

New Deal for Communities

The National Evaluation

Research Reports

The Housing Market Impact of the Presence of Asylum Seekers in NDC Areas

Research Report 24

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
<http://ndcevaluation.adc.shu.ac.uk/ndcevaluation/home.asp>



Sheffield Hallam University

**The Housing Market Impact of the
Presence of Asylum Seekers in NDC
Areas**

Research Report 24

Authors:

Rionach Casey
Sarah Coward
Tim Fordham
Paul Hickman
Kesia Reeve
Sue Whittle

***Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research
Sheffield Hallam University***

June 2004
ISBN: 1 84387 072 X

CONTENTS

Executive Summary	i
Introduction	1
1. Policy Context and Research Approach	2
1.1. Policy Context	2
1.2. Research Approach.....	3
2. The Impact of the Presence of Asylum Seekers on Local Housing Markets in NDC Areas	5
2.1. Introduction	5
2.2. Housing Demand	5
2.3. Empty Property	7
2.4. House Prices.....	9
2.5. Housing Supply.....	10
2.6. Stock Investment and Property Conditions	11
2.7. Neighbourhood Image	13
2.8. Community Cohesion.....	14
2.9. The Long-Term Impact of the Presence of Asylum Seekers on Local Housing Markets...	18
3. Policy and Practice Implications for NDC Partnerships and Policy Makers ..	23
3.1. Barriers Facing Partnerships in their Attempts to Meet the Needs of Asylum Seekers.....	23
3.2. NDC Partnerships: Implications for Policy and Practice.....	24
3.3. Challenges for Policy Makers	25
References	26

Executive Summary

Introduction

This report builds on a study of asylum seekers in NDC areas undertaken last year by members of the Housing and Physical Environment (HPE) team and colleagues at the Universities of Manchester and Liverpool John Moores. One of the key findings of the study was that the presence of asylum seekers appeared to have some affect on local housing markets. This report seeks to assess the extent to which this has been the case and to highlight how the presence of asylum seekers in NDC areas has impacted on local housing markets.

A telephone survey of representatives from 19 NDCs was conducted between January and February 2004, followed by in depth case study work in three NDC case study areas: Newcastle, Doncaster and Coventry. Interviews with a wide range of local stakeholders were conducted in the case study areas and focus groups with local residents and asylum seekers were held in two case study areas.

Implications for the Local Housing Market

The evidence from this study suggests that the inward movement of asylum seekers does impact, both positively and negatively, on local housing markets. The scale and contours of housing demand, housing conditions, community cohesion and neighbourhood popularity were all reported to have been affected, directly or indirectly, by the in-migration of asylum seekers.

The Perceived Impact of the Presence of Asylum Seekers in NDC Areas on the Local Housing Market

Respondent Perceptions	
The perceived positive impacts of the presence of asylum seekers in NDC areas on the housing market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased demand (in low demand neighbourhoods, for low demand property types) • repopulation of low demand areas • reduced numbers of empty properties • enhanced neighbourhood image and improved environmental conditions due to reduced number of empty properties • increased population diversity • improved community dynamics, particularly in areas with large BME populations • increased supply of private rented accommodation - improving tenure diversity and choice • investment in PRS stock to bring properties up to NASS standards
The perceived negative impacts of the presence of asylum seekers on the housing market in NDC areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased demand (in high demand areas), thereby increasing competition for scarce housing • resentment from local populations as competition for often scarce housing resources increased • external perception of the area as a 'dumping ground' reducing popularity • negative impact on community cohesion (particularly in predominantly 'white' neighbourhoods and higher demand areas) • encourages unscrupulous landlords to buy property in the area

The evidence points to four major areas of housing market impact arising from the inward movement of asylum seekers.

In relation to **housing demand**:

In areas of low demand:

- increased demand for hard-to-let housing in both the private and social sector
- repopulation of low demand areas, with asylum seekers providing a 'new market'
- reduced void properties in the social and private rented sectors
- in some areas, higher house prices brought about by speculative purchasing by private landlords seeking to house asylum seekers, and by their investment in these properties

In areas of high demand:

- increased demand, thereby increasing competition for scarce housing

In terms of **housing supply**:

- NDC areas with surplus housing reported that asylum seekers had helped reduce the scale of over-supply for some property types
- increased supply of private rented accommodation as landlords acquire property in the area to house asylum seekers. This in turn can increase tenure diversity
- a reduction in the supply of affordable housing in both the social and private sectors, in areas with high demand and buoyant housing markets

In relation to **stock investment and housing conditions**:

- some areas had seen significant investment in the private rented stock as landlords brought their properties up to NASS standards in order to accommodate asylum seekers
- there was evidence of improved environmental conditions and neighbourhood image as a result of the investment in the private rented sector
- in turn, this was reported to have contributed to increased house prices

In terms of **community cohesion**:

- in general stakeholders reported good relations between asylum seekers and local residents in NDC areas, although there were reports of harassment and abuse towards asylum seekers in some areas
- the harassment of asylum seekers was often perpetuated by residents from outside the locality
- community tensions were reportedly less likely to emerge in areas with large BME populations
- there was some suggestion that the presence of asylum seekers can give the area a reputation as being a 'dumping ground', thereby reducing its popularity
- in some areas asylum seekers were perceived as contributing to community stability and sustainability
- in others, particularly high demand areas, there was resentment from some local residents towards asylum seekers who were perceived as having received preferential treatment from housing and support agencies

The Long-Term Impact on Housing Market Conditions

The presence of asylum seekers can potentially impact positively on the local housing market, particularly in areas of low demand. However, a range of factors will affect how sustainable this is in the longer term including:

- the future housing intentions of asylum seekers who receive a positive decision
- the availability of, and access to, appropriate housing in the neighbourhood
- changes to dispersal policy
- a reduction in the number of people applying for asylum or being granted leave to remain
- changes to NASS housing contracts
- housing market change outside the NDC area

Policy and Practice Implications for NDC Partnerships and Policy Makers

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

- the lack of available information about asylum seekers in the area
- inadequate partnership working
- a lack of clarity or guidance about the role of Partnerships in the asylum process and in meeting the needs of asylum seekers
- a lack of awareness and understanding of immigration issues amongst NDC Partnerships

In terms of policy development NDC Partnerships should seek to:

- improve the evidence base and available data about asylum seekers in their areas
- improve understanding about the needs and aspirations of asylum seekers - by satisfying them they may be more likely to choose to stay in the neighbourhood in the event of a 'positive' asylum decision
- monitor changes in the asylum seeker population and in asylum policy
- link with other agencies to support asylum seekers in their areas and bring organisations together to develop a more integrated approach to supporting asylum seekers
- in collaboration with other agencies, promote positive attitudes towards asylum seekers and refugees through education, training, and projects promoting cultural awareness and challenging media myths and stereotypes
- NDCs are ideally placed to contribute to the management of the transition from asylum seeker to refugee status by developing or funding projects and services that support this process

Introduction

This report from the Housing and Physical Environment (HPE) Team of the NDC National Evaluation examines the housing market impact of the presence of asylum seekers in NDC areas. In doing so, it builds on a study of asylum seekers in NDC areas undertaken last year by members of the HPE team and colleagues at the Universities of Manchester and Liverpool John Moores¹. One of the key findings of the study, which sought to assess the overall impact of asylum seekers in NDC areas, including both housing and non-housing impacts, was that their presence appeared to have some affect on local housing markets. This report, therefore, seeks to assess the extent to which this has been the case and to highlight how the presence of asylum seekers in NDC areas has impacted on local housing markets.

The report is divided into three sections. The first provides a brief policy context to the study and highlights the research approach adopted. The second considers the impact of the presence of asylum seekers on local housing markets in NDC areas. The final section presents the main policy and practice considerations impacting on NDC Partnerships and policy makers.

Interspersed throughout the report in boxed format is more information about three Partnerships studied in detail as part of the research.

