BIBBY STOCKHOLM:
A PEOPLE'S INQUIRY

April 2024



Produced By

Care4Calais, Stand Up To Racism &
Portland Global Friendship Group

IN MEMORY OF LEONARD FARRUKU

Leonard Farruku was born on 29 January 1996, raised in Vorë, a town on the outskirts of Tirana. He was known as hard-working, kind and a talented musician. His mother, Shkëndije, a housewife, and his father, Petrit, a clarinet player, died when he was young. His two older sisters, Marsida and Jola, now live in Italy.

He died on 12 December 2023, on board the Bibby Stockholm, and is thought to have lost his life to suicide.



Photograph taken from: https://www.gofundme.com/f/tphag-leonard-farruku



This Inquiry was initiated after Leonard's death, and we dedicate it to his memory in the hope it may bring forth changes needed to avoid future tragedies.

Leonard's family are waiting for his inquest, and are calling for an independent investigation into his death.

The family have raised questions about conditions on the barge, including the vulnerability and complex mental health needs of those on board, who they say are at "elevated risk of suicide."

Their lawyers have raised concerns about Leonard's reported behaviour before and after he was placed on the Bibby Stockholm, and why he did not receive the support he needed.

"We will miss Leonard a lot. We will be forever heartbroken for the way he gave an end to his life. He was a lovely person who came to the UK to build a new life full of hope.

He fulfilled what the Home Office asked him to do, going on the Bibby Stockholm. We never ever will have peace in our minds, until the moment we find the truth about the circumstances inside that barge that contributed for our brother to commit suicide.

We feel the UK government should be held responsible for Leonard's death.

Our desire is to understand the truth about what happened to Leonard, and to make sure that the same thing doesn't happen to other asylum seekers. The way to do that is for the Government to carry out a full and independent investigation into Leonard's death."

Jola Dushku,
Leonard Farruku's sister

Our Demands

- Close the barge. No renewal of Contract.
- Halt all new arrivals.
- Improve mental health support.
- End segregation of people seeking safety.
- Invest in asylum claim decision makers.
- Introduce a centrally funded system which accommodates people seeking sanctuary in safe and suitable housing in communities, which in turn enables people to access local health services and rebuild their lives.
- Introduce safe routes for all people seeking safety.

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WHY IS AN INQUIRY NEEDED?

In April 2023, the Home Office announced its plans to house approximately 500 people on the Bibby Stockholm barge in Portland Harbour. There was no prior consultation with the MP, Dorset councillors, or with any local authorities. The refit of the barge, originally planned for 220 berths, more than doubled its capacity to over 500.

- After significant delays, concerns were expressed over fire safety on board. The Fire Brigades Union threatened legal action after not receiving satisfactory responses from the Home Office regarding fire safety concerns.
- The HO sent letters of removal (to the barge) to individuals in hotels. Letters were not sent to named individuals but were template letters with room numbers added by hand by hotel staff. Recipients were given less than 24 hours notice. Many recipients of the letters were assisted by Care4Calais in finding legal representation, and subsequently did not move to the barge.
- On 7 August 2023, a small group of people seeking asylum were transferred onto the vessel with minimal notice, only to be urgently evacuated a few days later due to the discovery of a hazardous strain of Legionella on board. This group had to be housed in emergency hotel accommodation, with some returning to the barge in September 2023.
- Multiple calls from NGOs and legal representatives for the Government to halt the transfer of men to the Bibby, due to concerns over safety, were ignored.
- On 12 December 2023, Leonard Farruku died by suicide on board the Bibby Stockholm. At least one other resident showed suicidal behaviour that night.
- Leonard Farruku's family have called for an inquiry into his death.
- Carralyn Parkes, local resident, has challenged the Home Office, and subsequently Dorset Council, in the High Court over the lack of planning consultation when placing the barge in Portland.
- The National Audit Office concluded in March 2024, that the Bibby Stockholm, and other similar sites, cost the Government *more* than housing people seeking asylum in hotels.
- The Home Affairs Select Committee has raised a number of concerns over the running of the barge. (see appendix)

Portland and Weymouth is an area of significant deprivation. The Home Office approach to the introduction of the Bibby Stockholm, and the lack of consultation or engagement with the local community, caused overwhelming local opposition to the plans, significant local division, and increased the danger of serious racially motivated tension in the area.

Stand Up to Racism Dorset and Portland Global Friendship Group, together with Care4Calais and other voluntary groups, have provided practical support for the refugees on the barge. We have worked hard to undercut attempts to scapegoat refugees locally, as well as organising activities so that those living on the Bibby Stockholm can meet with local residents.

These efforts have faced extreme difficulty because of the Bibby Stockholm barge regime of segregation. Our attempts at support have often been frustrated by the Home Office and those contracted to run the accommodation.

It was these experiences - hearing from those seeking asylum on board, and finding that other bodies have raised similar concerns - which led us to believe an Inquiry was urgently needed before further tragedy occurred on the Bibby Stockholm.



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VISITING BARGE RESIDENTS

NADIA WHITTOME MP



By David Woolfall - https://members-api.parliament.uk/api/Members/4869/Portrait?cropType=ThreeFourGallery: https://members.parliament.uk/member/4869/portrait, CC BY 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=86689786

Successive Home Secretaries had refused and ignored my requests to visit the Bibby Stockholm barge, so following the death of one of its residents in December, I went to Portland to meet those living on the barge and the local community to find out what the government is hiding.

The testimony from the Bibby Stockholm's residents made clear that it should be closed. They described cramped, prison-like conditions, with insects in their food, difficulties accessing timely medical care and poor treatment by under-trained staff. They are restricted as to when they can exit and enter, as they are not allowed to walk and must instead take buses to travel from the port to pre-agreed destinations.

The Bibby Stockholm is built for 222 people, but there are over 300 people already living there, with plans to cram in even more. The men I met said that many of those aboard have mental health problems. One person told me he had experienced torture, despite Home Office guidance stating that torture survivors should not be housed there.

I fear the suspected suicide on board the barge in December will not be the last - the rate of suicide and self-harm among asylum seekers has doubled in the last four years.

This dramatic increase should tell us that there is something seriously wrong with how our system is treating people. Because the Bibby Stockholm's performative cruelty is just the tip of the iceberg - it's a symbol of the inhumanity throughout our asylum system and the Conservatives' false narrative that we have to treat refugees poorly for all of our sakes.

The government wants to pit migrants against local communities in a fight for services and resources. It wants us to believe that we have to choose between housing the homeless or providing accommodation for those seeking safety. The irony is that the Bibby is not even saving the taxpayer money - the Home Office admits that it's costing the government more per person than it would to use hotels. The truth is that all our services have been vandalised not by migrants but by Conservative governments - a fact the party is keen to distract from.

