

Title of Report:	Home Office/TEO/Council briefing paper Asylum seekers
Committee Report Submitted To:	The Leisure & Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	20 December 2022
For Decision or For Information	For Information

Linkage to Council Strategy (2019-23)	
Strategic Theme	Resilient, Healthy & Engaged Communities
Outcome	Council will work to develop and promote stable and cohesive communities across the Borough
Lead Officer	Head of Community & Culture

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	Nil to council
Included in Current Year Estimates	YES/NO
Capital/Revenue	Revenue
Code	
Staffing Costs	n/a

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	<u>Yes/No</u>	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	<u>Yes/No</u>	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

To provide information in relation to the increase in the dispersal of asylum seekers across Northern Ireland, including the CC&G Borough.

On the request of the NI Executive Office, support the establishment of networks for assistance and integration with local communities.

2.0 Background /Context

Members will be aware that the number of people arriving in the United Kingdom to seek asylum has increased significantly over recent years and the arrival rate continues to be high.

Anyone seeking asylum in the UK is engaging in a legal process which they are entitled to do. As a result, they may or may not be granted leave to remain via several options: refugee status, humanitarian protection and discretionary leave. The timeframe for decisions is uncertain given rights of appeal and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Asylum seekers fear returning to their country of origin and apply for international protection as a refugee (or under the rules regarding humanitarian protection).

To be recognised as a refugee under the Refugee Convention, they must have left their country and be unable to go back because they have a well-founded fear of persecution, based on one or more of the following reasons:- Race, religion, nationality, political opinion or anything else that puts them at risk because of the social, cultural, religious or political situation in their country for example gender, gender identity or sexual orientation.

3.0 Government Responsibilities and Approach

The Home Office is the lead UK government department for nationality, immigration and asylum, *and these matters were not transferred as part of devolution and remain Excepted Matters.*

The Northern Ireland Executive do not have statutory powers in respect of immigration and asylum, however Executive departments do have a role to play in supporting refugees and asylum seekers here for example in terms of access to health and education services.

Asylum accommodation and financial support is funded and provided by the Home Office only for those asylum seekers who are deemed destitute whilst their claim is assessed. It is provided under the Asylum Accommodation and Support Contract (AASC) and does not form part of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) remit for the provision of social housing.

The Home Office seek to select Asylum accommodation where there are sufficient support services in place. They may on occasion have to place asylum seekers in temporary accommodation such as hotels **to meet their statutory accommodation duty** but would then seek to transfer asylum seekers to dispersed accommodation as soon as practicable.

Since June 2019 the company contracted by the Home Office to provide asylum seekers accommodation and to maintain such accommodation in Northern Ireland is MEARS.

Further information regarding key roles and responsibilities, both devolved and non-devolved is attached in **Annex A**.

4.0 Process for Asylum Seekers

Any individual claiming asylum is required to comply with the legal requirements in relation to COVID-19. The Home Office and Mears liaise with the Public Health Agency and the Health and Social Care Trusts to ensure devolved health guidance is followed.

Should an asylum seeker be granted leave to remain in the UK, they are then eligible to work, claim mainstream benefits, look for housing and get help with this in the same ways as other residents. If their claim is not upheld, they are expected to leave the UK.

Only once an asylum seeker is granted leave to remain are their details shared with NIHE to enable them to consider their housing obligation and acquire suitable housing if appropriate.

The Home Office and accommodation providers have a legal duty to protect and keep asylum seekers personal information confidential. No one has the right to share personal data under the General Data Protection Regulations without its qualifications being met (e.g. data required to meet a statutory duty).

5.0 Housing Challenges and the Local 'As Is' Position

There have been issues which have been encountered by the Home Office since the beginning of the pandemic in relation to the procurement of housing and pressures on existing stock, which has resulted in the need to procure hotel accommodation as a short-term emergency solution.

The Home Office have recently stood up a hotel in the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council area that has been procured as an additional emergency accommodation solution in **The Rambler Inn in Portstewart.**

This is the first asylum contingency hotel to be brought into the Causeway Coast and Glens council area and at the time of writing this report the 32 people are temporarily housed there. The number of available places in the hotel is 45.

The current cohort of Asylum seekers based therein have come from the following countries:

- Iran
- Palestine
- Guinea
- Eritrea
- Syria
- Sudan
- Kuwait
- Yemen
- Somalia

The Home Office have confirmed that they are developing an exit strategy along with their contracted delivery partner MEARS Group to ensure people do not stay in hotels any longer than is absolutely necessary. <https://www.mearsgroup.co.uk/news/mears-awarded-three-asylum-accommodation-and-support-contracts>

Departments are liaising with the Home Office to inform the procurement process and work closely with the Home Office in developing a regional approach, enabling housing to be procured in a planned and carefully managed way to facilitate this exit strategy.

