

HARROW STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

working in partnership with

HARROW REFUGEE FORUM

MULTI-AGENCY STRATEGY

FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SERVICES TO

REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS

IN HARROW

Partner Agencies

(Names of endorsing agencies)

(e.g.) Harrow Strategic Partnership
Harrow Refugee Forum

(on behalf of local Refugee Community Organisations)

Harrow Council for Race Equality

Harrow Council

Harrow Primary Care Trust

North-West London Hospitals (NHS) Trust

Metropolitan Police

August 2004

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Definitions

Under international law, the term 'refugee' has a very precise meaning, as set out in the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to Refugees. In the Convention, a refugee is defined as an adult or child who has been recognised by the government of another country as having:

- a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion;
- is outside the country they belong to or normally reside in, and
- is unable or unwilling to return home for fear of persecution.

An 'asylum-seeker' is someone who is seeking refugee status.

People cease to be regarded as asylum-seekers when 'status' is granted, whether that be Discretionary Leave to Remain (DLR), Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR), or full refugee status.

'DLR' is in fact a form of refusal, but this gives time-limited status usually in 2 year periods where it is not possible to return an individual to their country of origin at the time of the decision. This may be extended for a further 2 years, depending on the state of play in the country of origin. Other refusal decisions will usually lead to an enforced return to the country of origin

'ILR' is a positive decision (leave to remain) which is usually granted for 4-6 years, at the end of which another status letter is issued by the Home Office which is not limited to a date. In some cases, the initial decision is given without limit of time.

'HLR' ('humanitarian leave to remain'), has a similar impact, but relates to cases where the positive decision is made purely for humanitarian reasons.

With ILR and Refugee status, an individual is recognized as a citizen of the UK, and as a refugee under the terms of the Geneva Convention. Individuals can now be formally recognized as citizens through ceremonies that are held in Local Authorities.

Aim of the strategy

We value the contribution which refugee families have made to the borough over many generations. We aim to work in partnership with all agencies and communities to support more recently arrived refugees and asylum-seekers. Our objective is that they settle happily in Harrow, so that they can play a full and active part in the future development of the borough.

MULTI-AGENCY STRATEGY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SERVICES TO REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS IN HARROW

1. Introduction

Background / reasons for developing a strategy

Until 1996, asylum-seekers arriving in the UK were entitled to claim Income Support as well as other benefits. From February 1996, these benefits were drastically reduced; and from then on many people could only receive practical help (subsistence and accommodation costs) from local authority Social Services Departments, under the National Assistance Act and the Children Act. Some, but not all, of the costs of proving this support are recoverable by the local authority from Central Government funds.

An Asylum-Seekers Team was established within Harrow Social Services in 1996 as a short-term response to these new pressures. From 2000 onwards, the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) began to take over responsibility for providing these services to some (but not all) of those who require them. However, the workload of the Asylum Seekers Team has increasingly become heavier and more complex. Towards the end of 2001, the Team was subject to a review by the District Auditor. One of the key recommendations in their report was that the Team should be given greater strategic direction and clarity of purpose through the development of a local Asylum-Seekers Strategy.

Purpose and Scope

Initial discussions concluded that the Team could only develop strategically within a broader comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of local refugees and asylum-seekers. The specific functions of the Team could then be placed within a general overarching framework.

The work to develop this strategy was undertaken in order to pull together all existingly available information about local needs, services and expenditure; and to use this to identify key underlying issues and to try and secure agreement amongst key local stakeholders as to what this more comprehensive approach should look like.

2. Process

Project Steering Group

A Project Steering Group (made up of officers from Housing Services, the Education Service, the Asylum-Seekers Team, Harrow Council Partnership Unit, and People First Strategy Department), was set up and has worked in partnership with the Harrow Refugee Forum. The Project Sponsor was the Executive Director, People First. Although it was not possible to secure active representation from all relevant organisations on the Steering Group itself, key contacts were identified within key partner organisations during the course of the work.

