

## **National Refugee Integration Service – next steps**

### **Background**

In the consultation paper *A New Model for National Refugee Integration Services in England*, the Home Office set out its plans for developing the content and contractual arrangements for a standard set of services for the integration of refugees in England. We envisaged that the services would consist of four main elements: Sunrise, mentoring, employment services for refugee professionals and advice and consultancy support for refugee community organisations.

### **Delivery strategy**

On the basis of responses to the consultation, the Government will proceed on the basis that the main service elements in the new strategy will be delivered on a regional basis by a prime contractor or consortium in each region. We will however continue to explore the benefits of delivering specific aspects on a national basis where we are satisfied that this would bring added benefits to refugees. In order to enhance the links between the new refugee integration services and the arrangements for support of asylum seekers and to be consistent with the wider operations of the new Border and Immigration Agency (as the Immigration and Nationality Directorate will be re-named from 1 April), the new service will be organised in line with the six regions of the new Agency.

### **Procurement Strategy**

In planning to deliver the services on a regional basis we have taken the opportunity to realise further efficiencies and effectiveness in procurement, delivery and contract management by conducting a joint procurement of refugee integration and asylum advice services. The procurement specification will include the provision of 'wraparound' services to asylum seekers in Initial Accommodation and will explore the feasibility of widening this further to One Stop Services.

We will procure the refugee integration and asylum advice services through a two stage open and competitive tender. The first stage will consist of a pre qualification assessment which will determine prospective bidders capability to manage and deliver on a regional scale. Bidders will be evaluated against criteria covering commercial, financial, managerial and operational capability. Those bidders assessed as suitable will then be invited to tender to a detailed specification.

Refugee integration services will be procured by the Home Office in consultation with the devolved authorities in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

## **Timescales**

In order to ensure adequate time for specifications and for bids to be drawn up and evaluated, it has now been decided to introduce the new service model with effect from April 2008.

We expect to begin the pre qualification stage in early July, with invitations to tender following in August and contracts awarded in December.

## **Transition arrangements**

Current funding arrangements for refugee integration services will be extended as appropriate to ensure a smooth transition to the new service model. Organisations which receive core or strategic funding under the existing arrangements are being contacted separately.

## **Consultation response**

We received 66 responses and were encouraged that the principles behind our proposed approach were broadly welcome. There was general support for the main service elements and the proposals for where services might be located.

There was a widespread view that more work needed to be done with regard to the employment provisions of the proposed specification and this element will be further developed. Further details will be included in the tender documentation.

A summary of the responses is attached.

## **Questions**

We hope that this clearly sets out the revised position; further information will follow as appropriate.

If you require a full copy of any individual response to the consultation or if you do require any further clarification at this stage, please email:  
[NationalRefugeeIntegrationServiceProject@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:NationalRefugeeIntegrationServiceProject@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk)

## **A New Model for Refugee Integration Services in England – summary of consultation responses**

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

There was a range of suggestions covering: quality and timely notifications; information sharing; case owners engaging with providers and stakeholders; accessibility of case owners under regional asylum structure. There was an acknowledgement that case owners are unlikely to have the capacity to conduct all these tasks. Views were fairly balanced between the pros and cons of case owners monitoring the progress of granted applicants.

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

There was general support for the four main themes of Sunrise, mentoring, employment services and consultancy support for refugee community organisations. Other key areas that respondents felt should be included in the service delivery specification were:

- close links with the One Stop Service;
- service development;
- work with host communities;
- a supported (funded) volunteer strategy;
- English language provision and adult education in general;
- sharing of good practice;
- a clearer emphasis on health needs.

Sunrise-specific comments were:

- general perception that an average of 20 hours per case would be insufficient;
- need to recognise limitations of sunrise and the limitations of the services being signposted to;
- should have a closer link with mentoring;
- should include specific housing and employment services;
- should include audit of refugees skills and experiences;
- should await and take account of full evaluation of pilot phase.

Mentoring-specific comments were:

- general positive response about mentoring;
- time together model has strengths but needs to be more flexible to refugees needs;
- mentors should be sourced from wider than British citizens;
- language restrictions need to be relaxed.

Refugee community organisations (RCOs):

There was wide support and a number of detailed suggestions provided. There was a general emphasis that the proposals must maintain or increase actual funding to RCOs and that the operational role of RCOs within the model needs to be clear.

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

Apart from those with specific interest there was concern about an employment service dedicated to refugee professionals. Most respondents felt an employment service should be available to all refugees and that the funding should be used to access and enhance existing employment services facilitated through Sunrise and mentoring.

There were comments about Home Office needing to liaise more closely with DWP Jobcentre Plus (JCP) and that JCP staff needed to be educated and resourced to deal specifically with refugee issues. There were a number of comments about JCP regulations being in tension with proposed Home Office strategy especially around Job Seekers Allowance conditionality. There were a number of references to improving liaison with and education of employers.

### **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?**

The main comments were as follows:

- More work should be undertaken to map existing services and fill the identified gaps; that the Home Office should liaise more closely with Other Government Department, local authority and other funders to add value to existing funding streams.
- There should be a strategic role for government offices and local authorities to ensure that services are available and accessible.
- The Home Office should fund on a full cost recovery basis.
- The Home Office should fund 10% for service development time whereby providers would create an infrastructure that can create and support other funding initiatives.
- There were concerns about the risk to existing providers and their clients.

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

The need for prior mapping was mentioned frequently in responses to this question, as did the recommendation that bidders should demonstrate a track record in providing similar services. Some respondents mentioned that bidders should demonstrate how existing providers will be utilised.

A number of respondents said that tendering should not be simply price driven but take full account of quality and effectiveness of service.