6.0 NI Executive Office Requests of Councils

- **Council Engagement Group** -Officers have been asked to participate in the engagement group, in the first instance, for those Councils where accommodation is being provided by Home Office under the Asylum Accommodation and Support Contract.
- **Funding bid/proposal** - the dispersal programme for asylum seekers brings associated funding from the Home Office, some of which will be provided to councils to allow them to establish and/or build upon the necessary networks and infrastructure for integrating asylum seekers following full dispersal. Councils are expected to submit

proposals with associated, projected costing for this purpose, which may include costs for co-design work in advance of services going live.

7.0 Challenges

- There is very limited information available at this point in terms of existing resources in place to support asylum seekers, or in fact what support or information has been provided to date. An assessment of both existing and potential resource provision, mapped against need (which has not yet been established) needs to be scoped.
- Funding bids are expected (all be it an outline plan but fully costed) to be submitted by Monday 28th November and monies expended by the end of March 2023, with no timeline of expected offers being confirmed at the time of writing the report. Councils' funding proposals will be presented to the Strategic Planning Group (cross NICS group), and with SOLACE, where support had been secured.
- Full costed plans are expected without prior knowledge of what services are required at this stage with limited time to deliver projects.
- No funding *post March 2023* has been confirmed, presenting challenges in terms of delivering any effective interventions and support, although this is being pursued by TEO.
- TEO are in the process of developing a MoU with the Home Office, which will set the overarching governance arrangements to inform subsequent MoUs with the councils, in terms of monitoring, reporting on targets etc. and of course funding principles. This has not been completed ahead of the call for proposals which makes it challenging to develop proposals without a full understanding of targets, reporting requirements etc

8.0 Proposed/Draft Indicative Actions for TEO Funding Bid

These proposed/draft actions seek to embed and promote collaborative efforts at a local level while providing a range of activities which ensure appropriate support is available to asylum seekers located within the Borough.

- a. **Establishing the as is position to plan effective interventions** -There is an absence of information/data available on existing infrastructure/networks both regionally and locally, coupled with the lack of (known)needs assessment for the asylum seekers themselves at the point of writing this report, resources available from key service providers and identifiable gaps. It is necessary in the first instance, to carry out the necessary scoping and needs analysis, engaging both providers and service users in a co-design process to develop framework, delivery plan and associated governance structures compatible with need and demand.
- b. **Providing interim activities to support wellbeing and build community connections** – these activities provide opportunities for initial engagement with asylum seekers, while building connections with local community support available. It is anticipated that these activities will operate concurrently to the scoping/planning project with a view to encourage confidence to participate in a co design process by creating connections, building relationships and enhancing skills/capacity to participate in community life.

Due to the short notice to submit funding proposals these activities and associated costs are subject to in house resources to deliver same, levels of engagement from the asylum seekers themselves. Costs are estimated and therefore subject to changes.

9.0 Planning Assumptions

- The proposal is time bound and limited, in essence circa 3 months. The timeframe available comes with a range of challenges, specifically willingness of the asylum seekers themselves to participate, levels of interest by key stakeholders to view this as a priority and the ability to secure the delivery of the proposed activities by subject matter experts in such a short timeframe. With this in mind the full delivery of these priority actions will be subject to the challenges raised above.
- Council has been asked to develop an interim proposal to be delivered by end March 2023, effectively a 3 month period and which should direct efforts to asylum seekers only, and not inclusive of those with refugee status at this point
- Limited information about the current cohort is available at this point, including age, religious/political beliefs, family status, which makes planning services difficult
- Interpreter costs have been estimated at 2 per session, however due to lack of information regarding languages spoken and levels of English spoken, interpreter costs may not be required. Should these costs be beyond budget, participants will be prioritised depending on presenting issues/need
- There has/will no doubt be intervention and engagement from local churches and community based organisations. While council recognise the need to network local groups, provide training, awareness raising at grass roots level, alongside positive PR, this is a longer term project that requires additional consideration. The plan developed will consider best practice and agree the most appropriate methodology based on local intelligence
- ***The programme as set out below is subject to direct engagement with the current cohort of Asylum Seekers and will therefore be subject to change, following direct engagement with the group.***

10.0 Project Details

10.1 Research/Scoping, Needs Analysis and development of Collaborative Based Action Plan

As Causeway Coast and Glens have recently welcomed a number of asylum seekers, Council has recognised that there is a need to build a shared understanding of needs, existing resources and gaps and as a result, build collaborative action between key stakeholders/service providers to meet these needs effectively.

As a response, council would propose that a third party is engaged to carry out research which will act as both the 'context' and baseline to develop a local action plan and facilitate the establishment of a key stakeholder reference group/ forum to both develop and manage a local plan and joined u service for asylum seekers.

