

Dear Colleagues

### **Afghan refugee resettlement programme update**

Following my Briefing on 27 August when I referred to negotiations between the council and the Home Office, I can confirm that a hotel in the borough of Ashford is now being used as a temporary home for a number of Afghan families. It is part of a Home Office plan to find temporary resettlement for men, women and children fleeing their war-torn country, people who have worked with our Armed Forces and British government in Afghanistan.

We fully support this and I was pleased to meet some of these individuals to welcome them to Ashford. The Home Office has asked us not to reveal the name or location of the hotel due to respecting the privacy of the families involved.

The hotel is being used as a holding place until the families can be moved to permanent accommodation within the UK. Some may stay only a short period while this happens, while others may be in the hotel for a longer time.

Our officers are busy providing welfare support to these families while they are in Ashford. We are helping to make arrangements for any medical support, provide translation services and be on hand to offer any advice to ensure their time in the borough is as smooth as possible. We will receive funding from the Home Office to cover the costs of our involvement.

This development is totally separate to our recent announcement that we are increasing our efforts to meet the crisis by offering to re-home more Afghan nationals. Our decisive action – which has cross-party support – has attracted positive media and public attention.

We have already identified accommodation for three households but are looking to increase this to take up to ten families. As with our award-winning Syrian scheme, no social housing is



being used as we continue to work with partners in the private rented sector.

The response from the people of Ashford and organisations like the Ashford Volunteer Centre has been magnificent. Staff have been inundated with offers of help and

donations of clothes, shoes, toiletries and other items which will go a long way to help the Afghan families staying at the hotel and also the families that we are looking to integrate into our local communities. This photo taken at the hotel shows some of the clothes donated by warm-hearted residents.

Our hard-working staff – many of whom have volunteered to give up their time to help with the effort of organising such an enormous humanitarian task – been overwhelmed by the generosity and kindness shown by local people and on their behalf I'd like to thank everyone

who has offered their help and given donations of clothes.

Indeed such has been the huge response that today we are able to issue appeals for specific items of clothing and it would be very helpful if colleagues can share this information with their local residents. These are all for ladies, and include long sleeved blouses and tops (nothing low cut), long skirts and dresses not fitted (modest clothing), full length trousers, cotton pashminas or scarfs, long length kaftans (buttoned or open but with no bands as need to be worn over other clothing), black leggings and underwear (all types and sizes but must be new).

Clothing to be dark if possible and if we can ask that any of these donations are made as previously during in office hours and to the Civic Centre.

Just a reminder that colleagues will find a set of FAQs, which you may wish to share with your local residents.

<https://www.ashford.gov.uk/housing/housing-help/afghan-refugee-resettlement-programme/>

Finally, my heartfelt thanks goes out to everyone who has responded so warmly and positively to welcome our Afghan friends to Ashford – we often talk about ourselves as a caring borough and it's at times like this that we realise just how important that is as we help these people come to terms with the traumatic events they have lived through.

Gerry Clarkson CBE, BA (Hons)

**Leader - Ashford Borough Council**

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