

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No. 5

meeting date: THURSDAY, 3 SEPTEMBER 2015
title: REQUEST FOR ASYLUM SEEKER DISPERSAL IN THE BOROUGH
submitted by: CHIEF EXECUTIVE
principal author: RACHAEL STOTT – HOUSING STRATEGY OFFICER

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To inform Committee of the request for Ribble Valley to support asylum dispersal in the borough.
- 1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities
 - Community Objectives – to address the housing and support needs of all households in the borough.
 - Corporate Priorities – community cohesion in the borough.
 - Other Considerations – none.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 We received a request from the Asylum and Immigration Manager, North West Strategic Migration Partnership (RSMP) in July 2015, asking to meet to discuss Ribble Valley Borough Council being included in the Asylum Dispersal Programme across the North West.
- 2.2 All local authorities in the North West are to be approached to request their voluntary engagement in the dispersal programme.

3. Request

- 3.1 A meeting was arranged with a representative from the Home Office (Helen Earner) and the RSMP (Katy Wood). The request is for Ribble Valley to agree to a voluntary engagement in the dispersal of asylum seekers. The Home Office provide accommodation and support for asylum seekers and their families whilst their cases are processed and determined. They have awarded the contract to supply accommodation in the North West to SERCO. A link to the contract for the provision of accommodation for asylum seekers is included in Background Papers. Each region in the UK has a service provider for provision of accommodation. SERCO will seek to acquire private rented accommodation through a five year leasehold arrangement with private landlords.
- 3.2 The government has an obligation under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 to provide accommodation to asylum seekers. The government also provides financial support known as Subsistence Support for essential needs such as food and clothing, as asylum seekers are not allowed to work or claim mainstream welfare benefits. To be eligible for accommodation, asylum seekers must

- Prove that their application for asylum has been recorded.
- That they have no access to money or accommodation.
- Apply as soon as reasonably practicable after arriving in the country.
- If unaccompanied they must be over 18 years old.

4. Dispersal of Asylum Seekers

- 4.1 Following the meeting with the Home Office and RSMP, we requested a meeting with SERCO. The meeting took place on 11 August.
- 4.2 SERCO explained that eligible asylum seekers are firstly placed in hostel style accommodation on a short term basis whilst they make an application for financial assistance. Most asylum seekers make their initial claim at the asylum screening unit in Croydon.
- 4.3 The provider (SERCO in the North West) then arranges to move the asylum seekers to more permanent dispersal accommodation once the department has assessed and confirmed their eligibility for support. Providers (SERCO) must provide a property to the department within 5 days and should normally complete the dispersal process within 9 days. Dispersal accommodation is typically a flat or shared house in which the asylum seeker is provided with bedding and basic kitchen equipment as well as furniture and access to cooking and washing facilities. The type of property allocated depends on a number of factors including if they have children living with them.
- 4.4 This permanent dispersal accommodation is to be acquired in the borough. The properties are secured on a five year lease with SERCO taking full maintenance and repair responsibility. The property will be fully furnished with all white goods and all utility and Council Tax bills will be covered by SERCO.
- 4.5 SECRO are operating in Preston Borough Council; they have approval to secure 30 properties. They have established a multi-agency forum which is attended by the police, fire service, health and third sector. They have invited Ribble Valley Borough Council to attend the next Multi Agency Forum (MAF) to gain an understanding of how local authorities and partners are managing the scheme and their input.

5. Restriction of Dispersal

- 5.1 Dispersal accommodation will be located in areas in the community where the local authority has agreed to take asylum seekers up to a defined cluster limit. The definition of this is that there will be no more than one asylum seeker per 200 residents. Under the terms of the accommodation contract, SERCO are required to consider a range of social cohesion, housing and community factors when proposing properties. These factors include:
- The availability and concentration of accommodation.
 - Capacity of local health, education and support services.
 - The level of risk of increased social tension.
- 5.2 The local authority has a right to withdraw existing consent for properties used for asylum seeker accommodation or reject new proposals if there are any specific concerns. The asylum seeker will then be allocated accommodation whilst their claim is processed unless they are given permission to move; failure to do so will mean the accommodation and support is withdrawn. If an asylum seeker's claim for refugee

status is successful, they cease to be eligible for support after 28 days and are required to find alternative accommodation.

6 RISK ASSESSMENT

6.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications

- Resources – Any asylum seeker is not entitled to any welfare benefit claims but will be entitled to health, education and social care. Implications will also be on the voluntary and charitable sector, for example CAB, food bank, Home Start, children's centres etc. Should the asylum seekers claim be granted, then they can present as homeless to the Council.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – Any homelessness duty will be assessed once asylum claim has been decided.
- Political – Ensure the placement of asylum seekers is managed in a way to ensure the local community are kept informed and any community cohesion issues are dealt with promptly.
- Reputation – To agree to a voluntary inclusion in the programme will allow more involved and planned dispersal as opposed to involvement through statutory enforcement.
- Equality & Diversity – All Local authorities have an obligation under the Immigration and Asylum Act to provide accommodation to asylum seekers.

7 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

- 7.1 Agree to Ribble Valley Borough Council being included in the Asylum Seeker Dispersal Programme.
- 7.2 Agree to work with SERCO to deliver a maximum of 5 units in the towns of Clitheroe and Longridge as a pilot which will be reviewed within 6 months from the first occupation.
- 7.3 Agree approval of properties in the scheme will be delegated to the Strategic Housing Working Group and feedback, monitoring and MAF to be reported to the Strategic Housing Working Group.

RACHAEL STOTT
HOUSING STRATEGY OFFICER

MARSHAL SCOTT
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

BACKGROUND PAPERS

<http://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/10287-001.Executive-Summary.pdf>

Asylum seeker dispersal pack available on request and copy in the member's library.

For further information please ask for Rachael Stott, extension 4567.

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