



**Report of the Legacy Emergency Response
Service
February to November 2008**

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Introduction

This report is primarily an account of the work commissioned by Plymouth City Council from Students and Refugees Together (START) to set up a time-limited 'Legacy Emergency Response Service' from February to November 2008. Although the focus is on the provision that was made for the first group of families affected by decisions made through the Case Resolution Directorate (CRD), reference is also made to the continuing difficulties experienced by the second group of families receiving positive decisions through this process now that the additional support has ended.

These references are in shaded text to distinguish them from the body of the report.

National background

In May 2007 the Home Office introduced the New Asylum Model (NAM). This was explicitly designed to speed up the asylum process. Since that time people, including families, coming to the UK and applying for asylum have their claims dealt with through NAM. The Home Office recognised however, that a large number of older cases would not be fully determined by May 2007 and the Case Resolution Directorate or CRD (formerly known as Legacy) was set up to deal with these older claims. It was estimated that 450,000 cases (families and individuals) were outstanding nationally and currently the Home Office expects all of these to be resolved by 2011.

At the end of August 2007 the Case Resolution Directorate began to look at the cases of families who had been in the UK for a number of years. It was recognised by the Home Office that positive grants would place pressure on local authority housing stocks and homelessness teams. In view of this, the Home Office made some short-term funding available to local authorities.

This funding is no longer in place.

Plymouth background

In anticipation of the pressures placed on services locally Matt Garrett (Housing Options Manager) commissioned a 9-month 'Legacy Emergency Response Service' from START, an organisation which has provided a needs-led holistic service to people seeking asylum and with refugee status since 2001. As an organisation START was already familiar with many of the issues facing people when they received a positive decision because of its work under a 'Supporting People' contract providing a Refugee Housing Support Service (RHSS). Funding for the Legacy Emergency Response Service was made available through a variation to the existing RHSS contract.

Aims of the Legacy Emergency Response Service

The funding enabled START to employ a worker (0.75 FTE) for 9 months from February to October 2008. The post was increased by START to a full time position using START resources and was advertised and filled as such. Prior to February nine families had received a positive decision and were referred to, and supported within, the Refugee Housing Support Service (RHSS). Once in post the lead legacy worker had specific responsibility to coordinate the work with families receiving a positive decision through the case resolution process. The Home Office identified 32 families initially.

Seven key areas of work were identified:

- Initial assessment
- Obtaining National Insurance Numbers
- Accessing destitution support
- Signposting to other agencies
- Support in accessing UK benefits
- Liaising with housing support
- Identifying and reporting on unmet need – this is discussed under each of the above headings

Outcomes

This report details the service provided by the Legacy Emergency Response Service under the seven key areas of work listed above and incorporates feedback from the families. Students who had not been part of the service and were newly on placement at START collected the feedback in order to reduce any risk of bias.

Initial assessment

An initial assessment was completed with 26 families and covered the following areas: Housing, Finance, Health, Education and Employment, Legal Issues and Cultural and Social Integration. At first the legacy worker received notification of a family's positive decision early on. This allowed time to complete the initial assessment before Home Office asylum support stopped and the transition to UK benefits started, with its inevitable period of destitution. Early notification ended due to changes in Home Office systems and START became reliant on the families themselves contacting the agency. The initial assessment was often the first opportunity families had to explore the possibilities open to them on receiving refugee status. None of the service users interviewed for feedback identified any dissatisfaction with the initial interview and when asked specifically if it covered the area that were important to them all answered 'yes'.

All families experienced a huge sense of relief at having received a positive decision particularly as some families, including children, had been detained by the UK Borders Agency during the long asylum process. However families faced the sudden withdrawal of all support as asylum support continues for a maximum of 28 days after a termination notice is issued. Families then needed to negotiate the complex process of accessing UK housing and benefits systems and had to make crucial decisions around whether to access private or social housing and to decide whether to stay in Plymouth or move away. Together these factors made this a stressful time for families. The initial assessment was the start of a process whereby families could be supported to identify and understand these choices. The lead legacy worker co-ordinated services for families and worked as a member of the START team supporting the families. A service user commented that 'having a support

worker was very helpful', another commented that the support received from START was 'excellent, very helpful (if I) ever need help (I) just have to ask'.