ACCESS TO THE BARGE DENIED

In autumn 2023, then Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, failed to grant Lloyd Russell Moyle MP, Clive Lewis MP, Olivia Blake MP, Paul Sweeney MSP, and Kim Johnson MP permission to access the Bibby Stockholm barge to assess living conditions as requested through parliamentary channels.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle, Labour MP for Brighton Kemptown, nonetheless visited Portland on 30 October 2023, to meet with people accommodated on the barge and local community members.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle said:

"It is so important that the voices of the people most impacted by the government's hostile and chaotic asylum system are heard. The private Portland port owners and Bibby Stockholm barge owners are making huge profits off the accommodation of asylum seekers in this community, while local people receive nothing, and yet they're the ones reaching out to try to offer a warm welcome.

A better system would fund Local Authorities to provide safe, community-based accommodation for asylum seekers, and support so that all residents are able to access their needs."

Before people arrived on the barge, Portland Global Friendship Group were in touch with Dorset Council, and were invited to view the barge. However, when they arrived at the port, they were informed the Home Office had decided they could no longer visit, and they were denied access.

PGFG had made welcome packs with toiletries, other small items and local information for the first group of people to board.The group were stopped from giving them to the men when they arrived, and had to take them to the gate of the port instead.
Committed to providing packs for subsequent new arrivals, the group were then told they could no longer take them to the port entrance, but instead they should leave them at the Library - which was entirely impractical.



Despite repeatedly raising this with the council and the barge administration, PGFG did not succeed in getting these packs to the men. This was despite the fact that the Council's plan for a 'dignity shop' (to provide such items) had fallen through.
Since then, the group has come to know some of the residents very well, but can never visit them on the barge, or even drop them back to the port entrance, as they continued to be denied access.



IMPACT OF SEGREGATION ON BARGE RESIDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH

'A' who is an ex-resident of the barge states:

"I have moved now, but the negative impact of living on the barge, which was a number of different things, all added up to have a really severe psychological effect. That has lasted, and I think it will affect me even after I hope my claim is successful.

Being searched every time you leave or go back onto the barge, having a curfew, having to be behind two metal gates, not being allowed to do so many things. Not being able to just go outside and go for a walk. That is surely a human right. It made you feel like a criminal.

I would feel trapped inside, even if I didn't have something specific to go out for, but knowing, especially at night, that I was in effect locked in, that I couldn't go out. It left me feeling very uncomfortable, stressed and actually made me feel paranoid. I thought about it all the time, that we were detained and the gates were locked.

It felt like we were in prison. Although it was technically not detention, that is what it felt like, that we were being detained against our will.

I actually felt like I was going insane as soon as I got there. You have to climb up the metal stairs and a metal platform that shakes when the wind blows. I felt the whole structure looked like it was meant to scare you.



It felt like we were being watched all the time, searched, but also not treated like adults, with a curfew and not being able to go out when we wanted.

It is very distressing sometimes to be so close to so many strangers as there were on the barge, especially if you have your own stress and issues to deal with. There was no actual privacy anywhere on the barge. Men share rooms, with 2 - 6 men per room.

You couldn't just go out on your own, nor could your friends come and see you. At least in the hotel it is possible to go out and see your friends or find some space to be on your own.

On the barge I sometimes just felt like a zoo animal."

'S' fled his home country after being abducted and having his life threatened repeatedly, claiming asylum in the UK because his wife and her children were already living here. After arriving by plane, he was housed in a hotel for 9 months before being moved to the Bibby.

"The local support (when housed in a hotel) was so different to how it is on the barge. I had the good fortune of having a charity, and a church, arrange for me to have transportation in order to see my wife and her children. But because of where I am right now (the barge), there is a limitation on when I am allowed to visit.

We're here in a port zone, the only means of transportation to leave is using a bus. We are told that we need to be aboard the ship in time, or otherwise we may get locked out. I have always tried to be very compliant with the schedules and times that we have been given. But it's been hard. It means I feel more depressed. I have been 5 months without seeing my wife and the kids.

I rely on the internet and phone connection to speak to my wife and children. But this is the other issue – sometimes the connection on board doesn't function at all. I lose my privacy because I have to go to public spaces to try and connect. Sometimes I have to cope with the situation of staying in my room with no connectivity. Last week, it was national fathers' day in my country. One of the girls tried to contact me, but she could not get through."

When 'C' needed to flee his country and region for safety, he chose the UK as *" to me it was easy to feel like a second home, we speak English also as they colonised us."*

He claimed asylum on landing in a UK airport, and lived in a hotel for 1 year before being moved to the Bibby.

"The biggest problem for me is the isolation, and the lack of freedom of movement. They said we have 24 hour medical care on the barge. But that's not true... Our friend who passed away on the barge last year - it was because of the lack of care and medical help in the barge. They took (too) long a time to help the guy, until that happened. I was feeling to kill myself. I was having a pain in my head. I went to the reception for me to go to a doctor on the barge, they said I have to drink water and then go to sleep until tomorrow before I can see the doctor. It means they were lying to us or lying to the Home Office, I don't know."

'T' who fled religious persecution in his home country before flying to the UK to try and join family, adds, *"Staying alone in a closed area affects mental health. People have mental health problems on the Bibby. I felt depressed - I tried my best to escape that place. I tried to confront the depression, and I am much better now that I am not there. Many people are struggling there."*

Another resident, **'Q'** comments, *"It is a difficult place to live for a long time. It is depressing. The space is small. You cannot do anything without permission."*

Worryingly, concerns raised by people living on board do not seem to be treated seriously. One of the most egregious examples of this is the delayed reaction of staff when concerns were raised by Leonard Farruku's room mate.

At 5.45am, on finding the bathroom he shared with Leonard was still locked and his bed was unslept in, **'Y'** raised concerns with staff. He was dismissed. Only when returning to staff, and becoming increasingly distressed, did he finally persuade them to come and check the situation. It was then they gained access to the bathroom and found Leonard's body.

'Y' was subsequently put into isolation, and says he received no mental health support. He says he is 'still experiencing trauma. It is still hard to think about it.'



DOCTORS OF THE WORLD'S VIEW ON LARGE SITES TO ACCOMMODATE PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM

Doctors of the World UK (DOTWUK) has over fifteen years of experience in providing medical care and advocacy support to refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in the UK. We have provided medical care to people in Home Office accommodation, including contingency hotels[1], and former MoD sites in Napier[2] and Wethersfield[3]. We oppose the use of large containment sites for asylum accommodation. Our view aligns with evidence across Europe documenting the harm resulting from accommodating people in these settings[4], as well as positions of medical experts including the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the British Medical Association[5].

Our principal objection to large containment sites is the harm they cause to the mental health of residents: exacerbating mental health conditions, re-traumatisation and triggering trauma responses.

