

Scrutiny Board Meeting

Tuesday, 14 March 2023

Dear Councillor

SCRUTINY BOARD - TUESDAY, 14TH MARCH, 2023

I am now able to enclose, for consideration at next Tuesday, 14th March, 2023 meeting of the Scrutiny Board, the following presentation that was unavailable when the agenda was printed. The Chair, Vice-Chair and Monitoring Officer have agreed that this can be added as an additional item to the agenda.

Agenda No	Item
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7	<u>Home Office Asylum Policy</u> (Pages 3 - 14)
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Home Office Asylum Process

14 March 2023

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Agenda Item No: 7

Presenter:

Lynsey Kelly

CI

Head of Communities

Purpose

- To provide information and clarity on the Home Office Asylum process for any individual arriving in the UK claiming refugee status
- To provide details of current Government Policy and the steps taken by City of Wolverhampton Council to influence it

Government Policy

In accordance with the Immigration Asylum Act 1999 and Asylum Support Regulations 2000 the UK has a statutory obligation to provide destitute asylum seekers with temporary accommodation, transportation and money whilst their application is considered.

A person or persons can claim asylum in the UK if they fear persecution from their home country and they have failed to get protection from authorities within their country.

Pages 5 Persecution must be because of:

- your race and/ or religion
- your nationality
- your political opinion
- anything else that puts you at risk because of social, cultural, religious or political situation in a persons home country.

Not every asylum seeker will ultimately be recognised as a refugee, but every refugee is initially an asylum seeker. (Those entering on a resettlement scheme have different rights)

Different Asylum Routes

- There are a number of different asylum schemes including:
 - Ukraine
 - Afghan relocation
 - Other resettlement schemes
 - Asylum seekers outside of the above schemes

This slide pack focuses on the last category

Housing Asylum Seekers

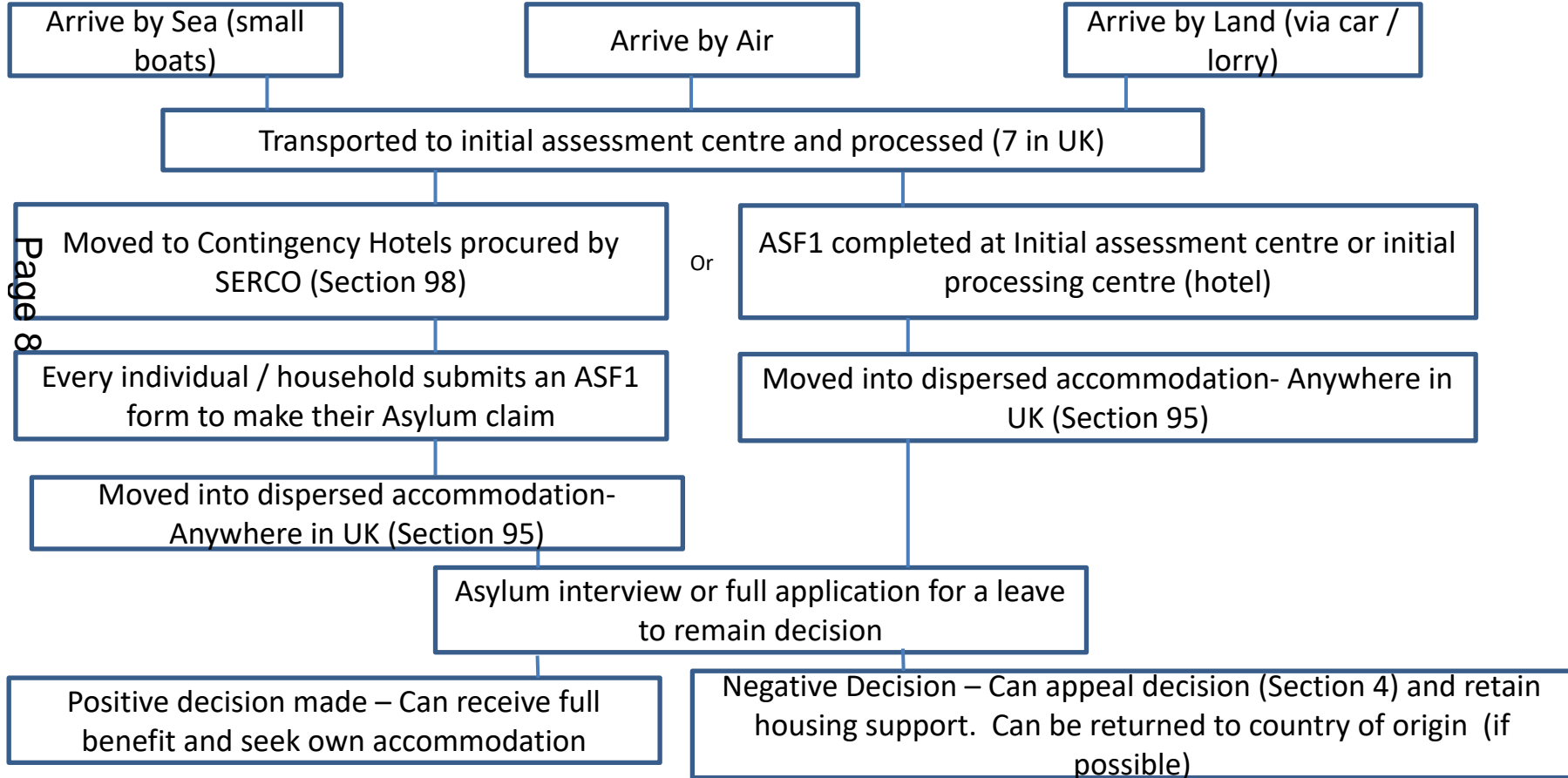
- Private company Serco hold the Asylum Accommodation and Support Services (AASC) contract with Central Government and cover the West & East Midlands, the Northwest & parts of the East of England. They provide properties for initial and dispersed accommodation requirements, for transportation to and from properties, and for a range of other services to support the welfare of asylum seekers.