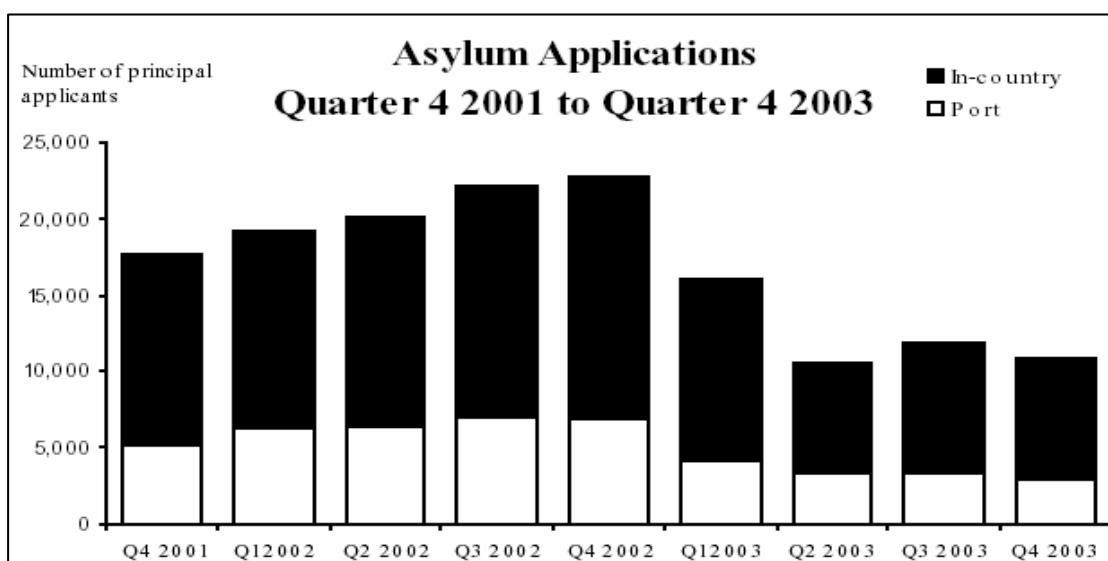
¹ A copy of the research report *Seeking Asylum in NDC Areas: A Report on Experiences, Policies, Research Report 18* (CRESR et al, 2003) can be obtained from the following NDC National Evaluation web-site: (<http://ndcevaluation.adc.shu.ac.uk/ndcevaluation/Reports.asp>)

1. Policy Context and Research Approach

1.1. Policy Context

During the 1990s and the early part of the first decade of the new millennium, the number of people seeking asylum in this country rose steadily and reached a peak in 2002 when 84,310 applications were received (Home Office, 2004). However, as Figure 1 reveals, 2003 saw a significant drop in the number of people seeking asylum in this country, with only 49,370 applications being received.

Figure 1: Asylum Applications to the United Kingdom (excluding dependents)



Source: Home Office, Asylum Statistics: 4th Quarter 2003, p2. Available from the following website: (<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html>)

The Government's decision to disperse asylum seekers across the United Kingdom meant that of the 80,121 asylum seekers supported by National Asylum Support Service (NASS) at the end of December 2003, 55,196 were housed outside Greater London (Home Office, 2004). The English Government Office Regions with the biggest asylum seeker populations were Yorkshire and Humberside (10,775), West Midlands (10,210) and the North-west (9,100) (Home Office, 2004). The local authorities with the biggest asylum seeker populations were: Glasgow, Birmingham, Leeds, Newcastle, Manchester, Bradford, Sheffield, Liverpool, Coventry, and Wolverhampton (Home Office, 2004). Reference to data gleaned from the MORI NDC household survey of 2002 suggested that many Partnerships have significant asylum seeker populations.

In 2003, most applications for asylum were received from applicants whose country of origin was located in Africa (15,690), Asia (7,665), and the Middle East (6,450) (Home Office, 2004). Figure 2 presents the ten most common applicant nationalities by volume.

The drop in asylum seekers in 2003 may be in part be attributed to the Government's decision to adopt a tougher stance towards the issue of immigration and asylum seekers. This is reflected in two recent pieces of legislation: the *Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002*, and the *Asylum Seeker and Immigration Bill 2003*, which is currently going through Parliament. The main proposed changes outlined in the bill affecting asylum seekers include the withdrawal of support for families at the end of the asylum process, the introduction of penalties for arriving in the UK without documentation, and greater restrictions placed on asylum seekers rights to appeal if

they are not granted asylum. The latter clause (the 14th of the bill or the so-called 'ouster' clause), has received considerable criticism from the judiciary and in March 2004 Lord Falconer announced that it would be modified to take on-board some of the criticisms of its detractors.

Figure 2: Applications Received for Asylum in the United Kingdom, excluding dependents, by Nationality - 2003

Somalia	4,435
Iraq	3,635
Iran	2,080
Zimbabwe	2,565
Afghanistan	1,590
Pakistan	1,355
Sri Lanka	1,320
Turkey	1,225
Dem. Rep. of Congo	1,205
Vietnam	960

Source: Home Office, Asylum Statistics: 4th Quarter 2003, Table 3b. Available from the following website: (<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html>)

In the last year, considerable attention has focused on how the Government has responded to the large scale movement of asylum seekers to this country and a number of reviews of policy and practice have been undertaken. For example, this month the Home Affairs Select Committee on Asylum Seekers published its findings (House of Commons, 2004) while the Government announced on 25 March 2004 that it would be publishing the key findings to emerge from the review undertaken of NASS, which was conducted a year ago (see Noble *et al*, 2003). It also announced that it would undertake an urgent overhaul of management and reporting processes in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate in the Home Office and that in light of a recent inspection, NASS had decided to terminate the contract of one of the 21 private landlords it had approved to house asylum seekers: Landmark Liverpool Ltd.

For further information about asylum seekers in the United Kingdom and recent policy developments in this field see the research report *Seeking Asylum in NDC Areas: A Report on Experiences, Policies, Research Report 18* and the following websites:

<http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/> (Immigration and National Directorate of the Home Office)

<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/> (The Refugee Council)

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html> (The Home Office's Research Development Statistics for Immigration)

1.2. Research Approach

The research comprised three main stages:

- a telephone survey of representatives from 19 Partnerships. Interviews, which lasted on average one hour, focused on exploring the extent to which the presence of asylum seekers in NDC areas had had an affect on the local housing market. Representatives from four out of the five NDCs - Sheffield, Haringey, Liverpool, and Manchester - which comprised the case study element of the first asylum seeker study undertaken by the research team (CRESR *et al*, 2003) were interviewed. This was done in order to incorporate a *longitudinal* element to the study and to provide an insight into how the impact of the presence of asylum

seekers on housing markets in NDC areas changes with time. The 15 other Partnerships involved in the telephone survey were: Doncaster, Newcastle, Nottingham, Bradford, Middlesbrough, Derby, Tower Hamlets, Leicester, Newham, Sandwell, Sunderland, Brent, Lambeth, Southwark and Coventry

- in-depth case studies of two Partnerships: Doncaster and Newcastle. Case studies comprised four key elements
 - a review of relevant documentary and statistical evidence including policy documents, housing management data, and house-price data
 - interviews with key local actors including representatives from the NDC Partnerships, social housing landlords, private landlords, integration and support agencies and estate agents (in all 18 interviews were conducted in the two case studies)
 - resident focus groups. Focus groups explored a range of issues including the perceived impact of asylum seekers on the popularity of the local area and the extent to which residents thought they had been integrated into the local community
 - asylum seeker focus groups. In both case studies translators were employed. Focus groups explored a range of issues including respondents' attitudes towards the NDC area and their future housing intentions
- a mini-case study of the Coventry NDC. Particular attention focused here on exploring the extent to which the local refugee population had assimilated into the local community. Interviews were conducted with representatives with range of key local stakeholders including the NDC, local housing providers, and asylum seeker and refugee support agencies

The data gleaned from this study has been subject to robust qualitative data analysis. Given the sensitive nature of many of the issues addressed in the report, many of quotes presented within it have been anonymised in order to protect the anonymity of respondents. This means on occasions that the analysis lacks specificity.

There are two other 'health warnings' that must be borne in mind about this study. The first relates to the subject group. The study focuses primarily on impact of asylum seekers (i.e. those people who have applied for refugee status in this country under the terms of the 1951 United Nations Convention) and pays little attention to the impact of a number of immigrant important groups such as refugees, people with exceptional leave to stay, and applicants whose application has been unsuccessful.

