

Committee: Community and Children's Services	Dated: 20/07/2022
Subject: Afghan bridging hotel closure	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1, 3, 4
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of: Andrew Carter – Director of Community and Children's Services	For Information
Report author: Abisola Ifasawo – Afghan Resettlement Project Manager	

Summary

This report informs Members of the closure of one of two 'bridging hotels' in the City of London that provide interim accommodation for Afghan evacuees. The closure results from the hotel provider giving notice to end its contract with the Home Office. The Home Office is responsible for, and is leading, the actions to decant the 143 people (39 households) to alternative accommodation. The hotel will cease its operation as a bridging hotel in mid-July 2022.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. Since August 2021, the UK government has evacuated more than 10,000 Afghan nationals to the UK. The government established bridging hotels around the UK as temporary accommodation for evacuees to reside in until they are matched with long-term homes. There are two bridging hotels within the City of London, secured by the Home Office, that have accommodated 556 individuals (including new-borns) to date.
2. Over the last nine months, 104 individuals (across 26 households) have moved on to settled homes or alternative short-term accommodation. Move-on accommodation offers are being sourced by the Home Office based on the support of local authorities across the country. The City Corporation provides wraparound support – funded by government – to Afghan guests to help their transition to this country.

3. In June, the hotel provider – which operates both of the bridging hotels in the City – gave notice to the Home Office of its intention to cease operating one of its premises as a bridging hotel and resume its normal business.

Current Position

4. The Home Office is responsible for the move-on of guests and has put plans in place for the relocation of all residents. Most will move to alternative bridging hotel accommodation. All accommodation offers are to locations outside of London. Locations include Manchester, Bradford, Essex, Nottingham and Canterbury. Households will be informed by the Home Office of their move location a minimum of seven days before their moving date.
5. Detailed plans have been put in place to deal with logistical issues such as transport and luggage transfer. The Home Office planning is based on its experience of closing a number of bridging hotels. The receiving local authorities will deliver wraparound support to secure access to education, health and other local support services.
6. The City Corporation is orchestrating the provision of information to relevant local authorities and partners to support the transfer into new schools, health and social care support where appropriate. It is working with its partners and commissioned providers to minimise the impact of this difficult situation on households. Support provision – including welfare and housing advice services – is being targeted at residents of the closing hotel to maximise their options. The full delivery of activity, youth services, community kitchen events, advice and specialist support remains in place.
7. Some households could exercise their right to present to the City Corporation as homeless and in need of housing assistance. The experience to date of other closures is that this has been very limited. The scarcity of available social housing and temporary accommodation in London, and the impact of stepping out of Home Office funded support programmes, means households must fully understand and carefully weigh the impact of such a choice in terms of meeting their housing and wellbeing needs.
8. The funding that supports the City Corporation's delivery is provided on a per capita, per day formula. Service delivery will be scaled to reflect the reduced population and single setting that will be supported going forward. Modelling has been undertaken and demonstrates that the City can sustain the high level of support it is providing to those who will remain. Officers will continue to model the level of ongoing departures to ensure that contractual commitments can be met and reflect changing needs.
9. All delivery partners have been briefed on the closure via the Afghan Resettlement Operations Group (AROG)
10. The Home Office – via its agent – holds a contract with the remaining bridging hotel until the end of September 2022. There is no indication from either party whether that contract will be extended after that point. It should be noted that hotel closure

is subject to a minimum of one month's notice. Officers continue to liaise closely with both partners to ensure that the City Corporation is prepared for a range of future scenarios, including closure, continuation and hybrid operation.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

11. Strategic implications: Under review.
12. Financial implications: A finance group oversees the monitoring of revenue income and commitments to ensure that delivery remains within the funding available.
13. Resource implications: additional resourcing has been secured through the funding available. Contractual and agency terms allow for flexible deployment to reflect changing needs and revenue support.
14. Legal implications: none
15. Risk implications: the City Corporation may face an increase in applications for housing support. Given the nature of the City Corporation's housing stock, in which there are few voids and no large properties, this could result in long-term and costly use of temporary accommodation.
16. Equalities implications: the City Corporation will continue to deliver high levels of support with extensive use of native speakers, translation and interpretation to ensure that guests fully understand their rights and secure access to services and support.
17. Climate implications: none
18. Security implications: none

Conclusion

19. The City Corporation and its partners will work closely with the Home Office to support guests impacted by the bridging hotel closure. We remain focused on providing as much support as is viable to minimise and mitigate any potential negative impacts from these and any other moves.

Appendices

- None

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