



**REPORT TO:** Regeneration Panel Cabinet  
**DATE:** 1 October 2003 16 October 2003  
**SUBJECT:** Progress Report - Implementation of Asylum Seeker Policy Framework  
**REPORT OF:** Director of Environmental Health and Consumer Protection  
**CONTACT OFFICER:** Ashley Crumbley 827072

**PURPOSE/SUMMARY:** Since implementing the Policy Framework for Asylum Seekers in November 2002, the Council and its partners continue to make good progress. Most crucially for the community asylum seekers are being dispersed locally in a managed way which ensures no one community is overly burdened.

**ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REASON FOR SELECTING THE ONE RECOMMENDED:** Progress report only.

**RECOMMENDATION/DECISION:** Members note the continued progress being made on implementing the Policy Framework for Asylum Seekers.

**KEY DECISION** This report does not involve a key decision.

**IMPLICATIONS:**

Financial: No cost to General Fund or the Housing Revenue Account.  
 Staffing: No new commitments.  
 Policy: Housing, Neighbourhood Renewal and Community Safety.  
 Equal Opportunities - Has a Diversity Impact Assessment been conducted? Issues of social cohesion and integration.  
 Wards Affected: All.  
 Special Interest Members – Which have been consulted Councillors Smethurst, Bourne and Hurst.

**For Cabinet reports only :**

Categorisation of the report:	x		x
Discussion leading to a decision		Discussion	
Monitoring		Decision	
Sharing for corporate understanding		Information	x

**Tracking/Process:**

	Consultation	Ward Members	Partners
			G M Police
Panel	Overview & Scrutiny	Cabinet	Council
Regeneration 1.10.03		16.10.03	

There are no Background Papers to this Report within the meaning of Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Proper Officer R D Saunders

Date 10 September 2003

## **BACKGROUND:**

In the November 2002 cycle the Regeneration Panel and Cabinet adopted a policy framework for asylum seekers drawing on the findings of the Scrutiny and Performance Panel's review of the issue. The policy framework endeavours to maintain community cohesion and includes:

- Commitments to the community not to accept any more asylum seekers beyond those set down in Government quotas and to endeavour to ensure that no individual community is overly burdened.
- Commitments to asylum seekers revolving around dispersal, access to key services and supporting the police in responding to race-hate crime.
- Key mechanisms for delivering the commitments, including using the Asylum Seekers Providers Forum to improve co-ordination between services, communications/awareness raising and a local Intelligence Exchange Forum led by the police to inform dispersal and respond to race-hate crime.

It has to be stressed that the Council simply cannot prevent asylum seekers arriving in private sector accommodation. The policy framework represents an attempt at trying to persuade the various parties, in particular private landlords, that a balance needs to be struck around dispersal and community cohesion.

## **INFORMATION – PROGRESS TO 1 SEPTEMBER 2003:**

Wigan Council's Asylum Seeker policy framework was unique but it is now being used by other Boroughs. The National Asylum Seeker Service (NASS) has still to formally endorse the approach though it continues to hold the approach up to be "best practice". Whilst NASS has still to reach a formal position on our approach, all local providers continue to co-operate and work within the policy framework. Support has improved from NASS following the creation of their Regional office and the Immigration Service, notably around issues such as illegal working, illegal use of vehicles, problematic asylum seekers and problems with private providers.

Appendix 1 contains a more detailed progress report on implementing the Council's policy framework. Notable achievements have been:

- the recommendations from the Intelligence Exchange Forum on dispersal continuing to be adhered to by all providers,
- close inter-agency working on community cohesion issues,
- the introduction of an A-Z of key services to assist the various agencies involved with asylum seekers,
- the production and dissemination of myth busting literature, and
- accommodation inspected, one legal notice served for substandard accommodation.

Appendix 2 contains a graph showing dispersal of asylum seekers against Review Level and Nominal Limit Level as at 31 July 2003. In total there were 913 asylum seekers accommodated in the Borough, only 60% of the 1,533 quota which had been set by NASS.

Crucially no ward is over the nominal limit. Currently restrictions apply to ten wards for various reasons. These wards are Abram, Hindley, Ince, Leigh Central, Leigh East, Newtown, Norley, Swinley, Worsley Mesnes and Whelley. In addition, following a meeting of the Intelligence Exchange Forum NASS agreed to adjust their dispersals until the end of September to direct more families to the Borough rather than single males to assist with community cohesion.

