

Refugee Donations Centres

Report by John Blair, Director Resources

1 Purpose of Report

To update the Council on the arrangements being established in association with local churches for the public, community groups, Council staff and other organisations to make donations which can be collected for onward transit to support the refugees living with camps within Europe.

2 Background

- 2.1 At its meeting on 3 November 2015 the Council considered a report by the Joint Director Health and Social Care which referred to the motion unanimously agreed by Council on 22 September 2015 which instructed officers to report on *“what support the Council could provide by acting as a central point for donations of essential items and practical support to these refugees”*.

Furthermore the report required that officers report on “how items (collected) could be delivered via a third party”.

This report sets out the proposed arrangements established by the Council together with the indicative costs based on the Council working in partnership with churches.

- 2.2 Many members of the public, including members of local churches and community organisations, are concerned regarding the current refugee crisis and are keen to offer aid to refugees – both the large numbers in camps in Europe and the relatively smaller number of refugees who may arrive in Midlothian.

On 13 January 2016 the Church of Scotland Religious Representative on the Council Education Cabinet, Rev Ruth Halley, and the Convener of Lothian Presbytery’s Church and Society Committee, Rev Sandy Horsburgh contacted churches in Midlothian to seek their urgent help with a Midlothian-wide, whole community response to the refugee crisis.

- 2.3 A loose partnership called ‘MidAid’ has been formed comprising the Council, churches, community groups and the business community working together to offer all people in Midlothian the opportunity to donate specific items which are needed.

3 Proposal Arrangements

3.1 Donations

In the initial stages, the Council and partners are linking with a distribution through Edinburgh Direct Aid (<http://www.edinburghdirectaid.org>, SC 021007) to provide urgently needed winter clothing and other aid for mainly Syrian refugees in camps in Europe. In the longer term the Council intend to use a variety of routes for getting the aid to where it is needed. However, at the moment there is an urgent need and immediate action is required.

The appeal is addressed to the whole community, not just to church members. Edinburgh Direct Aid has advised that the following items are currently required:

- Winter clothing
- Shoes and boots
- New underwear
- Toiletries
- School supplies

It should be noted that the items may be subject to change depending on the situation within Refugee camps.

3.2 Receiving Centres

Local receiving centres are being set up in the towns and villages across Midlothian which will allow donations to be received from the public, community groups, Council staff and other organisations.

A number of churches have already begun to act as receiving centres for donations and others may join in as wider publicity is released. To date the churches which are receiving donations are:

- Penicuik North Kirk
- Gorebridge Parish
- Loanhead
- Mayfield
- Newtongrange
- Bonnyrigg
- St Nicholas Buccleuch, Dalkeith

Large scale posters and banners for the front of the church buildings acting as collection centres have been prepared and a local press and publicity release is now in preparation.

3.3 Uplift and transport

The Council is providing vehicles and drivers and will be making regular uplifts from churches and transporting the goods donated to Edinburgh. The first uplift from Penicuik North Kirk took place on Wednesday 27 January 2016.

It is proposed that the Director Resources using existing Council Resources will establish arrangements to provide an uplift service of donated items to a temporary collection centre to be based at the Council's vacant archive facility in Bonnyrigg.

4 Resources

The indicative additional costs of supporting this proposal to cover publicity, signage, additional transport costs and sorting are estimated to be in the region of £2500.

The Director Resources confirms that these costs can be accommodated from within existing Divisional Revenue Budgets.

Accordingly the Director Resources will establish the necessary arrangements to monitor the levels of donations received and any associated cost implications based on the volumes.

5 Risks

There is a reputational risk if the Council does not support the Refugee Donation arrangements as set out in this report.

6 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

Themes addressed in this report:

- ☐ Community safety
- ☐ Adult health, care and housing
- ☐ Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- ☐ Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- ☐ Sustainable growth
- ☐ Business transformation and Best Value
- ☒ None of the above

7 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

Midlothian Council and its Community Planning Partners have made a commitment to treat the following areas as key priorities under the Single Midlothian Plan:

- Early years and reducing child poverty
- Economic Growth and Business Support
- Positive destinations for young people.

- The proposals in the report indirectly contribute to the above priorities.
- 8 Adopting a Preventative Approach**

Addressing the requirements refugees within overseas camps will assist in preventing the need for longer term or crisis support and support the international humanitarian effort.

9 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

It is intended to work with International Aid Agencies, communities and other organisations including the churches and faith groups as part of a Midlothian wide response to the ongoing European Refugee situation.

10 Ensuring Equalities

The Council in partnership with Church Groups will work with all individual groups and organisations who wish to support the Refugee situation.

11 Supporting Sustainable Development

There are no direct sustainable issues arising from this report

12 IT Issues

There are no direct IT issues arising from this report

13 Recommendations

Council is recommended to:-

- a) Note the establishment of local collection centres at churches as listed in section 3.2;
- b) Note the intention of the Director Resources to co-ordinate the collation and distribution of donated items in the short term at the vacant archive facility in Bonnyrigg; and
- c) Request the Director, Resources to report to Council in the event of the level of donations received being significant and resulting in any budgetary implications.

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Background Papers: