

To: Cabinet
Date: 12 July 2023
Report of: Housing and Homelessness Panel
Title of Report: Future Resettlement Commitments for New Refugee Families

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Panel of the Scrutiny Committee recommendations for Cabinet consideration and decision
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Cllr Lizzy Diggins, Panel Chair
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing
Corporate Priority:	Deliver More Affordable Housing; Support Thriving Communities
Policy Framework:	Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28
Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.	

Appendices	
Appendix A	Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee

Introduction and overview

1. The Housing and Homelessness Panel met on 05 July 2023 to consider a report concerning Future Resettlement Commitments for New Refugee Families. The report, which is due for Cabinet consideration on 12 July 2023, recommends that Cabinet approves the resettlement of a minimum of 8 refugee families per year from any of the resettlement schemes highlighted in the report for a period of 5 years from 2023 to 2028, on the condition that the requirements in paragraph 21 of the report are consistently met to ensure scheme viability; and delegates authority to the:
 - Executive Director (Communities and People), in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, to agree the resettlement of additional refugees above this allocation (which will incur additional expenditure from

Home Office grant funding for support provision) subject to sufficient grant funding; approves the use of Home Office grant funding of up to £1,313,840 (see Appendix 2 of the report) to procure the provision of 2 years of person centred support for each refugee family arriving in Oxford during the 5 year period between 2023 -2028;

- Head of Housing in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing to approve the use of the Home Office grant funding to procure additional person centred support as required;
 - Head of Housing in consultation with the Head of Financial Services/S151 Officer, the Head of Law and Governance and the Cabinet Member for Housing to allocate the approved budget and enter into contract(s) with a provider(s) for the provision of person centred support.
2. The Panel would like to thank Councillor Linda Smith (Cabinet Member for Housing), Nerys Parry (Head of Housing Services), Richard Wood (Housing Strategy and Needs Manager), Alan Chandler (Senior Refugee and Migrant Officer) and Paul Reid (Rapid Rehousing Manager) for attending the meeting to answer questions.

Summary and recommendations

3. Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing introduced the report. There was an ongoing need to resettle refugee families, as globally there were circa 100 million forcibly displaced people. The commitments outlined in the report were consistent with Oxford's values as a City of Sanctuary and aligned with work to date supporting refugees. The proposed commitment to resettle 8 refugee families per year for 5 years was determined to be manageable and sustainable; the commitment was consistent with the commitment in previous years. A number of factors had fed into the proposed commitment to resettle 8 families per year for the 5 year period – including the availability of affordable accommodation in the City and capacity to offer wraparound support to those families.
4. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the rationale behind the commitment to resettle 8 refugee families per year for the next 5 years; whether the Council's commitment could be more ambitious; financial viability of the scheme; placement of families within the City; how the scheme was monitored; and the support available to refugee families.
5. In particular, the Panel sought clarification on the Council's scope to increase the number of families resettled per year. A tension was identified within the report, in that it stated the commitment was to resettle a *minimum* of 8 refugee families per year; but the report also stated if an excess of 8 properties per year was secured, then that excess would contribute to the following year's commitment. The two statements did not appear to align. The Panel was advised that the proposal was to resettle 8 refugee families per year, but if that target was reached quickly and additional properties were secured in any given year, there was a small amount of flexibility to resettle more than 8 families per year. However, any large increase to the commitment of 8 families per year was not possible as significantly more resource would be required. The Panel agreed

that this position was not set out clearly in the report and would benefit from clarification.

Recommendation 1: That the Council clarifies its position in relation to the flexibility within its commitment to resettle more than 8 refugee families per year for the next 5 years; explicitly stating that any significant surplus will be rolled into the following year's commitment, but that there is capacity to support a small number of additional families in any given year.

6. The Panel had a broader discussion around the differences in language used to describe individuals' status, depending on which scheme they arrived in the UK under. It was noted that the term 'refugee' and 'asylum seeker' were often used to describe individuals from Afghanistan and Syria, for instance, yet individuals from Ukraine were referred to as 'guests'. While the Panel acknowledged that this mirrored the language used by the Government within its various resettlement schemes, it agreed that there was no requirement for the Council to perpetuate feelings of inequality between individuals from different countries who had all fled similar situations of war and conflict by using the same potentially divisive language.

Recommendation 2: That the Council considers the language used within future reports and documents to ensure that individuals and families entering the UK having fled war, conflict and/or persecution are given equal status regardless of their country of origin.

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