

## Place Select Committee

A meeting of Place Select Committee was held on Monday, 15th May, 2017.

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

**Officers:** Regina Harrington, Gary Knight (EG&D), Martin Gray, Fiona Ranson, Steven Hume (CHS); Ruby Poppleton (A&H); Peter Mennear, Gary Woods, Annette Sotheby (DCE)

**Also in attendance:** Emily Hodgeon (Bowesfield Primary School), Bill Williams (Arrival Medical Practice)

**Apologies:** Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley

**PLA 6/17 Evacuation procedure**

The evacuation procedure was noted.

**PLA 7/17 Declarations of Interest**

Cllr Bailey declared a personal non-prejudicial interest as secretary of the United Voices Women's Choir who assist asylum seekers.

**PLA 8/17 Minutes for Signature - 18th January and 13th February 2017**

The minutes of 18th January and 13th February 2017 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**PLA 9/17 Draft minutes - 13th March 2017**

Consideration was given to the draft minutes of 13th March 2017.

AGREED - that the minutes be approved.

**PLA 10/17 Scrutiny Review of Asylum Seeker Services**

**HOUSING**

An insight was given into the journey of asylum seekers granted leave to remain by the Home Office, and how the Local Authority assists in providing immediate short-term and long-term housing needs.

Members asked about the letter sent to asylum seekers by the Home Office when accommodation had to be vacated, and the difficulty experienced in understanding its lengthy terminology, particularly when English was not the first language. It was noted that Jomast and local voluntary organisations work with people of different nationalities using interpreters to assist.

A case study involving the journey of a young, single male not granted leave to remain was shown.

Members expressed concern about what happened to single males who had fled after support was discontinued. It was noted that the Home Office were currently looking at safe passage for individuals not granted leave to remain so

that they could be kept safe, particularly those who may be vulnerable to exploitation, for example trafficking and slavery.

Additional funding from Migrant Fund was a key element of Home Office enforcement to try to identify those individuals.

An overview of the Council's Private Sector Housing team was given, the key points as follows:-

- Involvement in the consultation process relating to procurement of new properties to be used for asylum seeker accommodation.
- Assessment of properties using the Housing, Health & Safety Rating System (HHSRS)
- Mandatory licensing of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) – ensuring landlords operate an adequate standard of management.
- Responding to requests for assistance.

Members asked what action was taken if property was damaged by tenants. It was noted that the housing provider, landlord and tenant would have to resolve this, although interim repair would be carried out to ensure the safety of property.

Members asked what criteria were used to decide the number of people allowed in each HMO. Members were assured that this was decided by the number of toilets, bathrooms, cooking facilities, room size, etc., so that if a large house had only 1 bathroom, for example, maximum occupancy would be 5 people.

Members asked if checks were carried out to see if occupancy numbers were correct, and were advised that annual property visits were carried out to check license compliance.

Members enquired if there had been a change in demand in service over the last few years and if this had affected outcomes or impacted on service. It was noted that a triage system was now in operation. A landlord had 28 days to comply with a request - if not dealt with in that timescale, a formal process of property assessment under HHSRS would be undertaken.

The greatest impact was that inspection of HMOs was now less frequent due to a reduction in resources, with more reliance on tenants to report any issues. However, assurance was given that inspections are still as rigorous.

Members asked if consideration was given to flights of stairs when assessing property for pregnant women. It was noted that information on falls could be looked at under HHSRS, but stairs were not considered for expectant mothers.

Although the number of asylum seekers coming to Stockton had increased, this was now made up of more families than single people. There had been a significant change in nationalities, with more people of African origin currently.

Members asked if asylum seekers were now housed in multiple areas since the Red Door incident in Middlesbrough where only one area had been used. Members were advised that permanent or temporary rehousing was usually town centre based for all homeless people, not just asylum seekers, and were

reassured that no specific colour was used for doors in this area.

Permanent asylum seekers would join the housing register to be accommodated within the locality.

## EDUCATION (SCHOOLS)

Members were presented with an overview by the Local Authority's Education Development Adviser (Inclusion) who worked with all Stockton schools and academies – looking at what was in place for new asylum seeker arrivals, including English as an additional language, to enable pupils to have access to the curriculum as soon as possible. The presentation was supported by the Head Teacher of Bowesfield Primary School, an educational establishment experienced in managing asylum seeker children.

Information was found to be inconsistent when children arrived into accommodation in the area, sometimes turning up at school unannounced with no information available about them.

Members asked about clear protocols giving details of asylum seeker children. It was noted that the Admissions Team obtained details from Jomast, the Home Office or sometimes the NHS when a family required a school place for their child.

It was felt crucial to establish a clear protocol for admission and how information was shared.

