

Place Select Committee
Review of Asylum Seeker Services
Outline Scope

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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.

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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?

Who will the Committee be trying to influence as part of its work?

Cabinet, Local Partner Agencies, NE Migration Partnership, Home Office

Expected duration of review and key milestones:

5 Months

What information do we need?

Existing information (background information, existing reports, legislation, central government documents, etc.):

Key definitions

Asylum Statistics (House of Commons Library Briefing Paper, December 2016)

Asylum Accommodation (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, January 2017)

Stockton Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (Health and Wellbeing Needs)

Who can provide us with further relevant evidence? (Cabinet Member, officer, service user, general public, expert witness, etc.)

What specific areas do we want them to cover when they give evidence?

North East Migration Partnership (NEMP)

Role and background of NEMP, effectiveness at representing views of Local Authorities, future role

Stockton Council Services:
Cohesion and Diversity; Housing (Housing Options/Conditions); Community Safety; Public Health, Children's Services (inc. Education/Schools)

Role in providing support to asylum seekers, transition of those with leave to remain

Local + Regional voluntary and community support:
-North of England Refugee Service (NERS)
- Red Cross
- Justice First
- Local Church and Mosque-based groups

Role, local co-ordination, detail on local projects (including Ariadne Project – Red Cross) , representation of asylum seeker views + concerns

Asylum Seekers and Representative Groups:
- Regional Refugee Forum (collective of refugee-led community groups)

Voice of the asylum seeker, representation of asylum seeker views + concerns

Arrival Practice / NHS Clinical Commissioning Group

Role and future of asylum seeker primary health provision

Home Office

Nationally Commissioned Service Providers: G4S (accommodation contract), Migrant Help (advice and information contract)

Potential to require information from national providers/commissioners (towards end of process once questions have been established)

How will this information be gathered? (e.g. financial baselining and analysis, benchmarking, site visits, face-to-face questioning, telephone survey, survey)

Reports, Committee meetings, Desktop Research/Survey

How will key partners and the public be involved in the review?

Committee Meetings – Partner organisations and stakeholders

Visit to support organisations/voluntary groups (eg. Church-based support groups) – Asylum Seekers / People with Leave to Remain

Survey of schools in wards with high concentrations of asylum seekers

How will the review help the Council meet the Public Sector Equality Duty?

The review will seek to understand the Council and partners have due regard to the need to consider the following in relation to the local asylum seeker population as part of the wider local community:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

How will the review contribute towards the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, or the implementation of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy?

The Stockton Joint Strategic Needs Assessment contains a section on Migrants; the review will consider the information as it relates to Asylum Seekers, and highlight any new issues as appropriate.

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

Project Plan

Key Task	Details/Activities	Date	Responsibility	
Scoping of Review	Information gathering	January 2017	Scrutiny Officer Link Officer	
Tri-Partite Meeting	Meeting to discuss aims and objectives of review	6 March	Select Committee Chair and Vice Chair, Cabinet Member(s), Corporate Director(s), Scrutiny Officer, Link Officer	
Agree Project Plan	Scope and Project Plan agreed by Committee	13 March	Select Committee	
Publicity of Review	Press Briefing at start of review	?	Chair, Link Officer, Press Officer Scrutiny Officer	
Obtaining Evidence	Background Briefing	13.2.17	Select Committee	
	Draft Scope	13 March		
	Work of the NE Migration Partnership / Definitions	10 April		
	Local Authority role and response: Housing, Public Health, Children's Services (inc. Education)	} 15 May		
	Community and Voluntary Sector		} TBC	
	Health			
Members decide recommendations and findings	Review summary of findings and formulate draft recommendations	12 June	Select Committee	
Circulate Draft Report to Stakeholders	Circulation of Report		Scrutiny Officer	
Tri-Partite Meeting	Meeting to discuss findings of review and draft recommendations	TBC	Select Committee Chair and Vice Chair, Cabinet Member(s), Corporate Director(s), Scrutiny Officer, Link	

			Officer
Final Agreement of Report	Approval of final report by Committee	10 July	Select Committee, Cabinet Member, Corporate Director
Consideration of Report by Executive Scrutiny Committee	Consideration of report	(19 September)	Executive Scrutiny Committee
Report to Cabinet/Approving Body	Presentation of final report with recommendations for approval to Cabinet	14 September	Cabinet/ Approving Body