

Title of Report:	Northern Ireland Executive Office Funding to District Council Good Relations Programme – Asylum Seekers Support Services
Committee Report Submitted To:	Leisure & Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	19 September 2023
For Decision or For Information	For Decision
To be discussed In Committee	NO

Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)	
Strategic Theme	Healthy and Engaged Communities
Outcome	The Borough comprises cohesive and stable communities which work collaboratively with a range of stakeholders to address issues and deliver on opportunities
Lead Officer	Head of Service for Community & Culture; Good Relations Manager

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	Nil net costs to council; £14,000 external funding
Included in Current Year Estimates	YES/NO
Capital/Revenue	Revenue
Code	1041
Staffing Costs	Nil

Legal Considerations	
Input of Legal Services Required	NO
Legal Opinion Obtained	NO

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	<u>Yes/No</u>	Date: 2017 for strategy - additional screening not yet complete
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	<u>Yes/No</u>	Date: same as above
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to seek approval from Members to allocate funds for the provision of essential services as part of Council's Asylum Seeker and Refugee Plan.

2.0 Background

In June 2023, Council received and approved the Asylum & Refugee plan which allocated a total sum of £162,095 from TEO sponsored by The Home Office. This funding was allocated to Council for; Research and development of local action plan, Staff resource costs for the co-ordination and overseeing the delivery of the action plan and programme costs for the development and provision of resources to support activities and services to aid integration.

The aim of the funding is to provide support and signpost users to access key information and relevant services applicable to their asylum seeker status. The funding bid also included support to establish and/or build upon the necessary networks and infrastructure for integrating asylum seekers following full dispersal. In order to support the implementation of the cross sectoral plan, an inter-agency working group has been established to deliver actions using a community planning approach.

3.0 Proposal

As the needs of those seeking asylum emerge, the issue of access to support has become more evident, including mental wellbeing and counselling services, volunteering, access to clothing and food banks, transport to access services, befriending, including appointments to progress asylum applications, and other inclusion opportunities.

Local infrastructure has not been available to specifically provide direct wrap around support to Asylum Seekers, however Vineyard Compassion do have the support structures in place, have been identified as the sole provider of services in the triangle area and are providing these services through the anti-poverty network for those who are most in need, albeit there are additional specific needs which need to be taken into account for asylum seekers.

In response to this gap in provision, and increased demand on existing wrap around services, Vineyard have recently employed a Welcome Co-ordinator for new arrivals to the CCGBC area. The Welcome Co-ordinator will visit the accommodations which house both individuals and families in Portrush, Portstewart and Coleraine on a regular basis to provide information on local support and services to new arrivals, while providing access to their direct provision such as welcome activities, befriending, counselling, food and clothing banks to name but a few.

Council's Asylum Seeker & Refugee plan has identified the following relevant key actions, including:

- Welcome, information and networks.
- Cultural Awareness.
- Health and Wellbeing.

In response to these needs, officers would recommend the following essential support services be provided by Vineyard to assist delivery of the local plan:

- Access to and provision of essential basic items of new clothing and food via their food and clothing bank;
- Travel cards to attend solicitor appointments in Belfast;
- Volunteering opportunities at Vineyard;
- Access to computer suite and internet for digital inclusion;
- One-to-one counselling and trauma based group sessions.

There are currently over 100 individuals residing in the triangle area with spaces for 50+ additional individuals. As existing residents are moved to dispersal accommodation outside of the borough, these are replaced with new individuals, therefore provision of support for up to 200 clients has been costed.

The project is funded at 100% from the Home Office/TEO with no additional cost to council and is costed at £14,000.

4.0 Recommendation

Provide funding of £14,000 to Vineyard Compassion for the provision of support services to Asylum Seekers placed in the Borough as outlined within the report.