



Communities Scrutiny Group

Thursday, 22 January 2026

Asylum Dispersal and Contingency Accommodation including HMOs

Report of the Director for Neighbourhoods

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. Councillor A Phillips has submitted a request for scrutiny which is provided in Appendix 1.
- 1.2. In response to the key lines of enquiry, it is intended that this report provides members with an overview of current UK asylum dispersal policy, the legislation relating to Houses in Multiple Occupation within Rushcliffe and more specifically their use as accommodation for asylum seekers. Representatives of both SERCO and the Home Office will also attend the meeting to respond to any further questions.

2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that the Communities Scrutiny Group:

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

3. Supporting Information

- 3.1. The Asylum Dispersal and Contingency Accommodation programme in Nottinghamshire is managed by Serco under the Asylum, Accommodation and Support Services Contract (AASC), commissioned by the Home Office. This programme supports individuals who have applied for asylum in the UK and are awaiting a decision on their status.
- 3.2. Given the high numbers of asylum seekers and the costs involved, the Home Office is reducing its reliance on contingency hotels. Following the closure of the Haven Hotel near Whatton, there are currently no contingency hotels located in Rushcliffe. Across the East Midlands, there are only 13 such hotels down from 33.
- 3.3. In April 2022, the Home Office introduced the "full dispersal" model, mandating that all local authorities in England, Scotland, and Wales participate in housing asylum seekers. This policy requires councils to accept a proportion of asylum seekers (families and singles) based on several factors

including the housing market, local population size, social impact and viability. A shift that brought many previously non-participating areas into the scheme, primarily via the private rented sector which will often be larger properties with 3, 4 or more bedrooms including Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). Initially the scheme was based on a postcode review process whereby councils provided Serco with postcodes which met the exclusion criteria. However, as a result of Rushcliffe's low crime rate very few postcodes met these criteria.

- 3.4. In 2024 the Home Office changed the model to an individual property notification whereby Serco notify the Council when they intend to proceed with the procurement of a particular property. The Council has 5 days to either accept, decline or accept with conditions. Officers will make every effort to notify local ward members, confidentially of the procurement and seek their feedback as local community leaders. It is important to note, however, that the criteria for a property to be declined by the local authority is highly specific, that is to say:
 - High chance of Service User(s) being subject to antisocial behaviour (ASB) with recent/relevant evidence preferably, this should be within the last 6 months;
 - Exposure of Service User(s) to extreme right-wing activity with recent/relevant evidence, within the last 12 months;
 - Inability of Service User(s) to access local amenities due to rurality or inadequate public transport;
 - Placement of a Service User(s) in a position where their safety is at risk.
- 3.5. There are currently 7 properties (6 HMOs) being used within Rushcliffe under the asylum dispersal scheme and a total of 35 service users. The majority (5) are situated in West Bridgford, one in Cotgrave and one in Radcliffe on Trent.
- 3.6. The East Midlands region has currently achieved approximately 59% of its asylum accommodation delivery target. These targets are reviewed twice a year, and since the programme is ongoing and rolling, there is no fixed end date for the target setting.
- 3.7. Rushcliffe's current notional delivery target is 182 individuals and 214 bedspaces, a reduction of 58 individuals and 68 bedspaces from previous targets, reflecting government considerations of market conditions, social factors, and viability.
- 3.8. Serco as the landlord is responsible for ensuring compliance with the relevant legal requirements including housing legislation. They are the single point of contact for any "management issues" that may occur during the lease of the property.
- 3.9. Serco will put in place arrangements with local service providers such as the voluntary sector, health, local GP's etc to ensure the migrants wellbeing. Notwithstanding, the dispersal model is discussed at regional Regional Full Dispersal meetings chaired by the East Midlands Councils Strategic Migration Partnership. These discussions aim to:

- Align asylum dispersal with other resettlement schemes
 - Mitigate unintended pressures on local services.
- 3.10. To further support the suitability of leases by Serco and to reduce the risk of localised issues Rushcliffe Borough Council, in partnership with Nottingham Refugee Forum (NRF), has recently commenced a 12-month project (starting 1 December 2025) using government funding to provide enhanced support for asylum seekers placed in dispersed accommodation within Rushcliffe. This initiative introduces a dedicated Dispersal Accommodation Outreach Worker, who will work directly with individuals and families to deliver holistic casework and advocacy.
- 3.11. The Outreach Worker's role includes:
- Developing individual support and move-on plans tailored to each client's needs
 - Facilitating access to essential services such as housing, health care, ESOL provision, and legal advice
 - Promoting community cohesion by addressing issues arising from dispersal placements and fostering positive relationships between asylum seekers and local residents
 - Escalating safeguarding concerns promptly and ensuring integration efforts are prioritised to help individuals transition successfully from temporary accommodation into longer-term housing solutions.
- 3.12. This project represents a proactive response to the Home Office's dispersal model, which aims to reduce reliance on contingency hotels and increase the use of private rented sector properties, including HMOs, for asylum accommodation. The initiative will be subject to ongoing review throughout the 12-month period to assess impact and inform future strategic housing decisions.
- 3.13. The Council also retains its statutory role in terms of investigation of any noise, anti-social behaviour reports from such properties as we would from any other type of owner occupied or tenanted property in the Borough using our powers under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime & Disorder Act 2014.

