

# **Place Select Committee**

## **Scrutiny Review of Asylum Seeker Services**

**Final Report  
November 2017**

Place Select Committee  
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council  
Municipal Buildings  
Church Road  
Stockton-on-Tees  
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## **Select Committee - Membership**

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## **Acknowledgements**

The Committee would like to thank the following people for contributing to its work:

- Cllr Steve Nelson (Elected Member) - Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC)
- Martin Gray (Director of Children's Services) - SBC
- Steven Hume (Community Safety & Strategy Service Manager) - SBC
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- Graham Strange (Manager) - Victim Care and Advice Service
- Brian McCarthy (Sergeant) & Beauty Tshuma (RAS Co-ordinator) - Cleveland Police
- Peter Chapman (Secretary) & Cath Ingram (Drop-In Lead) - Stockton Baptist Tabernacle Church
- All voluntary and community sector groups who contributed to the VCS questionnaire circulated as part of this review.
- Those asylum seekers who provided their experiences since arriving in the Borough.

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## Foreword

On behalf of the Place Select Committee, we are pleased to present the final report and recommendations following our review of Asylum Seeker Services.

This has been a very interesting and challenging review, with a wide range of issues presented to and discussed by the Committee. We are extremely grateful to all the organisations and individuals who have provided evidence.

Support for asylum seekers in Stockton-on-Tees is provided through a number of national, regional and local agencies, though it is clear that those seeking asylum also depend on an array of passionate, but often overstretched, voluntary and community sector groups. During the course of this review, we have heard about the experiences and difficulties faced by asylum seekers, particularly around forced room-sharing – we urge all the key stakeholders to work together effectively so that asylum seekers are treated with humanity and dignity.



**Cllr Derrick Brown**  
Chair  
Place Select Committee



**Cllr Sonia Bailey**  
Vice-Chair  
Place Select Committee

## Original Brief

### **Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?**

The following Council Policy Principles are relevant to this review:

- Protecting the vulnerable
- Promoting equality of opportunity
- Developing strong and healthy communities

### **What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?**

The Government has made a long-term commitment to support individuals seeking asylum in the UK who are fleeing violence, persecution and political instability. The Home Office is responsible for the management of this process, both in terms of asylum dispersal, as well as enforcement in relation to the removal of individuals not granted leave to remain.

Nationally, the Home Office has had to deal with unprecedented numbers of asylum seekers arriving in the United Kingdom. There has been a year-on-year increase of 19% for arrivals which has significantly exceeded initial projections. It is anticipated that this figure will continue to rise year-on-year. Stockton continues to act as a major dispersal area for asylum seekers.

A national contract is in place to accommodate asylum seekers. In the North East, G4S were awarded the contract and they sub-contracted with Jomast to act as their private sector housing provider. In terms of wider support, the contract allowed for asylum seekers to be supported to sign up for health care services, as well as signposting to additional support services and facilities in the local area. No provision was made available for wider social support and integration. The main scrutiny of G4S is via the Home Office and, ultimately, Parliament. The national contract is due for renewal in 2019.

The issue presents the Council with a number of challenges and opportunities, and the Committee's work will focus on the following:

- To ensure that asylum seekers are welcomed and assimilated as effectively as possible in order to ensure social cohesion is maintained.
- To assess the effectiveness of Council and partner support services, including housing, health, education (inc. Early Years), community safety, and role of voluntary and community groups, and any gaps in provision/co-ordination.
- To understand the demand for services in the future, and the impact of this on current providers and what new responses may be needed.
- To assess the effectiveness of information-sharing and quality of strategic planning with the NE Migration Partnership, including its role in representing the views of Stockton Council.

### **The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:**

What is the role of the various agencies involved in Asylum Seeker service provision? (Home Office, accommodation providers, Local Authority, NHS, etc)

What is the role of the North East Migration Partnership?

What information on asylum seekers to be placed in the area is currently provided to local services and is this sufficient? What information is available to project future demand on services / how is this used?

What does the current asylum seeker accommodation process look like? What are the emerging features of the new national accommodation support contract?

What initial support is provided to asylum seekers upon arrival in Stockton? What support/education is provided for children?

What role is being undertaken by the voluntary sector in supporting services for asylum seekers?

What additional support services are in place eg. health services, support for asylum seekers experiencing abuse? Have additional needs been identified?

What is the Council's role in relation to Asylum Seekers whose applications are refused?

**Provide an initial view as to how this review could lead to efficiencies, improvements and/or transformation:**

- Improved understanding of the local situation and roles and responsibilities.
- Review of the effectiveness of current support services.
- An understanding of the future need for local support services.
- Development of a local support service directory.

## **1.0 Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the Place Select Committee's scrutiny review of Asylum Seeker Services.
- 1.2 The Government has made a long-term commitment to support individuals seeking asylum in the UK. The Home Office is responsible for the management of this process, both in terms of asylum dispersal and enforcement in relation to the removal of individuals not granted leave to remain, and have had to deal with unprecedented numbers of asylum seekers arriving in the United Kingdom (there had been a year-on-year increase for arrivals which had exceeded initial projections, and it was anticipated that this figure would continue to rise year-on-year).
- 1.3 Previously, Local Authorities were part of the asylum dispersal process and delivered a service on behalf of the Home Office. Arrangements with Local Authorities came to an end in 2011-2012, and at that time, the annual cost to the Home Office of providing accommodation for asylum seekers was £150 million. In line with wider financial challenges, the Home Office identified a need to reduce the level of spend, and In March 2012, signed six new contracts called COMPASS (Commercial and Operating Managers Procuring Asylum Support) with three providers – G4S, Serco and Clearel, to deliver asylum dispersal across the UK. The contracts were initially agreed until August 2017, with the option of an additional two-year extension. Under the new contracts, the Home Office aimed to save around £140 million over seven years.
- 1.4 In the North East, G4S were awarded the contract, and they sub-contracted with Jomast to act as their private sector housing provider. In terms of wider support, the contract allowed for asylum seekers to be assisted to sign up for health care services, as well as signposting to additional support services and facilities in the local area. No provision was made available for wider social support and integration. The main scrutiny of G4S is via the Home Office and, ultimately, Parliament.
- 1.5 In order to support the management of asylum and migration issues at a regional level, the Home Office provided funding for the development of Regional Migration Partnerships. The North East Migration Partnership (NEMP) is made up of all North East Local Authorities, representation from VCS organisations supporting asylum seekers, health representation, all three Police forces, DWP and Probation/CRC. Meetings are also attended by the Home Office and the contract provider G4S. The aim of the partnership is to provide a single voice for the region, both in terms of lobbying the Home Office for improvements, as well as co-ordinating regional responses to emerging issues and calls for additional support.
- 1.6 Stockton-on-Tees continues to act as a major dispersal area for asylum seekers. The Home Office has made a commitment to reducing the number of new arrivals in Stockton in the long-term to reduce the risk of the agreed Home Office threshold total being exceeded. The current agreement for Stockton is a 'one in, one out' approach so that the figure remains static.
- 1.7 The current contract arrangements are due to end in September 2019. In November 2016, the Home Office hosted a meeting with Local Authority officers to start the initial consultation on what a revised dispersal contract will



look like after this date. Over the next 12 months, the Home Office are looking to carry out engagement work with a range of sectors both in terms of stakeholder engagement and market engagement, with a view to developing a number of possible options for consideration.

- 1.8 The main focus for this review was to identify and assess the effectiveness of national, regional and local services that provide support to asylum seekers in Stockton-on-Tees. This would involve a range of organisations covering nationally commissioned providers through to voluntary and community sector groups across the Borough, and would also examine interaction and information-sharing between the key stakeholders.
- 1.9 The Committee was keen to understand the levels of demand on services, and to ascertain how asylum seekers are welcomed and assimilated into the locality with a view to promoting integration and maintaining social cohesion. The identification of any gaps in provision and co-ordination was also an important aspect of this review.
- 1.10 The Committee found that there are a large number of statutory and voluntary/community organisations providing information, advice and signposting to asylum seekers in Stockton-on-Tees. It is therefore crucial that this information is consistent, up-to-date and accessible so that asylum seekers understand what services are available to them locally, which can aid their integration into the community.
- 1.11 The issue of room-sharing for asylum seekers who are not related was raised on a number of occasions, and it was noted that other Local Authorities (e.g. Newcastle) have tried to address this. However, due to the content of the current Home Office accommodation contract, the ability to prevent this is restricted. Room-sharing is a wider housing policy issue (linked to the payment of Local Housing Allowance), and as such, any decision would have an impact on housing as a whole.
- 1.12 Access to English language classes (where necessary) is a critical requirement for asylum seekers' integration into the community, and enables a better understanding of their locality, what is expected of them, and of the support available.
- 1.13 There is a significant burden put on the voluntary and community sector to provide support services for asylum seekers, and this is not addressed in the current asylum contract.
- 1.14 The work of the North East Migration Partnership (NEMP) is very positive, particularly as a means of bringing together the various key stakeholders and giving the region a voice. NEMP will continue to be an important vehicle for holding partners to account, as well as having the ability to influence the post-2019 asylum contract.

### **Recommendations**

The Committee recommend that:

- 1. a clear pathway and information about what asylum seeker services are on offer in Stockton-on-Tees is provided.**

**Recommendations (continued)**

- 2. acknowledging the frequent issues raised in relation to unrelated adult asylum seekers being forced to room-share, the Committee strongly object to such practice, but note that any attempts at preventing this would be difficult to enforce. The Committee does however encourage the Government to consider the position on room-sharing of unrelated adults when forming the post-2019 asylum contracts.**
- 3. the North East Migration Partnership (NEMP) should ensure it continues to effectively represent the views of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, in the context of effective representation and involvement of all Local Authorities in the region.**
- 4. there should be closer working with local voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations, including:**
  - a. ensuring that asylum seekers have the confidence and awareness to support their ability to raise issues of concern to the VCS and the Council, contributing to the intelligence needed to support action such as targeted inspections (of poor quality private rented accommodation) where necessary.**
  - b. enhanced links with refugee-led community organisations (RCOs) via the Regional Refugee Forum North East to increase understanding of asylum seeker issues/concerns.**
  - c. continued development of hate crime reporting processes to ensure asylum seekers and refugees have the confidence to report issues.**
- 5. information-sharing between agencies is strengthened to ensure joined-up processes, including:**
  - a. notifications from local delivery partners of Home Office decisions (for leave to remain, discontinued, fled, deported), communicated via G4S and/or their contracted accommodation partner, be shared with Housing and Education teams as soon as possible to enable effective planning and provision to be made across all relevant partners.**
  - b. the establishment of a clear protocol for asylum seeker children school admission, with key information provided to the Admissions Team and schools for the purposes of a robust induction, should form part of the planning for new contracts post-2019.**
- 6. there is a need for additional opportunities for asylum seekers to access basic/fundamental English language courses or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes.**
- 7. the Government is encouraged to ensure that, when forming the post-2019 asylum contracts, an approach is taken which would enable aspects of provision, such as support, to be met by local partners. The Local Authority can then explore the feasibility of bidding for elements of the post-2019 asylum contracts once these have been confirmed.**

## **2.0 Introduction**

- 2.1 This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the Place Select Committee's scrutiny review of Asylum Seeker Services.
- 2.2 The main focus for this review was to identify and assess the effectiveness of national, regional and local services that provide support to asylum seekers in Stockton-on-Tees. This would involve a range of organisations covering nationally commissioned providers through to voluntary and community sector groups across the Borough, and would also examine interaction and information-sharing between the key stakeholders.
- 2.3 The Committee was keen to understand the levels of demand on services, and to ascertain how asylum seekers are welcomed and assimilated into the locality with a view to promoting integration and maintaining social cohesion. The identification of any gaps in provision and co-ordination was also an important aspect of this review.
- 2.4 Other avenues to be investigated included the key role of the North East Migration Partnership (NEMP) and its representation of the views of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council. In addition, the emerging themes regarding the formulation of the post-2019 asylum contracts would be sought.
- 2.5 The Committee considered evidence from a number of key stakeholders involved in local asylum seeker service provision, including G4S (nationally commissioned housing provider), Migrant Help (nationally commissioned advice and information contract), the North East Migration Partnership (NEMP), the Local Authority, Arrival Medical Practice, the Victim Care and Advice Service (VCAS) and Cleveland Police.
- 2.6 Regional and local voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations provided details of their role in offering support to asylum seekers, as well as representing asylum seeker views and concerns - this included responses to a VCS questionnaire which was circulated to refugee-led community groups (RCOs), local churches and other relevant asylum seeker service providers.
- 2.7 In order to hear the direct views of those working with individuals seeking asylum, as well as from asylum seekers themselves, Committee Members visited the Arrival Medical Practice and Stockton Baptist Tabernacle Church.

