

<b>Agenda Item No:</b>	<b>11</b>	
<b>Committee:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	<b>5<sup>th</sup> September 2022</b>	
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>Asylum Seeker Dispersal</b>	

Cover sheet:

**1 Purpose / Summary**

- 1.1 This paper seeks to inform FDC Cabinet as to the potential financial and social implications of the Government's Asylum Seeker Dispersal programme to the extent that it will relate to Fenland

**2 Key Issues**

- 2.1 The Home Office has awarded a contract to Serco to manage sundry Asylum Seeker related responsibilities in the East of England.
- 2.2 Serco has responsibility locally to manage the Home Office's Asylum Seeker Dispersal Programme. Based on a full dispersal approach to allocations across the Country, there will be a requirement to house asylum seekers in Fenland by the end of next year.
- 2.4 Serco are expected exclusively or overwhelmingly to source accommodation for these asylum seekers from the private rented accommodation sector.
- 2.5 If asylum seekers' applications for asylum are unsuccessful, or they breach their conditions of stay in the UK as an asylum seeker, whilst the Government will signpost them towards repatriation, the asylum seeker will be left without recourse to public funds.
- 2.6 This asylum seeker dispersal policy is being imposed upon Fenland District Council without our agreement. This report provides a high-level overview of the risks to FDC inherent in this policy, requires Officers to estimate, monitor and report upon the potential pressures upon FDC's Revenue Budget and recommends that representations be made to Steve Barclay MP and to the soon to be elected new Prime Minister.

### 3 Recommendations

- 3.1 Members are asked to note the contents of the report now provided
- 3.2 Members are requested to provide instructions to officers on the basis of the request contained within the report.
- 3.3 Members are asked to confirm that representations be made as recommended within the report

Wards Affected	All wards
Forward Plan Reference	
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Sam Hoy – Portfolio Holder for Housing
Report Originator(s)	Councillor Sam Hoy, Portfolio Holder for Housing Cllr Chris Boden – Leader
Contact Officer(s)	N/A
Background Papers	N/A

## Report:

### **1 BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 FDC as local district council has been advised that, as part of the Government's Asylum Dispersal Policy, it is highly likely that Serco will seek to source accommodation for a significant number of asylum seekers within Fenland.
- 1.2 If asylum seekers' applications for asylum are unsuccessful, or they breach their conditions of stay in the UK as an asylum seeker, whilst the Government will signpost them towards repatriation, the asylum seeker will be left without recourse to public funds.
- 1.3 Fenland does not contain the community support networks seen in cities such as Peterborough or Cambridge to provide social support for asylum seekers. Fenland's sub-standard and expensive public transport system would make access to such support networks very difficult if not impossible for asylum seekers
- 1.4 FDC has been made aware that asylum seekers' rights to accommodation, supplied by Serco, would be lost if their application for political asylum were to be unsuccessful together with any associated appeal. In that case, we are told, the asylum seeker concerned would be 'signposted' to repatriation facilities but could be left, potentially destitute, here in Fenland with no access to public funds.
- 1.5 There is relatively tight, and increasingly expensive, private sector rented housing provision in Fenland. The impact of Serco's plans on the private rented market are uncertain. Any proposal requiring the allocation of asylum seekers within Fenland has the potential to restrict properties available for other people in need of accommodation. It is possible that the consequential impact on supply could create further inflation in rents at a time when the cost of living is causing people to struggle. There is a concern that the impact on housing supply for people already living in the area or wishing to relocate to Fenland may not have been adequately addressed

### **2 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 This paper is brought to FDC Cabinet is to allow members to review the situation, consider the options and give officers guidance as to members preferred course of action.

### **3 CONSULTATIONS**

- 3.1 FDC has made a submission to the Home Office's consultation about the Asylum Seeker Dispersal Programme. There has been no public consultation by Government with Fenland residents.

### **4 IMPLICATIONS**

#### **4.1 Legal Implications**

There are no immediate legal implications requiring detailed consideration for the purpose of this report.

#### **4.2 Financial Implications**

4.2.1 The accommodation and support costs for asylum seekers housed in Fenland under the Asylum Seeker Dispersal Programme will be met by Serco under the terms of the Government contract.

4.2.2 Asylum seekers will lose their right to accommodation provided by Serco if their application for political asylum and any subsequent appeal are rejected. They will then be left without recourse to public funds.

4.2.3 The additional pressures on the local private sector rental market will potentially create additional pressure upon FDC's homelessness budget, as residents currently in local rented accommodation find it more difficult to find alternative local private sector rented accommodation.

### **5 Equality Implications**

There are no immediate equality implications requiring detailed consideration for the purpose of this report however, Fenland District Council acknowledges its general and specific duties under the Equality Act 2010.

### **6 Other Relevant Implications and Alternative Options Considered**

- 6.1 Should the Asylum Seeker Dispersal Scheme proceed, whilst Serco will provide a 24/7 support package and monthly property checks there remain questions about the extent to which other forms of local social support will be accessible/available.

- 6.2 Where people have their application for asylum rejected and are left without recourse to public funds it is possible that this could constitute a significant problem in Fenland. It is unclear whether the potential impact this could have on the area and local public funds has been adequately assessed. We do know however that we currently have individuals with NRPF within the District and this is having an impact on public services.
- 6.3 Fenland District Council in its consultation response to Government requested a breakdown of allocation by District (rather than County) in order that any resultant allocation be proportionate to population rather than any other factors such as lower property rental costs. If the Scheme proceeds Fenland District Council is very likely to receive an allocation which has the potential to present a significant challenge.
- 6.4 Fenland District Council does not support the Asylum Seeker Dispersal Scheme. It is imperative that allocations take into account the existing or any newly created community support structures appropriate for the nationality and culture of the asylum seekers themselves – for example it would be wholly inappropriate to place a practising Muslim asylum seeker in a property in a village with no access to a local asylum seekers' support group, nor to an appropriate place of worship, nor to a shop selling Halal meat or foods with which they are familiar and with no practical means to afford public transport to access any such facilities. Until and unless the Government, and Serco, take into account the appropriateness of the locations where asylum seekers would be placed, the scheme remains fundamentally flawed and will be unsuccessful. Government should be taking urgent additional action to stop illegal entry to the UK, to process asylum seekers' applications far more expeditiously and to deport those people who have no right to remain in the UK.

## **7 Recommendations**

- 7.1 Members are asked to note the contents of the report now provided
- 7.2 Members are requested to provide instructions to officers as to what preparation needs to be made by FDC in respect of the Asylum Seeker Dispersal Programme, and the assessment of the FDC revenue budget implications of the scheme.
- 7.3 That Cabinet instructs officers, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, to send letters to Steve Barclay MP and to the soon to be appointed new Prime Minister to demand:
- A) that Government continues and increases its attempts to identify and reduce the number of illegal asylum seekers entering and remaining in the UK.
  - B) that Government significantly improve the asylum processing system so that asylum seekers' applications are processed in a timely manner.
  - C) that measures to remove from the UK those destitute individuals who have no recourse to public funds be significantly improved.

D) that all additional local authority costs resulting from the Asylum Seeker Dispersal Policy should be guaranteed to be reimbursed in full by Government, including those costs which are incurred following an asylum seeker's application for asylum being refused.