Mapping the Field
Refugee housing in Wales

Professor Vaughan Robinson
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Mapping the Field:

Refugee Housing in Wales

Researched and written by Professor Vaughan Robinson

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Hact + refugee housing

For over two decades, hact (the Housing Associations’ Charitable Trust) has been investing in and developing refugee housing solutions, engaging directly with refugee communities, housing providers and local, regional and national decision-makers.

In 2003, hact made an award to the Welsh Refugee Council (WRC) to fund a housing development worker post to develop appropriate housing services, support and infrastructure to meet the housing needs of refugees in Wales. In 2005 using funding from the Lloyds TSB Foundation for England and Wales and the European Refugee Fund, hact and the Welsh Refugee Council commissioned Professor Vaughan Robinson, former Director of the Migration Unit at the University of Wales, Swansea, to conduct a feasibility study into refugee housing in Wales. *Mapping the field: refugee housing in Wales* is the result of that research study.

The project was managed by WRC with support from the Refugee Well Housing Project Advisory Group. This group comprises experts from across the housing and voluntary and community sectors in Wales. WRC and hact are grateful for their contribution and support for this research and look forward to working with them in taking forward the recommendations.

Hact

Hact pioneers housing solutions for people on the margins. We develop sustainable partnerships and networks, promote practical solutions for social inclusion and share insights, outcomes and replicable models. For further information about hact:

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Welsh Refugee Council

Established in 1990, the Welsh Refugee Council (WRC) works in partnership with others to provide support for asylum seekers and refugees to help them integrate into their host community. It provides housing and accommodation services, education, training and employment, access to mental health services, advocacy, lobbying and influence local and national policies and community and race relations. It employs 35 staff in four offices based in Cardiff, Wrexham, Newport and Swansea and is committed to working with Refugee Voice Wales and refugee community organisations in their capacity building and empowerment. For further information about the Welsh Refugee Council:

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At the time of writing this report, Professor Vaughan Robinson was Director of the Migration Unit at Swansea University. He has since moved to become Professor of Refugee Studies at King's College, London, where he is also Director of the Graduate School. He has advised a number of refugee organisations on policy issues, including the Refugee Council, Save the Children, ECRE and the UNHCR. In addition, he also sits on the editorial board of the Journal of Refugee Studies, and has published a number of research papers and reports.

Disclaimer
A great many people have contributed to this research project through formal interviews and informal discussions. I have tried to represent their views as accurately as possible, but inevitably there will have been misunderstandings, errors in communication, and omissions. Some of the things I have been told may not, or may no longer, be true. Whilst I have tried to ‘triangulate’ evidence to ensure its accuracy, the report may still contain factual errors, and I take responsibility for these. Both the Welsh Refugee Council and hact have had the opportunity to read and comment on earlier drafts of this report.

Glossary
Hact  Housing Associations' Charitable Trust
NASS  National Asylum Support Service
RCO  Refugee Community Organisation
RSL  Registered Social Landlord
WAG  Welsh Assembly Government
WRC  Welsh Refugee Council
LHA  Local Housing Authority
WFHA  Welsh Federation of Housing Associations
WLGA  Welsh Local Government Association
HMO  House in Multiple Occupation

Protocols
Quotes from research respondents are shown in italics and are enclosed in single quotation marks. Where it is necessary to also show the question that I asked as interviewer, my words are shown in bold italics, again within single quotation marks.

I have not altered the meaning of any quotes, but where irrelevant material has been excluded this is denoted by the following symbol ...

I have taken the liberty of ‘cleaning up’ quotations to make them read more clearly. This has only involved the removal of phrases such as ‘erm’, ‘um’, ‘I mean’, ‘at the end of the day’, ‘sort of’, ‘like’ etc.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

This report describes the outcome of a short scoping project commissioned by the Housing Associations’ Charitable Trust (hact) and the Welsh Refugee Council (WRC) in May 2005. The main purpose of the research was threefold. Firstly, to identify the main gaps and weaknesses in provision. Secondly, to consider how these gaps might best be filled, perhaps by mapping over best practice from elsewhere in the UK. Thirdly, to ascertain the extent of co-working and collaboration, and to highlight key barriers to greater co-operation.

The research reflects the philosophy of hact, the organisation pioneering housing solutions for people on the margins. They find gaps in provision and then commission projects to identify best practice and fill these gaps. During the last two decades, they have invested over £2.5 million pounds into the refugee sector, mainly to develop capacity within the Refugee Community Organisation (RCO) sector, and to offer training to RCO staff. More recently, they developed a Refugee Housing Integration Programme which seeks to: increase the access of refugees to appropriate housing and related services; stimulate partnership working between RCOs and housing providers; and increase the amount of housing and housing-related services provided by RCOs to their own communities.

There are three main sections to the report. The first provides the context in order to help the reader understand the issues and challenges. The second describes the research undertaken for this report and the main findings from this. And the third outlines some of the key recommendations to come from the research.

In more detail, within the context section, Chapter 2 sets the scene by describing how Wales fits into the national refugee and asylum system, and outlines some of the uniqueness of the situation in Wales. It describes the limited role Wales played prior to the 1990s in the housing of refugees and asylum seekers. It then outlines the radical changes made to the asylum system by the 1999 Asylum and Immigration Act, and in particular the national dispersal policy that brought asylum seekers to Wales in significant numbers for the first time. The social demography of asylum seekers in Wales is then profiled, and a brief profile is also provided of Welsh housing and its distinctive features.