All families asked stated that the initial assessment covered the areas they were concerned about. Families had contact with a START worker within a week of receiving status with the exception of those families where there were difficulties with contact details supplied by the Home Office.

National Insurance Numbers (NINOs)

In order to access UK benefits, including housing benefit, child benefit and child tax credit, adults need to have a National Insurance Number (NINO). Any delay in receiving a NINO extends the period of destitution. A fast track system was put in place nationally to ensure NINOs were received soon after a family received a positive decision through the Case Resolution Directorate. This process was not in place for the first families, which did create delays and difficulty in accessing services. Once the fast track system was in place it worked well with families receiving individualised NINO forms with their status papers and when this was returned the NINO came, by post, within a week. Families completed these forms with support, usually from START, during the initial assessment. The lead legacy worker was able to ensure this process happened quickly and families realised the importance of obtaining a National Insurance Number. Families asked for feedback reported that the process for obtaining NINOs was easy and straightforward. A service user commented that he was 'pleased they (NINOs) came through so quickly compared to some friends (my) number came in a week.'

The fast tracking process has now ended and all families receiving a positive decision through the Case Resolution Directorate will now have to obtain a NINO from the Job Centre.

Accessing destitution support

Most families waiting for a decision on their asylum case receive weekly payments of 70% of UK state benefits: Job Seekers Allowance or Income Support. One family had received no financial support from the Asylum Support Service for several months and relied on the support of friends for food and housing. Families therefore have very little savings and all financial support from the Home Office is terminated after 28 days following a successful asylum claim. Unlike people who are granted refugee status through the New Asylum Model and can access an Integration Loan to help set up their first home in the UK, people who are granted asylum through the Case Resolution Directorate receive indefinite leave to remain 'outside the normal rules'. They are therefore disqualified from accessing the Integration Loan and from applying for some backdated benefits.

As discussed below the lead legacy worker was able to support families in accessing UK benefits although inevitably families went through a period of destitution of between one and seven weeks when they had no income at all. The lead legacy worker was able to ensure that families were referred to agencies where emergency support was available. This included referrals to The Devon and Cornwall Refugee Support Council food program [dried food parcels], the Red Cross [Tesco tokens which can be collected fortnightly] and the Food Bank. Families also utilised their own support networks with friends lending money or cooking meals.

Once the family had completed the Job Centre interview and their claim was being processed it was possible to apply for a Crisis Loan from the Social Fund. The lead legacy worker ensured all families were aware of this facility. The money was a loan and had to be repaid by making deductions at source from Income Support or Job Seekers Allowance payments. Some families, especially the larger ones, took advantage of this facility, however it did result in reduced benefits at a later date when the loan payments were collected.

The lead legacy worker was also instrumental in negotiating an initiative with the Social Inclusion Unit and the Social Services Assessment team to loan families the equivalent of the UK benefits they were entitled to access. This was to be payable from the point the asylum support payments ended and would have eliminated the

period of total destitution. It was agreed that once benefits were in payment the money would be repaid through the backdated benefits. Unfortunately due to administrative difficulties this process was not activated. However the groundwork that the lead legacy worker put in place should enable families in similar circumstances to access this funding. A service user described this period as 'very difficult, had to loan money', another service users commented that the wait for UK benefits took 'a long time' a third described receiving 'help from friends' as well as Red Cross vouchers and accessing the Devon and Cornwall Refugee Support Council food support.

Signposting to other agencies

The Legacy emergency response funded one worker for nine months and as the original Legacy list contained 32 names it was always anticipated that signposting to other agencies would be their primary function. However, families were able to receive significantly more practical support because of the unique nature of START's workforce and much of the lead legacy worker's time was spent co-ordinating the START team's work and being the main point of contact for external agencies.

