



ASYLUM SEEKER ACCOMMODATION PROCESS

Refugee Council proposal for a community- based pilot_

May 2002

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This paper sets out outline proposals for a pilot community-based accommodation process based on a linked network of small to medium sized hostels or centres each with between fifty and one hundred beds, accommodating between three and six hundred individuals in total. This would be combined with an integrated, individual casework management plan for every resident in the process.

The Home Office has already stated its intention to pilot four large accommodation centres in the White Paper, *Secure Borders Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain*. These proposals set out how a community based model might work following the Home Secretary's agreement at a meeting on Tuesday 9 April 2002 with a delegation led by Bill Morris, the General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union, that such an approach should be piloted and evaluated alongside the four larger single-site centres already proposed.

- 1.2 We believe this proposal could meet all the Government's objectives and be:

- better value for money
- faster to develop
- more flexible
- safer
- more acceptable to the local host community and
- better for integration

than the current alternatives.

- 1.3 The Refugee Council outlines here a proposed model for an alternative accommodation process. A number of other statutory, private and voluntary sector agencies involved in providing large scale services to asylum seekers have been consulted about this proposal and all have indicated their general support. However, the proposal is the responsibility of the Refugee Council alone.

- 1.4 This paper is not intended to constitute an outline bid for funding of any sort.

2. CONTEXT

- 2.1 The White Paper "*Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain*" proposes that four accommodation centres be established on a pilot basis, to run alongside the current asylum seeker dispersal system for a proportion of those asylum seekers receiving NASS support. The government's proposals envisage large centres of up to 750 beds, situated in rural or semi-rural areas.

- 2.2 The Home Office has said that to evaluate the pilots it will assess whether the accommodation centres:

- help improve the asylum process through, for example, closer contact between asylum seekers and the relevant authorities;
- reduce decision making times
- reduce illegal working
- reduce financial or housing fraud
- reduce community tension
- improve the integration of those granted status

- improve the rate of returns of those refused asylum.

2.3 The Home Office has described accommodation centres as follows:

“As well as full board and lodging, the centres will provide a range of services, including basic healthcare, education for children and purposeful activity for adults. Accommodation centres will also contribute to a swift and effective asylum determination procedure by providing direct links into the Home Office casework function. On-site staff will manage cases through the system and advise applicants on the progress of their cases. There will also be access to legal advice and interpretation. Those staying in accommodation centres will not be detained. They will however be subject to a residence requirement and they will not be offered alternative forms of support. The detail of the regime...will include clear criteria for allocating places in accommodation centres during the trial period.” (News release, 29 October 2001)

2.4 We believe our proposal is fully consistent with the Home Office’s intentions but will avoid some of the problems associated with the 750-bed centre model. These include:

- long development times
- high management risks
- local opposition
- high capital costs
- excessive staff emphasis on control
- likelihood that residents/clients will become institutionalised
- isolation from local services, including appropriate education for children
- difficulties in achieving successful move-on arrangements for asylum seekers whose asylum claims are accepted
- damage and delay to the integration of those who have a positive decision
- difficulty in ensuring the safety of residents and appropriate child protection processes
- likelihood of bullying and exploitation involved in any large-scale residential provision.

3. OVERALL APPROACH AND KEY PRINCIPLES

3.1 The alternative accommodation process based on a network of smaller hostels/centres draws on the experience of a range of local authority and voluntary organisations. This experience has been gained during the Vietnamese, Bosnian and Kosovan emergency resettlement programmes and the most successful examples of the current dispersal system. Key features are:

Size and location

- small to medium size hostels/centres, no larger than 100 beds each
- maximum stay of 6 months
- centres linked in a network of up to 600 beds within easy travelling distance of a “central services” core – a location in which a number of the different agencies involved are based, including NASS and Immigration Service staff
- locations in or near diverse urban areas
- steering group of key agencies to co-ordinate delivery.

Residents

- mixture of families and single/childless adults
- resident groups chosen to minimise spread of languages/cultures. This allows a higher level of skill in staffing, and lowers costs.

Staffing

- high proportion of bilingual staff able to support both residents and local service providers (plus access to professional interpreters on-site).

Casework

- integrated case-work management for each resident bringing together the requirements of each agency or organisation involved and meeting the needs of the individual
- effective briefing of potential residents before arrival
- initial assessment
- case management plan agreed between agencies and resident
- monitoring
- review.