The second health warning relates to the nature of the data used to inform this report. For a number of reasons, not least the scarcity of robust statistical data relating to asylum seekers at the neighbourhood level, most of the data presented in this report is qualitative in nature, and is concerned with exploring the perceived impact of asylum seekers on the housing markets of NDC areas.

2. The Impact of the Presence of Asylum Seekers on Local Housing Markets in NDC Areas

2.1. Introduction

This section assesses the impact of the presence of asylum seekers on the local housing markets in NDC areas. It draws on evidence gathered through telephone interviews with NDC officers in 19 NDC areas, and in-depth case studies in three NDC areas, where interviews and focus groups were conducted with a wide range of stakeholders including local residents and asylum seekers. Profiles of the three case study areas are embedded in this section.

2.2. Housing Demand

In terms of local housing markets, increased demand was considered to be the main impact of the inward movement of asylum seekers to NDC areas, with respondents in 15 of the 19 NDC areas commenting on this. Asylum seekers were reported to have provided a 'new market', or 'demand base' for the private and social rented sectors.

Most of the NDC areas outside London were suffering varying degrees of low demand - across the area, in pockets of the neighbourhood, or for particular property types such as 1 bed flats, tower blocks, and maisonettes. The increased demand from asylum seekers had reportedly helped to 'prop up' these local housing markets and address the problems of low demand: the emergence of a waiting list for local authority housing was attributed in part to the inward movement of asylum seekers; asylum seekers had provided demand for private rented housing which had previously been difficult to let; and RSLs leasing property to the local authority to accommodate asylum seekers reported having resolved the issue of surplus stock as a result:

"They've [asylum seekers] had a massive impact on increased demand in the private rented sector." (NDC representative)

"The social housing stock in the area has been reduced as voids were used to house asylum seekers but now the area has a healthy waiting list." (NDC representative)

In a context where attracting new residents to unpopular areas can be a challenge and a long-term process, asylum seekers had provided an 'instant' repopulation of some low demand neighbourhoods. Some stakeholders considered that this, in turn, had helped stem further decline:

"...if they hadn't been housed here the area might have gone down hill even more if properties had been left empty." (NDC Representative)

"Asylum seekers have had a positive impact on demand for housing here. We haven't got massive demand, so it's undoubtedly helped to increase demand in the area. That's not to say that we have high void levels.... we'd probably be able to let those flats anyway, but there's no doubt that asylum seekers have helped to sustain the estates through keeping demand going, so to speak." (Local Authority Officer)

In addition, asylum seekers were considered by some to have increased social capital and contributed to the stability and sustainability of neighbourhoods: social housing providers reported that asylum seekers presented fewer housing management difficulties than those tenants traditionally accommodated in their low demand stock,

tended to be committed to the neighbourhood and were therefore a valuable asset in furthering community stability. Local residents in one NDC area also pointed to the contribution asylum seekers had made to the sustainability of one part of their neighbourhood:

"It was useful that asylum seekers filled empty properties, partly because it was good that they were then occupied but also because it gave residents more clout in arguing that certain areas that were being talked about for demolition were now more sustainable and there was a better case to argue for retaining the existing properties." (Local resident)

In those areas where asylum seekers were considered to have increased overall levels of demand and contributed to community stability, respondents emphasised the importance of retaining those who received 'positive' decisions. To this end one respondent, for example, stressed the importance of considering the views and needs of asylum seekers in strategic planning.

Case Study Profile: Newcastle NDC

Newcastle NDC is home to around 9,260 people. The area in the North of the NDC has a long standing BME population, including significant Bangladeshi, Pakistani and African-Caribbean communities. According to the 2002 NDC household survey, 28% of the local population are from BME communities.

The housing stock in the area is a mix of pre-1919 terraced housing, and more recent flats, maisonettes and tower blocks. Social housing (predominantly local authority owned but including a small proportion of RSL owned property) makes up approximately 62% of the housing stock while 12% is owner occupied and 24% in the private rented sector. Housing management responsibility for the Local Authority's 34,000 homes was transferred to the new Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) on 1 April 2004. The quality and conditions of private rented sector housing in the area is variable, but there have been significant improvements in the sector, partly due to the Private Rented Project. Recently there has been a rising demand for properties, mainly for terraced 3 bed houses in the North of the NDC area.

The number of people seeking asylum and/or with refugee experience is difficult to ascertain. The NDC Household Survey 2002 found that 5% of respondents had applied for refugee status. In the NDC area, there are four main providers of housing for asylum seekers; Newcastle City Council, Home Housing Group, Roselodge and Angel Housing Group. Newcastle City Council provides 45 units of accommodation for asylum seekers, Home HA; 6 with the remaining 131 provided by private providers, contracted through NASS.

The neighbourhood is well served by a variety of agencies and community groups working for and with people who are seeking asylum and people with refugee experiences. These include supported housing and tenancy support schemes and advice and support services set up by the City Council's Asylum Seekers Unit. The voluntary sector is also active in providing venues and 'drop-in' sessions throughout the NDC area.

However, increased demand does not always have a positive impact on local housing markets. In areas of high demand asylum seekers were increasing competition for scarce housing, placing pressure on local authorities already unable to meet demand for housing in the area:

"... the situation here is that asylum seekers will increase demand, if anything, for certain types of housing, especially flats with more than 3 bedrooms. There's a dwindling stock anyway because of the right-to-buy. This puts very real pressure on the council to meet housing demand." (NDC representative)

This was the prevailing view of officers in the London NDCs surveyed, several of whom reported having thousands of homeless families on council waiting lists and in temporary accommodation. In contrast to respondents in NDC areas suffering depressed demand, any increase in demand was therefore considered highly problematic.

Problems associated with increased demand were also evident in a small number of NDC areas not experiencing significant pressures on the housing stock overall, but with high demand for particular property types. Two NDCs in the north of England with large BME (predominantly south Asian) populations, for example, explained that asylum seekers and the established community were both competing for the relatively small supply of larger properties in both the social and private rented sectors.

In several NDCs housing market conditions had shifted significantly since asylum seekers were first dispersed to the area. Initially, asylum seekers had provided an 'instant' means through which to sustain levels of demand but a subsequent upturn in the housing market left housing providers unable to meet demand:

"...there's a general housing shortage and there's a high number of homeless households. No-one could have predicted this - it was justifiable at the time to house asylum seekers in voids." (NDC Representative)

"...there used to be a problem with low demand in the area that's why asylum seekers could be housed here, but that's not the case now." (NDC Representative)

Thus, in areas suffering depressed demand the inward movement of asylum seekers can help repopulate neighbourhoods, providing a new demand base and contributing to community sustainability. In high demand housing markets however, their presence can exacerbate the problems of an already pressured housing market.

Concerns were also expressed that while dispersing asylum seekers to unpopular areas may help 'prop up' the local housing market, this may not be a positive experience for the asylum seekers themselves. The asylum seekers participating in focus groups in fact made few negative comments about their neighbourhoods. Where negative experiences were reported these tended to focus on the condition of the properties in which they were accommodated rather than on neighbourhood issues. However, local stakeholders working with asylum seekers questioned the appropriateness of housing a vulnerable population, many of whom may feel isolated, within deprived areas facing a range of social and environmental problems.

