

New Deal for Communities

The National Evaluation

Research Reports

Seeking Asylum in NDC Areas: A Report on Experiences, Policies and Practices

Research Report 18

The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit is currently sponsoring the 2002-2005 national evaluation of New Deal for Communities. This evaluation is being undertaken by a consortium of organisations co-ordinated by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University. The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit.

Those wishing to know more about the evaluation should consult the evaluation's web site in the first instance
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Sheffield Hallam University

**Seeking Asylum in NDC Areas:
A Report on Experiences, Policies
and Practices**

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Against a background of rising numbers of asylum seekers being received into NDC areas, as a result of a policy of dispersal away from the South East, and those seeking asylum 'voting with their feet' about where they want to live, this study was funded as part of the National Evaluation of the New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme.

The principal **objectives of this study** are to:

- Identify the issues associated with the location of asylum seekers in NDC areas
- Identify the policy and practice implications for NDC Partnerships
- Highlight some of the approaches made by Partnerships to address barriers to policy and practice; and
- Highlight key messages for policy makers

Interviews with local, regional and national organisations and agencies were carried out between April and June 2003, in addition to work in five case studies NDC areas: Liverpool, Salford, Manchester, Sheffield and Haringey. At a workshop held in July 2003, 70 or so representatives, from a wide range of stakeholders, were invited to comment on the main findings of the research and to engage further in identifying issues and constructing agendas.

One finding from this study is how the use of the terms *asylum seeker* and *refugee*, whilst having specific legal definitions, are used interchangeably by almost everyone outside the Immigration and Nationality Directorate of the Home Office. This distinction has little applicability when it comes to policy and practices in relation to renewal and community cohesion.

Implications

The evidence from this work points to four major implications arising from an increase in asylum seekers:

In relation to **community cohesion**:

- Respondents argue that the presence of more asylum seekers had enhanced cultural diversity
- Many asylum seekers have found the local population to be friendly
- Although, to varying degrees, many had encountered a degree of hostility, partly driven by the view that asylum seekers are receiving preferential treatment
- There is often fierce resentment amongst residents about the image of their communities portrayed by the media

In terms of **housing**:

- In the short run asylum seekers can reduce the numbers of vacant housing in areas of low demand
- But in the longer run there are concerns about the potentially adverse impact on community cohesion, the degree to which asylum seekers are likely to stay in the area, and the role of private landlords in buying up housing of poor quality

In relation to **economic activity** several observers pointed to the positive impact which asylum seekers can make on an area, but frustrations are also expressed that restrictions drive them into the informal economy.

And in relation to **local services**:

- An influx of asylum seekers can place very heavy demands on health and education services; schools can act as 'clearing houses' for all kinds of issues, many beyond their remit
- There is a strong sense that at the local level there are too many, often poorly organised, services

In terms of the concerns of **key stakeholders**:

- **Consortia and Local Authorities** are concerned about influences on the local housing market of significant and unregulated numbers of poor quality properties. They also express concerns about burdens on local resources and services from delays in removing those who receive negative decisions.
- **Support Agencies and Statutory Services** can be ill-equipped to cope with people with diverse and specialist needs, particularly if they tend to be located in a few areas.
- Many **local residents** are welcoming and supportive of people seeking asylum who find themselves in their local area. However, some are suspicious of their motives for being in an area with high multiple deprivations and poor services. Further, some feel it is difficult to discuss matters of service capacity and priorities for resource allocation without racist accusations being made.
- **Asylum seekers** themselves tend to find that the asylum process can add to rather than alleviate their problems and anxieties. Poor housing, problems with benefits, language, health and education services, and their ineligibility for work all add to exclusion.
- In the five case study areas, we found **NDC Partnerships** actively experimenting with projects, multi-agency working, education and service support to engage with asylum seekers in the development of NDC communities.

Policy and Practice Implications

In terms of policy development NDC Partnerships need to:

- **Find out what's going on.** Partnerships need to find out who is coming into the NDC and adjoining areas. This means numbers, timings, language, and characteristics such as household type, age, gender, disabilities, health needs, skills, etc. If this information cannot be "received" from an official source then it should be assembled by Partnerships themselves.

- **Make every effort to include the needs of asylum seekers within their programmes.**
- **Find ways to support and engage asylum seekers by linking NDCs to agencies working with asylum seekers and accessing their resources – financial, cultural, accommodation, personnel, support services, networks, trust, etc.**

This study found a number of **barriers impacting on the work of Partnerships:**

- The complexity of roles of those involved the asylum process
- Ill thought through structures and relationships for managing the asylum process
- The inadequacy of local support structures and the paucity of local resources
- A lack of partnership working in a high politicised and media aware context
- The range of anxieties of members of local communities - not helped by media hype and sensational reporting
- No clear vision or policies on the place of those seeking asylum in urban renewal. Policy on integration is a particular problem
- Uncertainty amongst NDC Partnerships about their role in the asylum process and the about legitimacy of committing resources
- A lack of involvement by those seeking asylum or their representatives in the NDC programme

1. Introduction and Context

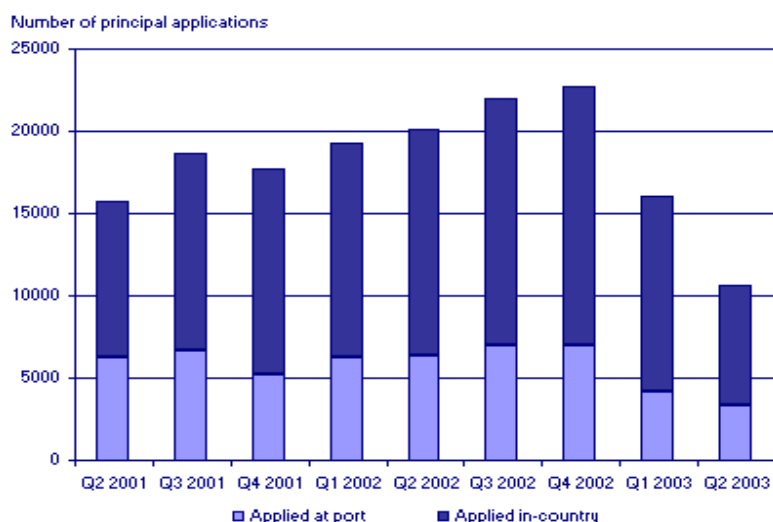
1.1 Introduction

There has been a marked growth in the number of people seeking asylum in this country. Many have been housed in areas of depressed housing demand, including a number of New Deal for Communities (NDC) areas. This report presents the key findings from a study of asylum seekers in NDC areas, funded by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) as part of the National Evaluation of the NDC programme. The research was undertaken by a team based at CRESR at Sheffield Hallam University, CUPS at the University of Manchester, and EIUA, at Liverpool John Moores University.

1.2 Context

In the last decade, the number of people applying for asylum in the UK has grown significantly, as Figure 1.1 illustrates. In 2002, there were 85,865 applications for asylum in the United Kingdom, representing an increase of 20% on the previous year and a rise of 289% on the figure for 1996, when 30,000 applications were received.

Figure 1.1: Application for asylum in the United Kingdom (excluding dependents)



Source: Immigration, Research and Statistics and Service, Home Office, February 2003

However, the first six months of 2003 saw a significant drop in the number of applications. In the first quarter some 16,000 people made applications, while a little over 10,000 applied between April and June. People from many countries apply for asylum in the United Kingdom. The top 10 nationalities, by volume of applications, are shown in Table 1.1

Table 1.1: Applications received for asylum in the United Kingdom, excluding dependents, by nationality between 2000 - 2002 (Top 10 nationalities)

| | |
|-------------------------------|-------|
| Iraq | 7,475 |
| Sri Lanka | 6,395 |
| Former Republic of Yugoslavia | 6,070 |
| Iran | 5,610 |
| Afghanistan | 5,555 |
| Somalia | 5,020 |
| China | 4,000 |
| Turkey | 3,990 |
| Pakistan | 3,165 |
| Former USSR | 2,505 |

Source: Home Office

The growth in numbers saw a Government re-think about how applications should be processed and how those seeking refuge status supported. In the last five years, the UK'S response to dealing with asylum seekers has changed markedly. There have been two major pieces of legislation: the *Immigration and Asylum Act* of 1999, and the *Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act* of 2002; and the creation in 2000 of a body responsible for providing support to asylum seekers, the National Asylum Support Services (NASS).