Local Services

- support staff based in the central core together with individual centres given local responsibility for making effective relationships with local providers of education, health, legal and other services
- funding available to support community based provision of services rather than provision in the centre
- opportunities maximised for residents to be involved in local volunteering activity, and for local communities to support befriending/mentoring schemes for residents/clients
- maximum access to local schemes providing training and preparation for employment, linked to UK EQUAL project (EQUAL – a European Social Fund-financed national project, testing and promoting new means of combating discrimination in the labour market)
- provision of legal advice and representation within centres or by locally based legal advisers, based on existing and planned Legal Services Commission funded provision
- self catering where possible.

A culture of realism

- a co-ordinated effort by all the agencies involved to create a realistic culture in which everyone understands defensible decisions will be made quickly and implemented effectively – whether positive or negative. Asylum seekers helped to be clear about the possible outcomes of their application and actively prepare for either outcome, integration or return.

Move-on and integration

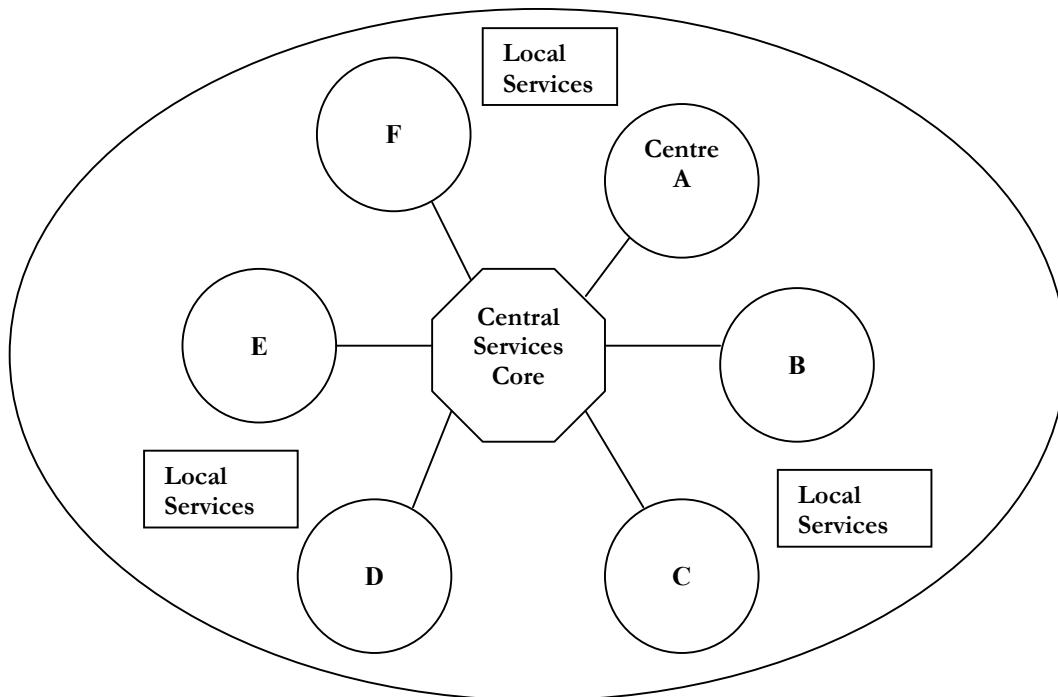
- planned move-on within region for successful applicants in conjunction with local consortia

- planning for move-on services integrated within local and regional strategies and plans developed by consortia, statutory authorities (housing, education, health, police, etc), Local Strategic Partnerships, Community Safety Partnerships, Community Legal Services Partnerships, NASS and Immigration Service regional managers, etc.
- follow up support where appropriate
- enhanced opportunities for residents given positive decisions to start making immediate economic contribution to local economies (helping to meet skill shortages etc.).

3.2 The concept of an accommodation process, based on a network of buildings linked by a common process, is analogous to the model of Induction Centre process being successfully piloted by Migrant Helpline in Kent, across a total of 3 sites.

3.3 The process can be represented as follows:

Network functions



Central Services

- management
- co-ordination
- IND functions
- NASS functions
- general advice service
- legal advice co-ordination
- local services support
- local communication
- facilities for on-site meetings/interviews.

Centres

- accommodation and support
- casework
- support for education, training and volunteering opportunities
- facilities for on-site meetings/interviews.

Local Services

- health
- education
- training
- legal advice and representation
- special needs provision
- volunteering opportunities
- facilities for religious & cultural activities
- other.