In 2021, DOTWUK provided consultations at the former MoD site in Napier. Patients reported high levels of mental health need, including suffering with flashbacks, nightmares and constant uncertainty. 70% of people we consulted with had psychological conditions, including PTSD and depression, and 40% reported suicidal ideation or attempts whilst accommodated at the barracks[2]. The Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (ICIBI) found that most residents at Napier had felt depressed and a third had felt suicidal, with people at risk of self-harm placed in a isolation block 'unfit for habitation'[6]. An APPG on Immigration Detention revealed residents were subjected to appalling treatment and conditions which left many feeling dehumanised, exhausted and suffering a profound deterioration in their mental health, in some cases to the point of attempting suicide[7].

Similarly, Penally Camp residents described dormitory accommodation with barbed wire fences inducing flashbacks of war, violence and time in captivity[8]. A Bibby Stockholm resident died of suicide, with his roommate warning that residents were struggling to cope and "don't have any hope for their lives"[9]. Since late 2023, we have been operating a mobile clinic outside Wethersfield and have observed deteriorating mental health of residents[10].

Many people seeking sanctuary have endured extremely traumatic experiences. It is well evidenced that refugees have comparatively poor mental health[11] with high levels of chronic stress, insomnia, anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation[12]. The use of containment sites for newly arrived asylum seekers is therefore particularly unsuitable.

DOTWUK also opposes containment sites because they restrict healthcare access. Despite on-site medical services, we have supported people with unmet physical and mental health needs. The absence of appropriate mental health services, combined with poor access to community and secondary care services, is felt particularly starkly, especially given the acute need for these services.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS BY DOTW

An immediate end to the policy of accommodating people seeking sanctuary in large containment sites

Introduce a centrally funded system that accommodates people seeking sanctuary in safe and suitable housing in communities which enable people to access local health services and rebuild their lives



1 Doctors of the World UK, 2022. "They just left me": Asylum seekers, health and access to healthcare in initial and contingency accommodation
2 Doctors of the World UK, 2021. Doctors of the World's evidence from medical assessments of asylum seekers accommodated in the barracks
3 Doctors of the World UK, 2024. Doctors of the World at UK mass asylum containment site
4 Médecins Sans Frontières, 2021. 'Constructing Crisis at Europe's Borders: The EU plan to intensify its dangerous hotspot approach on Greek islands'
5 Doctors of the World UK, 2022. Press release: doctors call for closure of military barracks housing asylum seekers amid health concerns
6 Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, 2021. An inspection of contingency asylum accommodation: HMIP report on Penally Camp and Napier Barracks (November 2020 - March 2021)
7 All-Party Parliamentary Group on Immigration Detention, 2021. Report of the Inquiry into Quasi-Detention
8 British Red Cross, 2021. Far from a home: why asylum accommodation needs reform
9 BBC, 2024. Bibby Stockholm: Others may harm themselves, says dead man's roommate
10 BBC, 2024. War zone medics begin treating Wethersfield asylum seekers
11 British Red Cross, 2015. Poor health, no wealth, no home: a case study of destitution
12 British Red Cross, 2017. Can't stay. Can't go. Refused asylum seekers who cannot be returned



"When people first arrived, some had not even been told they would be being moved onto a boat and wouldn't be able to just walk on and off. It came as a real shock to them.

In terms of mental health, I genuinely don't believe that is a priority. The residents often talk about reception staff being rude when trying to get help with their mental health.

We've had to support men at real crisis points, without the support or training to do so. We've had to call ambulances for asylum seekers who were thinking of suicide, who had been neglected or dismissed on the barge.

There are very few activities provided for the residents by any statutory body. This causes further detriment to their mental health.

Like other volunteers, I am often in touch with people on the barge who are in a mental health crisis. They seem to receive little or no support at such times."

Heather, volunteer Portland Global Friendship Group



LACK OF FAIR PROCESS & SUITABILITY CRITERIA REVIEW

"As soon as the gentlemen get the letter informing them that they will be moved to the Bibby, they get stressed and anxious at the thought of being moved.

They are desperate to get a chance to explain their personal situations and circumstances to the Home Office, including health reasons as to why the Bibby is not suitable.

However, they often believe there is nothing that can be done and raising any issue will negatively affect their asylum claim.

They feel like they must have done something wrong to get these letters otherwise why were they chosen?

They have friends where they are, connections in the community, and want to stay part of the community. The barge feels like a prison to them, locked and hidden away from everyone else. They cannot understand why they are being treated like this, when they have done nothing wrong besides wanting to live in safety.

They feel confused, under pressure and depressed. Often their memories of past traumatic experiences such as false imprisonment are brought to the surface again.

There is a lack of freedom and no privacy to be able to speak to loved ones to process their feelings. They feel like they are being punished but do not understand what for."

Josie Spalding, Care4Calais Volunteer Caseworker

'A' reflects on his experience. *"I am visibly queer and my very bad experiences were the main reason for leaving my country. I am gender fluid and this makes me a target. I was the victim of a hate crime where I was before I came to the barge, which resulted in a prison sentence for the man who did it.*

Because I am gender fluid, I am an obvious target which always puts me in danger. The Home Office was aware of all of this, but I was still moved to the Bibby Stockholm where everyone is male and has to share a room.

The situation on the barge being only men made the atmosphere very strange. It wasn't normal society with the usual diversity.

There was no privacy, and you couldn't have your friends come and see you. You couldn't be normal."

Only after **'A'**, and charities supporting them, raised multiple safeguarding concerns was **'A'** removed from the barge.

'S' speaks to the lack of a coherent system, *"On top of everything – we can tell that not everyone is forced to come to the ship. It's just us. It was mandatory for us. That feels like discrimination against us by the people who moved us here.*

As far as we see it, everything is very out of order. They do not respect the people in line for their asylum interview. In terms of the interview – it happens randomly. It feels all very reckless. I had three interviews already but I haven't received any answer whatsoever.

The Government needs to start getting their act together – having more order in the way they do things.

The lack of organisation is something that we only typically see in poor countries, not countries like the UK. It is a pity for the UK to have this lack of order with their affairs. It is a pity they have all these people stuck waiting, due to the lack of a good system in place.

At the end of the day, the UK is considered as having a good established order at different levels, but right now it seems they don't.
They should not use refugees being in the country for their own political agenda."



QUASI-PRISON CONDITIONS

The barge is supposed to be the residents' home, and the peaceful enjoyment of one's home is an article 8 human right. But this is not afforded to residents of the Bibby.

'C' comments *"Our family right now in Portland is the global friendship group, but they (authorities) don't allow them to come inside to see us. Even if we are not feeling well and they would like to visit, they are not allowed to come here.*

Seriously, I feel really bad. When I feel bad I used to go straight to the manager to ask them why it is like this. I asked two times why they don't allow them to see us. They said it's just because of the location where the barge is, the barge is very secure. People are not allowed to come in and see us.