### 3.0 Background

3.1 The Government has made a long-term commitment to support individuals seeking asylum in the UK. The Home Office is responsible for the management of this process, both in terms of asylum dispersal, as well as enforcement in relation to the removal of individuals not granted leave to remain.

3.2 Asylum is protection given by a country to someone fleeing from persecution in their own country. According to Article 1 of the 1951 United Nations Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, a refugee is a person who:

*...owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country;*

As a signatory to the Convention, the UK grants asylum to those who meet these criteria. The UK also adheres to the European Convention on Human Rights, which prevents the UK from sending someone to a country where there is a real risk they may be exposed to torture, or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

3.3 An asylum seeker is someone who has applied for asylum and is awaiting a decision on whether they will be granted refugee status. An asylum applicant who does not qualify for refugee status may still be granted leave to remain in the UK for humanitarian or other reasons. An asylum seeker whose application is refused at initial decision may appeal the decision through an appeals process. Asylum applicants initially refused refugee status may be granted leave to remain following an appeal.

3.4 Nationally, the Home Office has had to deal with unprecedented numbers of asylum seekers arriving in the United Kingdom. There had been a year-on-year increase for arrivals which had exceeded initial projections, and it was anticipated that this figure would continue to rise year-on-year.



3.5 Previously, Local Authorities were part of the asylum dispersal process and delivered a service on behalf of the Home Office. Arrangements with Local Authorities came to an end in 2011-2012, and at that time, the annual cost to the Home Office of providing accommodation for asylum seekers was £150 million. In line with wider financial challenges, the Home Office identified a need to reduce the level of spend, and in March 2012, signed six new contracts called COMPASS (Commercial and Operating Managers Procuring Asylum Support) with three providers – G4S, Serco and Clearel, to deliver asylum dispersal across the UK. The contracts were initially agreed until August 2017, with the option of an additional two-year extension. Under the new contracts, the Home Office aimed to save around £140 million over seven years.

3.6 In the North East, G4S were awarded the contract, and they sub-contracted with Jomast to act as their private sector housing provider. In terms of wider

support, the contract allowed for asylum seekers to be assisted to sign up for health care services, as well as signposting to additional support services and facilities in the local area. No provision was made available for wider social support and integration. The main scrutiny of G4S is via the Home Office and, ultimately, Parliament.

- 3.7 In terms of additional support for asylum seekers, there are a number of services locally that provide assistance in relation to signposting for support, community engagement and advocacy. The Home Office has contracted Migrant Help to provide first point of contact support for individuals and families. There is also a requirement for individuals and families to register with the Arrival Medical Practice on Yarm Road, Stockton as their main gateway to health services. Further support and signposting to services is also provided here.
- 3.8 Other agencies such as Justice First and the North East Refugee Service (NERS) provide a range of advocacy and support services where possible. Further to this, the British Red Cross has recently been successful with a £500,000 funding bid which will provide additional support over the next four years through the Ariadne Project. The project began in 2017, and Public Health is looking to provide additional support to promote key Public Health messages relating to asylum seekers and refugees, with work ongoing to look at how best to achieve this.
- 3.9 In order to support the management of asylum and migration issues at a regional level, the Home Office provided funding for the development of Regional Migration Partnerships. The North East Migration Partnership (NEMP) is made up of all North East Local Authorities, representation from VCS organisations supporting asylum seekers, health representation, all three Police forces, DWP and Probation/CRC. Meetings are also attended by the Home Office and the contract provider G4S. The aim of the partnership is to provide a single voice for the region, both in terms of lobbying the Home Office for improvements, as well as co-ordinating regional responses to emerging issues and calls for additional support.
- 3.10 Stockton-on-Tees continues to act as a major dispersal area for asylum seekers. The Home Office has made a commitment to reducing the number of new arrivals in Stockton in the long-term to reduce the risk of the agreed Home Office threshold total being exceeded. The current agreement for Stockton is a 'one in, one out' approach so that the figure remains static.
- 3.11 As documented within the Home Office asylum data tables immigration statistics (volume 4) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-april-to-june-2017-data-tables>), there were 674 asylum seekers in dispersed accommodation in Stockton-on-Tees at the end of June 2017. There has been a gradual decline in numbers since the peak of 878 at the end of March 2016.
- 3.12 The current contract arrangements are due to end in September 2019. In November 2016, the Home Office hosted a meeting with Local Authority officers to start the initial consultation on what a revised dispersal contract will look like after this date. Over the next 12 months, the Home Office are looking to carry out engagement work with a range of sectors both in terms of stakeholder engagement and market engagement, with a view to developing a number of possible options for consideration.

## 4.0 Findings

4.1 When an asylum seeker enters the UK, they can receive the following:

- A place to stay - this is offered on a no-choice basis, and it is highly unlikely that an individual or family will be housed in London or the South East;
- Cash support of £36.95 per week per person in the family household - this money can be withdrawn on a weekly basis from the Post Office;
- Free NHS health support which includes prescriptions, dental care, eye-sight and help to buy glasses;
- All children aged 3-17 must attend education and may be eligible for free school meals.

Additional payments can be made for the following:

- Pregnant mother - extra £3 per week;
- Baby under 1 - extra £5 per week;
- Child aged 1-3 - extra £3 per week;
- A one-off maternity payment of £300 if a baby is due in 8 weeks or less, or is under 6 weeks old.

Where an individual or family has been refused entry, they will be provided with housing and £35.39 per week per person on a payment card which can be used for food, toiletries and clothing. No cash will be provided and the payment card will be refused should the individual refuse the offer of housing. A one-off maternity payment of £250 can also be applied for if a baby is due in 8 weeks or less, or is under 6 weeks old. Individuals not granted leave to remain are required to leave the UK at their earliest opportunity.

### Nationally Commissioned Service Providers (G4S & Migrant Help)

4.2 The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 sets out three circumstances under which asylum seekers are entitled to accommodation:

- while the Home Office is considering whether an individual is eligible for support (Section 98 of the Act)
- while the Home Office is assessing the application (Section 95), and
- when the application for asylum has been refused but the applicant has yet to leave the country (Section 4).

The vast majority of people are housed under Section 95, and the number of people accommodated on this basis has almost doubled over the lifetime of the COMPASS contracts.

4.3 G4S has been the North East, Yorkshire and Humberside housing provider since they were awarded two of the six national Commercial & Operational Managers Procuring Asylum Support Services (COMPASS) contracts in 2012. Along with their other contracted region (Midlands and East of England), approximately 18,200 asylum seekers are currently supported under G4S in over 5,000 properties.



In the initial period of the contract, G4S were housing around 9,000 asylum seekers, half the current number. The current contract ends in autumn 2019.

4.4 Accommodation requirements are split into two stages:

- a) During the first stage of their claim, asylum seekers stay in Initial Accommodation (IA) for around 19 days - Urban House in Wakefield is the centre where most asylum seekers who come to Stockton-on-Tees are initially accommodated.
- b) Upon destitution checks carried out by the Home Office, asylum seekers are then moved to Dispersed Accommodation (DA) - this is provided on a 'no-choice' basis, though efforts are made to find the most appropriate housing for their needs in recognition of language/religion/case type/etc. Asylum seekers remain in DA while their claim is assessed by the Home Office, and it was noted that some nationalities receive a quick decision, whilst applicants from other countries can wait for years.

4.5 Within DA, some asylum seekers may share a room (these could be relatives in family properties or unrelated singles of the same gender in Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs)). G4S gave assurance that if unrelated single applicants are allocated to a shared room, they always aim to ensure there is compatibility with nationality, language and religion. However, as recommended within the Home Affairs Committee - Asylum Accommodation (January 2017) report:

*'When allocating accommodation Providers should do much more to address the needs of particularly vulnerable asylum seekers, such as expectant mothers, those living with mental health needs and victims of trafficking, rape and torture. At the very least people in these circumstances should not have to share a room or be placed in large-scale Houses of Multiple Occupancy. Indeed, we recommend that forced bedroom sharing be phased out across the asylum estate as a whole and that the use of large scale HMOs be reduced.'*

The Committee raised concerns around incidents of room-sharing asylum seekers being put back together again following a complaint by one about the other (on one occasion involving an alleged physical assault). G4S stated that, in such instances, relocation for one of the individuals would be requested, and they would investigate any particular issues raised.

4.6 A number of key documents are provided to asylum seekers upon access to DA, including an occupancy agreement (which must be signed in order to take up the accommodation, and outlines their own responsibilities as well as G4Ss responsibilities towards them), a G4S briefing pack (available in eight languages), an induction checklist, details on the complaints process, and local area welcome leaflets and maps. The sub-contractor, Jomast, also take asylum seekers on a tour of the area (which is above and beyond what they are expected to do), and enable individuals to register with a GP and, for children, schools. Following Member queries around asylum seekers being able to understand the briefing packs,



G4S advised that these are currently being reviewed regarding their readability.

- 4.7 Incorporated within the COMPASS contracts are Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), a number of which involve housing maintenance standards - G4S acknowledged the need for a KPI regime, and stated that they have robust measures in place to ensure delivery. However, in response to Member concerns around asylum seeker housing issues, G4S emphasised that they can only address problems that they are made aware of, and that any complaints/concerns should be directed to them instead of the sub-contractor, Jomast (this has been re-iterated with partners, including voluntary and community sector support groups). Members stressed the need to ensure that asylum seekers have confidence in the complaints system - this echoes another recommendation from the Home Affairs Committee - Asylum Accommodation (January 2017) report:

*'For a complaints system to work people must feel able to complain without threat of negative repercussions. Providers should make it explicit in the welcome pack, and in oral introductions when someone is first placed in accommodation, that raising concerns about accommodation will not affect their application for asylum.'*

G4S provided the Committee with details of complaints received from asylum seekers based in Stockton-on-Tees since January 2016, all of which had been resolved (see Appendix 1), and noted that, for the same period in question (from January 2016), they had not incurred any KPI penalties against any of the nine KPIs for either Stockton-on-Tees or anywhere else in their contract regions.

- 4.8 Some examples of the ways in which G4S performance manage Jomast were outlined:

- Property inspections - G4S and the Home Office conduct property inspections on the Jomast portfolio on a regular basis to ensure that service users in their care are being looked after, property standards are being maintained, and the properties are fit for purpose;
- Meetings with Jomast - G4S hold operations meetings with Jomast to discuss their performance;
- G4S engage at all levels with Jomast on a daily basis, principally with their operational teams to discuss elements of service delivery;
- Jomast self-report to G4S every month and provide management information on all aspects of their service delivery - this data is scrutinised and checked to ensure that they are compliant in all aspects of their contract;
- A representative from G4S is in attendance at all stakeholder meetings in the Jomast area, and G4S also regularly attend meetings in the absence of Jomast to allow stakeholders to report back on any issues they have;
- Internal audits - G4S conduct audits on specific areas of the Jomast business as part of the governance of their contract (e.g. an audit on their induction process to ensure that service users are provided with all the information they need upon arrival at their dispersed accommodation).

Members relayed voluntary/community sector group concerns that some asylum seekers were receiving different approaches depending on their nationality. G4S stated that a number of bi-lingual staff are employed by



Jomast, and there should be no difference in the information provided to any asylum seeker. Again, G4S want to be made aware if there are any specific issues.

- 4.9 Along with the key areas of housing and transporting asylum seekers, co-ordination with strategic partners (including the Local Authority) regarding the sharing of information and in supporting social cohesion was highlighted, as were measures in promoting the safety and wellbeing of asylum seekers while they are in DA.
- 4.10 A 24/7 G4S COMPASS Service/Call Centre (which includes a freephone number) is in place for asylum seekers in relation to general enquiries, complaints, maintenance issues, anti-social behaviour and public harassment incidents, requests for information/advice, etc. Interpreter services are available at all times which remove language barriers and ensure clear communication.
- 4.11 The Home Office are currently considering alternative delivery models (six options have been proposed), as well as the geographical spread, for the post-2019 asylum contracts. Stakeholder engagement events are underway and Local Authorities are being asked for their input. One possible option which is being explored is splitting the contract into two elements, one for housing provision and one for support.
- 4.12 Asylum Help, part of the Migrant Help organisation, were awarded a contract in 2014 to provide asylum support applications for adult asylum seekers, failed adult asylum seekers and any dependents (UK-wide). A grant was also awarded in 2014 to provide advice and guidance services, including to adult refugees. Both the contract and grant have been extended to 2019.
- 4.13 The Asylum Help service delivery model involves a UK-wide free helpline available in 15 languages, regional services for clients in IA, and outreach services in some dispersal areas (the North East has two FTE advisors based in Middlesbrough and Newcastle). Co-ordination with other key local partner agencies is crucial in achieving positive outcomes for asylum seekers - Asylum Help work closely with housing provider, G4S. A new compliance service to check the quality of asylum applications before submission to the Home Office (ensuring a 99% acceptance rate) is now in place.