Casework process

Induction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Orientation• Assessment• Possible outcomes
Case plan agreed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Asylum claim• Education• Health• Training• Special needs• Voluntary work• Possible outcomes
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ongoing briefing & rebriefing• Case management• Monitoring• Regular review
Initial decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review• Outcomes• Options
Final negative decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Return arrangements
Final positive decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Move on• Follow up support

4. ACCOMMODATION AND LOCATION

- 4.1 The Refugee Council proposes that the hostels/centres in the accommodation process network are ones in or near to the towns and communities in which it is expected that residents given refugee status or ELR will subsequently be rehoused. Initial consultation in one region (Yorkshire and Humberside) has already identified a number of suitable potential hostel buildings, owned by RSLs (Registered Social Landlords) and local authority consortium members, which meet this criterion. A number have previously

been successfully used in the Kosovan programme and others. It is proposed that the total capacity of the network be in the range of 300 – 600 beds.

- 4.2 Similar hostels are likely to be available in other cluster areas currently used for dispersal, where local infrastructures of support services are already in place and being steadily strengthened. The lead manager for the consortium in the West Midlands has already expressed interest and support. The proposed development of a network of hostels/centres in existing dispersal areas enables the new system to build on the best elements of the current dispersal system rather than simply replace it.
- 4.3 It would be highly desirable but not essential for all the hostels/centres within the network to be located within the same current dispersal region. However, the network would need to operate within a clearly defined broader area to ensure effective management co-ordination and control (e.g. a network spanning Yorkshire & Humberside together with the Northwest or with the East Midlands would be feasible, but developing two or more parallel pilots in different regions would be preferable).
- 4.4 A key element of this proposal is that a network of accommodation process hostels/centres should be located in a region or regions already being used for asylum seeker dispersal. The development of the hostel/centre network for accommodation process purposes will thus be highly compatible with local strategies for developing services for asylum seekers and refugees. Local authority consortia in their strategic role are already developing these, with input from NASS regional managers, IND, health, police, legal and advice service providers and others. The centres and their development will also be compatible with local housing, economic, race relations and community safety strategies.
- 4.5 The establishment of the network in current dispersal areas will maximise the likelihood that residents given positive decisions will be relatively easily accommodated in move-on housing locally, or be able to secure their own accommodation. This will speed up the integration process, and simplify the planning of local and regional services by local authorities and others that will assist the integration of refugees into local communities and local economies. The use of a number of hostels/centres across a region or regions will reduce the impact on individual local authorities that would occur with the establishment of large 750 bed centres in any given area.
- 4.6 Potential concerns or resistance from local communities or local service providers under pressure will be minimised, and community safety concerns reduced. Locating hostels in or near towns and communities also reduces transport costs, and facilitates the recruitment of bilingual staff.

5. PROPOSED DAILY STRUCTURE

- 5.1 The daily structure within the hostels/centres would include:
 - Clear occupancy agreements/tenancy agreements, as for current dispersal accommodation, with appeal system. Agreements to include hostel/centre rules, signing-in/out arrangements, visiting arrangements
 - Entitlement to continuing NASS support dependent on continued residence in the centre (overnight absences, e.g. to visit relatives elsewhere, allowed by prior agreement, as for dispersal accommodation). This ensures compatibility with the reporting regime proposed for dispersed clients. We believe legal arrangements about reporting, the refusal or acceptance of places in hostels/centres in the

network etc are covered by existing legislation and would not need separate legislation, as is required for the 750 bed accommodation centre model

- Casework system for client/resident management (see section 6)
- Individual move-on and return plans developed for all residents during their stay, in preparation for the possible outcomes of their asylum application
- Culture of realism, orientation and learning in safety (women and vulnerable residents in particular are much safer than in large centres, and bullying and control problems reduced)
- Maximising the independence and self-reliance of residents to avoid institutionalisation – self-catering/menu planning, cleaning, accessing local services, residents meetings - within the constraints of their case management plan.

5.2 We have asked The Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture for their views on this model. They have confirmed that for some of their clients, it would be particularly advantageous to have a network of small-to-medium sized staffed hostels and centres available. Medically, they consider the use of large 750 bed centres for such clients to be completely inappropriate.

