

NOTICE OF MOTION – MERCURE HOTEL, DUMFRIES

REPORT APPROVED BY SERVICE DIRECTOR SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

1. Reason for Report

1.1 Members are asked to consider the Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor Ian Blake and seconded by Councillor Jackie McCamon (**Appendix 1**).

1.2 The Notice of Motion was received by the Proper Officer at 10am on 5 February 2025. In accordance with Standing Order 13.1, Full Council is required to withdraw delegation to consider motions which concern matters that have been delegated to committees. The terms of this motion fall within the remit of the Social Work Services Committee and Economy and Infrastructure Committee.

2. Recommendations

Members are asked to:-

2.1 agree to withdraw delegation from Social Work Services Committee and Economy and Infrastructure Committee; and

2.2 dependant on the decision at 2.1 above, consider the terms of the Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor Ian Blake and seconded by Councillor Jackie McCamon as set out in **Appendix 1**.

3. Executive Summary (What is the report about?)

3.1 The Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor Ian Blake and seconded by Councillor Jackie McCamon (**Appendix 1**) identifies the potential road traffic issues that may present significant risk to pedestrians and drivers on the New Abbey Road; and sets out the action being taken to address the issues raised in the Motion

4. Detail and Analysis

Background

4.1 The Motion refers to the procurement of the Mercure Hotel by Mears Housing in August 2023 Mears Housing is contracted by the UK Government Home Office to manage the Asylum Dispersal Estate by procuring Hotels and private accommodation to meet the needs of the service user group ie. Families or single males. the Mercure Hotel can provide one hundred and three bedspaces following the implementation of the Government Maximisation Policy. (room sharing) Numbers average at seventy-five males between the ages of eighteen and fifty years old.

4.2 In any discussions with all afore mentioned parties and were made aware of the use of the Mercure approximately three weeks prior to service user arrivals. Dumfries and Galloway Council involvement in the contractual discussions would have enabled the sharing of local knowledge and possible challenges that may have arisen due to location.

4.3 Dumfries and Galloway Community Planning Resettlement Board oversees the Syrian, Afghan and management of the Ukrainian Resettlement Schemes. It was therefore good practice to utilise the knowledge and skills of the stakeholders who had a statutory

duty and responsibility to those asylum seekers who required support and so the Community Planning Partnership Board agreed the extension of the remit to include asylum seekers in June 2023

4.4 When the Mercure Hotel began receiving arrivals, an Asylum Seekers Liaison Group was formed with NHS, Council (Community Engagement and Social Work), Police Scotland, Home Office, and Mears representatives to promote partnership working. This Group therefore addresses the proposal in the Motion. The Group covers:

- ensuring early notice of new arrivals
- arrangements for the NHS to plan health assessments, respond to immediate health needs and GP registration
- Social Work to respond to age disputes and those deemed vulnerable to ensure safeguarding duties are met
- Lifelong Learning to arrange ESOL assessments
- Support from Third Sector organisations including provision of welcome packs with basic toiletries and clothing and health and wellbeing activities
- Police Scotland to arrange briefings including Road Safety advice, dealing with hate crime and other relevant information.
- ensuring safe transport and travel arrangements for the asylum seekers, residents and road users including a minibus for appointments
- agreeing communications messages and information e.g. Newsletter articles, wording for Briefings etc

4.5 Following assessment of the position, additional road signs were agreed with the Council's Roads and Infrastructure Team and were erected in September 2023, with the Home Office to cover the costs. Mears have recognised that the lack of a public bus service has led to groups of men walking up and down the New Abbey Road. A minibus service is provided by Mears to support the residents in attending appointments for health and ESOL. This service has not covered nights or over the weekends and this has been raised with Mears by partners involved in the Asylum Liaison Group.

4.6 There were a been a small number of concerns expressed by local residents, particularly in winter 2023/24, direct and through their Ward Members, about road and community safety. To date, Police Scotland have not reported any issues around road safety incidents.

4.7 Mears are responsible for the welfare of their service users within the Hotel and its grounds. All service users are adults and can go out at their own will. Police Scotland and Mears repeatedly share the relevant road safety information; however, the service users have experienced such levels of trauma that might affect their ability to process information. Their anxiety levels will be high as they attempt to try to navigate living in a new country under uncertain circumstances, as well as navigating language barriers and their understanding of road safety and risk is very different. As a welcoming region to all of those living in our region, we need to recognise the vulnerability of those who have sought sanctuary in our beautiful area.

4.8 The Motion explores the extension of the footpath with appropriate lighting.
Information and communication

4.9 An Elected Members Briefing on the Council's responsibilities for Asylum Seekers was given to Members by the Chief Social Work Officer in June 2021.

4.10 A Q and A (**Appendix 2**) was developed by the Resettlement Board and Mears and published online in August 2023, sent to Elected Members, and a hard copy hand delivered to the adjacent residents by Community Engagement staff, which provided an opportunity to listen to their concerns. Road Safety concerns did not feature at that time.

4.11 There is a dedicated email address for any queries or concerns about asylum dispersal which includes the contingency hotel and has been promoted to local residents and Elected Members and partners.

5. Council Plan Outcomes and Principles (How do the proposals contribute to the delivery of the Council's strategic outcomes and impact the principles as published?) [Themes and Strategic Outcomes](#)

5.1 Principles

Support our communities.
Be a Responsive Council.

6. Implications and Risk

Financial: (what resources are required/is it budgeted for?)

There would be significant costs and resources required to assess, design and implement this project. The infrastructure implications and related costs are as a direct result of the decision of the Home Office and would therefore require the Council to seek Home Office assurance of funding in regards the costs.

Legal: (are there legal implications to be considered?)

There are no legal implications for the Council to consider at this time.

Workforce: (do the proposals have any implications for or impact upon employees?)

None

Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment: (is the proposal such that an [Equality and Diversity Impact Assessments](#) is required?)

The report does not propose a change in policy, the formal adoption of a plan, policy or strategy or propose a service change and it is therefore not necessary to complete an impact assessment.

7. Governance Assurance

7.1 Council Management Team and the Community Planning Resettlement Board have been consulted during the preparation of this report of this report and are in agreement with it contents.

Author(s)

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Approved by

CHIEF OFFICER	DESIGNATION
Charles Rocks	Head of Children, Families and Justice (DCSWO)

Appendices – 2

Appendix 1 - Notice of Motion

Appendix 2 – Q&A

Background Papers and Relevant Committee Decisions –

Dumfries and Galloway Community Planning Resettlement Board remit and membership - [Resettlement Project Board - CommunityPlanning](#)

Support for Asylum Seekers - [Agenda for Dumfries and Galloway Council on Wednesday, 4th October, 2023, 10.30 am - Dumfries and Galloway Council](#) (item 14)