

National Refugee Integration Services Consultation  
Social Policy Unit  
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Dear Mr Dutt

**A New Model for National Refugee Integration Services  
Consultation response by the Building and Social Housing Foundation**

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The Building and Social Housing Foundation is pleased to respond to the consultation on Refugee Integration Services, having recently published a report summarising the deliberations at a Consultation held at St George's House, Windsor Castle in June. I enclose the report and executive summary with our compliments.

Refugees typically arrive in the UK without money, anywhere to live or little ability to speak English. What is less well known is that many also arrive with capabilities as well as needs and wish to improve not only their own situation, but also that of others. Having a secure and settled home is the key to them being able to rebuild their lives and become part of the local community.

A range of practical actions were identified to enable refugees to be better housed and live in more welcoming and cohesive communities. Recommendations cover five broad areas of action:

- Establishing national, regional and local strategic frameworks for integrated action.
- Incorporating refugee integration within new policy development.
- Identifying assets and building capacity of refugees and refugee community organisations.
- Fostering partnership working to achieve local action.
- Carrying out research to improve understanding and raise awareness of their assets and needs of refugees.

It is important that a network of support links up with the resources that exist within Refugee Community Organisations. The current lack of information on settlement patterns and lack of opportunity for inter-community exchange lead to tensions. Registered Social Landlords, have strong links within the community and have a role to play in encouraging understanding and working with volunteers from within refugee communities.

The following Consultation response incorporates some of the recommendations detailed in the BSHF report. A copy of our report, Building on Diversity, and an executive summary are available on the BSHF website at [www.bshf.org](http://www.bshf.org) for free downloading.

Yours sincerely

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## **A New Model for National Refugee Integration Services**

### **Consultation response by the Building and Social Housing Foundation**

#### **1. How can New Asylum Model Case Owners best support providers and refugees during the initial integration process?**

Easy access to ongoing support is essential and referrals to Sunrise must be made as soon as a positive decision has been made, so that the integration process can begin immediately. Support in accessing housing is fundamental to the successful settlement of refugees. Safe, secure accommodation is the first step towards access to support services, employment, education and training.

There is a lack of quality information on the settlement patterns of refugees at present; and why they make choices to live in certain areas. Housing Needs Surveys should ask specific questions about the needs of refugees in order to inform policy and allocate resources effectively.

#### **2. Are the four main elements of the specification the correct ones?**

The four main elements of the specification are the correct ones although this should not mean that the service is not flexible enough to provide other services or support if needed.

The four elements are important but in addition, there should be consideration of how to encourage partnerships between Registered Social Landlords and Refugee Community Organisations. There needs to be greater recognition of the contribution of refugees themselves. Opportunities for members of host communities to work alongside refugees, has the advantage of encouraging understanding between communities.

Initial support must be sufficient to enable refugees to access safe, secure housing which could potentially take up a large proportion of the 20 hours of intensive casework support. It is important for caseworkers to link up with and to work more closely with Refugee Community Organisations, to assist refugees in settling in their dispersal areas once they have received a positive decision.

#### **3. In particular, should a dedicated service be available for refugee professionals?**

This would be a useful and welcome service as one of the difficulties faced by refugees when trying to find employment is that their qualifications are not recognised in the UK. The earlier that any gaps in knowledge can be identified and refugees can access appropriate training, the sooner that they can enter employment and support themselves. There tends to be a lack of advice and information available on training prospects.

The possibility of employing refugees as advisors in job centres should be explored as it has been shown to increase the number of refugees who successfully access employment. An advisor from within a refugee community is more likely to understand their situation and offer appropriate advice and support.

#### **4. How can the Home Office ensure that funding from alternative sources is not lost through this process of providing a standard set of services for refugees?**

Bolton's partnership approach offers an example of how various organisations have been able to work together, sharing risks and combining resources. This partnership has been able to utilise government funding effectively through the Gateway Protection Programme, but has also created a range of support services in collaboration with voluntary organisations.