Core agencies and support received by most families:

Homelessness team at Midland House: *housing support*

Devon Inclusive Housing Worker (DIHP): *support for families with complex housing issues*

Devon and Cornwall Refugee Support Council (DCRSC): *food programme and assistance for families wanting to obtain travel documents*

Red Cross: *Destitution support the form of Tesco tokens*

Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS): *supported children with obtaining bus passes when in temporary housing and offering advice about schooling when families left the city*

Plymouth Job Centre Plus: *interviewed families and processed claims for Job Seekers Allowance and Income support*

Additional agencies and support received by some families:

Race Equality Council (REC): *supporting families facing issues with racism*

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB): *advice for families with complex financial issues*

Enterprise Plymouth: *advice on setting up own business*

Action 4 Employment A4e: *advice on employment*

Disability Information and Advice Centre (DIAC): *advice on benefits linked to disability*

Plymouth Christian Centre: *help with sourcing furniture and white goods for families setting up their first homes in the UK*

Resettlement Agency: *help with sourcing furniture and white goods for families setting up their first homes in the UK*

City College: *English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes and other further education courses*

Open Doors: *English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes*

Plymouth University: *accessing higher education*

Signposting on most occasions did not simply mean giving the family the phone number and then leaving them to access the agency. Different families required varying amounts of support from START depending on factors such as levels of English, family composition [e.g. lone parent, older child with good levels of English], expectations of the families and the experience families had previously had with other agencies. All families were happy to work directly with agencies such as the Devon and Cornwall Refugee Support Council, Race Equality Council, Devon Inclusive Housing Project Worker and Education Minority Achievement Service. These agencies have considerable experience of working with people who have claimed asylum and families were frequently familiar with key workers.

Signposting into mainstream agencies with less experience of working in the refugee and asylum field is complex. The families' documents and 'financial histories' are very different from those routinely requested and provided by the general UK population. Also many families do not have as clear an understanding of processes as agencies assume. These obstacles are coupled with language and

cultural barriers and years of waiting in the asylum system. Although families may have lived physically in the UK they were excluded from nearly all opportunities to interact with agencies other than those explicitly designed to support the asylum process. Families wanting to apply for a provisional driving licence for example needed far more support than signposting to the DVLA, which repeatedly refused to accept status documents.

Accessing UK benefits

Once the support provided by the asylum support service ended families usually needed to access UK benefits until they were able to find employment. For most adults the benefits they were entitled to claim were either income support or job seekers allowance; parents also applied for child benefit and child tax credit for each dependant child. Other benefits accessed by specific individuals supported by the lead legacy worker were: working tax credit, disability living allowance, incapacity benefit and educational maintenance allowance (EMA). NB. Housing benefit is discussed separately.

Job Seekers Allowance and Income Support

These benefits were usually accessed by an initial telephone interview to a call centre followed by a face-to-face interview at a Plymouth Job Centre approximately 4 to 6 working days later. After interview the claim was sent to processing and benefits were paid once the claim has been successfully processed. One service user commented that the success of the initial phone interview 'depended on the person (I) found some helpful and others not understanding'.

Families encountered difficulties at a number of stages in this process. Some workers would not take the claim until after the end date for asylum benefits. Although it was explained that the UK benefits claim would not be in payment for some time, due to delays in processing, on occasions the worker would not proceed with the claim. The lead legacy worker was able to support families with this process by encouraging them to persist. Families also needed support when making the phone call, as some questions were outside people's experiences, for example questions relating to UK savings schemes such as ISAs and industrial disputes.

During the interview at the Job Centre people encountered further difficulties as Home Office documents frequently contain inaccuracies.

Families who receive a positive decision through the New Asylum Model have named case owners who can take responsibility for ensuring correct documents are received once status is granted. These case owners can be contacted by phone. The experience of the lead legacy worker was that families receiving a decision through the Case Resolution Directorate did not have a named case owner in the same way. Without a named case owner, it is extremely difficult to make alterations to documents when there are inaccuracies with dates of birth and spellings of names.

