

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO HEALTH & HOUSING COMMITTEE

meeting date: THURSDAY, 9 JUNE 2022
title: ASYLUM TRANSFORMATION – FULL DISPERSAL MODEL
submitted by: DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING
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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To receive information on the government's proposals for asylum dispersal.
- 1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:
- Community Objectives – To address housing needs across the borough.
 - Corporate Priorities – To ensure the Council is a well-run authority.
 - Other Considerations – none.

2 INFORMATION

- 2.1 The Government has recently announced changes to the way that asylum dispersal will be managed. This marks a move away from individual authorities determining the scale of assistance in the dispersal of asylum seekers who have entered the country and will move to an approach where the number of asylum seekers to be accommodated in an area are determined through regional agreements.
- 2.2 Members have previously agreed to support up to 5 families in properties within the Ribble Valley. These properties were acquired and operated by the government's accommodation agents Serco.
- 2.3 The Home Office has revised the asylum dispersal system and on 13 April the Minister for Safe and Legal Migration announced the move to a full dispersal model with immediate effect. This aims to have asylum seekers more fairly and equitably accommodated across England, Scotland, and Wales. It will consider all the immigration demands on a local authority. The model is intended to provide local authorities with more control and autonomy at a regional level through which authorities will collectively agree on an approach to dispersal in the region and each local authority having an allocation to meet. The Home Office has started a process of consultation and engagement with local authorities through the Regional Migration Partnerships (RMP) and with an online informal consultation.
- 2.4 The Home Office expects the consultation process to help agree the full dispersal process, quantify the impacts of asylum dispersal on local authorities and establish the requirement to move to a 'placed based' immigration process that delivers a sustainable, flexible end to end asylum accommodation process.
- 2.5 The move to a full dispersal model is not itself subject to consultation. The policy approach has been implemented by government; the current consultation is part of the process for agreeing the local model for the region.
- 2.6 A preliminary workshop was recently held with the Home Office where a wide range of issues and concerns were raised about how the process was to be managed by a number of authorities. In particular, the proposed timetable was viewed as an issue insofar as consultation was launched on 9 May and closes on 1 July, however the

Home Office expects regional plans to be in place, agreed and implemented by 15 July 2022. The Home Office anticipates providing more details on the numbers of asylum seekers to be accommodated during June.

- 2.7 At this stage there are 5 key principles set out by the Home Office that are to be borne in mind as part of the consultation:
1. Statutory obligations and the pace of procurement.
 2. Fairness for local authorities and being informed by market availability.
 3. Value for money.
 4. Sensitivity to local considerations.
 - 5 Flexibility.
- 2.8 Of concern to many authorities was the impact on local housing services given that the delivery of properties against these principles will be likely to be delivered by way of accommodation secured to areas that have a greater number of low-cost properties. Increasingly taking more affordable units out of the market. The main issue for Ribble Valley now is we have no indication of the scale of impact the full dispersal model will have or how likely regional shares will be distributed. At this stage, officers will continue to monitor the process with the SMP to try and establish the implications.
- 2.9 To date, the number of asylum seekers in Ribble Valley has been relatively low. As part of the move to full dispersal, the government has issued a payment of £250 per asylum seeker in the borough registered as of 27 March 2022. This equates to some 11 residents and a total grant payment of £2750 to the Council. This payment is intended to assist in the delivery of additional workloads experienced by the authority during 2021/22. These have been primarily related to consultations regarding the suitability of properties and a limited amount of homeless support for asylum seekers leaving the national support scheme.
- 2.10 The Home Office has identified that it will undertake a new burden assessment as part of the process to ensure that additional costs associated with the full asylum dispersal model are recognised. The challenge for the Council at this stage is we are unaware of the numbers of asylum seekers that will be expected to be accommodated.
- 2.11 The next step will be the commencement of the regional share workshops due to be started from the 6 June where the Home Office will invite regional planning from dispersal through the SMP who will have been asked to coordinate the development of the regional plans. Once plans are in place, the Home Office will undertake to procure accommodation in line with that plan with the resultant dispersal of accommodation across the country accordingly.
- 2.12 As indicated, the development of the regional plans will be monitored, and Members kept informed as details emerge. Whilst it is not anticipated that the approach to dispersal itself will be a significant issue for the Council and for the most part additional workloads generated will be around liaison and accommodation procurement, there may be implications of additional demands upon the housing services, specifically around homelessness, as there could be an increase in service users seeking support from the Council under homelessness duties.



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