The broad approach adopted was one of:

- Gathering all relevant and available background information about the refugee and asylum-seeking communities in Harrow, and the current state of local services;
- A two-stage detailed consultation process:

- to test the broad picture emerging from that work against the directly reported experience of refugees and asylum-seekers in Harrow; and
- to engage key local stakeholders in work to refine understanding of the key strategic issues which require attention, and to help shape proposals for how best to respond to those;
- Circulation of this draft strategy to all key local stakeholders, for comment and amendment prior to seeking formal 'sign-up' and adoption by partner agencies.

Work Undertaken

During the second half of 2003, the Group held extensive discussions with many staff working for London Borough of Harrow, Harrow Primary Care Trust, voluntary sector organisations, (including RCOs) as well as London-wide organisations working to address the needs of refugees and asylum-seekers. The Group also worked closely with the Harrow Practitioner and Refugee Support Group, which was set up in 2002 to share information and best practice amongst practitioners in different fields, with the aim of ensuring an improved and more joined-up service for refugees and asylum-seekers.

Consultation

A public consultation event was held with refugees and asylum-seekers in February 2004 to develop understanding of their experience of living in Harrow and to hear suggestions for service improvements. This was attended by more than 200 local refugees and asylum-seekers, from a wide range of linguistic groups. Further consultation, held in May 2004, was attended by approximately 40 workers in the voluntary and statutory sectors, and considered the underlying strategic issues as well as more detailed suggestions for service development.

3. Current Picture

Refugee and Asylum-seeking communities in Harrow

- There are no firm figures or completely reliable estimates available for the number of refugees and asylum-seekers living in Harrow. Pooling of information from a wide range of sources suggests there are likely to be about 8,000 – 10,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in the Borough (approximately 4.5% of the total population), although this number is not expected to rise significantly from now on, and will include those who have been settled here for a long time. This number is based on many assumptions but includes up to 3,500 children in schools speaking a language from refugee / asylum-seeker communities, together with their parents. There is also no accurate way to disaggregate the above numbers into those who are relatively recent arrivals, as opposed to those who have been settled in the borough for some considerable time.
- Statistics indicate that of those who arrived before 2000, single adults were roughly 15% of the total number of applicants and roughly 26% of all adults. However, NASS statistics, reflecting people who arrived after 2000, indicate that nearly 75% to 80% of applications for asylum are now from single people.
- Analysis of service users, and of the languages being used in Harrow, give a picture of the main countries of origin:- Sri Lanka, Somalia, Iran, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Croatia. French and Portuguese speaking countries are the most prominent. Romanian, Slovenian, Turkish, Lingala, Kurdish, and Polish are also used.

Entitlement to benefits and services

Asylum-seekers and refugees living in Harrow may be entitled to different benefits, depending on their date of arrival, whether they applied for asylum in-country or at port of entry, where they are arriving from, and the stage of their application. They may receive full or reduced benefits, or a subsistence allowance, with or without housing.

The majority of those arriving after September 2000, as well as some of those previously living in Harrow, have been dispersed to areas outside London, being offered a subsistence allowance only if they chose to remain in London.

Refugees and asylum-seekers access a range of mainstream statutory services aimed at residents generally - the most significant ones being housing, education and health care. There are also some services which are aimed at all residents, or specially at minority ethnic groups, but which are used to a significant extent by refugees and asylum-seekers - e.g. the African well-woman clinics, or the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service in schools (EMAS). There are also some specially targeted services, e.g. the Asylum-Seekers Team, and a dedicated health visitor for asylum-seekers.

Several mainstream voluntary organisations are used to a significant extent by refugees and asylum-seekers - e.g. CAB, and there are about 15 Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) aiming to address the needs of their own members – usually from particular countries of origin.

Appendix 1 outlines the services provided to refugees and asylum-seekers by the local authority, by the PCT, and by the voluntary sector.

