

Place Select Committee

A meeting of Place Select Committee was held on Monday, 13th February, 2017.

Present: Cllr Derrick Brown(Chairman), Cllr Sonia Bailey(Vice-Chairman), Cllr Chris Barlow, Cllr Maurice Perry, Cllr Evaline Cunningham, Cllr Bill Woodhead MBE

Officers: Steve Hume (CS), Peter Mennear and Kirsty Wannop(DCE).

Also in attendance: None

Apologies: Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley,

PLA 46/16 **Declarations of Interest**

Cllr Sonia Bailey declared a personal non prejudicial interest in agenda item 3 - Scrutiny Review of Asylum Seekers as she was a member of the united Voices Women's Choirs who worked with asylum seekers.

Cllr Evaline Cunningham declared a personal non prejudicial interest in agenda item 3 - Scrutiny Review of Asylum Seekers as the church she attended worked with asylum seekers.

PLA 47/16 **Scrutiny Review of Asylum Seekers**

The Committee was presented with background information to support the Review of Asylum Seekers. It was explained that usually a scope would be agreed prior to receiving evidence but due to officer availability this had not yet been possible. The item also provide background information to Members which would help to allow Members choose a direction for the Review when the scope was considered at the next meeting.

The main information provided included:-

- 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.
- Details of how Asylum dispersals was previously delivered and how it was now delivered.
- Details of what was provided to asylum seekers when they enter the UK and what additional payments could be made, and what was provided to an individual or family that had been refused entry. Individuals not granted leave to remain were required to leave the UK at their earliest opportunity.
- 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 was 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. The meetings are also attended by the Home Office and the contract provider G4S.
- Stockton continued to act as a major dispersal area for asylum seekers. 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 of 19% for arrivals which had significantly exceeded initial projections. It was anticipated that this figure would continue to rise year on year.

- While there had been no significant community tensions in Stockton, the Council were starting to see an increase in isolated incidents in the Town Centre and surrounding areas, the Council also continued to receive individual comments and complaints about issues such as parking outside of mosques and concerns about asylum numbers and perceived 'threats' to other members of the community, all of which had no foundation. It was important that the Council continued to monitor community tensions as there may be a need to revisit wider engagement and cultural awareness within certain communities.
- Through consultation with the Home Office and the North East Migration Partnership (NEMP) efforts had been made to expand the dispersal areas across the region. As part of this process, Northumberland, Darlington and Redcar and Cleveland had recently agreed to act as dispersal areas.
- The Home Office had also made a commitment to reducing the number of new arrivals in Stockton in the long term to reduce the risk of the threshold being exceeded. The current agreement for Stockton was a 'one in one out' approach so that the figure remains static.
- In response to the wider impact of migration in the UK the Government had allocated a total of £140 million to respond to the problems caused by high migration into local authorities. The DCLG had been allocated a local service impacts fund of £100 million to help English local authorities and their communities experiencing high and unexpected volumes of immigration to ease pressures on local services. This would be split equally over the next four years. The Home Office had been allocated £40m to direct enforcement action against people in the UK illegally in order to reduce the pressure on local areas.
- In relation to the Syrian Resettlement Programme, through the NEMP and in consultation with the Home Office a North East 'offer' was developed. Currently 8 local authorities have agreed to take part in the scheme as part of the Governments 5 year commitment to accept 20,000 Syrian refugees. Due to the high numbers of Asylum Seekers in Stockton and Middlesbrough both authorities opted out of the Syrian Resettlement Programme. This decision was supported by the Home Office. As with all current refugees, once individuals and families were settled in the region they would have the freedom to re-locate to another area. With this in mind there was a strong possibility that some families would opt to relocate to areas which may be better suited to meet their needs and as such Stockton may see an increase in refugee numbers.

Members were given opportunity to ask questions/make comment, this could be summarised as follows:-

- Members requested definitions of what an asylum seekers, refugee, migrants and illegal immigrants was.
- Members queried the range of information provided to local authorities prior to an asylum seeker being placed in an area. It was noted that accommodation providers were required to inform the local authority where someone was to be placed, but there was little time in which for the Authority to respond. The NEMP has devised a form which ensured there was some consultation with regard to education, policing, and suitability of properties, and although this system was not perfect, it did provide some level of control.
- The police and probation services were reviewing the amount of information provided in relation to any criminal background.
- Stockton Town Centre Ward had the highest numbers of asylum seekers,

followed by parts of Thornaby.

- A key focus of the review could be to consider the role of the NEMP and its role in representing the local authority position.
 - There was an opportunity to promote more positive stories associated with asylum seekers, and NEMP would welcome this.
 - The Committee agreed it would be good to speak to the different voluntary and community sector organisations as to gain an understanding of the work they were doing with asylum seekers, including church provision. The Red Cross had received funding for a new project in the Tees area.
 - The Committee would like to gather the views and testimonials of asylum seekers.
- The Committee would receive a draft scope and project plan at the next meeting.

AGREED that the information be noted.

PLA 48/16 Work Programme

The Committee noted its work programme.

PLA 49/16 Chairs Update

The Chair had nothing to update.