Job Centre staff in Plymouth were often unfamiliar with the documents families were issued with such as the NASS 35, which lists asylum support received. When accompanied by a START worker the families were able to explain the documents and any inaccuracies and the lead legacy worker was instrumental in ensuring families were supported during the interview. When the claim was sent to processing the lead legacy worker ensured that START workers and the families claiming benefits maintained phone contact so the claim could proceed into payment as quickly as possible, thus reducing the period of total destitution. As both of these benefits are paid at just over £60.00 for one adult and £94.00 for a couple the income for a single mother with five children was extremely low. It was only when child benefit and child tax credit was also in payment that income levels moved up to the minimum income levels set by the government. People's experiences of the Job centre varied. One service user described the process as 'easy because of having a support worker' and went on to comment that there was 'no interpreter at the Job Centre only through the phone line (Language Line)'. Another service user stated that 'some staff were not very polite'

Child benefit and child tax credit

In order to claim **child benefit**, a form that can be downloaded from the Internet was completed and posted to the child benefit office in Newcastle along with original documents. However, as the immigration status document was the only document accepted as proof of identity, and because it was needed to access other benefits,

families were extremely reluctant to send off the originals. The lead legacy worker was able to find an alternative. By going to the Tax office and getting photocopies of the status document authenticated families were able to retain originals. This process became more complex when the Tax office in Plymouth made the decision to see each child as well as the original document. Families needed to take children out of school and supported by a START worker the entire family [for example 2 adults and 5 children] had to attend the Tax office for documents to be authenticated.

This service was valued, as it meant families could retain their only form of identification. The Tax office's ability to check an adult or child's photographic ID against a photocopy of that ID and send it on to the Child Benefit department was extremely helpful. The additional layer however, which was suddenly introduced of having the children and adults physically present themselves at the Tax Office before the photocopies of documents could be validated, was not helpful. Currently the child benefit phone line quotes a wait of up to 16 weeks for people claiming child benefit if they come from overseas and invariably families did have to wait for this period.

This prolonged wait still exists and has a huge impact on families.

To claim **child tax credit**, a short phone interview triggered a form, which was posted to the claimant. A START worker supported the families making this initial phone call. If National Insurance numbers had not yet been received the phone operator was usually reluctant to send the application form.

As families now receiving a positive decision have had the fast tracking national insurance number service through a 'legacy decision' removed this substantially delays the claim for child tax credit.

Once the form was completed it was posted to the tax credit department. Initially it took the same length of time as child benefit, 16 weeks, as the checks for this benefit are done through the child benefit claim. The lead legacy worker was instrumental in getting this process speeded up. Through discussions at the Welfare Rights Forum in Plymouth it became apparent that a fast tracking system was in

place for families receiving a decision through the case resolution process and once this was accessed, child tax credit was sometimes in payment in 4 to 6 weeks. This made a huge difference to the families.

Housing benefit

This had to be accessed by completing a housing benefit form and then providing supporting evidence relating to income, savings and identity. For families coming through the case resolution process there were the inevitable difficulties with providing documents. The lead legacy worker was able to work collaboratively with a named worker from the homelessness team who was initially given two days a week to work exclusively with the Legacy families. The homelessness worker had access to housing benefit information and this enabled the START worker to find out which documents were missing and ensure the housing benefit process was not stalled. Housing benefit forms could be handed into the homelessness team and the use of the change of address form provided by the homelessness team when families moved into permanent accommodation speeded up the process considerably. Using this form meant a fresh claim with all the attendant documentation was not required.

Housing benefit delays cause considerable problems to private landlords and the ability to access information relating to housing benefits minimised delays and has helped maintain a positive relationship between landlord and tenant. Housing benefit forms are complex and all families needed support from a START worker to complete them. A service user described the START worker as 'good at explaining information'. Many people were very keen to begin paid employment as quickly as possible and would take on very short-term work through employment agencies. In some case the work lasted for only a few days. Although this work provided valuable experience, housing benefit invariably stopped when circumstances changed and families needed ongoing support to negotiate these complex systems. All families found the process of accessing and maintaining housing benefit difficult with the inevitable delays in payments causing considerable anxiety.

Liaising with housing support

Housing interviews

Families getting a positive asylum decision automatically establish a 'local connection' with the area to which they have been dispersed by the Home Office and so are able to access support from the homelessness team based at Midland House. Initially all families had to go through the process of two interviews, the housing advice interview followed by an interview with the homelessness team. With the appointment of the lead legacy worker and the identification of a named worker in the homelessness team however, it became possible for families to be interviewed at home and the initial housing advice appointment was avoided. This was seen as beneficial both to the families and also to Midland house.

