



SCRUTINY FORUM EXECUTIVE

Report of the

HOUSING AD HOC SCRUTINY PANEL

into

**ASYLUM SEEKERS -
ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT**

13 MARCH 2000

HOUSING AD HOC SCRUTINY PANEL RE ASYLUM SEEKERS

MEMBERS: Councillor Robert Light (**Chair**)
Councillor Jean Calvert
Councillor Bev Warby

LEAD OFFICER: Mr Stephan Brown

COMMITTEE ADMINISTRATOR: Mr John Quarmby
(Tel. 01484 221703)

The Panel was established by the Housing Scrutiny Panel with the following Terms of Reference:

To obtain an overview of the range of services related to the issue of asylum seekers, to undertake Scrutiny of the Consortium Contract, the role of Housing Services and other related Services, the Voluntary Sector - specifically KRAFT and of the Home Office National Asylum Support Service.

The Panel met on 6 November, 21 November 2000, 7 February and 20 March 2001.

Reports of the individual meetings are detailed below.

(a) **6 November 2000** - The following information was provided by:

Tony Hood - Chief Housing Officer
Rose Simkins - Project Manager (Asylum Seekers)
John Dixon - Group Finance Manager

The Panel considered regional and local arrangements for the accommodation and support of asylum seekers and noted that the Council was one of ten participants within the Regional Consortium for Yorkshire and Humberside in administering arrangements for the dispersal of asylum seekers. The contract between the Consortium and the Home Office National Asylum Support Services provided accommodation and support for 1640 asylum seekers in the region with simultaneous agreements drawn up between participating Local Authorities and the Consortium to provide for a proportion of the overall contracted number, the figure for Kirklees being 188. The terms of the contract provided for the provision of accommodation, utilities, furnishings, basic personal support, interpretation, liaison with other agencies such as health, further education and some funding for education and social services support assessment. The provision of weekly payments to asylum seekers was administered by a separate body. Funding from NASS was on the basis of delivery of available units of accommodation with a unit cost for each type of accommodation. The actual Contract had become effective from 9 October 2000 and not from April/May as originally envisaged as a result of difficulties in reaching agreement on terms and reduced numbers of asylum seekers requesting accommodation which had resulted in other consortia not signing up to the contract and having to abort their preparation.

Asylum seekers welcomed to Kirklees as part of the interim arrangements for dispersal supported since December 1999 continued to be funded on the basis of weekly payments to the Council which covered accommodation, support, translation and personal payments. The payments being £140 per week for single people and £240 for families which was insufficient to meet the Council's costs with a shortfall in the region of £30,000 in 1999/2000. There was a possibility (and nothing more) that asylum seekers under the interim arrangements would be integrated into the Contract over time but there was no information on when this might happen. The Panel noted that NASS was placing asylum seekers with private housing providers which included Safe Haven - Yorkshire (a partnership of South Yorkshire Housing Association and Yorkshire Housing Association) and that actual numbers were difficult to assess as the Council were not notified of the figures. Support in the private sector for asylum seekers was limited and there was evidence to suggest that beyond providing accommodation the private sector did not offer the same back up facilities as the Council. NASS appeared unwilling to comment on these matters stating that contracts were for the provision of suitable housing and not other services provided.

An asylum seeker referred to the Council would upon arrival be placed in a hostel for a maximum of 3 weeks after which they would be placed in temporary Council accommodation. Currently 18 single people and 2 families occupying Council accommodation had received positive decisions as to their future and following those decisions (which were notified to the Council by letter) financial support would cease after 16 days. A housing needs interview/assessment would then take place and the Council would arrange an appointment with the Benefits Agency and a notice would be issued for the temporary property occupied to be returned to the Council. The asylum seekers would be allowed to remain in the property until an offer of accommodation had been made by Housing Services. The time taken by Housing Services for offers of accommodation was normally within 3/4 weeks and generally asylum seekers requested areas of low demand.