I don't think it's good to live here because it's like a prison to be honest. We need peace and freedom of movement."

A theme running through the concerns of people living on the barge is the treatment they receive from some staff members, and the level of security checks - even a simple cigarette break or breath of fresh air requires full searches. Residents speak of how they feel criminalised by this.

'Q' *"The barge does feel like a detention centre"*

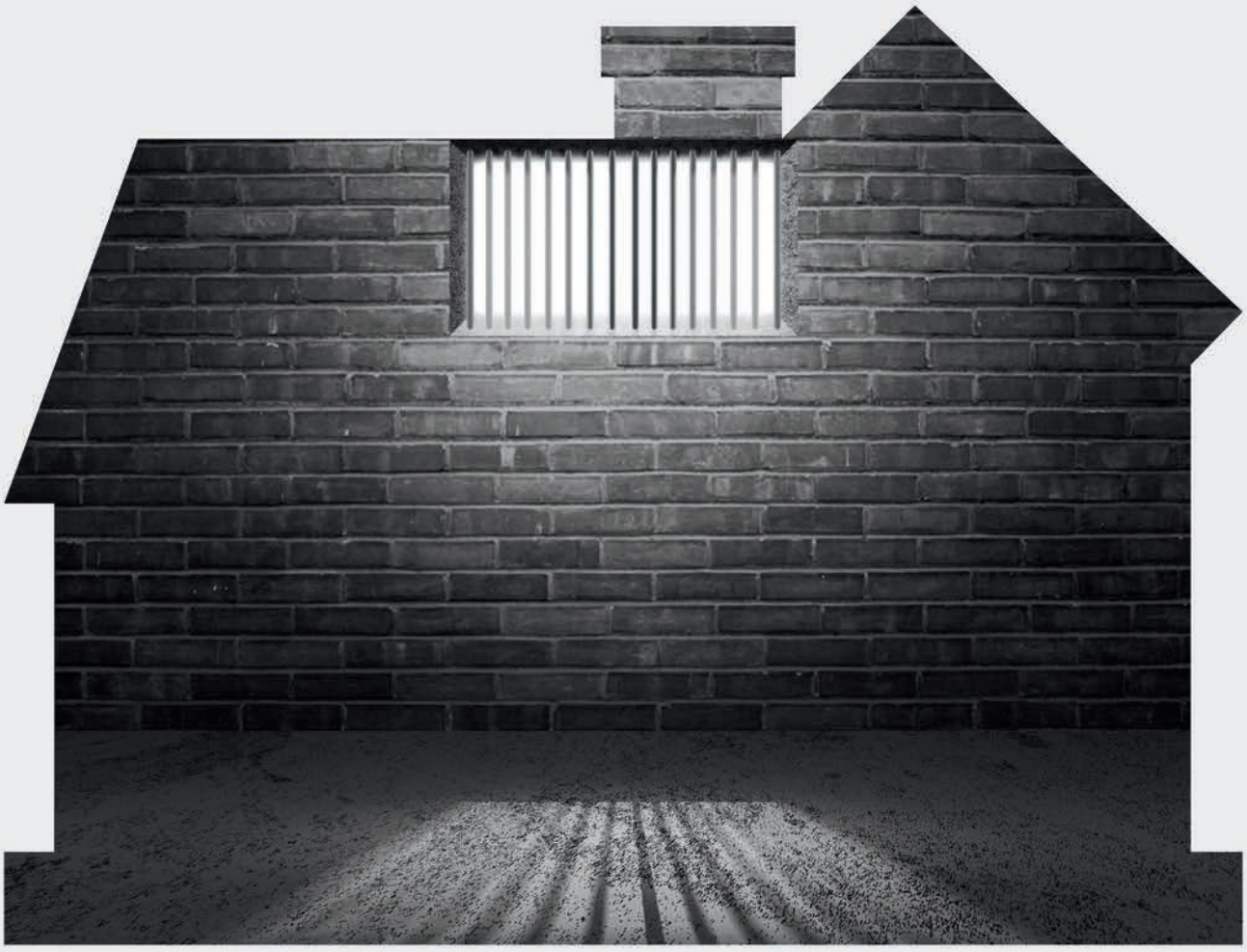
'S' *"When leaving and entering we have to be scanned, like airport security. Many people don't go outside because of this. They stayed inside and tried to do something in the 'common' rooms. But there is not enough space for people.*

When there were only 39 people, the staff's behaviour was very good. When the number increased, the behaviour of the staff was not good.

One day I was standing in the restaurant and I said the food was not good. The security staff said 'keep your mouth shut and sit down'."

'C' *"We feel like we're in prison because when we go out and come back, even for one minute, we have to be searched. It's really difficult.*

Only officials can visit the barge here, because Portland is a secure area. Everytime we come on and off the barge we have to be searched. Even to walk, you can't walk here. There is a lot of security and they can't even allow you to walk."



'H' *"They search everything – we have to remove belts, caps, jackets, then go through the scanner and luggage would go through the machine. If we have liquids, they check this. I tried to avoid the staff all the time. If they said something rude I kept silent.*

If you do something, they make reports. Because of this, when I was there I didn't go outside of the barge for 14 days, for two weeks. I just stayed in the room, because of the depression, I was so stressed because of my case.

We are not allowed to just walk outside of the barge. There is engineering there [on the dock] - it is a closed, private area."

'S' *"Some staff are very strict and stringent. There are situations which are not so pleasant but we must be compliant because we don't have anywhere else to live.*

Some of the staff members don't speak English, they are from Ukraine, so it's another extra layer of the language barrier. That's not their fault, but it's part of the problem – that's the responsibility of the company who hires people to do the work."

'C' *"All of the staff are not the same. Some are treating us like we are in prison. They are really rude to us."*

"I WAS SACKED FOR BEING FRIENDLY TO THE BARGE RESIDENTS"

I started working as a cleaner on the Bibby Stockholm when it first came to Portland Port. I was employed by Connect Catering Services Ltd which changed its name to Catering Connect Ltd. There was never any criticism of the standard of my work. However, I received comments from the supervisor and manager that I should not be friendly with the service users.

I have always expected to be polite and friendly to anyone I work with. I found the barge residents respectful, helpful and polite towards me, and I felt sympathy for their situation.
This did not appear to be the attitude of some of the senior staff, who made comments about the service users that were often hostile, and possibly racist. They told me I should be careful of them because they were illegal, that if I was friendly towards them, that this could put me at risk.

On 12 December 2023 I was given a verbal warning by the manager because I and another member of staff, (who did not receive a warning), stood outside in our break with two of the barge residents who were smoking. I was told that I was being given a verbal warning because I should not be friendly with the service users in this way.