**5. How can tendering and procurement processes support the objective of building on existing services and maintaining diversity and good practice in service provision?**

Small organisations, particularly Refugee Community Organisations have the relevant knowledge, trust and ability to communicate with refugee communities. Any prospective contractor must effectively demonstrate how they will deliver a high standard of service but also how they will encourage participation by host and refugee communities to encourage cohesive communities. RCOs and RSLs should be encouraged create partnerships as part of the tender process. Where necessary, support should be available to assisting them

**6. Are our proposals for ensuring closer links between refugee integration and overall integration policy workable? How might we enhance this relationship to the benefit of the refugee population?**

Integration is a process rather than an individual's decision. Successful integration is reliant on decision of society as a whole to better understand different communities. The duty to integrate is the responsibility of all communities, not just minorities. Indifference to inequality and deprivation is an obstacle, as by definition, you cannot integrate if you are not equal.

Refugee integration must definitely be part of the wider process of tackling social exclusion and encouraging cohesive communities.

The arrival of refugees in an area can cause resentment and tensions in a community. More work needs to be done to foster understanding between different cultures through organising cross community engagement. Integration works in both directions, it not just about working with refugees to help them access housing and services so that they can integrate but also about educating local communities and preparing them for the arrival of refugees. Work which is undertaken to help refugees to integrate should also be linked into other mainstream policy and practice such as the Respect and Safer Neighbourhoods Agenda.

**7. Have we adopted appropriate criteria for locations for services? What changes should be made to the list in Annex A?**

The South West in particular may suffer from a lack of services based on the list in Annex A. Even providing services in Bournemouth for instance but with a remit to cover all of Dorset and East Devon would be covering a huge area geographically in areas where availability of public transport is an issue. The same could be said for a service in Plymouth covering all of West Devon and Cornwall, again a large and very rural area.

There is a lack of quality information on where and how refugees are settling; this should to be addressed in order to inform the allocation of resources.

**8. Which of the options for national/ regional delivery is best? Would any other option be preferable?**

Options 3 and 4 offer the best opportunity to utilise existing resources within communities and to make best use of the local knowledge of RSLs and RCOs, for the delivery of services. Option 3 offers the ability to link into other strategic networks such as LSPs and LAAs. Option 4 enables partnerships with Asylum Teams delivering the New Asylum Model.

**9. Should there be any restriction on the type of organisation which is able to bid to provide refugee integration services, either as a prime contractor or as a subcontractor?**

There should be evidence of experience of working with refugees or of providing support for vulnerable groups, with preference being for organisations that are value based and return surpluses to further social objectives rather than purely commercially motivated.

**10. Are the proposals for contract structure set out in paragraphs 24-26 workable?**

**11. Are the proposed performance management arrangements and the role of the Regional Strategic Co-Ordination Groups likely to optimise performance?**

**12. Are the contract procedures set out at paragraphs 29-31 fair, workable and likely to produce services of high quality and value?**

**13. How can performance measurements and targets most effectively support refugee integration and promote best practice among other agencies?**

All performance measurements and targets need to be set based on robust information gathered from various sources. Until more information is gathered on where and how refugees are living and what their needs are, for example by including questions in local authorities' Housing Needs Surveys, it is difficult to measure performance and set realistic targets.

Service users must be involved in the design of performance indicators and should be consulted on policy development. Good practice as identified through performance indicators or other method, should be shared through a learning/knowledge sharing framework.

There are three key areas in which achievement of integration can be identified: respect, equality of opportunity and safety. Performance measures and targets which assess these criteria should be established as part of the monitoring process.

### **Summary**

Information and understanding should be key features of an Integration Service:

- Quality information on settlement patterns; refugee needs; assets available within communities.
- Understanding – inter-community exchanges that dispel myths, develop respect and highlight common values
- Partnerships have the potential to bring together revenue streams, avoid duplication of services and share knowledge.

Partnership between social housing providers and refugee community organisations provides the opportunity to develop the skills of both. The assets that exist with both host and refugee communities should be exploited and opportunities for inter-community exchange should feature strongly in the Integration Service.