

**MINUTES  
OF THE MEETING OF THE  
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY GROUP  
THURSDAY, 22 JANUARY 2026**

Held at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Rushcliffe Arena, Rugby Road, West  
Bridgford  
and live streamed on Rushcliffe Borough Council's YouTube channel

**PRESENT:**

Councillors H Parekh (Chair), L Plant (Vice-Chair), R Butler, C Grocock,  
R Mallender, D Mason, P Matthews, J Cottee (as substitute) and A Phillips (as  
substitute)

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:**

Home Office Representative  
Serco Representative  
Councillor R Upton

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

D Banks	Director of Neighbourhoods
D Burch	Assistant Director of Environment and Communities
G Carpenter	Assistant Director of Public Protection
S Brannan	Assistant Director of Planning
J Bate	Team Manager – Monitoring and Implementation
E Richardson	Democratic Services Officer

**APOLOGIES:**

Councillors M Barney and J Billin

**9 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**10 Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 October 2025**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2025 were agreed as a true record and were signed by the Chair.

The Chair advised and the Group noted a change in the order of the items on the agenda, with the Work Programme to be discussed before the Asylum Dispersal and Contingency Accommodation item.

**11 Work Programme**

The Assistant Director of Neighbourhoods presented the Work Programme and outlined the upcoming scrutiny items. The Group noted that the scheduling of bringing the Review of Debt Collection Agents by RBC report to scrutiny was

subject to possible Government changes.

It was RESOLVED that the Communities Scrutiny Group approved the Work Programme as set out below:

### **2 April 2026**

- Carbon Management Plan Update
- West Bridgford Contact Point
- Work Programme

### **xx October 2026**

- Review of debt collection agents by RBC in line with the outcome of the Government's consultation on Council Tax and Enforcement
- Work Programme

## **12 Exclusion of the Public**

It was resolved that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 3 of part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

## **13 Asylum Dispersal and Contingency Accommodation including HMOs**

The Assistant Director for Public Protection introduced the Asylum Dispersal and Contingency Accommodation including HMOs report which was the result of a scrutiny request submitted by Councillor Phillips. He explained that prior to the adoption of the asylum dispersal model there had been a contingency hotel located within the Borough near Whatton, which had housed, on average, over 60 individuals, with officers concerned about the safety of those residents given the highly rural location in which the hotel was located. He confirmed that that had now closed. He said that as of April 2022 the Government had introduced a full dispersal model, with the Borough currently having 7 properties located within it as part of this scheme, five situated in West Bridgford, one in Cotgrave and one in Radcliffe on Trent, with the majority being HMOs, which meant that they were over three stories or accommodated more than five people and which were an important part of the national housing market.

The Home Office representative explained that the Home Office had a legal obligation to accommodate asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute whilst their asylum application was being considered as part of the Immigration and Asylum Act of 1999. The Home Office representative said that dispersal areas (DA) had always been a significant part of how the Home Office had undertaken that legal obligation and played a significant role in how asylum seekers were accommodated in a diffused and dispersed way through communities.

The Home Office representative said that the Home Office had initially adopted a policy of voluntary dispersal which had worked well when the asylum

population had been at a lower level. However, as the asylum population increased it had become unfeasible for a small number of local authorities to accommodate the greater number of asylum seekers. In light of this, in 2022 the Home Office moved to adopt a policy of full dispersal, where rather than local authorities volunteering to be dispersal areas, every area became a potential dispersal area. The Home Office representative said that to ensure that full dispersal was undertaken in a structured and considered manner, targets were introduced and in 2023 Regional Allocation Plans (RAPs) introduced a target requiring 100,000 bed spaces across the Country. Through a process of informal negotiation with Strategic Migration Partnerships, local authorities and providers for the Home Office, each local authority was given a notional target for their area.

