

APPENDIX B to "Still Here, Still Human"

**1. Asylum Seekers in Portsmouth:**

Since 2000 Portsmouth has been one of three designated 'cluster' areas in the south of England for the dispersal and accommodation of asylum seekers. Cluster areas were originally set up in locations across the country, to alleviate pressure on areas of concentration of asylum seekers, such as London.

Accommodation for asylum seekers is sourced by private organisations under contract with the Home Office who set targets for the number of people to be accommodated in each region.

Clearsprings, the local provider of housing support report, as at August 2015 are accommodating 165 people, 113 of which are in family units, 52 are singles. This figure has remained more or less constant over recent years, although fluctuates as and when decisions are made by the Home Office on each person's status. A report on all new arrivals into the city is requested to be sent to Housing Options each week. This should also include trends by nationality, family grouping, date of birth etc. Latest information on new claimants in the city suggest their origins are mainly Afghanistan and African countries such as Somalia, Kenya, Cameroon and Sudan, however, these trends also fluctuate.

Numbers accommodated in the three cluster areas are as follows (as August 2015 and not including Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children):

Portsmouth	165
Southampton	87
Hastings	100

**2. Support arrangements for asylum seekers entering the city:**

- Accommodation, support and advice provided by Clearsprings includes:  
Support with living expenses, access to local GP's, schools in the area and other support groups/networks. The Clearsprings manager will help with local orientation and access to other amenities.
- Migrant Help:  
A multi-lingual telephone support network which operates 24 hours a day. Also providing outreach workers with whom people can make an appointment.
- Portsmouth Refugee and Asylum Seeker orientation and support project:  
Red Cross provide food vouchers and assistance with learning English, IT skills and help to improve employment opportunities for those with refugee status.

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- Red Cross and Haslar visitors group:  
A drop - in service is held at All Saints Church for asylum seekers and refugees.
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC):  
Any unaccompanied asylum seeking child found in our area will be accommodated by PCC and be regarded as a looked after child. There are currently 18 UASC in the City and when reaching 18 years of age will continue to be supported as care leavers. PCC are currently supporting 17 UASC as "care leavers".
- Portsmouth Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB):  
CAB are authorised to give immigration advice

**3. What happens when negative decision given?:**

If all rights are exhausted then there is an expectation they will be returned to their home country. "Section 4" support has now been repealed and support for refused asylum seekers will only be granted if there is a genuine obstacle to removal - this applies to singles and families.

Failure to co-operate with return can lead to people becoming destitute with no accommodation, and as they will have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) they will have no access to financial support. They are not entitled to support from the LA. A Human Rights Assessment may have to be undertaken to decide if failure to provide LA support would breach their human rights.

**4. What happens for those receiving a positive decision?**

If their application is successful they will have the right to access local services including support in finding accommodation.

**5. PCC and Home Office liaison**

Over recent years there have been a number of meetings between PCC and Clearsprings at which any issue of concern can be raised, such as pressure on local services and any increase in the number already dispersed to the City.

With an increase in the number of applications for asylum nationally, together with other cluster areas reaching saturation point, there has been a wish to increase the number accommodated in some cluster areas. We have voiced concerns that such a move may increase pressure on local services and that we are already accommodating a higher number of asylum seekers compared to the other cluster areas in the region. Until now there appears to have been a reluctance to open up new cluster areas in the south, one possible reason being the availability of cheaper accommodation in Portsmouth, Southampton and Hastings than in some other areas across the South. The existing Home Office contract to supply accommodation allows for increases in numbers if deemed necessary.

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**6. Impact on local services:**

**6.1 Education:**

The arrival of asylum seekers, particularly involving those with family units, will inevitably put further pressure on the availability of school places in the City. The availability of school places in Primary Schools is now very limited but as result of significant investment by the Council in primary school places, a surplus of 2% (equivalent to approx. two forms of entry) has been achieved for the medium term. For secondary places the issue is more serious with a forecast deficit in school places from 2018/19 onwards unless further investment is secured. The Council is currently undertaking a feasibility study to determine where the additional places should go.

In May 2014 PCC's Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS) delivered a workshop to schools, working with the Red Cross, on issues relating to Refugee and Asylum Seeking (RAS) pupils. Those schools who were aware of having RAS pupils engaged with the session, 10 in total. In general, school staff are not always aware of these pupils, as it is not required information, nor is it recorded on admission to schools.

EMAS offers support to new arrival pupils in schools that hold a service level agreement, either through first language (where available) or training for teaching staff, or both. Hampshire County Council produces excellent guidance for schools about supporting RAS pupils and we have their permission to use it. We are considering developing our own guidance based upon our experiences and some local case studies.

**6.2 Health:**

Increased numbers of asylum seekers being dispersed to Portsmouth does raise the level of demand on NHS resources; this tends to fall on specific services such as GP surgeries (because access to other NHS services relies on a person being registered with a GP), on community NHS services, particularly mental health services and also on urgent care services including ED but also walk-in centres. There is also an added pressure in respect of interpreting services required to conduct NHS appointments – most notably in GP surgeries and also translation services (where medical notes or advice need translating).

There is also an added burden on screening services – particularly TB – this impacts on Public Health who have had to resource TB (and other) screening services specifically for asylum seekers from local resource.

**6.3 Social Housing:**

The number of Asylum Seekers via the dispersal scheme, who are given leave to remain and become the immediate responsibility of Portsmouth City Council to accommodate under the homeless persons legislation, is on average 10

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households per year. The impact on the social housing provision in this area was less than 1% of the 1219 properties that were available to let in the past year.

Whilst the numbers are relatively low there is an impact on budgets, as most households have to be placed in temporary homeless accommodation. This is often the result of the limited timescales given by the Home Office and the delay in benefit claims being processed by the DWP. Once a decision is made and households are given leave to remain, the notice period of 28 days does not give sufficient time to secure suitable alternative accommodation and any delay in benefit payments restricts the council's ability to discharge its duty, as landlords will not accept households who are not in a position to sustain a tenancy.

Other categories of applicants subject to immigration control, who have been given leave to enter/remain and access to public funds are eligible to join the housing waiting list. The impact on the social housing provision for this group is 5% of the 1219 properties available last year. This will include some refugees who have settled in the city but it is not possible to identify the exact number from the data available.

EEA nationals who are not subject to immigration control are also eligible for housing assistance if they are working and meet the criteria to be defined as a worker. Last year this group accounted for an additional 5% of the 1219 properties let.

**6.4 Social Care, Adults and Children:**

We have been required to undertake 5 Human Rights Assessments in respect of Asylum seekers to date. In 4 cases there was no duty to provide a service. One Asylum Seeker was supported by Adult Social Care as a result of their personal care requirement and subsequently assisted to return home.

Children's services have an extra demand on their service through the requirement to support UASC as detailed above.

**6.5 Police - PCC liaison:**

In line with the government's counter terrorism strategy (CONTEST), Portsmouth City Council operates and chairs a 'Channel' Panel.

The aim of the panel is to allow local agencies the opportunity to meet and discuss issues linked to potential acts of terrorism and to offer vulnerable people who are at risk from being drawn into extreme terrorist activity, appropriate interventions to prevent this happening. The panel is made up of members from various agencies who offer services such as housing, health, social services and police.

Robert Watt - Director of Adult Services  
9 October 2015