In connection with determinations as to whether asylum seekers could remain in the country Members noted that an asylum seeker had to be given leave to appeal with no automatic guarantee; that arrangements were being made whereby asylum seekers would be required to attend for "signing in" in Leeds on a monthly basis and any asylum seekers whose application to remain in the country had been refused would be detained at that point. This obviously raised a series of questions such as who collected that persons belongings from their temporary place of residence? what arrangements had been made or could be made for access to that persons residence? etc. The Panel were also advised that asylum seekers within the Authority's area were still being required to travel to Croydon for immigration interviews (currently 3 per month) and that Liverpool was also being used for this purpose. It was likely that within five months all asylum seekers would have been interviewed by immigration and a decision made on whether they could stay in the country or not. Members were then advised of Council properties which were being used to accommodate asylum seekers and of problems which were likely to arise in relation to the identification of one bedroomed accommodation which were subject to age restrictions on lettings.

(b) **21 November 2000**

(i) **Kirklees Refugees and Friends Together (KRAFT)**

Pam Bye and Alan Brooke of KRAFT provided the Panel with the following information:-

KRAFT had been formed on 2 March 2000 to support asylum seekers in Kirklees, in particular Kurdish people. KRAFT offered support on a daily basis and their premises officially opened on 21 July 2000 were open from 9.00 a.m. to 7.00 p.m. Originally the premises had been open from 10.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m. but the numbers of people visiting particularly those housed in the public sector had resulted in the hours having to be extended. KRAFT had some evidence to suggest that a small number of private sector accommodation used to house asylum seekers was not up to standard; and on occasions subject to overcrowding. Support arrangements were not always as good as they might be. There had been alleged instances where support workers in the private sector had not arranged for the asylum seekers to be registered with a local GP. KRAFT had referred complaints to the private sector providers. Relationships between KRAFT and the Council were considered to be good although initially KRAFT had concerns that staff dealing with asylum seekers had not received adequate training, subsequently this matter had been put right. Upon arrival in Kirklees Council accommodation for asylum seekers was provided on a temporary basis so that when the asylum seeker was granted leave to remain in the country their names were placed on the Housing Register which meant that they had to leave the temporary property which they had come to regard as their home when an offer of permanent accommodation was accepted.

KRAFT received funding from the Council totalling £9,000 which paid the rent and running costs of the premises occupied. The organisation had no paid staff and a core of 6 people ran the office plus some part-time workers. In the long term KRAFT wished to employ a full time worker with office management skills. Arrangements had been made for a representative of a local firm of Solicitors to hold a surgery at their premises every Wednesday for 2 hours. On Friday evenings KRAFT ran a "coffee bar" service for asylum seekers as a social facility. Currently KRAFT were seeking charitable status and once that had been achieved an application for lottery funding would be submitted. KRAFT were also seeking financial support from the Rowntree Trust. KRAFT were of the opinion that there were probably 150 asylum seekers accommodated in the private sector in Kirklees.

As regards the issue of vouchers KRAFT implied that on occasions the vouchers had not arrived at the appropriate time and that in some instances details of how the voucher system worked had not been explained in sufficient detail to asylum seekers.

Members noted that NASS had received complaints about accommodation used by private providers and as a result had appointed agents to inspect properties used by the end of December 2000. There were also problems in relation to NASS sending asylum seekers to areas where existing asylum seekers spoke a different language to their own.

KRAFT agreed with the suggestion that local authorities should have a co-ordinating role in the arrangements for the housing of Asylum seekers in the private sector which would enable local authorities to have an over view of the numbers of asylum

seekers in their area which would allow better planning of the services required e.g. social services, education, etc. Currently NASS did not advise local authorities of asylum seekers placed in the private sector due to the "confidentiality" of contracts with those providers.

KRAFT were currently negotiating with Huddersfield Technical College for the funding of courses which asylum seekers wished to attend. Currently there was a large waiting list of asylum seekers wishing to attend English classes.

