

REQUEST AND RESPONSE

Have the Council decided in principle to take Syrian families, and if so how was this decision taken, and has the whole Council endorsed such a decision? What further factors does the Council need to ascertain before taking more Syrian refugees ? Is your Scrutiny Committee looking into this matter, and if so, how far have they progressed with any investigation ?

Could you please confirm the following:

- 1.) Was the Council or any individual Council member asked in any way by the Conservative party or the national UK government to make an offer to take refugees/asylum seekers in the area ? Was the proposal initially put forward by an Civil Servant, local Councillor/s and/or any other individual or any type of group, political, charitable or any NGO ?

Has the Council been requested to take Syrian refugees by the Home Office, and if so, please could you disclose the full contents of any such letter/request from the Home Office ? Have the local MPs, Douglas Carswell , or any others, been involved in any way with the Council on this, and if so, what has their involvement been ? Have they advised the Council to take Syrian refugees, or have they advised the Council to act with caution?

Initial approach was from Essex County Council seeking information as to whether Tendring District Council was able to assist with accommodation.

There has been no involvement with local MP's

- 2.) Has the Council decided in principle to take a specific number of Syrian refugees, and if so, how many, and was this advised on by any official or unofficial body, or national UK government? Are you proposing to give preference to "refugees" over local citizens ? The Home Office advice is that the need is around families and single males. Will you be taking any single males ? Will you be taking any unaccompanied children, and if so, what is their age range, and where will they be living? What is the current position regarding numbers of refugees in Tendring and how does the treatment of existing refugees differ financially and in all other ways, to the treatment of the new Syrian refugees ? Are there effectively two classes of refugee now ?

The Council has not made any decision as to the number of refugees it is able to assist and has advised that it will consider available options when it is known what it is being asked to assist with.

There are currently no refugees receiving assistance from Tendring District Council

- 3.) In respect of any Syrian families who could be taken to live in the Council's area, what is the makeup of these families, the ages, sexes, and religion. If muslim, whether sunni, shia or other? What are the total numbers involved ? Surely you cannot make such commitments without having the information about who would potentially be coming ? Are you able to decide on who specifically comes to live in the area, or does the Home Office decide this for you?

See (2)

Tendring District Council will work with Essex County Council to determine the appropriate level and nature of response.

Has the Council offered to take more refugees/asylum seekers, if asked to do so by the UK government? How long is the Council committed to having the refugees living in the area, because the Home Office is giving leave for them to live in the UK for five years, with full recourse to public funds. Is the Council prepared for the possibility of these refugees staying longer or permanently, and what guarantees have the Council had from the national UK government on funding for up to five years, and funding after five years? Once the refugees are in the area of the Council and the Council decides that that they no longer want the refugees, how can the Council remove them from the area?

See (2)

- 4.) Has the Council made preparations, financial, social and otherwise, for those who have currently may be offered to be accommodated in the area, and has the Council done so, in respect of any possible additional families? What are such preparations, if any? Should any offers have been delayed until the Council was fully informed and prepared on this issue?

N/A

- 5.) Will the families concerned be entitled to be joined by other members of their families, increasing on the current numbers ? If so, what is the worst scenario of increased numbers? As these refugee families will be entitled to be joined by other members of their families, does this mean that the Home Office decides on additional numbers coming to live in the area, and that the local authority has no control of the matter?

N/A

- 6.) What is the cost of taking any Syrian refugees agreed to live in the area, taking into account ALL aspects, including housing, living and re-settlement costs, education, health, social services, interpreter services, and whatever else is needed, on an initial and annual basis. What are the projected costs over the next five years ? How much

funding will be coming from the central UK government towards covering these costs? What funding, if any will be coming from ANY other sources ? If these figures are not known or not clear, how can the Council offer to take refugees on the basis of not being aware of the full information?

N/A

- 7.) What is the effect on all services for resident citizens in the area of taking Syrian refugee families (and possibly more) ? As it has been admitted there will be such an effect and attempts will be made to minimise them, the resident citizens are entitled to this information. If the effect is deemed to be marginal, just what does this mean, because marginal still means there will be an effect?

N/A

- 8.) In view of any offer to accommodate the Syrian refugees/asylum seekers, why has a similar offer to accommodate local citizens who are homeless or in unsuitable housing, not been made ? Is this not a case of giving preferential treatment to people who have made no contribution to taxes and rates, than to those who have ? What is the housing situation for local citizens, and how many are waiting for Council provided and other accommodation ? As accommodation is likely to be given to refugees, which could have been given to local residents, why have the local residents' needs not been given priority, or at least equal treatment?