#### North East Migration Partnership (NEMP)

- 4.14 NEMP was formed in January 2015 as a result of emerging regional and local issues. Funded by the Home Office and consisting of Local Authorities, statutory agencies such as the Police, and voluntary and community sector groups, it has a small team of staff with sub-groups co-ordinating asylum and refugee issues in the region, as well as the transition between asylum seeker and refugee. NEMP is annually reviewed and approved by North East Chief Executives, alongside Leaders and Elected Mayors, with Migration Lead Officers and Lead Members nominated by each Local Authority in the region (for Stockton-on-Tees, this is Steven Hume and Cllr Steve Nelson respectively).



- 4.15 To relieve the demands on high-dispersal areas such as Middlesbrough and Stockton-on-Tees, NEMP have successfully sought a more equitable distribution of asylum seekers across the region - all North East Local Authorities have now agreed in principle to take part in asylum dispersal by the end of 2017 (though Durham are yet to agree an operational start date). Other developments include enhanced communication protocols with all partners, an Asylum Accommodation Use Protocol to improve consultation with Council's and the Police on new homes for asylum use, and encouraging complaints to go direct to G4S rather than the sub-contractor, Jomast.
- 4.16 The Committee were informed of the current key priorities for NEMP, which include reviewing the local multi-agency groups, continuing support for Local Authorities who want to address room sharing for unrelated asylum seekers, and improving pre-arrival information on those coming to the region (a pilot is ongoing in Middlesbrough). Input to, and support of, the new asylum contract, as well as supporting the implications of the changes in the Immigration Act 2016, is also a central focus for NEMP.
- 4.17 Acknowledging the number of voluntary and community sector organisations providing support for asylum seekers, the Committee questioned if a register of services was available that could be provided to families/individuals on arrival in the locality. It is hoped that the local multi-agency groups would take a lead role in working with the accommodation provider to keep welcome packs up-to-date.
- 4.18 Members were provided with details of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS) and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS). Stockton was not expected to support the SVPRS initially due to the high dispersal rate of asylum seekers across the Borough - however, this may be revisited due to the recent reduction in asylum seeker numbers locally. Similarly, Stockton were not expected to participate in the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) scheme initially due to existing pressures from other migration programmes and higher levels of Looked After Children - again, a formal request from the Home Office to review this position may be received in the near future.
- 4.19 As a vehicle that represents the region, NEMP has evolved to better represent the various Local Authorities, and its work has increased the accountability of the housing provider - it is therefore hoped that NEMP can play a significant role in influencing the post-2019 asylum contract. While NEMP is funded by the Home Office, it needs to ensure, as far as possible, it remains independent and represents the interests of regional Local Authorities (who will be guided by their own interests, which are subject to change). Increased NEMP focus on/involvement of Members would be a positive development.

#### Local Authority

- 4.20 The Council's Private Sector Housing team are involved in the consultation process relating to the procurement of new properties to be used for asylum seeker accommodation.



- 4.21 Housing conditions in accommodation occupied by asylum seekers are addressed in the same way as with other properties in the private rented sector, though the team receive few queries in relation to asylum seekers. Properties are assessed using the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) - this does not set a minimum standard; it is concerned with removing or reducing the risk of harm from housing-related hazards. Should any remedial work to a property be identified, an informal approach to the landlord is usually initiated. If this proves unsuccessful, the Council's Private Sector Housing team visit and undertake an inspection/assessment - where required, formal action via the serving of a notice to have work carried out is instigated.
- 4.22 The mandatory licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) - there are four such properties housing asylum seekers in Stockton-on-Tees - is also aimed at improving housing conditions. This ensures that landlords of HMOs are fit and proper, each HMO is reasonably suitable for the number of people allowed under licence (this is determined on the amenities available, and numbers are regularly monitored), the condition of the property and its contents are satisfactory and in good working order, and the standard of management is adequate.
- 4.23 The Private Sector Housing team previously undertook a programme of visits to unlicensed HMOs - this included properties housing asylum seekers. However, the Committee were informed that, given the reduction in resources, and the fact that accommodation is inspected by the Home Office, HMOs housing asylum seekers are no longer part of the team's programme of inspections. The approach to dealing with unsatisfactory housing conditions in unlicensed HMOs housing asylum seekers places a greater reliance on tenants or their advocates to raise issues themselves. In general terms, the number of inspections in respect of unlicensed HMOs is not as numerous and regular now as in the past, with less pro-active visits carried out. Nevertheless, any inspection that is undertaken remains as rigorous.
- 4.24 The Council's Homelessness and Housing Solutions team provide support to asylum seekers in their transition to permanent housing following confirmation of them being granted leave to remain (see flowchart in Appendix 2).
- 4.25 Although the UK Visas & Immigration letter notifying asylum seekers of the decision to grant them leave to remain is dated 28 days prior to their support being discontinued, and signposts individuals to contact the local housing office to help find accommodation, there will be delays in asylum seekers receiving this correspondence (e.g. it is sent in the post, they may be away from the property at the time), as well as issues around whether they understand the letter (they may have to take it to any support groups representing them for interpretation), before they then contact the Local Authority for help - this eats into the time the Homelessness and Housing Solutions team has to source accommodation.
- 4.26 Information on asylum seeker children is received by the Council's School Admissions Team from a number of sources, but is often inconsistent - this leads to schools being given limited information which impacts on their ability to provide robust inductions. In some cases, neither Jomast nor UK Visas & Immigration had provided any notification to the Admissions Team.

- 4.27 The Committee heard of instances where asylum seeker children were moved to another area in Stockton, with parents (or the schools themselves) having to fund transport to maintain the child's place at the school they were originally attending. As noted within the Home Affairs Committee - Asylum Accommodation (January 2017) report:

*'Children's school or nursery education can also be disrupted by moves, a particular concern given that children of asylum seekers may be in receipt of additional pastoral care.'*

*'Movement without consent should be limited, and for those individuals engaged with local services, such as schools or specific welfare support, it should be used only in exceptional circumstances.'*

- 4.28 Schools (predominantly in central Stockton and Thornaby) have to adopt a very flexible approach when inducting asylum seeker children, with a high level of input (assessment, resources, staffing) required despite the knowledge that a child may not stay at the school beyond a few months. External pupil-facing support for schools with high asylum seeker pupil turnover is no longer in place, and funding for these children is not always ring-fenced.

- 4.29 Some children (those subject to Section 4 support) are not automatically eligible for free school meals\*, and there has been evidence of schools funding meals for families. Whilst this is at the discretion of schools, The Children's Society 'Fair and Square' 2012 campaign called for all children in poverty (including those on Section 4 support) to receive free school meals, noting:

*'These families are among the poorest members of our society, often having fled war, torture and violence. Ensuring they are provided with free school meals would make a significant difference to families' severely restricted budgets.'*

Although this is not a significant issue within Stockton-on-Tees, Members supported the provision of free school meals for those children who are subject to Section 4 support.

\* note - every school age child in years reception to year 2 receives free school meals; after that is benefit dependent.

- 4.30 Regarding Early Years, there is evidence that some asylum seeker children (those subject to Section 4 and Section 95 support) have been exempt from the free two-year old education provision - referrals have therefore been made to Social Care for funding. The Department for Education have since sought clarification from the Home Office regarding acceptable evidence for support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 - they have confirmed that any asylum seeker receiving support under Part VI will have a letter stating that, as an asylum seeker, they are entitled to help and support under either Section 95 or 98 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. The Council will now accept this as evidence for free childcare for two year-olds, though those children subject to Section 4 support remain exempt.

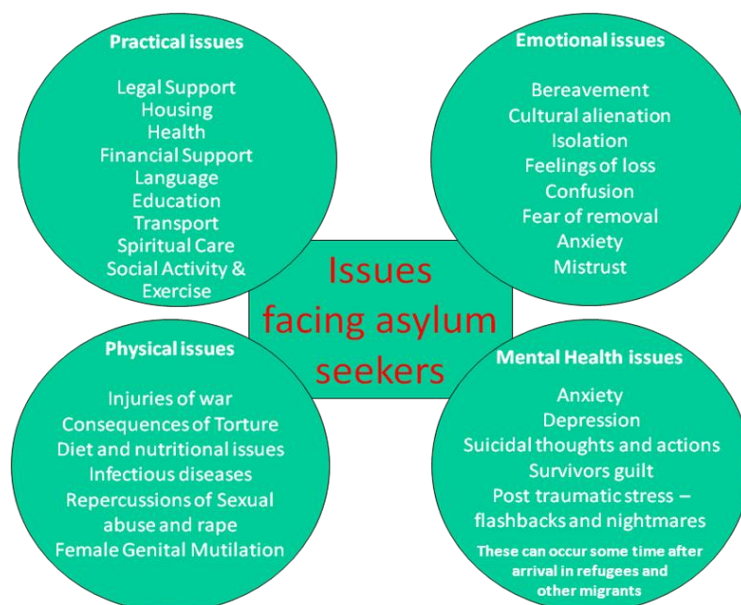
- 4.31 Members noted the 'Schools of Sanctuary' initiative - Stockton lead on this within the Tees Valley and produced the national Schools of Sanctuary audit

which is available on the national website. Layfield Primary School, Yarm, was the first school in Stockton-on-Tees to be recognised as a School of Sanctuary, with Egglecliffe School following soon after.

- 4.32 Asylum seekers are often ineligible to access formal English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) funded classes, with national funding criteria stating that they must have lived in the UK for six months or longer while their claim is being considered by the Home Office, and no decision on their claim has been made. Similarly, asylum seekers cannot afford to pay to attend classes.
- 4.33 Stockton Learning and Skills (formerly Tees Achieve), which provides ESOL classes to improve opportunities for employment, engagement with schools and participation in community activity, have visited all informal ESOL providers in Stockton (usually voluntary organisations) to raise awareness of support that they can fund for both individuals and volunteers running classes (e.g. train-the-trainer workshops to ensure informal provision matches the formal ESOL curriculum). These visits also raised awareness of any community activity that learners can be signposted to and any projects which Stockton Learning and Skills can involve learners in.
- 4.34 In response to the wider impact of migration in the UK, the Government allocated a total of £140million to respond to the problems caused by high migration into Local Authorities. The aim of the fund is to address this impact and deliver benefits to the established resident population.

In light of this opportunity, a funding bid for Stockton was submitted, the main elements of which covered housing support, language support, community engagement and youth diversionary activities. It proposed an area-based approach, aimed at the Town Centre, Parkfield and Oxbridge wards of Stockton, with a view to building capacity and support wider community engagement and integration. This bid has been successful in securing £471,386 from the Controlling Migration Fund (see Appendix 3 for details). A separate enterprise bid is also being developed in partnership with Stockton Riverside College.

Health



4.35 Those seeking asylum can face a huge array of practical, emotional, physical and mental health issues. Although many of these are often initially 'parked', an overriding sense of insecurity pertains as they do not know if they will be able to stay.

4.36 All people seeking asylum have the right to apply to be fully registered with an NHS general practice, and GPs cannot refuse to register an individual due to the patient's residency status. As such, primary healthcare is a crucial gateway for the health and wellbeing of people seeking asylum. It was noted that the Home Office can now access migrants NHS data to track down undocumented migrants, overstayers and failed asylum seekers (this is being challenged via a Doctors of the World '#StopSharing' campaign).

4.37 Arrival Medical Practice began in 2003 as a specialist practice serving 500 asylum seeking patients. Included within the staffing structure was an Asylum Support Team from the Local Authority (comprising mainly Housing elements, but with some Social Care input). Patients were to be assessed, care started, and then moved into mainstream General Practice.



4.38 The Practice ethos is to be a supportive and safe place for asylum seekers to talk about their thoughts and feelings, which fosters a 'can do' philosophy that is not limited to clinical needs (staff solve all kinds of problems), and is ultimately helpful towards these individuals who usually do not feel good about themselves. The Practice focuses on wellbeing rather than illness, something which is more than simply health.