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Serco provide Housing Officers who support Asylum seekers within hotels and dispersed accommodation, to signpost to a range of service, such as GP registration, Education, social prescribing, translation

- Migrant Help are Central Governments contracted provider under the Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility Contract (AIRE) and provided advice and assistance to people seeking asylum in understanding the asylum support system, across the UK.

Asylum Process



Changes to the current asylum process - 2022

- City of Wolverhampton Council along with many other local authorities and indeed the Local Government Association, has for many years been engaging with Home Office trying to get it to improve the way in which it carries out its asylum process. Two key areas being:
 - A fairer distribution of asylum seekers across the country
 - A fairer funding settlement for those areas that have asylum seekers to ensure that they have the support they need without unfunded burden on those authorities

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In September 2021, following a failure of the Home Office to make any changes to the dispersal policy 7 local authorities, led by City of Wolverhampton Council, commenced a judicial review of the Home Office's previous approach to dispersal of asylum seekers.

Changes to the current asylum process - 2022

- The Home Office's previous position was that it would only place dispersed asylum seekers in "voluntary" areas, ie those local authority areas that had, at some historical point, agreed to take such asylum seekers. The 7 authorities withdrew their "voluntary" consent in 2021. The Home Office refused to accept that and therefore the Judicial Review took place.

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Following the action the Home Office changed its policy to:

- a) provide that every local authority area was a dispersal area – the Full dispersal plan
 - b) Put in place additional funding for the 2022/23 financial year in respect of those asylum seekers dispersed into each area (subject to certain limitations)
- This Council (and the other authorities) are now seeking evidence to demonstrate that the commitments made by the Home Office to the High Court are being met.

Challenges to current asylum process

- House of Commons Library published 'Asylum Statistics' on 1 March 2023.
- This data available here - [SN01403.pdf \(parliament.uk\)](#) - which states that:
 - *As of December 2022 there were over 110,000 asylum seekers in the UK, with 56,000 living in dispersed accommodation and over 49,000 in initial accommodation, including contingency hotels.*
 - *Wolverhampton currently houses;*
 - *350 individuals in initial accommodation (Hotels) under S98*
 - *820 individuals in dispersed accommodation under S95 or S4*
 - *This equates to approximately 0.45% of Wolverhampton's population (31 per 10,000)*
 - *In 2022 over 74,000 asylum applications were made in the UK, the highest number since 2002.*
 - *As of September 2022, over 136,000 claims were outstanding, over half of those had been waiting longer than 6 months to be processed.*

Changes to the current asylum process - 2023

- Implementation by Home Office of the changes to the policy of dispersal is still taking place and therefore a definitive position cannot be stated at this stage. Serco are now engaging with all West Midlands local authorities to procure against the Full dispersal plan. A governance group including local authority officer has been set up and will meet monthly to understand and discuss progress.

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The Government is currently proposing changes to the current system through a new Migration bill.

- Detail and full information is still subject to debate and change during the passage of the bill and therefore impact within Wolverhampton is not currently known.

wolverhampton.gov.uk

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