The Home Office representative noted that the targets had not necessarily been well evidenced and feedback received from various agencies led to the Home Office, in collaboration with other government departments, and in conjunction with the LGA, developing Asylum Accommodation Plans (AAPs) which provided evidence-based delivery plans underpinned by an index model. The Home Office representative said that the indexing took account of a range of factors, including local homeless population levels, availability of schools, dentists and GPs, and other local authority resettlement schemes, with information being continuously refreshed. The aim of which was to create targets which accounted for the various pressures faced by individual local authorities, with those targets called Service User Demand Plans (SUDPs). The Home Office representative added, however, that a significant factor influencing allocations was the total national number of asylum seekers requiring accommodation.

In relation to accommodation, the Home Office representative said that this was procured by the Home Office's accommodation providers, with the procurement process underpinned by a robust adjudication process, with consultation taking place for every property procured in every local authority. The Home Office representative explained that when the accommodation provider identified a potential property, nominated local authority officials were notified and asked to input their local expertise and knowledge as to whether the property was suitable. If there was disagreement as to whether or not a property was appropriate, there was an escalation and adjudication process whereby the Home Office would objectively make the decision.

The Group was informed that AAPs were regularly reviewed and refreshed and monitored via monthly government forums, with local officials invited to attend, and which provided an opportunity for concerns and issues to be raised.

The Serco Representative confirmed that Serco was the accommodation provider for the Home Office for Northwest Midlands and East of England and said that it was working on moving away from using asylum contingency hotels towards delivering the asylum full dispersal model alongside the Home Office. The Serco Representative said that Serco attended a variety of Government and multi-agency forums to support delivery and consulted with local authorities on all properties. The Group was informed that Serco had received feedback from local authorities advising that the information Serco had previously shared with them about properties had not been granular enough for

them to provide informed feedback, so as of July 2025, Serco had changed to undertaking an individual property consultation process with the local authority before progressing with any property. If there was any impasse regarding a particular property, then there was an adjudication process which could be used.

In relation to identification of properties, the Serco Representative informed that Serco was looking for a range of different accommodation types and noted that currently most within Rushcliffe were HMOs. He explained that Serco did not buy properties but rather rented them and said that whilst there had been concerns about this distorting the property markets, he said that Serco did not look to inflate rental prices but offered normal rental rates. He said that property standards were compliant with contractual requirements and local authority standards, with properties subject to monthly inspections, and local authority and home office inspections, with asylum seekers able to report defects themselves through the agreed mechanisms.

Councillor Phillips explained that he had submitted this scrutiny request after learning that a planning application in his ward had been submitted to convert a six bed HMO into a seven bed HMOs. He said that the original six bed HMO conversion had taken place through permitted development and he had not been notified as Ward Councillor and so was unaware that it had happened. He questioned why the Council had allowed the previous four bed family home on a quiet cul-de-sac to be converted to house six single male asylum seekers without consulting the Ward Councillor.

Councillor Phillips said that he had been contacted by concerned residents and made aware of the ongoing issues coming from this property, with many anti-social behaviour, littering and noise complaints having been raised with the Council and Serco. Councillor Phillips thought that the Council needed to be in a position to protect its residents and have more control over who was placed where, with the accommodation needing not just to be safe for asylum seekers, but also for residents. He thought that an Article 4 directive was required to give the Council control, to stop permitted development rights for family home conversions into HMOs, so that they would be properly assessed through the planning application process. He said that the Council needed to have robust measures in place to stop an influx of inappropriate houses being used by Serco as HMOs.

Councillor Phillips said that asylum dispersal and contingency accommodation, including HMOs, was one of the most emotive topics in the Country at the moment and thought that the Council and Councillors needed to be in a position of knowledge to understand and scrutinise the system and adopt the tools to deal with it.

Councillor Matthews asked whether the Home Office or Serco kept records of complaints received for each of the properties. He asked whether any form of risk assessment was conducted in relation to who was placed in properties and whether there was assessment as to whether a tenancy or tenant was suitable for a property in any given area and what was in place in terms of support and supervision for properties.