Chapter 3 then provides the results of the literature review undertaken for the project. Published and grey literature was searched in order both to provide an evidence-base for best practice and to highlight weaknesses in provision or practice that have been identified in England, Scotland, and Wales. Very little of the literature relates to Wales, and most recounts the experience of English stakeholders.

Chapter 4 describes the field research that has been undertaken to gather the opinions and experiences of key stakeholders in the four main cluster areas of Wales and, in some cases, beyond these. The methodology underpinning this research is also explained.

In Section Two, there is a series of chapters which convey the findings of the field research. The initial four chapters are organised in a chronological fashion, beginning with Chapter 5 which discusses the housing of asylum seekers during the initial period when they are
supported and housed by NASS. Chapter 6 discusses the move-on period that follows an asylum seeker receiving a decision on their claim, and Chapter 7 details the support available to refugees once the move-on period has expired. Chapter 8 then lays out the housing options and pathways open to refugees after they have received a positive decision on their asylum claim. Chapters 9, 10 and 11 then take different housing sectors in turn, and describe how each works, and what barriers might exist which could limit the access of refugees. Chapter 12 then focuses upon Refugee Community Organisations and their role in the housing system. Chapter 13 looks at co-working between the main stakeholders. And Chapter 14 discusses two stand-alone housing and housing-related initiatives.

Section Three contains the recommendations which flow from the evidence base provided in Chapters 5-14.
THE CONTEXT

Refugees, asylum seekers and Wales

Evidence from the literature: what works and what doesn’t

Research methodology
Chapter 2

Refugees, asylum seekers and Wales

Pre-1999

Although Wales has a tradition of black and minority ethnic (BME) settlement that dates back to the end of the nineteenth century (Collins, 1957), it has only recently seen the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers (Robinson, 1997). Although many other parts of the UK experienced the arrival of refugees from the 1950s onwards, Wales did not. In fact it was not until the arrival of the Vietnamese ‘Boat People’ in 1979 that Wales received its first major refugee immigration. Some 602 Vietnamese ‘quota refugees’ were dispersed by the government to Wales (Robinson and Hale, 1989), although many later left to join fellow countrymen and family in London and Birmingham. Swansea, for example, had lost six of its fourteen families by 1989. However, as the Vietnamese were leaving Wales another group of asylum seekers was arriving. From the mid 1980s onwards the established and settled Somali communities in Cardiff and Newport both began to attract asylum seekers fleeing to the UK from Somalia’s civil war (Save the Children, 1994). By 1994, Save the Children estimated that the Somali community in Cardiff numbered some 4000, of which perhaps 2000 were recently arrived refugees. The community was interconnected by extensive family networks and by the fact that most people originated from the same part of Somalia, namely Somaliland. Save the Children identified several key issues facing the Somali community at that time. Two of these are pertinent to the current report, namely: the way in which language was acting as a barrier to access to services and entitlements; and the need for a community-based one-stop shop to signpost refugees and others to key entitlements and sources of impartial information. The report concluded with a number of recommendations, three of which were that the statutory and voluntary sectors should: ‘invest in projects which develop the skills and capacities of the community, and in so doing provide routes out of poverty’; ‘improve access to mainstream services through the appointment of more Somali speaking staff’; and ‘allocate resources to the development of culturally sensitive services targeting specific groups in the Somali community’ (Save the Children, 1994: 5).

As a consequence of the movement to South Wales of Somali asylum seekers and also the staying on of students at Welsh Universities who felt they might be persecuted if they returned to their countries of origin, the refugee and asylum seeker population of Wales had reached 1016 households by 1997 containing perhaps 3565 persons (Robinson, 1998). Most lived in Cardiff (67% of the total), Newport (16%), and Swansea (12%), and the majority were from Somalia (70%), Vietnam (9%), Iran (7%), Sudan (6%), and Iraq (6%).

Robinson (1999) reported the second phase of his research for the Welsh Refugee Council, which was concerned with whether service providers were aware of the needs of this new refugee population and had positively responded to these. The main results of this survey were that: only eight organisations provided services for refugees/asylum seekers; only two organisations intended to expand their service provision for refugees; 40% of organisations stated that refugees were an extremely low priority for them; 6% felt that refugees had become much less of a priority over the previous five years, even though that period had seen a sharp increase in the number of asylum seekers entering the UK; and organisations
seemed to have made little effort to understand the sometimes unique needs of refugees. Only two organisations had appointed refugees to their staff. Only four (7%) had appointed staff to deal specifically with the needs of refugees, although few of these staff had subsequently received specialist training. Over half of all bodies sought no consultation whatsoever with refugee communities or their advocates, and only two organisations arranged regular formal consultation. And 82% of organisations had never had any direct contact with the WRC. Robinson (1999) concluded his survey by arguing that attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers in Wales were shaped – at that time – by three ‘cultures’. The first of these was a ‘culture of ignorance’ deriving from the absence of any data on the distribution of refugees or their socio-demographics. This allowed some organisations to avoid their responsibilities, and even where organisations wished to bring about change, they found this very difficult because they were working in an informational vacuum that hobbled decision making. Less easily remedied was the ‘culture of disbelief’ amongst service providers who argued that there was no need for action in Wales because there were no refugees in Wales or in their particular locality. Instead, refugees were seen as an English ‘problem’ which was restricted to that country’s major metropolitan areas. This ‘culture of disbelief’ was widespread within Wales, with many organisations claiming that refugee needs were an unimportant issue for them, although few of these organisations had taken the trouble to consult with refugee groups or indeed ascertain whether there was a local refugee population. Finally there was the ‘culture of denial’ which assumed that racism and exclusion were less virulent in Wales than in England, and therefore that refugees did not face any unusual or noteworthy problem living in Wales (see also Robinson and Gardner, 2006 on the same belief in relation to the BME population).