Gaps in services

The main areas of concern identified by refugees and asylum-seekers, Refugee Community Organisations, and practitioners were: housing, financial worries, getting advice, post-16 education / training, language difficulties, health, and care of unaccompanied minors. There was some concern about the impact of crime and drugs, difficulty in accessing sports and leisure facilities, and the unhelpful attitude of some professionals. School education was generally viewed very positively, and tends to be seen as something which off-sets other difficulties; although there were some concerns and suggestions for improvement. Appendix 2 details the key gaps which were identified.

Current remit of the Asylum-Seekers Team

Following various legislative and policy changes (and the shifting role of NASS), the remit of the Asylum-Seekers Team is now limited to the direct provision of subsistence and accommodation support, and / or specialist assessment services, for:

- Single adults and families who arrived in the UK before September 2000;
- 'Dis-benefited cases', i.e. those asylum-seekers with children under 18 who lost benefits on or after 25th September 2000 because of a negative decision on their application. The Team supports them, on behalf of NASS, with subsistence and accommodation until deportation or successful appeal;
- Those people who are not entitled to NASS support due to restrictions placed by the Act of 2002; but who are destitute / in need of care and attention / have dependent children.
- Unaccompanied minors aged 16 years and over (the Children and Families Service works with unaccompanied minors under 16).

- although 'NASS subsistence-only' asylum-seekers are not within the remit of the Team, they do come for advice and may require 'signposting' assistance.

The impact of the recent Government-announced 'amnesty' in relation to those with long-outstanding asylum applications (allowing those whose application dates from prior to October 2000 to apply for ILR status) has already led to a significant reduction in the numbers of families and single adults being supported through the team, and the count of people in these groups is expected to fall still further to minimal levels within the next few months. It had already been planned that there would also be a gradual transfer to NASS of responsibility for all asylum-seekers for whom the local authority is providing support under interim regulations, but the time-scale for this remains uncertain. Moreover, people in the last four of the above categories would continue to require support from the Asylum-Seekers Team.

4. Policy issues and other considerations

National policy concerned with the way newly-arrived applicants for asylum are treated and the range of support available to them whilst their case is being considered remains somewhat unpredictable and is the subject of considerable public and media interest. This may well be subject to further considerable change as political imperatives and priorities develop over the next few years. This creates a degree of unavoidable uncertainty in relation to the policy context within which local agencies and local services function. There is also a considerable history of change in the functioning of the NASS, and in the pace and timing of their ability and capacity to take on the support responsibilities formerly held by local authorities.

It is also important to recognise that (by the very nature of the issues at stake) it will always be difficult to predict future patterns of arrival. In particular, it is difficult to predict what proportion of (currently dispersed) people may seek to make their way back to the Harrow area once their immediate status issues are resolved, or (almost by definition) about the numbers of people who may be here illegally, anxious to remain hidden, but potentially likely to call on some local (e.g. health services) at some time. However, it should now be possible to position local services so as to be better attuned and more responsive to future changes in need and patterns of demand.

The current and anticipated future functioning of NASS and the operation of the dispersal scheme means that it is very likely that this local authority will have to provide for relatively smaller numbers of new asylum-seekers in the future. The work required will increasingly be with people who have been settled in the UK, and perhaps in the borough, for a few years. However, the expanding range of countries of origin involved suggests a need to refine predominant understandings of Harrow's cultural diversity accordingly so as to more fully recognise the wider range of groups now present, especially in relation to linguistic variation.

There is a very strong foundation available to build upon, provided by Harrow's recent experience of welcoming and being enriched by the presence of very significant numbers of people from minority ethnic groups.

This should mean that the future positioning of local support services for these groups can be presented in a clear and positive way, although it is recognised that much national media attention and some local opinion towards refugee and asylum-seeking groups is likely to remain predominantly negative in tone.

Recent changes in national policy and in the development of nationally-managed services means that the future role of the current Asylum-Seekers Team can now be more clearly

defined. The location of this Team within the emerging structure of the People First Directorate can now be more appropriately decided; and discussions to resolve this issue are now under way.

