

Evicting a Somali woman and her family, Salford CC

28.01.03 RAPAR caseworkers immediate recall notes

DH: I was first called by A*e when the asylum team that they wanted the key. He'd explained to me that he had gone and sorted a house out and that they just needed time to apply for a grant. Now, what I did then was I went (I know I shouldn't have done this) I went and got a community care grant form and got them to fill it in with them the next day. Reflecting on this I thought no, I shouldn't be doing this the city has a resettlement team. So I rang A* and told him to go down to the asylum team, that they should be filling in the form and helping them with this move.

A couple of days later, A*e rang again and said that he had signed for the house and had the keys. I went round after work, spoke to them about the house. They informed me that 2 housing officers came and said that they would be taking the keys, they have to hand the keys back, and asked them to come to the office. The mother said that she didn't want to go into a hostel because of the things she had heard about hostels. That they just needed time to get some things together. At that point I said that I would ring the asylum team and try and negotiate some time for them. A* kept on saying that he didn't see the point of going to a hostel for 2 weeks.

The next day I rang the asylum team and spoke to L*. She wouldn't give me a definite answer about whether they were taking the keys off the family that day. I felt that she was more hung up about A*e putting the phone down on her – she kept saying he was rude – than actually telling me what she had done with the case and where they were up to with the keys. She said that she would ring me back when she looked into the case. I also asked her to leave a message for L* to ring me. Nobody rang back. That day I also visited the house with F* and A*. I was concerned about the area because I knew that their was a czech family (refugees) nearby who had visited us at the RAPAR office and who had been subjected to stoning of their house and car in that area.

On 23rd January A* rang to say that they were taking the keys on Monday. What should he do? I said don't hand the keys back. He then rang me on 27th January and said that they were coming to take the keys tomorrow. He said that he had to go to school tomorrow. I said to him to tell his mum not to open the door and that I would ring him back.

Then a conversation within the core management of RAPAR decided that first thing on 28th January, P* would contact Cllr W* explaining the situation and asking for intervention into the asylum team. This was done and P* received a response from J T saying that he was trying to get in touch with the team.

28th January, I tried a few times to get a hold of A* but his phone was off. Then at about 1pm I received a call from him saying that they (Asylum Team) were at this home.

From mothers/community workers perspective

At about one o'clock L* from the asylum team arrived at the house with two removal men. She opened the door. When F* (mother) asked L* if she could wait for the

boys to come home and feed them and stay one night, L said No. F* said she wanted to go and ring her son (A) so he could help her. L* tried to call A* but couldn't get through. F* then ran out to the phone box but then decided to go to the community centre. She returned with S*(community worker). When they arrived a washing machine was being carried down the stairs. S* asked where they were going with it and the men replied that they did not know. They went back into the flat and S* began to try to negotiate some time with L*. L* said No and if she didn't go today and hand over the keys she would be prosecuted. S* tried to explain this to F*. She couldn't convey the meaning of prosecution so she said to F* that the asylum team would call the police. At this point F* became very distressed and began to throw her own property around the house and out the front door. She then ran out of the house.

Shortly after F* left, L* and R* arrived from the Asylum team and also two police officers. S* began to sweep up and then RAPAR caseworkers arrived.

The two police officers who attended were PC* and PC* who both seemed quite stunned by what was happening. The asylum team workers and the police left. At that point S* said that L* had made various statements during the sequence of events: "we know about her (F*) in the office (asylum team)" "I'm not prepared to work with her (F*) anymore." "She (F*) does speak English, she is just pretending not to."

I rang A* to ask him to come home. His teacher answered the phone, who said that she was aware of the situation and she was happy to bring him home. After waiting for half hour during which a call was placed to R* as we wanted to know what arrangements had been made for the children. I am sure that there must be some policy around the well being of these children. They are under 16 and with full refugee status have rights under the Children Act. Has the asylum team informed social services of the conditions that these children are now going to be staying in? (I was told that she was on the toilet I left a message for her to ring me back). We then spoke directly with C* of the Salford Advertiser who agreed to come and meet us. The boys arrived looking very sad. A* said that this is what he was frightened of and this was why he had not been to school for two weeks. We told the boys that mum was fine and that we would take them to her. We asked the boys to identify their belongings...the remainder of which had been left outside the property – including half prepared food in pots. We collected the belongings and put them in the car and went to the new address

As we arrived both C* and a photographer arrived. We entered the property where F* and S* were. All the belongings had been piled up in the kitchen. We asked F* and the boys if they would agree for the press to be involved in our discussion about what had happened to them. They agreed on condition that neither their names nor either address would be printed and that no photos of them would be taken. In addition S* did not want to be identified – just to be described as a local community worker. We all stood together in the empty living room and went through the sequence of events. R from RAPAR led on the questioning and C* the journalist took detailed shorthand notes. At different points we had to explain the system to Conrad so that he could understand the significance of the following:

Refugee status was granted in October 2002
NASS 35, issued on 8th January, arrived on January 11 2003

Without NASS 35 there is no access to any grants i.e. money to buy beds and a cooker etcetera.

R from the asylum team phoned back at about 4pm. I asked her what provisions had been made for the children. She said that it is the mother's responsibility to provide provision for her children. She (F*) had an option of going into a hostel and she refused. I said OK, fine thanks Bye. I thought how disgusting...these are children who were going to come home from school to a locked door.

At this time at their new house there is no electricity, no heating, no gas, no furniture, no cooker. Shelli has taken the family to her home tonight.

Spoke with P from RAPAR after 5pm. She had not heard from Cllr JT other than his initial email. She had emailed him again at 3pm and asked for an update.