The verbal warning was not confirmed in writing to me, nor was I told how long it would remain active for. After this I worked one more booked shift and then was offered no further work, even though other staff were being offered shifts.

When the manager concerned did not reply to my messages, I contacted the senior manager to ask why I had not been offered shifts. He replied "based on feedback from the unit we are not able to offer you work", in effect confirming my contract has been terminated.

I believe I was unfairly dismissed and have suffered discrimination because I was courteous to the Bibby Stockholm residents.

Testimony from Levana



SUPPORT FROM THE COMMUNITY BUT NOT FROM THE AUTHORITIES

Filling in the gaps left by the authorities

Portland Global Friendship Group (PGFG) was formed by a group of local residents who believed the Bibby Stockholm was an inhumane home for those seeking asylum, but wanted to welcome any residents on it into our community.

When we heard there would be a need for those on board to partake in local activities, we enthusiastically researched lots of options. We contacted local organisations, charities and businesses where the men could get involved, volunteer, and where they could help their language skills and get to know people locally.

Despite the tense atmosphere before the barge residents arrived, an enthusiastic and growing network of local people was formed. We expected help and support from Dorset Council and the barge management, and that they would approach the matter in a similar fashion.

PGFG provided Welcome Packs for the first group of asylum seekers and was committed to providing packs for all new arrivals. But when the authorities failed to support this, we realised the working relationship we initially hoped to have with them was not going to happen.

When the first cohort of people arrived, it was obvious the official response with regards to activities was wholly inadequate. In the absence of any plan by Dorset Council, PGFG continued to source activities and gathered a large group of volunteers.

We have not received any support, and have often been frustrated by the relevant authorities – even on such simple requests as for pack lunches so that the men do not have to miss meals to take part in activities. We have received no funding, being told that the "Home Office would not approve" because of our opposition to the Bibby Stockholm. We understand that the council has been given £370k to fund activities but feel overall the duty of care the men receive has been shoddy.

With our network we have delivered classes, social groups and have distributed essentials, and have also been called on for support regarding the asylum process.

We are proud of the wide range of activities PGFG has created for the asylum seekers despite our meagre budget, and remain dismayed that more has not been done for them by those who should be responsible.

Laney White, Portland Global Friendship Group



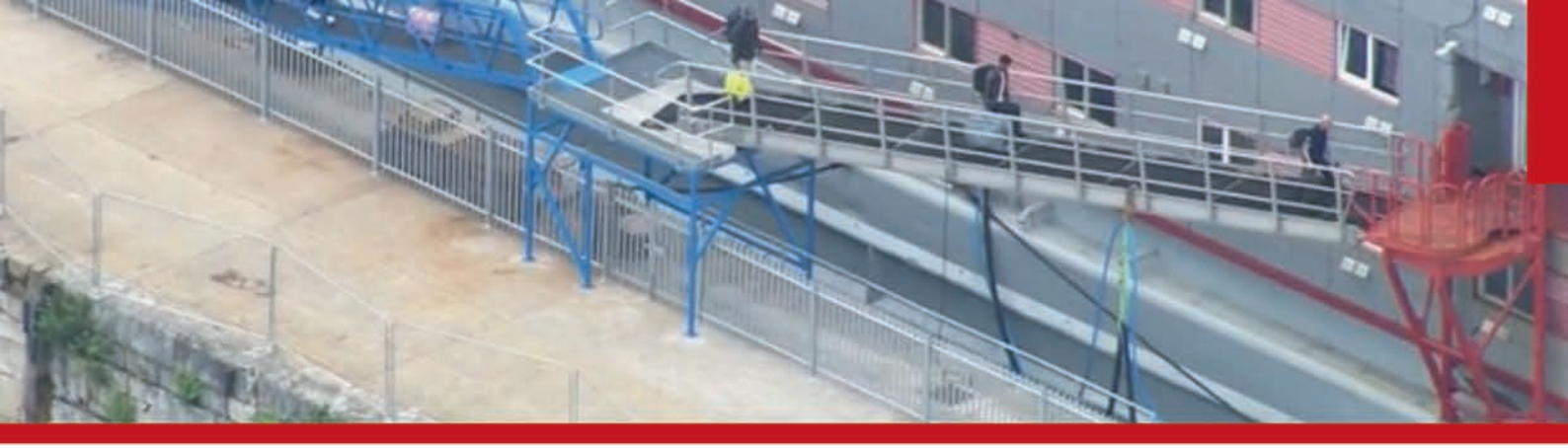
Volunteer led English lessons have helped overcome isolation

The arrival of The Bibby Stockholm Barge in Portland caused great division within my local community. There was a lot of anger, fear mongering and a noticeable rise in racism. I wanted to do something, to not only help the newly arriving asylum seekers but to demonstrate that not all local people were small minded and intolerant. I decided to utilise the skills that I had and to set up English provision.

In the eight months that the barge has been in Portland, we have achieved incredible things concerning the provision of English lessons and activities, on little to no budget and entirely carried out by volunteers. I feel that Dorset Council and the barge management have been slow and lacklustre in their provision of activities , which would improve language skills, encourage community integration and give the men a sense of purpose, especially important because of their isolation on the barge.

If we can do all of this as volunteers, with little or no budget, why is this not being done by those contracted to look after those seeking asylum in our country?

Lucy Hardwicke, English teacher, Portland Global Friendship Group



IS THE BARGE SAFE?

The updates to the Bibby Stockholm were aimed to increase accommodation designed for **222** residents, to accommodate **506** men. After this work was delayed, the Home Office were forced to further postpone the arrival of refugees on the barge at least three times because of safety concerns. Both the presence of Legionella, and significant work required to rectify fire safety concerns, had not been detected before it was planned to move people onto the barge. (See Appendix, Timeline of Health & Safety Concerns)

The Home Office came under increasing pressure to deliver their promise of moving people on board, which they did on 7 August, before either of these checks were completed. The residents were then removed from the barge only four days later because of safety concerns.



Legionella not checked in advance and report not acted on

Legionella was checked for on 24 July - after the first residents were due on the barge. On the day they moved on board, Dorset council informed CTM (Barge Contractor) that the test results had come through, and Legionella was present. The men on board were not informed, or told to take any precautions, until four days later when they were removed from the barge. The press knew about the Legionella and their move before they did. It fell to Care4Calais caseworkers to inform the men, and warn them to stay away from possible sources of contamination.

Confirmation of whether all of the work required by Wessex Water after the Legionella was discovered has still not been given by the Home Office, who claimed that the work could be done with residents on board.

A floating Grenfell?

Meanwhile, Dorset and Wiltshire Fire Service were also raising safety concerns, with a report produced on 10 August, three days after people were moved onto the barge. This raised a number of concerns and listed changes required. Some of these were to reverse the impact of the removal of a fire escape, and other changes, which occurred during the refit to increase capacity. (See Appendix, 10th August Dorset and Wiltshire Fire Service Report)



Is the barge safe now?

