

Report to: Cabinet Community Protection Panel

Date: 26th July 2007 23rd July 2007

Subject: Update on the Implementation of the Asylum Seeker Policy Framework

Report of: Director of Environmental Services

Contact officer: Steve Sargent 01942 827702

Purpose/summary: To update members on the dispersal of Asylum Seekers in the Wigan Borough

Alternative options considered and reason for selecting the one recommended: None – report for information only

Recommendation/decision: Members to note the content of this report

Key Decision: This report does not involve a key decision.

Risks / Implications: None at this stage – continuing to implement existing policy helps minimise risk to Asylum Seekers and service that support them.

Financial: None

Staffing: None – within existing resources

Policy: None

Equal Opportunities - Has a Diversity Impact Assessment been conducted? Yes

Wards affected: All

Special Interest Members – Which have been consulted: None

Has the Director of Legal and Property Services confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council's Constitution? **Yes**

Has the Director of Finance and IT confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council's budget? **Yes**

Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council? **No**

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
Panel	Overview & Scrutiny	Cabinet	Council
Community Protection 23/7/07		26/7/07	

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

Proper Officer M. Kimber

Date 3rd July 2007

Background:

Wigan Council has been proactively managing the dispersal of asylum seekers in the public and private sectors since the government introduced the National Asylum Seeker Service (NASS) back in 2000. Wigan's Policy Framework for the Dispersal of Asylum Seekers was used as an example of good practice by the Home Office.

Update on Asylum Seekers Contracts:

Since Wigan withdrew Council housing for asylum seekers in June 2006 accommodation and support has been provided by private providers under contract to the Border and Immigration Agency (BIA), formerly NASS.

The 3 private providers working in Wigan are:

- Happy Homes
- Priority Properties North West (PPNW)
- United Property Management (UPM)

Happy Homes and UPM have a relatively small number of properties in the Wigan Borough, 10 and 20 respectively. PPNW are by far the biggest providers with 114 properties providing accommodation for around 440 people.

All 3 providers are in regular contact and have a good relationship with the Housing Strategy team, who in turn implement the Asylum Seeker Policy Framework, overseeing the procurement of new property.

The Policy Framework is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that the information contained within is accurate and up to date. Regular contact is made with the Police, the PCT and Children and Young Peoples services so that issues such as hate crime incidents, GP places and school places can be taken into account when making decisions as to the additional dispersal of asylum seekers.

The most up to date Policy Framework is attached at Appendix A.

Numbers of Asylum Seekers in Wigan:

Members will recall from the report to cabinet in June 2005 that in their dispersal policy, the Home Office introduced the concept of a "Cluster Limit" based on 1 asylum seeker per 200 of the local population. This formula suggested a cluster limit of approximately 1500 individual asylum seekers for the Wigan Borough.

A more recent demand forecast model developed by the Home Office suggested a future need broadly in line with the numbers accommodated in the region in December 2004. In June 2005, members agreed that Wigan's future Cluster Limit should be in line with this, i.e. 650 individuals which allows for sensitive dispersal within borough. This number was also thought to be sufficiently large to enable sustainability for support services in the voluntary sector whilst ensuring the Borough can meet the needs of asylum seekers receiving a positive decision.

The latest information from BIA shows that at June 2007 there were 563 asylum seekers being supported in Wigan. Members will note this is just 87 short of Wigan's

limit, a trend duplicated across Greater Manchester, indeed many local authorities have in effect closed their borders to additional dispersal because they have hit or have exceeded their cluster limit. BIA have asked the private providers to look to disperse into other local authorities in the North West that they have no presence in. The situation will continue to be closely monitored by the Housing Strategy team.

Conclusions:

The Asylum Seeker Policy Framework continues to be implemented by the Housing Strategy Team. The Framework is reviewed regularly to take into account factors such as pressure on services and hate crime. The number of asylum seekers receiving support in Wigan is nearing the cluster limit.