The third piece of research focusing upon the refugee population in Wales prior to the 1999 Act was Hansen and Hempel-Jørgensen’s 1999 project looking into the needs and characteristics of the Somali community in Cardiff (Hansen and Hempel-Jørgensen, 2001; Hansen, 2002). The first output from this project was a report which aimed to describe the needs of the Somali community in Cardiff. Their key findings about housing were: that many Somalis lived in overcrowded housing; that those 30 Somali families who had been rehoused by the Council in St Mellons in the early 1990s were experiencing considerable hostility and isolation, and were moving back into the heart of the community in Butetown and Grangetown, even though this meant trading down to much smaller houses; and that the hostel used for homeless Somalis was located in Ely, which was distant from the community, from Mosques and from specialist food shops. They then went on to consider future housing needs. Their initial findings were that ‘many (Somalis) were happy with their current housing’ (Hansen and Jørgensen, 2001; 18). There were, however, three needs that the community felt were not being adequately met. The average number of people in a household of Somali ethnicity was thought to be six, but most of the properties occupied by Somalis in Butetown and Grangetown had less than four bedrooms. Overcrowding was consequently quite common. The Council had built some four-bedroom housing, and this was available to Somalis, but was thought unattractive because of its distance from the community and its support services, and its location in areas where racial harassment was prevalent. Somali families thus had the choice of large houses in what they regarded as inappropriate locations or overcrowded houses in suitable and safe locations. The second unmet need was housing for disabled people in Grangetown and Butetown. And the third was the unwillingness of elderly Somalis to take up sheltered accommodation. Elderly Somalis who owned their own homes were unwilling to move into sheltered accommodation because they did not wish to give up their independence, did not wish to be isolated from their own community, were not aware of opportunities, or were concerned that carers would not be
able to speak Somali. As a result, some were still living in privately-owned lodging houses around Angelina Street that were in poor physical condition while others remained in their own homes but were not really able to look after themselves properly. Hansen and Jørgensen did, however, comment that – at the time they were writing their report – the Council’s Housing Department and Taff Housing Association were looking into the possibility of specific provision for Somali elders. This has now been achieved.

Hansen (2002) later developed her work further, by focusing on gender issues and broadening the scope of the study to include Somalis, Sudanese and Bangladeshis. The Sudanese were largely a refugee and asylum seeker community, driven from Khartoum in the 1990s by political unrest and civil war. They numbered approximately 100-150 adults, plus children and a few students. Hansen argued that these three groups had very different housing experiences and needs. She claimed that Sudanese women were widely dispersed throughout Cardiff, mainly lived in ‘white’ middle-class areas and were less fearful of racism. They sought new houses in quiet and attractive neighbourhoods that were near mainstream facilities like shops and the city centre, and did not see it as a priority to live close to other Sudanese, although they enjoyed spending time in each other’s company and valued their Sudanese identity. Most could drive and had access to a car. Within the Somali community, the picture was rather different. Those women who could speak little English and/or had no access to a vehicle wished to live near other Somalis. This gave them a sense of identity, assisted them with child-care, gave them access to interpreting services, and gave them a sense of security and belonging. These generalisations also applied to elderly Somalis, those who could speak English well, and those with access to a car had different desires. While they felt that contact with other Somalis was important, they could achieve this without living in an ethnic area. Instead, for them, the critical locational factors were closeness to shops, the city centre, good schools, and the absence of racist harassment.

The 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act and Wales

The 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act marked not only a sea-change in British asylum policy but also a turning point for Wales. For the first time, Wales became an official reception area for asylum seekers while they awaited the outcome of their application.

The 1999 Act introduced a new centrally managed and funded no-choice dispersal policy in which asylum seekers were moved away from the South East of England to areas of lower housing demand and cost (Robinson, Anderson and Musterd, 2003). This new policy developed out of earlier ad hoc schemes organised by local authorities that felt they were supporting a disproportionate share of the nation’s growing asylum seeker population simply because of their geographical location (Robinson, 2002). The 1999 Act was a reaction to both the failure of these voluntary and informal arrangements and to the growing number of people seeking asylum in the UK. The Act established a new division of the Home Office called NASS (National Asylum Support Service) which had responsibility for the welfare and housing of all asylum seekers deemed deserving of state support. NASS sourced accommodation in ‘cluster regions’ throughout the UK, and Wales became one of these.

The Act proposed that local organisations and authorities should come together into consortia which would provide the full range of services needed by asylum seekers, including 40% of all housing. Each consortium would organise, co-ordinate and administrate provision and promote positive media images of asylum seekers. Consortia would also make provision for the long-term integration of those asylum seekers granted refugee status, protection or leave to remain.
NASS also negotiates directly with other organisations for the provision of specific elements of support. Sixty per cent of all accommodation, for example, was expected to be volunteered directly either by local authorities, registered social landlords or the private sector. These organisations were to provide a range of appropriate accommodation as well as the necessary support package (e.g. orientation, guidance on living skills, and activities to prevent asylum seekers becoming isolated or bored). In Wales, the Welsh Refugee Council has been contracted to provide emergency accommodation for those people making their asylum claim in Wales, and to date they have helped a total of about 200 people.