NASS, which falls under the remit of the Home Office, is charged with providing support to asylum seekers to this country. It has been responsible for implementing and managing the dispersal of asylum seekers to the regions, and at a local level which best suit their social, cultural and language needs. NASS is undergoing significant organisational restructuring and is 'regionalising' by creating substantial staff bases at the regional level.

Regional consortia, usually comprising representatives from local authorities, voluntary sector organisations, housing providers and health organisations, have also been established to ensure effective inter-agency working to support asylum seekers and refugees at regional and sub-regional levels.

Concerns have been expressed by some NDC Partnerships about the impact of asylum seekers on regeneration in their localities. There seems to be very little, accessible neighbourhood based information on the distribution of asylum seekers. As a result, conversations about numbers and impacts tend to take place around anecdotes and perceptions. However, in 2002, the NDC evaluation commissioned a household survey from MORI and NOP. This indicated that 3.1% of all respondents in NDC areas had applied for asylum in this country *at some stage*. It should be noted that this figure includes 'refugees' i.e. those whose applications for asylum has been accepted.

As table 1.2 illustrates, the proportion of asylum seekers and refugees in NDC areas varies at the regional level, with London and Yorkshire and Humberside having the highest proportions (6.8% and 4.3% respectively), and the South East (0.1%) and South West (0.8%) the lowest.

Table 1.2: Asylum seeker and refugees in NDC areas

| Region | % of respondents that had applied for refugee status in this country <i>at some stage</i> |
|---------------------------|---|
| Eastern | 1.2 |
| South-East | 0.1 |
| South-West | 0.8 |
| West Midlands | 1.2 |
| East Midlands | 2.1 |
| Yorkshire & Humberside | 4.3 |
| North-West | 1.3 |
| North-East | 2.4 |
| London | 6.8 |
| Overall percentage | 3.1 |

Analysis of the MORI data at a Partnership level revealed Sheffield (11.0%), Haringey (9.8%), and Southwark (9.6%) as having the highest proportions of respondents who had applied for refugee status *at some stage*. In a number of NDC areas, no residents assigned themselves to this category.

1.3 Research Objectives

The principal **objectives of this study** are to:

- Identify the issues associated with the location of asylum seekers in NDC areas
- Identify the policy and practice implications for NDC Partnerships
- Highlight some of the approaches made by Partnerships to address barriers to policy and practice
- And highlight key messages for policy makers

1.4 Research Approach and Limitations of the Study

This study focuses on asylum seekers in NDC areas - i.e. on people who have applied for refugee status in this country under the terms of the 1951 United Nations Convention. Although the legal distinction between ‘asylum seeker’ and ‘refugee’ is relatively precise, distinctions become blurred and perhaps meaningless in the context of regeneration and community cohesion. Whilst the research was conducted specifically in regard to asylum seekers, the team found that many of those interviewed used the terms ‘refugee’ and ‘asylum seeker’ interchangeably.

The project, which began in April 2003, comprised four main elements¹:

1. A review of the literature and data associated with asylum seekers in the United Kingdom
2. Interviews with representatives from key national stakeholder groups, including the Home Office, NASS, the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, and the Refugee Council

¹ Further information about the research methods and the approach employed in this study can be found in Appendix 1

3. Case studies in contrasting environments, designed to assess the impact and experiences of asylum seekers in NDC areas. These involved documentary analysis, interviews with a range of key local actors, and focus groups with asylum seekers. The case study NDC areas are Haringey, Liverpool, Manchester; Salford, and Sheffield
4. A research seminar, where the key findings from the study were presented for discussion to stakeholders

Before discussing the findings of the study, a number of health-warnings are in order. Perhaps the most obvious of these relates to the scale and remit of the project. This is a relatively small-scale study, with a robust but limited fieldwork element. As such, the research findings should be seen as providing indicative rather than conclusive evidence.

Second, the study does not examine the specific experiences or assess the impacts on NDC areas of a number of important groups - such as people with exceptional leave to stay, and asylum applicants whose applications have been unsuccessful.

And third, much of the evidence is qualitative and is concerned with exploring the perceptions of (i) people living and working in NDC areas and (ii) national, regional and local stakeholders. The analysis presented therefore relates to *perceived* impacts and implications.

2. Implications

2.1 Introduction

This section assesses the implications of the presence of asylum seekers in the five case study NDC areas, pen-portraits of which are embedded in this section. Evidence is drawn from interviews with all key stakeholders: asylum consortia, local authorities, support agencies, statutory services, government departments, NDC Partnerships, local residents and so on. The overarching messages emerging from these interviews are outlined in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 – Asylum Seekers in NDC Areas: Some Implications

| Respondent Perceptions | Regeneration | Community cohesion |
|--|---|---|
| <p>The perceived positive impacts on NDC areas of the presence of those seeking asylum are:</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting innovation and new ways to solve local problems. • Adding to the local economy. They have an ethos of working hard and offer a range of locally available skills and experiences. They also have some money to spend. • Increasing attainment levels in schools. • Occupying low demand property that would otherwise be demolished or lie empty. • Raising demand for and hence market value of local properties | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a vibrancy, a dynamism in the area • Enriching the local culture. • Contributing to community values. Many are family-oriented; they help each other out, build support network, and are good neighbours. • Reducing youth nuisance and graffiti by being good tenants • In areas of high turnover, offering a desirable alternative to “smackheads”. |
| <p>The perceived negative impacts on NDC areas of the presence of those seeking asylum are:</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupying low demand property that would otherwise be demolished and the area rebuilt. • Undermining the achievement of floor targets and other indicators (e.g. in health, education) which may influence access to future funding. • Placing additional and uncertain requirements (e.g. provision of language support) on all service providers, making mainstreaming of many focused/ innovative services less likely. • Exceeding the capacity of local services to meet locals demand (e.g. numbers of school places) which requires local people to travel or move and can unpick local ties. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating friction/ sense of inequity in areas of high housing demand amongst those who have waited some time to be housed. • Skewing property values and the local housing market, making it more attractive to speculative and absentee landlords with no interest in the area. • Adding to existing residents’ sense of being forgotten or last in line when funding goes to projects to support those seeking asylum but not to “local” groups – e.g. health, nursery provision. • Presenting an easy platform for those interested in pursuing racist political agendas. |

The issues addressed in Figure 2.1 can best be explored under the following headings:

- Community cohesion
- Housing
- Economic activity
- Local services

2.2 Community Cohesion

Paragraphs below examine the perceived impact of the presence of asylum seekers in relation to cultural diversity, the experiences of asylum seekers, anxieties of local residents, perceived preferential treatment, and media impact.

2.2.1 Cultural diversity

Respondents in all five areas reported that the presence of asylum seekers had added to the cultural diversity of their areas.

"Haringey has a diverse and rich ethnic mix, of which it is very proud - and new arrivals have added to that." (Local Authority Officer)

"Before dispersal Burngreave was diverse, even though not as diverse as now... the dispersal of asylum seekers has enriched the Burngreave community." (Housing Provider Officer)

"A lot of good things are brought to the communities (by asylum seekers) from different cultures. They (asylum seekers) are often quite family orientated, they help each other out, support networks, we should learn from that." (Representative from a Regional Consortium)

2.2.2 The experiences of asylum seekers

While there were variations across the five areas, many asylum seekers we spoke to appeared to have found the local population relatively friendly and welcoming and few had experienced hostility.

"The people who are not even from our country, the English people, are friendly towards us. When we ask questions of people on the street, they try to help and to understand what we really want. We respect the people here and that is why we get respect in return." (Asylum Seeker)

"Nobody is harassing us, which is good and we don't have any problems with other people in the area." (Asylum Seeker)

We asked local people and local service providers why they thought asylum seekers seemed more welcome in some areas than others. Whilst a range of factors were cited, several felt that the history of the local population and the area were critical factors. For example, an NDC Officer in Manchester thought that the relatively successful inclusion of asylum seekers in that area could in part be put down to

"the long tradition of welcoming immigrant groups in the area".

A local Housing Association Officer described a similar situation in Sheffield:

"Burngreave is a very diverse area and has a history of embracing people. It doesn't have the same tensions as other places. Asylum seekers are not out of place there."