(ii) **Safe Haven**

Jude Horsnell of Safe Haven provided the Panel with the following information:-

The organisation who provided accommodation throughout West Yorkshire had to achieve a target number of properties and had not as yet achieved that target. One of the major problems for asylum seekers was that once in an area and homed they had a great deal of time on their hands. Asylum seekers had requested televisions but the contract which the organisation had with NASS did not provide for TVs although other agencies contracts did. The organisation had difficulties in engaging interpreters who were at a premium and were working for those agencies which offered the highest remuneration. The organisations client group between them spoke 18 different languages with only a very small number of asylum seekers being bi-lingual. The Council were aware of these problems and options were being considered - either to employ interpreters on an hourly rate or to create permanent full-time posts. The latter option was considered the more cost effective. It was noted that interpreters were also in demand by the Health Services, the Courts and the Police. As a consequence some interpreters were now working for the "highest bidder".

The Panel discussed a possible co-ordinating role for the Authority with the private sector providers vis-à-vis the sharing of information as to the number of asylum seekers in the Council's area and specific services which those asylum seekers would require from the Council. Jude indicated that the organisation would be happy to work with the Local Authority particularly to overcome common problems. Currently Safe Haven ran a hostel for 30 single men and had a small number of family houses (less than 10). It was unlikely that the number of family houses would be increased. NASS wished to revise the contract with Safe Haven with a view to the organisation concentrating on housing single males. The Chair suggested that there appeared to be inconsistencies in the approach of support staff employed by private sector providers when dealing with asylum seekers. Jude advised that when she had been appointed to her position the organisation had a team of temporary staff and that she was currently working to consolidate the staffing problem. The organisation had an ongoing recruitment process. Support workers appointed would receive training in different skills within the next three months.

Jude advised that NASS appeared to pay particular attention to the first 48 hours of an asylum seeker being referred to the organisation with little follow up thereafter. NASS ensured that the right accommodation was provided and that the asylum seeker arrived at the right place and had been homed at the correct address. When settled the organisation arranged to visit the asylum seeker at home every four weeks. This system was working reasonably well although there were occasions when individuals were not at home at the time of the pre arranged visit. The organisation arranged for asylum seekers to be registered with a local GP within 2

days of their arrival and discussed basic issues with them such as local shops, access to schools etc. The organisation had found it easier to accompany the asylum seekers to the local GP for registration as appointments had not always been kept. The organisation had encountered problems around the voucher system in that if an asylum seeker changed address, the vouchers were issued to the previous address and repeated requests to the issuing agency to re-direct had not always been successful. Vouchers were available from Head Crown Post Offices only. Jude agreed that it would be better if local authorities were able to distribute the vouchers. The Panel noted that asylum seekers had also to be homed within 3 miles of a Crown Post Office. Jude advised that asylum seekers in their care in the Leeds area had been enrolled onto English language and computer courses for which an enrolment fee was payable. The organisation could not seek a reduction in the fee in view of confidentiality clauses within the contract which prevented the organisation from stating that the person was an asylum seeker.

(iii) **Angel Group Ltd.**

Mike Boyle of Angel Group Ltd provided the Panel with the following information:-

Mike circulated an information booklet prepared by Angel Group Ltd. which indicated that at the end of September 2000 NASS estimated that over 9,000 asylum seekers had been dispersed under the new arrangements throughout the United Kingdom and that of this figure approximately 2,900 asylum seekers had been dispersed in the Yorkshire and Humberside Region. NASS supported a number of asylum seekers on a voucher only basis and in these cases the asylum seekers had somewhere to live but only required assistance with essential living needs - the vast majority of voucher only cases currently living in accommodation in London and the South East.