The Intelligence Exchange Forum has also initiated a range of interventions including issues such as illegal working, the unlawful use of vehicles and crime and disorder.

This enforcement stance has been balanced by the Asylum Seekers Providers Forum where in particular the voluntary sector and faith movement have been active on both community cohesion and in providing support to asylum seekers, many of whom have fled persecution. These agencies are working to extend their activities giving more emphasis to humanitarian assistance such as mentoring and support for those who have experienced trauma. Community Cohesion initiatives are also being progressed by the Forum following a one-off allocation of £33,000 from Government Office North West. These include support to the Wigan Anti-Racism Campaign, additional resources for initiatives in schools and updating the myth busting leaflet. On induction NASS has approached the North West Consortium to assist with the induction and accommodation of new asylum seekers. Discussions are taking place around a number of options. It is unlikely that Council housing stock will be involved due to increased housing demands locally, instead the dialogue involves possibly using under-utilised private sector accommodation. This will be reported more fully once the potential options have been evaluated.

The Government has issued guidance to local authorities on the disclosure of information to home office officials. This relates to legislation which came into effect in July aimed at improving the enforcement of immigration laws and safeguarding local authority resources from potential misuse. The legislation, Section 129 of the National, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, requires local authorities to provide information requested by the Immigration service where there is reasonable suspicion an individual has committed an immigration offence and may be in the local authority's area. Wigan Council works closely with various Home Office agencies including the Immigration Service. Requests will normally be made through the Immigration Service's link officer who attends the Intelligence Exchange Forum.

**CONCLUSIONS:**

The Council and its partners have made good progress in implementing its Policy Framework for Asylum Seekers that was adopted in November 2002. In particular the Council's approach is ensuring that the dispersal of asylum seekers is now being managed and that no one community is overly burdened.

The numbers of asylum seekers within the Borough remains well below the 1,533 quota set by NASS. Various measures are being taken to address community cohesion issues whilst ensuring humanitarian support and assistance is provided to asylum seekers.

A further report will be submitted on options for the induction and accommodating of new asylum seekers. This is unlikely to involve Council housing stock.

**Appendix 1: Progress Report on Implementing the Asylum Seeker Policy Framework**

<b>Delivery Mechanism / Action</b>	<b>Progress as at 1 September 2003</b>	<b>😊 😐 ☹️</b>
Leadership and Accountability	Leadership has included Cabinet Member as Chair of Forum.  Accountability – cyclical performance report submitted March and October cycle.	😊
Co-ordinating Mechanism - Asylum Seekers Providers Forum	Meeting at least quarterly (currently monthly), agenda extended to include progressing key issues eg community cohesion and also asylum seekers/refugees.	😊
Police / Local Authority Liaison	Council now represented on Greater Manchester Police's weekly tactical and quarterly strategic meetings.	😊
Reporting, reducing, minimising and responding to race-hate crime	Joint Race-Hate crime task group established by Community Safety Partnership has developed a policy framework.  Intelligence Exchange Group established - led by Greater Manchester Police and including Wigan Council. Considers every reported incident of race-hate crime and other criminal matters revolving around the asylum seeker issue. Various interventions.	😊 😊
Dispersal – to ensure as far as possible no ward is overly burdened	Information from Intelligence Exchange Forum is being used with other information to make recommendations to NASS and providers on dispersal. Currently no ward is over 1:100 level. Recommendations now being adhered to by all providers, currently restrictions apply to 10 wards.	😊
Asylum Seeker Induction – Single induction covering introduction to Borough, standard setting (eg no working and compliance with laws) and access to services	Development of an induction process has been suspended following new proposals from NASS.	😊
Education, promotion, awareness raising and social cohesion	Education has extended its services further to ensure asylum seekers are assimilated.  Myth busting literature produced and over 15,000 copies disseminated. A further 3,000 distributed through the "Faith" network. Various other measures.  Social cohesion – various measures taken by providers, voluntary sector and Greater Manchester Police.	😊
Access to Key Services	An A-Z of key services relevant to asylum seekers has been produced and is available to all agencies on the Council's website.	😊
Communication and Dissemination of Policy Framework	Policy framework has been widely disseminated and reinforced by media coverage. It is also available on the Council's website.	😊
Performance	Performance targets –  No ward exceeding 1:100 limit .	

