

Item 4 - Support for Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Tulat Raja, Community Cohesion and Racial Harassment Officer at Cambridge City Council, and Eddie Stadnik, Chief Executive Officer at Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum

The purpose item is to inform Panel Members of support Cambridge City Council is providing to refugees and asylum seekers part of the formal resettlement schemes. Eddie Stadnik will also inform members about the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support and Information Service, which Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum is running to support refugees and asylum seekers who are not part of the formal resettlement schemes. This has been funded for two years by Cambridge City Council's Community Safety Team.

In 2016, Cambridge City Council commissioned Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum to undertake a piece of research on Asylum Seekers and Refugees who were then residing in Cambridge¹ who arrived in Cambridge through their own efforts in order to learn what issues they may face and what support they may need.

Some of the issues facing the refugees surveyed were:

- Access to English Language classes: participants did not have information on classes, found that there is a lack of classes available to them and/or found costs prohibitive
- Lack of information as to whether their qualifications are recognised in the UK
- Unfamiliarity with the job market
- Access to appropriate housing: many lived with friends and family, which contributed to overcrowding, for instance
- Health issues: particularly mental health problems, and difficulties in accessing treatment due to language barriers
- Difficulties in accessing immigration advice that is important in helping them present cases to the Home Office

¹ Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum (2016), 'A Report On Asylum Seekers & Refugees In Cambridge 2016'

- Difficulties in accessing welfare benefits in being unable to understand what they are entitled to and how to go about claiming benefits due to the complexity of the benefits system

One of the report's recommendations was to provide an established, specialist service for Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Cambridge that is able to respond to needs highlighted by their research participants, and to respond to the increasing numbers of asylum seekers and refugees coming to the city

The level of support available to asylum seekers and refugees who are not part of formal resettlement schemes was a key issue of concern that organisations shared during the council's consultation on the Single Equality Scheme 2018-2021. This issue was identified as an area for action in the Single Equality Scheme.

A report by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees in 2017² indicated that a two tier system of support has developed between those helped through resettlement schemes, such as the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme, and those arriving and resettling under their own efforts. Refugees arriving in the UK through a resettlement route receive accommodation and support to access services and find employment. The All Party Parliamentary report stated that this support is not available for refugees who have gone through the asylum system.

² All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees (2017), 'Refugees Welcome? The Experience of New Refugees in the UK': https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0004/0316/APPG_on_Refugees_-_Refugees_Welcome_report.pdf