

Minutes of Resettlement Programme Meeting held on Thursday 2nd June, 2016 at 2.30pm at Aras Contae an Chláir, New Road, Ennis, Co. Clare

Present: Councillors PJ Ryan (Cathaoirleach), Pat McMahon, Gerard Flynn, Mike McKee, Cathal Crowe

Leonard Cleary, A/Director of Service, Housing: Liam O'Connor, Administrative Officer, Housing: Orla Doolaghty A/Staff Officer, SMD

Apologies: Cllr John Crowe.

The a/director of service, Mr Cleary, outlined that the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration (OPMI) attached to the Department of Justice and Equality had given a briefing to Shannon municipal district councillors on the resettlement programme. A total of nine families (47 people) will be coming to Clare in June. Six families will be accommodated in Shannon while a further three will be accommodated in Sixmilebridge.

Mr. Cleary outlined that Clare County Council welcomed the refugees. He advised that an inter agency working group had been set up, lead by Clare County Council. The other agencies involved include TULSA, HSE, Limerick Clare Education and Training Board, Clare Local Development Company, Department of Social Protection, Clare County Childcare Committee, Clare Immigrant Support Centre and An Garda Síochána. A resettlement support worker will be in place to work with the refugees for 12 months.

Cllr Flynn stated he didn't support the way the meeting with officials from the Department of Justice and Equality had been set up and had the view that the meeting should have been held in public and wondered about legal issues. Cllr Ryan acknowledged what the Department officials had to say and did not consider there was any legal issue in the discussion during the in-camera meeting. Administrative officer, Mr O'Connor clarified that he was requested by the cathaoirleach to arrange a meeting with the officials from the Department of Justice & Equality in a statutory meeting of the municipal district. When discussions took place with the Department, it was confirmed the meeting could only take place in-camera.

Cllr Flynn voiced his concerns about the current housing waiting list that has over 3,000 on the list. He said as chair of the Housing SPC he had requested up to date figures to be collated, and confirmed he would not support the resettlement programme until additional funding is made available for re-housing those in the humanitarian crisis. Cllr Flynn stated that the Department of the Environment, the government and the taoiseach needed to deal with the housing crisis before he could support housing refugees and stated that funding for the resettlement programme was not in Clare County Council's housing budget.

Cllr Ryan outlined that all councillors are supportive of the refugee families in crisis and welcomed them into the communities and confirmed a request was made to the Department for further funding for the resettlement programme. He said he had also queried with the Department whether security vetting had taken place and it had been confirmed that three checks had taken place on each refugee entering Ireland.

Cllr McKee expressed his disappointment that a meeting of the Housing SPC had taken place prior to this special meeting of Municipal District of Shannon, as there had been an outcry on social media where it had been reported that refugees are to be housed by Clare County Council. He called for additional leasing or purchasing of housing to house current applicants on the waiting list to balance out the housing of refugee families. He felt the integration of refugees should have been on a more phased basis. He welcomed the refugees into the community.

Cllr McMahon outlined that Co. Clare has a great reputation in welcoming refugees and welcomed the 9 new families. He recognised a housing crisis in Clare that needed to be addressed. He highlighted that officials of Clare County Council have to abide by government policy as per the resettlement programme.

Cllr Flynn queried why councillors will not be notified when allocations are made and the a/director indicated that this would be a matter to be discussed at full Council.

Cllr Cathal Crowe apologised for being late to the meeting. He welcomed the Syrian families. He expressed the view that ‘leapfrogging’ of the housing system could cultivate resentment and lead to future racism. He suggested that refugees should be placed in a reception type centre and then progress through the housing system. Cllr Crowe requested that a letter be issued to each applicant on the housing list and tenants to outline the situation and how the refugees will be housed. Mr Cleary confirmed that resources were not available for this, but said he would request the Council’s communications officer to issue a press release on the issue.

The business of the meeting then concluded.

Meetings Administrator

Cathaoirleach