Although the original worker is no longer in post there is still a named worker at Midland House. However she no longer has any time specifically allocated for work with the legacy families. The system of two interviews has now resumed.

Temporary housing

The first families receiving status had to move at the end of the 28-day notice period to temporary homelessness accommodation, often a considerable distance from their children's schools, and then remain there until permanent housing was accessed. This first move often occurred when families were totally destitute with no income at all. The accommodation provided by the asylum support service had included the provision of all utilities. Families moving to temporary housing had to pay either a service charge or gas and electric charges usually on a key meter. Bus passes were accessed through the Education Achievement Service [EMAS] to enable children to get to school as they had, in many cases, moved across the city. However as UK benefits were frequently not yet in payment, families had no financial resources at all to pay for bus fares for the parent accompanying the children for example. One service user commented that the temporary housing was 'too small, too far away and there were problems with the electrics and gas'. The same service user also added that the children 'stayed at the same (school) but problems with travel'. Another service user described the temporary housing as

‘very dirty not suitable for a family’, and a third service user said the temporary housing was a ‘good size, very cold (and the) area was not very nice’.

The process was improved considerable when it was agreed that families could remain in their asylum accommodation for up to 6 months. Children could continue to get to school easily, families could access local resources and did not have to pay utility bills at a time when they had no income. As well as alleviating considerable stress for the families, this arrangement meant that temporary accommodation provided through the homelessness team was not utilised. Large families in particular are difficult to accommodate, as there is a limited stock of four-bed accommodation.

This option of remaining in asylum accommodation was only available to families identified on the initial list and families on the second list, who receive a positive decision, have to leave their asylum accommodation after 28 days and move into temporary housing. This can include multiple moves and a period in bed and breakfast.

Permanent housing

The lead legacy worker and the named homelessness team worker supported families when they were considering their permanent housing options. This was a complex process as families had been placed in Plymouth by the asylum support service while their asylum claim was being considered and had no experience with making housing decisions in the UK. Families needed to consider whether to stay in Plymouth or move away **see graph 1**. Those families that moved away did so for a number of different reasons, one service user commented that this was ‘for the children’s benefit’, other families moved to areas where they consider employment opportunities to be greater, others moved to be closer to extended communities. Unless it was possible to establish a local connection, which one family did, those choosing to move away needed to access private accommodation. Families remaining in Plymouth then had to consider whether to look at renting from a private accommodation provider or apply for social housing **see graph 2**.

Families choosing private accommodation both in Plymouth or elsewhere had to arrange a deposit, agency fees and one month's rent in advance. This choice was made possible through the additional financial support put in place by the Home office and accessed through Midland House. The lead legacy worker and named homelessness team worker were instrumental in accessing this funding and ensuring potential accommodation providers were paid on time. Without this support families would have had considerable difficulty in accessing private rented accommodation.

This support was only available to families on the first legacy list and is not available to other families receiving a positive decision through the Case Resolution Directorate. Whilst they may still be able to access the Deposit Guarantee Scheme and a Crisis loan, the latter is repayable.

A service user who is a single mother with small children who moved into social housing commented that she was not happy at first but is 'happy now'. She described furnishing the property as 'difficult' she received decorating vouchers to help and continues to find it 'expensive'. Another service user who moved into a housing association property commented that she has 'nice neighbours'.

Each family was of course unique with different requirements and varying personal resources (see case histories) however there were some common themes. All families found the issues around housing difficult, but with support from the lead legacy worker and other START workers, families ultimately moved into accommodation, which included private and social housing, which enabled them to begin to integrate into life in the UK.

Common housing themes

In terms of housing support it is possible to identify a number of issues that caused difficulty for all the families and where the work of the lead legacy worker was particularly useful:

- Families had been in the UK for a number of years before receiving a positive decision. This meant that many people had good spoken English. However many families had difficulties with telephone communication and all needed

support from the lead legacy worker with filling in the numerous forms that were part of the housing process. Good support meant forms were filled in correctly and this speeded up the process.

