

Report of	Record of	Date
Director (Communities) (Introduced by Executive Member (Homes and Housing))	Executive Member Decision	28 June 2023

Asylum Seeker Grant Funding 2023

Is this report confidential?	No
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Is this decision key?	No
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Purpose of the Report

1. The information in this report provides a breakdown of the Home Office funding committed to Chorley Council to assist with the costs of supporting asylum seekers under Full Asylum Dispersal.
2. It also provides proposals for grant funding expenditure.

Recommendations

3. That the funding be treated as a reserve and utilised over subsequent financial years so that it is utilised effectively.
4. That the Executive Member approves the allocation of a proportion of the funding as per Table 2.
5. That the Executive Member approve of a further scoping exercise for funding allocations proposed in Table 3.

Reasons for recommendations

6. The Home Office's policies and procedures associated with asylum seeker dispersal are constantly changing. As a consequence, so are the support needs of asylum seekers and the pressures on local services. The above recommendations advise that a proportion of the funding be used to cover council costs incurred since 2021 and that any remaining funding be used over subsequent years to mitigate the impacts of asylum dispersal.

Other options considered and rejected

7. To return the funding to the Home Office and not use it to support asylum seekers dispersed in Chorley or alleviate pressures on local services.

Executive summary

8. The Home Office has committed to make funding available to local authorities to assist with the costs of supporting asylum seekers under Full Asylum Dispersal. This paper provides a breakdown of the funding allocation for Chorley Council, summarises the impacts of asylum dispersal on internal teams and highlights what support is available to asylum seekers in the wider community. The paper then details proposed expenditure for costs already incurred to the council prior to March 2023 and then recommends further scoping activity for the expenditure of any residual funding.

Corporate priorities

9. The report relates to the following corporate priorities:

Housing where residents can live well	A green and sustainable borough
An enterprising economy with vibrant local centres in urban and rural areas	Healthy, safe and engaged communities

Background to the report

10. Asylum seekers are some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in society. Securing asylum status is difficult and complex and should this status be granted, asylum seekers are not permitted to work, leaving them dependent on government payments of approximately £5 per day. As a result, asylum seekers' lives are stressful and afflicted by hardship.
11. Dispersal is the process by which the Home Office moves asylum seekers to specified local authority areas across the UK. They are first moved to initial accommodation while their application for asylum support is processed. Once the application has been processed and approved they are moved on to dispersal accommodation.

Funding Purpose, Allocation and Timeline for 2021/2022 and 2022/2023

12. For the period between 01 April 2021 and 31 March 2023, the Home Office has committed to make funding available to local authorities to assist with the costs of supporting asylum seekers under Full Asylum Dispersal.
13. The funding has been made available to address concerns raised by local authorities in relation to pressure on local services associated with supporting asylum seekers.
14. According to the Home Offices funding instructions, the funding must be used to facilitate Local Authorities to support requests for properties made under Full Asylum Dispersal. The funding is to address concerns raised by Local Authorities in relation to pressure on local services associated with supporting asylum seekers.
15. Chorley Council has received three payments totalling £109,750
16. The 2021/2022 grant payment was calculated using a different formula to the 2022/2023 grant payment(s), which is why the funding allocation is significantly lower for 2021/2022

Table 1: Funding Allocation Timeline

Date Received	Allocation	Payment Reference
10/08/2022	£22,250	Grant Payment 1 (Expenditure period 01 April 2021 – 31 March 2022)
25/10/2022	£45,500	Grant Payment 2: April 2022 – June 2022
24/11/2022	£42,000	Grant Payment 2B: July 2022 – September 2022
Total	£109,750	

17. Chorley Council did not receive notifications for further payments for quarter 3 and 4 eligibility. This is likely to be because there was no increase in the number of bed spaces during these periods.