The Group had started providing services to asylum seekers in 1998 and through a contract with Brent Council the Group had developed facilities in Leeds to support 97 destitute asylum seekers. In January 2000 the Group had purchased a hostel in Newcastle and entered into a contract with Kent County Council to provide support to a further 200 asylum seekers. In April 2000 the Group had been awarded a contract by the Home Office to provide substantial amounts of private accommodation in the North East, Yorkshire and Humberside and West Midlands. At 14 November 2000 the number of asylum seekers who occupied their accommodation by region was as follows:

- North East 389
- Yorkshire and Humberside 1624
- West Midlands 68

So far as Kirklees was concerned the Group had the following placements:-

- Batley 14
- Huddersfield 48
- Dewsbury 63

Asylum seekers were placed mainly in houses ranging from 3-4 bedrooms. Houses were registered as HMOs in those Authorities where a registration scheme applied. If a registration scheme did not exist then the contract specification required that the property be fit and have adequate means of escape. The company was

contractually obliged to take action in instances where enforcement notices were issued. The minimum level of support made available to asylum seekers was set out in the Group's contract with NASS and in most cases the Group aimed to exceed minimum requirements. As an example the contract required asylum seekers to be visited every four weeks whereas company policy was to visit on a three weekly basis. Similarly, where there was no absolute requirement to provide asylum seekers with information in their own language the Group intended to produce a welcome letter in the 10 most common used languages. The Group would meet the asylum seeker at the designated point of arrival with an interpreter being on hand (where requested) and the asylum seeker would be accompanied to their allocated property where they were shown how to safely operate all electrical appliances with the evacuation procedures/exits routes being explained. The asylum seeker would be issued with a formal welcome letter together with details of local services. The asylum seeker would also be asked to sign their formal occupancy agreement. The day after arrival a follow up visit was undertaken and if required, assistance would be given in registering the asylum seeker with a doctor and in supporting the admission of children to a local school. The asylum seeker would then be visited every three weeks with the following objectives:-

Firstly, to assess the degree to which the asylum seeker had gained access to local services and

Secondly, to ensure that the property and inventory was being maintained.

The Group did not provide televisions. Washing machines were provided for families but not for single people. The Group had received 70 decisions in the last 4 week to the effect that asylum seekers could remain in the country following which they gave 8 days notice to terminate the temporary property occupied. The Group would advise Crown House re benefits and submit an application to the appropriate Authority for re-homing. 16 days after the decision notice the Group's support of the family/individual would end. If a negative decision was given then the indication from NASS was that the asylum seeker had no further legal entitlement to support. The main concerns of the Group related to notifications from NASS about the time of arrival of asylum seekers who invariably arrived later than the time stated; vouchers not being available or continue to be provided on time. Mike suggested that emergency vouchers should be available with Local Authorities being accredited to issue vouchers spread over five days rather than on the single day from Crown Post Offices as at present. The Group had raised concerns to the effect that the language of the asylum seeker as notified by NASS was not always correct. The Group were aware of problems around the language issue and suggested that this could be overcome in some instances by asylum seekers being placed in a shared household with other asylum seekers who could speak English assisting. The Group also employed people from different nationalities many of whom had themselves been asylum seekers who would work with asylum seekers, although the Group recognised that problems did arise where these people were from different cultures with different religious and political perspectives.

The Group had commenced a formal evaluation of the properties used, on a grading system of 1-4. Subject to consultation with NASS the Group intended to use only properties which received a high grading (4).

The main priorities for the Group in the immediate future were to establish a relationship with the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Consortia and to work with the Consortia and local Refugee Agencies to support the integration and resettlement of asylum seekers. To this end the Group intended to appoint a full-time Settlement Worker to support this area of work with the possibility that this worker might on occasions be able to work with the Authority and also to improve the management of complaints and ensure that policies and procedures were applied consistently throughout the Group. Mr Boyle also indicated that the Group would like to have further discussions with the Council towards the possibility of emergency facilities being available to accommodate late arrivals overnight.