- All families found moving stressful and many had no resources with which to effect the moves. The practical help, including hiring vans and moving possessions, provided by START workers and the lead legacy worker was particularly important.
- All families found it difficult to manage bills on a very limited budget, this was exacerbated by years spent in asylum accommodation where no bills are paid directly by the individual.
- All families had possessions, as they had been in the UK for years and this made moving difficult. When families had to go into temporary accommodation storing their belongings became an issue and expense.
- All families found furnishing and decorating their permanent accommodation difficult. Even accessing essentials like a cooker and beds was at times very problematic. Community care grants were unpredictable, and could not be applied for until the permanent address was known.
- The first families receiving a decision through the case resolution process had to move into temporary housing. This was particularly stressful. They moved before any benefits were in payment and had no means to pay for utilities, bus fares etc. The introduction of the named homelessness team worker and the extension of the time in accommodation provided by the asylum support service was very helpful in alleviating this difficulty for other families.
- All families found accessing a START worker and the lead legacy worker invaluable.
- Agencies found having the lead Legacy worker as the main point of contact helpful.
- All families had to wait for a considerable period, usually 4 months, before they could access all benefits and periods of total destitution were extremely stressful.

Case Studies

Two case studies will be used to highlight the effect the additional support had on the experiences of families.

Case study family A - single mother with 5 children

The family were granted indefinite leave to remain in October 2007. This was before both the fast tracking system for the national insurance number and child tax credit was in place and before the extended period in asylum accommodation of up to six months had been agreed.

The family were supported by START and began the process of applying for benefits as soon as they received status papers. As the fast track National Insurance Number (NINO) process was not yet in place there were considerable delays getting a NINO for the mother and this in turn led to delays with the income support claim. Three weeks after all asylum support ended income support was in payment at the rate of £59.15 a week. This was the only income for a family of six individuals. Benefits for the children, in the form of child tax credit and child benefit, were not fully in payment for 15 weeks. The family applied for, and were awarded, a crisis loan. This was repayable from the income support payment and is deducted at source each week. The family accessed destitution support in the form of Tesco vouchers from the Red Cross and food support from the Devon and Cornwall Refugee Support Council.

The family had to leave their accommodation provided by the asylum support service 28 days after receiving status and were placed in a temporary property by the homelessness team. As families are responsible for paying utility bills in temporary accommodation this created considerable difficulties, as benefits were not yet in payment. Housing benefit was applied for to cover the rent for this and for the subsequent temporary property and was paid directly to the homelessness team. The house was a considerable distance from the children's schools and bus passes were provided by the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS) however the mother had to pay for her own fare when accompanying the children. The family remained in the temporary accommodation for only a few days and were then re-

housed by the Homelessness team in another property as they were subject to racism.

Once settled in the second temporary property the family began to consider permanent housing options. They were offered a property by a housing association in Plymouth however the family were concerned about the location of the house and also discussed renting privately. The latter option would allow them to move to the area of Plymouth in which they had been housed by the asylum support service and with which they were therefore familiar. The area had a good local support network and was close to the children's schools. The family, after considerable debate both within the family and with the homelessness team and START workers, finally decided to move away from the city to an area with a more diverse culture and where there was greater opportunity to interact with people from the family's country of origin. This was particularly important to the mother who felt her son needed male role models.

A furnished property was found for the family within the local housing allowance and so housing benefit would cover the cost of the rent. There were some delays as children were taking school exams in Plymouth but eventually with support from START the family moved to a privately rented property in the area of their choice, which has a strong African culture. The homelessness team was able to access the additional support from the Home Office which was in place by the time the family finally moved. The funding was used to pay the deposit and month's rent in advance necessary to secure the private rental.

Case study family B - a single mother with one child

The family were granted indefinite leave to remain while the additional support was in place during February 2008. This made the process of integration much less stressful.

The family were supported by the lead legacy worker and began the process of applying for benefits as soon as their documents arrived. The National Insurance Number arrived within 10 days as the fast tracking process was in place and

although there were still long delays with child benefit, child tax credit and income support was quickly in payment, as the fast tracking process was used. This reduced the time the family needed to use the destitution support discussed above. Housing Benefit was also applied for.