6. CASEWORK SYSTEM FOR CLIENT MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 The network of hostels and centres would use an integrated and consistent casework system for client management. It is proposed that an extended diary/individual planning system is developed, based on the shorter 7-day diary used by Migrant Helpline for guiding their clients through their pilot induction process in Kent. The extended diary/plan would incorporate the timetable for dealing with the asylum claim and other issues.
- 6.2 The diary/plan should include an induction and assessment phase where work is done with the client and IND to assess their needs – health including any special needs, accommodation, training, legal advice, language, orientation etc. A programme of support and assistance would then be developed to meet these needs. Continued briefing and rebriefing of clients would be an integral part of the plan/diary.
- 6.3 The plan/diary would be recorded formally, reviewed regularly and changed as required. The process would have clear similarities with the formal assessment and care management process in the health and social care field.
- 6.4 The plan would include a clear expectation on the asylum seekers to co-operate with the asylum aspects of the process. It would contain an appraisal element, including recording the client's compliance with the requirements of their residence in the hostel/centre and the terms of their occupancy agreement, and opportunities for clients to contribute and feedback on their casework plan and the support offered.
- 6.5 The plan would include structured advice about potential outcomes of the asylum application – acceptance or rejection and how the client can deal with these. A key element would certainly be work from an early stage directed towards preparing the client for possible longer-term integration into the local community. Clients would also be given information about the availability of voluntary assisted return arrangements where appropriate. They would be helped to think through the emotional and practical consequences of return – whether enforced or voluntary. Council of Europe and

Medical Foundation advice stresses the benefits of clear advice and counselling support at this stage, in preparation for possible enforced return as well as for positive decisions on asylum applicants. These benefits apply both to clients and to Immigration Service staff responsible for implementing removal processes.

- 6.6 The plan would need input from all the agencies involved and would be discussed with and agreed by the asylum seekers concerned.

7. MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

- 7.1 A number of options are available for management arrangements:
- a) Accommodation providers could be individually responsible for the management of their own hostels/centres, complying with an overall service specification, and with the operation of different hostels/centres co-ordinated by a steering group of relevant agencies. Within this option, the provision of casework or advice services within hostels/centres could itself be provided by each hostel/centre individually, or by one agency across the whole network.
 - b) Alternatively, a single agency (existing or specially created) could contract with the Home Office/NASS for the operation of the accommodation centre network of hostels/centres, and subcontract for the operation of individual centres.
- 7.2 The Refugee Council is not proposing at this point that it or any other specific agency is invited to run the proposed accommodation centre network of hostels. Specific proposals on this would be developed in the light of the Home Office's decision on the pilot model proposed. The Refugee Council itself would not in general wish to be directly responsible for the large scale provision of accommodation, but would wish to discuss appropriate and effective management arrangements.
- 7.3 To minimise delays through protracted procurement processes, it might be feasible for a network of hostels to be established under current funding arrangements for dispersed accommodation, through variations to existing NASS contracts with accommodation providers. The network could offer all the non-NASS/Immigration Service services and functions, leaving these to be added as soon as they could be organised. This would clearly be subject to appropriate contractual negotiations.

8. ACCESS TO LOCAL SERVICES/INTEGRATION

- 8.1 It would be important that effective links were made with local communities from the start of the development process and that good communication was maintained thereafter. Asylum seekers would be encouraged to support this process by participating in voluntary work activity.
- 8.2 As far as possible, asylum seekers would be encouraged to access services in the community rather than having specialist services provided on-site. This must be cheaper on a unit cost basis and some of the savings made could be utilised to provide support to local service providers. Some service needs would be reduced as a direct result of accommodating residents in hostels/centres of a more appropriate size – e.g. residents' mental health would be promoted and the demand for mental health services reduced.
- 8.3 Support staff based in the central core would provide resources and on site support to local schools attended by asylum seeking children in the accommodation process. Individual centre staff would support parents and children deal with the UK education

process. The education of children of asylum seekers in local schools would trigger the entitlement of Local Education Authorities to some additional funding through existing funding formulae, such as EMTAG and Section 11.

- 8.4 This proposal to provide education for asylum seekers children through local educational facilities may require amendments to the current published Bill, through the parliamentary process, depending on whether a network of hostels/centres as proposed fell within the definition of accommodation centres contained in the Bill.
- 8.5 The availability of interpreters based in local hostels/centres would be potentially beneficial to other local service providers, increasing the pool of locally based interpreters available to help other providers make their services accessible to refugees and asylum seekers. Interpreters, volunteers and bi-lingual staff would accompany asylum seekers to health appointments and other contacts with statutory providers, thereby minimising impact on other local providers.
- 8.6 The centres would have a focus on involving residents in purposeful activity. The culture of the centres should include making productive use of each resident's time while they wait for a decision.
- 8.7 Initially, this might involve ensuring they were attending language and orientation training. At later stages of the process, when discussing possible outcomes, the focus might shift to what skills could be developed to facilitate the return process or how, in the event of a positive decision, the asylum seeker could most quickly and appropriately access the UK labour market. Clear links with the UK EQUAL project would facilitate this process.
- 8.8 Links would be developed with local housing providers (statutory, RSLs, private sector) to facilitate swift local settlement in future where appropriate.
- 8.9 The use of local services in existing dispersal areas would maximise the opportunities for hostels/centres and their development to be compatible with local and regional strategies already developed, and for the needs of hostels and their residents to be taken fully into account as those strategies are reviewed and further developed. Opportunities to use Neighbourhood Renewal Funding and similar would also be maximised.