(c) **7 February 2001**

Asylum Seekers - Accommodation and Services

Liz Westmoreland of the Regional Consortium for Yorkshire and Humberside provided the following information:-

The Panel considered the five year contract with the Home Office for the provision of accommodation and support for asylum seekers in the region. Liz advised that the actual contract had been signed in October 2000 and provided for 1,640 units of accommodation on the basis that one unit could range from a bed sit property to a dwelling house. As a consequence any hostel provision would be classified in terms of bed spaces. Kirklees would be required to allocate 188 units to Kirklees Asylum Support Services with a gradual build up to that figure over 12 months. Two lead Authorities had been nominated, these being Leeds for West Yorkshire and Sheffield for South Yorkshire who undertook a co-ordinating role on behalf of the region. Each Authority had to notify NASS as to the number of properties to be brought into use each month which were then included in the contract with the ensuing payment to the Authority. As to the recovery of support costs which might fall on the Council the Panel were advised that the Home Office would not make provision in the contract for education or health related matters although a management charge which included rent and Council Tax.

When a Local Authority was notified that an asylum seeker was to arrive in their area then the Authority had to allocate an appropriate property to that person or persons if a family and a detailed specification applied in this instance. The specification also stated how that person would be supported in the first 48 hours of arrival e.g. access to a general practitioner and educational facilities, together with an initial health assessment. Following the initial 48 hours the asylum seeker would be visited on a monthly basis. It was acknowledged that most Local Authorities had a reception centre as an initial point of contact.

The consortium had an enabling role which was becoming more defined as more asylum seekers arrived in the area and where necessary would look to meet any "gaps" in need.

NASS supplied Local Authorities with figures of asylum seekers in their area which covered both Local Authority and private accommodation which currently showed 3,000 asylum seekers dispersed across the region. Individual occupancy of properties was not known as the information supplied by NASS was based on addresses and not actual numbers and did not give information as to who the private providers were. Details of the actual figures involved was improving. Information

had also been provided which suggested that no new contracts would be entered into between the Home Office and private providers in this region and it appeared that the content of contracts with private providers were not necessarily the same as for those with Local Authorities.

Currently, any Local Authority property which was made available but remained empty would qualify for 84% of the monthly payment. As regards single persons then following receipt of the decision that they might remain in the country they were allowed a grace period of 14 days to vacate the temporary accommodation and for any who remained in the property after that time period then NASS would cease to make payments to the Authority. In those instances it was unlikely that the individual would be evicted as generally they migrated elsewhere. Similar single people accommodated in the private sector could remain in the accommodation and receive housing and Council Tax benefit which covered the rental payments. The Housing Service tried to avoid placing people in temporary accommodation and generally tried to secure a service tenancy. Asylum seekers who were granted permission to stay had to wait for something like 3/4 months before they received a permanent offer of accommodation by the Council and this was largely due to them selecting the more popular areas of Kirklees.

Currently, approximately 30 single people and 10 families were homed under the interim scheme and confirmation was still awaited from the Home Office that these persons could be transferred to the new contract which following their re-housing to permanent accommodation would free up properties for the new scheme. This would be of financial benefit to the Housing Service who would not have to 'fit out' additional temporary properties.

The Consortium were financed by a grant from the Home Office and by the top slicing of an amount for each unit of accommodation. The Consortium had been given an enabling grant of £100,000 shared between Leeds and Sheffield. A Regional Reference Group had been established whose membership included all key partners across the district who provided accommodation including Angel and Safe Haven Associations and representatives of the Police and of the Regional Assembly.

As regards the voucher system it was suggested that there were a number of administrative problems attached to this with the result that an increasing number of asylum seekers were not receiving vouchers. This had become more frequent when the asylum seeker moved from an hostel to other accommodation. Unless NASS made arrangements to improve the system then it was likely that Local Authorities would have to be issued with a supply of vouchers for issue in emergency situations. In the event of this happening then Local Authorities would need to set up appropriate systems to process issue. There were also problems around the issue of vouchers being undertaken at Crown Post Offices and not Sub Post Offices.

