

North Somerset Council

Report to the Adult Services and Housing Policy & Scrutiny Panel

Date of Meeting: 23rd February 2023

Subject of Report: Asylum Seeker Programme

Town or Parish: All

Officer/Member Presenting: Hayley Verrico, Director of Adults Services

Key Decision: No

Reason: The programme is led by the home office and local authorities are not responsible for commissioning asylum seeker services though are expected to accommodate up to 0.5% of their population. Some local authorities are legally challenging the home office policy with little success.

Recommendations

It is recommended that ASH members note the content of the report and accompanying presentation.

1. Summary of Report

- 1.1 The report summarises North Somerset Council's approach to accommodating asylum seekers. This report pertains to people crossing the channel in small boats/crafts. It does not relate to other asylum programmes including the Ukrainian, Afghanistan or Hong Kong programmes.

2. Policy

- 2.1 On 13th April 2022, the Home Office announced that all LA's would be expected to be asylum dispersal areas, this is in an attempt to have a fairer distribution of asylum seekers. This programme is separate to the Ukrainian resettlement scheme and is purely for asylum seekers waiting for their asylum claim to be considered. The obligation arises from the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) and the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act.

3. Details

- 3.1 Most asylum seekers have entered the UK in small boats and crafts and the sharp increase in crossings and the pandemic have led to over 50,000 destitute migrants who are currently being accommodated in hotels. The increase has in part occurred because the pandemic prevented the Government from removing people from the UK. Local Authorities are not expected to accommodate asylum seekers beyond

0.5% of their population, equating to one asylum seeker per 200 residents. Currently there are 400 asylum seekers being accommodated in North Somerset. The hotels are meant to be a temporary measure but there is no information yet on how long they will operate.

- 3.2 There is no central government funding for the hotels, administration or services commissioned to support the asylum seekers. There are little grounds on which to object though councils have raised legal challenges, and these have been unsuccessful.

4. Consultation

- 4.1 Elected members in areas where hotels are located have received briefings. We are also working on a promotional campaign aimed at developing and maintaining community cohesion. Consultation on the location of hotels is not undertaken because the council have limited and sometimes no advance notification that a hotel is being opened and have little grounds on which to object to their location or opening. Representation has been made to the home office by the CEO and officers.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 The government are providing no funding for the hotels or supporting services. Currently the programme is being managed by Adult Social Care and supported by Public Health and Housing Solutions. There are financial implications for Children's services, this is because several people placed in the hotels are either identified or self-identify as being under 18 years of age and in some cases need to be accommodated.

6. Legal Powers and Implications

- 6.1 European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR)
1999 Immigration and Asylum Act

7. Climate Change and Environmental Implications

- 7.1 There are no climate change or environmental implications relevant to this report.

8. Risk Management

- 8.1 There is a risk to our place making programme, housing, tourism, and children's placement budget.

9. Equality Implications

- 9.1 The home office is responsible for developing and publishing the EQIA.

10. Corporate Implications

10.1 Risk to our place making programme, housing, tourism, and children's placement budget. There are also challenges in respect of senior management capacity to manage the programme and operation support.

11. Options Considered

11.1 None – the programme is managed by the home office and local authorities have little grounds on which to object to the programme.

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Appendices:

Asylum Contingency Hotel Presentation

Background Papers:

None

