

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE			
PORTFOLIO AREA: HEALTH & WELL-BEING			
Date of Meeting:	18 February 2002		
Public			
Key Decision:	Yes	Recorded in Forward Plan:	Yes
Inside Policy Framework			

Title: ASYLUM SEEKERS

Report of: DIRECTOR OF HOUSING

Report reference: H. 015/02

Summary:

The report describes the latest proposed Cumbria-wide arrangements to prepare for the possible re-housing of asylum seekers at some point in the future.

Recommendations:

The Executive is recommended to:

- Agree the proposals set out in Section 4.3 of the report in relation to: Representation on the consortium Executive; a collective approach to the dispersal contract; and the development of 'cluster areas'.
- Note the potential accommodation implications for Carlisle set out in Section 4.6.

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ASYLUM SEEKERS

1. Background Information

1. The Council last received a report on its potential involvement in housing asylum seekers on 25th January 2000 (H. 018/2000 "*Assessing the Possible Local Implications of the National Asylum Seekers Dispersal Programme*".)
2. This report authorised officers to pursue detailed investigations through the County Council and with the 'North West Regional Consortium for Asylum Seekers' on six items:

- Cultural Diversity/support services in Cumbria;
- Anticipated numbers involved;
- Costs to be incurred;
- Role of private sector providers;
- Signing up to a 'Joint Committee' to administer the scheme;
- Relationship with earlier Kosovar rehousing plans

and then to "*...report back to a subsequent meeting with a proposed action plan*".

1. Two years have lapsed and this report-back has never taken place despite a series of County-level meetings with the lead authority for the consortium (Liverpool City Council) and inter-District/RSL discussions on planning for provision and support.
2. There are four main reasons why progress has not been made:

- Confusion over and alterations in national policy on asylum seeker dispersal;
- Uncertainty over and apparent dispute between Liverpool City Council and the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) over the terms of the dispersal agreement;
- Uncertainty over the continuing lead role of Liverpool City Council in relation to the rest of the North West consortium;
- Uncertainty over the practical expectations on the contribution from areas such as Cumbria, which lack both significant concentrations of ethnic minority groups and the service infrastructure to support them.

1. Some doubts still remain on the first point – which is due to be the subject of a Government White Paper – but it would appear that in respect of the latter three points some tentative clarity is starting to emerge, as follows:

- The terms of the agreement are still not finalised but we believe that Liverpool CC and NASS could now work to a conclusion on this for commencement during 2002.
- We understand that Liverpool CC have re-confirmed their offer to act as the co-ordinating authority for councils in the North West (West) Sub Region *
- A clearer view on the expectation of areas such as Cumbria is emerging and the key issue will be the county's ability to deliver this expectation.

* (Effectively Cheshire, Cumbria and Merseyside. Manchester City Council acts as

lead authority for the 'east' of the NW region).

1. The Dispersal System – How it should work in practice

1. To recap, the following greatly summarises the process as it should work once a consortium is up and running:
 - Council's in the (Sub) region form a consortium and negotiate a contract with NASS which specifies numbers of asylum seekers to be accommodated, the property to be provided, the services to be delivered, length of contract, areas to be used, lead-in times and allowances to be paid.
 - Consortium works up detail of provision of accommodation and support on a council-by-council basis and advises NASS as properties come available.
 - NASS allocate asylum seekers, local councils provide/commission accommodation and services, NASS pay pre-arranged allowances toward costs.

1. The Liaison Arrangements in Cumbria

1. Under the legislation the prime responsibility for assisting NASS lies with unitary/county authorities. In respect of the latter this raises additional issues as they are not housing authorities in their own right.
2. In these circumstances the legislation requires District Councils as the local housing authority to provide reasonable assistance to the County Council to discharge their responsibility.
3. In turn, District Councils can seek aid from RSLs who are required to provide reasonable assistance to them as housing authorities.
4. In Cumbria we have a long-established and well co-ordinated steering group led by the County Council and involving all six District Councils and other key agencies (e.g. police, public health, etc) which is working closely together on a collaborative basis to seek to efficiently and effectively jointly discharge these responsibilities. This group is in close liaison with Liverpool City Council.
5. The Cumbria Sub-Regional Housing Group (CSRHG) has in turn accepted responsibility for co-ordinating the activities of the six housing authorities and five largest RSLs in the County in sourcing the accommodation element of the requirement.

