, and the different skills levels attained.

4.4. He also referred to the balance attempted to be found between offering support when and as needed, and helping each of the families to achieve independence. The resettlement programme had been established as a five year scheme, but he anticipated that support would remain available after that time, on the assumption that the families applied for and were granted leave to remain in the UK.

4.5. The Working Party was then given an update in relation to the current situation of each of the families, and the Group Manager and Client Lead answered detailed questions about the support which had been and would be offered and available.

- 4.6. The Group Manager then reported on the funding of the scheme, and presented an overview of expenditure to date. In response to discussion, he reiterated that support would remain available as necessary at the end of the five-year funding period, and reminded councillors that much of the support offered was comparable with general day-to-day work carried out within the service. Councillor Bolger referred to a document produced by the Local Government Association and Migration Yorkshire entitled “Resettling Refugees: Support after the first year” and it was confirmed that staff were fully aware of it.
- 4.7. In response to a question, the Group Manager explained the use of other agencies when appropriate and confirmed that that would continue to be the case as and when necessary.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1. Councillors were highly appreciative of the information and assurance provided, and thanked Jon and Kerry for their work and input for this meeting, but also in relation to the scheme as a whole.
- 5.2. Councillors considered that the Working Party could meet again in around six months for an update. It was explained that the Working Party did not have a remit to do that, and that it was usual for a Working Party to operate on a “task and finish” basis, and suggested that this could be considered by the Committee in due course.

Keith Butler

Head of Democratic Services

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Date: 23 October 2018

Background Papers:

None

EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF THE 20 SEPTEMBER MEETING

35. VULNERABLE PERSONS' RESETTLEMENT SCHEME

Councillor Bolger had requested that this item was included on the agenda. She outlined the background to the resettlement scheme, under which the Government had wished to accommodate 20,000 Syrian families via a well-funded initiative with great potential for successful resettlement and integration. Six families had been accommodated in West Oxfordshire, and Councillor Bolger considered that the programme had declined after its first year, with insufficient support being provided for at least some of the families, and gave examples of her understanding of some of the issues. Councillor Bolger felt that her enquiries had not met with sufficient responses, and accordingly wished to initiate a full review of the programme and support for the families in West Oxfordshire, to include analysis of funding and expenditure.

The Group Manager, Customer Services responded with detailed comments about some of the problems reported by Councillor Bolger which in his opinion cast a different light on matters. He acknowledged that there had been some issues, but was confident that they had been addressed and that appropriate support was in place.

The Committee –

RESOLVED: That a Working Party comprising Councillors Beaney, Bolger, Graham, Leverton and Mead be established to consider the matters raised.