A number of national stakeholders shared this view, that asylum seekers experience fewer difficulties in areas that already have a diverse local population, but added to this the availability of services. The following comment was typical:

"Often things work better if there are existing communities already in place. For example, in the West Midlands there is a long history of refugees and asylum seekers in the area. Local services there are geared up for them – for example, translators are in place.... But in Peterborough for example, which has relatively little experience of asylum seekers, then the services aren't geared up for them."

A Sikh asylum seeker, dispersed to an area with a diverse local population, was very unhappy that he had been located in a neighbourhood and city that had a relatively small Sikh community, and therefore did not meet his needs:

"There is no Sikh community to mix with. There is not a very big Sikh community in xxxx. I am from Afghanistan but I'm a Sikh. We feel isolated here. I want to move to London or Birmingham because they have big Sikh communities."

Similarly:

"I want to move to a different part of the city where I will be amongst other Muslims - I stick out here and sometimes feel lonely." (Asylum Seeker)

The reasons for the apparent popularity of certain areas amongst asylum seekers suggests that they are already diverse, they house residents with similar backgrounds to asylum seekers, *and* because local services and networks are in place to cater for specific ethnic and minority needs. For example, two people were very clear about the advantages of living in area where their cultural and faith requirements were catered for:

"Having the community centre available to meet with other women helps us to keep the traditions of Somalia and helps us to tackle our problems, for example with housing, DSS and immigration issues." (Refugee)

"We have got used to the area, there are services near by, near to town, and there is a Mosque and Halal shops." (Asylum Seeker)

Officers in local authorities also recognised the benefits to asylum seekers of living in culturally diverse areas, well serviced to meet their needs:

"For asylum seekers, it's good to be in an area where other people from your community or country live. Issues such as buying appropriate food can be met for instance." (NDC Officer)

2.2.3 Anxieties of local residents

It was difficult to form an accurate picture as to whether asylum seekers have been subject to harassment. Robust information about offences against asylum seekers is difficult to access in some areas and the prevailing view is that much low level harassment goes unreported, as the following statement from an asylum seeker suggests:

"I have experienced many incidents of racial harassment, but it is only a crime if it is physical, not name calling. People do not know how to complain and the police do not know either."

Our analysis suggests that asylum seekers in each of the five case studies had to *varying degrees* all experienced some hostility from local residents. The concentration of asylum seekers in some areas makes them a very visible target for extremist groups and arouses fears amongst some local residents. There are concerns that this threatens community cohesion. Authorities can sometimes argue that they do not have enough accommodation for refugees in the right areas to help maintain school and other support networks. In Salford, for example, it was reported that hostility had increased when asylum seekers became "an obvious presence" in the area, following the introduction of dispersal.

Antipathy towards asylum seekers has been fuelled by the active presence of the British National Party and it was suggested that asylum seekers have been made 'scapegoats' for the deprivation experienced by many residents. Whilst reports of harassment of asylum seekers are widespread, hard data is not forthcoming.

There is some evidence to suggest the level of harassment suffered by asylum seekers is in part linked to world events: for example asylum seekers in Liverpool reported that it rose after September 11th and the start of the war in Iraq. These world events, it was argued, also altered the public perceptions of the group – even in culturally diverse areas:

"There has been a lot of propaganda since September 11th which has changed public attitudes towards asylum seekers." (Housing Provider Officer)

"At the beginning of the contract in 2000 attitudes towards asylum seekers was more positive. Since September 11th attitudes have hardened even in Sheffield." (Housing Association Officer)

"We got some abuse after September 11th [2001], but that soon died down. It is the children who give us abuse now - not adults - calling us racist names." (Asylum Seeker)

Violent incidents against asylum seekers may reflect the high crime rates in these areas, rather than any underlying hostility towards the group. This assertion appears to be corroborated by the views of asylum seekers themselves:

"There is a lot of criminal activity taking place... There is a rumour that at least once a week someone will get killed in the area, which is very frightening." (Asylum Seeker)

"Between 5pm and 6pm it is very common to be approached by someone with a knife. They rob your money or your gold." (Refugee)

"A lot of people use drugs in the area and people get desperate when they are on drugs – people turn to crime and mugging people." (Asylum Seeker)

We found some evidence to suggest the response of the local population to asylum seekers was in part dependent on household types: families appear to be more 'acceptable' to local communities than single young men. For example, in Salford, it was the tendency of single male asylum seekers to congregate in "large groups" that evoked most hostility from the local community (particularly local youths who attacked a building in which asylum seekers were living).

A representative of a national stakeholder organisation also noted the importance of household type in shaping attitudes:

"There's a preponderance of single males amongst asylum seekers and this tends to attract trouble."

Many thought it was unrealistic to expect asylum seekers and local communities to instantaneously 'get along' and that inclusion and the allaying of fears would 'take time'.

"If people want asylum seekers and refugees to mix with the majority they need to understand that it will take time, people need to understand the different cultures and be sensitive to them and the problems back home. The government don't understand different cultures and don't know how to talk to asylum seekers and refugees. Asylum seekers and refugees also need to understand the British culture." (Residents' Group Representative).

Case Study Profile: Sheffield Burngreave NDC

Burngreave NDC is home to around 10,500 people and is one of the most ethnically diverse and deprived areas of Sheffield. There is a long history of welcoming people with significant Caribbean, Pakistani, Somali and Yemeni communities. The NDC Household Survey 2002 indicated that 52 per cent of respondents in the Burngreave NDC area are from BME communities. The neighbourhood's housing stock is a mix of late Victorian terraces, large terrace villas and more recent council housing. Around 50% of households are in local authority accommodation, 35% are owner occupied and 8% are in private rented housing. Burngreave has a variable housing market. There have been significant demolitions of some local authority housing in the past year and private sector housing in the area is variable, with some in a poor state of repair.

Recently there has been rising demand for property, mainly for larger semi-detached and detached properties. In addition to housing, the neighbourhood has a busy commercial centre with a variety of small shops, cafes and businesses.

The number of people seeking asylum and/or with refugee experiences is difficult to ascertain. The NDC Household Survey 2002 indicated that 12 per cent of respondents had applied for refugee status. In the Burngreave NDC area, in April 2003, there were 55 NASS contracted properties with 97 cases and 134 clients. 27% were from Iraq, 21% from Afghanistan, and 15% from Iran. Four main housing providers accommodate NASS cases in the NDC: Safe Haven Yorkshire, Angel Housing Group, Clearsprings and the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Consortium.

The neighbourhood is supported by a variety of community groups working for and with people seeking asylum and people with refugee experiences. These include supported housing and tenancy support schemes for people who have recently received a positive decision (leave to remain), advice and support services and the Refugee Forum - set up by Sheffield City Council's asylum team to bring together those providing services for asylum seekers.

2.2.4 Perceived preferential treatment

Our analysis suggests that resentment towards asylum seekers is often driven by the belief that this group is receiving (unfair) preferential treatment from the state.

"There is resentment from some in the community, particularly about housing. When people cannot get housing themselves, they get angry that asylum seekers do". (Local Authority Officer)

"Then there's a perception issue. We're in a high housing demand area and there's a perception that asylum seekers get preferential housing allocations ...This is a simmering issue and people are finding it difficult to verbalise it without appearing racist." (NDC Officer)

Some observers were quick to point out that local residents' resentment was unfounded and that asylum seekers did not receive preferential treatment but just the opposite:

"There's some resentment from local people that asylum seekers are getting furnished houses, but it's only very basic furniture and it's housing that no one else wanted to live in." (Representative from a Regional Consortium)

Nevertheless, evidence derived from this study indicated that in these areas of high multiple deprivation, some residents are suspicious of why people would seek asylum in these areas. With asylum seekers now coming from the former communist and eastern European states, *"there's a feeling that these aren't refugees – they're just here for work."* Long standing existing residents who may be out of work can be challenged by feelings of displacement and being pushed out.

Residents can find it difficult to express their concerns, about housing or educational support for certain groups, without appearing racist, so tensions continue to simmer. There are concerns that legitimate debates about under-resourcing or ineffective targeting of resources can become reframed into battles about who's getting what. There can be deep tensions regarding preferential treatment for one group over another, who deserves to be helped, and who is part of the community. Some existing residents may fear for the future of the NDC area. Does the future of NDC areas lie in becoming transit camps for any displaced or excluded groups, and what then would be the implications for the deployment of "their" NDC resources? What does that mean for the people who stay?

