



# EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

<b>REPORT OF:</b>	Executive Member for Public Health, Prevention & Wellbeing
<b>LEAD OFFICERS:</b>	Strategic Director of Adults and Health
<b>DATE:</b>	Thursday, 8 December 2022

**PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:** Adults Social Care & Health

**WARD/S AFFECTED:** (All Wards);

**KEY DECISION:** Y

**SUBJECT:** Asylum Funding

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Blackburn with Darwen have been a supporter of Asylum seekers for many years. The asylum seekers we are currently supporting have primarily come through Asylum Accommodation and Support Contracts (AASC), previously known as 'Compass'. This is now a contract operated by the Home Office through SERCO.

SERCO at the instruction of the government are procuring more properties in every area of the UK to include Blackburn with Darwen. The indicative number of concurrent placements in Blackburn with Darwen will rise from just over 350 to approximately 750.

Up until 2022 we did not receive any financial assistance with the costs of supporting placements outside of the Controlling Migration Fund which ran from 2017 to 2020. This has now changed. The Home Office have agreed to provide funding to local authorities recognising their role in supporting people while their asylum status is settled, and in the further support provided as and when individuals or families obtain refugee status.

A retrospective payment of £93,250 has been issued alongside a one off payment of £3500 per additional bed space secured by SERCO. They have already secured an additional 50 bed spaces, with a further payment of £175,000 received in November. Further allocations as additional properties are secured throughout the year are expected.

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Executive Board:

- Notes the funding being made available to Blackburn with Darwen
- Approves expenditure against this budget in discharging the requirements of the grant conditions.
- Delegate authority to the Strategic Director for Adult & Health in consultation with the Executive Member to make representations to the Home Office with regards the level of funding and sustainability of funding in comparison to other similar asylum schemes.

## **3. BACKGROUND**

Asylum seekers are housed in initial accommodation (IA) and then dispersed via SERCO to local authorities across the country. Liverpool is the North West centre for IA but when this is full SERCO use hotels as an emergency alternative. Individuals from hotels are transferred to the IA in Liverpool before their onward 'dispersal' journey to North West local authorities. This arrangement is repeated in other regions.

In the North West, there are 7 contingency hotel sites in use currently accommodating over 1,700 people.

The Home Office has recently re-evaluated the number of Asylum seekers each local authority in England should take through the AASC scheme, and has now mandated all local authorities' involvement given demand for properties far outstrip supply. This includes an increased ask of those authorities already supporting asylum seekers. For Blackburn with Darwen this means an increase to 750 asylum seekers supported locally concurrently, a figure reflective of the 1:200 population target for all authorities. To April 2022, Blackburn was voluntarily supporting 370 concurrent placements. This has already increased to circa 450 as of November 2022 and will continue to rise toward the 750 figure indicated.

A large number of areas of the UK have made less support available, resisting provision of placements for a variety of reasons. The Home Office now direct SERCO to 'go straight to market' for both hotels and properties in all areas, consulting local authorities and the police and crime commissioner where landlords have offered a property to them they are considering.

Asylum seekers supported in the borough comprise both individuals and families. Those that receive positive decisions on their asylum claim are then rehoused by us. Up until 2022 we did not receive any financial assistance with the costs of this and wider support (with the exception of the Controlling Migration Fund - 2017 to 2020) This has now changed. The Home Office have agreed to provide some funding to local authorities, both to recognise existing participation and contribution and also to facilitate new dispersed accommodation when identified and brought on-line.

Aligned to this programme area is the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children scheme (UASC), with the local authority able to claim £114 per day per child. This is often significantly less than the placement costs, and so as part of the programmes development, within our offer to families, we will be looking to provide additional support to those children, complimenting the work children services are already undertaking.

#### 4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

The retrospective funding of £93,250 is a one off, as is the allocation for additional bed spaces.

Unlike for example the Homes 4 Ukraine or Afghan resettlement schemes, the funding is per additional bed space and not per person supported. This is significant as once that bed space is made available no further funding is expected when the next person uses it, whereas with the Ukraine and Afghan schemes each new person arriving into the authority would receive funding.

The one off payment is equivalent to £250 per person. The additional £3500 per bed space, doesn't compare well with the £10,500 allocated to each person through the Afghan or Ukraine schemes, albeit SERCO are required to provide basic support until the asylum decision process is completed. Similarly, while any funding is welcome, both the scale and the one off nature of this funding makes it difficult to sustain additional support infrastructure outside of the year in which the additional bed spaces were secured. Essentially the closer we get to the home offices figure the less funding will be available to support with a cliff edge once reached.

The support needs of this group are also high, with support in language, culture and integration, education, training and employment amongst other needs regularly identified. This support needs to be available where the individual's asylum application is successful and they transition to becoming a refugee and wish to remain in Blackburn with Darwen.

#### 5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There is no change or impact on current BwD policy. This is a continuation of long established support for asylum and refugee communities in Blackburn with Darwen.

#### 6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Funding:

- £268,250 has already been received. Comprising of £93,250 retrospective grant, and £175,000 for additional 'bed spaces' already secured.
- An additional allocation of £217,000 is expected in Q4 of 2022.
- Further allocations will be made quarterly in line with the number of properties SERCO secure.

#### 7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Secretary of State has the power to make payments such as these to local authorities under section 110 the Immigration of Asylum Act 1999 Act in respect of the authorities' expenditure incurred in assisting the SS with his arrangements under s95 of the Act to provide support for asylum seekers. Local authorities have the power by virtue of section 99 of the Act to provide support for asylum seekers in accordance with these arrangements made by the Secretary of State and to incur reasonable expenditure in doing so.

## 8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Resources required of the programme will be funded through the programme. Planning for the use of this funding is underway and will be approved through an executive member decisions when developed.

## 9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1 ☒ Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 ☐ In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA link here)*

Option 3 ☐ In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA attachment)*

## 10. CONSULTATIONS

Consultation on how the resource will be used to best support the asylum community is ongoing, to include with members, the councils integration team, council departments, the home office, local community and 3<sup>rd</sup> sector organisations in addition to the asylum and refugee communities directly.

## 11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

## 12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

<b>VERSION:</b>	<b>1</b>
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<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	<b>Mark Aspin</b>
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<b>DATE:</b>	<b>15/11/2022</b>
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<b>BACKGROUND PAPER:</b>	<b>N/A</b>
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