4.39 Asylum seekers can face a range of specialised health issues including infectious diseases (e.g. HIV, TB), lack of immunisations, and experience of torture/violence, rape, bereavement and female genital mutilation (FGM). These issues are compounded by the uncertainty around their asylum cases, frequent re-housing, poverty, separation from family members, low esteem and loss of status, and a lack of a support network. Being inactive and unable to work is linked to ill health, and asylum seekers may also be vulnerable to exploitation and radicalisation.

4.40 A good induction to the locality, with clear and understandable signposting, along with language provision are crucial inclusion mechanisms - social, volunteering, education and exercise opportunities would also aid integration into the community. Asylum seekers do not know what to do to fit in, so who is telling them what is expected of them? They are potentially valuable to the area, not a burden.

4.41 During the course of this review, Committee Members visited the Arrival Medical Practice, and consulted with staff and asylum seekers in order to identify key current issues direct.



Staff provided an overview of what takes place when asylum seekers are first brought to the Practice by a Jomast representative (who notify staff what language they speak). Initial actions include a face-to-face health assessment with a Nurse, blood tests, age of consent advice, scheduling of a TB appointment, social assessment with a Care Co-ordinator, and identification of those who need language opportunities. Challenges were noted around the lack of information on individuals' medical history, issues in getting to the Practice (some asylum seekers live in Thornaby), and an inability for the Practice to plan ahead in terms of demand as they are not forewarned of arrivals. Staff often hear that Jomast have no regard to where asylum seekers are placed, and observe high levels of depression/anxiety.

Asylum seekers praised the Practice for its welcoming/open approach, and the staff for their desire to help (staff were described as being like family). However, on a wider note, concerns were expressed over the lack of respect and poor service they receive from Jomast, as well as difficulties in accessing services/voluntary work to avoid inactivity and aid social inclusion. One individual had experienced people throwing things at them, and another felt uneasy walking by themselves in the evening - it was also noted that most asylum seekers are housed in less desirable locations, and may therefore be scared to report incidents. On a positive note, Members heard that individuals were happy to be in Stockton (particularly once they were connected with support systems) and found it a busy place where people were helpful.

#### Voluntary & Community Sector (VCS)

4.42 The Committee received an overview of several regional and local VCS groups who provide services for asylum seekers. Regional Refugee Forum North East, which represents the collective voice of the region's refugee and asylum seeker (RAS) community, gave details of recent activity involving their Health, Community Safety and Stronger Families Working Groups, the latter of which now has dedicated funding meaning that work will be scaled up to systematically engage with Local Authorities.



4.43 Regional Refugee Forum North East emphasised the need for public sector and VCS agencies to develop more understanding of refugee-led community organisations (RCOs) and support their role. This would involve recognising the unique role of small, often informal, RCOs, ensuring offers of collaborative/partnership working are empowering rather than exploitative or merely extractive, and reviewing the availability of capacity-building support for community groups in Stockton.

4.44 In addition, increasing opportunities for purposeful and positive activity for asylum seekers (who cannot work whilst waiting for a decision on their case), preventing the sharing of rooms by unrelated adults (a cause of much tension and escalating risks amongst G4S residents), and improving access to ESOL classes before the six-month entitlement were identified as being key areas of development. The Local Authority and VCS were also urged to fully support the imminent re-launch of NEMPs local multi-agency groups, maximising the opportunity for structured, focused shared learning, problem solving and escalation of unresolved issues.

4.45 Noting the large number of RCOs (43 across the region, of which eight are in Stockton-on-Tees) and other voluntary sector agencies that Regional Refugee Forum North East are involved with, Members questioned whether there was a risk of duplication of services. This could also lead to a lack of clarity around who provides what support.

4.46 Justice First, a North East charity formed in 2006, provided details of their work in helping people refused asylum to re-engage with the legal process (free-of-charge). The provision of emotional and practical support, as well as awareness-raising, lobbying and involvement in partnerships, was noted. In



2016, over 150 individuals accessed the service, representing over 1,000 client-contact episodes - many cases are on Human Rights grounds, with no legal aid available.

4.47 The Mary Thompson Fund, a hardship fund established in 2001 that responds to the critical and emergency needs of those who are seeking asylum or are settled refugees in the Tees Valley, was highlighted. Up to 100 destitute payments and food are provided each week (25-35 in Stockton-on-Tees), along with various hardship donations including school uniforms/trips, college costs, travel to see solicitors/submit fresh asylum claims, and help with utility bills and fines.

4.48 The work of Tees Valley of Sanctuary (TVoS) was noted. As part of the mainstream 'City of Sanctuary' movement, TVoS builds coalitions of organisations from all sectors of society and creates opportunities for relationships between local people and those seeking sanctuary. In early-2017, TVoS undertook a non-governmental organisation (NGO) and voluntary sector consultation on asylum accommodation (mainly carried out in Stockton-on-Tees) to help inform the development of a new model for asylum accommodation and support for the period after the current COMPASS contracts expire. Consultation responses were submitted to the Home Office and are detailed in Appendix 4.

4.49 The British Red Cross offer practical and emotional support to individuals and families at all stages of the asylum process, and following a successful bid via the Big Lottery Fund, have established the Ariadne Project. This is a partnership across Stockton-on-Tees, Middlesbrough and Hartlepool, which will deliver end-to-end holistic support for RAS with a range of partners through a needs-led design involving assessment, signposting, information-giving and referrals for casework appropriate partners.



4.50 The Ariadne Project will provide food, clothes and emergency shelter to destitute RAS, who will also be able to access practical support (e.g. completing applications for welfare benefits and funding for travel to get to appointments), fresh claims and specialist support (e.g. legal advice from solicitors and navigation through the immigration system). New arrivals will receive orientation to and information about key local services (e.g. schools, hospitals), wellbeing courses to reduce anxiety, and social drop-ins to make new friends. They will be able to access English language, employability classes and volunteering opportunities at the hubs. Via volunteering, they will develop new skills and the references will enhance their CVs.



4.51 Feedback from British Red Cross focus groups re-iterated some of the themes faced by the RAS community:

- **Stress, anxiety, depression, isolation:** RAS stated that the asylum process leaves them 'feeling lost' and 'breaks even the strongest'. They consistently described being 'isolated' / 'alone': feeling left with 'too much in their heads'.
- **Poverty, hunger, homelessness and lack of access to justice:** RAS highlighted daily struggles meeting basic needs (food / clothing / shelter). 40% in one group spoke about experiencing hunger throughout the asylum process. RAS reported having to share rooms with strangers, in accommodation without heating / electricity. They said state solicitors were doing 'only the minimum' and unwilling to take on complex cases.
- **Waste of skills and lack of anything 'to do':** Asylum Seekers consistently said they needed 'something to do' whilst waiting for an asylum decision, which can take several years. One stated 'I would like to start over a new life here but I haven't the possibilities'; [we are left] 'to nothingness'. Refugees (who are able to access employment) told us not speaking English was a significant barrier.
- **Stigma and abuse from the local community:** RAS reported harrowing experiences of harassment from local communities: a broken jaw; being spat at; having eggs thrown at them; stigmatisation at Job Centres and local food banks.

Room-sharing was once again raised as a significant issue, and concerns had been relayed regarding incidents of bullying, intimidation and violence against room-mates. Some of those sharing rooms had been released from prisons and had a history of violence.

4.52 Concerns were raised from a number of organisations/groups regarding the implementation of the Immigration Act 2016. It is believed that this will bring a rise in destitution if families are left without support and accommodation (including access to NHS services), a result which may bring additional demands upon the Local Authority in particular. However, it should be noted that details have yet to be released in relation to the implementation of the Act.

4.53 Members visited the Stockton Baptist Tabernacle Church and discussed asylum seeker issues with the Church Secretary and organiser of the weekly drop-in sessions.



It was reported that a mixed response had been received from the housing provider sub-contractor, Jomast, when the Church had requested things on behalf of asylum seekers, who were reluctant to make a complaint themselves due to the perceived impact this may have upon their case. Room-sharing issues were once again noted, with an example given of a domestic abuse incident between two asylum seekers sharing a room who had not been separated despite this being known. The Church are working with the Police to encourage the reporting of hate crime without this rebounding back to the complainant, and would encourage some form of voluntary sector signposting system with Jomast (e.g. could meet up with them when they bring asylum seekers to the Arrival Medical Practice if this could be co-ordinated).

4.54 As part of this review, a VCS questionnaire which was circulated to refugee-led community groups (RCOs), local churches and other asylum seeker service providers - Appendix 5 shows the key issues/concerns/gaps in provision identified by these organisations. Some of the themes raised included:

- Difficulties in accessing English language courses.
- Lack of health awareness, particularly men.
- Community safety issues (victims of hate and risks of radicalisation).
- Involvement in criminal activity.
- Mental health not being addressed - not helped by limitations placed on asylum seekers and general inactivity.
- Shared accommodation - no-one doing anything about it.
- Lack of understanding of the services available to them.
- Challenges around the transition from asylum seeker to refugee status.

4.55 Other organisations providing support in Stockton-on-Tees include BECON (Black Minority Ethnic Community Organisations Network), a service based at Parkfield Community Centre that supports individuals to participate more fully and inclusively in the economic, social and cultural developments of their localities, and Cultures CIC, who work with individuals and groups from BME, Immigrant and Refugee communities to improve social, economic and cultural integration and build social cohesion. The Stockton Welfare Advice Network (SWAN) provides immigration and asylum information/advice, and the Stockton Volunteers website promotes opportunities for volunteering.

#### Community Safety / Cohesion & Diversity / Integration

4.56 Members received an overview from the Victim Care and Advice Service (VCAS), a free, independent and confidential service to help victims cope with the immediate impact of crime and subsequently make a full recovery. Victims are entitled to support through VCAS regardless of whether they have reported the incident to the Police or not. VCAS will



always encourage victims to report their crime to the Police and would offer support to the victim during the reporting process if that was needed. However, if the victim did not want to report to the Police, then their wish would be respected unless there was a safeguarding issue that would need to be addressed.

- 4.57 In order to increase the knowledge of asylum seekers and refugees so that they are more confident in the process to report crime and know where to go if they would like support to cope and recover after being a victim of crime, VCAS have been directly involved in developing a briefing session for Community Champions - this has been delivered in collaboration with the Regional Refugee Forum North East and Cleveland Police. Crime prevention advice (Friends Against Scams) has also been delivered to communities in relation to frauds and scams. VCAS are aiming to get people from an asylum seeker background to volunteer for its service, which may help engage with other asylum seekers in the locality.
- 4.58 VCAS expressed concerns around people from different countries, continents and cultures being placed together in shared accommodation when they have nothing in common, and stressed the need to spend time with asylum seekers to explain British cultures - some things that may appear quite basic for British people may initially appear unusual when asylum seekers first arrive in the UK (e.g. dogs are kept as pets and not only as guard dogs, an explanation of Halloween and bonfire night, etc.). Social isolation is also a key issue.
- 4.59 Cleveland Police presented information on the barriers that exist which can inhibit refugee and asylum seeker (RAS) community engagement with Police services (e.g. language barriers, isolation through non-inclusion, reluctance to report a crime as they believe it could have an adverse effect on their Home Office decision), and their response to these identified barriers. This included the creation of a RAS Co-ordinator, now filled by a refugee with experience of engaging asylum seekers to promote social inclusion and integration.
- 4.60 As part of a new approach to engage with the RAS community, Cleveland Police have established a Community Engagement Team consisting of a Police Sergeant, the RAS Co-ordinator, a Community Cohesion Co-ordinator, a Hate Crime Co-ordinator, two Hate Crime Police Staff Investigators and three school liaison PCSO's. A fundamental aim is to raise awareness of hate crime and the avenues for reporting incidents.
- 4.61 Future training and engagement with the RAS community was noted, a key area being the creation of joined-up approaches to making RAS feel welcome as part of the community, with access to all-round services for their inclusion/wellbeing. Visits to asylum seeker drop-ins around Cleveland will continue in order to promote positive relationships and answer any questions, and the Police will consult with voluntary agencies on issues they encounter and ways in which they can be addressed.