The family were allowed to remain in their Home Office asylum accommodation for the extended period and so did not have to move into temporary accommodation or begin to pay utility bills before benefits were in payment. The family were settled in Plymouth with strong community links and so applied for social housing in the city. The lead legacy worker liaised with the identified worker within the Homelessness team and the family were offered a suitable property. They were able to access some furniture from a local charity and also applied for a community care grant. START assisted the family with the move into permanent housing and the mother has now started to go to college to improve her English and is working part time.

Summary

It is important to recognise that although the Home Office has ended its additional support for families receiving a decision through the Case Resolution Directorate in Plymouth a further list of 26 families has been identified. Some of these families have now received a positive decision while others are still waiting (one family from the original list is also still waiting for a decision). The Home office currently expects all claims to have been considered by 2011. The system for fast tracking national insurance numbers has been withdrawn, and the families on the second list do not have the extended period in asylum accommodation of up to six months. This extended period allowed families time to access UK benefits such as child benefit which currently takes four months before the claim is in payment and avoids families having repeated moves, from asylum accommodation into temporary accommodation, which may include a period in bed and breakfast and then a further move into permanent housing. All of these moves occur when families have no financial resources and are often reliant on destitution support in the form of food parcels. The additional financial support that families on the first list utilised to access private accommodation, both within Plymouth and in other parts of the UK, has also ended.

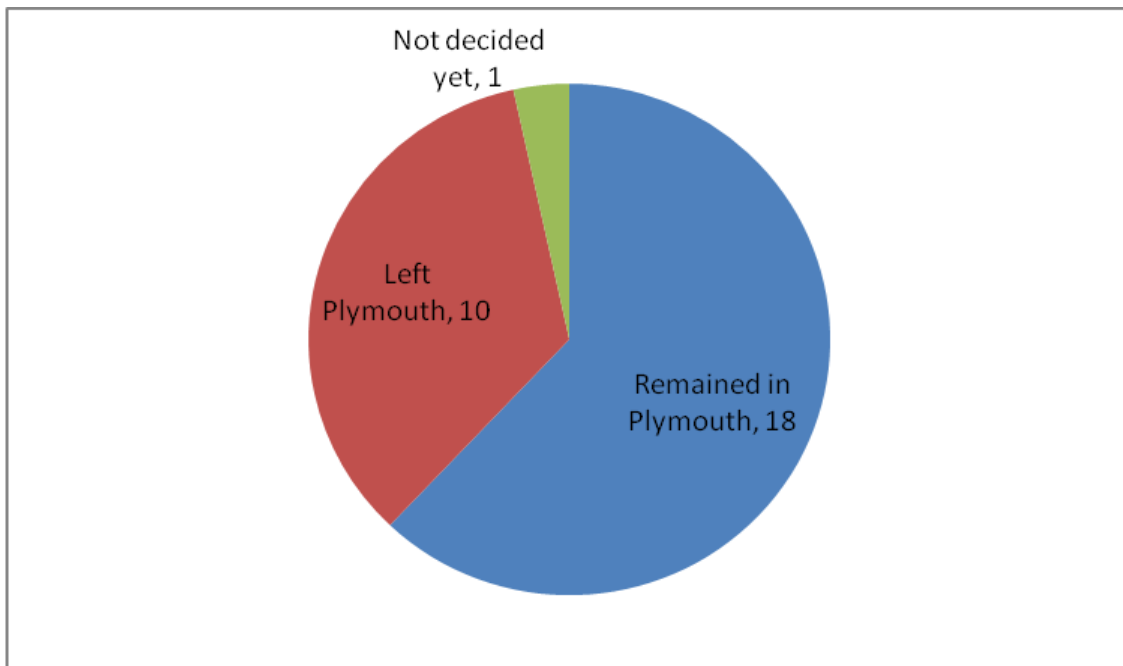
Recommendations

Clearly there is continuing need for support to both families and single people who receive a positive decision outside the NAM process. Those in local and national positions are therefore encouraged to seek appropriate support for people who will otherwise 'fall through the net' because of administrative delays. There is a need to

