
ASYLUM SUPPORT CONTRACT

**Responsible Cabinet Member(s) – Councillor Bill Dixon,
Community and Public Protection Portfolio**

Responsible Director(s) – Cliff Brown, Director of Community Services

Purpose of Report

1. To advise Members that the current contract for Asylum Support scheme ends in September 2006 and seek approval for new contractual arrangements.

Information and Analysis

Background

2. Darlington is a partner in the North East Consortium for Asylum and Refugee Support Services (NECARS). Ten of the North East local authorities have an existing contract with the Home Office for the support and integration of Asylum Seekers. Darlington's service has been inspected by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) and the properties used inspected by consultant surveyors. Our properties have been found to have the highest standards in the region, our service has been in one of the top two positions for occupancy levels and we have been complimented on the quality of the service by NASS. One of the contributory factors to the overall success of the scheme is that we have ensured Asylum Seekers integrate well into their local communities by operating the scheme in a variety of locations at manageable levels.

Terms of the Contract

3. The proposed new contract differs from the existing contract, which is based on a weekly payment for occupied property. Payments will in future be made at a daily rate for each service user who is supported with different rates being paid for families and singles. There are also changes to the way the service is delivered. Currently NASS allocate people directly into properties but under the new arrangements there will be more flexibility and the Northern Consortium will offer us new clients who we can choose to allocate specific properties. The number of Asylum Seekers we currently support under the scheme is 37 but it is likely that the number will reduce over time, if as predicted, the Asylum Seeker population reduces. To reflect this position there is a release clause whereby if the overall numbers across the Consortium reduce by more than 30% the contract could be ended or renegotiated. There is also flexibility to allow us to re-let properties currently designated for use by Asylum Seekers to meet other temporary accommodation needs for homeless people.

4. It is considered, therefore, that the contract will be at least cost neutral in that the expenditure will be fully covered by the income received from the Home Office with the overall value of the current scheme being around £150,000 per annum.
5. Newcastle City Council as lead local authority is to sign a new five-year contract with NASS on behalf of the Northern Consortium. It is anticipated that each of the six other participating authorities will be asked to sign an agreement with Newcastle City Council. There is as yet still no fully agreed timetable but NASS have asked that the contract be signed and implemented as soon as possible, well before the current contract expires in September 2006.

Outcome of Consultation

6. The Asylum Locality Forum has been consulted and is supportive of the scheme continuing to be operated by the Council.

Legal Implications

7. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

8. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

Council Policy Framework

9. The issues contained within this report do not represent change to Council policy or the Council's policy framework

Decision Deadline

10. For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does represent an urgent matter because NASS have requested that contracts be signed as soon as possible now that negotiations are complete. Early agreement to the new arrangements will, therefore, enable the new contract to be signed off at the earliest possible time once all six local authorities involved confirm their acceptance.

Key Decisions

11. This is a key decision and as such has been reported on the forward plan.

Recommendation

12. It is recommended that Members authorise the Borough Solicitor to complete the new contractual arrangements for the continuation of the Asylum Support Scheme in Darlington over the next five years.

Reasons

13. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons: -
 - (a) Participation in the national asylum dispersal arrangements is recommended by the ODPM.
 - (b) The current asylum scheme has operated successfully for the past five years.
 - (c) The scheme contributes significantly to social inclusion and diversity, as well as contributing to the promotion of equalities.

**Cliff Brown,
Director of Community Services**

Background Papers

- (i) Draft contract from NASS

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