



# EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

<b>REPORT OF:</b>	Executive Member for Housing & Public Health
<b>LEAD OFFICERS:</b>	Strategic Director Adults & Health Directorate
<b>DATE:</b>	Thursday, 10 October 2024

<b>PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:</b>	Housing & Public Health, Adult Social Care
<b>WARD/S AFFECTED:</b>	(All Wards);
<b>KEY DECISION:</b>	Y

**SUBJECT: Asylum Dispersal Grant**

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to inform the Executive Board of the Home Office Asylum Dispersal Grant 2024/25 of £561,000 allocated to Blackburn with Darwen, and to seek approval in respect of proposals contained within this report as to how the funding is used.

The Asylum Dispersal Grant is provided to Local Authorities with the aim of ensuring that the Home Office and Local Authorities work collaboratively on the delivery of the government's 'Full Dispersal' policy announced in April 2022. The financial support provided via this grant is to ensure Asylum Seekers and refugees are housed in safe and sustainable accommodation across the UK.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Executive Board:

1. Note the grant provided to Blackburn with Darwen and authorise the acceptance of the funding allocation of £561,000
2. Give authority to create a supplementary revenue estimate equivalent to the grant and approve that the funding be allocated and utilised as proposed within to enable the grant to be spent for its intended purpose

## 3. BACKGROUND

The Asylum Dispersal Grant has been provided annually to Local Authorities since 2021/22 to address concerns raised by councils in relation to pressure on local services associated with supporting asylum seekers. Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council has received funding since this time with the Executive having received a previous report on this grant on 8 December 2022.

A focus of the government in recent years has been to ensure a more equitable distribution of asylum seekers across the UK and to move people out of hotels. This has been with the aim to help to prevent disproportionate pressures falling upon certain local authorities and enable better support for asylum seekers. For this reason, each region in the UK has been given an allocation of asylum seekers proportionate to their population size and has agreed a plan for dispersal. The Home Office has recently confirmed to Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council that there are currently no further plans to procure additional Dispersed Accommodation for asylum seekers in the local authority area because the area is already considered to be housing the allocated number of asylum seekers based on the current Asylum Accommodation Plans modelling developed by the Home Office in conjunction with Local Authorities, Strategic Migration Partners, the Local Government Association and other Government Departments.

At the end of July 2024, the Home Office announced details of the 2024/25 funding package which includes a payment of £561,000 for Blackburn with Darwen under the 'Grant 6' funding package which provides a payment of £750 per asylum seeker in all Home Office Supported Asylum Seeker accommodation types on 1 April 2024 within the geographical bounds of the local authority.

Previous years' Asylum Dispersal funding received by Blackburn with Darwen has fluctuated in award amount in correlation with Home Office activity to disperse, accommodate and resettle asylum seekers. There was a significant amount of procurement activity (by Serco on behalf of the Home Office) in securing additional bedspaces in Blackburn with Darwen in 2022/23. The Asylum Dispersal Grants enable the Council to ensure that the additional housing pressures created by this can be managed (practically and financially), and that asylum seekers can be supported to access and maintain safe and suitable housing, whilst integrating successfully and engaging in their new communities. As anticipated, the costs to the Local Authority of achieving this aim reaches far beyond the initial months of Home Office dispersal into the area, thus the funding is not required to be spent within the financial year during which it is received.

Whether, and for how long, Local Authorities will continue to receive the Asylum Dispersal Grant is unknown year on year and this must be considered when ensuring that the funding remains sufficient to support the cohort for which it is intended into the future.

Plans for the use of the Asylum Dispersal Grant received in 2022/23 were determined in full consultation with stakeholders including Asylum Seeker hubs in Blackburn with Darwen. In conjunction with feedback from the consultation, the learning from several years prior experience of welcoming asylum seekers to Blackburn with Darwen was considered, and a revised Asylum Seeker offer for Blackburn with Darwen was created for 2023/24. This service has been running in its current form for the past 15 months and successfully supporting the dispersal and settlement of asylum seekers in Blackburn with Darwen via a multi-disciplinary collaborative offer. Specialist Housing Support Officers, and Community Integration and Engagement Officers work closely with the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector to support asylum seekers to identify accommodation, manage and sustain accommodation, support general welfare, access English language provision, navigate welfare systems and education, training and employment opportunities, and much more. The current model within Blackburn with Darwen Council also enables some strategic capacity within the Council to keep its services for Asylum Seekers under review via regular Partnership Forums thus enabling ongoing service development and coproduction.

