

HAVANT BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

21 September 2022

GOVERNMENT ASYLUM DISPERSAL PROGRAMME

FOR NOTING

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Gwen Robinson

Key Decision: No

Report number: HBC/080/2022

1. Purpose

This paper is submitted to Cabinet to note the changing Government policy regarding asylum dispersal.

2. Recommendation

Members are requested to note :

- i. The Home Office is proposing a scheme for dispersal of asylum seekers under a model of fair distribution to each Council based upon the population of the South East region
- ii. The impact this may have upon Havant Borough Council

3. Executive Summary

3.1 Traditionally local authorities have participated voluntarily in housing asylum seekers in their area with the majority of asylum seekers being placed into larger, urban conurbations.

3.2 Arrangements for housing asylum seekers are dealt with by the Home Office. Placing asylum seekers into temporary contingency accommodation is undertaken by contractors acting on behalf of the Home Office. Housing asylum seekers is therefore not the responsibility of Havant Borough Council, although it may later assume responsibility for housing once an application for asylum has been successful. Havant Borough Council has not received a large number of asylum seekers to date, although it has participated voluntarily in the Ukrainian and Afghan resettlement schemes.

3.3 On 13 April 2022, the Minister for Safe and Legal Migration at the Home Office announced that the asylum accommodation system is under enormous pressure,

because of the significant and sustained increase in asylum intake over the last 12 months and the build-up of the population as a result of Covid-19 related measures. This has placed unsustainable pressure on a limited number of local authorities. The Home Office announced they were committed to working with local authorities to move to a fairer distribution of asylum seekers, with all authorities being expected to participate in a new system of dispersed accommodation.

3.4 There were three key elements to this new system.

- To reduce and eliminate the use of hotels for asylum seekers by moving to a full dispersal model for asylum accommodation.
- An informal consultation with local government to inform how this model will work within regions and nations.
- Providing specific funding to recognise the existing contribution of local authorities and for new dispersed accommodation.

3.5 The Home Office have announced the regional allocations for the distribution of asylum seekers based upon the population of the South East as a percentage of the population of England as a whole. The South-East needs to grow from the current 1,600 to 7,200 by December 2023. For Havant Borough Council this could mean approximately 90 asylum seekers being accommodated by the Home Office in our area between now and December 2023. The percentage has to increase over the following years to reach the South East 14.4% share of the population by the end of the decade.

3.6 The Home Office has asked each region to reach agreement on how the percentage will be distributed across the area based upon a fair distribution model. This discussion is being led by the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration. A plan for the proposed distribution of numbers has been submitted to the Home Office which proposes that the South East share rises from 7.2% in Dec 2023 in stages so that the 14.4% share is reached by 2029. This proposal is currently awaiting a response from the Home Office.

3.7 The Home Office has said that development of the fairer distribution model is not delaying dispersal of asylum seekers. This has already commenced and the Home Office has begun procuring in new areas alongside completing this engagement at regional level. The Home Office is reporting that as a result of this engagement it has already received additional interest and engagement from local authorities that were not previously asylum dispersal areas. This is already alleviating pressure on the system. It has also indicated that any additional accommodation capacity sourced within a particular region during this interim period will contribute to the agreed regional shares totals.

4. Additional Budgetary Implications

4.1 There are no immediate and direct financial implications arising from the proposed distribution model. The Home Office engages contractors to source accommodation in our area into which asylum seekers are placed on a temporary basis.

4.2 Implications arise for Havant Borough Council if asylum seekers are successful in their applications and seek to present as homeless. The waiting list for housing within Havant Borough is already considerable. Private sector housing is also under considerable strain.

4.3 Community support teams will also be engaged in providing support to asylum seekers to settle within the community, although this support is supplemented by voluntary groups and charities also.

5. Background and relationship to Corporate Strategy and supporting strategies and policies

5.1 The fairer distribution of asylum seekers is a matter of Government (Home Office) policy and therefore does not feature within the Corporate Strategy.

5.2 The Home Office is under an obligation to house asylum seekers and wants to work in collaboration with local authorities to ensure there is a fairer system for distribution of asylum seekers amongst all local authorities, not limited to those who voluntarily engage in the housing of asylum seekers.

6. Options considered

6.1 The Council's options are limited. As this is Government policy, local authorities are being given the option to engage at regional level in developing principles for fair distribution of asylum seekers. They are not being asked to comment on the policy or the duties of the Home Office to deal with asylum seekers.

6.2 The Council may consider objecting to the allocation of asylum seekers to Havant Borough Council on the basis of the housing pressures it faces. The number allocated to Havant Borough is ultimately a matter for the Home Office who is the arbiter of these matters.

7. Resource implications

7.1 Financial implications

Section 151 Officer comments:

None

7.1.1 None at this stage

7.2 Human resources implications

7.2.1 None at this stage

7.3 Information governance implications

7.3.1 None at this stage

7.4 Climate and environment implications

7.4.1 None at this stage

8. Legal implications

8.1 The legal implications are set out in the report. No further implications are offered at this stage.

Monitoring Officer comments

[Monitoring Officer to insert comments here]

9. Risks and mitigations

9.1 None additional to those set out in the report

10. Consultation

10.1 The Home Office conducted 11 regional/national engagement workshops between 17th and 31st May to gather views and inform the design of the regional allocation model. No one preference was expressed to inform the design of regional shares

10.2 A meeting was scheduled with the Home Office Local Government Chief Executives (HOLGCEX) on 14 June 2022 to present options for regional allocation and reach consensus on a set of inputs to the allocation model.

10.3 Regional shares were developed, taking on board feedback from the regional/nation workshops and HOLGCEX meeting.

11. Appendices

None

12. Background papers

12.1 Home Office policies and full dispersal model slides

Agreed and signed off by:

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