RCOs are a major resource for local asylum-seekers, and are often their first port of call on arrival or when seeking services: any strategy needs to pay particular attention to their role and how this can be effectively and progressively developed. Other key considerations which are recognised as being specially relevant are:

- The increasing significance of the 'West London' dimension in relation to patterns of movement and settlement among refugee and asylum-seeking communities, and the consequential need for new service initiatives to be planned and managed on a cross-authority basis. This has special significance in relation to the way in which new bids for external funding are evaluated, and on the emerging significance of the 'West London Alliance' in extending capacity-building work with local RCOs and in securing funding support for the service-development initiatives which they seek.
- The range of work now being focussed on developing and supporting 'community cohesion' across West London, which is now gathering momentum and which has the potential to help both to secure additional resources and to allow access to developing good practice in this area.

5. Key strategic issues

The Project Group has identified a number of key strategic issues, response to which should provide the key foundations for this strategy. These were tested and broadly endorsed by those who participated in the second (stakeholder) consultation discussions.

5.1 Co-ordination of services

It is very clear from the information gathered to date (and especially from the initial consultation meeting) that existing services are seriously fragmented and uncoordinated, and are experienced as such by those seeking to use them. By and large, they have been developed in an ad hoc way in response to immediate issues / changes in national policy and / or NASS practice, but without any effective strategic overview. Potential service users, and also those professionals working most closely with these communities, find the greatest difficulty in locating information, in knowing what services are available and in how to secure access. This criticism effectively echoes the District Auditor's findings from their review of the Asylum-Seekers Team

There is a clear need to secure a better co-ordinated approach to the strategic development of local services, and the Project Group strongly felt that this should be led at a senior level within each of the main partner organisations (Director level within the Council); tied in to the Harrow Strategic Partnership framework, and to the Community Cohesion programme being managed through the West London Alliance; and undertaken in partnership with the voluntary sector.

A possible model for establishing a co-ordinating group would be:

A Director level lead; strategic as well as operational leads from relevant identified services - Urban Living (Housing, Regeneration and Environmental Health); People First (Childrens Services, Community & Learning, and Area Directorate, Manager of Asylum- Seekers Team); Harrow PCT; NWLHT; HUMHS; Police; representatives from CAB and HCRE; Chair

of Harrow Refugee Forum. To function using a Partnership Board model, meeting perhaps quarterly, and reporting through to the Harrow Strategic Partnership framework.

This needs to go hand in hand with clarifying the role of the Harrow Refugee Forum and RCOs, and reviewing funding. This arrangement could provide for the continuation (and possible expansion) of the work of the current Refugee Practitioner Group, but should ensure that this can report through to a more senior level group with capacity to review strategic direction and coordinate local policy and service development.

5.2 Role of Harrow Refugee Forum and RCOs

As part of the co-ordinating group, the Forum needs to ensure that it is more fully representative of its full range of constituencies and members, and that it can support them to fulfil their objectives. Steered by the co-ordinating group, RCOs could work with each other and other groups to set up services. If their role is clarified, RCOs could begin to access more funding and appropriate training, so that they can move to being direct providers of specified services – e.g. in relation to information services, accredited advice services, support to deal with low-level mental-health / the effects of trauma, etc.

5.3 Funding

The District Audit report recommended that grants to voluntary sector organisations be reviewed and that grant-giving be used to support the delivery of the strategy. The grant system needs to be reviewed to evaluate if RCOs are appropriately funded to deliver certain services as part of the overall strategy, this needs to be taken account of within the scope of the review of grant-support for the voluntary sector more generally, which is currently underway within the Council. Targets and funding criteria for mainstream voluntary organisations need to be sharpened to ensure that these agencies are better able to respond to the needs of refugees and asylum-seekers – an issue which it is hoped the current Council review of its voluntary sector grant support may be able to address.