Wales has one consortium made up of all 21 local authorities in the country. Whereas some consortia in England provide both accommodation and support services, this is not the case in Wales. The Wales Consortium is not a housing provider but is a co-ordinator and service provider. It meets the needs of those asylum seekers dispersed by NASS to the four cluster areas of Swansea, Cardiff, Wrexham and Newport. Housing in these localities is supplied by three local authorities and three RSLs.

Between 2001 and 2005 Wrexham stood outside this all-Wales Consortium. Asylum seekers were dispersed to the Wrexham cluster area by NASS, which had contracts with two accommodation providers there. Clearsprings and Adelphi provided support for their own asylum seekers, and it was not until after the disturbances of 2003 that the local authority designated a housing officer to deal with ‘overseas’ applicants (including migrant workers and refugees), and seconded a Tenancy Support Worker to help ‘overseas’ tenants. Wrexham joined the all-Wales Consortium in 2005.

Originally, the Wales cluster area was due to receive its first asylum seekers in April 2000, but delicate negotiations between central and local government and the desire to establish critical masses of asylum seekers in other parts of the UK led to delays in asylum seekers being sent to Wales, with the first only arriving in May 2001.

Robinson (2005) has profiled the asylum seeker population of Wales. He presented NASS data that showed that, by March 2004, Wales had a NASS-supported asylum seeker population of 2605 people, of whom 44% lived in Cardiff, 36% in Swansea, 16% in Newport and 2% in Wrexham (see Figure 2.1). Asylum seekers in Wales were more likely to be in receipt of the full ‘support and accommodation’ package than those in the UK as a whole, and are therefore less likely to have chosen where in the UK they wished to live while waiting for the decision on their asylum claim. Men outnumbered women within the Welsh asylum seeker population 1.2:1, but the trend had been towards gender balance. 51% were single adults (cf 82% for UK). Ten languages accounted for 70% of people, and the two languages of Arabic and Slovak accounted for 25% of the total. 74 nationalities were represented within Wales (cf 132 for UK), and 14 nationalities accounted for 75% of total. The largest nationalities in March 2004 were Somalis, Pakistanis, Iraqis and Iranians, but the size of each nationality had changed over time in line with changes in migration streams to the UK (Robinson, 2005). The distribution of the main nationalities between the largest cluster areas in South Wales is shown in Figure 2.2.

The distinctiveness of housing in Wales

In 2004 Wales had a population of 2.952 million, up from 2.903 million at the last census. Between mid-year 2002 and mid-year 2003 the population had risen by 146,000, partly as a result of continuing strong net immigration from the rest of the UK. This flow added net increases of 13,900 2003-4 and 15,200 2002-3. It has been estimated that while the population of Wales will rise by a further 4% between 1996 and 2021, the number of households will increase by 14% (Smith, Stirling and Williams, 2000). This increase in
household numbers will drive demand for accommodation, as people live longer (often after the death of a partner), the divorce rate remains high, and people choose to marry or cohabit later in life.

This growing demand for accommodation has not been satisfied either by new-build or by subdivision. By 2004 there were 1.259m properties in Wales, some 6.3% more than there had been in 1991. Even so, in 1998 there was a backlog of unmet need of 33,000 dwellings (Kenway et al, 2005) made up of concealed families, private tenants who are sharing and crowded private/social tenants. And it has been estimated that an additional 8,600 net new

![Map of Wales with distribution of asylum seekers](image)

Figure 2.1: The distribution of NASS-supported asylum seekers throughout Wales in March 2004 (after Robinson, 2005).
dwellings will be needed each year between 1998 and 2016 to meet the growth in numbers of households. As one commentator put it:

“The provision of low cost home-ownership in Wales is declining even though all the evidence points to a considerable unmet demand.” (Williams, 2000)

Wales also has an aged housing stock. 31% of occupied first homes were built before 1919 (Cf 23% in England). Most of this stock is owner occupied, and 60% is terraced (Smith, Stirling and Williams, 2000). Wales also has average incomes that are below the UK mean, so

![Figure 2.2: The distribution of NASS-supported asylum seekers in Cardiff, Newport and Swansea, by country of origin (after Robinson, 2005)](image)
there is an issue of low-income owner occupation. In 2004, there were 50,000 unfit homes in Wales (c4% of the stock), but although this number is large, it represents a sharp reduction since 1986, when almost 20% of the stock was unfit. The main causes of unfitness are disrepair and dampness, with two-thirds of unfit properties being owner occupied (Kenway et al, 2005).

At a time when the number of households in general is rising, and demand for affordable housing is growing, the social housing stock in Wales has shrunk. The share of stock that is social housing has fallen from 21% in 1995 to 18% in 2004 (Kenway et al, 2005). The number of socially rented homes has also fallen, from 309,000 in 1981 to 229,000 in 2004. The council stock has fallen particularly sharply as that sector has been affected by the right to buy. The number of local authority owned homes fell from 298,000 in 1981 to 176,000 in 2004. In addition, the council sector has been residualised, with better properties having been sold, and hard to let properties having remained. Nor has the housing association sector been able to compensate for this loss of council housing. The stock owned by housing associations rose from 11,000 in 1981 to 53,000 in 2004. These falls in the social housing sector have not been compensated in Wales by rapid expansion of the owner occupied or privately rented sectors. For example, while the number of social housing units fell by 12,000 between 2002 and 2003, the number of owner occupied properties only rose by 14,000 and the number of privately rented units increased by 2,000.