The facilitation of a key stakeholder group/forum including representation from both relevant statutory and community service provision would be set up to encourage:

- Engagement,
- Commitment,
- Collaboration from all relevant statutory and community agencies,

with the aim of developing a local agreed approach supporting asylum seekers within the CC&GBC area.

Participation within the group/forum would require the long term support/commitment and leadership at all levels to help drive such an initiative forward and will assist in

meeting the outcomes which to be agreed by the Home Office and The Executive Office, NI.

Community Planning colleagues will be integral to the successful facilitation of partnership working, utilising the Community Planning framework and partnership members to progress this forum/group.

10.1.1 Process

The process includes the following components:

- a) Steps in the development of an agreed plan to deal with such challenges would involve:
- b) Identification, recruitment and formation of a working/ steering group involving all key stakeholders to actively participate and contribute to the development of an area based strategy and *structure* which supports addressing need within the Borough area. This will include development of a terms of reference for the group and facilitation of at least 8 meetings in order to effectively establish it.
- c) Analysis of the functions of the key agencies and service providers in relation to the various range of Asylum seeker support.
- d) Collective analysis and agreement of what the key issues and concerns are by all stakeholders. This element requires the inclusion of **engagement processes** appropriate to the range of agencies and service providers to reach agreement. The brief will include the facilitation of these discussions.
- e) Identification of the resources (expertise and financial, physical resources) available at present and the gaps therein to deal with priority issues.
- f) Devise and agree an area based action plan for the CC&GB council area. This plan requires commitment and participation from all stakeholders and result in a SMART plan which is complementary to existing and emerging Government policy/strategy.
- g) Participating stakeholder groups should be required to demonstrate an *ongoing commitment* in engaging and participating in a structure to oversee the implementation of such a plan.
- h) Present plan to TEO and Council for consideration and to establish sources of longer term resourcing and governance arrangements of the plan.

Costs Consultant research x facilitation of cross sectoral group (inc AS representation?) = £5,000 desk based research (£500 p day x 10 days) plus facilitation of 8 sessions @£500 p day = £4000.

Meetings costs x 8 meetings = £500.

Total research/development and facilitation costs= £9,500.

10.2 Community Integration Activities

These are examples of local actions that can be delivered, following an initial assessment of need and can be subject to change. It should be noted that the eligible period of expenditure (31st March 2023) will significantly limit the ability to deliver meaningful engagement with local communities as these activities require additional time to deliver.

January – March 2023

- **Language provision** - ESOL classes/sessions – this provision is crucial at the outset and provide the essential language skills that are needed to be able to

properly communicate and engage in everyday life while improving chances for progression into education, training etc.

- **Promoting positive active citizenship** - Encouraging 'giving' involving local groups, churches etc - e.g. Donations for Starter Packs – working collaboratively with local food banks, clothes banks etc – contribution of materials & direct provision of additional food.
- **Awareness & promotion of local services** – It is important asylum seekers understand how society and its services work. – includes **welcome events/fair, welcome/information packs**, connection with health, personal safety, welfare and education both formal and informal, community support projects in the first instance (many services may be limited prior to achieving refugee status)- these activities have previously been delivered through Council's Good Relations team in association with other services for refugees and can be adapted accordingly.
- **Local Cultural Awareness/orientation raising workshops/networking**, delivered within community setting by BME support organisations and involving other BME representatives in partnership with council.
- **Arts and sports workshops/sessions** delivered through Council services to help address isolation and promote mental and physical wellbeing.
- **Building Resilience course** – delivered by the BME support sector (local group) to raise awareness of mental health and the importance of well-being/support available. Taking asylum seekers wellbeing into consideration is vital in terms of the trauma experienced and should be part of the wrap around support.

Activity	Partners	Details/kpis	Direct costs
Language provision - ESOL classes sessions	CCGBC in association with community partners	25 individuals @ 6 sessions each x 2 hours per week x£100 per class (2 cohorts) =12 sessions in total £60 room hire x 12 sessions Materials provided	25 individuals @ 6 sessions each x 2 hours per week x£100 per class (2 cohorts) =12 sessions in total = £1,200 £720 £280 £2,200 total
Promoting positive active citizenship - Encouraging 'giving'	Causeway Coast & Glens Anti Poverty Group	Encouraging 'giving' involving local groups, churches etc - eg Donations for Starter Packs – working collaboratively with local food banks, clothes banks etc – contribution of materials & direct provision of additional food 25 individuals supported	Nil In kind contribution from partners
Awareness raising,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CC&GBC (council) services • PSNI 	1 x Welcome/information event delivered, with health, personal safety, welfare and education both formal and informal, community	Venue hire costs x 1 day = £300