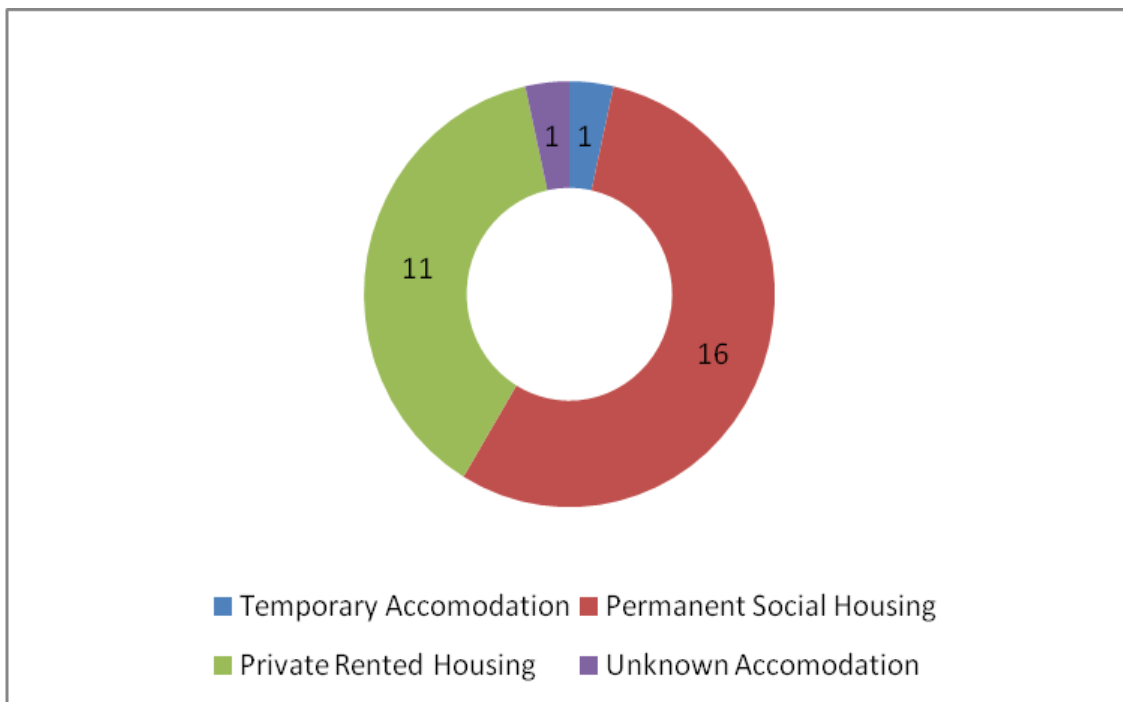
- encourage the Home Office to reinstate the financial support, which enabled families to remain in their asylum accommodation for an extended period. This eliminates the extra moves into temporary housing at a time when families have few resources and puts less pressure on the limited temporary housing stock.
- Press for the Home Office to reinstate the financial support, which enabled families who wish to leave the city and rent privately, access to deposits and rent in advance.
- Investigate accessing financial support from the local authority, in the form of a loan, which could be used to bridge the gap between Home Office support ending and benefits being in payment. This could be a revolving fund linked to child benefit payments, which is a fixed rate non-means tested benefit.
- Identify with Job Centre Plus a process to enable Job Seeker Allowance or Income Support claims to be accepted and processed [but not paid] before asylum support ends. A clear end date of this support is identified on Home Office documents and it should be possible to set up a seamless system or at least minimise the period of destitution. The identification of a named worker at the Job Centre to facilitate benefit claims when people receive status would be very useful.
- Reinstate fast tracking for the national insurance number.
- Identify good communication routes with the Home Office 'case worker'.
- Review the current system of two interviews at Midland House. Families granted indefinite leave now attend both the Housing Advice interview and the Homelessness interview. As they will definitely become homeless at the end of the 28 day notice period and are not able access any form of privately rented accommodation (because no benefits are in payment yet and families are destitute) the Housing Advice interview could be avoided.

- Identify a lead worker within the homelessness team, with allocated time, to work with families granted status.
- Continue to fund a Lead Legacy Worker as existing services are already stretched and cannot accommodate the urgent and high level of need experienced by 'Legacy' families see **graph referral rates to service**.

Graph 1: Families who stayed in Plymouth or moved away



Graph 2: Type of accommodation accessed.



Graph 3: Referral rates to Service