Kensington Regeneration News, an NDC newsletter, used a full page spread in a recent issue to represent the situation of asylum seekers in the area in a positive way. A Refugee's Story gives an account of a hospital doctor who fled his home in Burundi. It relates the events leading up to his escape and talks about steps he is taking to enable him to practise medicine in this country. It also mentions his problems in Kensington with children smashing windows in the house he shared with others. The report also includes an overview from the BME Outreach Worker about asylum seekers, highlighting their plight at home but also stressing their potential contribution to Kensington.

A third item in the newsletter reported events marking Refugee Week. When traditional Kosovan dancers performed in a local youth club to an audience of other young refugees and asylum seekers and young Kensington residents, asylum seekers also had an opportunity to tell their stories. A similar event in a community centre again brought local people together with asylum seekers. The newsletter describes how "Events like these are helpful because they give community groups an opportunity to share cultures and meet and make friends with people in an informal way."

2.2.5 Media Impact

Agitation in local communities is continually fuelled by press sensationalism and there is fierce resentment amongst many residents we spoke to about how the image of their communities is manipulated for media gain. On the ground lots of positive things are happening, communities are welcoming and supportive in many cases, but these successes are being eroded by a high powered and relentless media assault. On several occasions, it was suggested that local residents' attitudes towards asylum seekers are influenced by sensational media reporting:

"Experiences are very different, but often asylum seekers are scapegoats. There's anger about social things - poor housing, education, health and so on - and anger is targeted at refugees. Fuel is added by certain sections of the media, creating what I call the 'double disadvantage.'" (Representative from a National Stakeholder Organisation)

"You constantly have to defend what you're doing. The media don't help." (Representative from a Regional Consortium)

"On the ground lots of positive things are happening. Communities are welcoming and supportive in many cases, but these successes are being eroded by a high powered media assault." (Representative from a National Stakeholder Organisation)

There may be a role for NDC newsletters to encourage better understandings and a more positive role.

2.3 Housing

Paragraphs below address the implications of asylum seekers on local housing.

2.3.1 Short term impacts on housing demand

Four case study areas, Sheffield, Salford, Manchester and Liverpool, suffer varying degrees of low demand for housing. The movement of asylum seekers into these areas has had the effect of reducing the numbers of empty properties:

"Asylum seekers have been dispersed into low demand properties that no one else wanted. If asylum seekers weren't placed there they would have been demolished. It's better that there are new people in the areas and bringing money into the local economy." (Representative from a Regional Consortium)

"I think it's better to have asylum seekers living in housing than for it to be bricked up." (Representative from a National Stakeholder Organisation)

In Liverpool, some local residents recognise and welcome the presence of asylum seekers in helping to reduce the numbers of empty properties in the area. In the Manchester NDC, the emergence of a waiting list for local authority housing was attributed to the inward movement of asylum seekers.

However, the nature of the impact on the local housing market seems to depend on a number of factors, including volumes and concentrations of properties for the use of asylum seekers and occupancy and turnover rates. One local authority officer in the North West suggested that:

“It is too simplistic to suggest (local authority X) does not want asylum seekers to go to NDC or other renewal areas. In fact, asylum seekers are changing patterns of demand for council stock, which is very beneficial.”

Case Study Profile: Liverpool Kensington NDC

The area has a high turnover of residents, with low demand for both owner occupied and rented housing and low levels of satisfaction. 68% is privately owned, with half rented out and in poor condition. Kensington has significant levels of clearance and redevelopment is being negotiated with the local community. A new housing vehicle, Community 7 has taken over the combined stock of the RSLs. High numbers of vacant properties are presented at auction with very low reserves, depressing market prices and encouraging speculators to buy properties both for current income through letting to asylum seekers and in the hope of higher values when the property is needed for demolition or as part of the renewal programme.

A 2002 MOR/NOP Household Survey indicated that 13% of respondents in the NDC area are from BME communities. Local intelligence suggests there are 650-700 asylum seekers in Kensington NDC (population 13,500) mainly from Africa (Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and Zimbabwe), Eastern Europe (Czech Roma, Kosovans), Middle East (Iraq), and Asia (Sri Lanka, Pakistan).

Almost all asylum seekers in Liverpool are in private sector accommodation due to difficulties in creating a viable local consortium. Elsewhere in the city, a large provider, contracted by NASS, was the subject of an independent enquiry. This found that, although there was no breach of contract, there were major problems relating to the suitability of accommodation and the needs and rights of asylum seekers.

Asylum seekers were dispersed to the area largely after the production of the original Partnership delivery plan and some local residents feel that NDC funding is intended for longer standing residents only. This, combined with the lack of adequate data and the multiplicity of groups/nationalities, has made it difficult to develop any coherent response. Some NDC support has been given to various groups working with asylum seekers. The appointment of the Co-ordinator for Liverpool Council's Refugee/Asylum Seeker project onto the NDC Board has created a slightly more direct link with asylum seekers.

2.3.2 Medium and longer term impacts on housing demand

While most of those we spoke to felt that the movement of asylum seekers into NDC areas had had a positive impact on housing demand in the short term, there was some debate about the *medium* and *longer term* effects of their presence. Two issues were raised over and over again:

- The (potentially) adverse impact of the presence of asylum seekers on community cohesion could make the areas more unpopular, with both *existing* and *potential* residents, thereby undermining housing demand.
- Asylum seekers are a highly mobile group and (understandably) unlikely and unwilling to make a long term commitment to an area – especially an area with a history of multiple deprivation. Sustaining the rise in housing demand beyond the short term will therefore be difficult, if not impossible.

This second issue contains a number of contested assertions about how mobile, how committed to an area, and how much choice asylum seekers have about where they live. A selection of views is shown below:

"Asylum seekers are transient by their nature, they have no particular roots, they don't really join local groups as they don't know the decision of their application, and therefore don't have a voice." (Representative from the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Consortium)

"Lots of families want to stay in their area when they get a positive decision as they have been supported and often welcomed into the community and like the areas." (Representative from a National Stakeholder Organisation)

"Because the area was where we started when we first came to the country, we got to know it and the services which were available, so we just stayed here because of that." (Former Asylum Seeker)

The issue of asylum seeker mobility was explored with representatives from key national stakeholder organisations. Respondents acknowledged the lack of data on the issue but felt that the transience of the group had been exaggerated.

"It's hard to get data on this... but roughly between 50% and 65% of asylum seekers with a positive decision choose to stay in their region." (Representative from a National Stakeholder Organisation)

From our case studies, it would appear that in those areas with (i) a longer history of people seeking asylum and (ii) the availability of specific support services, the overall view was that many asylum seekers wanted to (and did) stay if they received a positive decision.

In two case study areas, Sheffield and Liverpool, the lack of suitable vacant property in the neighbourhood results in some asylum seekers who have a 'positive' decision having no option but to move out of the area. Representatives from two national stakeholders suggested that this problem was not unique to these areas:

"The problem when asylum seekers get a positive decision is finding them another house that isn't too far from schools children are already in and maintaining support networks." (Representative from a National Stakeholder Organisation)

"A lot of local authority housing has been sold off through stock transfer. Therefore there is not enough 'move on' accommodation for refugees." (Representative from a National Stakeholder Organisation)

The limited time (28 days) given to asylum seekers to leave their NASS accommodation once a positive decision had been received was mentioned a number of times. This was seen as limiting refugees' housing choices in their dispersal areas and forcing them to go elsewhere:

"When asylum seekers get a positive decision they get 28 days to leave NASS accommodation, which isn't much time. When trying to secure permanent accommodation they often get housed in a different area where they have to build up new support networks." (Representative from a National Stakeholder Organisation)

Case Study Profile: Salford Charlestown & Lower Kersal NDC

Charlestown and Lower Kersal NDC has a population of 10,000 in inner city Salford and lies within the Manchester-Salford Housing Market Renewal Fund area. The NDC area includes distinct communities and pockets of housing as well as an industrial area, the student village of Salford University, and large areas of green land. 40% of housing is owner occupied and 11% is private rented. Owner-occupiers have been leaving. Cheaper housing is bought by landlords to let to housing benefit recipients and possibly to asylum seekers. Like other parts of Salford, the NDC has a small BME population (6%). The area is described as “insular” and does not have a history of receiving immigrant groups.