Recommendations:

Members are asked to note the contents of this report



**Partnership Policy Framework
for the Dispersal and Integration
of Asylum Seekers in Wigan
Borough**

Updated May 2007

Housing Strategy Section
Environmental Services Department
Wigan Council
Unity House
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Wigan
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Introduction

Wigan Council believes that by working closely with the Borders and Immigration Agency (BIA) formerly NASS, support services, accommodation providers and local communities, asylum seekers can be welcomed into the Wigan Borough community whilst protecting the needs and rights of all and promoting community cohesion. Wigan Council is committed to fulfilling its duty to:

- the wider Wigan Borough community, and
- asylum seekers who temporarily, and potentially permanently, live in the Borough.

Commitment to the Borough's Community

Wigan Council aims to ensure local services are not overburdened by the introduction of asylum seekers into the Borough. This will be achieved by:

- not accepting any more asylum seekers than set out in Government quotas
- securing the co-operation of housing providers and BIA in ensuring the distribution of asylum seekers is managed and that no one community is overly burdened, particularly communities with high levels of deprivation
- wherever possible, and with the help of partner agencies, consulting local communities on any sizeable distribution into any ward, (i.e. accommodation requiring planning permission or involving ten or more asylum seekers), and
- supporting the police in responding to any criminal, fraudulent or anti-social behaviour.

Commitment to Asylum Seekers

Wigan Council aims to ensure asylum seekers are supported with settling into the Wigan Borough community and receive equal access to local services. This will be achieved by:

- creating and maintaining a framework of locally co-ordinated services to support effective dispersal to a home that meets local housing standards
- supporting the police to respond to race hate crime or anti-social behaviour and with measures to promote social cohesion.
- providing guidelines and signposting for accommodation providers to encourage provision of support for those who receive a positive decision with finding move-on accommodation.

Co-ordination and service delivery frameworks

To deliver these commitments a number of mechanisms need to be established and maintained. These include:

Leadership and accountability

- The Cabinet member for Community Protection takes the lead executive role for asylum seekers, with support from the Director of Environmental Services.

Leads:
Cllr Keith Cunliffe
(Cabinet Member,
Neighbourhood
Champion)

- Annual performance reports will be submitted to Community Protection Panel and Cabinet.

Co-ordination

- The Asylum Seeker Intelligence Exchange will be the main co-ordinating mechanism. Its agenda will include:
 - Monitoring of dispersal (see below)
 - Accessibility of key services
 - Race-hate crime patterns
 - Criminal activity
 - Fraud, and
 - Anti-social behaviour
 - Performance / issue reports from lead partners including BIA, housing providers and statutory agencies
- The Asylum Seeker Provider Forum will be the co-ordinating mechanism for housing and support providers within Wigan Borough. Its agenda will focus on sharing information, best practice, problems / issues and disseminating changes in legislation. It will also look at promotion, awareness raising and other initiatives when relevant.
- Links between Wigan Council and GMP will be strengthened with Council officers attending monthly Wigan Partnership Tactical Assessment meetings.
- Wigan Council's Housing Strategy Section have established and will maintain an internet website containing key documents related to asylum seekers in Wigan, including the policy framework and A-Z of key services. Also included will be lead contacts from various agencies. Go to www.wiganhomelessnessforum.org.uk/AdviceServices/aspf

Accommodation dispersal and standards

- Dispersal within the Borough will involve close liaison between BIA, Wigan Council, GMP, housing providers and other local statutory agencies. The Intelligence Exchange Group will receive reports on existing and proposed dispersals and the Housing Strategy Team will make recommendations to BIA and housing providers on further dispersals. Issues taken into account will include:
 - Levels of deprivation
 - Community cohesion
 - Number of private lettings in the immediate area
 - Dispersal ratio levels
 - Pressure on local statutory services, including GP and school