Any Syrian refugees will be assisted into accommodation via the same process as any other persons requiring accommodation

- 9.) What is the actual status of the Syrian families who may be coming to live in the Council's area ? Are all of their number definitely from Syria, or are there any from other countries? Are they all refugees with their request for asylum having been accepted, or are any of them asylum seekers ? Has the Council offered to take refugees without regard to their status ? Surely the Council has a responsibility to its local citizens to ensure there is certainty about the status of refugees, before accepting any to live in the area ? Is the Council just going to follow Home Office instructions on these issues, or is the Council going to have a definite say on them ? If matters go disastrously wrong, can you confirm that the Council will take full responsibility for all the consequences of taking refugees, and will not seek to blame the Home Office or UK government, because it is Councils themselves who have offered to take refugees and it is not a compulsory national UK policy to do so?

N/A

- 10.) What exactly are the strict security vetting checks these families have had ? Have the Council verified these checks for the safety and security of the citizens of the area, or have they relied totally on the UK national government's assurances on this ? Is the Council fully satisfied that all members of these families had documents, and that if they did, that they were not fake ? What steps were taken to verify the checks with the Syrian government, as they would be the most likely authority to be able to be able to provide verification ? What sort of criminal record checks, if any, have been carried out ? What type of health checks, if any, have been carried out? Is the Council certain that none of the Syrians are believers in the wahabbi strict sunni form of Islam, and/or believe in Sharia law ? Whilst these matters are normally the responsibility of the Home Office, what steps is the Council taking to verify that checks done by the UK government have in fact been carried out to the highest of standards, and what full compliance and safeguarding checks is the Council carrying out in these regards ? It has been stated that initial vetting and selecting is done by the United Nations. How can the Council be sure about any such procedures done by the UN and/or the UK Home Office?

N/A – the Council has not been asked nor provided any accommodation to date

- 11.) What authority would the Council feel they had in order to take Syrian families into the area ? It has never been an election issue and they must be aware that they have no mandate from the citizens of the area to adopt such a policy. In view of this, will they hold a local referendum in the area, so that local citizens can have their say in the matter ? Even if the Council have decided that they have general powers of competence and housing, this is disputable, as how can the Council maintain this, as principles of good governance are at stake ? Legally, there can be local and Parish referenda on this issue, and legally, according to Home Office guidelines, Councils have to ascertain levels of "support" or otherwise on the issue of taking refugees. It appears that the Council has not done any such gauging of local opinion, so when will this take place and when will the Council have referenda on this most important matter?

N/A

- 12.) Some people are on record as stating that this policy is one of responding positively to a major international crisis and is morally right, doing their bit, and other similar comments, which effectively mean nothing. However, it is known that numerous bodies in Syria, including the Christian Churches there, have appealed to the west to not encourage their Syrian people to exit their country, when they are needed in their country. So why is the Council potentially ignoring the wishes of the Syrian government and the other bodies in Syria, who feel that the policy of taking "refugees" is exactly what ISIS Daesh and the Saudi government want. Is not the Council policy of taking Syrian refugees effectively supporting the objectives of ISIS Daesh and the fundamentalist Gulf States, who want the end of the secular all faith supporting Syrian government ? How can it be morally right to encourage people to run away from persecution, instead of supporting them in standing to fight to look after their families and homeland ? How is such a potential Council policy in any way "positive" in helping the situation in Syria ? Is not the Council aware that the cost of

funding the Syrian families in the area could help many, many more families if spent instead in Syria itself and in the Syrian region, on those who have become displaced because of the fighting? How can it be “moral” to exercise a policy which assists a few a very few, as opposed to be able, with the same money, to help many more people ?Is not the Council aware that at least one of the refugee camps in Jordan, the £100 million purpose built one in Azraq, has 115,000 places available in an area safe from persecution? Any Council decision to take refugees, is making a political decision, which is not subjective, but is in support of the policy of the national UK government. As some of UK Councils have decided not to take refugees, has the local Council reviewed whether a decision to take Syrian refugees is the right course of action for the local Council, the local citizens and indeed the refugees themselves ?What would be the political reasons for a decision to take refugees, because this is a Council political decision, and not a UK government directive ? As it has been said that assisting genuine refugees rather than economic migrants, is very important, how is the Council actually verifying this, apart from just relying on what the UK government says, particularly in view of the news about the Azraq camp and indeed others ? Indeed it has even been said that those coming will include professionals such as doctors. How can these people be considered “vulnerable,” and why is the Council considering taking them, when they are very much needed in their own country?