It is estimated that there are around 1200-1300 asylum seekers in Salford as a whole and around 250 in the NDC area. Asylum seekers and refugees originate from a range of countries including: Afghanistan, Iraq (Kurds), Iran, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Eritrea, and the Czech Republic (Romany). In Salford, approximately 150 council homes have been used for dispersal and around three times as many private rented properties. One large property in the area, housing a number of young male asylum seekers, has caused some friction with local people. Salford City Council launched a scrutiny commission to investigate the experience of the city's asylum seekers and refugees in December 2002. The Commission has looked into what services are provided to asylum seekers and refugees, and will produce recommendations as to how the City Council and other agencies can improve those services.

The NDC Partnership has part-funded and supported a new organisation, Refugees and Asylum Seekers Participatory Action Research, which aims to gather evidence with asylum seekers about their needs in order to improve services and develop their own capacity. Five former asylum seekers are employed as community development workers and NDC staff are linked into professional networks concerned with asylum seeker issues. In addition, the NDC is working with some highly-skilled individuals to help them gain English credentials and access employment in this country.

2.3.3 The housing circumstances of asylum seekers

Many of those seeking asylum are dissatisfied with the state of their accommodation. In turn stakeholder respondents express concern at the quality of accommodation for asylum seekers, especially that provided by private landlords.

A survey by Manchester City Council found that an estimated 35% of this form of accommodation was unfit for habitation, with many houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) lacking compulsory fire safety equipment. Similar concerns were expressed in Liverpool where it was added that asylum seekers were afraid to complain about their housing because they did not want to jeopardise their application. There is no duty of care on landlords. There were also reports of situations when asylum seekers had been unable to switch on the electricity and of neighbours spotting them living without light or heat and going to help. Stories of intimidation and bullying by private landlords in the area were also widespread.

Case Study Profile: Manchester Beacons NDC

East Manchester NDC comprises two neighbourhoods of terraced and later houses: 63% council owned and 25% owner occupied. The NDC falls within the Manchester-Salford Housing Market Renewal Fund area. The 2002 MORI/NOP household survey indicated that 89% of residents are white, with the most significant minority groups being black (5%), Asian (2%), and Chinese/other groups (3%).

Asylum seekers are dispersed by NASS to the Manchester cluster into housing provided by private agencies (around 1000 properties) and to social housing (around 200 properties) provided through the North West Consortium, which is based in Manchester City's Social Services department. It is estimated that around 500 asylum seekers are accommodated in the two wards partially covered by the NDC. A range of ethnicities is represented in the area including Eastern Europe (Czechs), Africa (Democratic Republic of the Congo), Middle East (Palestine) and South East Asia (Pakistan). Their location within the NDC area reflects the distribution of pre-1919 terraced housing stock.

The Manchester NDC reacted quickly once the dispersal of asylum seekers had been identified as an important issue. A sub-group of the NDC's public agencies forum developed an action plan to consider the needs of local asylum seekers to take steps to improve services. It has been central to discussions about the development of a drop-in centre for asylum seekers and refugees. The NDC is one of the area task groups of the city-wide Multi Agency Forum, which has agreed the strategic framework for developing appropriate services across all partner agencies.

One of the main concerns of Consortia and local authorities in areas of low demand is how private providers "buy up whole streets", which can act as a sudden and unregulated influence on the local housing market. The absence of a statutory duty on providers to maintain the standard of dwellings means NDC areas and Housing Market Renewal areas act "like magnets" to speculative landlords - adding to the long list of problems in these localities. As NASS contracted properties are outside authorities' CPO powers, local authorities and others are concerned that supported accommodation may jeopardise housing market renewal strategies.

For example, there is extensive speculation in Liverpool, with individual landlords buying up empty, often unfit, properties at 'knock down' prices. A number of agents act for individual owner occupiers who are intending to move out but who cannot sell or let their own properties. It is easier for landlords to negotiate with asylum seekers whose expectations are lower and who provide a higher rent yield.

"What happened when NASS began to operate was that speculators saw a massive opportunity. Some existing bad landlords and some speculators benefited from the advent of NASS. In effect there was no control over this."
(Local Authority Officer)

But there is some optimism that NASS has heeded and is responding to these concerns:

"NASS has listened. It has taken on board the prime concern about housing quality – for example, by carrying out a nation-wide survey of properties. There is a worry that this might be a one-off though, which it must not be." (Local Authority Officer)

One local consortium had put in place checks to tackle the activities of unscrupulous landlords:

"The consortium now has good relations with several of the private providers... And some of the worst private landlords now know they will get caught if they are providing appalling housing."

Circumstances can of course change for asylum seekers, which can in turn impact on their relationship to the local housing market. Asylum seekers who get a negative decision get little if any support, after a short period of time. They often resort to staying with friends with knock on effects in relation to housing, health, education and community cohesion problems. "Dropping out" in this way can fuel the perception that asylum seekers are a nuisance or involved in criminal activity. People given leave to remain also need support in finding new accommodation and in going from what has effectively been supported living to living independently in the community. This may particularly apply to young people coping on their own. These transition phases seem to have fallen out of view as far as policies, procedures and funding are concerned.

Agencies express a concern that there can be a conflict of interest between supporting asylum seekers until they receive a decision and then being expected by the Home Office to relinquish any responsibilities and act as a branch of the immigration service in "turfing them out". In addition, asylum seekers given a negative decision can wait months for immigration to act. These "over-stayers" clog-up accommodation and place visible burdens on resources. This may give rise to resentment amongst communities that already see themselves as at the back of the queue.

2.4 Economic Activity

A number of respondents reported that asylum seekers make significant economic contributions to their local economies.

"Asylum seekers help regenerate areas, they have some money, even if not much, to put into the local economy." (Representative from a National Stakeholder Organisation)

"Arguably asylum seekers have helped some local shops to stay open." (NDC Officer)

"Those who have a positive decision will continue to add to the economy especially when working." (Representative from a National Stakeholder Organisation)

In Sheffield a number of asylum seekers who had received a positive decision have set-up businesses in the area, including a Somali café and an internet café.

The preponderance of IT based enterprises amongst these businesses may be indicative of the skill levels of some asylum seekers. Numerous references were made to the high levels of qualifications possessed by many asylum seekers – but many also felt that their skills were under utilised:

"A lot of qualifications asylum seekers and refugees have are not recognised here. Therefore skills are lost. The NHS are now looking into using refugee doctors." (Representative from a National Stakeholder Organisation)

"Organisations need to think of the potential of asylum seekers. We need people with skills to develop the economy as we have an ageing population." (Representative from a National Stakeholder Organisation)

"We work closely with an Iranian refugee who was a doctor back home but now has to work in Pizza Hut. How will he improve his language enough to qualify that way? The NHS doesn't recognise the benefits for them and for local communities of training such people!" (NDC Officer)

In addition to problems over the transferability of asylum seekers' skills and qualifications, two other reasons were given to explain why asylum seekers were under employed in the local community: language difficulties and legal restrictions placed on their capacity to work.

One consequence of the restrictions placed on asylum seekers' ability to work is that many take work in the informal economy:

"Asylum seekers can't get work permits so some are forced underground and often become slave labour under terrible work conditions. They need education and jobs. A lot are willing to work." (Housing Provider Officer)

"They (asylum seekers) do jobs that frankly the indigenous population don't want to touch." (Representative from a National Stakeholder Organisation)

Many of those we spoke to wanted to see work restrictions relaxed believing this will bring tangible benefits for both asylum seekers and local communities:

"The impact will be good if refugees set up their own businesses, areas will be become more multi-cultural, but they need to be given job opportunities and education so they don't fulfil the stereotype of 'benefit shoppers'. Most asylum seekers want to work and that is a positive thing for the UK." (Housing Provider Officer)

Several asylum seekers were frustrated at not being allowed to work:

"We want the opportunity to work and contribute. We could be paying out taxes. Not being able to work, with nothing to do leads to boredom and can make you mentally depressed." (Asylum Seeker)

2.5 Local Services

The presence of asylum seekers in NDC areas has a number of implications for service providers: local service capacity, access and organisation of services, the specific implications for education, and the concerns of asylum seekers themselves.

2.5.1 Local service capacity

Overall, local services are often struggling to cope with the additional demands placed on them by the movement of asylum seekers into NDC areas.