The Serco representative confirmed that Serco did keep records of concerns raised with them and that feedback was also shared with them through a range of channels, including partnership agencies or local authorities, and that there was also a feedback mechanism available online. In relation to individual placements, he said that conduct was managed through various methods, including direct engagement with asylum seekers, often offering education as a first approach, for example explaining the impact of noise for example on local neighbours, followed by a warning letter if behaviour did not improve and ultimately reporting it through to the Home Office compliance team. The Serco representative added that they would also engage with the local authority, for example, to assist with noise monitoring. Any criminal behaviour would be reported to the police. He said Serco would also consider whether it was necessary for an individual to be relocated if there were, for example, concerns about personal safety or conflict with neighbours. In relation to risk assessments, the Serco representative said that risk assessments were carried out by Serco and local authority Officers but noted that full information may not be known about individuals arriving from abroad to make fully informed decisions in all circumstances.

The Serco representative said that if neighbours raised concerns with Housing Officers visiting properties, those concerns would be responded to as appropriate on a case-by-case basis, but he was not able to confirm how many complaints had been raised for specific properties in Rushcliffe.

Councillor Butler asked about Home Office consultation with the local authority and whether the Council's enforcement or complaint history for a property or nearby properties was taken into consideration. The Home Office representative explained that the consideration process was multi-faceted taking account of a variety of factors, including social cohesion and any contentious issues. The Home Office representative explained that on identifying a potential property the provider would issue a notification to the nominated local authority officials who would provide feedback. She stressed that local authority information was part of the decision making process and that the safety of asylum seekers and the community was important to the Home Office. The Home Office representative added that the type of accommodation required was determined by the demand, that procurement needed to align with what was required.

In response to a question from Councillor Butler in relation to complaints, the Home Office representative said that there were contractual mechanisms in place to determine the thresholds for levels of complaints, with the provider flagging more serious complaints with the Home Office, whilst noting the difference between what would be considered a high profile incident versus what would be a local or operational incident. The Serco representative added that complaints were reviewed on a case-by-case basis based on the specific aspects of each one, taking account of partnership information and feedback to make informed decisions.

The Director for Neighbourhoods confirmed that the Council held information about complaints in relation to properties in the Borough. He noted that the Council had provided feedback to Serco regarding proposed properties in the local area, which had been taken on board in their decision making processes.

Councillor Grocock thought that the current system was better than previously but that it still seemed reactive and asked how much influence local knowledge and feedback had in respect of properties coming forward. The Director for Neighbourhoods said that the process was driven by Serco who were looking for properties but thought that the Council's feedback had been taken into account locally.

Councillor Matthews asked whether there was any funding available to support local services, such as GPs and pharmacies, in meeting the increased demand. The Home Office representative said that grant funding was available for asylum seekers in dispersal accommodation and agreed to provide links for publicly available information ([Funding Instruction for Local Authorities: Asylum Grant 2025 - 2026 - GOV.UK](#)). She said that local authorities received a recognition payment every financial year which was not ringfenced. The Director for Neighbourhoods confirmed that information about Rushcliffe's funding was contained within the agenda report and said that the Council had used it to procure a dispersal accommodation outreach worker who visited the properties and supported asylum seekers with their needs and social integration including connecting them with local community and voluntary groups.

The Chair asked about asylum dispersal funding received by the Council in 2024/25 and what activities it supported, whether it fully covered the Council's asylum dispersal costs. The Assistant Director for Public Protection explained that the £38k grant funding had been used to fund a range of services, including tackling anti-social behaviour, community initiatives, wellbeing services, interpreting, signposting and orientation and general administration of the scheme. He added that in general the funding received broadly covered the cost of the Council's activity.

Councillor Matthews referred to Serco having responsibility to support asylum seekers with access to local service providers and asked about measures to ensure that local services weren't overstretched and any funding available for those services. The Serco representative said that they did not provide funding directly and said that impact on local services was something that was taken into consideration as part of the indexing tool to inform how many people should be placed in specific areas. He said that Serco attended multiagency forums with local service providers to discuss issues and took onboard feedback from providers, particularly GP practices. The Home Office representative acknowledged that there were often structural issues impacting on service delivery irrespective of asylum seeker impacts and added that asylum seekers did not get preferential treatment.

