

10 September 2019

REVIEW OF LEWISHAM'S REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMME

There has been a general consensus by everyone involved in the Council's refugee resettlement programme that, with the first families having arrived in 2017 and the Council committing after the 2018 local elections to reshape the programme to take in additional 100 families, it would be very wise to hold an independent review that can help ensure that the best possible outcome for existing and future families.

As such, at the start of this year the Council commissioned CSI to undertake a review of the programme as delivered for the original 17 families who arrived in 2017. CSI have now produced a report from the review which includes a number of recommendations to which responses have been made as part of the Council report to the Housing Select Committee meeting on 18 September 2019.

The review highlights many of the positive areas of work in our original refugee programme. Undertaking London's most ambitious refugee resettlement programme was never going to be straightforward and I am pleased to see the review has found that the Council is committed to overcome any challenges that arise.

Another positive is that the review's findings did not reveal any unknown issues. The biggest common challenge has been ESOL provision, essential of course for opening the door to a fulfilled life in the UK. As noted in the report, the Council now has a new project management team (with capacity significantly increased by the recruitment of two dedicated officers earlier this year) which is expected to overcome these challenges and I have already seen the real difference this has made.

Additionally, since this review was commissioned, the Refugee Council and Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network are set to become our support providers for our new families. We now need (as the review envisages) to ensure that these two elements of the programme are properly joined up with the local community and volunteers via the newly set up Lewisham Refugee Welcome so that everyone involved, not least the families, have a clear understanding of roles and expectations.

As our new leadership team and our new support providers work more effectively both together and with the community, I am confident we will deliver this ground-breaking programme with increasing success. Three families have already arrived this summer with three more due in the next month and the rate of arrivals is set to increase in the months ahead.

Finally, I was particularly pleased to see that the reviewers found that all "staff and volunteers interviewed for this evaluation have shown great pride in their work, have been conscientious and diligent in their approach to the SVP programme and have demonstrated a great deal of care and concern for the findings". The support of the community and from within the Council for this programme has been overwhelming and is a key pillar of our common determination to make Lewisham a Borough of Sanctuary.

I am incredibly proud of this refugee programme and the fact that it was born out of a desire from our community in Lewisham who have also been amazing in providing support and friendship. I have been able to see families reunited after being separated by 8 years of civil war in Syria. These have been incredibly emotional experiences and every time I meet these families it reaffirms my own deep personal commitment to this project.

Cllr Kevin Bonavia

Cabinet Member for Democracy, Refugees & Accountability