(d) **20 March 2001**

National Asylum Support Service

Ann McKillop, Regional Manager for NASS provided the following information:-

Ann advised that her role as Regional Manager was directly concerned with implementing partnerships which involved the accommodation providers (6 in total

for the Yorkshire and Humberside region) the voluntary sector grant aided partners (which included the Refugee Council) and the Local Authorities Consortium in its enabling role. Ann also had links with the Immigration and Nationality Directorate and the Immigration Service. Partnership meetings were held on a monthly basis at the IND Office, Leeds. The meetings were designed to develop good working practices and enabled the individual partners to meet each other. Arrangements were also made for meetings with representatives of all Police Forces in Yorkshire and Humberside specifically those Officers who had responsibility for an overview of community safety. Ann also reported in general terms on contracts with accommodation providers particularly the private sector providers and advised that she would arrange for a model contract to be made available to the Panel. The model contract included information on the standard of property to be made available to asylum seekers together with effects which had to be supplied in the property. All accommodation had to comply with relevant Planning and Health Regulations. Each specific contract was overseen by a Contract Manager who had to inspect the properties to ensure that standards were being met. Working alongside the Contract Manager were Performance Monitoring Teams who investigated complaints and also dealt with cases of anti-social behaviour, fraud etc. Quantity Surveyors had also been engaged to carry out an inspection of properties used by the private accommodation providers and all properties had been inspected prior to Christmas 2000. Ann advised that details of asylum seekers moving into the Yorkshire and Humberside area for both the private and Local Authority accommodation providers were forwarded to Liz Westmoreland of the Regional Consortium and that the information included details of the nationality and gender of the asylum seeker and the address to be occupied. With effect from April 2001 targets had been set for dealing with each individual asylum seeker's case in that the first decision had to be given within two months and any subsequent appeal to be dealt with within the next four months. The Panel then discussed with Ann support services provided by the accommodation contractors in particular services offered for the registration of asylum seekers with a local GP. The panel noted that the contract stated that providers had to issue the asylum seeker with a list of local GPs and a map showing where they were based. In reality providers appeared to be arranging appointments with GPs and accompanying them to the surgery.

In connection with the issue of vouchers it was acknowledged that problems did occur in the following areas:-

- (i) Wrong information being put on the IT database.
- (ii) The client area in that the asylum seeker had failed to collect the vouchers from the Post Office within seven days following which the Post Office would return the vouchers.
- (iii) Asylum seekers changing addresses without notifying appropriate persons.

A call centre had been established and an asylum seeker could obtain emergency vouchers within 72 hours of contacting the call centre. Calls received were monitored in order to identify any specific mistakes which had been made either by the asylum seeker, the issuing Post Office or the supplier and the Manager checked the calls to see if any trends could be identified and if so how these might be improved. Ann advised also of the role of the Integrated Casework Directorate based at Croydon and Liverpool who had responsibility for making the first decision

on whether an asylum seeker could remain in the country. A satellite branch of the Liverpool office had recently opened in Leeds.

The Panel would like to thank all the witnesses for their assistance in this matter.

SCRUTINY REPORT ON ASYLUM SEEKERS

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the National Asylum Support Service, when placing asylum seekers into regions like Yorkshire and Humberside, should ensure proper consideration of the well being of the asylum seekers; that effective support systems are in place and that arrangements for the co-ordination of access to health, education and social services are similarly in place
2. That Local Authorities should be notified by NASS of asylum seekers resident in their districts who have been placed with private sector providers.
3. That Local Authorities should have a co-ordinating and monitoring role for all asylum seekers in their area. e.g. inspection of properties prior to occupation; ensuring that houses in multiple occupation used to accommodate asylum seekers are registered with the Authority; monitoring of support services for asylum seekers homed in the private sector and inspection of properties to ensure that they are not overcrowded.
4. That Kirklees Housing Services should recognise that whilst early accommodation is easily found from less popular properties as the scheme continues accommodation might have to be provided from housing stock which is in demand from Kirklees people. The Service needs to ensure that the existing scheme recognises this matter in order to avoid frustration amongst people on the housing waiting list. The Housing Service should identify, as far as possible, all temporary properties which are intended for occupation by asylum seekers.
5. That Kirklees Education Service should ensure that support arrangements for children of asylum seekers placed in local schools, are suitable and adequate and that schools will work to help children with a relevant education on a short-term basis and on a long-term basis for those who, continue to reside in Kirklees following a positive decision.
6. That Kirklees Social Services who are likely to have an increasing involvement with asylum seekers should ensure that sufficient resources and staff are available to assist and support short-term asylum seekers and those who continue to reside in Kirklees following a positive decision.
7. That Health Service Primary Care Groups should ensure that adequate provision has been made for asylum seekers to access local health service facilities (e.g. registration with the local GP) and accommodation providers should ensure that registration has taken place.
8. That private providers should work with Housing Services to ensure all asylum seekers in the borough gain adequate accommodation and support.
9. That the Regional Consortium for Yorkshire and Humberside and private providers in that area should seek to work together to provide specialist services such as interpreters with the Regional Consortium having an overall co-ordinating role for such services.