External funding opportunities for RCOs need to be maximised, with the aim of building up and extending their role so that they can move more securely towards becoming specialist service providers, not just campaigning / lobbying / support agencies. This will require a dedicated post-holder with knowledge and capacity to enable RCOs to make successful bids - on their own, or jointly. Possible areas in which local RCOs could be encouraged to develop as service-providers include: collation, maintenance and dissemination of systematic service and guidance information; provision of translation and interpreting services; provision of accredited advice services; provision of support for those experiencing the effects of trauma, stress, or other 'low-level' mental health problems.

Quite frequently, refugees will move across and between different boroughs in West London. Funding organisations (e.g. Renewal) are also now moving towards funding larger projects which cut across all of West London, and which provide for different refugee communities.

Hence, building links with other boroughs in terms of strategy development is important, as is the need to work across a range of RCOs within the borough. This consideration again reinforces the need to establish an overall umbrella planning group with multi-agency input and a strong strategic focus

5.4 Location and function of the Asylum-Seekers Team

This issue clearly needs to be considered in view of the role the Council wishes the Team to play in meeting the needs of unaccompanied minors as well as refugees and asylum-seeker communities generally.

Two possible models suggest themselves:

1. To develop the Team as a multi-agency, multi-professional service (on a similar model to that underpinning the Youth Offending Team) so that this can provide a comprehensive, 'one-stop shop' service to all local refugees and asylum-seekers (not just those for whom the Council has a formal responsibility for the provision of welfare subsistence support), and using a 'concentrated expertise' style of approach.
2. To develop using a 'distributed expertise' model which would involve retaining a smallish core unit centrally to provide services for what will almost certainly be a steadily diminishing number of adults for whom the Authority retains some formal responsibility; but encouraging the identification of 'local specialists' within other relevant service teams. The role of the specialist team would include co-ordinating, monitoring, training, and developing links with the voluntary sector. This might involve some team members being out-posted to other relevant services, and / or working more directly with RCOs.

Given the anticipated decline in the numbers of adults requiring the range of services currently provided by the Team, and the importance of the aim of ensuring that local arrangements can support refugees and asylum-seekers to access mainstream services effectively and to take their place as full citizens whenever their legal status allows for this, the Project Group recommendation is that the second of these models would be the more appropriate.

It is envisaged that the specialist support required by those who arrive as 'unaccompanied minors' without local parental-style support will continue to be provided through the specialist services of the Childrens Services social work and Leaving Care teams within People First, including use of the Looked-After Children system for those for whom this is appropriate. The policy and resource implications of the recent 'Hillingdon Judgement' will continue to have potentially very significant impacts, but also suggest that the continued provision of this range of specialist support services will need to be delivered from that kind of basis.

The effective functioning of the Asylum-Seekers Team would benefit from the provision of some dedicated support from the Council's Legal Section, to help them keep up with and interpret legislative changes, and the impact of rapidly developing case-law decisions as these emerge.

The development of area-based working as a key feature of the way Council services are now managed and delivered provides an ideal platform from which to develop the role of this team to begin to provide a much stronger 'community development' focus - working to promote community cohesion, and to address health and social inequalities.

This role would certainly not be incompatible with their retaining a role in providing a 'safety-net' of direct subsistence and accommodation support for those not covered by NASS arrangements, and in providing specialist advice and expertise / assessment input to support other Council services.

This approach would also be consistent with a key theme of this strategy which would be to secure the provision of a continuing safety-net of direct provision where this is needed, but otherwise to begin to move towards ensuring that mainstream provision is better geared to provide for the needs of this group of people, as opposed to building further specialist services.

5.5 Addressing specific gaps in current service provision

Given the broad resource constraints under which all local public service agencies now operate, it is likely that there will always remain a range of service development and resourcing issues in this area which will require attention and prioritisation along with other local needs.

However, there is a clear need to take practical steps to progressively address identified gaps in local services as and when resources allow, some of the priorities being:

- Improvements to the range and distribution of more appropriate information about local services and support frameworks;
- A review of the spend on language services in order to maximise benefit;
- Employment and training:

Co-ordinated efforts between local colleges, Early Years and Childcare Team, and educational lettings / other venues to set up a more readily accessible range of ESOL provision and other courses;

Enable RCOs to provide some direct services, which will help to open up job opportunities for refugees and asylum-seekers;

Explore the capacity of '*Refugees into Jobs*' to have a higher and more local profile within Harrow, and develop initiatives with them - e.g. work-placements etc;

Maximise the use of Connexions and the Careers Service to provide advice about qualifications etc.

