

Policy and Sustainability Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 1 June 2021

Petition for Consideration: Resettle refugees and asylum seekers from the Aegean Island camps in Edinburgh

Executive/routine Wards Council Commitments	Executive All
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1. Recommendations

- 1.1 To consider the terms of the petition 'Resettle refugees and asylum seekers from the Aegean Island camps in Edinburgh' as set out in Appendix one.

Andrew Kerr

Chief Executive

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Report

Resettle refugees and asylum seekers from the Aegean Island camps in Edinburgh

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Policy and Sustainability Committee is asked to consider a petition at this meeting. The petition asks the Council to:
- increase the number of refugee places pledged from 500 to 750 over the next five years
 - ensure a sustainable resettlement process by working with organisational partners and private individuals
 - engage with the Home Office on a number of refugee policy issues
 - encourage neighbouring Councils to adopt a similar stance.

3. Background

- 3.1 The City of Edinburgh Council at its meeting on 22 June 2017 agreed the Petitions Committee be discontinued and that petitions would be sent to the responsible executive committees or in future locality committees for consideration.
- 3.2 A valid petition entitled 'Resettle refugees and asylum seekers from the Aegean Island camps in Edinburgh' has been received. The petition received 372 signatures.
- 3.3 At the meeting, the committee can:
- a) request a report on the issues raised by the petitioner and the committee;
 - b) agree that the issues raised do not merit further action and/or
 - c) agree to take any other appropriate action.

4. Main report

- 4.1 Edinburgh's resettlement commitment was previously considered by Policy and Sustainability Committee on 25 February 2020. At that meeting, the current commitment of resettling 100 people per year (500 people over five years) was agreed as the level that was sustainable given existing pressures on the city's housing stock.

- 4.2 The Council can, at its own discretion, vary the number of resettlement places pledged at any time. The pressures previously cited remain and due to recent changes in legislation and practice are likely to increase further over the coming year. Any increase to the current resettlement commitment needs careful consideration within that context and further scoping work undertaken before officers can come to a view.
- 4.3 Members may also be aware of the recent announcement by the Home Office of a plan to resettle to the UK of approximately 3,000 Afghan locally employed staff and their families over the coming few months. Councils are urgently being asked to consider participation and officers are currently scoping the potential for Edinburgh's involvement.
- 4.4 Since November 2015, the Council has resettled four hundred and ninety people (one hundred and fifty-four households) under the UK's formal resettlement programmes. This is slightly below the original pledge figure of five hundred places which would have been achieved but for the global travel restrictions resulting from the COVID pandemic.
- 4.5 COVID restrictions have prevented any meaningful level of resettlement throughout 2020/21. Resettlement has now re-started and several cases previously accepted for resettlement under the Syrian Resettlement Programme (SRP) in Spring 2020 but prevented from travelling at that time are now being resettled under the successor UK Resettlement Programme (UKRS).
- 4.6 Resettlement in Edinburgh has benefitted from a wide range of formal and informal support from all sectors (public, private and third sector) as well as private individuals. Officers note that support with gratitude and acknowledge the significant contribution it has made to the sustainability of the resettlement process. This will continue to be an essential element of resettlement in the future.
- 4.7 Criteria for resettlement under the formal UK schemes is set by the Home Office and people who already travelled to Europe are specifically excluded. Their inclusion would require a change of policy by the Home Office and this is one of the topics on which the petition seeks the Council's engagement with the Home Office.
- 4.8 If members are minded to support the terms of the petition and encourage neighbouring authorities to do likewise it is recommended advocacy is considered through existing networks such as COSLA Leaders, COSLA Resettlement Lead Officers group and City Region networks.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 The committee will determine next steps at this meeting.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 Not applicable.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 There are no stakeholder/ community impacts arising from the consideration of the petition.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 Minute of the City of Edinburgh Council 22 June 2017.

9. Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix 1 – Petition - Resettle refugees and asylum seekers from the Aegean Island camps in Edinburgh

Appendix 1 - Resettle refugees and asylum seekers from the Aegean Island camps in Edinburgh

Date made available for signatures	Date closed for signatures	Petitions Title and Petitions Statement	Wards affected
1 April 2021	24 May 2021	<p>Resettle refugees and asylum seekers from the Aegean Island camps in Edinburgh</p> <p>We, the undersigned, call upon the City of Edinburgh Council to prioritise the moral and ethical obligation of Scotland and the United Kingdom (UK) to welcome and resettle refugees.</p> <p>We call on the City of Edinburgh Council to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pledge to resettle a minimum of 750 refugees in Edinburgh between 2021-2026, as part of the new UK Resettlement Scheme, an increase of 250 people from the Council's 2015-2020 pledge. 2. Commit to working with local agencies, residents, landlords and charities to resolve any barriers to resettlement and ensure a sustainable resettlement process. 3. Write to the UK Government, specifically the Home Office and Chris Philp, Minister for Immigration Compliance to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Communicate willingness to welcome and support more refugees in Edinburgh. b. Acknowledge desperate and urgent conditions in camps on the Aegean Islands and call for those asylum seekers living in abhorrent conditions to be included in the new UK Resettlement Scheme. c. Advocate for a humane migration policy in the UK, which should include the decongestion of the camps in the Aegean Islands. This is supported by UK Must Act and Europe Must Act. d. Advocate for a humane migration policy in Europe more widely, regardless of Brexit. We cannot ignore our connection to, and complicity in, migration policies in Europe upon refugees and asylum seekers. 	All

		<p>4. Invite surrounding council areas to uptake similar goals to resettle additional refugees within their local authority areas and collaborate with the City of Edinburgh Council to ensure the refugees are adequately and ethically supported during the resettlement process.</p>	
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