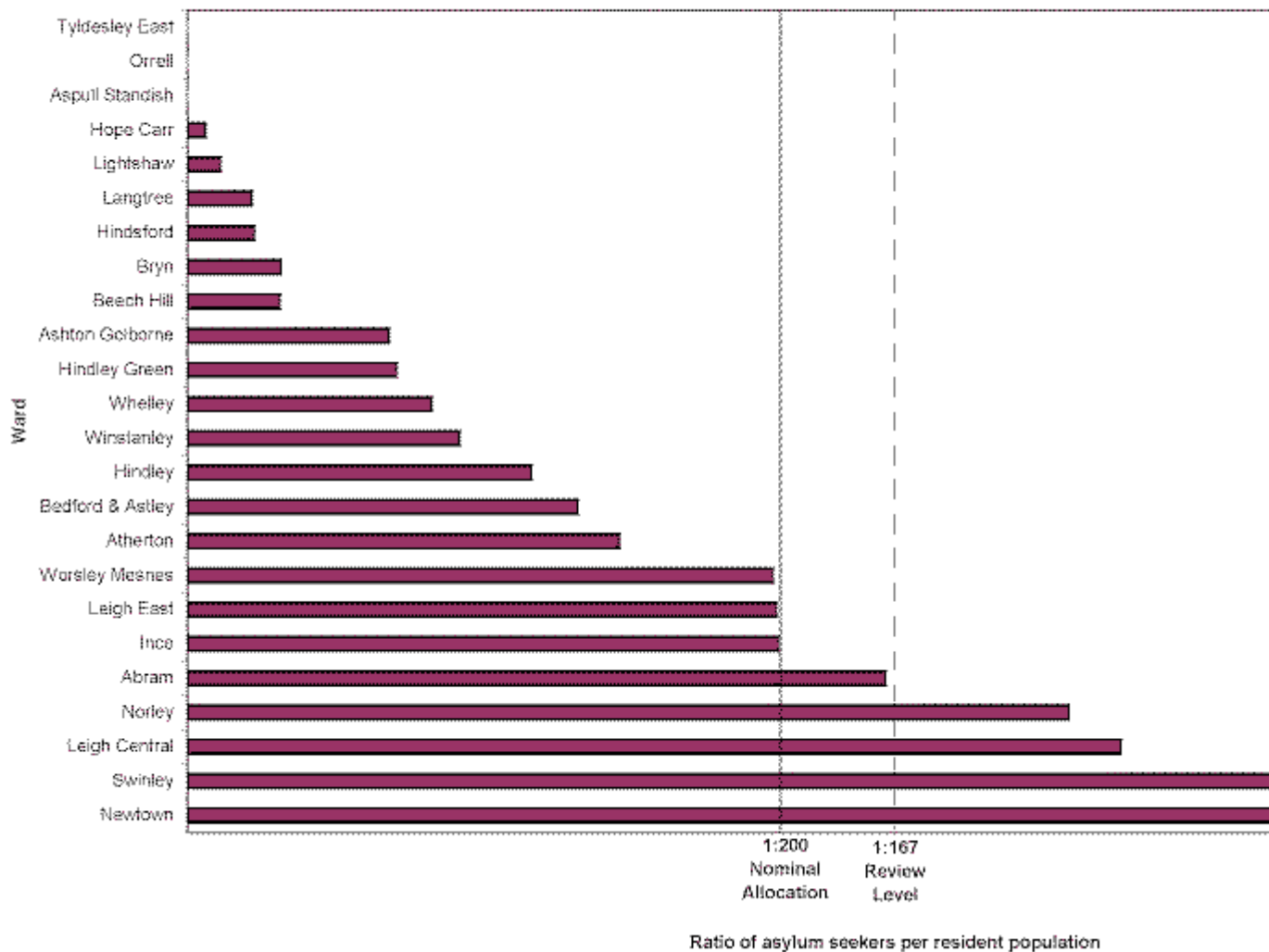
95% of asylum seekers to receive induction - service not yet introduced

90% of asylum seeker accommodation to comply with housing standards – figures produced annually.

Full implementation of policy framework by April 2003 – only induction service outstanding.



Graph showing dispersal of asylum seekers against Review Level and Nominal Limit Level as at 31 July 2003



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