Houses in Multiple Occupation

- 3.14. A House in Multiple Occupation (or HMO) is a property that is shared by three or more tenants who are not living together as a family, and who share basic amenities such as a kitchen, bathroom or toilet facilities but have separate bedrooms.
- 3.15. The private rented sector is an important part of the national housing market, with 4.7 million households in England. The sector has undergone rapid growth over the last 10 years. It is the second largest tenure in England, representing 20% of all households in England. Houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) form a vital part of this sector, often providing cheaper accommodation for people whose housing options are limited. HMOs are

known to be commonly occupied by students but there are also a growing number of young professionals and migrant workers sharing houses and flats.

- 3.16. Mandatory licensing of HMOs came into force in 2006 (Housing Act 2006) and applies to properties of 3 storeys or more with 5 or more people making up 2 or more separate households living in them. HMOs that do not meet the criteria do not need to be licensed but must still meet the statutory legal requirements for housing fitness standards.
- 3.17. Licensing has largely been successful in helping to drive up standards and make these 60,000 larger HMOs safer places to live in across the Country. Licences can last up to five years and will have conditions attached to them that must be complied with. All licensed HMOs are routinely inspected to ensure they meet all necessary statutory requirements.
- 3.18. Licensing is intended to make sure that landlords of HMOs are:
- fit and proper people, or employ managers who are
 - each HMO is safe and suitable for occupation by the number of people allowed under the licence
 - the standard of management of the HMO is adequate
 - high risk HMOs can be identified and targeted for improvement
 - HMOs are not overcrowded.
- 3.19. There are currently 200 licensed HMOs in Rushcliffe situated in the following wards:

Trent Bridge	80
Compton Acres	16
Abbey	11
Lady Bay	43
Radcliffe on Trent	1
Lutterall	1
Musters	46
Soar Valley	2

- 3.20. The licence will specify the maximum number of people who may live in the HMO. It will also include the following mandatory conditions, which apply to every licence:
- a valid current gas safety certificate, which is renewed annually
 - proof that all electrical appliances and furniture are kept in a safe condition
 - proof that all smoke alarms are correctly positioned, installed and maintained
 - each occupier must have a written statement of the terms on which they occupy the property, for example, a tenancy agreement
 - minimum sleeping room sizes
 - waste disposal arrangements.

Planning Considerations

- 3.21. Large HMO's (those with 7 or more occupants) fall into a separate use class for planning (Sui Generis) with no permitted development rights for material change of use to a large HMO from any other planning use. As such the creation of large HMOs requires planning permission, where the use being changed from is sufficiently different to the large HMO being created as to amount to a 'material change of use'.
- 3.22. Small HMO's, with 3-6 occupants, fall into use class C4 however permitted development rights exist to allow free-flowing change of use between C3 (dwelling house) and C4 (small HMO) without the need to make planning applications. There is no requirement for property owners to notify the Local Planning Authority when undertaking changes of use via this permitted development right.
- 3.23. These would be matters stemming from the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 and The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 and various interactions between the three pieces of legislation.
- 3.24. Planning enforcement has had no recent involvement in matters relating to HMOs, however the only opportunity for the planning enforcement team to get involved at present would be in a situation where a large (7+ occupant) HMO had been created causing a material change of use without the benefit of planning permission.
- 3.25. It should be noted that at its September 2025 meeting a motion was passed by the Council requiring officers to investigate the potential use of an Article 4 Direction which could potentially see the removal of permitted development rights for smaller HMO's. This work is still in progress and will be reported back in due course.

4. Risks and Uncertainties

Serco acting on behalf of the Home Office may decide to proceed with a new property despite the Council having recommended refusal. In such cases there is a reputational risk to the Council as well as local community cohesion.

5. Implications

5.1. Financial Implications

Whilst there are no direct financial implications arising from this report, it should be noted the council has received £24k in asylum dispersal funding from the Home Office so far this financial year (£38k 24/25). This funding is made available to provide support to asylum seekers and increases in-line with the number of asylum seekers housed in the area.

The cost of delivering the Dispersal Accommodation Outreach Worker project (as detailed in paragraph 3.10) is £15,000, which is being fully offset by the Asylum Dispersal Grant. This ensures that the initiative is delivered at no net cost to the Council while supporting strategic objectives around housing and community integration.

5.2. Legal Implications

The Council has statutory responsibility for ensuring all HMOs are compliant with legal requirements.

5.3. Equalities Implications

The governments full asylum dispersal model and associated policy will have been subjected to an appropriate equality impact assessment at a national level.

5.4. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Implications

The Council retains its statutory role alongside the Police to investigate reports of noise, crime and anti-social behaviour.

5.5. Biodiversity Net Gain Implications

Not applicable

6. Link to Corporate Priorities

The Environment	None identified
Quality of Life	Ensuring HMOs and the private rented sector are safe and compliant with relevant housing legislation is a key building block for health and local residents' quality of life.
Efficient Services	None identified
Sustainable Growth	None identified

7. Recommendations

It is RECOMMENDED that the Communities Scrutiny Group:

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

For more information contact:	Geoff Carpenter Assistant Director for Public Protection Tel: 0115 9148229 gcarpenter@rushcliffe.gov.uk
Background papers available for Inspection:	None
List of appendices:	Appendix 1 – Copy of the scrutiny request form