The fire safety report of 10 August 2023 required that any increase in numbers on board has to be approved by the fire service.

So far the occupancy has never gone over 350. The National Audit Office report states Portland Port was providing accommodation for 321 single adult males at the end of January 2024. However by that time the Home Office had expected it to be accommodating 430 men.

Verbal reports from Dorset Council have given a maximum figure of around 425, as does an internal fire risk assessment from the barge contractor CTM, ***"realistically, since the second floor has been reconfigured and cabin configuration has been determined 425 has been fixed as planned service user occupation."***

However, the Home Office deny these figures (which would increase the cost per head of the accommodation) and still claim that the barge can accommodate 500 people.

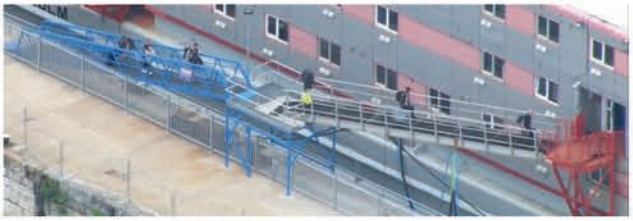
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/asylum-accommodation-portland-port/portland-port-factsheet

There is no public confirmation as to what procedure is in place (with the Fire Service) were the number of residents to be increased above the current level, or to the level the Home Office claims.

In addition, the strong feeling of residents on the barge is that even current levels feel overcrowded, and add to the feelings of mental distress.

Matt Wrack, general secretary of the Fire Brigades Union, said the Dorset and Wiltshire Fire Service report vindicated the union's demand for a meeting to discuss fire safety. He said: ***"Our requests were denied and ministers instead engaged in a disgraceful vindictive attempt to claim that our serious fire safety concerns were 'politically motivated"***.

"Everyone has the right to go to sleep at night knowing that proper fire safety measures are in place, regardless of where they are from. The government must rethink its reckless approach to fire hazards on the barge." 31 August 2023



Fire Brigades Union assistant general secretary **Ben Selby** said: ***"The Fire Brigades Union warned the Home Secretary that forcibly holding migrants on this barge was a huge health and safety risk.***

It remains our professional view that it's a potential death trap and an accident waiting to happen. However, Suella Braverman and her ministerial colleagues are hellbent on confining vulnerable people in jail like conditions on what is effectively a prison ship.

This outbreak of Legionella suggests that it's only a matter of time before either lives are lost or there is serious harm to a detainee." *11 August 2023*

IMPACT ON LOCAL RESIDENTS

The choice of Portland Port as a location for the barge is significant. Portland and nearby Weymouth are among the most deprived communities in the south of England.

In 2017, average weekly wages in Weymouth & Portland were the lowest in the UK, reflecting local industrial decline and the prevalence of insecure, seasonal work. In 2018, social mobility in the area was the lowest in England – a measure of declining life chances of young people in the area.

Portland experiences multiple deprivation. The location of the barge in Castletown places refugees in the area's most stressed community, in which child poverty exceeds 40 per cent.

Portland's welfare services have experienced continuous decline, intensified by run-down of the island's hospital, which is close to the Port and where key resources have been removed. Despite many protests by islanders, neither the hospital nor GP services meet local needs.

For several years local people have expressed a growing feeling of abandonment by local and national policy makers.

See Forgotten Towns - Weymouth, Portland and the Coastal Economy, South Dorset Research Group:

https://www.bournemouth.ac.uk/sites/default/files/asset/document/Forgotten%20Towns.pdf

Phil Marfleet Co-author "Forgotten Towns, Weymouth, Portland and the coastal economy"

"The only purpose for the barge appears to be as a political stunt to ramp up any electoral support the government may still be clinging onto. Shame on them. Whilst some local people have been concerned about the impact this would have on our island, many people have been able to remember our common humanity and welcome our friends with support and care from a place of love. It is wonderful to be part of this."

Giovanna Lewis, Portland Global Friendship Group

Carralyn Parkes has mounted a legal challenge in a personal capacity to the Bibby Stockholm because she believes the barge is a terrible plan for the local community as well as for asylum-seekers.

"The tragic death of Leonard Farruku on the barge underlines why we are doing this. I think containing people on the barge is an inhumane way to treat those fleeing from war, conflict or persecution. I firmly believe that locating the Bibby Stockholm at Portland Port breaches planning regulations. The barge is totally unsuitable for asylum-seekers, as well as for Portland. I am determined, with the help of my legal team, to enforce planning law so that the Bibby Stockholm can be consigned to the dustbin of history.

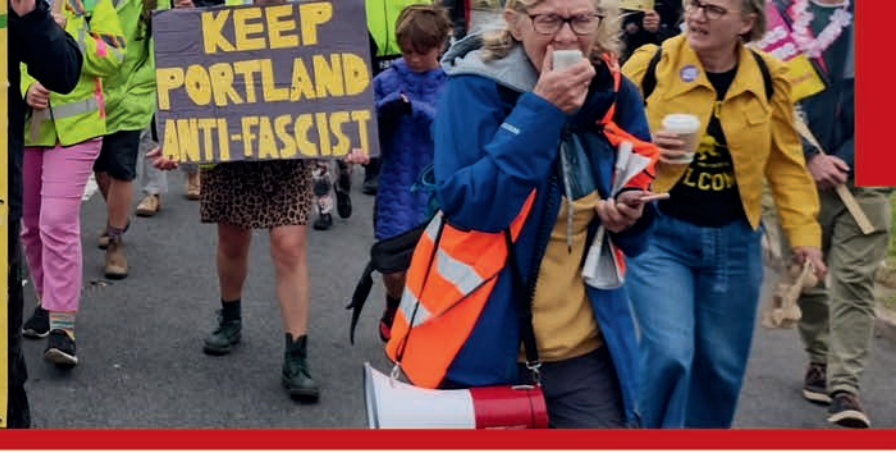
I have been really reluctant to take my local authority to Court. Although I am acting as a private individual, as an elected Town Councillor I recognise the difficult position that the Home Secretary has put Dorset Council in. However, I also strongly disagree with Dorset Council's ongoing determination that it does not have jurisdiction over the Bibby Stockholm barge.

I feel very strongly that the decision to accommodate people in this way in Portland has been imposed upon us as the local community, without any consultation, without proper processes being followed, and without local people having the opportunity to raise concerns and objections.

I believe that in the Twenty First Century the Bibby Stockholm is a wholly unsuitable place to house asylum seekers and I am very concerned about the risks to the vulnerable people who are accommodated on the barge."

Carralyn Parkes, local resident, Mayor of Portland and Portland Town Councillor representing Underhill Ward where the Bibby Stockholm is berthed.





