THE UK BORDER AGENCY RESPONSE TO
THE CHIEF INSPECTOR’S REPORT
ON THE ASYLUM SCREENING UNIT (ASU) LIVERPOOL
1. That the Asylum Screening Unit (ASU) introduces a formal monitoring system to facilitate effective queue management and ensure that customer queuing and waiting times are as short as possible.

   1.1 Accepted

   1.2 A new counter sheet has been implemented recording details of arrival time and time of completion of screening; this will be actively monitored. Average waiting times have been added to the weekly stats returns.

   1.3 A new process has been introduced requiring the Counter Supervisor to check at 13.00hrs each day that the front desk and counter sheets reconcile. A check will also be made in the waiting area after all notified applicants have been called to the counter, to ensure that all applicants have been dealt with.

   1.4 Delays have also been incurred at the end of the process due to transport to Initial Accommodation. The transport schedule has been revised to allow earlier collections.

2. That the Liverpool ASU reviews its provision of information to customers, particularly about the time they are likely to have to wait.

   2.1 Accepted

   2.2 The appointment letter has been amended to highlight likely waiting time. The letter now advises customers to bring with them anything they might need whilst waiting.

   2.3 Notices will be available by 18 September 2009, in a variety of languages, to:

   - advise the likely average waiting time;
   - advise that applicants may be called out of strict numerical order
   - highlight that identity checks are made and the importance of applicants being open and honest.
   - give additional information, including the availability of a complaints procedure.

3. That Liverpool ASU takes immediate steps to make improvements to its accommodation and facilities in order to bring these up to an acceptable standard for customers and staff. In particular to address:-

   i) Privacy for customers and
   ii) The needs of children.

   3.1 Accepted

   Generally

   3.2 As reflected in the report, the shortcomings in public caller accommodation had been recognised and highlighted by both management and staff. A deep clean of the area had been carried out, but due to the state of the furnishings had limited effect. Only a renewal
of the carpet and seating, with something more easily cleaned will make significant improvement.

3.3. The Liverpool estate is being consolidated into a single building with moves from existing accommodation starting towards the end of 2009 with the move out of Reliance House due to take place in early 2011. As a result of this, significant works have been limited but we have applied for necessary funding to redecorate the main foyer area on the Ground Floor of Reliance House and to improve the waiting area.

3.4. The area will be professionally deep cleaned. Replacement chairs have been identified and will be fitted by end September 2009. The cleaning contract for the area has been reviewed and requirements underlined.

Privacy for customers

3.5 The limitations with the counters have been recognised and highlighted by managers and staff. To renew the counters would involve a significant financial commitment. The problem will be resolved in the design of any new ASU to be occupied when Reliance House is vacated.

3.6 The report acknowledges the availability of interview rooms for vulnerable or distressed customers. This process has been formalised to allow counter staff at their discretion to interview applicants where appropriate in separate interview rooms. All staff have received further instruction in the use of the speaker systems to ensure maximum privacy.

The needs of children

3.7 A new process has been implemented where children and young people are collected on arrival and accompanied by Social Services to a suitable separate interview room. The identified rooms have been fitted to ensure they are appropriate environment for use with children.

3.8 We are investigating the provision of crèche facilities.

4. The UK Border Agency to ensure that information displayed is up to date, consistent with current UK Border Agency Branding, and relevant.

4.1. Accepted

4.2. Out of date material has been removed. Branding displays have been installed and posters have been updated

4.3. A system has been implemented to ensure that there is a daily check of inappropriate information and that it is removed or replaced. The Senior Responsible Officer for the building will complete a weekly audit.

Other points raised in the report

The UK Border Agency offers the following comments on other observations in the report not dealt with in response to the specific recommendations.
5. **UK Border Agency staff are professional, courteous, and respectful when dealing with customers irrespective of their status**

5.1 We welcome the very positive feedback on customer service which underlines the high value we place on the Home Office and Regional standards. Any shortfall in the high service standards is taken very seriously. The few instances highlighted at page 11 of the report have been addressed and findings highlighted to all staff.

6. **UK Border Agency staff can identify and sensitively support vulnerable and distressed customers especially children**

6.1 We welcome the very positive feedback in this area. We believe that new referral procedures to identify potential victims of trafficking have added real value.

7. **The environment fosters proper engagement with customers**

7.1 At page 15, it is noted that the environment was very noisy and chaotic. We have taken steps to limit the noise in this area shared with both the Public Enquiry Office and Nationality Caller Unit. We do ask applicants to keep children under control and will increase these interventions, but we have no sanction to enforce this.

7.2 At page 15, the report also comments on the distraction due to the location of the Chief Immigration Officer (CIO) behind the counter. The CIO has now been moved to a more suitable location.

8. **Ensure that the provision of information via hard copy and web site is accessible, clear, easy to use, in plain language and accurate including self service where available.**

8.1 Page 16 highlights that differences in information on the website between entries relating to Liverpool and Croydon ASU could be misleading. We are working with the website team to improve the entries.

8.2 We welcome the very positive feedback from the Independent Chief Inspector’s Office and customers on the pre-screening pilot.

8.3 At page 16 reference is made to the Legal Service Pilot. This is an important point as accuracy will be fundamental to a valid pilot exercise. Not all applicants who attend ASU are located in areas covered by the pilot and are therefore not offered the facility of an appointment with a legal representative. Further training has been given and a new counter sheet has been implemented ensuring that suitable applicants are always given the opportunity to benefit from the new system.