2.3. Empty Property

Asylum seekers tend to be accommodated in properties and pockets of NDC areas for which there is low demand, the consequence of which is a reduction in empty properties in the area. Officers from 10 of the 13 non-London NDCs talked about the positive impact of the presence of asylum seekers on reducing voids and filling hard to let properties, with local authority officers, RSLs, private housing providers, local residents and estate agents across NDC areas commenting on this. Social rented housing providers had seen their void rates decrease and, in the private rented sector, property which had previously been empty and boarded up had been brought back into use:

".. the presence of asylum seekers in the NDC area has had a very positive affect on the housing market. Empty properties have been brought back in to use to house asylum seekers." (Local Authority Officer)

"All our void properties are referred [to the local authority] and used to house asylum seekers. It's great from a housing management point of view." (RSL Officer)

"Asylum seekers have been housed in some properties that were boarded up, it's great that they've been brought back in to use." (NDC representative)

Case Study Profile: Doncaster NDC

Doncaster NDC is home to around 10,855 people and is made up of the central neighbourhood adjacent to the town centre. Within the area there are five districts. According to the 2002 NDC household survey, 13% of residents are from BME communities. The neighbourhood's housing stock is a mix of late Victorian terraces, and more recent flats, maisonettes, terraces and semi-detached properties. Around 37% of households are in social rented accommodation, 36% are owner occupied and 27% are in private rented housing. The NDC area has a variable housing market:

- there are pockets of low demand - according to the 2001 Census (14.7%) of dwellings were empty, doubling from 6.4% in 1991
- private sector housing in the area is variable, with some in a poor state of repair
- between 2001-2002 detached property prices doubled, the price of terraced properties slightly increased and the price of semi-detached slightly decreased
- recently there has been rising demand for property by investors and for owner occupation

The number of people seeking asylum and/or with refugee experiences is difficult to ascertain. The NDC Household Survey 2002 indicated that 3% of respondents had applied for refugee status. In the Doncaster NDC area, in November 2002, there were 139 NASS contracted properties (99 Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) and 40 family houses). Asylum seekers are reported to be from a number of different countries including Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Afghanistan. Four main housing providers accommodate NASS cases in the NDC area; Safe Haven Yorkshire, Adelphi, Roselodge Group, and Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council.

Asylum seekers in Doncaster have access to a weekly drop-in service at a local church where they can access a range of services and interpreters. Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council set-up and co-ordinates two groups that bring together services working with asylum seekers; 1) a multi agency group; and 2) a housing providers group. Both groups meet every four weeks, are well attended, and have proved to be a very useful resource for services involved.

Reduced numbers of empty properties were reported to have enhanced the visual attractiveness of an area, improved environmental conditions and neighbourhood image. Some considered that this, in turn, had contributed to increased property prices and neighbourhood popularity. A local authority officer in one case study area explained that, prior to the dispersal of asylum seekers, boarded up and unsightly empty private property in the neighbourhood was a key issue. These had now been brought back into use without the need for local authority resources and intervention.

"Housing asylum seekers in the private sector has meant a lot of empty properties have been brought back in to use which is great for the area and the council are

pleased about as it has been at no cost to them. It has had a positive effect."
(Local Authority Officer)

Local residents in another case study area talked at some length about the contribution asylum seekers had made to occupying properties which may otherwise have remained empty:

"This area has been subject to a lot of voids in the past. A number of the voids have been filled by asylum seekers and refugees." (Local resident)

These residents expressed anxiety about asylum seekers leaving the neighbourhood, concerned that problems of low demand and visible empty properties would return once again. In this case, then, and in contrast to the perception that local residents may be hostile to an increase in asylum seekers in their neighbourhood, these residents positively wanted them to remain, recognising the role they play in resolving a key issue within the neighbourhood.

2.4. House Prices

A small number of respondents reported that the in-migration of asylum seekers had positively affected house prices in the area. They emphasised that the presence of asylum seekers was only one of a number of contributory factors to increasing house prices, alongside the impact of regeneration activity, the national housing boom, and speculative buying by landlords in anticipation of improved neighbourhood popularity. However, there were a number of ways in which asylum seekers were thought to have indirectly contributed to increasing house prices including:

- by occupying property which otherwise would have laid empty and thereby improving neighbourhood image (see section 2.3)
- as a consequence of investment in the housing stock in order to meet NASS standards (see section 2.5)

Increasing house prices were, however, reported to have a number of negative consequences. Firstly, some stakeholders commented that rising prices can prevent asylum seekers from remaining in the area once they receive a positive decision. Thus, in a context where asylum seekers had initially helped sustain demand they can then find themselves priced out of the local market.

Secondly, in one NDC area a respondent explained that competition from private landlords and rising prices were hampering their efforts to purchase housing in the area for clearance. As a public body they are restricted in the amount they can pay for properties and landlords are outbidding them. An NDC officer explained:

"landlords are buying properties; the NDC can't bid against them in many cases so lose out, hiking prices up. Some let to asylum seekers and some leave them empty as they know the NDC are wanting to clear areas and they will qualify for POP monies when cleared." (NDC Representative)

In contrast, residents in one case study area suggested that the presence of asylum seekers was one of a number of neighbourhood factors contributing to the continuation of *low* house prices in the areas:

"House prices in the area have always been affected by things happening in the area, e.g. prostitution, drugs, we can't blame it on asylum seekers. Asylum

seekers are just another issue on top of lots of others that put pressure on the area and make the area not as desirable as other areas." (Local resident)

2.5. Housing Supply

Some NDC areas have seen an increase in the supply of private rented housing as landlords, recognising that asylum seekers provide a 'new market', acquired property in the neighbourhood to accommodate them.

"At the beginning private landlords were buying up properties to house asylum seeker." (Local Authority Officer)

"There was an increase in speculative buying in the area by landlords to house AS, families have not bought houses." (Local resident)

On the one hand this was reported to have increased tenure diversity, prompted investment in the private housing stock (see section 2.5) and, in the long-term, may increase housing options for local residents if these properties are released back onto the market when landlords' NASS contracts come to an end. However, concerns were expressed that the 'business opportunity' presented by asylum seekers can skew property values and encourage unscrupulous, speculative and absentee landlords with no interest in the area. In one case study area there was anecdotal information that assured short-hold tenants had been evicted by landlords wanting to 'move into' the more lucrative asylum seeker market.

A number of respondents commented that the presence of asylum seekers also *reduces* the supply of affordable housing - in both the social and private rented sectors - for other populations. Analysis suggests this is particularly relevant, and problematic, in areas of higher demand or where the housing market had recently become more buoyant. In the social rented sector the supply of available housing for homeless households was reported to have reduced. In the private rented sector there had been a reduction in the availability of housing for people requiring rental accommodation at the low cost end of the market, such as students and first time buyers.

"Housing asylum seekers principally in the town centre area has decreased the amount of accommodation available to single people and accommodation that would normally have been used to house homeless people, mainly HMOs. There used to 150 bed spaces in the area that could be used to house homeless people and this was reduced to just five bed spaces at one point." (Local Authority Officer)

"Housing asylum seekers in the area has reduced the supply of housing across all tenures which hasn't helped as there is a healthy demand for properties in the area." (NDC representative)

One case study area has become increasingly popular over the past few years and the housing market is healthy. The rental market is now buoyant, there are more households wanting to live in the neighbourhood, and it has recently become popular with new populations such as students. However, many private landlords in the neighbourhood are contracted to NASS to provide housing for asylum seekers and the local authority is also contracted for a certain number of units. The number of units housing providers are contracted for is reportedly inflexible and cannot be changed significantly to accommodate the changing patterns of demand for the area. Consequently, the numbers of properties available for rent for residents seeking to live in the area are restricted and supply can no longer meet demand for the area.

".....in some areas of the city that doesn't matter but in [X neighbourhood] it does because it's turned into an area of high demand." (RSL Officer)

Case Study Profile: Wood End, Henley Green and Manor Farm NDC, Coventry

With a total population of 7,300, the Wood End, Henley Green and Manor Farm NDC lies on the northern edge of Coventry and comprises mainly local authority housing estates built in the 1950's and 1960's. With a surplus of social housing across the City, several vulnerable sections of the population seem to be concentrated in this area.

One social landlord, a stock transfer authority, owns three quarters of properties within the NDC boundary, with other social landlords and owner occupiers making up most of the remaining stock. The privately rented sector is just 2% (NDC Household Survey 2002). There is little in the way of housing pathways in the NDC area. Around 97% of properties are in council tax bands A and B and there is "a lot" of out-migration. The NDC 2002 Household Survey indicated that 40% of those responding would like to move - although percentages decrease considerably with age of respondent. The percentage of residents from BME groups is in single figures.