For 2024/25 and beyond it is proposed to extend the existing Asylum Seeker support model currently operating within Blackburn with Darwen. It is proposed that the Asylum Dispersal Grant continue to be used to fund dedicated housing, and integration and engagement staff, along with commissioning services in the VCSFE to provide specialist wraparound support services. It is also proposed that some of the grant continue to be utilised to assist with the costs of accessing and setting up tenancies for asylum seekers, as well as a proportion used for temporary accommodation cost pressures that positive decisions on asylum claims can create.

In summary, the Executive is asked to authorise the Asylum Dispersal Grant to continue to be used as set out in the Home Office Funding Instruction document to support asylum seekers to resolve their housing needs in a safe and sustainable way, and to support successful integration into communities. These activities will be a continuation of current activities being undertaken with any minor adjustments to delivery being lawful and fully compliant with procurement and financial regulations.

#### **4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS**

Potential risks and issues associated with this grant are minimal because:

- The grant can be carried forward and is not required to be spent in year.
- Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council also has a track record over the past 3 years of delivering a successful Asylum Seeker dispersal programme with the help of the Asylum Dispersal Grant.
- The Home Office has confirmed that there are currently no plans to procure further Asylum Dispersal accommodation in Blackburn with Darwen thus no further surge in demand is expected.
- There is the potential for increased demands for further homelessness assistance and temporary accommodation if the Home Office change their approach on addressing a backlog of undetermined of asylum claims. However, the Council is now better equipped to cope with a surge in demand for temporary accommodation having increased its portfolio of dispersed units to minimise the risk of needing to utilise Bed and Breakfast accommodation.

#### **5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

This grant and the current and proposed future activities associated with it are aligned to the corporate priorities across all Council Departments. They also conform with the relevant national guidelines and statutory requirements relating to Homelessness, Housing Allocations and Asylum Dispersal.

#### **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

This grant funding is paid directly to Blackburn with Darwen by the Home Office and the Grant 6 payment for 24/25 of £561,000 was received in August 2024. The budget will sit within the Housing Needs: Asylum Dispersal cost centre.

The grant comes with a Funding Instruction document which explains that the grant is a “contribution to supporting Asylum Seeker Dispersal” in respect of the Local Authorities costs in fulfilment of its statutory duties and anything otherwise agreed with the Authority related to supporting Asylum Seeker Dispersal.

The expenditure of the grant does not relate to the financial year during which it is paid, allowing for ongoing support to be provided to Asylum Seekers resettling in Blackburn with Darwen in forthcoming years.

Note that the Council is not required to provide any formal or statutory returns in relation to this grant.

All delivery costs will be managed within the funding allocation received. Robust governance and budget monitoring will be in place within Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council to ensure, costs and funding are balanced and that the Local Authority is not exposed to any cost pressures.

## 7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The services provided or commissioned by BwD under this grant will be conducted in compliance with the legal framework. Legal officers from the Legal and Procurement teams will be involved in any drafting and approval of grant agreements or contracts, which will also include relevant requirements around safeguarding, holding, storing and sharing of data from this programme.

## 8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The management, implementation and delivery of the services provided by BwD or its partners under the scope of this grant will be provided solely with the Home Office Asylum Dispersal grant. No additional resources or funding outside what is provided by this funding allocation will be required to deliver any activities detailed in this report.

Any changes or increases to staffing establishments will be processed via established governance reports, e.g. Workforce Management Group reports. There may be the need to recruit an additional staff post and/or to undertake recruitment to vacant posts – adopted recruitment policies will be fully adhered to and any posts (including on-costs) will be funded solely by this grant. Finance representatives will be included in ongoing meetings to ensure all staffing and resource costs are within budget.

## 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

Not Applicable

## 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>3</b>
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<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	<b>Carly Hohn, Richard Brown</b>
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<b>DATE:</b>	09/09/2024
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<b>BACKGROUND PAPER:</b>	
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