There were a number of questions raised about how RCOs and other small providers would fit into the tendering process; that they should not have to compete; or that they would need support in the tendering exercise

**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?**

There was a clear consensus that the Home Office needed to do more in joining refugee integration with wider integration, community cohesion, and social exclusion policies. The Regional Strategic Coordination Groups (RSCGs) were seen to be a good development in this respect. Closer strategic links with Communities and Local Government, DWP, JCP and Department for Education and Skills were recommended with the view to facilitating engagement with local JCP offices, local authorities and with regard to ESOL provision. There were a number of comments about the need for 'positive images' and host communities work.

Responding on behalf of the Mayor of London the Greater London Authority (GLA) argued for the location of the new services within a London strategic framework offering synergy with the Mayor's forthcoming refugee integration strategy for London.

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

Although there were some specific suggestions about boundaries, there was general agreement to the proposals. With regard to a methodology for allocating funding, a number of respondents felt that one year did not provide a sufficient baseline. There were a number of comments concerning the effect of new asylum model decisions and the Initial Accommodation strategy and how these affected Home Office projections. A number of responses pointed to a role for RSCGs in determining the location of services.

A number of respondents felt that the proposals for London did not properly reflect its distinctiveness.

There were a number of questions about refugees moving location and consequent eligibility to integration services.

There were some concerns about geographical spread of the services in more remote areas which may be difficult to access by public transport

**8. Which of the options for national/regional delivery (paragraphs 18-22) is best? Would any other option be preferable?**

There was no significant support for Option 1, a single service supplier responsible for the delivery of the full range of services across England. There was very limited support for Option 2, separate national contracts for each of the main service elements.

There was overwhelming support for a regional approach to delivery with Option 3, alignment to the Government Office areas, thought to be most workable. Those that specifically commented favoured an integrated service

delivered by one provider or prime regional contractor sub-contracting accordingly.

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

There was a clear consensus that providers should have a proven track record in integration service delivery; and of partnership working. There was also a majority view that providers should come from the Not for Profit sector.

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

There was a general acceptance that it would not be feasible to contract at city or town level and that a wider delivery arrangement would be achievable. Two organisations made specific recommendations about contract duration that the minimum duration should be three years.

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

Although there was a consensus that RSCGs were in good position to fulfil a performance management function a number of doubts were raised about their capability. There was a perception that current format and strategic approach of individual RSCGs is not yet consistent.

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

There was broad agreement with the proposed procurement strategy. A number of respondents emphasised the need for sufficient time to be provided for tender preparation and contract negotiation.

Responding on behalf of the Mayor of London, the GLA said that a competitive tendering route was inappropriate for London and proposed that the Home Office allocate funding to the GLA under a Service Level agreement.

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

There was a general feeling that a mix of hard and soft measures would be required, with the majority saying that outcomes rather than inputs and outputs should take precedence. There was a host of additional detail also provided.

## **List of respondents:**

1. Accommodata Ltd
2. Advisory Board on Naturalisation and Integration
3. British Medical Association (BMA)
4. British Red Cross
5. Building and Social Housing Foundation (BSHF)
6. Building Bridges (Forum)
7. Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, The University of Birmingham
8. Chartered Institute of Housing
9. City Parochial Foundation (CPF)
10. ClearSprings (Management) Ltd
11. Derby Refugee Advice Centre
12. East Midlands Consortium for Asylum and Refugee Support (EMCARS)
13. East of England Regional Assembly - Consortium for Asylum and Refugee Integration (EERA-CARI)
14. ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd
15. Employability Forum
16. Greater London Authority - Mayor of London
17. Greater Peterborough Partnership
18. HACT
19. Hammersmith and Fulham Refugee Forum
20. Hillside Resource Centre
21. Inter-Agency Partnership (IAP)
22. International Care Network
23. Islington Council
24. Jobcentre Plus
25. London Metropolitan University - Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit (RAGU)
26. Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (MBF)
27. Merseyside Refugee Support Network
28. Methodist Church
29. Michael Bell Associates Research & Consultancy
30. Middlesex University
31. Migrant Helpline
32. National Consortia Co-ordinating Group (NCCG)
33. National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)
34. North East Strategic Partnership for Asylum & Refugee Support (NESPARS)
35. North of England Refugee Service
36. Northern Refugee Centre
37. Oldham Citizens Advice Bureau
38. Partnership for Refugee Employment through Support Training and Online Learning (PRESTO)
39. Plymouth City Council
40. Praxis Community Projects
41. Reconnect
42. Refugee Action
43. Refugee Action on behalf of RCOs and Refugee Groups
44. Refugee Council

45. Refugee Education & Training Advisory Service (RETAS)
46. Refugee Housing Association
47. Refugee New Arrivals Project
48. Refugee Resource
49. Refugees in Effective & Active Partnerships
50. Refugees Into Jobs
51. Regional Refugee Forum North East
52. Renewal SRB
53. Rotherham Refugee Integration Sub-Group (RISG)
54. Royal College of Nursing
55. Scottish Refugee Council
56. South of England Refugee & Asylum Seeker Consortium (Portsmouth City Council)
57. South West Regional Assembly
58. Southwark Refugee Communities Forum
59. Stoke-on-Trent Citizens Advice Bureau
60. Sunderland City Council
61. TimeBank
62. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
63. UnLtd
64. West London Housing Partnership
65. West Midlands Strategic Partnership for Asylum and Refugee Support (WMSPARS)
66. Yorkshire & Humberside Regional Strategic Group/ Yorkshire & Humberside Consortium for Asylum Seekers & Refugees
67. Your Homes Newcastle