Homelessness is also a growing problem in Wales. The number accepted as statutorily homeless doubled from 8000 in 2000 in 16,000 in 2004 (Kenway et al, 2005). During the same period the number in England rose by less than 19%. Moreover this definition includes only people who have applied to a local authority and been accepted as homeless. It does not therefore represent the entire homeless population, as many homeless people do not apply to local authorities or do not meet the stringent criteria to be accepted as homeless. The growth in the homeless population has also necessitated that local authorities use more temporary accommodation to house them. The number of homeless households in temporary accommodation has trebled 2003-5, and has risen five-fold since 1997. The use of bed and breakfasts for the homeless has risen even more sharply, with an eightfold increase since 1997 (Kenway et al, 2005).

The Homeless Persons (Priority Need) (Wales) Act of 2001 enlarged the group of people to whom local authorities owed a full homelessness duty. This had the effect of increasing the share that priority needs cases formed of the total from half of those accepted as statutorily homeless in 1997/8 to two-thirds in 2003/4. This means that it is less likely that non-priority cases will be housed, or housed quickly.
Chapter 3

Evidence from the literature: what works, and what doesn’t

Introduction
The purpose of this chapter is to extract and draw together the key learning points from the published and grey literature on refugees and housing. It begins with a brief statement outlining why housing is so important for asylum seekers and refugees, and then identifies a series of factors that seem to be blocking the access of refugees to adequate and appropriate housing. Ways of challenging these blockages are provided wherever possible, usually through examples of good practice.

Housing and integration
There is a good deal of agreement in the literature that housing is the cornerstone of successful refugee integration. Refugees, like all human beings, have a basic need for shelter. But housing is much more than physical shelter: it offers a space to practice and maintain your own culture and customs; it should offer physical and emotional security; it contributes to the formation of personal and group identities; it might facilitate the future migration of other family members; and the location of housing can profoundly influence access to services and opportunities. It can, for example, provide the key to accessing employment (Hact, 2004a), healthcare, training, learning, and social participation. While all the above is true for the entire population, housing is particularly important for refugees, who are likely to spend a large proportion of their time in their homes and in the neighbourhoods that immediately surround them (Carey-Wood, 1997); usually because of a combination of unemployment, language difficulties, low incomes, child rearing commitments, and the hostility of some members of the established population (Carter and El-Hassan, 2003).

For these reasons, when Ager and Strang (2004) defined indicators of integration they made housing one of the ten key domains of integration, including it among the four ‘means’ and ‘markers’ of integration, alongside employment, education and health. They argued that these domains ‘are widely recognised as critical factors in the integration process’ (p3), and ‘that these domains are “markers”; because success in these domains is an indication of positive integration outcomes, and “means” because success in these domains is likely to assist the wider integration process’ (p3). They went on to suggest specific indicators which could be used to define the presence or absence of successful integration. For housing these were; percentage of households living in owner occupation or secure tenancies; percentage living in multiply deprived local authority wards; satisfaction with housing conditions; and levels of homelessness.

The government has also acknowledged the importance of housing to integration. In their National Strategy for Refugee Integration they state that ‘stable and safe accommodation is an essential pre-requisite to integration, without which refugees are much less likely to be able to focus on achieving their full potential and contributing to the community’ (Home Office 2005, p25). They argued that the first steps towards integration consisted of finding safe and appropriate housing, gaining employment or social security support, addressing
health concerns, and getting children into schools. And that, as far as housing is concerned, the key aims should be to prevent homelessness; ensure access to suitable accommodation after the granting of refugee status, Humanitarian Protection of Leave to Remain; and sustaining households in their homes in the longer term.

While housing is particularly important to refugees, refugees also need to be seen by housing providers as a distinct group of customers. Perry (2005) notes four key differences between refugees and asylum seekers and other service users. Firstly ‘it should not be assumed that staff who are from minority ethnic groups, or have experience of BME customers, will necessarily know the problems, needs and difficulties of new migrants’ (Perry, 2005, p22). Secondly, asylum seekers and refugees are likely to be experiencing extraordinary levels of stress, which might be manifested in poor time keeping, an inability to concentrate, lack of motivation, poor self-esteem and an inability to express needs. Thirdly, staff will need to be very sensitive when helping refugees and asylum seekers because of the circumstances which might have prompted flight and the experience of migration, which might include having been trafficked. Fourthly, asylum seekers might be especially fearful and distrustful of authority figures because of their previous experiences.

Issues and challenges

When should integration begin?

While current government thinking is that integration measures should only really begin after the granting of asylum, other stakeholders feel that there is scope to begin the process earlier. In particular, and for reasons which will be more fully discussed in the next section, some researchers argue that information should be provided to asylum seekers so that they are better prepared to make informed choices when they become refugees. Most asylum seekers have little idea of how the UK housing system operates, and what rights and responsibilities they have. They have no knowledge of application procedures or of how their housing needs will be assessed. Consequently, Buck (2001, p54) argues that:

‘In order to allow refugees to exercise choice about where they want to live and what type of accommodation they want to live in, this policy must include the provision of advice both prior to and after the decision.’