Information given to schools was often limited, therefore more detailed information was required from the Home Office to assist in a child's school induction for example prior knowledge of Arabic, since this might mean Sudanese or Egyptian Arabic speaking would enable the correct interpreter to be used.

Sometimes newly arrived families were not aware that their child was eligible for a school place or that an admission form had to be completed. Some parents never having attended school do not know their child has a right to education. Sometimes language was a barrier. The Attendance Team visit the family within two weeks to assist in this process.

Some children were not eligible for free school meals, however some schools were finding funds for this.

In an effort to better support parents, some schools were now providing interpreters for parents evening. Although this incurred a time and cost implication, it was felt worthwhile for parents to learn of their child's progress.

Families seeking asylum sometimes disappear, often moving to another part of the country, with the children not attending school for some time - there were currently 8 asylum seeker children missing education out of 105 cases.

It was difficult to identify SEN children until new arrivals were assessed, however pupil support was available.

Ethnic Minority Achievement (EMA) Network very well attended from primary perspective.

Schools of Sanctuary Programme –Stockton leads in the Tees Valley and have produced the National SoS audit, ensuring all school communities know about asylum seeker refugee issues, getting provision for EAL learning in place and sharing best practice.

Funds had been acquired through liaising with UNICEF to increase the number of schools accessing the Right to Respect in School award, looking at human rights, rights of a child, anti-bullying and exploring refugee issues in the Local Authority.

Northfield was the only beacon school of holocaust education in the area.

All of this was in place to support capacity building in our schools.

Members asked how information on faith and religion was obtained and were informed that schools were asked at the point of induction, along with details of any dietary requirements. Diversity could be explored through collective worship and the RE curriculum.

Faith schools were discussed and it was noted that children of different faiths would not be asked to leave prayer, but parents could opt to withdraw their child from RE, having responsibility themselves to replace this.

Members asked how long the children stayed in school and whether any data was available to give a picture of arrival/departure numbers of those children. It was reported that sometimes children who started school in Stockton moved accommodation across the authority mid-year.

Members asked about absenteeism, the high churn, whether figures included regular pupils taking time off and how this was reflected in reports for Ofsted. It was noted that protocol was followed with the evidence available.

## PUBLIC HEALTH

Information from the circulated Migrants section of the Stockton Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) document was noted.

## ARRIVAL MEDICAL PRACTICE

A presentation was given by the Principal of the Arrival Medical Practice (asylum seeker primary health provider) around the practical, emotional, physical and mental health issues facing asylum seekers.

Those seeking asylum had the right to apply for registration with a GP practice, however many were reluctant to do so due to mistrust of authority, not speaking English, lack of awareness of medical practices, etc. Many used Accident & Emergency or walk-in centres as they were fearful of disclosing personal details.

Longer appointments at GP practices caused problems with other registered

patients who often had to wait due to this. A solution to this and other issues was to introduce a specialist practice - although this would not help integration it would allow specialisation in asylum seeker issues. Patients would be assessed, care started and then moved to mainstream general practice with the relevant care needed.

A community nurse, health visitor and counsellor were part of the team and also assisted asylum seeker patients with a variety of non-medical issues (including housing and interpreters) in an approachable, welcoming way, with confidentiality assured.

Testing offered for infectious diseases such as HIV and STDs. Work carried out with North Tees Hospital respiratory nurses testing for TB. In 2016, 560 patients were tested for TB and 280 had either active or latent TB – from those figures, two of those patients with latent TB would become active TB.

From 950 people coming to Stockton, 750 were registered with the practice, but 200 people were not – it was felt this could be a hidden problem. Patients were from 40 different countries, speaking around 25 languages. Some had no immunisations, so the aim was to include all of them in the UK immunisation programme.

Work ongoing with the Red Cross to trace family members who had been separated, also assistance given to pregnant women who may have no extended family help.

It was felt crucial to help self-esteem and assist in the rebuilding of the lives of asylum seekers, with social inclusion, not exclusion, and give help to learn English and integrate. Asylum seekers should be potentially valuable to us, not a burden. We should embrace, nurture and guide their talent and recognise their skills.

Asylum seekers come under criticism for not fitting in, but they don't know how to fit in.

Members asked what the Local Authority could do to help that they were not already doing - in response it was felt that English language lessons were crucial. Although good work was being carried out by church drop-ins and the voluntary sector, only around 100 people were receiving lessons out of more than 800.

Members agreed to informally visit the Baptist Tabernacle to attend a drop-in session.

Members were invited to attend the Arrival Medical Practice at any time to gain an insight into their work.

**PLA  
11/17**      **Work Programme 2017-2018**

AGREED - that the Place Select Committee Work Programme 2017-2018 be noted.