10. That NASS Contract Managers should ensure that asylum seekers receive fair and consistent treatment from different accommodation providers and that NASS should consider the suggestion that Contract Managers work on a district basis rather than a contract basis as at present.
11. That NASS should ensure that the accommodation provider and the Council receive not less than two days notice of when asylum seekers will arrive in the borough with a clear indication of the actual time of arrival and of the language spoken so that the relevant interpreter is on hand.
12. That NASS should in any future arrangements ensure parity of contracts between Local Authorities and private sector providers in order that common standards might apply.
13. That the Home Office be urged to incorporate those asylum seekers on the interim scheme in the full scheme at the earliest opportunity.
14. The Panel noted that contracts made provision for asylum seekers to be visited by support workers at 4 weekly intervals. The Panel recommends that as a minimum asylum seekers should be visited on a two weekly basis.
15. That Housing Services and the private sector providers operating in Kirklees should have further discussions regarding the role of support workers and their training requirements in order to achieve common standards of operation.
16. The Panel noted that the issue of "vouchers" to asylum seekers is undertaken by a private company and that the vouchers can only be issued by certain Post Offices. The Panel has also received evidence which suggests that vouchers have arrived late and in some instances have not been provided for longer periods of time (e.g. where an asylum seeker has moved property with information of the new address not having been notified to the company quickly enough). The Panel considers this matter to be unsatisfactory and would urge the Home Office to consider the possibility of Local Authorities being authorised to issue vouchers, generally and at the very least to have a supply of vouchers which can be issued in an emergency.
17. That Kirklees Housing Service should ensure that any future contract takes account of the following costs:-
 - (i) The cost of the interim scheme
 - (ii) The cost of housing support
 - (iii) The cost of social services support
 - (iv) The cost of education supportand that these costs should be recognised by NASS as an essential part of the accommodation contract or preferably should form a separate contract.
18. In connection with 17 above a full assessment should be undertaken of the support costs of both the five year scheme and the interim scheme in order to inform Government of the true costs to the Council. That Government should recognise these hidden costs of support and reimburse the Council accordingly.

19. The Panel acknowledges that the housing and supporting of asylum seekers is a national problem which cannot be left to those Local Authorities who have a major point of entry into the country. However the policy of transporting people across the county and leaving them with an accommodation provider for an indefinite period pending the outcome of their application leads to a great deal of uncertainty and instability. The Panel would urge the government to provide the necessary investment so as to ensure that applications and appeals by asylum seekers are processed and decisions given within 8 weeks of them being placed with an accommodation provider.
20. That NASS should supply Local Authorities with up to date statistics on Asylum Seekers in their districts and stick to easily definable terminology i.e. refer to beds or people not units.
21. That a nationally agreed contract should be established so that all providers have to meet set criteria for set remuneration and that district limits be set to prevent "overload" in certain areas ideally with a Local Authority/Private provider split.
22. That contracts with accommodation providers should ensure that the quality of accommodation to be provided meets agreed standards, furthermore that the number of properties to be made available by each provider (public and private) are achievable in the short and longer term.
23. The Panel has noted areas of concern as notified by asylum seekers to KRAFT such as allegations of overcrowding and household effects not being provided. The Panel requests NASS to ensure that any such allegations are investigated and are not occurring as a result of any omission in a contract specification.