

<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>Home Office/TEO/Council Asylum seekers project update</b>
<b>Committee Report Submitted To:</b>	<b>Leisure and Development</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>21<sup>st</sup> January 2025</b>
<b>For Decision or For Information</b>	For Information.
<b>To be discussed In Committee YES/NO</b>	<b>No</b>

<b>Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)</b>	
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 and Culture Good Relations Manager

<b>Estimated Timescale for Completion</b>	
Date to be Completed	March 2025

<b>Budgetary Considerations</b>	
Cost of Proposal	
Included in Current Year Estimates	<b>YES/NO</b>
Capital/Revenue	
Code	1041/30186
Staffing Costs	100% funded

<b>Legal Considerations</b>	
Input of Legal Services Required	<b>YES/NO</b>
Legal Opinion Obtained	<b>YES/NO</b>

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

Assessment (DPIA)	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
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## 1.0 **Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To provide an update to members on dispersal of asylum seekers in the CCGBC area.
- 1.2 To update members on Home Office and The Executive office sponsored Refugee Integration Funding and Asylum Dispersal funding programmes for councils across Northern Ireland.

## 2.0 **Background**

- 2.1 Previous reports to council provided members with information on the dispersal of individuals and families seeking Asylum across Northern Ireland as a result of increase in those arriving in Northern Ireland to seek Asylum coupled with a lack of emergency / contingency and dispersal accommodation available in Belfast where the main agencies and services are available for Asylum Seekers.
- 2.2 Information was previously provided to council that The Home Office, through Mears Housing, were utilising The Rambler Inn Hotel accommodation in Portstewart for males as contingency emergency accommodation. Additionally the Magherabouy House Hotel, in Portrush was being utilised to provide contingency emergency accommodation for families.
- 2.3 Members were also informed of the plans by the Home Office and Mears to expand dispersal accommodation (DA) into the Causeway Coast and Glens Council. Dispersal Accommodation (DA) is considered as temporary accommodation whilst awaiting an asylum application outcome and is inclined to be private rented accommodation, either Houses of Multiple Occupation or family properties which are procured by Mears Housing who manage and maintain the properties on behalf of The Home Office across the UK. As of December 2024, Mears were utilising 18 HMO's and 4 family properties in the CCGBC area.
- 2.4 Initial funding was provided to Council by The Executive Office (sponsored by the Home Office) in early 2023 to the sum of £162,095. This funding was provided until March 2024 and allowed council to carry out research and develop of local action plan, cover staff resource costs to co-ordinate and oversee the delivery of the action plan and programme costs to develop and deliver initiatives to provide support and aid integration within local communities.

## 3.0 **Update on current position**

- 3.1 Since the Asylum Dispersal programme was first implemented throughout Northern Ireland, the Home Office had committed to ensuring the Asylum application process was reviewed and steps implemented to ensure that the process was fit for purpose and that emergency contingency accommodation would only be used on a short-term basis. Since its initial implementation asylum applications are now being processed sooner.

3.2 Council officers continue to engage in the Home Office through the 'NI Executive Office Council engagement forum' where updates are provided on a bi-monthly basis, however the number of people in each area *can* change on a daily basis. Councils are not however provided with information on successful and unsuccessful Asylum applications. Many of those who receive their application outcome are moving away from the CCGBC area however a small number remain and others are relocated from other council areas.

3.3 CCGBC area is home to a number of refugees who have either come here through a refugee scheme (Syrian or Ukrainian scheme) or of people who have decided to stay in the area after receiving a positive outcome to an asylum application.

#### **4.0 NI Executive Office /Council Engagement & funding.**

4.1 The Executive Office provided Council with an additional £50,000 via the Refugee Integration Fund. The funding is specifically for the development and delivery of programmes to support the integration and settlement of refugees to in the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council area.

4.2 Several initiatives have been developed in relation to priority needs. Projects are being delivered in partnership out with both community & voluntary sector groups and statutory bodies, Projects include formal and informal English language classes, networking and raising awareness of local services and support, befriending, education for understanding of and raising awareness of diverse cultures, mental health and wellbeing initiatives, training for staff and staff costs for implementing and overseeing the delivery of the initiatives.

4.3 Council have been allocated further Asylum Dispersal Funding (Home Office Sponsored) to the value of £42,239 in December by The Executive Office. This will include the delivery of further initiatives identified as priorities in line with Council's Refugee and Asylum Seekers Plan. Projects will include initiatives such as information and orientation events, networking, Asylum Advice services, mental health and wellbeing initiatives and awareness raising for community and statutory partners and resources for groups providing support services and social inclusion opportunities to those seeking Asylum and who have been housed within in the Council area. Staff resource costs are covered under the Dispersal Funding for Asylum Support heading.

#### **5.0 Moving Forward**

5.1 Uncertainty of future availability and / or late notification of Asylum Dispersal and Refugee Integration Funding, means it is difficult to develop a sustainable model of support, not only for those placed in the Council area but for the community organisations and churches who have been instrumental in providing the necessary services to support individuals and families seeking sanctuary in the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council area.

5.2 The Executive Office requires the current Refugee Integration and Asylum Dispersal Funding to be fully committed by the end of March 2025. The Executive

Office are not in the position to confirm availability of funding for the next financial year, however there is no current plan to stand down either of the hotels being used for contingency emergency accommodation or cease the provision of dispersal accommodation within the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council area.