

Refugee Update to Micheldever Parish Council 1st June 2016

The City Council is committed to working with our partners to assist in the national commitment to accept and resettle 20,000 refugees for Syria and other areas of the Middle East.

The effort locally is being coordinated by Hampshire County Council in partnership with all Hampshire district councils. Along with all our neighbouring councils, the City Council has committed to finding appropriate accommodation for at least two families each year. The combined efforts of Hampshire councils will ensure that the county takes its fair proportion of the 20,000 target over 5 years.

Winchester accepted its first family in 2015. They have settled in the city with the support of Council staff and the Red Cross. The next families coming to Winchester are expected in September.

Whilst there are many challenges that refugees face, arguably the most significant challenge in this area is the cost of Housing. The City Council is not using its own housing stock for this purpose, as with 2000 local residents already on our waiting list; demand for social housing is incredibly high. However, finding appropriate private rented housing at a cost that can be covered by housing benefit (which refugees do have to rely on, at least in the short term) is very difficult. We have been fortunate to have very positive support from the Cathedral and the local Diocese, who have helped to find properties. We are also engaging with the Rural Refugee Network in this search for private rented properties.

A further issue is that the two properties identified to date have both been large four bed properties. The landlords have been extremely generous and accepted lower rents than they could receive from the local market, but we do desperately need to locate some smaller properties to ensure housing is affordable and sustainable for families who are resettled to this area.

Last year, we did receive many well-meaning and generous offers of help and accommodation such as short term room lets. However, the Home Office are very clear that any resettlement should be to self-contained accommodation and through an assured tenancy with at least a six month but more preferably up to a two year commitment. If local residents are aware of any such accommodation where the owner may be prepared to consider offering a lease on a private rental basis, the Council would be keen to hear from them.

The Council's Housing Options team can offer support through its "City Lets" scheme, which could take on much of the hassle of arranging a managing a rental agreement. We have expertise and standard agreements and can even take on the day to day management of any tenancy agreement. In effect, we can offer a Gold Star letting agency service and bond at no cost to owners or landlords, who retain 100% of all rental income. **Anyone who is interested should phone the Council's Housing Options team on 01962 840222 or email them at housing@winchester.gov.uk.**

Thank you for your support.