9. LENGTH OF STAY

- 9.1 The proposal takes into account the government's wish to see residents staying no longer than six months, or until final asylum decisions are made, whichever is the sooner. If the streamlining of the asylum decision-making process does not ensure decisions are made within this timescale, it is proposed that residents should normally still be moved on to local dispersal accommodation after this time. Exceptions could include clients with special needs, including Medical Foundation clients where appropriate, for whom the experience of moving on might be particularly difficult.
- 9.2 Experience of operating reception centres previously is that long-stay residents tend to regress in their ability to learn because of the effects of institutionalisation. This can create a culture of dependency that needs to be avoided, to promote return or the future successful and active integration of families and individuals into local communities.
- 9.3 Hostels/centres would be able to accommodate successful applicants for the duration of the new 28 day grace period at the end of the period of NASS support, where this still fell within the maximum six month stay envisaged.

10. FACILITIES FOR NASS AND IND STAFF

- 10.1 NASS/IND services could be provided as part of the central services in an office location accessible to all the hostels/centres. Legal advice and representation and other central functions would also be co-ordinated from this site.
- 10.2 NASS/IND services in the Accommodation Process could be either existing contact functions such as interviewing or could include various levels of decision making depending on what is most convenient or quick to develop for those services.
- 10.3 The proposal is highly compatible with the progressive development of NASS regional service delivery points (e.g. the Leeds Waterside pilot, mobile reporting centres, NASS Outreach team activity, pilot projects to enhance NASS regionalisation, etc). The existing co-location of a number of NASS and Immigration Service functions at the Leeds Waterside pilot could be a significant factor in the choice of region or area in which to develop an accommodation process network of hostels/centres, together with the strength of inter-agency liaison arrangements developed in the region. The NASS regionalisation pilot in the West Midlands could bring similar advantages in that region.

11. INFRASTRUCTURE / IT

- 11.1 All hostels within the accommodation centre network would need to have access to a shared IT and information infrastructure. Decisions on the IT systems required would depend on the organisations/agencies selected to operate and manage the network. Data protection issues would need to be taken into account in linking the work of different agencies involved within the network, as would be the case with large single-site accommodation centres.

12. COSTS/FINANCE

- 12.1 Detailed costings cannot be produced at this stage.
- 12.2 Savings over the costs required for large 750 bed accommodation centres are likely in the following areas:
- major reduction in capital costs associated with construction/conversion of large accommodation centres
 - reduced costs for security and centre management
 - reduced costs for staff required for control of large numbers, child protection etc
 - reduced transport costs
 - reduced costs for separate education and health provision within centres – not now required
 - reduced insurance costs through reduction and spread of risk.
- 12.3 Additional costs would be incurred, including:
- support workers in local schools/education liaison staff
 - employment/training/volunteering co-ordinators

- basic health care facilities within hostels/centres.

12.4 All the costs would be significantly offset by a reduction in dispersal costs. Some providers of dispersed accommodation already provide support in these activity areas within the contract prices for dispersed accommodation paid by NASS.

13. EVALUATION OF PILOT

13.1 We believe the model proposed has significant advantages over the large 750-bed centre model. We would wish the model proposed to be evaluated alongside the existing model for which procurement has already started.

13.2 We propose that the monitoring and evaluation process be incorporated from the start of any service development and fully integrated within it, to inform future policy-making in the area of asylum support and refugee integration.

14. SUMMARY

14.1 The proposed model outlined for an accommodation process model meets the key Home Office objectives for the accommodation system for asylum seekers.

14.2 The model has significant advantages over the large 750-bed centre model, including:

- lower capital and set-up costs
- significantly reduced development times
- development flexibility
- more effective preparation for long-term integration of clients given positive final decisions
- improved fit with local and regional strategies for refugee and asylum seeker support
- enhanced community support/reduced local opposition.

15. FURTHER ACTION / DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

15.1 Further development of this proposal would depend on an initial indication from the Home Office about the acceptability of the approach and the overall concept. The Refugee Council would hope for an early indication from the Home Office about this.

15.2 We think this model could be brought on stream within a six-month time frame. Implementation by early 2003 is feasible if initial decisions are taken by summer 2002.

Alistair Griggs
Director of Regions
Refugee Council

7 May 2002