FAR-RIGHT ACTIVITY

"The announcement of the Bibby Stockholm Barge moving to Portland led to perhaps the worst threat of division and racial hatred that has ever been seen in Dorset.

It was not surprising that a proposal to suddenly add 500 additional people to an area which faces significant deprivation and lack of facilities would lead to concern. But the way the proposal was framed by the Home Office as a deterrent only fuelled people's fears. Disgraceful anti-refugee rhetoric used by Government figures at the time led to the expected occupants of the Bibby being described locally as 'criminals who would be a threat to your homes and your family.'

No one responsible for the introduction of the barge ever countered these attempts to stir up hostility towards the refugees who were due to arrive.

An online 'No To The Barge Group' grew quickly with over 2000 members on Facebook by July 2023. The group had regular racist comments and growing links with far right organisations. These have been documented by Stand Up To Racism supporters here: https://bit.ly/dorseteye_bailey

By June the group began to have a physical presence, organising public street events and protests. Black people locally began to face increased racism, and were assumed to be living on the barge. Before refugees had even arrived, photographs of local people who were not white were circulated online, suggesting they were asylum seekers and were a threat to local children and girls.

As the barge arrived, online commentary became increasingly hostile, with suggestions that the barge should be sunk or "could use the incinerator for the immigrants". There were suggestions of setting up a group to follow the refugees around, and we began to fear the safety of those on board could not be guaranteed when they arrived.

I believe it is a terrible failure by the Government - that they did nothing to counter these horrible local developments.

Responsibility for publicly showing refugees should be welcomed not feared - fell to Stand Up To Racism Dorset. Through many events and initiatives we have managed to avert a horrendous situation - working with Portland Global Friendship Group to get local people to meet with barge residents to undercut the prejudice towards them. But the racist targeting of the refugees, and the impact that has locally, has not gone away.

We call on the government to end the segregation of those claiming asylum that is not just inhumane, but is also being used to stir up racism and division."

Lynne Hubbard, Joint Chair Stand Up to Racism Dorset



"As a black person who has lived in Weymouth for many years, I am also angry that the way the barge has been dumped on local people has allowed the far right to try and exploit the situation. This has increased racial tension in the whole area. It is only because we have campaigned and made a stand against the racism, that we haven't had even more serious situations developing."

Grafton Straker, Joint Chair
Stand Up To Racism Dorset

Dorset TUC represents union members in 19 local branches. From the first announcement, we opposed the government's callous decision to use a cramped barge in Portland Port to house people forced by conflict, repression or environmental disaster to flee their countries. We immediately joined the Refugees Welcome - No Prison Barge campaign.

We have consistently demanded proper housing, supported community integration activities, and actively campaigned against any racist hostility towards the refugees. We have submitted two Freedom of Information Requests to Dorset Council and are shocked to discover that, by 10 April 2024, they had received £1,102,500 Home Office (HO) funding which they say is being spent on 'officer time in responding to the situation across services within the organisation'.

This seems to include additional Community Safety Accreditation Scheme officers and CCTV overtime, suggesting that the Council has been won over by spurious racist claims that the refugees on the barge are all criminals.

*They also received **£377,000** from the HO to organise activities and volunteering opportunities for the residents of the barge. Of course this is welcome but we note that the Portland Global Friendship Group has very effectively generated a wide range of regular activities for the refugees while also creating opportunities for local community members to provide friendship and support. All this on less than one percent of the HO funding.*

Jenny Lennon -Wood Dorset Trades Union Council

DOES THE BARGE SAVE ANY MONEY?

The Government claims the plan to introduce barges, and large accommodation sites is to save money when compared to housing people in hotels.

There appears, however, to be discrepancies between how wide scale such plans were intended to be, and the Government's ability to deliver them.

When announced in April 2023, the plans were for a number of vessels, and Rishi Sunak announced two further barges in June 2023. But in the event, barges were refused from all other ports and Portland agreed to only one.

Original Home Office calculations suggested that a minimum of two barges should be berthed at Portland Port to make the project cost effective.

In February 2023 the Home Office agreed a £1.6 billion contract, without tendering, with Corporate Travel Management Ltd to run such vessels.

https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/barge-australia-asylum-contract-travel-b2354578.html

The size of this contract suggests that more boats were planned. So far, only the £22.5 million contract to run the Bibby Stockholm has been progressed. This has triggered a 20 per cent share price drop for CTM, whose chief executive appeared to have hoped for a dozen vessels by now.

https://www.smh.com.au/business/companies/legal-fight-threatens-aussie-company-managing-deathtrap-uk-migrant-barge-20240229-p5f8ww.html



National Audit Office Report

A recent National Audit Office report "Investigation into Asylum accommodation" March 2024, found significant extra costs for large site accommodation including the Bibby Stockholm.

https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/investigation-into-asylum-accommodation

The report shows that the Home Office paid £500,000 to reserve barges which have not been used because no port has been found.

It also shows the Home Office expects its large sites programme to cost £1.2 billion, and believes the sites will now cost £46 million more than using hotels.

The National Audit Office has criticised the lack of proper planning by the Home Office and unforeseen set up costs for large accommodation sites including the Bibby Stockholm.



ARE CLAIMS THE BARGE IS CHEAPER TRUE?

In a letter to the Home Affairs Select Committee from the Home Office in January 2024, it is claimed that the latest running costs for the Bibby Stockholm are £120 per person per night, compared with the latest average hotel cost of £140 per person per night. These running costs exclude set-up costs.
https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/43144/documents/214622/default/

1. This presumes that the running costs are the cost of the contract with Corporate Trust Management of **£22.5 million** for 18 months. The supplier management fee and VAT are not included in this figure (according to the contract.)

2. This figure does not include the money given to Dorset Council **(£3500 per person + £377,000)**, the local police authority, and the local NHS **(£315,000 per annum)**.

3. This figure does not take into account the set up costs. The Home Affairs Select Committee have asked for these figures in a follow up request to the Permanent Secretary.
https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/43399/documents/215971/default/

4. The cost of **£120** per person per night compared with **£140** in hotels given by the Permanent Secretary presumes 342 people are on board the Bibby Stockholm.

The National Audit Office quotes 321 inhabitants on board in January 2024. This would give a cost per person per night of **£128.**

The residents on board believe that the total number of inhabitants has often been no more than 300, which would give a cost per person of **£137.**

For four months of the contract, the barge was empty (except for 4 days in August, when residents had to be removed). Even if the average occupancy was **342,** as claimed by the Home Office, for the remaining months the overall average cost per person per night for the whole length of the contract increases to **£154.**

5. According to the National Audit Office, between April 2023 and January 2024, the cost of hotel accommodation for those seeking asylum has ranged from around **£127 to £148** per person per night.