Provision of basic information about housing to asylum seekers would not only improve their subsequent decision-making but also prevent the development of expectations that cannot later be met.

Move-on

Hact has suggested that the Home Office did not really consider the issue of move-on accommodation when it first introduced the dispersal programme (Carter and El-Hassan, 2003). Initially, the Home Office evicted people from NASS accommodation without there being any mechanism in place for other bodies to take over responsibility (Carter, 2002). Because of this, there have been problems with move-on, which have had to be resolved in an ad hoc manner as the programme has progressed.

The length of the move-on period

Once asylum seekers have been given a decision on their asylum claim, they are required to vacate NASS accommodation and find their own housing. At present, people are given 28 days notice to quit, although delays in communicating the decision often mean that this can be reduced to as little as 14 days (Hact, 2003). During this time people have to register with the Benefits Agency, find alternative accommodation, furnish it, and move in. Many
researchers argue that even 28 days is insufficient to do all this, and that it is also unrealistic
to expect people who have been living day-to-day to suddenly be capable of making
medium-term decisions about their futures (Carter and El-Hassan, 2003). Furthermore this
period in a refugee's life can be very stressful as they shift out of the NASS welfare regime
which has been all-encompassing and also realise that they have made a final break with
their homeland. Because of these reasons, some authors have argued that the notice to quit
period should be extended to 60 days (Carter, 2002). There has been some recognition by
government of these problems, and two pilot trials have been established to see whether 14
weeks might be a more appropriate time period (Home Office, 2005). In addition, the issuing
of National Insurance numbers has been speeded-up, so that there are fewer delays in
refugees being able to claim benefits (including housing benefit).

The provision of advice during move-on

Given the pressures on refugees during the 28 day move-on period, it is vital that they are
given sufficient information about their housing options to make informed choices, and that
this information is impartial, appropriate and provided in their mother tongue. Unfortunately
this is not always the case. Carter and El-Hassan (2003) found that not all refugees are well-
infomed about housing matters, that translation/interpreting services are not always
available, and that not all local authority homelessness staff are aware of the needs of
refugees or are trained in cultural awareness. Carter (2002, p8) also found that the amount
of help given to refugees by different NASS accommodation providers varied. She stated:

‘there has been a wide variation in contractual expectations and obligations as a result of
the individual contracts drawn up between NASS and private housing providers...
and, therefore, in what different providers are delivering, especially in terms of advice
and support.’

And, in Scotland, Buck (2001) found that because 50% of all refugees had received no
housing advice whatsoever, there was the potential for them to make poor decisions.

Perhaps in response to this criticism, Perry (2005) describes how Communities Scotland has
now developed a guide which has been sent to all local authorities specifying a checklist of
what information should be provided to asylum seekers (box 1, Good Practice example 5).

Too many agencies involved

Hact (2003) found that move-on advice and information was being dispensed by an array of
agencies, which were not effectively co-ordinated. Refugees are emerging from a tailor-made
welfare system (NASS) that takes care of all their needs and which can be accessed usually
through one individual (the caseworker). It is vital that the move-on period is equally
seamless. This can best be achieved through initial and continuing contact with one agency
that can be both a facilitator and signpostor. The intervention of a range of overlapping, and
even competitive agencies is likely to make the transition to refugee status more difficult and
delay the beginning of integration.

Access to housing

A person who has just been granted one of the forms of refugee status potentially has a
number of housing options or pathways open to them. If they can prove they are
‘vulnerable’ they can apply to a local authority under the statutory homelessness legislation.
If they do not qualify as ‘vulnerable’ or ‘priority' homeless, they can apply to a local
authority for rehousing through the general waiting list. They can approach an RSL (usually
a housing association) to be added to their waiting list. They can seek accommodation in
the private rented sector. Or they can join the hidden homeless, and stay with friends or relations. In many cities, all forms of housing are in short supply. Even where this is not the case, none of these types of housing is easy to access, with each having its own entry requirements. Consequently:

‘for a number of people, relief at receiving a positive decision is immediately tempered by a housing crisis.’ (Carter and El-Hassan, 2003, p36)

Homeless families with children and pregnant women are likely to be accepted by local authorities or housing associations as priority cases and rehoused relatively quickly. Even here though, the shortage of stock might mean that they have to spend a period in temporary accommodation until appropriate long-term housing becomes available. Couples without children usually have to find private rented accommodation while they work their way to the top of the general waiting lists of RSLs. And single people are likely only to have resort to private rented housing or bed and breakfasts. Even this sector has barriers to entry, with many landlords refusing to take benefit claimants, the Benefit Agency not providing rent deposits or bonds, and average rents exceeding the amount paid by the state in benefits.

And for all refugees, there is the issue of whether accommodation is available in neighbourhoods devoid of racial harassment and close to existing ethnic communities, with their tangible and intangible benefits. If properties are not located in areas that can meet these criteria, isolation is likely to result and refugees will feel neither secure nor settled.

Perry (2005, p33) has recently argued that because of these generic difficulties:

‘local authorities which have not already done so should review their policies and procedures to ensure that they cater both for the circumstances of refugees in housing need and for the short timescale in which they are likely to need accommodation.’

In particular, he suggested that local authorities might accept single refugees as being in ‘priority need’ if there is evidence of stress related symptoms arising from their experience of becoming or being a refugee.