Funding Allocation for 2023/2024

18. On 29 March 2023, the Immigration Minister confirmed that the government is continuing work to reduce the unsustainable pressure on the UK's asylum system and the cost to the taxpayer caused by illegal crossings.
19. Further measures were also announced to improve the asylum accommodation system which includes:
- For existing dispersed accommodation and beds in hotels, the government will provide local authorities with a one off £750 payment for each asylum seeker who is in Home Office accommodation on the 1st April 2023 – up from £250 last year. The payment will be made during quarter 1 of 2023/24 and Chorley Council has been notified that it will receive £81,000.
 - An incentive payment of £3,500 for each new bed space occupied from 1st April 2023 to 31 March 2024
 - A four-month pilot from 31st May 2023 to 31st August 2023 payment of £3,000 where dispersal accommodation beds are delivered within one month of the provider identifying suitable property or £2000 where new beds are delivered within two months of the provider identifying suitable property.

Funding Allocation Delays

20. Table 1 indicates that the grant payments were received from August 2022 and currently, the funding remains unallocated. The main reasons for this are as follows:
- a. Informal consultation with community stakeholders and asylum seekers has been ongoing in order to ascertain need and any gaps in provision.
 - b. Clarification on the terms and conditions of the funding needed to be sought
 - c. Consultation needed to be undertaken with internal teams to ascertain support offered to asylum seekers and agree a funding allocation
 - d. Within the Communities team, scoping out an effective approach to allocating the funding has been postponed to allow for the roll out of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, the standing up of a temporary asylum seeker hotel in December 2022, the rolling out of the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy, and existing commitments to the UK Resettlement Scheme
 - e. Management of asylum provision, and the undertaking of such scoping work, is a new requirement which previously was not funded and therefore not allocated within the team.

Feedback from the Home Office

21. The Regional Strategic Migration Partnership (RSMP) based at Manchester City Council, is the local authority link to the Home Office. The Communities team has consulted with the RSMP and has been able to ascertain the following regarding the grant funding:
 - A local authority can spend their funding allocation as they wish, to support asylum seekers where there is need. The Home Office does not ask local authorities to specify what they intend to spend the money on
 - The funding can be utilised over subsequent financial years
 - The funding is not ring-fenced, so if it remains unallocated before 30 June 2023 it is unlikely that the Home Office will ask for it to be returned
 - Asylum seeker grant funding allocations for 2023/2024 are not guaranteed due to ongoing government data gathering exercises which are being used to inform the new burdens assessment

Impacts of Asylum Dispersal on Internal Teams

22. The Communities team collaborate frequently with community stakeholders to ensure that asylum seekers can access the relevant support services. For example, Refugee Resettlement staff consistently attend a community-based drop-in service offering advice and guidance to asylum seekers and coordinate a multi-agency forum so that this and other community-based provision remains coordinated across Chorley. This support has been provided in addition to the teams' commitments to the UK Resettlement Scheme, the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy.
23. The Public Protection team regularly receive requests to undertake postcode checks on areas where asylum seeker dispersal may take place. This is undertaken to ensure that asylum seekers are not accommodated in areas where anti-social behaviour or hate crime is an issue as this could further exacerbate community tensions.
24. The Housing Solutions team regularly support Refugees to find temporary or emergency accommodation once they receive their 'Right to Remain' status. Once this status has been granted, Refugees are served a 28 day notice by the accommodation provider to vacate their Home Office accommodation, which is often not at the start of the process and this leaves little time to secure alternative living arrangements. The resource from the Housing team is intensive due to the complexity of the individuals and the additional support required to ensure they are fully supported.

Support Available from Community Stakeholders in Chorley

25. In Chorley, there are four organisations that offer support to asylum seekers; Saheliyaan Asian Women's Forum, the Chorley United Reformed Church (URC), the British Red Cross and Citizens Advice.
26. The Saheliyaan Asian Womens Forum has been well-established for many years. The support they offer includes access to emergency accommodation, access to emergency food, immigration advice, English language acquisition support, health and wellbeing support and general signposting to other services. This organisation has not received any Chorley Council funding for the support they offer to asylum seekers.
27. Between October 2021 and October 2022, the URC received £10,000 from Lancashire County Council (LCC) to deliver a drop-in support service. However, during a re-commissioning exercise, the British Red Cross was awarded the funding for Chorley. Despite this, the URC has continued to offer support to asylum-seeking populations in Chorley without any funding being in place. Examples of support include; community integration, access to emergency food and essential supplies, health and wellbeing

support and signposting to other services. The URC is working collaboratively with the British Red Cross and has supported them to run their drop-in service from their premises.