"Services are already stretched in many dispersal areas and when more people come in they are stretched even further. There is a lack of funding for services to accommodate asylum seekers and that's where tensions can arise with local people." (Representative from a National Stakeholder Organisation)

This 'strain' seemed to be more acute in two particular services: health and education – services presenting perhaps the biggest delivery changes to NDC partnerships. This view is typical:

"If they are strongly concentrated in these places (NDC areas) demands on education and health services increase. And while there is an argument that such services will become "expert" providers and hence better able to cope, it is not fair that asylum seekers should bear the brunt of worse services as a result of overstretch." (Representative from a Regional Consortium)

Many service providers were frustrated by what they thought were the unreasonable demands placed on them:

"We don't have the resources for one-to-one working which this issue really needs - so what we prefer to do is empower and create community organisations around the different refugee clusters... it's a real issue for the NDC. We don't have the resources to role services out all at once, and to everyone." (NDC Officer)

"The government needs to contribute more funding to support asylum seekers in these areas to make sure they get access to adequate services, e.g. increase school funding in order to manage the increase in pupils. This is where hostility arises due to pressure on local services." (Representative from a National Stakeholder Organisation)

In all five case study areas, lack of information about the numbers and needs of asylum seekers, particularly at a neighbourhood level, made the targeting of resources highly problematic for service providers.

"There is very little information about who and where asylum seekers are. We are struggling to get information." (NDC Officer)

"There is uncertainty about where people are – the greatest numbers seem to be in xxxx. There is no estimate of numbers for the NDC area but it is definitely large." (Local Service Provider Officer)

" We don't know where people are, how many there are, what they needs have ... tracking people is tricky for us. If we knew where and who everyone was, we'd have a better idea what to do. Our challenge is to understand what's happening." (Local Authority Officer)

2.5.2 Access to services

The difficulties experienced by asylum seekers in accessing local services were widely reported and again education and health were key concerns.

"Another problem is asylum seekers' access, or should I say, lack of access to mainstream services such as education and community facilities. I think education is a particular problem." (Representative from a National Stakeholder Organisation)

Those with specific needs, e.g. for trauma counselling or support for mental health or physical disability problems, seem to find accessing local services even more difficult and the prevailing view is that their needs are not adequately addressed².

² Our research echoes many of the findings relating to service access carried out in 2001 and published by the Home Office (on line report 13/03) as *Asylum seekers in dispersal – health care issues*.

"The asylum policy is not geared up to dealing with special needs. This is an area that's been completely overlooked." (Representative from a National Stakeholder Organisation)

"Asylum seekers with mental health problems find it difficult to access services, they often fall in between services, and services often don't understand their problems ... they (asylum seekers) are fleeing problems but are having to deal with a whole new set of problems here." (Housing Provider Officer)

"There is not much of a problem accessing primary health care. The big problem is the lack of appropriate counselling provision. Many asylum seekers bring issues of anxiety and stress – a product of their background but also the life they lead in the UK. There is a need for more trauma counselling provision...almost all asylum seekers have health problems, particularly mental health issues." (Local Service Provider Officer)

A specific issue was a shortage of doctors in the area who were qualified (and willing) to write reports certifying torture or oppression that are needed by asylum seekers to support their applications.

As might be expected, language difficulties are a major barrier for asylum seekers looking to access services:

"A great deal of effort was involved in arranging for a family to visit the doctor – translators had to be arranged for the appointment. But when the family turned up they were informed that the appointment had been cancelled. A letter had been sent out – but in English!" (Local Service Provider Officer)

While ESOL (English as a Second Language) classes for asylum seekers are established in each case study area, lack of local translators remains a stumbling block to take up and development of this service.

"The massive weakness at the moment is the lack of materials in appropriate languages and accessing of interpreters. There are not the densities of formal and informal links for translation that exist in other parts of the city. There is a huge shortage of appropriate translators." (Local Regeneration Partnership)

In dispersal areas without access to established communities who speak the languages relevant to incoming asylum seekers, the burden on translation services is overwhelming. NASS was felt to have contributed to this problem.

"NASS send us asylum seekers who aren't relevant to our language clusters." (Housing Provider Officer)

2.5.3 The organisation of services

In each NDC area a range of organisations are involved in housing and supporting asylum seekers. Everyone we spoke to *at a local level* thought there were too many organisations involved and that services are ineffectively co-ordinated - resulting in duplication and/or gaps in service provision.

"There is a huge complexity of service providers to asylum seekers in the city." (Local Service Provider Officer)

"I think that it (service provision) is too fragmented in the area... the resources that are being targeted for asylum seekers are not being used effectively as services overlap... I think the co-ordination of services is a real issue." (NDC officer)

But irrespective of how well services might be organised, some of those interviewed spoke of asylum seekers' lack of faith and a trust in any services:

"Refugees are sensitive to issues, a lot are wary of services, often thinking services are "working for themselves" and that they have their own agenda. Refugees have already seen that services are not doing anything for other people in the community and therefore are wary of approaching services." (Residents' Group Representative)

"A lot of refugees and asylum seekers don't trust services, they don't understand their problems." (Local Service Provider Officer)

The view that the asylum process contributes to rather than alleviates the problems facing asylum seekers was raised a number of times:

"We find that many asylum seekers shut themselves away and go out very rarely. They are either afraid or have a very limited social circle. Some people argue that the situation asylum seekers face replicates the conditions they are fleeing." (Local Service Provider Officer)

Case Study Profile: The Bridge NDC Haringey

The Bridge NDC neighbourhood in Haringey is home to around 9,500 people and is one of the most ethnically diverse and deprived areas of London. Around 140 languages are spoken locally and 70% of the population are from minority ethnic communities. The housing stock is a mix of small terraced houses and more recent council estates. 50 percent of households are in local authority accommodation, 30 percent owner occupied, and 11 percent privately rented housing. A significant proportion of this is short-term temporary accommodation, some of which is occupied by families and individuals seeking asylum in the UK. In addition, Haringey has around one third of London's 'hotel annexes' that are used as temporary accommodation. The NDC team believes that many 'right-to-buy' council properties have become poorly maintained short-term lets. In addition, the neighbourhood has a Tube station to central London, a small industrial estate, a variety of small shops and businesses, a hospital, six primary schools and two parks.

Haringey has attracted a significant population of newly arrived families, single adults and unaccompanied minors who are either seeking asylum in the UK or have permission to stay. The presence of many different cultural and ethnic communities, relatively affordable housing, a long history of welcoming refugees and a range of community and local authority support services may explain its attraction.

Haringey Council's Asylum Service supports and accommodates destitute asylum seekers who have been resident for over a year. In May 2003, the service supported 847 families, 517 single adults and 267 unaccompanied minors - more than any other London borough. The main ethnic groups include Turks, Kurds, Somalis, Albanians, Kosovans and Black Africans. Families and single adults are placed in Haringey by other boroughs, due mainly to the affordable housing. Numbers are not known. In addition, NASS supports around 2000 people directly.

The NDC is keen to engage the refugee and asylum seeker community in all its activities, for example by developing good practice in making school a more positive experience for newly arrived pupils. An Asylum Seeker Forum is proposed to promote local involvement.

2.5.4 Education

Whilst the concentration of asylum seekers was generally perceived in a negative, light in relation to health, there was some disagreement about the implications on educational achievement. Some respondents, including several from Sheffield, Haringey and Liverpool, believe that the presence of asylum seekers in NDC areas may result in improved educational attainment *in the long term*:

"They are more willing to learn. Kids achieve well in schools, they want to be there. Once they have mastered English they often do better than our kids."
(Representative from a Regional Consortium)

"Asylum seekers and their children are more motivated to learn."
(Representative from a National Stakeholder Organisation)

An OFSTED report on a local primary school in Liverpool commented on the very good progress of the children of asylum seekers staying over six months. They often appeared "more advanced" in their educational development than local children. In schools in Haringey and Sheffield, it was reported that asylum seekers are performing as well as local children.

However, the presence of asylum seekers is also seen as placing additional financial and resource demands on local schools, demands they are ill equipped to meet. Overcrowding is an issue in Sheffield and Manchester, while translation coverage seems to be an issue in all the case study areas. We were also told that, in preference to other service providers, schools are often left to address a whole raft of other needs, a service which most schools struggle to provide.