- Promote positive images of asylum-seekers, initially focusing efforts on young people, perhaps including through the use of the Internet.

6. Commitment of Key Agencies

The key partner agencies, identified on the title page of this document, have agreed to endorse the strategy and to support delivery of the Action Plan outlined below (Section 7). They have further committed to supporting the further on-going strategic development and direction of local services in partnership with each other and with local community groups, and have agreed to be accountable to the Harrow Strategic Partnership for the delivery of their contribution to achieving the Aim of this strategy.

7. Useful links / local groups

(to be added)

7. Action Plan (Initial version - to be further developed)

Strategic issue	Action	Lead person	Target date	Resource required	Comments
Co-ordination of services; Role of Forum and RCOs; Role of Asylum-Seekers Team	Invite nominations from People First (Learning Services, Childrens Services), Urban Living (Regeneration Team, Housing, Environmental Health), PCT, Police, CAB, HRF, HCRE for Partnership Board	Nominated lead Director			
	Set up co-ordinating group with Head of AST and HRF, agree terms of reference, etc.	Nominated lead Director			
Funding	Explore Funding Officer resource to support RCOs	Director of Strategy, Urban Living			
Address gaps in services	Explore funding to develop information pack				
	Develop brief for information pack project				
	Award contract for information pack	Regeneration Team			
	Explore local service outlet for Harrow from Refugees into Jobs				
	Liase with colleges and Early Years Team to set up community-based ESOL provision				
	Explore better legal support for AST with Legal section	Manager, AST			

Appendix 1: Services used most significantly by refugees and asylum-seekers

Local Authority Services

- Housing service (25% of temporary housing)
- Schools (1800 refugees and asylum-seekers receive EMAS support in addition to the range of mainstream services, including school meals and clothing allowance)
- Colleges
- Language and IT classes in colleges and community venues
- Asylum-Seekers Team (caseload of 525 in June 2003, 1947 cases closed since 1996)
- Mental Health Teams (4% of Team's caseload)
- Children and Families Team (7-10 unaccompanied minors per year)
- HIV Team (over 50% of Team's caseload)
- Environmental Health (poor housing, neighbours' complaints and Khat distribution points)
- Youth Offending Team (victims and perpetrators, as well as those involved in gang conflict)
- Translation and interpreting services
- Local Authority gives approximately £20,000 in grants to approximately 12 Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) which provide a support and advice service to refugees and asylum-seekers. In addition, some of the groups are based at Community Premises, free of charge, which offers the services of a full-time premises co-ordinator.

PCT Services

- 1 health visitor for asylum-seekers and refugees
- 1 health visitor for the homeless, which would include some asylum-seekers and refugees
- Information booklets for refugees and asylum-seekers and professionals
- Female genital mutilation clinic, African well-woman clinics, use of HIV clinics
- Translation and interpretation
- Personal Medical Service funding at Enderley Close includes refugees and asylum-seekers living in the catchment area. (supposedly up and running)
- Personal Medical Service funding to employ 1 GP, 1 nurse practitioner, and 1 mental health nurse practitioner for hard to reach groups, including refugees and asylum-seekers being set up at Caryl Thomas clinic

Local Voluntary Sector Services

- Approximately 12 RCOs
- Several specific projects, e.g. Mental Health Worker, Access Development Worker, 'Refugees into Jobs', two Children's Fund projects
- Several mainstream voluntary sector organisations are used to a significant extent by refugees and asylum-seekers, e.g. CAB, & HCRE
- London-wide organisations offer services to Harrow RCOs and individuals, especially the Community Cohesion programme managed through the West London Alliance.

