

Council: 20 October 2015

Joint Motion in the names of Cllr Richard Cornelius, Cllr Alison Moore and Cllr Jack Cohen

Syrian refugee crisis

Council has great sympathy for the plight of refugees, notably those driven from their homes in Syria.

Council notes that the current refugee crisis is the greatest such crisis in Europe since World War II and represents the largest mass movement of people fleeing their homes and livelihoods since that war, with 4.1m people having fled Syria, and a further 7.6m internally displaced.

The scenes of human suffering played out daily on the news make us all conscious of the need for supranational and British Government action to end the conflict and allow normal life to be restored.

Council recognises that the vast majority of refugees that have fled Syria have been absorbed by neighbouring countries and notes that the UK has delivered over £1bn in aid, including large sums to support refugees in those neighbouring countries.

Council also notes that the government has agreed to resettle 20,000 refugees over 5 years in the UK.

Council recognises that Barnet is a place with acute pressures on housing. However it is a large borough with a proud tradition of helping those seeking refuge and is home to refugees and their descendants from all over the world. Indeed it is a borough whose own success has, in no small part, been built on the success of those who have previously sought refuge.

Council feels it would be wrong to shut our eyes to the situation of those in danger. Barnet therefore thanks the large number of residents who have already volunteered, donated or offered to assist those in need, and applauds the work of community organisations, notably Citizens UK, who have identified housing, schooling, GPs and even offers of employment in the borough.

Council commits to support their endeavours and to use its position as the leading organisation in the borough to inspire such generosity and enable others. Subject to compatibility with the government scheme and suitable funding, so as not to disadvantage our existing residents, we would commit to helping the community resettle at least 50 Syrian refugees in the borough as extra accommodation is found.

Council further recognises that many more people are likely to end up in the London boroughs as a result of this conflict, arriving via other channels (such as internal migration within the UK following initial resettlement). Council calls upon the Chief Executive to begin preparing plans to deal with this.

In the meantime, Council calls on officers to continue to take practical steps to support residents in assisting with the crisis; sign-posting information to help people donate and volunteer their services, such as those of a linguistic nature, or coordinate offers of accommodation.

Council notes that national government has the leading role in identifying, transporting and supporting refugees, but that every local authority in the UK has a part it can play. Council confirms that Barnet will do its bit.

Council therefore calls upon the Chief Executive to write to the Secretary of State and inform him of our borough's readiness to assist those in dire need, as we have done before and will do so again in the future.