Councilor Plant asked whether asylum seekers had tenancy agreements with Serco and how long, on average, Serco would rent a property for. She referred to funding to support asylum seekers and thought that it should be ringfenced and asked how the Council spent its funding. She asked for more information about the work of the Outreach worker contracted by the Council.

The Serco representative said that they had rental contracts for the property owners which could last until the end of the 2029 but which did not prevent

Serco from moving away from a property if there were issues with it. In relation to asylum seekers, Serco signed tenancy agreements with them, with a copy given to the asylum seeker following completion of their induction. The Serco representative said that asylum seekers had a point of contact through their Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility Contract (AIRE) provider who could support them with a range of enquiries, including completion of forms, financial assistance applications and complaints and whose details were regularly advertised. AIRE operated remotely and were accessible via web chat, email, or telephone and offered translation services. The Serco representative added that Serco also had housing officers who were allocated to patches of properties who would log complaints about issues which would be dealt with through the stipulated mechanisms. The Home Office representative confirmed that they also regularly received data from AIRE providers which was monitored for any escalating matters.

The Director for Neighbourhoods explained that the Council worked with Notts Refugee Forum locally and had procured the service (Outreach Worker) through them and had also collaborated with the local library to allow them to meet and access support there.

Councillor Phillips asked what types and number of complaints would need to be received before withdrawal from a property would be considered. He referred also to the potential financial impact on a property owner if a rental agreement was broken. The Serco representative said that consideration of complaints would be on a case-by-case basis, based on an investigation of the specifics of that situation and property. Whilst commercial elements of property agreements could not be discussed, the Serco representative said that property owner may have opportunity to secure alternative rental options should the Serco agreement cease.

Councillor R Mallender asked how long people typically spent in accommodation or as an asylum seeker. The Home Office representative agreed to provide published figures ([Immigration system statistics data tables - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-data-tables)) and said that the Home Office was working through the backlog and new applications as quickly as it could and was aware of the impacts on asylum seekers and local communities.

The Chair asked whether any statutory powers were triggered and what information was requested by the Home Office when the Council received notification of potential dispersal properties in the Borough. The Assistant Director for Public Protection explained that under the latest Home Office policy the Council had five days to respond to a notification from Serco, with set parameters as to how it needed to respond and as part of that it would gather information from relevant organisations, including the police and local Members. He also explained that when a notification was received by the Council Officers would make every effort to notify the local ward Member. The Director for Neighbourhoods said that it was the responsibility of Serco to ensure that it complied with any relevant legislation and any necessary planning and housing standards.

The Chair referred to selected licensing of HMOs and the Director for Neighbourhoods said that the Council did not currently consider selective

licensing to be an appropriate tool to manage HMOs in the Borough but said that it may be more appropriate in areas with a greater number of HMOs as a tool to improve the standards of their HMOs. He said that the Council would keep this under review but noted that a trigger had to be reached before a case could be made to the Secretary of State.

The Chair asked what steps the Council could take to ensure planning oversight, including whether properties should require planning permission, or whether an Article 4 directive could be introduced to control family home conversions. The Assistant Director for Planning explained that planning permission was required for conversions to house seven or more occupants with anything less coming under permitted development. She referred to Article 4 directions which could be used for situations like this and others such as for conservation aspects and noted that there were strict legal requirements which a Council had to evidence before they could be introduced. She confirmed that a report would be taken to Cabinet in relation to this matter. In relation to hostel accommodation, the Team Manager for Monitoring and Implementation said that the Council was looking into whether some HMOs may be classified as hostels and how this would impact permitted development for HMOs, but that there was little case law as to what constituted a hostel. The Team Manager for Monitoring and Implementation took the Group through some specific case law outcomes and noted a possible difference was that hostels may have shared bedrooms but that HMOs usually did not. The Chair asked that the Council continue to look into this area of enquiry.

The Chair thanked Officers and Home Office and Serco representatives for their attendance and input into the meeting.

It is **RESOLVED** that the Communities Scrutiny Group:

- a) scrutinised the content of this report, and
- b) provided feedback to the representatives of the Home Office and Serco on the application of government asylum dispersal policy within Rushcliffe.

The meeting closed at 8.48 pm.

CHAIR