The majority of the accommodation is low demand family housing plus a substantial number of hard to let, one-person flats and bed-sits. It is to these that single male refugees tend to be allocated. There are areas of more popular housing but some are perceived to have a higher incidence of hate crimes and harassment. Due in part to building defects, a significant demolition programme is planned for 2005. The need for decants is thought to be influencing current strategies on voids and empty properties.

Through nomination rights, the local authority lets 75% of RSL properties directly. Landlords, agencies and the NDC partnership share a good deal of frustration about the difficulties of tracking who is moving into the area and how better to identify their needs. Whilst numbers are not available, most refugees are thought to come from Somalia (single men and women with children) and Zimbabwe (families) with others from Afghanistan, Iran, Kurdistan, Iraq, Burundi, Congo and Turkey. Main languages spoken are Swahili, French and Arabic.

A number of attempts to establish specific NDC support for refugees, allocated tenancies through the Council's homelessness policies, have not been developed further. The area is described as "difficult for refugees". The BNP is active in the area and the landlord aims to operate a sensitive lettings policy. A local authority-led but NDC-focused multi-agency network has recently been convened. It is hoped this will lead to a more explicit and thought-through strategy for engaging with refugees and the dozen or so families who have been refused asylum and are now thought to be living in the area.

Similarly, respondents in another NDC area reported increased demand across all tenures, partly due to regeneration activity in the area. This has resulted in stiff competition for housing at the more affordable end of the housing market, compounded by large scale demolition in parts of the neighbourhood, which has restricted supply further.

2.6. Stock Investment and Property Conditions

Although there were reports of asylum seekers living in poor quality housing, landlords providing accommodation to asylum seekers are required to adhere to minimum standards. The robustness of procedures for inspecting properties and regulating

private landlords were questioned by respondents but, in theory, all properties have to meet minimum standards.

Good Practice

Doncaster: Environmental Health Officer Inspections of Private Property Housing Asylum Seekers

In 2002 a procedure was established between the environmental health department (DMBC) and private providers of housing to asylum seekers in the area whereby private providers (SafeHaven, Adelphi, RoseLodge) or an officer from DMBC housing contacts the EHO department to arrange an inspection of one of their properties. An inspection is carried out and a report sent to the provider who then has responsibility for carrying out any necessary works. An EHO officer then inspects the works, tests the fire alarm and such like and decides whether to 'pass' the property. Once the property is considered to be of an acceptable standard it is registered under the councils HMO registration scheme. A charge is made of £60 per habitable room to cover time spent on initial inspection work. This procedure has resulted in 90% of HMOs being inspected.

In some NDC areas this was reported to have prompted significant investment in the once derelict, empty and poor condition private housing stock. In one case study area this was considered to be the primary impact of the in-migration of asylum seekers on the neighbourhood. Respondents reported that landlords, recognising the business opportunities that accommodating asylum seekers presented, had bought properties and significantly raised the standards:

"Landlords who house asylum seekers see the benefit of bringing their properties up to standard, it's lucrative for them, they see the business side."
(Local Authority Officer)

In turn, the physical environment was reported to have become more attractive, which was thought to have positively affected house prices and increased external demand for the area:

"The presence of asylum seekers in the area has had a positive impact. Landlords have put money in to the economy doing properties up and streets have been lifted, the quality of properties is a lot better as is the environment."
(Property Manager)

"Housing asylum seekers has helped regenerate the area. Landlords housing asylum seekers have improved their properties to meet standards and properties in the area have been improved generally through a council scheme and HMR funding...This helps regenerate the area and makes it look a lot more attractive."
(NDC representative)

"the presence of AS has meant properties have been improved in the area which has in turn helped raise property prices." (Local Authority Officer)

There was no evidence to suggest that the presence of asylum seekers had contributed to a *decline* in property conditions although there were reports of asylum seekers living in poor quality accommodation. In two of the case study areas some asylum seekers reported living without adequate cooking facilities in properties which were cold, in poor condition and having to wait weeks for repairs to be undertaken. There was speculation that if the presence of asylum seekers encouraged unscrupulous landlords to acquire property in the area then property conditions could deteriorate. There were also

anecdotal reports of overcrowding, with some respondents suggesting that 'failed' asylum seekers were lodging with refugees or other asylum seekers still receiving NASS support, and local residents also pointing to overcrowded conditions:

"Asylum seekers live in private rented housing in the NDC area, it's generally in good condition, but friends come to stay and the houses must become overcrowded." (Local resident)

2.7. Neighbourhood Image

The way in which neighbourhoods are perceived by residents living outside the locality has an important impact on local housing markets, particularly with regard to levels of future demand. Neighbourhoods can rarely be sustained on the basis of demand from existing residents alone - people do move out, new generations will not all remain, and elderly residents gradually dwindle. Attracting a steady trickle of new residents is therefore crucial to sustain future levels of demand. However, attracting new residents to areas with a negative neighbourhood image can be problematic.

A number of respondents speculated that the presence of asylum seekers may deter people from moving to the area. There were concerns that potential residents, with limited understanding of immigration issues, fuelled by negative stereotypes in the media, may discount the area as a place to live and that the neighbourhood may develop a reputation as a 'dumping ground' for asylum seekers.

"The presence of asylum seekers in the area and the area being perceived as deprived may have put people off moving to the area." (NDC representative)

Similarly, local residents in one case study area, while firm in their own view that asylum seekers enrich the local community, expressed concern that people outside the locality may have a very different perception:

"The word that's going around is that it's these sorts of people who come into the country who are spoiling things, and they're not. A lot of people read the papers and say that because of asylum seekers our way of life is being destroyed, whereas, in fact, these people can enrich our lives." (Local resident)

"An area can get a bad name. Also, if an area looks bad, then it will become a dumping ground. Having a lot of new people in the area is putting a strain on the services in the community such as health centres and schools. However, having immigrants in an area can enrich it." (Local resident)

Interviews with residents living outside NDC areas were not conducted as part of this study. However, stakeholder speculation was not supported by hard evidence that neighbourhood popularity had been undermined by the presence of asylum seekers. This may well be the case, but their comments tended to reflect concerns about the possibility of negative external perceptions of the neighbourhood rather than evidence regarding the views of residents outside the NDC area. A small 'mystery shopper' survey of estate agents in two of the case study areas did not suggest that the presence of asylum seekers was deterring people from moving to the NDC areas. In fact one estate agent spoke positively about the NDC area as a culturally diverse and popular location for people seeking lower cost housing.

The data suggest that in areas already suffering from extreme unpopularity, any negative external perception of the area arising from the presence of asylum seekers is likely to have only minimal impact. Several respondents expressed this view. For example:

"It adds to the negative perceptions that people already have about an area. On the other hand, it's so unpopular anyway; it's hard to see how asylum seekers could make it any worse." (NDC representative)

In London NDCs respondents pointed out that any negative image of the area as a result of the presence of asylum seekers would, in any case, be outweighed by the cheaper housing in the area, providing opportunities for affordable housing not available elsewhere in the borough:

"...but properties are still cheaper in the NDC area so people will still move to the area." (NDC representative)

2.8. Community Cohesion

In the media, the presence of asylum seekers in deprived neighbourhoods is frequently linked to heightened community tensions, which in turn can impact on neighbourhood popularity. Changing community dynamics can also affect existing residents' housing intentions, influencing the choices they make with regard to leaving or remaining within the neighbourhood.