One response to the challenges of the move-on period has been the provision of ‘floating support’. The aim of floating support has been defined as:

‘to support vulnerable tenants in independent housing to cope with a range of issues such as isolation, mental ill-health, debt, neighbourhood disputes, rent arrears, lack of English language skills, etc. A key outcome is the prevention of homelessness.’ ( Lukes, 2003, p39)

Or as Riseborough (2004, p29) put it:

‘The overall objective for the service was to provide a person centred approach to support based on the needs of the whole person and family, with the intentions of helping people integrate and contribute to the economy and community. The rationale underlying the objectives was that the “traditional” approach to providing support services tended to be accommodation and provider led rather than person centred.’

Liverpool was the first city to strategically support floating support for refugees, when CDS began a pilot scheme in March 2003 that was designed to provide a multi-agency response to gaps in service provision that had been identified by the Liverpool Strategic Partnership (Riseborough, 2004). Clients were offered up to two years of support, with help being very intensive initially and then tapering over time. The floating support workers helped refugees access suitable housing, welfare benefits, translation services, and information on RCOs, legal services, educational opportunities and enterprise initiatives. They provided furniture and pots and pans, and liaised with the utility companies and health professionals. And they
offered advice on welfare and personal matters and also financial budgeting. Riseborough's evaluation of the early days of the project found that accommodation was the issue that most preoccupied refugees and therefore support workers. She concluded that the service had 'performed extremely well' and had been successful in improving the lives of its clients, had put them in touch with appropriate advice, had improved their communication skills and had encouraged them to remain in Liverpool, when they might otherwise have left. In addition, Riseborough drew out the main good practice lessons from the project and found these to be:

- That the basis of security is a permanent home of an appropriate quality in the right place;
- That dispersed asylum seekers can be anchored as refugees in the cluster areas;
- That networking was vital for the success of the scheme;
- That the 'assessment tool' that had been devised in Liverpool to evaluate need had worked and could be used elsewhere;
- That it was essential for the floating officers to have support and back-up from all the agencies involved;
- And that it is easier for organisations which have experience of providing services to develop new ones.

Her overall conclusion of the Liverpool pilot was therefore that, 'The CDS service is in many ways a blueprint for the support services of the future'.

Box 1 (next page) provides some examples of good practice in England and Scotland that relate to move-on and access to housing

**Homelessness**

While it might take some time for families and couples to access social housing, this is almost impossible for the majority of single people. There is therefore a considerable risk of them becoming homeless. Commentators are already suggesting that visible and invisible homelessness is growing rapidly in refugee communities (Hact, 2004a), because unemployed single refugees on benefits are unable to pay commercial rents, find rent-in-advance, and put down a deposit/bond. A Refugee Council/Broadway (2004) survey of refugee and asylum seeker homelessness in London found the following:

**Hostels**

- One-fifth of all bedspaces in hostels were occupied by refugees and asylum seekers of which 62% were long-term refugees made homeless by factors other than the asylum process, and 31% were move-on cases;
- Hostels required clients to be in receipt of housing benefits or NASS support;
- 55% of refugee clients in hostels were women, with 56% being 26 years old or younger;
- Few hostels had access to interpreting services, specialist knowledge of immigration matters, or cultural awareness training.
Good practice example 1

REFUGEE MOVE-ON PROJECT IN SHEFFIELD

This is a joint venture between Sheffield City Council (SCC) and the Refugee Housing Association (RHA). The City provides 28 units of accommodation under licence to RHA. RHA then sublets these to refugees and provides them with floating support and life-skills training for up to 2 years. After 2 years SCC withdraws floating support and refugees become normal secure tenant of SCC.

Candidates have to be referred by approved agencies, and are then assessed by RHA prior to being accepted and registered by SCC.

Tenants pay rent that includes a service charge that includes support and furniture. This is covered by housing benefit. Utility bills are paid direct by tenants.

The project is funded by Supporting People.


Good practice example 2

EAST MIDLANDS

Another joint venture between a local authority (Leicester City Council) and the Refugee Housing Association (RHA). When asylum seekers are given a positive decision RHA provides them with a leaflet on housing opportunities and procedures and also on benefit entitlements. Families are immediately accepted as homeless by LCC. LCC has piloted scheme whereby refugees are allowed to remain in the same property that they occupied when they were NASS tenants. The city simply substitutes an alternative property for the NASS contract. This allows refugees to remain in a home and neighbourhood that they have got used to, thereby removing the upheaval that would be associated with a move.

Source: Hact (2004b) and Perry (2005)
Good practice example 3

**GENERIC MOVE-ON PROCEDURES**

Zetter and Pearl (2005) identify the following elements as being central to effective move-on mechanisms:

- Ensure that refugees are given adequate information on housing at move-on. This could be provided by one single organisation for a cluster region so as to reduce duplication;
- Establish links to both NASS providers and providers of move-on accommodation;
- Establish links to local communities to improve advice and infrastructure;
- Ensure collaboration with consortia;
- Put in place a development worker to assist access to training and employment;
- Provide partly-furnished temporary bedsits for initial 12 month period. Bills would be covered by housing benefit. Provide life-skills training during this period;
- Provide floating support workers in conjunction with Social Services;
- Ensure tenants in all tenure groups have housing and support package.

Good practice example 4

**CIH EXAMPLE SUPPORT PLAN FOR REFUGEE CLIENT**

In the Chartered Institute of Housing’s (CIH) Good Practice Guide for Housing Support Services for Asylum Seekers and Refugees, Perry (2005) provides an example of a document that can be used to identify and record the support needs of individual refugees and monitor the delivery of services designed to meet these needs.

