

KIDLINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

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Clerk: Rachel Faulkner

30 September 2022

Mr Phil Riley
Director, Detention and Escorting Service
3rd Floor Apollo House
36 Wellesley Road
Croydon
CR9 3RR

Dear Mr Riley

Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre – Proposal

Thank you for attending our Policy and Finance committee meeting on 18 August. The Council discussed the proposal at their meeting on 29 September and have asked me to write to you with the following comments and concerns.

At a high level the Council is concerned about the need to hold so many immigrants and feel that the resources and energy should be channeled into faster processing of asylum seekers applications and the resolution of their status. This would avoid the need for costly and unnecessary detention.

Your letter tells us the centre is planned to support the newly signed migrant deportation agreement with the Government of Rwanda. However, recent coverage in the media about advice provided to the UK Government questioning the legality of the agreement, damning reports

of the Home Office's illegal detention and planned removal to Rwanda of torture and trafficking victims, and accounts of serious human rights failings in Rwanda itself all seem to indicate that this deal may come to nothing. So far, due to legal challenges, no migrant has been sent to Rwanda.

Meanwhile, it is reported that the rate of the Home Office's processing of asylum applications has slowed drastically, and that there is currently a massive backlog of over 100,000 individuals waiting for an initial decision on their case, a quadrupling of the figure since 2016. Surely it would be more humane and a better use of our taxes to speed up the resolution of claims, to facilitate alternatives to detention, and to develop and support voluntary return schemes than to construct migrant prisons, where, in the UK, alone among the OECD countries, individuals can be detained indefinitely. All other states have time limits on migrant detention.

From what the Council has read and from your presentation we understand that the centre accommodation would be increased to house 400 adult males, that residents would be fully detained and that health care would be commissioned by the NHS. It remains unclear how you will be dealing with issues such as mental health support and operational oversight. Given the history of Campsfield house before it closed we would like further clarification on these points.

In your letter of 28 June you refer to the importance of the Shaw recommendations for the new centre. As you know, Steven Shaw, the former Prisons Ombudsman, was asked by the Home Office to carry out reviews of immigration detention in 2016 and 2018. His highly critical, detailed reports make difficult reading. They each contain over 50 recommendations for reform, ranging over many areas including mental and physical health care, support for at-risk detainees, record keeping, staff training, accommodation, access to legal support, case-work handling and others.

Mr Shaw's view was that migrant detention was psychologically damaging to all detainees and that it was much too readily used. His overall conclusion was that:

'a smaller, more focused immigration detention estate.....would be

more protective of the welfare of vulnerable people and deliver better value for the tax-payer. Immigration detention has increased, is increasing and – whether by better screening, more effective reviews or formal detention time limits - it ought to be reduced.'

Shortly afterwards, in 2019, Campsfield House was closed. The following statement was issued by the Home Office announcing the decision:

'The closure of (Campsfield House) is part of Home Secretary Sajid Javid's commitment to cut the number of people detained at any given time and improve the welfare of detainees. These reforms were announced in response to Stephen Shaw's review into welfare of vulnerable people in detention. By next summer, the Home Office will aim to reduce the immigration detention estate by almost 40% since 2015.

Immigration Minister, Caroline Nokes said:

I am grateful to all the staff who've worked at Campsfield over the years for their commitment and professionalism. Now is the right time to modernise and rationalise the detention estate. We are committed to ensuring we have a fair and humane immigration system that provides control, and detention must only be used when we are confident no other approaches will work.

In response to Stephen Shaw's second review of the government's approach to vulnerable people in immigration detention, the Home Office is committed to working with charities, faith groups, communities and other stakeholders to develop alternatives to detention, strengthening support for vulnerable detainees and increasing transparency.'

The plan to re-open Campsfield House seems therefore a complete reversal of the Home Office's own policy of only three years ago. There has been no clear explanation given for this radical change of direction. Furthermore, given the assurance in your letter that recommendations made in the Shaw reviews would be taken into account in the re-opened centre, we would ask you to give detail assurances about the conditions in any reopened centre.

If this proposal does go ahead we are concerned for the residents of Evenlode Crescent in terms of access. There were also some historic

problems with drainage and a pumping station for which in the past the ministry were charging residents for repairs and maintenance. We would want to be assured that such a situation does not occur again

We look forward to a response to the points raised in this letter and further updates on the proposals

Yours sincerely

Rachel Faulkner, Clerk to the Council
For and on behalf of Kidlington Parish Council

Cc Layla Moran MP
Oxford West and Abingdon