## 5.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

- 5.1 There are a large number of statutory and voluntary/community organisations providing information, advice and signposting to asylum seekers in Stockton-on-Tees. It is therefore crucial that this information is consistent, up-to-date and accessible so that asylum seekers understand what services are available to them locally, which can aid their integration into the community.
- 5.2 The issue of room-sharing for asylum seekers who are not related was raised on a number of occasions, and it was noted that other Local Authorities (e.g. Newcastle) have tried to address this. However, due to the content of the current Home Office accommodation contract, the ability to prevent this is restricted. Room-sharing is a wider housing policy issue (linked to the payment of Local Housing Allowance), and as such, any decision would have an impact on housing as a whole.
- 5.3 The work of the North East Migration Partnership (NEMP) is very positive, particularly as a means of bringing together the various key stakeholders and giving the region a voice. NEMP will continue to be an important vehicle for holding partners to account, as well as having the ability to influence the post-2019 asylum contract.
- 5.4 Issues were identified around information-sharing with schools, as well as concerns around schools funding transport and meals for some asylum seeker children.
- 5.5 Access to English language classes (where necessary) is a critical requirement for asylum seekers' integration into the community, and enables a better understanding of their locality, what is expected of them, and of the support available.
- 5.6 There is a significant burden put on the voluntary and community sector to provide support services for asylum seekers, and this is not addressed in the current asylum contract.
- 5.7 The under-reporting of hate crime towards asylum seekers is concerning. Whilst the Committee acknowledge the work being undertaken to increase asylum seeker engagement with the Police, further development of processes would increase confidence in reporting.

### **Recommendations**

The Committee recommend that:

1. **a clear pathway and information about what asylum seeker services are on offer in Stockton-on-Tees is provided.**
2. **acknowledging the frequent issues raised in relation to unrelated adult asylum seekers being forced to room-share, the Committee strongly object to such practice, but note that any attempts at preventing this would be difficult to enforce. The Committee does however encourage the Government to consider the position on room-sharing of unrelated adults when forming the post-2019 asylum contracts.**

**Recommendations (continued)**

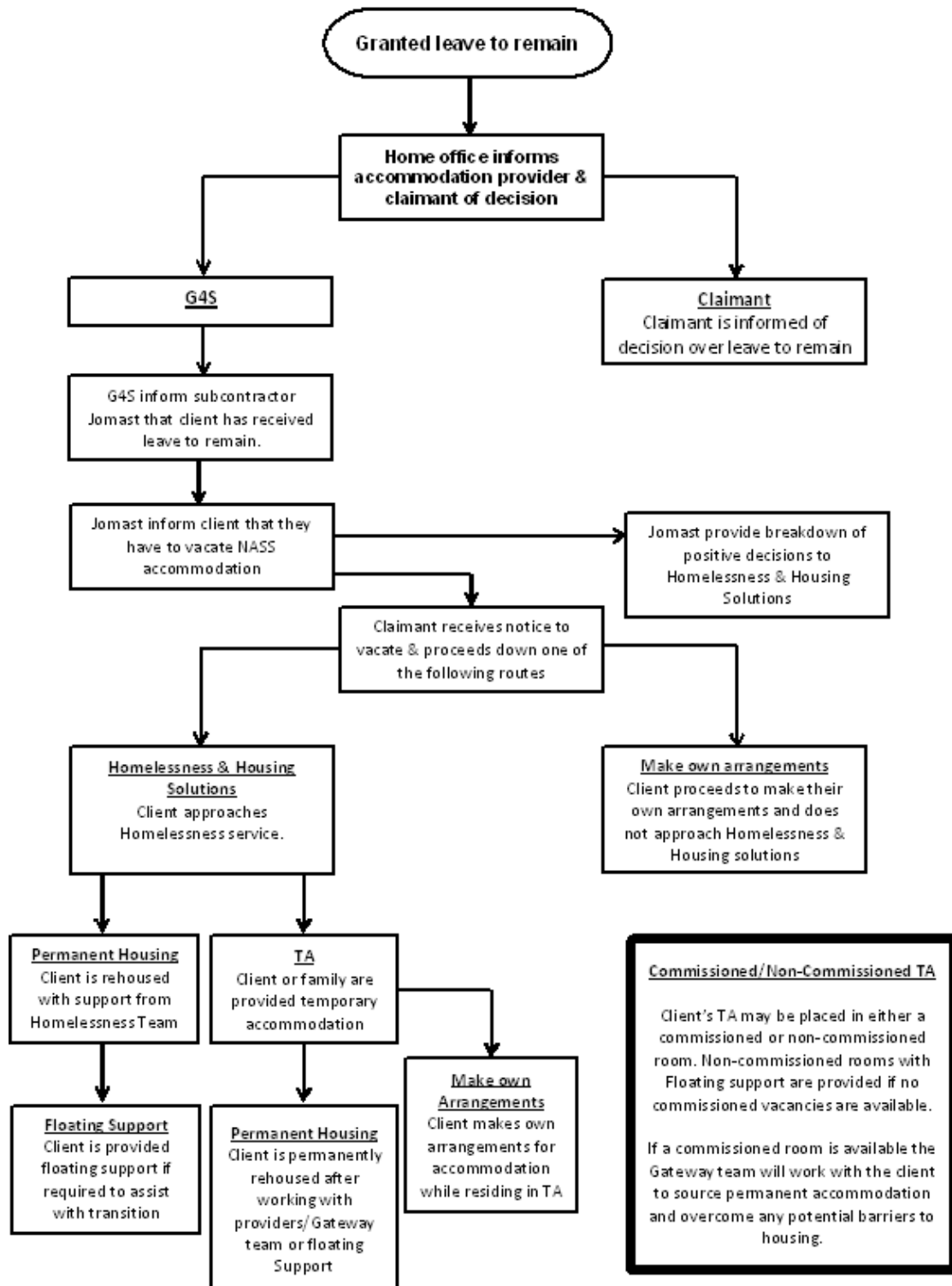
- 3. the North East Migration Partnership (NEMP) should ensure it continues to effectively represent the views of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, in the context of effective representation and involvement of all Local Authorities in the region.**
- 4. there should be closer working with local voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations, including:**
  - a. ensuring that asylum seekers have the confidence and awareness to support their ability to raise issues of concern to the VCS and the Council, contributing to the intelligence needed to support action such as targeted inspections (of poor quality private rented accommodation) where necessary.**
  - b. enhanced links with refugee-led community organisations (RCOs) via the Regional Refugee Forum North East to increase understanding of asylum seeker issues/concerns.**
  - c. continued development of hate crime reporting processes to ensure asylum seekers and refugees have the confidence to report issues.**
- 5. information-sharing between agencies is strengthened to ensure joined-up processes, including:**
  - a. notifications from local delivery partners of Home Office decisions (for leave to remain, discontinued, fled, deported), communicated via G4S and/or their contracted accommodation partner, be shared with Housing and Education teams as soon as possible to enable effective planning and provision to be made across all relevant partners.**
  - b. the establishment of a clear protocol for asylum seeker children school admission, with key information provided to the Admissions Team and schools for the purposes of a robust induction, should form part of the planning for new contracts post-2019.**
- 6. there is a need for additional opportunities for asylum seekers to access basic/fundamental English language courses or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes.**
- 7. the Government is encouraged to ensure that, when forming the post-2019 asylum contracts, an approach is taken which would enable aspects of provision, such as support, to be met by local partners. The Local Authority can then explore the feasibility of bidding for elements of the post-2019 asylum contracts once these have been confirmed.**

## APPENDIX 1: Complaints received by G4S from asylum seekers based in Stockton-on-Tees since January 2016

Complainant	Date	ASYS	Type	Complaint details	Update	Status	Date resolved
NHS	03-Nov-16	511557	Property standards	Property standards issues reported: Cooker not working, and cot required.	Informed complainant that these issues have been raised and will be dealt with asap	Resolved	04-Nov-16
NHS	03-Nov-16	496973	Property standards	Requesting bed for 1 year old child due to child falling from cot.	Informed complainant that G4S would ask the Welfare Services Officer to visit and check if any injury sustained from child falling, assess if cot can be altered further and also request bed if necessary.	Resolved	07-Nov-16
Service User	08-Dec-16	465319	SU Management	ASB reported at property	Jomast investigated and mediated between SUs. Incident resulted in other SU being relocated in March 2017.	Resolved	09-Dec-16
Charity Worker	24-Jan-17	510144	Property standards	Property issues identified: Heating, intercom fault and house number missing.	Raised with Jomast and resolved.	Resolved	24-Jan-17
Stockton City Council	26-Jan-17	512413	Property standards	Reported that heater not working	Informed complainant that this has been raised as a 24 hour issue. 27/01/17 Jomast confirmed all working ok.	Resolved	27-Jan-17
Stockton City Council	30-Jan-17	507791	Property standards	Further property defects reported: Communal kitchen sink blocked and safety gate broken	Informed of timescales and Jomast resolved issues.	Resolved	30-Jan-17
Migrant Help	10-Mar-17	442148	Property standards	infestation of bed bugs	Issue passed to Jomast and resolved.	Resolved	10-Mar-17
Sunrise Children's Centre	13-Mar-17	93965	Property standards	Carpet is threadbare on stairs and child has fallen.	Informed that G4S will ask maintenance to attend with regards to the carpet and the Welfare Service Officer to attend re. the fall. The WSO reported that daughter ok, carpet is compliant and an Incident Report has been sent through to the Home Office. In-	Resolved	16-Mar-17

					formed the complainant of the outcome.		
Migrant Help	19-Jun-17	480811	Property standards	SU has been relocated but states he is without a bed, so is sleeping on the floor. He also states the property is without adequate facilities in the kitchen.	Passed to Jomast. Response provided. Informed that Jomast have attended and provided a bed, and addressed the issues with the kitchen	Resolved	26-Jun-17
NHS	23-Jun-17	465318	Property standards	New single mattress required - soiled, and springs were sticking out - so refused it and now doesn't have a bed	Informed that a new mattress has been brought to the property	Resolved	26-Jun-17
NHS	17-Jul-17	524799	Property standards	Complaint about a double mattress that has "blood and fluid" stains on it	Passed to Jomast to investigate and resolve. Jomast advised that when the family moved in the house was compliant; they have since had to move unwanted articles that the family have discarded or replaced with their own from a spare bedroom, into the yard and the matter will be resolved within time-scale.	Resolved	24/07/2017

**APPENDIX 2: Flowchart of housing process one leave to remain is granted**





### **APPENDIX 3: Controlling Migration Fund - SBC bid**

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council has been successful in securing £471,386 from the Controlling Migration Fund. Funding is to be spent over a two year period and aims to mitigate against the impact of increased migration on the established community. The funding has been broken down into a number of key areas:

**Increased community ESOL provision:** Currently the local authority spends approximately £25,000 per year on direct translation costs to support residents. Currently ESOL provision is provided by local colleges and in some cases voluntary groups. This provision is limited and there are large waiting lists for ESOL provision across all of the limited providers. Funding will be used to provide community ESOL within Stockton Town Centre via a local community centre or through a local provider. Increased provision will reduce the burden on the local authority to provide translation support as well as improve the potential for residents and families to better integrate with the wider community. This element of the project will be co-ordinated by SBC Adult Learning and Skills. **Allocated funding: £160,656**

**Language support in schools:** An element of the funding will be used to develop a pilot project in conjunction with the University of Northumbria which will provide additional training and support to existing teaching assistants in order to support EAL (English as a second language) children in the classroom reducing the burden on teaching staff and increasing the contact time with the established children in the classroom. This is a unique project and will be the first of its kind nationally, it is envisaged that once the training package has been developed other local authority areas will implement the project. This element of the project will be co-ordinated by SBC Education Development. **Allocated funding: £142,364**

**Work to tackle irresponsible landlords:** Stockton Town Centre has the largest concentration of private landlords and we regularly experience a number of issues including poor housing conditions and limited vetting and checking of problematic tenants. An element of the funding has been allocated to establishing the scale and diversity of migrants choosing to live in Stockton and identify the locations and conditions of the housing they occupy. Part of this approach will look at an extension to the existing 'Hit Squad' approach within the Town Centre targeting the high numbers of private rented homes and HMOs. Extension of the successful 'hit squad' approach would allow the Private Sector Housing team to proactively target a broader range of properties and landlords to continue the Council's ambition to drive up standard in the private rented sector as well as reduce the appeal of the area for unscrupulous landlords. Funding will provide additional staffing capacity to enable the Housing team to provide a dedicated resource to the Town Centre. **Allocated funding: £118,700**

**Youth engagement and inclusion:** An element of the funding has been allocated to further build on youth engagement activity in Stockton Town centre making use of existing community resources to provide a programme of activities throughout the year to complement existing activity based around themes such as sport, culture and art. It is proposed that the Cornerhouse Youth Project will co-ordinate this element of the bid. **Allocated funding: £49,666**

#### **Management of the grant**

A steering group has been established consisting of the responsible officers tasked with co-ordinating elements of the project. A progress plan has been developed as part of the bid process and it is envisaged that an annual progress report be provided to members.