2.6 Other Issues

2.6.1 Synthesis of Views

Summing up the issues raised by different stakeholders suggests that the experiences of asylum seekers may vary considerably depending upon prevailing histories, cultures and institutional settings. Our analysis of the evidence we have accessed suggests that:

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|--|--|
| <p>Those seeking asylum tend to be perceived as an asset where:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An area has: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A history of acceptance of those seeking asylum • A local population that is diverse and comfortable with a range of cultures and ethnicities 2. Those seeking asylum have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Useful skills/recognised qualifications/ access to (re)training & language support 3. The provision of services to those seeking asylum is perceived <i>not</i> to be at the expense of more established residents. | <p>Those seeking asylum tend to be perceived as a problem where:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An area has: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant low demand, empty and/or derelict properties with clear plans for their future. • An established immigrant group that perceives new arrivals as a threat. 2. Those seeking asylum have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little/no access to education or support services and must spend their time waiting for a decision. 3. The provision of services is largely in the hands of statutory agencies with little involvement of refugee or other support groups. |
|--|--|

These tentative conclusions are based on a short study of 5 NDC areas and we do not know the extent to which these two scenarios can be generalised to all 39 Partnerships.

2.6.2 Key Concerns of Stakeholders

The **key concerns** for each major constituency are summarised below.

1 NDC Partnerships

- The biggest cause for concern is **lack of information** on where asylum seekers are placed. They often consider that they are not recognised as “needing to know”. In order to act and engage with asylum seekers, partnerships need to understand what is happening.
- As Partnerships are unable to offer housing they are unsure about how to respond to the question from asylum seekers: ‘what can you do for us?’ What **roles and responsibilities** can NDC Partnerships reasonably be expected to take on board?
- Several have already embarked on activities and programmes focused on asylum seekers but **inclusion is a key concern**. NDC staff and Boards often stress the difficulties of engaging people from a wide range of (troubled) backgrounds
- NDC’s are aware that when pressurised services are stretched even further, **tensions can arise with local people**. If NDC areas are expected to accommodate and provide services for asylum seekers, where is the **extra funding going to come from?**
- There are concerns that existing residents can be **priced out of the local property market** by the increases in rents and property values attached to dwellings with NASS contracts, with deleterious consequences for physical regeneration plans.
- Finally, NDC Partnerships cannot be expected to join up **unresolved policy clashes between government departments** (between deterring and reducing the numbers of asylum seekers and promoting community cohesion) *ad infinitum*.

2 Consortia and Local Authorities

- In areas of **low demand** private landlords can “buy up whole streets” creating a sudden and unregulated influence on the local housing market.
- The concentration of asylum seekers in some areas makes them a visible target for extremist groups and can arouse fears amongst some local residents thus undermining **community cohesion**
- Authorities argue that they do not have **enough accommodation** for refugees in the right areas to help maintain school and other support networks.

- There is a perceived **conflict of interest** between supporting asylum seekers until they receive a decision and then being expected by the Home Office to relinquish responsibility.

3 Support Agencies and Statutory Services

- **Heavy demands placed on education and health** services as a result of the concentration of asylum seekers in specific areas
- Not all asylum seekers can register with a doctor; waiting times for GPs are high; and the physical condition of health centres can be poor
- **Schools can act as proxy advice centres** for all sorts of inquiries not linked to education
- Problems in interacting with asylum seekers in areas where **local community and voluntary groups are weak or absent.**

4 Those Seeking Asylum

- The **benefit system** is particularly hard to understand and navigate.
- **Specialist support services**, especially in mental health and translation, may not be available
- Though steps are being taken to improve landlords' compliance with required property standards, the **quality of accommodation is generally perceive as poor**
- Those seeking asylum may be **afraid to complain** about services and shut themselves away
- **Not being allowed to work** is experienced by many as humiliating and debilitating. Asylum seekers will take jobs not wanted by many others and they can be pulled into illegal and or "slave labour" working-arrangements.

5 Other Local Residents

- Some residents are **suspicious of why people would seek asylum in their area**
- Long standing residents who may be out of work can be challenged by **feelings of displacement** and being pushed out.
- Residents can find it **difficult to express concerns** - about housing or educational support for certain groups, without appearing racist
- There are deep concerns about **preferential treatment** for one group over another,
- There is fierce resentment amongst many residents about how the **image of their communities is manipulated** for media gain.

- Concern about whether the **future of NDC areas** lies in becoming transit camps for any displaced or excluded groups

6 Cross Cutting Concerns

Finally a number of cross-cutting issues were raised by many observers:

- The range of bodies involved in supporting those seeking asylum has added to an already **crowded institutional stage**.
- Lack of **shared and reliable information** in terms of numbers or needs.
- **Scope for different interpretations** of what should or should not happen amongst agencies involved; answers to enquiries can vary depending on who is asked.
- A **large and shifting range of language groups** in many areas makes arranging access to services problematic.
- Support services are **not well co-ordinated** and can be very fragmented in an area.
- There appears to be little logic, or predictability, about how long it takes for a decision to be made.

In one region the police local authorities and members of the local consortium are provided with a list of properties procured for use by those seeking asylum which is judged to be fairly accurate. They are also supplied with a weekly list of movements into that accommodation which is judged to be always outdated and unreliable – because for example asylum seekers may have moved on since they were initially housed.

And overall, there is a view that

"Asylum issues are becoming increasingly politicised. What's needed is a better policy message, and it should come from the Government."

3. Policy and Practice Implications for NDC Partnerships and Policy Makers

This final section of the report addresses the major policy and practice considerations impacting on NDC Partnerships and highlights some of the key national policy concerns many of which cannot be addressed solely - or often, not at all - by neighbourhood renewal partnerships.

3.1 Barriers to Achieving Regeneration and the Response of the Case Study NDCs

This work has identified a number of barriers which have impacted on the work of many Partnerships. These are outlined below, together with an indication of some of the approaches adopted by Partnerships to help overcome them.

1 The complexity of roles of those involved the asylum process

- In South Yorkshire, the consortium asylum team is multi-disciplinary and operates through a group of *named* officers;
- In Manchester, the Multi-agency forum of organisations working with asylum seekers is organised thematically (health, housing, advice and information, etc.);
- In Salford, a Professionals Group organised by the Social Housing Team has begun to co-ordinate asylum seeker issues;
- Merseyside Refugee Support Network brings together a number of refugee and asylum seeker organisations and has a number of sub-groups, including ones concerned with mapping and housing.

2 Ill thought through structures and relationships for managing the asylum process

- South Yorkshire Consortium are funding a new strategic post and developing a resettlement programme with a range of voluntary agencies;
- Also in South Yorkshire, the Consortium, through their enabling role, aims to keep people in the same NASS accommodation for a while after they receive a positive decision, to ease transition;
- NASS regional officers are now *“going out and talking to different agencies so we can work together and develop a joined up approach to working with asylum seekers.”*

3 The inadequacy of local support structures and the paucity of local resources

- A block of 13 one bedroom furnished flats, owned by Sheffield City Council, leased by a regional Housing Association and managed by a specialist Housing Association for refugees, provides temporary supported accommodation for men and women who have recently received a positive decision. Clients are assessed to evaluate their support needs, visited at least once a week, and helped to register with GP's, for work, etc. An advocacy service is also available. The project is funded through Housing Corporation Housing Management Grant and the support charge is funded through Supporting People;
- Salford's Social Housing Team are responding to concerns about inadequate sign-posting of services and support available to asylum

seekers in some accommodation by producing their own welcome pack, in consultation with partner agencies.

4 A lack of partnership working in a high politicised and media aware context

- A shortage of interpreters in Liverpool is being addressed by joint working between Refugee Action and Liverpool Open College. Two courses have been run this year- which accredits the training received;
- Manchester City Council established a multi-agency forum to bring together relevant agencies in providing a co-ordinated and non-duplicating response to the needs of asylum seekers. Part of its role is to disseminate “myth-busting” information;
- As part of a project working with people in privately rented accommodation, Merseyside Health Action Zone funded work to support asylum seekers to improve their accommodation on health grounds and access other services. Some of this work is now mainstreamed through a Social Inclusion team in Central Liverpool PCT.

5 The range of anxieties of members of local communities - not helped by media hype and sensational reporting

- A youth project run by Refugee Action in Liverpool and funded through the Princess Diana Trust works with 18-25s to put asylum seekers along side local young people with the aim of developing understanding through activities such as trips, sport, a women’s group etc. Young people are trained to deliver awareness-raising sessions to their peers;
- East Manchester NDC has trained Neighbourhood Wardens on issues relating to asylum seekers in the area, and discussed issues with residents at public meetings.