2. Questions Posed by Liverpool CC

1. In anticipation of the revised dispersal arrangements now expected to be introduced during 2002 by the Home Office, Liverpool City Council has formally requested a response from all Councils' in the North West (West) Sub Region to the following three points:
 - The creation of a new executive function to direct the Consortium;
 - The proposed dispersal contract with NASS;
 - The development of 'cluster areas' within the sub-region where asylum

seekers would tend to be grouped.

1. These matters were discussed with Liverpool City Council by the county asylum seekers group on 17 December 2001, and subsequently by the districts and RSLs at the Cumbria Sub-regional Housing Group on 29 January 2002 with County Council input.
2. Arising from these two meetings the unanimous collective view of those present was as follows:
 - **Executive** – that Cumbria should be represented by two members, one a County Councillor and the other a District Councillor nominated by the Cumbria Sub-Regional Housing Group.
 - **Dispersal Contract** – that Cumbria authorities should make no commitment on this matter until such time as a draft contract has been made available to them all. However, they would look to jointly sign a county-wide agreement rather than multiple individual agreements.
 - **Cluster Areas** – that the Cumbria authorities express their reservations about the suitability of the county for dispersal unless there are clear and firm commitments on the funding and provision of the necessary support services to ensure the well-being of both the asylum seekers and the communities they join.

Based on work previously undertaken by both the Steering Group and Housing Group the recommendation was that the towns of Barrow, Carlisle, Whitehaven and Workington could form the starting point for the creation of 'cluster areas' if the dispersal does proceed.

1. It remains a matter for individual authorities to determine their position in relation to the request from Liverpool City Council and responses are required by them, via Cumbria County Council, by **28 February 2002**. Following the sub-regional housing meeting there was a collective agreement among the seven authorities to recommend to their Executives/Cabinets the arrangements set out in 4.3 above.
2. In terms of numbers that may need to be accommodated Liverpool City Council has advised that we work on the basis of accommodating c.500 persons between the areas of Cumbria and Cheshire. Assuming for now that Cumbria takes 50% of this figure (250 persons) this may require anywhere between c. 60 and 250 units of accommodation depending on the combination of the units available and size of households nominated.
3. Under the arrangements previously agreed by the CSRHG in 2000, 78 units of accommodation were offered up between five of the districts, but these were never utilised. **Carlisle has previously offered 20 'family-sized' units and officers would now recommend that any future discussions on the City Council's contribution be set in the range 20-50 units.**

1. Options

1. The City Council has three main choices to consider:
 - Re-affirm its previous decision to enter into joint arrangements with the other 6 authorities, on the basis of the recommendations made in 4.3 and 4.6 above.
 - As above, to re-affirm the decision on collaborative arrangements but to vary the detail from that set out in 4.3 and 4.6 above.
 - To decline to be involved.

1. The outline implications of these three options are set out in section 11 below.

1. Consultation

1. To Date – with Cumbria County Council, the five District Councils in Cumbria, the five largest RSLs in Cumbria, North Cumbria Health Authority and Cumbria Constabulary.
2. Proposed – as above through the Asylum Seeker Steering Group and CSRHG.

2. Staffing/Resource Comments

1. It is not possible to quantify these as yet as the terms of the potential contract are not finalised.
2. The City Council can expect to face expenditure in relation to:
 - Scheme set-up costs
 - Works to properties
 - Furnishing of properties
 - Utilities' costs
 - More intensive management of properties
 - Rent liability
 - Council Tax liability

1. In recompense it can be expected to be paid a set rate of allowance by NASS in respect of every unit of accommodation provided. The principle issue requiring clarification will be whether this allowance meets the costs identified and within this the main cost variable will be how additionally intensive the management of the units may prove to be.