N/A

- 13.) Has the Council made any communications or research on the subject of refugees/asylum seekers in Europe generally, the costs, the costs to their communities, the increases of rape, murder and other violent crimes. Is the Council aware of the possibly social and community consequences, or is the Council just taking chances with the best interests of local citizens? Is the Council aware of the problems already caused by those refugees who have arrived in local UK communities, and is the Council prepared to review such information, and in relation to any policy regarding Syrian refugees?

The Council is working with Essex County Council and will make Safeguarding judgements when appropriate

- 14.) Has the Council made any efforts to check on what reasons any Syrian refugees possibly coming to live in the Tendring District Council area, need to be in this country and not in their own? The vast majority of Syrian people are in government controlled areas in Syria and are becoming increasingly more safe, as the ISIS Daesh alliance is pushed into retreat. One million Syrians have returned to Syria since the Russian intervention. Even though there approximately three million Syrians in countries such as Lebanon, Jordon, Iraq and Turkey, and six million “displaced” persons in Syrian government controlled areas, such people are increasingly becoming more safe and secure and able to return to their homes in Syria. It is felt that a number of Syrian refugees/asylum seekers are military draft dodgers. Is the Council certain that none of the Syrians offered residency in the area are not avoiding fighting for their country against ISIS Daesh and their associates ? Whilst this is also the responsibility of the UK government and the Home Office, does not

the Council believe that it should be ascertaining whether taking refugees into the UK and therefore into its own locality, is a the best policy for helping the refugee crisis ? In particular, does not the Council have a primary responsibility to its own citizens and their health, welfare, security and financial and responsibilities?

N/A

- 15.) In view of the fact that Syria will need help with the re-building of their country, what are the plans of the Council to re-settle the Syrian families back in Syria ? Will these families be able to stay in the local area even when others are returning to Syria ? Should the Council not be relying on the Home Office and national UK government on such issues, but have regard for the best interests of their local citizens first, and not take any refugees unless and until there are definite plans for the refugees returning to their country?

N/A

- 16.) How many asylum seekers and refugees are already in the local area, as a result of them gaining entry to the UK over the last few years? What has their cost been to the cost to the Council and how much of that cost has come from central UK government funds? What has been the effect on the local community in terms of costs, crime rates and social issues ? What have been the cost and other implications, in respect of education, housing, health and other resources ? If you do not have such information, why don't you ?If you have difficulty obtaining this information, do you not have a good governance responsibility to local citizens to ensure you obtain this through all the resources which can provide it?

There are none in the area.

- 17.) Does the Council have any responsibility for "young" asylum seekers, and if so, where are they housed, and are safeguarding issues fully taken into account ? Is the Council aware of the problems faced by other Councils, particularly in Kent, where they are in the front line of such problems ? Is the Council aware of the gang rape of a teenage girl by "Syrian" "young" asylum seekers in a local care hostel?

No

- 18.) Has the Council provided any funding to any local bodies, whether charities, political groups, or NGO's, who are supporting the current Syrian families settling in the local area, does it intend to do so in future, and has it done so in respect of any other previous refugees/asylum seekers ? What exactly is the up to date position on this ? Does the Council provide any support by direct or indirect financing, or direct or

indirect support to refugee groups, charities, political groups or NGO's, who are assisting illegal migrants ,such as those at Calais?

No

19.) Would the Council be providing the same level of assistance to Syrian refugees/asylum seekers as other Councils, and does the Council liaise with other Councils on this issue ? What is the liaison with the County Council on this matter and what is their view?

What specific requirements are made by the Home Office to local authorities in respect of refugees, and is the Council able to comply with all of these ? Has the Council questioned the policy of the Home Office in respect of dispersing Syrian refugees across the country on a quota proportionate type basis ? Previous immigration into the UK has broadly involved different communities settling into their own community areas in different parts of the country, and this policy seems to have worked relatively well. Does not the Council believe that the policy of splitting up Syrian refugees into small numbers throughout the UK could mean that those refugees are potentially isolated from their own communities, which makes settling into new communities more problematic? Does not the Council believe that it could also be far more costly with more impact on local Council resources, with the policy of Syrian refugees being spread across the UK thinly, rather than kept in larger numbers together in local areas which are more suitable for providing for their needs ?

Tendring Council is working with Essex County Council – Tendring District Council Is not in a position to provide a view from Essex County Council.