6 No clear vision or policies on the place of those seeking asylum in urban renewal

- In Haringey NDC area, schools have prepared welcome packs in different languages for newly arrived children and their parents, laying out simple things such as school times, teachers names, what to wear, school rules and what happens in classes;
- East Manchester NDC mirrors a city wide, thematic approach to its Asylum Seekers and Refugees Subgroup. It has overseen the local provision of English classes and fun days, and is now exploring a drop-in centre.

7 Uncertainty amongst NDC Partnerships about their role in the asylum process and the about legitimacy of committing resources

- Haringey NDC seeks to improve services for and the inclusion of asylum seekers in its area by developing good relationships with other agencies that have resources - such as Sure Start;
- East Manchester NDC has consulted with landlords and government agencies to ensure property inspections for dispersal accommodation in the area are carried out;
- Salford NDC has fostered close links with a local project, RAPAR, which works with asylum seekers and mirrors their experiences back to service agencies;

- A local authority tenant liaison officer works with Burngreave NDC's housing theme group to look at the support needs of asylum seekers and their transition to refugee status;
- Acknowledging that resources for the one-to-one working which is really needed to support many asylum seekers is not available, Haringey NDC has adopted a strategy of creating and empowering community organisations (around the different language clusters) to take on that role.

8 A lack of involvement by those seeking asylum or their representatives in the NDC programme.

- Salford's RAPAR is staffed by refugees and has strong networks within the asylum seeker community, adding legitimacy to NDC programme development;
- South Yorkshire Consortium has set up a refugee forum to help agencies understand issues and to enable people working in similar circumstances to meet;
- Haringey NDC has an outreach team who are knocking on doors to start an asylum seekers' forum;
- The Guidance Delivery Co-ordinator of the Refugee/Asylum Guidance project run under the city council Adult Guidance Service is a member of Kensington Regeneration Board and the partnership has a BME outreach worker;
- Burngreave NDC's employment theme has community language projects that refugees can link into;
- Sheffield City and Wakefield Councils have commissioned a quality of life study of asylum seekers, focusing on the dispersal process. It will be published autumn 2003.

3.2 NDC Partnerships: Implications for Policy and Practice

One implication from this work is that different areas are starting from different places with different needs and different issues. Policy and practice therefore need to be constructed **locally**. Nevertheless there are a number of **overarching policy considerations** which will tend to impact on all Partnerships:

- **Find out what's going on.** Partnerships need to find out who is coming into the NDC and adjoining areas in terms of numbers, timings, language, and characteristics such as household type, age, gender, disabilities, skills, etc. If this information cannot be "received" from an official source than it should be assembled by Partnerships themselves.
- **Partnerships should be able to respond rapidly and effectively to changes in the needs of the local population.** They ought also to be able to plan for contingencies and multiple scenarios. Many of those seeking asylum want to work, have valuable skills, and do well in education. To harness these assets means NDC's need to find ways to include those seeking asylum within their programmes.
- **In developing their programmes Partnerships may find it sensible to link with other agencies and their resources to support asylum seekers in NDC areas and make the asylum process work for them (for NDC's and for asylum seekers).** NDC Partnerships may not have the language skills, the people, or project resources to do this unilaterally but in many areas there are a host of voluntary and statutory agencies that have something to offer.

Partnerships are becoming adept at aligning their agendas with mainstream concerns. In this respect, the issue of asylum is no different from many of the other issues facing NDCs. The overwhelming need is for support to be better informed and to be smarter, rather than to provide more of the same. A multi disciplinary asylum team, developing shared protocols, working through a system of named contacts seems one way of moving forward on this issue. However other Partnerships may feel that they would prefer to 'mainstream' the problem and seek to address it mainly through its own resources. Contrasting approaches emerged in this work:

- *“Instead of services solely for asylum seekers, the NDC has decided to use existing services and initiatives to reach asylum seekers. It is investigating holding drop-ins with Sure Start and Home Start to reach immigrant families.”* (Manchester)
- *“What we [NDC] are really trying to do is universal provision. Services have to be improved for everyone, including asylum seekers and refugees.”* (Haringey)
- In Liverpool, a project, partly funded through Merseyside HAZ, provides a befriending and orientation service. The project depends on about 25 volunteers – 75% of whom are asylum seekers.

The movement of asylum seekers into some NDC areas has also raised some profound long-term dilemmas which are not easy to resolve:

- There are tensions between short-term performance needs and longer-term community cohesion issues. NDC's need to demonstrate progress against floor targets and progress on their Delivery Plans, many of which do not refer to asylum seekers. How can these potentially contrasting demands be balanced and what are the consequences for NDC of paying more attention to one at the expense of the other?
- Should NDCs take steps towards the active retention of those asylum seekers getting leave to remain?

3.3 Challenges for Policy Makers

Many NDCs are grappling with the issue of asylum seekers. But the difficulties they are facing up to are often not unique to NDC areas but instead raise questions which can often only be resolved on the national stage. In this context we are aware that NASS, local consortia led by local authorities, the Department of Health and other government and third sector organisations are working to speed up the processing of claims for asylum and to make support more responsive to the needs of those waiting for, and also those having received, a decision. Whilst expectations are high that changes to procedures and practices will improve the management of dispersal and result in a less traumatic experience for those seeking asylum and for those delivering services, it is not clear that such changes will always impact positively on community cohesion and neighbourhood sustainability.

There are also however a range of other considerations which NDC Partnerships, and no doubt many others dealing with the issue on the ground, would welcome being addressed:

- The elastic use of the terms Asylum Seeker, Refugee, Migrant and Immigrant is unhelpful as is the application of legal definitions to social and urban policy contexts.
- Those seeking asylum are not an homogeneous group, but a collection of people with diverse ages, languages, skills, experiences, backgrounds, ethnicities, nationalities and needs. A dispersal policy based on language clusters might help put some boundaries around the diversity with which services within a single locality might be expected to cope.
- “Inappropriate dispersals” whether by language, sex, household type, or extent of support required may account for much of the frustration and sense of siege expressed by many of those we spoke to - at regional and local levels. These may be addressed, in part, by further changes, such as the use of accommodation centres, regionalisation of NASS, improvements to the management of contracts with landlords, and local developments in aligning the support delivered to those seeking asylum by networks of small voluntary and larger statutory organisations.
- By its very nature, the asylum process will never be an exact science. Speed and reliability of information with appropriate access for necessary stakeholders are well known requirements for managing situations high in complexity and uncertainty. There is room for considerable improvement here at national, regional and local levels and across the various stakeholders involved.
- To what extent are the issues described in this report here for the long term? Or will they fade away as:
 - controls on access reduce the numbers of applications for asylum,
 - the asylum/ leave to remain decision-cycle is speeded up, and
 - efforts continue to remove quickly those not granted asylum?

Will NDC's and others invest in support services and come to depend on a steady supply of those seeking asylum to fill otherwise empty property only to find that the supply is dwindling? Will NDC's and other areas start to compete for the presence of those seeking asylum?

- Where do policies on asylum and immigration, mobility and community cohesion, inclusion and regeneration meet? The application of a performance management approach to the work of consortia and others involved in supporting those seeking asylum (perhaps as part of Comprehensive Performance Assessment) might be explored jointly by the Home Office and ODPM. Whilst fairly standard checklists could be constructed of the type of and speed with which support services are to be provided, decisions about the specific mix, range and method of delivery of those services would the responsibility of local consortia working in conjunction with providers of accommodation, voluntary sector agencies and others. We understand a pilot looking at this type of arrangement is currently being tried in NE region, and this may have wider applicability across the country.

Appendix 1: Research Methods

The study drew on a MORI survey of 19,500 households, commissioned for the National Evaluation of the New Deal for Communities program, for contextual and demographic data on New Deal for Communities (NDC) areas.

An initial review of published literature and round table discussions with representatives from a number of stakeholders (accommodation providers, asylum support groups, NASS, and NDC Partnerships) identified a series of issues.

These were explored through:

- Semi-structured interviews with 50 or so members of national, regional and local organisations, NDC Partnerships, voluntary groups and government departments
- Case studies in 5 NDC areas
- Focus groups with asylum seekers and refugees in NDC areas
- A workshop for 60+ representatives (from central, regional and local government, NDC Partnerships, voluntary organisations and others) to discuss and debate the research findings and recommend next steps