## APPENDIX 4: Tees Valley of Sanctuary asylum accommodation consultation

Tees Valley of Sanctuary  
Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, Stockton-on-Tees



### CONSULTATION ON ASYLUM ACCOMMODATION

#### Background & Introduction

On 20th December 2016 UKVI published a written consultation document with the purpose of 'obtaining feedback from the NGO and Voluntary Sector in relation to ideas or insights to help inform the development of a new model for asylum accommodation and support, for the period after the COMPASS expires.'

This document is the result of a survey done by Tees Valley of Sanctuary on asylum housing issues in response to the UKVI written exercise with NGOs and voluntary organisations.

A copy of the consultation document is here: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=0BwWB2S2KUOcKcXcwam1xR3FJVEE>

Service User experiences have therefore been sought from current and previous COMPASS Service Users via a brief questionnaire (see Appendix 1).

#### Contact

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#### Aim & Scope

Our aim is to produce information that will provide feedback to UKVI to help improve the COMPASS Contract.

Face to face questionnaires were completed at some drop-ins in the Tees Valley dispersal area (mainly Stockton-on-Tees). Number of responses = 50

The consultation was carried out mainly in Stockton on Tees, mostly at the 5 "drop ins" run by local church and voluntary groups, and after a Church service. This was mainly in the week 16 th to 20 th January 2017. There are some responses from Middlesbrough from the Methodist Asylum Project and other contacts too. Urgent issues which emerged were reported directly via G4S complaints systems.

Unfortunately, the consultation was released on 20th December, when "Drop In" services provided for asylum seekers by the voluntary sector were closing for over the Christmas period. We did not find out about the consultation in Teesside directly until 2 weeks ago, so not as many people have been interviewed as could have been in order to respond to the consultation by the consultation deadline of 31st January.

An online questionnaire was also circulated to reach more people, but note that these responses will be from different parts of the country. Number of responses = 51

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#### Responses

The responses below were nearly all from face to face interviews, using the questions highlighted in yellow. Not everyone answered all of the questions. The quotes, in italics, have been done using words from asylum seekers themselves wherever possible and only changed for clarity. Both positive negative comments are included. Anything that could identify them has been removed, to ensure confidentiality, as most of those interviewed were very anxious indeed about repercussions from the housing provider or from the Home Office.

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## APPENDIX 4: Tees Valley of Sanctuary asylum accommodation consultation

For all who are in, or have been in, Home Office / NASS housing.

The Government is doing a consultation on housing for asylum seekers. They want to know what improvements could be made for a new contract.

The deadline is January 31st so we need to get as many views as possible well before then, so we can put them together to put them forward.

It would help if you could answer as many of the questions below that you want to. ALL information will be treated in confidence, and NO information will be passed on that could identify any asylum seeker.

**1. When you arrived at your accommodation were you given information that you can understand about how things work in the house or flat? YES 18 NO 27**

It was people in shared accommodation that were not shown how to use such as the washing machine or heating controls. They were expected to pick it up from existing residents who often did not share the same language, had not been given proper information themselves. One person got the information after asking.

*Just this is your room, this is the kitchen / bathroom / kitchen, gave key and went.*

*Just "no men, keep clean"*

*No, we learned on our own and by asking other people. They didn't explain us anything, just put us there.*

*No explanation about how the cooker works, or smoke alarms, or washing machine.*

**2. When you arrived at your accommodation were you given information that you can understand about local area, for example post office, shops, buses? YES 28/ NO 12 some 8**

Some people were actually taken to the Post Office, but others had the general direction pointed out to them. The Post Office in Stockton High Street is at the back of a retail shop in the middle of a shopping precinct.

Those taken to the Post Office in person just had other places, such as the GP practice, pointed out to them. Nobody mentioned such as local ethnic shops, discounts stores, the market, buses.

*Places were pointed out from the van, but that is not the same as trying to find places when you are walking.*

*The doctor told me (a 17 year old) about college, and where the church was.*

*Given 30 minute tour but couldn't understand, and disorientated*

*When we arrived on a Friday night after an 8 hour journey we were met by the housing provider worker who told that driver that he did not like people arriving at evenings and weekends. But he was very nice and helpful to us, helping take the luggage to our flat, and showing us how everything worked. He gave us our vouchers and took us to a small supermarket nearby, and left us there. We had a lot of difficulty finding our way back to our accommodation and at one point thought we would have to spend the night on the streets.*

**3. When you arrived at your accommodation were you given information that you can understand about support services, drop ins, places of worship / where you can go for advice? YES 12/ NO 33 some 3**

Nobody had been told where a place of worship was, some had had "drop ins" pointed out to them but not what days and times they operated.

## APPENDIX 4: Tees Valley of Sanctuary asylum accommodation consultation

Nobody said they had been told where such as the Red Cross was.

*A Drop in was pointed out to me after being told where the police station was, but I didn't know what a "drop in" was.*

*The only advice place I knew about was a map of Middlesbrough with an arrow to NERS, but it was a difficult map to understand.*

*Just NERS*

*MAP were helpful showing us where things were*

*Just about Refugee Council, but with no more explanation than that. In the beginning we did not know what is the Refugee Council.*

*Nothing about advice*

- 4. When you arrived at your accommodation were you given information that you could understand if things were not working as it should, or a repair was needed? most said yes**

There was written information about this in the packs given, however comments included :

*Given the phone number for the housing provider but they don't really want to address the problems  
The ceiling has lots of marks on it where the water leaks through; the shower does not work properly, only 2 rings on the cooker work. This has gone on for 3 – 4 months but nothing has been done. The vacuum cleaner is very noisy, the whole street can hear! so we only use it in the afternoon so as not to annoy neighbours.*

*The lock to the outside door is not working and we keep on reporting it, this has gone on for 2 weeks now. We have to push a chair against the door at night to try to stop someone getting in.*

*Mice in the house but it got sorted eventually*

*The mattress is very bad, you can feel the springs coming up through it. My uncle reported it as well but nothing is being done about it. Radiator not working for 2 weeks so very cold, promised they would come but haven't been.*

*We were left for a whole week with no heating or hot water*

*I have a separate room (in the hostel) but it is very small indeed.*

*The heating is switched on for just certain hours and we cannot alter it. It comes on 6 – 10 am, then 1 – 4 pm, and it is so cold at night it wakes me up.*

*There are 2 washing machines for 10 women, but 1 does not work. It was reported and they came eventually, but it does not work properly still.*

*When we asked for some safety things for the youngest child we were told that we "shouldn't have children in our position".*

*There are cockroaches, and we have reported the 3 or 4 times but after 3 months nothing has been done.*

*Took a while for them to come when the washing machine flooded*

*The sofa has broken and we cannot sit on it, we went to the housing provider office and they said they would come to look at it, but that was 2 months ago.*

*Nobody ever comes to check anything in the house, they only come when they bring a new person.*

## APPENDIX 4: Tees Valley of Sanctuary asylum accommodation consultation

*Washing machine not worked since well before Christmas*

*No and especially in 1st week we came the smoke alarm went off in the night and we cannot make it stop. We called the housing provider, but it was 1am and they did not answer. They had not given us G4S number, we get it after. So we rang Fire Brigade and they came and made it stop.*

*The house wasn't clean.*

### 5. Was there enough equipment in there for you to use for such as cooking and cleaning-?

In general it seems that there are not enough cooking utensils for shared houses, particularly where there are not shared faiths or shared cultures, and people need to cook in different ways according to religious teachings, or as they are used to in their own countries.

There appears to be no checking of an inventory of number of items provided, or their condition, from small items like chopping boards, to pans to microwaves. Not one person reported seeing this happen in a shared house when a person left or new person arrived.

There appears to be a disparity around vacuum cleaners. They are what most people need to have, when there are carpets, and it could be that there is one in some houses and not others as one may have been donated and left there. However the housing provider has repaired some and not others, and not told people they will not repair if reported – they just haven't done it.

*I need to buy meat on special offers, but I cannot buy things that have pork in as I cannot really put them in the fridge when there are Muslims using the fridge too. It would be better if more than one fridge in mixed faith houses.*

*Not enough plates and cutlery for a family*

*Given plastic plates that cannot be used in a microwave. The place was dirty.*

*Cooking yes, cleaning no.*

*We had no chopping boards and no microwave till given them by the Church.*

*We asked for a vacuum cleaner as we need one with having a child, but we were told "you are not here for holidays"*

*The only problem was especially in cooking. They gave us very light saucepans and when you cook it is too easy to burn. They don't give vacuum either and that is a problem. You have no money and you do not know where to buy cheaply anyway. There is no extra money for equipment, so how can we buy, only we have money for eating.*

*I didn't know cooking equipment was shared, I just thought I hadn't been given any, so I had to go and buy some with the money I had.*

*There was a hoover but it broke, housing provider would not mend it so we had to get someone to help us get another one. There are enough pans and cooking things, but the pans got rusty so someone from the church helped us to get some better ones.*

*When we came in Middlesbrough we got some crockery, cooking things etc. This now is our 4th house in Middlesbrough, and still when we move now they are saying we cannot give you any new crockery or equipment. But in 4 years in a normal house, we are careful but things get break. 1st of all also when we came we got 3 small pans for family of 4. We needed a big pan to cook for all family. 1 plate each person is also not enough. They did not provide a hoover and obviously in a carpeted house, how can we clean? It is impossible, how will we clean it?*

*Yes for cooking, but not for cleaning.*

*The pans are rusty so we have had to save up to buy some, there was no chopping board, no microwave and no hoover.*

## APPENDIX 4: Tees Valley of Sanctuary asylum accommodation consultation

*No big pans, and I need to cook a lot at once. The fridge is not big enough for 8 people having different food.*

*There are not enough pans between us, no steriliser for the babies' things, and no vacuum*

*No microwave or hoover*

*Yes we had basic things. For each person we had bedding and towel and a set of plates. And for cooking we had pans.*

*There should be 2 fridges, one for halal food and one for other.*

*No TV (this person had not had it explained to her that a licence was needed and it was a criminal offence not to have one). No microwave, no kettle, hoover not working.*

*There are 6 of us in the house and when there is a mixture of Christians and Muslims there are not enough pans and we have to wait for someone to finish cooking. The hoover does not work*

*They say they will come and repair the hoover but they haven't been*

*I thought there were no pans as we were not told we should share. There is a hoover but it doesn't work, we rely on charity to help us with some equipment.*

*No vacuum cleaner*

*2 pans for 5 people is not enough, and the fridge is not big enough. Also when there is someone using halal meat they cannot share with us, which is not fair on them.*

*Not enough pans when there are Muslims in the house as they need separate ones. no chopping board provided.*

*Not enough things to cook with for so many people cooking different things.*

*No microwave or toaster provider.*

*No hoover provided. When asked was told "You are not on holiday, you are a refugee!"*

### 6. Have you had any problems with sharing a house or group of flats with other people? What sort of issues ?

This question and the next had the most interest and what people wanted to talk about most.