In conclusion, there is no saving on the running costs per day for the barge compared with hotel accommodation, and when the set up and additional costs are taken into account, it is likely the Bibby Stockholm will be significantly more expensive than hotel accommodation.

WHAT IS THE ALTERNATIVE?

People seeking safety do not belong in barges and barracks. This report has detailed the various ways in which such segregation contributes to the deterioration in mental health of residents, and the increased pressures on remote areas.

People seeking safety should be housed within our communities; close to society and infrastructures which can facilitate support. When this happens we see success stories, where people seeking asylum feel safe and supported, and local communities benefit from the wealth of new members.

Before 2020 it was not common practice for people seeking asylum to be held in hotels, let alone large sites such as the Bibby. What changed?

With the Government's failure to process claims efficiently and fairly, a backlog of claims was created. Lack of training and support for decision-making staff, and an insufficient number of said staff, meant poor decisions were made, leading to further delays whilst appeals were justifiably launched. Rather than investing in decision-makers and a substantial increase in dispersal accommodation (housing within communities) the government extended existing hotel providers' contracts.

Efficient, high quality processing of claims, alongside housing people within communities, is the humane, sensible and economically sound alternative to housing people in barges and barracks.

Therefore, the contributors of this report put forward the following recommendations:

- **Close the barge. No renewal of Contract.**
- **Halt all new arrivals.**
- **Improve mental health support.**
- **End segregation of people seeking safety.**
- **Invest in asylum claim decision makers.**
- **Introduce a centrally funded system which accommodates people seeking sanctuary in safe and suitable housing in communities, which in turn enables people to access local health services and rebuild their lives.**
- **Introduce safe routes for all people seeking safety.**



APPENDICES

10 AUGUST DORSET & WILTSHIRE FIRE SERVICE REPORT

The Fire Service report identified ***"some people were at risk in case of fire"*** and that improvements are ***"required"*** to provide additional safety. The report found the barge did not have enough escape routes and that some escape routes could be hindered by locked doors.

The changes include reinstating an alternative escape route from the stern of the barge leading from the canteen. ***"The provision of exits from the canteen/dining room is inadequate for the number of people who may be required to use them. This means that people may not be able to escape safely in case of fire,"*** the inspector wrote.

The contractor was told to install easy to open door securing mechanisms for 10 bedrooms, saying that ***"people requiring to use these doors in an emergency may not be able to open them easily, preventing them from escaping safely."***

Two stairwells aboard the barge did not have proper ventilation, which could prevent the stairs from being a safe escape route. Vents that could be manually opened by fire crews had to be built into two main escape routes on the barge, the report said. ***"Protected stairways require a means to ventilate any residual smoke that may enter the stairway during evacuation or firefighting operations."***

A fire resistant wall had to be reinstated, the report said, because otherwise ***"fire and smoke could spread rapidly from the store which could enter the escape routes and make them unsafe for people to use, exposing them to harm."***

Inspectors also raised concerns about the lack of fire drills on the barge. The report said: ***"If people do not understand what to do in case of fire they may behave inappropriately if fire breaks out. When people are familiar with what to do, their safety is more assured. Barge operators previously said they would not carry out fire drills due to a risk of "re-traumatising asylum seekers."***

The report did not ratify the maximum proposed occupancy and stated this had to be reviewed during future fire inspections and drills. It also recommended retrospective fitting of residential sprinklers to all sleeping accommodation.

https://amp.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/aug/31/fire-safety-report-demanded-five-changes-on-bibby-stockholm

TIMELINE OF A HEALTH & SAFETY CONCERN

29 March: Immigration minister announces the government is looking at accommodation vessels.

5 April: Government confirms plan to house migrants on Bibby Stockholm.

9 May: The Bibby Stockholm arrives in the UK.

18 July: Barge arrives in Portland after significant delays. In a tweet on 19 July announcing its arrival, the Home Office said: "Next week the first asylum seekers will be moved to the vessel".

24 July: Legionella test done - results take approx 2 weeks. No explanation ever given for why this routine testing was not done before residents were due to move on board, or during the lengthy preparation of the barge.

27 July: Plans to move people on board were confirmed as delayed. Home Office spokesperson said Bibby Stockholm had "completed a statutory inspection and refurbishment and is now berthing in Portland."

https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/bibby-stockholm-could-become-floating-grenfell-pzqg2jtnc

https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jul/31/home-office-asylum-seekers-barge-bibby-stockholm-fire-safety-fears?

1 August: First men due to arrive on board cancelled because of safety concerns. Dorset & Wiltshire Fire Service report "very critical".

A Home Office spokesperson said the vessel was "undergoing final preparations to ensure it complies with all appropriate regulations before the arrival of the first asylum seekers". The FBU raises concerns about fire safety. Home Office sources and government ministers claim their motivation is political because they donate to Labour.

2 August: Postponed arrival of residents cancelled again. Home Office suggest fire safety issue is only a fire door put on the wrong way round.

https://news.sky.com/story/bibby-stockholm-health-and-safety-worker-checks-now-delaying-barge-taking-asylum-seekers-12932167

And they suggest delay due to HSE not fire safety concerns. HSE deny this.

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-dorset-66381331

The FBU write to ask Suella Braverman for a meeting

https://www.fbu.org.uk/news/2023/08/02/firefighters-union-demands-meeting-braverman-over-bibby-stockholm-fire-safety

7 August: First people moved onto barge. Home office and government claim all safety checks complied with. Test results confirm Legionella on board. Dorset Council inform CTM contractors. Residents and staff on board not informed until 11 August when they are removed.

https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/aug/13/home-office-was-told-about-legionella-on-refugees-barge-on-day-they-boarded

10 August: UKHSA meeting held about Legionella. Agreed no new refugees to board barge.
6 new refugees who had arrived that day were immediately removed again. Fire safety inspection by Dorset and Wiltshire fire service, requiring 5 changes to be completed within a month and maximum occupancy not ratified.

https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/aug/31/fire-safety-report-demanded-five-changes-on-bibby-stockholm

Home office ministers decide to remove 39 refugees in preventive measure which they state as due to legionella. However, the move may also have been required by the work required by the fire service report.

15 August: Deadliest strain of Legionella still present on barge.

https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/sep/08/legionella-found-onboard-the-bibby-stockholm-is-most-deadly-strain

23 August: Inspection of the barge by Wessex Water. CTM given 8 weeks to complete safety work. Home Office claim work was "scheduled and routine." This is denied by Wessex Water.

https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/aug/30/bibby-stockholm-government-playing-russian-roulette-with-asylum-seekers-lives

27 August: The FBU threaten legal action because their fears over fire safety remain.

https://www.fbu.org.uk/news/2023/08/27/fbu-launches-legal-challenge-over-bibby-stockholm-barge

19 October: Refugees return on board the Bibby Stockholm.

