

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director (Communities) Introduced by (Executive Member (Early Intervention))	Council	Tuesday, 16 May 2023

Asylum Seeker Grant Funding

Is this report confidential?	No
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Is this decision key?	Not applicable
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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. The purpose of this report is to provide an update to members and ask that consideration be made to the recommendations listed below.

Recommendations

3. To receive the funding allocation of £109,750 and create a budget to allocate the funding.
4. To receive subsequent grant funding allocations and create an equivalent level of budget to allocate the funding.

Reasons for recommendations

5. 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 will give the Communities team the opportunity to further scope out proposals for expenditure which align to the needs of the asylum-seeking community and allow for flexibility as these needs evolve over time.

Other options considered and rejected

6. 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.

Corporate priorities

5. 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

6. In March 2022, the government announced its decision to move to a full asylum dispersal model supported by grant funding. As part of this move, funding was allocated to local authorities for each new dispersal accommodation bed space occupied until 31 March 2023.
7. This report provides an overview of the grant funding allocation for Chorley, details the outcomes of scoping activity undertaken to date and provides recommendations for the approval of funding allocations.

Introduction

8. 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.
9. 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

10. 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.
11. The funding has been made available to address concerns raised by local authorities in relation to pressure on local services associated with support asylum seekers.
12. According to the Home Offices funding instruction, 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.
13. To date, Chorley Council has received three payments totalling £109,750.

14. 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	

15. Chorley Council will receive a further payment for quarter 4 eligibility by 30 June 2023. No quarter 3 payment was made, and this is likely to be because there was no increase in the number of bed spaces.

Funding Allocation for 2023/2024

16. 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.
17. 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.
 - A new pilot will be introduced to offer local authorities an additional one-off payment of up to £3,000 for new dispersal beds which are brought on and occupied quickly.
18. As of yet, it is unclear how much this funding allocation will equate to for Chorley Council.

Funding Allocation Delays

19. 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

20. 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

Impacts of Asylum Dispersal on Internal Teams

21. 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.
22. 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.
23. 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

24. In Chorley, there are four main 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.
25. 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.

26. 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.
27. 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.
28. 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

29. 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

30. The Communities team propose to undertake further scoping activity and develop a spending proposal for the grant funding which:
 - a. Attempts to mitigate the impact of asylum dispersal on internal teams
 - b. Aligns to the priorities of asylum seekers as identified during initial community consultation activity.
32. The Communities team recommend that these spending proposals be delegated for approval to the Executive Member for Housing

Climate change and air quality

31. 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

32. Any proposals for expenditure will 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.
33. An impact assessment will be completed once proposals for expenditure have been fully scoped.

Risk

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

Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer

35. The report seeks approval to receive government grant funding of £109,750 for the period April 2021 to September 2022, with further grant expected for the period through to March 2023, and to support expenditure incurred by the council in line with the conditions of the grant. As expenditure will be fully covered by the grant received, there is no impact on the overall financial position of the council.

Comments of the Monitoring Officer

36. Any grants to delivery partner organisations may be recorded in legally binding grant agreements with provisions commensurate with the size of the grant.

Background documents

37. There are no background documents.

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