

## St Thomas Church Lancaster Info Evening: Asylum Seekers and Refugees

### UK Asylum Seeking Process – Pat Allen

- We need to be aware about the politics of using the term Asylum Seekers (AS) and Refugees (R), or indeed the work migrant. Would we ever call ourselves migrants – were we to move to Australia for example, would we instead use the word expat?
- There is a difference in meaning between AS and Refugees. When a person begins the process of applying to be a refugee, they are called as Asylum Seekers. Once they are given permission or leave to remain in the country in which they are seeking refuge, they are called as refugees.
- Asylum Seekers (AS) can claim approx. £35/per person per week to cover everything apart from housing.
- AS also receive legal aid.
- They are not allowed to work but can volunteer and work shadow.
- If AS are granted leave to remain it is for 5 years, after which they must reapply.
- If they are granted leave to remain, AS have 28 days to find new accommodation before their £35 is stopped but it takes 42 days to request and receive welfare benefits from the government as a resident in the UK. Many go homeless in this time.
- 65% AS applying for leave to remain are refused the first time around; after this only 1/3rd succeed when they appeal to a tribunal and the remaining 2/3 can appeal again to the High Tribunal but most fail. If all 3 attempts fail, they are forced to return to their home country or country they came from.
- Detainment of AS is unusual but can happen with no notice.
- In 2014, 42% AS applicants were granted leave to remain.

### City of Sanctuary Lancaster & Morecambe

- An umbrella group of organisations that builds friendships and cooperation between local residents of the area and AS & refugees (R).
- SERCO are a government agency paid by the Home Office with the task of housing AS and R. AS & R must agree to live wherever they are housed or stop receiving help, or even be deported. They can be uprooted at any time.
- In Lancaster & Morecambe district there are currently around 150 AS – 30 of whom are officially approved as refugees now. We are expecting to welcome about 300 AS over the next few years.
- David Cameron made a promise to resettle refugees directly from camps in and around Syria. In July 2017 ten families of about 4 to 5 people are coming to Lancaster & Morecambe district under this programme. These people will have a different status to AS as they will be coming in as refugees directly.
- The nature of housing for AS in the area (student houses) lends itself to individual male occupation, but as more family housing opens this will become more balanced.

### Caroline Jackson – Green Party Local Government Councillor

- The Council ensures SERCO housing is decent – this is done by a housing officer.
- Lancaster & Morecambe currently has around 30 houses for the 150 AS but many AS leave because they cannot find work in this area.
- The Council places AS in schools and provide the services available to any local residents, but nothing extra to this.
- The Council will decide where the ten families from Cameron's resettlement programme will live. They were supposed to be admitted earlier but Storm Desmond of winter 2015 delayed this. There is currently a huge lack of housing for these families though.