28. The British Red Cross is relatively new to Chorley and as described above, has been recently commissioned by LCC. After significant delays, their drop-in support service commenced in February 2023. A unique feature of this drop-in service is that specialist immigration advice and guidance should be available to asylum seekers, however, early feedback suggests that the service is not yet organised effectively, communication is poor and asylum seekers are being asked to travel to drop-in sessions outside of Chorley.
29. Citizens Advice has also been offering immigration advice to asylum seekers for many years. However, their advisors are only trained to offer low-level immigration signposting support and access to interpreters can be a challenge. Citizens Advice are recipients of Chorley Council's large commissioning funding.

Community Consultation

30. Since the first Home Office funding instruction was received in May 2022, Refugee Resettlement staff within the Communities team have been informally consulting with community stakeholders and asylum seekers to identify gaps in provision for asylum seekers specifically. The outcome of this informal consultation suggests that the main priorities of the community are:
 - Access to health and wellbeing opportunities, such as gym memberships, exercise classes and alternative therapies
 - Digital inclusion through access to devices and connectivity
 - Health advocacy support
 - Affordable transportation
 - Access to community-based support and spaces to socialise
 - Access to immigration advice and guidance within the Chorley area

Proposed Spend

31. The total amount of funding available is £190,750. A proposal for expenditure can be seen in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Spend Category	Budget Allocated	Rationale
Housing	2021/2022 = £7,571.20	2021/2022: Scale 6 hourly rate (£14.56) x 10 hours per week = £145.60
	2022/2023 = 12,954.24	£145.60 x 52 weeks = £7,571.20
	Total = £20,525	2022/2023: Scale 6 Hourly Rate (£15.57) x 16 hours per week = £249.12 £249.12 x 52 weeks = £12,954.24
Public Protection	2021/2022 = £381.78	2021/2022: 21 checks x 1 hour at POA hourly rate (£18.18) = £381.78
	2022/2023 = £1,324.80	2022/2023: 69 checks x 1 hour at POA hourly rate (£19.20) = £1324.80
	Total = £1,706	

<p>Communities team</p>	<p>£63,766</p>	<p>It is recommended that a proportion of the funding be used to create an additional scale 6 case worker post that will focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing early intervention processes which prevent issues effecting asylum seekers from escalating • Collaboration with community-based drop ins and providing low-level support which builds personal resilience • Case managing asylum seekers with higher level support needs related to health, social isolation, community integration and education, for example. • Supporting public protection colleagues when cases related to asylum seekers are escalated to multi-agency forums • Supporting housing colleagues during housing assessments with asylum seekers granted leave to remain <p>The above will allow:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resettlement Officers to focus on fulfilling commitments to other resettlement programmes • the mitigation of the impacts of government policy changes on other internal council teams • Support already overstretched community-based support services • Intelligence gathering and the development of a deeper understanding of issues effecting asylum seekers • the council to understand where there are constraints and issues with capacity in other public sector organisations and attempt to develop strategies to overcome these <p>It is recommended that the post be fixed term until 31 March 2025 so that it is aligned with the employment contracts of current resettlement staff.</p> <p>Scale 6 post, full time, fixed term for 19 months (September 2023 start date) = £59,756</p>
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Management Fee	2021/2022 = 1,112.50£ 2022/2023 = £4,375	Management time to coordinate staffing and support. 5% management fee for 2021/2022 and 5% management fee for 2022/2023.
Total Expenditure	97,560	This includes £6075 spent in 2023 for health and wellbeing programmes delivered by a local community group
Funding Remaining	£93,190	