The data suggest that in high demand markets the presence of asylum seekers can result in resentment from local residents, driven by a perception that asylum seekers are receiving preferential treatment and that resources were being disproportionately targeted to them:

"It's seen as an issue in the local area because of the high demand for housing by local residents....They think any new housing should be designated for local residents. This view has been expressed at various forums and residents' groups." (Local Authority Officer)

"Local families on the waiting list for bigger flats see the asylum seekers getting flats and they assume that means they are waiting longer. This doesn't go down well, it causes resentment." (NDC representative)

It was not only local white populations who were reported to take this view. Respondents in some areas reported that the presence of asylum seekers had also caused resentment from established BME communities:

"The Asian community have questioned why asylum seekers have got money and they haven't. I've been asked by African-Caribbean and Asian youths why they can't have more funding, when the asylum seekers are getting money all over the place." (NDC Representative)

"I'm aware that the Indian and Pakistani community in the area that have been here a long time are not that happy with asylum seekers living in the area. They have become settled and accepted but with asylum seekers coming along they have been lumped in with them. Some locals perceive it as them and us; they say it can be very uncomfortable." (Local resident)

A number of NDC officers reported that there had been 'incidents' in the neighbourhood, which have received publicity, heightened community tensions and affected the image of the area, particularly if it already had a reputation for anti-social behaviour. Asylum seekers themselves also reported experiences of racial harassment and abuse:

"It was a terrible experience. When I first started to live here I suffered verbal abuse and racist leaflets were put through the door." (Asylum seeker)

"I have a problem when I go out in the town on Friday and Saturday nights, people swear at me, I don't feel safe. I have also been sworn at in the day in the town centre." (Asylum seeker)

Despite this, and with some exceptions, many respondents reported that, in general terms, the relationship between asylum seekers and the local population was relatively good and evidence from focus groups conducted in two case study areas supports this. Asylum seekers in one case study area, for example, reported having a good relationship with their English neighbours, feeling safe and not having experienced any harassment. As one commented:

"People are friendly and talk to us, we have good neighbours, we help each other out. We have met people through the school and local gym, my brother is really happy at school." (Asylum seeker)

The data suggest that serious tensions may be more likely to emerge *between* communities than *within* them, and that harassment of asylum seekers is often perpetrated by residents outside the immediate locality in which the asylum seekers are living. For example, one case study area was divided - North and South - with a predominantly white population in the south, where there is also some BNP activity, and a more ethnically diverse population to the north where most asylum seekers are located. Although there were far fewer asylum seekers in the southern part of the neighbourhood there was reportedly far more hostility towards them from local residents than in the north of the area. Similarly, a number of anecdotes were reported by respondents in other NDC areas of violent incidents being perpetrated against asylum seekers by residents from other neighbourhoods.

It was suggested that local residents' attitudes towards asylum seekers are influenced by sensational media reporting:

"Some people might be put off moving to the area as asylum seekers live here; many people have only got the image of asylum seekers that is fed to them through the media, they often live in areas where there are no asylum seekers and have no real idea about asylum seekers." (NDC representative)

"The attitudes towards asylum seekers isn't helped by the media, who are totally inaccurate and out of order when it comes to their reporting. They say that asylum seekers are the reason why the NHS waiting list is so long.... One NDC [resident] board member said that some of the East Europeans were driving around in big cars and claiming benefits in more than one name. When people like that have those views what hope is there." (NDC representative)

Some issues impacting on community cohesion *within* neighbourhoods were reported by respondents. These tended to focus on lower level issues, such as asylum seekers unaware of how to dispose of their rubbish or congregating on street corners, causing local residents to complain. A lack of cultural awareness amongst local residents was also considered to impact negatively on community cohesion.

"People often see asylum seeker males hanging out in groups on street corners and don't like it. I think they need to be given a place to meet and activities to keep them occupied." (Local Authority officer)

"People need to be made aware of different cultures and learn to respect other cultures. This can be an obstacle." (Local Authority Officer)

"I have told our neighbours about putting the rubbish out and things, I don't think they always get told how things work." (Local resident)

Good Practice: Challenging Negative Stereotypes about Asylum Seekers

Newcastle

The Asylum Seekers Unit in Newcastle hold asylum seeker awareness training days, a multi-cultural refugee week, and work with local schools to raise awareness of asylum seekers and refugees. They are in the process of producing a training video designed to provide insight into the situations and experiences of asylum seekers which explore some individual case studies and attempts to 'explode a few myths'. The City Council's web site contains information about asylum seekers and the Asylum Seekers Unit, including a section on 'Frequently Asked Questions', which presents information about asylum seekers, nationally and locally, in a 'user-friendly' way.

Leicester

The Oak Project in Leicester was set up to promote cultural awareness and inclusion. The private provider of housing for asylum seekers in the NDC area is involved in this project.

Coventry

The Local Authority's Hate Crime Reduction Unit is looking into ways of improving positive reporting about asylum seekers and refugees and offering a more accurate picture of their presence in the area.

The data suggest that community tensions are sometimes less likely to emerge in areas of low demand, and in areas with an established BME population or a diverse local community. In some low demand neighbourhoods residents recognised that asylum seekers had helped repopulate the area, reducing the number of boarded up properties and thereby contributing to improved environmental conditions. Far from expressing anxiety about the presence of asylum seekers, they were anxious in case asylum seekers left the area:

"I think they will be there for a while, the houses will be filled and then they will all disappear. What happens then? What happens to the void that's left when they have gone?" (Local resident)

"There is no stability for them or their children, when they may be moved on. They need to be stable and we need them to be stable. We want them to stay." (Local resident)

"I think refugees will stay as it is generally an accepting area, we already have an established BME community in the area, I'd like them to stay, it would be good if they settle down in the area." (Local resident)

These residents were firm in their opinion that problems of anti-social behaviour, lack of community cohesion and community tensions were attributable to the local population and they expressed no resentment towards asylum seekers:

"What stops a lot of people moving into the area or buying houses here is the 'dysfunctionals.' It puts people off. There have been doors kicked in and windows broken. That is the biggest detriment for the area. It's connected to the

unscrupulous landlords. The genuine asylum seekers and the immigrants are OK, no problem." (Local resident)

"It's the British people who are causing the problem." (Local resident)

"It's 'our own' that's the problem." (Local resident)

The asylum seekers in this area did report having been victims of harassment and anti-social behaviour which they believed was sometimes racially motivated. They were also quick to point out however that they were only one group at the receiving end of anti-social behaviour and that other residents had similar experiences:

"...there is a problem with children causing nuisance, but they cause a nuisance to everyone in the area, not just asylum seekers." (Asylum seeker)

The data suggest that diversity of the local population and a long history of black and minority ethnic populations make local residents more accepting and welcoming of asylum seekers and community tensions less likely. Officers in London NDCs, for example, explained that their local populations were accustomed to living within a multi-cultural community as a result of the diversity of local populations and the long history of immigration to the city. And in two of the case study areas - where asylum seekers are accommodated in neighbourhoods with existing BME populations - respondents considered this to be a factor in the relatively low levels of physical and verbal abuse directed at asylum seekers:

"Asylum seekers are housed in areas where the existing BME population live so they mix in well, don't stick out, there are few tensions." (RSL Officer)

"There were people from all nationalities in the area before, a diverse population, asylum seekers don't stick out and therefore they're not a problem."
(Private Housing Provider)

In contrast, respondents in one case study area with a predominantly white population reported incidents of abuse, threats and racial harassment and the area was described as 'difficult' place to live for people immigrating to the neighbourhood.

There were mixed views about the extent to which asylum seekers had *integrated* into local communities. Several respondents commented on the positive contribution of asylum seekers in increasing cultural diversity and thereby improving community dynamics, while others reported that the reception from local residents varied:

"There's a mixed reaction from the local people towards asylum seekers. Asylum seekers who are living in the face of adversity are placed near to locals who are also used to adversity. Some people respond to that positively and rise to the occasion and embrace asylum seekers. Then the other element of the community are outwardly hostile. There has been some far right activity... asylum seekers are spreading Aids etc, so they're coming at it from all angles." (RSL Officer)

"There are some problems with the mentality of the older generation, some people don't let their kids out of the yard, they don't want them to mix with asylum seekers, but we need integration". (Local resident)

Good Practice

Support and Advice for Asylum Seekers: Assisting Asylum Seekers Integrate into Local Communities

Newcastle

Drop-in sessions run by a Catholic Church provide an important social outlet for asylum seekers, providing a local contact point and a friendly welcome. Volunteers are not 'experts' and sign-post asylum seekers to agencies that can help. Their value lies in providing a befriending service and hence a positive experience for asylum seekers of local residents. This hopefully counter-balances any more hostile reactions they may encounter from local residents.

Doncaster

The local authority Asylum Team co-ordinates a drop-in service for asylum seekers at a local church each Thursday afternoon. All services working with asylum seekers attend, including private housing providers. Interpreters are available and the service enables asylum seekers to access services in one place. Agencies reported that they often signpost asylum seekers to this drop-in service.