Appendix 2: Identified gaps in current services

Housing

This has been identified as a major area of difficulty:

- Long period spent in temporary accommodation
- The poor quality and overcrowding of housing, particularly for NASS subsistence only households
- No statutory access to housing for single former asylum-seekers
- Insufficient access to information about housing options
- Poor quality and cost of privately rented accommodation
- Impact on young people settling into schools etc.

Money

Not enough, especially to pay for private housing and to pay for activities for children, for nearly everyone.

Advice

- Anxiety about legal status, lengthy procedure etc. Variable quality of solicitors.
- RCOs themselves would like to become accredited providers of Information, Advice & Guidance
- Not aware of other entitlements, and where to go to find out, need one-stop shop
- Asylum-Seeker Team does not work with refugees, would benefit from an attached worker

Post-school education and training / employment

- More ESOL provision needs to be established.
- Information and assistance in accessing the education, training and employment
- Information and encouragement for potential employers
- Need for skills analysis of refugee communities and careers advice.
- Delays and difficulty in getting recognition for existing qualifications, or converting
- Getting only unskilled jobs
- Childcare support

Language services

- Most groups urgently need info in own languages
- PCT workers have experienced difficulties with use of interpreting services
- RCOs themselves want to play a greater role in providing language services

Health

Some groups have no concerns, but the following are quite frequently mentioned:

- Lack of information on rights and benefits in appropriate formats
- Information for health professionals on entitlements to services, and cultural issues
- Difficulties in registering with a GP, and GP understanding of refugee needs
- Specific issues, e.g. women with male GPs, Somalis using Khat, TB, new arrivals being run down after a difficult journey and poor nutrition, female genital mutilation
- Need for one stop health needs assessment on arrival
- Interpretation services
- Same language GPs if possible, e.g. Tamil
- Community stigma for HIV patients

Mental Health

- Many communities, some more than others, report loneliness, isolation, and depression.
- Often GPs can not differentiate between physical and mental health issues
- Need for support and preventative work, which the mental health teams do not address
- Little access to counselling services
- Stigma surrounding mental health problems, and insensitivity of services to it
- Joined up working between the Asylum-seeker Team and the Mental Health Teams

Unaccompanied Minors

- Anxiety about reaching 18. Very limited support for 16+, who are in B&Bs. Need advice and training. Various workers attempt to provide advocacy, life skills and independence training, emotional support, help with accessing services, but resources are limited and work is not joined up.

School Education

Many people are happy with the education service and feel this off-sets many other difficulties. Some concerns do exist however:

- According to a recent Ofsted report asylum-seeker children perform well once appropriate language support is in place. Good practice needs to be explored.
- Most children requiring EMAS support need 3-5 hours per week, but only get an hour each.
- EMAS have lost links with supplementary schools due to lack of time.
- Need for a comprehensive needs assessment and personal education plan.
- Many children need counselling support, which schools are not resourced to provide
- Some have experienced long waiting times for admission, far-off schools, difficulty in settling in, and being encouraged to follow 'soft options'.
- Some RCOs feel schools could play a role in mother-tongue teaching.

Sports and Leisure

Refugees and asylum-seekers are frequently unable to access facilities, due to lack of funds, information, and perhaps due to public attitudes. However, this is particularly important in view of poor housing and mental ill-health, as well as increasing use of Khat, and the fact that people socialising on the streets can fuel negative images in the neighbourhood and will be affected by the Anti-Social Behaviour Bill.

Crime, drugs etc

- Not identified as a big issue, although some areas felt to be not safe, and some people have experienced racial abuse. A few communities are concerned that children may get involved in drugs and there is some distrust of Police from the Somali groups.
- Concerns about crime within and amongst Refugee groups, e.g. Tamil and Somali, and young people being involved in it.

Attitude of professionals

Users report that attitudes vary from helpful to rude or unaware.

Background paper: Mapping of needs and services to inform strategy: April 2004

Copies of this paper (which provides a more detailed description and analysis of the local information summarised in Appendices 1 to 2) are available on request from:

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