Martin Kimber
Director of
Environmental
Services

Leads:
Steve Sargent
(Housing Strategy
Team Manager)
Gail Spruce
Inspector Greater
Manchester Police

Lead:
Steve Sargent
(Housing Strategy
Team Manager)

Leads:
Monthly meets -
**John Pendry &
Sandra Green**
(Principal Officers
Neighbourhood
Teams Officer)

Lead:
Steve Sargent
(Housing Strategy
Team Manager)

Leads:
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(Housing Strategy
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Gail Spruce
Inspector Greater
Manchester Police

- places
 - Other potential indicators of housing market decline/collapse.
- Dispersal limit recommendations encompass all asylum seekers, including:
 - Those receiving accommodation and subsistence from BIA
 - Those receiving subsistence only from BIA
 - Destitute asylum seekers supported by local authorities (Interim cases)
 - 'Section 4' (destitute) asylum seekers supported by BIA
 - Induction Service occupants
 - Asylum Seekers supported in Emergency accommodation
 - Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC)

- These recommendations will be forwarded to all housing providers and relevant agencies identifying the wards where no further dispersal should take place and wards where prior consultation is specifically requested for any scheme. Housing providers will also be requested to consult with Housing Strategy prior to acquiring any property in the Borough. Dispersals across all tenures will be monitored by the Council's Housing Strategy Team. Wigan Council's Private Sector Housing Renewal will submit observations on any planning applications that are known to be intended for asylum seekers.

- Standards of accommodation will be monitored and enforced by BIA as part of contract agreements between BIA and housing providers. In addition the Council's Private Sector Housing Renewal Team will work with BIA to monitor and enforce standards in line with Local Government powers.

On refugee status and move-on accommodation

- Where an asylum seeker is given indefinite leave to remain (i.e. refugee status) they are no longer eligible for BIA support and will be asked to leave BIA supported accommodation. They will, however, become eligible to be assessed for mainstream benefits and social housing. In order to assist in this transition period all housing providers should inform Wigan and Leigh Housing's 'Housing Aid' section if an asylum seeker / refugee has housing need or is at risk of becoming homeless, ensuring access to housing advice.

Leads:
Housing Aid Teams,
Wigan and Leigh
Housing

On access to statutory services

- All asylum seekers are eligible for health services and will be given access to a GP. All housing providers should inform the PCT of new arrivals, who will then allocate asylum seekers a GP. Contact:

Lead:
Ashton Wigan and
Leigh Primary care
Trust

Susan Coventry, Patient Data Manager, Bryan House, 61 Standishgate, Wigan.

Tel: 01942 772732

- The Council has extended its services to ensure the children of asylum seekers are assimilated into local schools. To assist with this process all housing providers should inform Wigan Council's Children's Services of all children under the age of 16 who arrive in the Borough. Contact:

English as an Additional Language Team, 1st Floor - Leigh Town Hall, Leigh.

Tel: 01942 404589

On promotion, awareness raising and social cohesion

- The Community Cohesion Forum, alongside the Asylum Seeker Provider Forum will support measures to promote social cohesion including promotion and awareness raising. The Community Safety Partnership and voluntary sector will promote social cohesion measures and assist in integration.
- Wigan Council, working with partners, will co-ordinate the briefing of communities on any proposals involving known sizeable distributions of asylum seekers into any particular neighbourhood or ward.

Measuring performance

- Progress on implementing the policy framework will be reported annually to the Community Protection committee and Cabinet. The report will include progress on managing dispersal, incidence of race-hate crime and the performance of any agency funded by Wigan Council.
- Performance targets will include:
 - No ward to exceed a 1:200 dispersal ratio.
 - 95% of all asylum seeker accommodation to comply with the housing standards enforced by Wigan Council

Lead:
English as an
Additional Language
Team

Lead:
Vacant (Social
Inclusion Policy
Officer, Wigan
Council) Contact
Sian Jay as a
temporary measure

Steve Sargent
(Housing Strategy
Team Manager)