



## Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary

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President Lord Roger Roberts of Llandudno

# HOUSING ISSUES FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS

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## THE PROCESS

After an initial assessment the responsibility for housing asylum seekers in the UK is with a contractor for the area, such as G4S covering the NE and Yorkshire. They usually subcontract out the actual housing provision to a housing provider, in the NE that is Jomast. The contract between the Home Office and contractor is referred to as the Compass Contract. This has just been extended to 2019, and there is consultation currently happening over the new contract.

A house or flat is provided for a family; single people live in a house where it is divided into bedrooms with a shared kitchen and bathroom; mothers and young children can be in a hostel with shared kitchens and bathrooms. The rent, Council Tax, and utilities are all paid by the Home Office. Basic furnishings and equipment are provided.

## DESTITUTION

**Those who have exhausted their appeal rights, but are still pursuing ways of appealing, or cannot be returned to their own country through no fault of their own have no housing provided. They have no benefits, are not allowed to work, and destitute and homeless.**

Their only hope is that a friend who is settled here, a church or other organisation puts them up.

Some areas have hosting schemes where people volunteer to put them up in a framework and with support of that organization e.g. the Grace Hosting project of Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Network. This could be a positive way of helping for those who want to and have a spare room.

West Yorkshire Destitute Asylum Network piloted a Winter Night Shelter for Destitute Asylum Seekers in Leeds between January and March 2015. Essentially volunteers from faith organisations provided bed, breakfast and evening meal for up to 12 destitute asylum seekers for a week usually in church halls or churches with support from local synagogues and mosques. WYDAN provided the support and co-ordination. They plan to operate it again from December this year and possibly extend it to other organisations.

**NACCOM has more information on projects providing accommodation and support to those facing destitution across the U.K. at <http://nacom.org.uk/>**

## HOUSING PROBLEMS.

There have been a number of issues in the Teesside area with the Jomast contractor, not resolved by G4S. Some groups of asylum seekers had been working with a community organising group, Thrive, to try to resolve those issues. Suzanne Fletcher, LD4SOS chair up to September 2016, was involved with Thrive from 2012, working with them to try to give them a voice and make that heard to the contractors and providers. A number of issues were resolved, including an end to employees of the provider walking into accommodation unannounced and poor conditions in the hostel, but some remain. More recently a housing issues group has been set up as part of the local City of Sanctuary movement.

**RED DOORS.** This is the issue that has hit the headlines in 2015, but is by no means the biggest problem. All the doors of the asylum housing have been painted red, and there would have been nothing wrong in that, except that when the problems they were causing asylum seekers living behind those red doors, making them an easy target for harassment and abuse, were raised they were ignored time and time again, even after Ian Swales when he was an MP raised them at a Parliamentary Select Committee. It was only when a Times Reporter did some real door knocking working work that the issue hit the press, and as we all now know became a national scandal, with the result that most of the doors are now painted different colours. The other issues, behind those doors, remain.

**SHARED ROOMS.** Most asylum seekers that are single are in their own rooms, but where a room can accommodate it there are 2 beds to be occupied. Those in the rooms are allocated at random, so that people sharing often do not even have a shared language to talk about differences and problems. They can come from different faiths, countries and cultures; have different ages and music tastes. G4S & Jomast refuse to make attempts at moving people so they share with another person more in tune with them. There are similar issues around shared houses.

**FORUMS FOR RAISING PROBLEMS.** It was asylum seekers in Stockton themselves that asked for a forum where they could constructively discuss and air problems before they escalated. These do exist in some areas, but despite it being promised at a Select Committee by G4S, There has been no progress. A Home Office report has said there should be such a forum, but there is no progress to report.

**Note** that whilst this briefing outlines experience mainly in the NE the provision or non- provision of housing for refused asylum seekers is applicable nationally as and the issues with contractors.

*If you have experience of housing for asylum seekers issues in your area, please get in touch.*