The presence of language barriers was a recurring theme, hindering integration between asylum seekers and local residents. Professionals, local residents and asylum seekers all reported this to be a key barrier to developing relationships and combating isolation.

"For those who don't learn English it's a big stumbling block to making friends, fitting in and integrating." (Private Housing Provider)

Although a lack of integration does not necessarily prompt community tensions, it was reported to hamper the development of community 'spirit', considered essential by some residents for community sustainability. Analysis suggests that the provision of local services and agencies for asylum seekers can help foster such integration.

2.9. The Long-Term Impact of the Presence of Asylum Seekers on Local Housing Markets

The findings presented above suggest that the presence of asylum seekers can potentially impact positively on local housing markets, particularly in areas of low demand. They may, for example, provide a short-term partial resolution to low demand and voids. However, a range of factors will affect how sustainable this is in the longer-term. Consideration needs to be given to changes and trends which may affect the role asylum seekers play in local housing markets. Some of these are discussed below.

2.9.1. Is housing demand from asylum seekers likely to be sustained?

In those areas where asylum seekers have provided a much needed source of housing demand, the long-term continuation of this trend relies on retaining current numbers of asylum seekers, or retaining those asylum seekers who receive a positive decision. In one case study area, for example, asylum seekers were considered to have been instrumental in the repopulation of parts of the neighbourhood and concern was expressed that dwindling numbers of asylum seekers could result in a return to problems of severe low demand. A number of other stakeholders expressed similar views regarding the long-term consequences for the local housing market of a reduction in this population:

"We may have a low demand problem again if our properties weren't used to house asylum, but then we've always had a low demand problem in the area, and it's hard to find good tenants who will look after the property." (RSL Officer)

"A lot of private rented properties are taken up by asylum seekers and speculative buyers are buying properties often to rent out. This has meant an increase in the number of private rented properties. There is no major void problem at the moment but voids could rise as asylum seekers leave and numbers decrease." (Property Manager)

There are a number of factors which could affect the extent to which current levels of demand from asylum seekers will be sustained:

- a) The future housing intentions of asylum seekers: Asylum seekers are assumed to be a highly mobile group who can increase the transience of an area and undermine community stability and sustainability. While there is certainly the possibility of 'enforced transience' (see point b below), in terms of the intentions and aspirations of the asylum seekers themselves, the data suggest this perception may not accurately reflect reality.

There was evidence that asylum seekers were committed to the neighbourhoods in which they lived and hoped to remain in the area if they received a positive decision. Professionals across many NDC areas reported that asylum seekers wanted to remain in the area and evidence from focus groups conducted with asylum seekers supported this perception. Reasons provided by asylum seekers for their commitment to their local area included: local services and facilities; good public transport links; open spaces and environmental conditions; feeling settled in the area; not wanting to remove their children from local schools; and wanting to continue with courses they had enrolled in at local colleges.

"A lot of refugees want to stay in this area as it's the area they want, the area they're used to as they used to live here as asylum seekers, they have built up community links, and employment is in the area and town centre area." (Property Manager)

"I am very pleased in this area because the college is near and public transport is good." (Asylum seeker)

"I'll probably stay in the area; I've been here 13 months and am quite settled in the area, I have got used to things." (Asylum seeker)

The scope does therefore exist for retaining asylum seekers who receive a positive decision. However, there is a difference between asylum seekers' intentions and desire to remain within a neighbourhood, and their ability to do so.

- b) The ability of asylum seekers to remain in the area: Sustaining future levels of demand may not be dependent on whether asylum seekers who receive a positive decision *want* to remain in the area, but whether they will be *able* to remain in the area. NASS contracted housing provision is, by definition, temporary and, once a positive decision is granted, asylum seekers usually have to move from their current accommodation. The availability of appropriate move-on accommodation will therefore affect whether they are able to secure alternative accommodation within the neighbourhood.

Good Practice

Newcastle Asylum Seekers Support Unit 'Move-on Team'

The Asylum Seekers support unit provides a range of services not only to asylum seekers (see page 5) but also to refugees. They have worked with the council's Advice and Support Workers to develop a 'Move-on Team'. Members of the team will usually visit a client when they are still living in their NASS accommodation. They help clients to find alternative accommodation, access utilities and welfare benefits and tailor the service to each individual. They continue to offer support when the client has been re-housed.

A number of respondents commented that the property types available in the neighbourhood did not match asylum seekers' requirements and suggested that they may have to leave the area to obtain appropriate accommodation:

"There is limited larger properties in the NDC area so people have nowhere to move on to from terraces, they have to move out of the area."
(NDC representative)

"...a lot of them need houses with at least 3-4 bedrooms because of the size of their extended families. They want bigger houses, which aren't available."
(NDC representative)

In areas with high demand for social housing, or limited supply of certain types of accommodation in the social rented sector, asylum seekers who receive a positive decision often join a long waiting list. There were suggestions that they may therefore leave the area in order to secure social housing more quickly, or to obtain private housing instead:

"A lot of asylum seekers who get a positive decision want to stay in the area but there isn't sufficient housing for them. A lot of refugees go through the social housing route, mainly the council, but there is already a pressure on social housing in the NDC area. Social housing is often the only affordable housing option for refugees when they initially get leave to remain." (NDC representative)

"In order to stay in the area they really have to rent privately. A lot don't go to the council as they could get placed any where and they want to stay in this area."
(Property Manager)

Local housing providers in two NDC areas expressed concern about the possible impact of the forthcoming 'amnesty' for asylum seeker families, which will increase the number of families given indefinite leave to remain. Many of these families are supported under the Interim Scheme and others are in council-funded accommodation. Once they are no longer supported in these ways and are in receipt of mainstream benefits, it was suggested that private landlords, particularly in areas of high demand, may not be as keen to accommodate them, restricting their 'move-on' housing choices.

Respondents in NDC areas with buoyant housing markets also expressed concern that asylum seekers would not have the financial resources to obtain private housing and may be forced to leave to neighbourhood in search of more affordable accommodation:

"Generally asylum seekers want to stay in the area if they get leave to remain but it can be a problem for them to get a house in the NDC area, a lot want to stay as

they've got used to the area etc. There is a lack of suitable move-on accommodation as there's a general shortage of housing in the area."
(NDC representative)

- c) Changes to the dispersal policy could affect the number and profile of new asylum seekers dispersed to NDC areas. At present there are no plans for changes to the dispersal policy but consideration would need to be given to the impact on housing market conditions were this to happen in the future.
- d) A reduction in the number of people applying for asylum, or a reduction in the number of people receiving a positive decision would also impact on the numbers of asylum seekers (and subsequently refugees) requiring housing in the neighbourhood.

2.9.2. Changes to NASS contract arrangements

In some areas, if private landlords' NASS contracts are not renewed, or they choose not to renew their contracts, a 'glut' of private properties could be released onto the market. Landlords in the private rented sector within areas where demand has increased may be attracted by higher market rents and less likely to renew NASS contracts, or contracts may be transferred to the local authority by NASS. Respondents in all three case study areas expressed concern for the future of the housing market resulting from such changes.

Respondents in one of the case study areas, for example, had seen an increase in the supply of private rented accommodation as landlords acquired property in the area to house asylum seekers. Some respondents were concerned that if their NASS contracts were not renewed there would be a sudden influx of private rented housing onto the market without the demand to sustain it. Some local stakeholders suggested that these properties, which had seen significant investment and improved standards, may be easily let to other residents. However, respondents also suggested that a sudden release of high quality private rented housing onto the market may drain demand from those dwellings which had not been used to house asylum seekers and which had not therefore been improved:

"...there could be a glut of private rented accommodation and not enough people to fill it. However, landlords who have housed asylum seekers should not find their properties hard to rent as they have been brought up to a very good standard. Therefore properties that have not been improved may not be as desirable. There will be competition." (Property Manager)

Where the local housing market is buoyant, or where there are new populations seeking to move to the area (for example, students and first time buyers in one case study area) a change in private contracts is less likely to have any detrimental impact. In other areas, however, respondents were doubtful that other populations would absorb additional supply.