*I am part of a house with 10 women and it is very difficult with the cooking, there is such pressure on use of pans. One woman put food I had just cooked out as she needed the pan.*

*I (young person) am in a house with 7 people, it is difficult to sleep as the old man I share a room with snores all night. Also the others are shouting and laughing a lot. I have to study and find it difficult, so my college wrote to the housing provider, and also Stockton Navigation Project wrote to the housing provider, but were told they were not allowed to move me. There is also difficulty between Christians and Muslims in the house. Also some people are not clean, and are smelly. Another person cannot clean as they are disabled. When I told the housing provider, he said I had to go to the Home Office, but I was frightened to do this and did not know how, anyway.*

*People from other cultures do not like the smell of my cooking, but it is what I eat and know how to cook.*

*We all try to learn to speak English but it is difficult, and we don't get help to do this, but it would make talking about problems better*

*Some bring boyfriends to the house, some stay overnight*

## APPENDIX 4: Tees Valley of Sanctuary asylum accommodation consultation

*Other men in the house have women in their rooms, and want me to be part of that, but I am saying no, you do not do that in the country I come from, and I am a Christian and do not do things like that. I am young, and feel bullied by this, and wish did not have to share with them.*

*I have 2 children and am a Christian, and the other lady has a child and is a Muslim. When sharing I try to be very open minded but it is difficult when people are of a different culture, belief or language. There are always issues, but as a Christian I know I must do everything to live peacefully. My children want to have a nice treat sometimes like sausages or bacon, but I only cook them once a week so it does not offend the Muslim lady too much. I don't want to upset her.*

*Problems with different cultures / backgrounds / religion. Also when someone smokes, some people have mental health problems. It all leads to a lot of disagreement but we try to get on.*

*Men sleeping at night sometimes in girls' rooms. Other people have different standards of cleanliness, it would help if houses had people of the same country and culture together.*

*In the Yarm Road hostel there are problems as there are so many children, and too many to deal with all at once, especially when we are all from different cultures and language is a big problem, although we do try.*

*There is not enough common language although we try very hard to learn English*

*The house is old and the floorboards creak when walking on them, so I have to be very careful when going up to my room as it upsets and wakes up people in the other rooms.*

*I do not always get my post as other people take it, and some things are very important.*

*Personally I don't have problem. I live with a mixture of people. I know friends though who have problem because someone will bring people into house until late and others cannot sleep.*

*People need reminding of their rights and responsibilities, there is no support or interest from the housing provider worker when told of things like others being abusive, or pushing me away from the sink when I was washing my clothes (the washing machine was broken).*

*Some of the girls have other people to sleep, and some of those are men*

*There are not enough pans for us all (this was house of 10), you don't have time to remove your food before someone else needs the pan. There are only 2 chopping boards. Just 4 coat hooks for us all to use, and the Hoover does not work very well.*

*8 people in 4 rooms means there is no privacy, and especially difficult when we are all from different cultures*

*There are too many people who don't know each other in the house and the toilets are often dirty because of people from a different culture than mine.*

*A helper at a drop in said "we often hear of problems with room sharing between people who are different ages, and it is so difficult to trust people you do not know but sleep in the same room as them. Women are treated badly, and are just ordered around by the housing provider".*

*It is difficult for different faiths to share a fridge. I like pork items and want to buy several at a time if on special offer, but I cannot as I don't feel I should put pork products in the fridge when it is being shared by Muslims.*

*It would be more bearable if a decision was made within 6 months, but it goes on for so much longer.*

*Others who bring boys in cause a problem. We don't mind them coming and sitting and talking in the lounge, but not in the bedroom and bathroom.*

*We have been able to set up a time table for who has responsibility for cleaning and that is being adhered to.*

*Problem about bad language and behaviour from someone in another flat not dealt with for some months.*

## APPENDIX 4: Tees Valley of Sanctuary asylum accommodation consultation

*One housemate is disabled and unwilling to help with cleaning.*

*One housemate "went crazy" and tried to attack other residents with a knife. Police was called, housemate was removed and never seen again.*

*Other people drinking and smoking hashish*

*No, we are all the same nationality*

*Nobody comes to the house to check if relationships are working out.*

*There is an issue around shared corridors and stairs being used by occupants that have families with children, and single men with not very good behaviour.*

*Cleaning arrangements often done by one for two, NOT everyone. Standards of hygiene vary considerably.*

*Threatened by a bully – he was selling drugs. There were gunshot holes in the walls. Why put violent ex prisoners in a communal house?*

### 7. Have you had any problems with sharing a room to sleep in with another person? What sort of issues?

The strongest views came from this section.

*The other person smoked which caused me a problem, as I have asthma, but it is difficult to explain the problems when we have no shared language. I don't want to report her as it could badly affect her case for staying here, and she is from a dangerous country*

*There is a lot of conflict and stress. If the other person comes and is new, and they have a lot of stress because of what has happened to them, it is very difficult as you do not know how to help them. It is especially difficult if they are from a different culture or have mental health problems.*

*If you are not getting a quick decision you should be able to have a single room. When you are preparing for your case it is really important that you can get sleep.*

*Always a problem with different times for lights to be on and off. Also difficult when we have different prayer times.*

*I am a Christian and share a room with a Muslim. It is very difficult, I am from DRC and he is from Sudan and we try to talk about things in English but we cannot manage to do this very well. I do understand what he needs to do and why, but I cannot do anything in the room when his mat is rolled out. I need to sleep in the daytime sometimes because of my problems. He says his prayers out loud, and I know he needs to but it is disturbing me when it is every day.*

*My room mate dries his washing on the radiator in the room when it cannot go outside and it makes the room smell.*

*I shared with someone when I first come in Middlesbrough. I don't find any problem. But if you do not have common language then it is problem. For myself, I can speak languages, so I have not problem.*

*At sleeping time it is so difficult as other people have different times they sleep. Some have to have the light on all night because of torture they have had and it so difficult to sleep then.*

*Them snoring, having different cleaning standards, and it is bad when they are sick.*

*No problem as the other person is my brother!*

*Yes it is a problem, especially when we are from different countries and culture, if you can't communicate in good English.*



## APPENDIX 4: Tees Valley of Sanctuary asylum accommodation consultation

*Snoring.*

*I am a Syrian sharing with someone from another African country, and we do get on OK with different ways of praying, but it is very difficult when the other person needs to have the light on for much longer or is on the phone.*

*It is so difficult when we need different times of going to sleep and I cannot sleep when the light is on for the other person. I am having to have sleeping tablets now, for the first time in my life.*

*The other person talks on the phone when I need to sleep, she talks from 12 – 2. I told the housing provider and he said their worker would sort but he didn't.*

*Sharing with same nationality/culture so no issues.*

*No problems now, but there will be as I am pregnant and it will be disturbing the other girl when I have to get up a lot in the night.*

*We are 8 women in 4 rooms and it is very difficult as we sleep at different times, and sometimes the other woman is talking on the phone when I am trying to sleep*

*Housing Provider is unwilling to allow refugees to move rooms (for instance from a shared room to a single room) in the same house, even if that space is available.*

### 8. Do you feel able to report any problems, and have you been listened to? just 5 people said YES

*Dare not report as told by someone sharing a room with that I would be sent to Sunderland if they did.*

*We don't report, as no notice taken. Housing provider only comes to bring new people.*

*No longer because of consequences of complaining*

*Sometimes report, but no notice seems to be given*

*No point in reporting bad behaviour as housing provider just says to go to the police and they say not their problem.*

*Yes we can report it and it depends on problem if they listen. Sometimes yes, sometimes no.*

*When we arrived the mattress was in poor condition with springs sticking up. My wife was pregnant so we asked for a better one but were refused. My back is bad and a few years later I asked, but was just that told we could have a duvet to put on top of the mattress.*

*Why waste energy reporting when they take no notice*

*The door to the street for our flats is not secure, and anyone can just walk in. There is a hallway where we are supposed to be able to leave our buggies and bikes etc, but they have been stolen. So now I have to try to carry the buggy upstairs each time. The housing provider will not do anything, but at least they could contact everyone in the building and ask them to check that the door is locked. Also warn them if could their things stolen. It also worries me that anyone could get in and knock on my door, and I would open it, it makes me feel very vulnerable.*

*In the last 3 months my boiler not working properly. Because of pressure I think, but there is no heating in the 2 upstairs bedrooms and the loft room. It is January now. I reported this first 3 months ago. I have reported it 10 times or more to housing provider. Only 1 month ago a man came and said this boiler needs to be changed for a new one. He said he would tell housing provider but I told them too. Still nothing. 2 days ago another man came, and he said the same thing, it needs a new boiler. From last 3 months, all winter, my heating is not working at all in 3 upstairs rooms, and I have a 1 year old baby and other children. I am using in these rooms only electric heaters, one of them I bought and 1 of them is given by Fire Brigade because they visited and said you cannot sleep here with children without heat.*

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*There are "badbax" (bedbugs) in our house. We reported it and they came after a week with a spray can but they are still there, and biting us so we cannot sleep. (2 people said the same thing, and were clearly suffering from the bites when talking).*

*I have a very bad back, but the mattress has springs that stick out and it makes it painful for me. They won't do anything about it though.*

*G4S slow to repair broken cooker, taps, light. Bedroom furniture (drawers) still broken*

*We have found it best to report anything needing doing to G4S rather than the housing provider as it gets properly logged then, and more likely to get done. They are always polite with us.*

*Yes, I think housing provider in M'bro is good with us. When I have problem with heater, they come and repair, also how to collect garbage they solve for us.*

*I have reported problems to the housing provider in Middlesbrough. They listened, and then they came and fixed it. Before they did this immediately, it was a good experience. But nowadays they don't take action promptly. In 2016 I noticed they start to become very slow. Our washing broke and I asked them to fix it. Even it was me always who had to chase this, and ask, will you fix it, will you? It took more than one month, but I have children, me and my wife we can take care for our clothes but how can I live for one month with no clean clothes for the children?*

*The boiler is very loud, and makes banging sounds, it keeps us awake at night. They say they will repair it but don't. It has been happening for about 6 months.*

*The Hoover has not been working for 6 months, they say they will repair it, but don't.*

*I had a broken kitchen lamp that took three months to fix.*

*Many things don't work, - No help is given.*

*Boiler makes strange noises and nobody comes out to check it.*

*When I was taken to the house my room was dirty although the bathroom was clean. I asked him what I was to do about it, and he said I had to clean it myself. I didn't think I would be able to report anything else.*

*Housing provider advised to call police when at risk of knife attack, and police arrested person.*

*Problems were raised by no-one took any action so the situation became worse.*

### 9. Would you like a way of being able to raise issues informally in a group with the housing provider?

Nearly everyone said YES. Some added that an interpreter would be needed, some that someone that they could trust needed to be there too. The general view was that it would save problems getting worse, and it would be good to have better understanding between the asylum seekers and housing provider.

*Yes it would be very good, but I would not be happy if the housing provider was there, as there could be repercussions if he didn't like what we said. There should at least be a questionnaire when a person leaves so they are not afraid to say what the problems were.*

*I would rather it was just someone I could trust like the charity that has helped me or my teacher, and then them tell the housing provider so I didn't get into trouble.*

*Yes I am interested in this. I would come to this. Because I am part of asylum-seeker but also as volunteer I am the solution too.*

## APPENDIX 4: Tees Valley of Sanctuary asylum accommodation consultation

### 10. Anything else you would like to say?

*I don't feel I am a human being, just a number that they have given me. Nobody can hear our voice. I was told "who are you to complain". The heater in my room has not worked for 2 months, but there is no point in reporting it as they take no notice of us.*

*The address the housing provider gave us is wrong. Mail goes to other places, and when an ambulance is called, we have to go to the bottom of the (2 flights) of stairs to wait for it, so it comes to the right place.*

*We have 3 children but have just 2 bedrooms, 2 cupboards and 40 stairs. The buggy has to be carried up and down the stairs every time we go out.*

*We are entitled to a 3 bedroomed house because of our number. But they give us a house with 2 bedrooms and upstairs there is a loft, but it is a very big loft room and there is no door to close it. I do not think a room with no door is a bedroom, and also this is in the roof, it is very cold. And especially because we have no heating!*

*When I was 7 months pregnant I was moved from house to a flat with 45 stairs. My neighbour used to translate letters from schools or health for me, but I don't have anyone to ask now.*

*Accommodation is old and dirty, and furniture us old and broken.*

*They told us we had to move to another house in Middlesbrough. I asked, why are you moving my home? They said they need house for asylum-seekers. They sent me a letter with the address of the new house. I went to look at it to see is it a good house, and there was a lady there, I talked to her but she said you are not moving here this is my house I own it. So I went in housing provider office and said I want to check address. I explained about the lady. I said I need to know about my new address because I want to check for bus ticket for my children, because they will go to school that next day when we move and it might be far, I want to know where. They make it my problem. They rude, they say you are wrong, this is your address. But next day, I got a new letter with the same date as the first letter, and it just give a different address. They should explain everything to us more and be polite, but we can say nothing. When we move I just wait that day, and think, I will see which house they take us.*

*When I moved in with my husband the worker said to me, when I was on my own, that I could be his friend and him help me with my case. This worried me. Then he came to the flat and said there was a problem with the doorbell and for my husband to go downstairs to press it whilst I was upstairs with the worker. This really worried me and I went downstairs, but he followed me and touched me, I shouted out and a neighbour came.*

*Things never gonna be perfect but we try our best as much as possible but please don't forget we should be in a temporary house, not still here after year and a half.*

*I wish there was a check every 3 months to make sure that everything is alright*

*Still some problems with the same vandals after the red door repainted. I hope they will forget.*

*House is old, in poor condition, too small.*

*I have been moved from a house to a flat that is on the second floor, making it difficult for me with the disabled leg I have as a result of torture. I don't know why I was having to move.*

*Overcrowding is an issue.*

*Kitchen was so dirty, it took two people a full week to clean it.*

*Carpet was broken and dirty in a home with child. No help given, we cleaned carpet ourselves.*

*Blocked drains.*

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*One representative of the housing provider is a refugee and is very kind.*

*There are problems but thank you for giving me somewhere to live*

*Someone from the housing provider walked into the room twice when I had nothing on, in bed. Each time it woke me up. The first time was to ask about someone else in the flat. The second was to talk to me about handing over the keys – but my 28 days were not up when they did this.*

*I have been moved from Middlesbrough where my oldest daughter had just started in the reception class after settling in happily at the nursery there. It was good for her, as we had already been moved once. Also I was studying at the college there. But then I was moved to Stockton as the housing provider wanted to let the house privately. I do need to give my daughter stability, it is the only thing in my life I have any power over, so I take her there every day. I have to pay £12.25 a week for a bus pass. There are not many buses, so I walk back in a morning and walk there in the afternoon, that takes me about 30 minutes each way every day.*

*We were moved with just over a week's notice to somewhere 5 miles away, in the middle of a school term, when the children were all settled in their schools where we lived. It meant a lot to us that they children were settled, and the schools have been very good and welcoming to them.*

*We only want to be dealt with, with some humanity and empathy*

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### Results from online questionnaires

The responses below were collected via a shared link which was posted on some Facebook pages and groups. Any identifying information has been removed to protect confidentiality.