1. City Treasurers Comments

1. It is assumed for the purposes of this report that the level of contribution to be made by NASS under any financial scheme to be agreed, will leave the City Council in a neutral position compared to any expenditure to be incurred in receiving, accommodating and supporting Asylum Seekers who may be assigned to Carlisle's care.
2. It will be important that any financial scheme put forward by NASS properly distinguishes between capital and other expenditure incurred in making properties and services available for Asylum Seekers in advance of their

arrival, as distinct from any ongoing revenue support or services provided by reference to the level and period of occupation.

3. It is clear from the previous scheme, that a lot of expenditure incurred in advance of receiving Asylum Seekers has not been reflected in the level or period of occupancy, and if a scheme were based solely upon occupancy as a basis of reimbursement, there must be a possibility that the City Council's expenditure could exceed any income under the scheme.

2. Legal Comments

1. The City Solicitor & Secretary has been consulted in the preparation of this report.

3. Corporate Comments

1. In terms of District Council responsibilities, the impact of the proposals falls almost wholly on the Housing Service.

4. Risk Management Assessment

1. A risk assessment for the two main options of taking an active part in the consortium and not taking part are set out in Appendix 1.

5. Equality Implications

1. One of the prime concerns of both the Steering Group and CSRHG is to avoid a situation where asylum seekers are dispersed into Cumbria without adequate expert support arrangements being in place for both them as individuals and for the local agencies expected to provide local services.
2. This consideration must be a key part of the negotiations with NASS/NW (West) Consortium.

6. Environmental Implications

1. None arising from this report.

7. Crime & Disorder Implications

1. Cumbria Constabulary is a partner on the Steering Group and any arrangements will be subject to consultation with them.

8. Recommendations

1. The Executive is recommended to:
 - Agree the proposals set out in Section 4.3 of the report in relation to: Representation on the consortium Executive; a collective approach to the dispersal contract; and the development of cluster areas.
 - Note the potential accommodation implications for Carlisle set out in Section 4.6.

1. Reasons for Recommendation

1. A humane, properly resourced and professionally supported asylum seeker dispersal arrangement in Cumbria is unlikely to be achievable without a collaborative approach from all the agencies concerned and across council boundaries.
2. The alternative may result in arbitrary private sector placement of asylum

seekers in the county which may not be in the best interests of the asylum seekers themselves, the authorities with support responsibilities, or the local communities affected.

T. Bramley

Director of Housing

Appendix 1a

Risk Assessment 1

Involvement in NW Asylum Seeker Consortium Arrangements

Factors	Probability	Impact	Comments
1. Abortive costs for Council in preparations if Consortium does not proceed	Medium	Low	Given past 'false-start proposal is to commit [consistent with comp until a start date is co
2. Some county partners fail to contribute leaving increased burden for remainder	Low	Medium	Risk is minimised by j and prior history of co
3. Adequate support services fail to materialise			Requires local and reg on preparations
4. Costs exceed allowances	Medium	High	Assessment must awa terms
5. Adverse public reaction	Unknown	Unknown	Council must be sens arrangements which a
	Unknown	Unknown	

Appendix 1b

Risk Assessment 2

No Involvement in NW Asylum Seeker Consortium Arrangements

Factors	Probability	Impact	Comments
1. NASS institutes private sector direct placement arrangements	Medium	Medium	Council will lose initial nature, quality and dis accommodation used
2. County's ability to deliver adequate support may be impaired	Medium	Medium	Ad-hoc placement ma delivery
3. Council will need to monitor accommodation standards	High	Unknown	While NASS should le shows an additional b private sector housing
4. Private sector properties in use while council properties may lie empty	High	Medium	While involvement in t be viewed as an econ to fill otherwise void p
5. Adverse public reaction	Unknown	Unknown	The Council may be v ad-hoc direct placeme unforeseen issues