32. Proposed expenditure for remaining 2022/2023 grant funding and further 2023/2024 grant payments are detailed in Table 3 below:

Table 3

Spend Category	Budget Allocated	Rationale and Timeline for Expenditure
Funding to support the delivery of the drop-in support service at the United Reformed Church. This is a support service that provides low-level advice and guidance, community-based support and spaces to socialise	£20,000 for 2 years	To cover staffing costs and other associated drop-in programme expenses for 2022/2023 and cover further costs for 2023/2024. 2022/2023 = £10,000 2023/2024 = £10,000
Management fee for 2023/2024	TBC	Management time to coordinate staffing and support. To be calculated once all grant allocations received for 2023/2024
Funding for local community groups to deliver more community-based support programmes	TBC	Timeline to be determined Further scoping is required to ascertain what community-based programmes or types of support would benefit the asylum-seeking community
Digital Inclusion	TBC	Timeline to be determined To work collaboratively with a community organisation to develop and roll out a digital inclusion scheme specifically for asylum seekers. This approach offers the opportunity to replicate the council's 2022/2023 digital inclusion programme.
Health Advocacy Support	TBC	Timeline to be determined LCC have developed a

		<p>Resettlement Strategy which will be sent to council Leaders imminently. LCC are asking for 5% per person of the funding to be allocated to them so that they can provide the following examples of support to asylum seekers and resettlement populations generally:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A health advocacy service - Employment support and training opportunities - Greater support for schools - Additional ESOL classes
Access to immigration advice and guidance within Chorley	TBC	<p>Timeline to be determined</p> <p>The Communities team could research whether there is scope for, and any costs associated with Chorley Council becoming Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) registered. This would mean that Resettlement Case Workers could be trained to provide an appropriate level of immigration advice and guidance needed to support the asylum community. However, more of an opportunity needs to be provided to the British Red Cross to develop their drop-in service and LCC may include immigration training as part of their Resettlement Strategy</p>

33. For the spend categories detailed in Table 3 which require further scoping, additional Executive Member Decision papers will be submitted to obtain approval on the proposed expenditure. This relates to digital inclusion, health advocacy support and access to immigration advice and guidance within Chorley. Similarly, if the needs of the community change, then Table 3 will be updated and approval for expenditure obtained from the Executive Member.

Climate change and air quality

34. The work noted in this report has no overall impact on the Councils Carbon emissions and the wider Climate Emergency and sustainability targets of the Council.

Equality and diversity

35. The proposals noted in this report support the Councils objectives around promoting equality and diversity. Asylum seekers are some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in society. The funding made available to local authorities to assist with the costs of supporting asylum seekers will ensure inclusivity by allowing asylum seekers to participate in activities which encourage the development of personal resilience.

Risk

36. All project proposals will be scoped accordingly, and risks identified through appropriate policies and procedures.

Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer

37. There are no direct financial implications of this report. The Asylum grant funding balance of £190,750 has been held in reserves / received in 2023/24 and table 2 provides the spending plan for £97,560 of this, with the balance of £93,190 to be used towards the proposed expenditure listed in table 3. The proposed expenditure in table 3 is reliant on existing and potential further grant allocation in 2023/24

Comments of the Monitoring Officer

38. The proposed expenditure meets the requirements of the funding and provides desirable outcomes for the reasons provided in the report.

Background documents

Asylum Seeker Grant Funding Full Council Report (16 May 2023)

Report Author:	Email:	Telephone:	Date:
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Following careful consideration and assessment of the contents of this report, I approve the recommendation(s) contained in Paragraph 3 – 5 of the report in accordance with my delegated power to make executive decisions.

Terry Howarth

Councillor Terry Howarth
Executive Member for Homes and Housing

Dated 28/06/23

This decision will come into force and may be implemented five working days after its publication date, subject to being called in in accordance with the Council's Constitution.