networking, access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PCSP • NHSCT services • BCRC (ethnic support project) • BME forum (voluntary group) • Church welfare projects • Foodbank(s) • ST V De Paul • Salvation Army • Corrymeela • NI Education Authority inc Northern Regional College • Other community based health & wellbeing projects • Volunteer Centre 	<p>support projects in the first instance (many services may be limited prior to achieving refugee status)-</p> <p>Travel, interpreters for AS, hospitality, 1 welcome event x 25 AS and local statutory & voluntary service providers -</p> <p>Local welcome packs developed & translated into main languages</p>	<p>Materials & Refreshments = £300</p> <p>2 interpreters @5 hrs x £50 per hr = £500</p> <p>Local Welcome pack design, translation and print (includes on line provision)= £2,000</p> <p>£3,100 total</p>
Local Cultural Awareness raising workshop	<p>CC&GB council</p> <p>BME support group</p>	<p>Local Cultural Awareness raising workshops x 4, delivered within community setting by BME support organisation in partnership with council</p>	<p>25 individuals @ 4 sessions each x 1 ½ hour @£150 per session = £900</p> <p>£50 room hire x 4 sessions = £200</p> <p>Interpreter costs x 2 languages £50 ph x 8 hrs x 2 interpreters = £800</p> <p>£2,300 total</p>
Arts & sports workshops/sessions	<p>CC&GB council arts service</p> <p>CC&GB council sport and wellbeing service</p>	<p>Workshops/sessions <i>delivered though Council services to help</i> address isolation, mental and physical wellbeing</p>	<p>3 arts workshops x £150 per event tutor costs plus materials @ £50 material costs x 25 AS = £1,250</p> <p>Interpreter costs x 2 languages £50 ph x 18 (3 x 3hr sessions) x 2 interpreters= £900</p> <p>Facility hire x 3 sessions x 3 hours (9 hrs) x £30ph = £270</p>

			<p>4 sports sessions x 2 hrs x £30 p hr coach fees x 3 coaches £720</p> <p>Refreshments - £60</p> <p>£100 x 4 sessions sports facility hire = £400</p> <p>Transport costs = £500</p> <p>£4,100 total</p>
Building Resilience course' – subject to confirmation from NHSCT and/or other charities that an existing service is not in place	Local BME group delivery	'Building Resilience course" with qualified Therapist/Coach. 2hrs workshops once a week that could bring awareness of mental health and the importance of well-being/support available.	<p>Cost approx £400 per session x 8 sessions (2 cohorts x12 participants each) including co-ordination and 2 facilitators). £3200</p> <p>Interpreter costs x 8 sessions x 2 hours x2 interpreters @£50 per hour (16 hrs x2) 32 hrs - £1600</p> <p>Total costs for 2 cohorts of training (25 participants in total) =</p> <p>£4,800 total</p> <p><i>These costs and the project as a whole are dependent on existing or programmed activity delivered by other partners</i></p>

10.3 Administration and Overhead Costs (Council)

3 months @ project management and support costs

- To facilitate this Council will appoint a lead officer who will undertake this groundwork, and ultimately manage the contract when awarded. This Officer will also act as liaison between appointed contractor, council and the Department.
- Anticipated Costs of this Council Officer will be circa £200 per day – On basis of 2 days per week (£400 pw) commencing Jan 2023 – end March 2023 = 13 Weeks this would be a total estimated cost of £2,600.

Total Programming/activity costs = £16,500 + £2,600 project management fees (based on circa 25 participants)

Overall Costs* £28,600

*(inc programming, management, research & development & partnership development costs from December 2022- 31st March 2023)

April 2023 – March 2024 - should funding be available.

Continuation of above by resourcing a service provider to deliver same and are not fully costed at this point

- **Ongoing facilitation of interagency grouping with aim of the development and delivery of a sustainable plan** which will meet identified need of asylum seekers – monthly facilitation & hosting fees.
- **Volunteering** – while asylum seekers are not permitted to engage in paid employment, many will come with particular skills, interests and ambitions but may need support to access opportunities. – matching through volunteer centres – initially an orientation session with the local volunteer centres for AS who express interest – costs may include interpreters and facilitation costs.
- **Provision of adequate overhead and project costs with external service provider to offer a wraparound support (welfare, integration, education, social inclusion, health & wellbeing, good relations activity with local communities etc) for Asylum Seekers with ongoing staff & programme support – building local community infrastructure.**
- **Encouraging and resourcing local groups to host Socialising / Networking activities** for asylum seekers - opportunities to interact in safe settings with each other and with the wider community – eg : coffee morning, a book club, a women's/men's group, a cooking demonstration, other social inclusion activities in association with churches and local community organisations - costs to be confirmed - potentially small resource allocations to groups to help with direct costs.
- **Local cultural awareness training and engagement with local indigenous communities** - education/awareness raising, good relations projects, through schools, community arts, heritage and community development programmes. Positive PR programmes.