
Report To:	Inverclyde Council	Date:	24 September 2020
Report By:	Louise Long, Corporate Director (Chief Officer) Inverclyde Health and Social Care Partnership	Report No:	SW/39/2020/SMc
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Subject:	Support for Aegean Refugees – Remit from Policy & Resources Committee		

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report, following a request from the Council is to provide advice in respect of correspondence received from the Scotland branch of Europe Must Act, a movement calling for the decongestion of refugee camps in the Greek Aegean Islands and a humane migration policy in Europe.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Committee requested that a report by Officers be submitted to the September 2020 meeting of the Inverclyde Council on this subject. This report is provided in the context of a separate report regarding the Council's wider review of its involvement in the UK Government Resettlement Schemes. That report is being presented to the next meeting of the Policy and Resources committee.
- 2.2 The Europe Must Act movement launched a campaign in March calling on councils across Europe to make a pledge for the immediate resettlement of asylum seekers from the Aegean hotspot camps and is asking the Council to support the campaign by:
- writing to the Home Office, asking the UK government and UNHCR to support the decongestion of the Aegean Island camps and allow UK councils to take inhabitants of these camps as an immediate emergency measure under the new UK Resettlement Scheme; and
 - Pledging to relocate refugees from the Aegean Island camps.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended the Council:
- a. Agrees in principle to supporting the Aegean Refugee Scheme as outlined in Section 5, subject to the scheme being fully funded
 - b. Agrees that following response from the UK Government regarding funding, a report be submitted to the Health & Social Care Committee regarding proposals to participate in the new resettlement scheme.

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Europe Must Act have recently contacted the Council to ask that the authority write to the Home Secretary, the Home Office and the United Nation High Commission for Refugees to request that the UK agree to accept refugees currently living in camps on the Aegean islands in Greece. This short briefing provides background and context to that request. This to be considered within the context of the Council's review of its involvement in UK Government Resettlement Schemes and a further report to the service committee which will follow, subject to approval by the Corporate Management Team. That report, again subject to CMT approval will make recommendations to recommence the refugee resettlement programme and consequently would have a direct bearing on the current issue.
- 4.2 There are currently over 50,000 refugees living in Greece, having arrived by land and sea. The majority, around 38,000 live on the mainland with the rest, about 11,000 living on Lesbos, Chios, Kos, Samos and Leros. They have no current legal right to travel further into Europe. Conditions in the camp are intolerable and there is constant conflict with the local population. The majority of the refugees are from Afghanistan with the second largest grouping coming from Syria. Others come from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Palestine, Iran and some other countries.

5.0 PROPOSAL

- 5.1 Europe Must Act are asking the Council to support their efforts to have the UK agree to relocate unspecified numbers of the refugees into local authority areas across the country. The Government's new Resettlement Scheme, which was due to come into effect in April this year, is seen as the easiest and best mechanism to address this. Inverclyde has already agreed, in principle, to participate in the new Scheme following the successful arrival of a number of families and individuals through the Afghan Relocation Scheme, the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme and the Vulnerable Children's Scheme. The new Resettlement Scheme has been put on hold due to the Covid 19 pandemic. A report to Committee will be presented shortly outlining proposals for the Council to participate in the new Resettlement Scheme.
- 5.2 The proposal from Europe Must Act is that people currently seeking refuge on the Aegean islands be relocated to the UK as part of the Resettlement Scheme. If that were accepted, local authorities would receive funding from central Government to assist in accommodating and supporting these refugees and helping them to integrate into the local community. That funding would be at the same level as the Syrian and Children's Schemes. As previously stated, Inverclyde has a proud record of integrating refugees into the area over the last five years and is committed to the new Resettlement Scheme. In addition, we already have established Afghan and Syrian communities in the area, the largest groupings of refugees on the Aegean islands.
- 5.3 At this stage, the Council is being asked to write to the Home Office and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees to support the proposal and to agree, in principle, to take a number of families and individuals into the area. The services recommendation is that the Council should agree to do this whilst at the same time reinforcing that this requires to be fully funded under the existing mechanism in order to be of genuine support to the individuals concerned. The agreement to accept refugees would not include Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children as the Council is not currently in a position to be able to accommodate and support this category of migrant.
- 5.4 The agreement to accept refugees would not include Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children at this time as the Council is not currently in a position to be able to accommodate and support the children. The number of children being looked after in Inverclyde currently exceeds our local provision of alternative care placements. Our residential houses are over capacity, all our foster placements are fully utilised and we are funding more external placements from private providers than we have previously to meet the demand of caring for children from the local authority area. This quota has risen again during the pandemic with more children requiring alternative caring arrangements and accommodation to ensure their safety and wellbeing. The capacity issues shall continue to be reviewed and if the situation changes this position will be revisited in the future.

5.5 A fully detailed report to the Health & Social Care Committee will follow detailing the Council's proposals to participate in the new Resettlement Scheme, including financial, support and staffing arrangements.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

Finance

6.1 Financial Implications:

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report £000	Virement From	Other Comments
N/A					

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact £000	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
N/A					

Legal

6.2 No implications

Human Resources

6.3 No implications

Equalities

6.4 Has an Equality Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES
	NO - X

Repopulation

6.5 No implications

7.0 CONSULTATIONS

7.1 None

8.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1 N/A