

SUBJECT:	<i>Asylum Seekers</i>
REPORT OF:	<i>Cllr Patrick Hogan, Healthy Communities Portfolio Holder</i>
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	<i>Martin Holt – Head of Healthy Communities</i>
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WARD/S AFFECTED	<i>All</i>

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To consider adopting an agreement in principle with the Home Office to accommodate Asylum Seekers.

The PAG is asked to advise the Portfolio Holder on the following recommendation to Cabinet:

RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET

- 1. To delegate the final decision to adopt an 'in principle agreement' with the Home Office to accommodate Asylum Seekers to the Head of Healthy communities in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities.**

2. Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 In March 2016 the Chief Executive of every local authority in the UK received a letter from the Director General of UKVI requesting their participation in permitting people seeking asylum to live in their areas. The Home office has powers available to require the Councils to participate in a resettlement programme for asylum seekers and is seeking an in principle decision at this time.

3. Content of Report

- 3.1 In March 2016 the Chief Executive of every local authority in the UK received a letter from the Director General of UKVI requesting their participation in permitting people seeking asylum to live in their areas.
- 3.2 As a follow up to that correspondence the UK Visas & Immigration and Migration Partnerships committed to meet with every UK local authority. The South East Strategic Partnership for Migration was asked to arrange a meeting to discuss the possibility of asylum dispersal with the Buckinghamshire authorities. The meeting held 13th March 2018 included Home Office representatives and the government's accommodation provider in the South East, Clear Springs Ready Homes.
- 3.3 Due to the shortage of accommodation in the existing dispersal areas the Home Office wants local authorities to participate in a scheme to increase the number of locations throughout the UK where people seeking asylum could live.

- 3.4 Currently in the South East the main areas where asylum seekers are based is Hastings, Portsmouth and Southampton. Currently a number of people have been placed in High Wycombe.
- 3.5 The purpose of the meeting was to seek "in principle" agreement with the County and District authorities to permit Clear Springs, to look for suitable accommodation in the Councils areas.
- 3.6 Whilst any agreement would allow Clear Springs to seek to secure accommodation in the local area there is no predetermined number of people the Home Office would be looking to accommodate in any new area.
- 3.7 As far as locations was concerned, they would be looking at larger towns due to the services available, but would not rule out rural locations as some people have come from those backgrounds.
- 3.8 The types of properties to be considered would be a variety, ranging from family homes to bedsits. They could be looking to house large families, couples or singles. They would consider houses of multiple occupation but would never take single rooms in a house with non-asylum seekers
- 3.9 Accommodation would be sought from the private rental market, which would entail long term agreements with landlords to provide accommodation at Local Housing allowance rates.
- 3.10 The level of funding that can be paid for accommodation can be no more than the local housing allowance (LHA). Rent levels are such that very little accommodation would be available in Chiltern and or South Bucks that would enable Clear Springs to accommodate asylum seekers at LHA rate.
- 3.11 The Home Office also advised they would not wish to place people who would be isolated in the community so more than one unit of accommodation would be required in any location, increasing the difficulty in finding suitable accommodation at an affordable rate.
- 3.12 Clear Springs would be responsible for the acquisition, maintenance and management of properties. The local authority could inspect the properties to ensure they met local standards agreed with the Home Office as well as meeting the current housing legislative requirements. A property would not be used without the permission of the local authority and the local authority can refuse if it is not deemed suitable.
- 3.13 The factors that could also be taken in to account by a local authority include location, access to services, impact on the community and cohesion. The Home Office can also move asylum seekers if they are found to be impacting negatively on the community.
- 3.14 The Home Office reminded the meeting that it does have powers to require authorities to participate in accommodating asylum seekers but that it has not current utilised these powers, it would rather follow the 'in principle' agreement route.

3.15 The benefits to the local authority may include;

- Improved opportunities to access accommodation that Clear Springs cannot use but the private sector landlords may wish to let to homeless households through the Paradigm Leasing scheme
- Improved networking with the migrant support system benefiting future needs
- Reduced risk of the council being required to accommodate asylum seekers by the Home Office

3.16 The significant risk is that following any 'right to stay decision' being made by the Home Office the Council would have 28 days to address any Homeless Application by a former asylum seeker and identify the provision of temporary accommodation. However through working with Clear Springs this risk may be better managed until alternative accommodation is sourced. The applicant would be entitled to access the benefits system or employment reducing the risk of rent arrears.

3.17 The Healthy Communities PAH 12th June 2018 is asked to recommend to the Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities as to any decision for South Bucks District Council entering into discussions with the Home Office over an 'in principle agreement' to accommodate Asylum Seekers in the District.

4 Options

- 1.1.1 To agree to further discussions over an 'in principle agreement' with the Home Office

5. Corporate Implications

6.1 *Financial* – the in principle agreement with the Home Office does not adversely impact on the Councils mid-term financial plan

6.2 *Legal* – the Home office has powers available to require the Councils to participate in a resettlement programme for asylum seekers and is seeking an in principle decision at this time

7. Links to Council Policy Objectives

- 7.1 Delivering cost-effective, customer focussed services-
7.2 Working towards safe and healthier local communities.

8. Next Step

- 8.1. To arrange discussions with the Home Office

Background Papers:	None
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