2.9.3. Consideration to Housing Market Changes outside the NDC area

Changing housing markets outside NDC areas may impact on the situation within NDC areas. For example, an upturn in the housing market of an adjacent area in which asylum seekers are accommodated may result in their 'displacement' to the NDC area once they receive a positive decision, if affordable private accommodation or lower demand social housing is available. This will inevitably increase demand (for better or worse) within the neighbourhood. Alternatively, a reduction in the number of asylum seekers placed in neighbourhoods outside NDC areas will increase the supply of

accommodation in that neighbourhood which, in turn, could drain demand from the NDC area.

The situation in one case study area illustrates the potential impact on NDC areas of changes in housing market conditions elsewhere. In this case study area the majority of asylum seekers are accommodated outside the NDC area, with many allocated low demand social housing within the NDC once they are awarded refugee status. The private houses outside the NDC in which many asylum seekers are currently accommodated *"have generally been improved to better standard to satisfy regulation."* However, private landlords currently operating under NASS contracts may release this property onto the market if their contracts are not renewed in 2005, with several potential consequences for the housing market within the NDC area. Firstly, there will be a ready supply of private accommodation outside the NDC area, providing more attractive move-on accommodation for refugees, many of whom are currently occupying the one bed flats, maisonettes and low demand family homes within the NDC area. Secondly, there will be an increased supply of high quality private rented accommodation on the market elsewhere. Local residents more generally may be attracted by this, which will in turn drain demand from the NDC area.

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

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

3.1. Barriers Facing Partnerships in their Attempts to Meet the Needs of Asylum Seekers

3.1.1. Limited Information

Most NDC Partnerships reported having no accurate or robust information about the asylum seeker population in their area and could only offer anecdotal or impressionistic insights about it. Partnerships participating in the first asylum seekers study undertaken by the research team (see CRESR *et al*, 2003) had reported similar difficulties obtaining information about asylum seekers in their area, and three of the five case study respondents re-contacted as part of this study reported no improvement in the availability of information. Partnerships interviewed for this study commented on the limited availability of the following information:

- the numbers of asylum seekers in the NDC area
- the profile of asylum seekers in the area, for example with regards to their age, household composition and ethnic origin
- where in the neighbourhood they are located
- what happens to those who receive a positive decision
- what happens to those who do not receive a positive decision

The lack of information about asylum seekers hampers Partnerships' efforts to understand their impact on the local housing market, and impedes strategic planning and provision of services for them:

"We have no information on the number of asylum seekers in the NDC area, this impacts on the planning of services and we don't know what to do to meet the needs of asylum seekers as we have no information about them." (NDC Officer)

3.1.2. Inadequate Partnership Working

The Partnerships reported that a lack of communication and partnership working between housing providers, between services working with asylum seekers, and a lack of engagement between organisations working with or accommodating asylum seekers and the Partnership Board, presented obstacles to developing an integrated approach to meeting the needs of asylum seekers in their area.

3.1.3. A lack of clarity regarding the role of NDC Partnerships

There was a high degree of uncertainty amongst Partnerships about their role in the asylum process and in meeting the needs of asylum seekers in their area. Some respondents considered that Partnerships were ideally placed to address asylum issues, to develop services supporting asylum seekers in the area, and to incorporate their needs into the strategic planning process. However, they were hampered by a lack of guidance regarding their role and therefore felt unsure about the legitimacy of

committing resources. Other Partnerships perceived this issue to fall 'outside their remit' altogether.

3.1.4. Lack of awareness and understanding of immigration issues amongst NDC Partnerships

There was evidence that in some Partnerships there is limited understanding of immigration issues and the asylum process, and a degree of confusion about the difference between the status of asylum seekers and refugees. In a very small number of areas there were reports that some Board members did not perceive asylum seekers as being part of the local community and were consequently reluctant to commit resources to them.

3.2. NDC Partnerships: Implications for Policy and Practice

Despite a lack of clarity regarding the role that Partnerships could, or should, play regarding asylum seekers, there was a general view that the local, community based approach of NDCs places Partnerships in an ideal position to support asylum seekers and refugees in the area:

"the NDC is in a good position to provide support to asylum seekers and especially refugees as they get little support; they are ideally placed in the community."
(Local Authority Officer)

"are asylum seekers and refugees an NDC issue? The NDC is focusing on deprivation, asylum seekers and refugees say they also suffer from deprivation. The NASS system is meant to look after asylum seekers, what can the NDC do? I think the NDC needs to engage with the bigger concept of asylum seekers and refugees and they could play a role in providing a social focus for asylum seekers in particular." (Local Authority Officer)

Nevertheless, there are a number of policy and practice implications for consideration:

- **improving the evidence base and available data regarding asylum seekers.** Partnerships need to obtain more information about asylum seekers in their area in order to engage with asylum seekers and immigration issues, to understand the role asylum seekers are playing in the local housing market, and to develop appropriate local services. If this information is not available from official sources then Partnerships should seek to assemble it themselves
- **improving the understanding of asylum seekers' needs and aspirations.** If these are satisfied they may be more likely to choose to stay in their neighbourhood in the event of receiving a 'positive' asylum decision. In areas of depressed housing demand asylum seekers this may have a positive impact on neighbourhood stability and enhance demand for the area in the long term
- **monitor changes in the asylum seeker population and asylum policy.** In some areas changes in the numbers of asylum seekers or the supply of housing for them, could impact significantly on the local housing market
- **NDCs are ideally placed to contribute to management of the transition from asylum seeker to refugee status** by developing or funding projects and services that support this process. This transition can be difficult and without adequate support planning problems such as failed tenancies and community tensions, could emerge. The provision of support for asylum seekers refused leave to remain should also be considered
- **in developing their programmes Partnerships should link with other agencies**

to support asylum seekers in their areas. Partnerships may not have the knowledge, resources or skills to tackle this issue alone but many areas have a range of agencies which have something to offer. In addition, Partnerships are well placed to bring together housing and support services to encourage better partnership working in order to develop a more integrated approach to supporting asylum seekers in the local area

- **initiatives promoting positive attitudes** towards asylum seekers and refugees through education, training, and projects promoting cultural awareness and challenging media myths and stereotypes could be undertaken in collaboration with local agencies. These may improve asylum seekers' experiences of living in NDC areas, further community cohesion and reduce community tension and resentment. Awareness training for housing providers, Partnerships and other professionals would also be beneficial

3.3. Challenges for Policy Makers

Many NDCs are grappling with the issue of asylum seekers, but the difficulties they face are often not unique to NDC areas and raise questions which can only be resolved on a national stage:

- the policy (or practice) of housing asylum seekers in NDC areas which are, by definition, areas suffering deprivation, needs to be examined as it is likely to contribute to the overall level of social exclusion in NDC areas
- the 'period of grace', or the 'prescribed period' between asylum seekers receiving their decision and support being terminated currently stands at 21 or 28 days. This is unworkable and needs to be significantly extended
- a national government policy is needed to address the growing problem of 'failed' asylum seekers who have not been granted leave to remain. This is an issue which cannot be tackled effectively at the local level - it needs resources and political will
- refugees need to be supported in the transitional period from being an asylum seeker to a refugee. They require assistance finding accommodation, accessing services, employment, and benefits. Many may initially require support in their new tenancies. More formal arrangements for the provision of move-on accommodation are also needed

References

CRESR, CUPS and EIUA (2003) *Seeking Asylum in NDC Areas: A Report on Experiences, Policies and Practices - Research Report 18*. Sheffield: CRESR, Sheffield Hallam University: (<http://ndcevaluation.adc.shu.ac.uk/ndcevaluation/Reports.asp>).

Home Office (2004) *Asylum Statistics: 4th Quarter 2003*. (<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html>)

House of Commons (2004) *Asylum Applications - The Second Report Select Committee on Home Affairs*. (<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmhaff/218/21802.htm>)

Noble, G., Barnish, A., Finch, E. and Griffith, D. (2003), *A Review of the Operation of the National Asylum Support Service*: (<http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/default.asp?PageId=4615>)