1. When you arrived at your accommodation were you given information that you can understand about how things work in the house or flat?  
YES 21 (45%) / NO 26 (55%)
2. When you arrived at your accommodation were you given information that you can understand about local area, for example post office, shops, buses?  
YES 20 (43%) / NO 27 (57%)
3. When you arrived at your accommodation were you given information that you can understand about support services, drop ins, places of worship / where you can go for advice?  
YES 14 (30%) / NO 33 (70%)
4. When you arrived at your accommodation were you given information that you could understand if things were not working as it should, or a repair was needed?  
YES 17 (36%) / NO 30 (64%)
5. Was there enough equipment in there for you to use for such as cooking and cleaning?  
YES 15 (32%) / NO 32 (68%)

## APPENDIX 4: Tees Valley of Sanctuary asylum accommodation consultation

6. Have you had any problems with sharing a house or group of flats with other people? What sort of issues? Seven people said the language barrier and cultural differences were a problem. Other comments include:

<i>The establishment of more than one person in a single room</i>
<i>We have to share the kitchen and the bathroom and in most of the time they don't clean after when they finished the problem is when the inspector come and see it he will blame every one on it and it's not fair.</i>
<i>Non-compliance with laws and hygiene and sometimes stealing food, Supervisor knew about this, told me when I came</i>
<i>Many problems</i> <i>Loud noise hassle late in the night.</i> <i>General cleanliness of the house, especially the bathrooms and kitchen.</i> <i>Stolen food from the refrigerator.</i>
<i>The people that I am living with is so dirty, nothing common between us and it's hard to communicate with them because they don't speak English or my language.</i>
<i>Lack of house cleaning and I hate it when they are drinking a lot of alcohol</i>
<i>The house was known as a refugee house because the door is red, and the large number of people have a key to enter. My phone and a computer were stolen, and police did not do anything but write report</i>

7. Have you had any problems with sharing a room to sleep in with another person? What sort of issues?

<i>The absence of any privacy</i>
<i>The biggest problem is sharing rooms, and having 10 people in one house, and three bathrooms and one out of service</i>
<i>They put me and a gay person in the same room and this thing caused me problems with him</i>
<i>Lack of personal hygiene and not clean the room</i>
<i>No problem</i>
<i>Just if he is not clean or keep the room in mess all the time</i>
<i>Yes, problems with cleanliness and order in and he invites a lot of his friends</i>

## APPENDIX 4: Tees Valley of Sanctuary asylum accommodation consultation

8. Do you feel able to report any problems, and have you been listened to?  
YES 18 (40%) No 27 (60%)
9. Would you like a way of being able to raise issues informally in a group with the housing provider?  
YES 33 (79%) No 9 (21%)
10. Anything else you would like to say?

<i>I suggest a visit to be arranged by Home Office representative to a group of Asylum seekers periodically to meet and listen them.</i>
<i>[Service Provider] did not listen.</i>
<i>Please prevent drinking too much alcohol in the house and housing provider needs to check on the cleanliness and the emphasis on the presence of all the tools at home, and good tools and is idle and the bed is still fit to stay</i>
<i>[Service provider] provide a very low level of housing for new arrival refugees in [City]</i>  <i>The worst 6 months I had with this company till I get my paper done and moved to another provider.</i>
<i>Many problems psychological pressure and nervous</i>
<i>Supplier of houses in [Town] not interested in the security of the houses of thieves and racists are targeting just refugee homes.</i>

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### Conclusions and Recommendations

- 56% of face-to-face respondents in Teesside were not given or did not understand the information given to them about how things work in the property
- 72% of respondents in Teesside were not given information, or given information they could not follow, or not given sufficient information, about where to go for advice and support
- The vast majority of respondents in Tees Valley would welcome the opportunity to discuss issues in an informal group with housing provider along with relevant interpretation and independent support.

We very much hope that the responses will be used to address issues raised during this consultation on the next Compass Contract to be drawn up. However many of the issues do not need a new contract, they can be dealt with more quickly for instance.

- Those seeking sanctuary with us as asylum seekers should be treated with dignity and respect.
- The biggest issue raised with us is shared accommodation. The quotations from the service users themselves spell out the problems, mainly centred around people sharing houses of different culture, language, and faith. We feel that more effort needs to be made for compatibility when occupants are going to be living together for more than a week or so.

## APPENDIX 4: Tees Valley of Sanctuary asylum accommodation consultation

- The biggest issue around shared accommodation is shared rooms though. Again the quotations tell the stories. The worst problems are connected with people of different faiths, even though it was clear that there were great efforts on both sides to understand and accommodate each other.
- Other issues of incompatibility around lights being on, noise, health and cleanliness need to be addressed.
- In all of the shared accommodation problems, there was nobody that could act as an intermediary or mediate in any way. If resources and support were available, the voluntary sector could help with this.
- There needs to be much better introduction to the home they are to live in, with proper explanations as to how appliances and heating works; where essential local amenities are, and where important facilities such as advice agencies, Drop Ins and places of worship are, and when they are available.
- Both the amount and condition of equipment provided must be reviewed. There needs to be an inventory when each person leaves and another arrives, and items should be replaced immediately.
- There is a disparity in which kitchens have a microwave, and whether or not a vacuum cleaner can be mended. In carpeted accommodation a vacuum cleaner is essential for cleaning.
- Issues around reporting problems and not being dealt with very promptly, and lack of information as to why anything was taking longer, needs to be addressed. There was clearly a demand for an informal way of meeting with other service users and the housing provider to discuss issues in general around housing. In this way there could be constructive communication, which would help to stop problems escalating. There was a strong call for interpreters and trusted independent third parties to be there too.
- Most of the above would cost little to implement, and most would be in line with the current contract.

### Contact

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## APPENDIX 4: Tees Valley of Sanctuary asylum accommodation consultation

### Appendix 1 - Questionnaire

#### CONSULTATION ON ASYLUM HOUSING

The Government is doing a consultation on housing for asylum seekers. They want to know what improvements could be made for a new contract.

The deadline is January 31<sup>st</sup> so we need to get as many views as possible well before then, so we can put them together to put them forward.

It would help if you could answer as many of the questions below that you want to. ALL information will be treated in confidence, and NO information will be passed on that could identify any asylum seeker.

1. When you arrived at your accommodation were you given information that you can understand about how things work in the house or flat?
2. When you arrived at your accommodation were you given information that you can understand about local area, for example post office, shops, buses?
3. When you arrived at your accommodation were you given information that you can understand about support services, drop ins, where you can go for advice?
4. When you arrived at your accommodation were you given information that you can understand about was everything working as it should?
5. Was there enough equipment in there for you to use for such as cooking and cleaning?
6. Have you had any problems with sharing a house or group of flats with other people? What sort of issues?
7. Have you had any problems with sharing a room to sleep in with another person? What sort of issues?
8. Do you feel able to report any problems, and have you been listened to?
9. Would you like a way to raise issues informally in a group with the housing provider?
10. Anything else you would like to say?



## APPENDIX 5: Voluntary & Community Sector (VCS) questionnaire feedback

From your perspective, and those of asylum seekers using your service, what are the key asylum seeker issues/concerns/gaps in provision?	
Organisation	Response
<b>Purple Rose Health &amp; Wellbeing</b>	Lack of awareness in the community about FGM especially among men because the focus is on women. Many Asylum Seekers are single and nobody is doing anything about it formally. Issues of illegality and consequences – the affected community hardly gets mainstream support on this issue. Lack of knowledge health problems associated with bad health. Funding to engage with the men is a problem.
<b>One Community Link</b>	Feeling vulnerable especially in this current political climate. Lack of adequate support to learn English. Inability to sustain current levels of support and the challenge of not getting support to further develop our community centre because there is no one doing that. We have gone to SCRAGA and there is nothing there.
<b>Stockton African Caribbean Association (SACA)</b>	Unfortunately, some members of our community are, through circumstances, beginning to engage in criminal activities, especially around driving and financial fraud. There is no one pro-actively doing work to reduce criminality amongst our members. Some of these people are less aware about the impact of this on their whole futures – such as future prospects of employment. Other than by word of mouth there is no formal programme to teach new arrivals and those who have been here longer about the options for a better life other than crime. So more and more crimes will potential happen.
<b>Pro-Immigration Skills Project</b>	If a group is predominantly run by Asylum Seekers it seems there is pretty little they can deliver given that the restrictions are increasing by day. Depending on others to do things for them is a problem. Being threatened with deportation when asylum seekers express a willingness to do more volunteering.
<b>Open Hands North</b>	Mental health illness in the RAS (refugee and asylum seeker) community is not being addressed adequately. Asylum seekers are struggling to handle the asylum system which promotes idleness and it is very limited what one can actually do. Asylum seekers in shared accommodation are exploding against each other but there is no one really doing anything about it. Lack of support that adequately address the RAS issues. When it has become too much people either go to the police or housing provider but it's largely ineffective. For Asylum seekers, the main thing to look forward to is the Drop-in which promotes interaction with others in a similar situation. The community's lack of understanding of services available for them. Elderly Asylum Seekers and Refugees are in a worse situation because most of them struggle with language, and nothing to do and the stress of isolation is too much for them. As more and more RAS are getting challenges our service is going to require more support but there is no adequate support. At the moment no one is actually helping us to establish our organisation well – the is no infrastructure support in Stockton.
<b>Stockton Sudanese Community</b>	Community safety is the major concern in our community: both as victims of hate and also to prevent risks of radicalisation of our children. The community fears negative attitudes developing because of unresolved community safety issues.
<b>Self-Advancement Foundation &amp; Education (SAFE)</b>	Lack of a comprehensive hand holding support for people who are really into setting up business. Lack of visible and flexibility from council to support entrepreneurship. Stockton Council not taking advantage of the international links that has been brought by refugees in the area. Focus should not be on Riverside Festival only. Concerned about sustainability of our projects because everything so far is done by volunteers. Lack of resources to promote and deliver to more people.
<b>Stockton Baptist Tabernacle Church</b>	Delay in getting Home Office response for some people. Difficulty of managing a transition from Asylum Seeker to Refugee status in a 28 day time scale - it's a major change, and not easy getting everything in place for independent living, including moving out of Jomast accommodation. Could some joint training be organised to help volunteers/voluntary organisations support people through this process?
<b>Christians Against Poverty (CAP)</b>	Refugees sometimes have difficulties accessing ESOL provision at Stockton Riverside College (Free) and SBC Learning and Skills (Chargeable) courses. Many Refugees have attained a high level of education in their birth country, but those certificates are not recognised here by educational establishments for further education. NARIC provides a chargeable service, but some no longer have access to their transcript/certificates. They find it hard accessing loans to go to university to start employment in their previous careers here. I understand that the DWP has a pilot with Syrian resettlement program not sure what this entails? Maybe Refugees could have a language assessment and be allowed to concentrate on ESOL classes and reach a certain level before having to attend Job Centre Plus on such a regular basis and risk being sanctioned if they do not keep to their job seekers agreement due to language misunderstanding. Formal volunteering opportunities for Asylum Seekers so that when they get Refugee status they have some UK experience on their CV to help them get paid employment.