Perry argues that this document can act as an informal ‘contract’ between a refugee customer and his/her support worker. Both would ‘commit’ to specified targets and tasks, and a timetable would be agreed by which these should be achieved. The document would also specify how progress was to be monitored.

The personal review might reasonably cover housing needs, language tuition, children, health, special needs such as those arising from disability, legal advice, and longer term integration issues.
Good practice example 5

COMMUNITIES SCOTLAND CHECKLIST OF INFORMATION THAT SHOULD BE PROVIDED TO REFUGEES

In 2005, Communities Scotland prepared a downloadable good practice checklist of information that should be provided to refugees.

This document not only alerts local authorities to the types information that refugees will need to settle in a new locality, but provides templates and text that authorities can download to create their own information leaflets.

The Guide outlines information requirements for the following:

- Housing;
- Benefits;
- Education;
- Getting into work;
- Healthcare;
- General (eg how to live cheaply, opening a bank account, Victim Support, access to interpreters, legal aid, local drop-in centres, Post Offices).

The housing section lists what information should be provided on:

- Housing transition from NASS accommodation;
- Housing to rent;
- Local authority housing;
- Housing associations;
- Your rights as tenant;
- Private landlords;
- Sheltered Housing;
- Shared ownership;
- Homelessness;
- Council Tax;
- Furniture Grants.

Outreach teams

- Homelessness outreach teams largely catered for young single men;
- 49% of these were move-on cases and 18% had long-term residence;
- Homeless refugees who were living on the streets experienced considerable hostility from other homeless people.

Day Centres

- Day Centres estimated that 15% or less of their clients were refugees or asylum seekers, with most being single young men;
- 20% of refugee day centre users were move-on cases, although one centre estimated this figure at 90%;
- Day centres reported that the key difficulty for this group was finding them any accommodation.

All agencies

- All staff dealing with homeless asylum seekers and refugees would benefit from training in cultural awareness and the specific needs and circumstances of refugees;
- All agencies wished they had better access to specialist advice and organisations.

While it therefore seems clear that in certain parts of the UK refugees and asylum seekers are becoming more numerous amongst the homeless, it is much less clear that their needs were factored into the Homelessness Reviews required of each Local Housing Authority under the 2002 Homelessness Act (Lukes, 2003). LHAs were required to carry out a comprehensive assessment of local present and likely future homelessness, and then develop a 5 year multi-agency strategy to assist all those at risk of homelessness. In retrospect it seems unlikely that homelessness officers would have had much knowledge of refugees, refugee communities and their needs, or even consulted widely with RCOs about this dimension of homelessness.

In addition to the homelessness within refugee communities arising from personal circumstances and an inability to access conventional accommodation, there is also homelessness caused by recent changes in legislation. Both section 4 and section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 denied NASS support to parts of the asylum seeker population. Section 4 withdrew NASS support from those who's asylum claims had failed, and Section 55 ($55) precluded those who had not made their asylum claim immediately on arrival in the UK from receiving housing and support. Patel and Kerrigan (2004) have researched the latter and have argued that Section 55 is leading to a rise in asylum seeker destitution. They found 74% of RCOs, refugee agencies, advice centres and homeless charities reporting $55 clients sleeping rough, 58% reporting lone females sleeping rough, 71% reporting $55 clients sleeping in overcrowded conditions and 62% saying that they had $55 clients who were unable to access a doctor because they had no permanent address. The effect of this on the organisations concerned was dramatic. One in five organisations said that over half their workload was now $55 cases even though 85% were not funded for such work. 53% had actually provided accommodation for $55 asylum seekers, sometimes in the homes of their staff. And 58% said that their work with $55 cases was impacting on their ability to help other asylum seekers and refugees.
Finally, however, the growth in homelessness amongst the asylum seeker and refugee populations is testing whether local authorities have adequate resources to deal with this challenge and whether they physically have sufficient vacant stock to meet the needs of all vulnerable groups.

The role of RSLs

Registered Social Landlords were always envisaged as a key element in the national dispersal programme, and were expected to provide both temporary accommodation for asylum seekers and move-on accommodation for refugees (Carter, 2002). In practice, however, even though housing associations had already played a small but significant role in the housing of refugees in the early 1990s, few took up the opportunity to bid for NASS contracts directly in the first round of tenders, either in England (Zetter and Pearl, 1999), or in Scotland (Buck, 2001: Hutt, 2002). Zetter and Pearl (2005) argued that this was entirely understandable given the unattractive nature of NASS contracts to housing associations, the level of risk involved, the ad hoc nature of central government policy with its emphasis on crisis management prior to 2003, and the fact that few housing associations were familiar with, or in contact with, refugee communities. Hact agreed with this last point, claiming that the failure of housing associations to engage was a product not of their unwillingness, but of their ignorance (Hact, 2004b).

There were exceptions to this non-engagement, for example Safe Haven in Yorkshire and Cube Housing Association in Glasgow (see box 2 – below).

As the dispersal programme has evolved and bedded-in, Zetter and Pearl (2005) suggest that new opportunities for housing associations are opening up. They argue that there is now increasing emphasis upon refugees and their integration rather than the temporary accommodation of asylum seekers, that local settlement is now encouraged, that NASS and dispersal are being regionalised, that single young males are becoming less dominant within

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**Good practice example 6**

**Cube Housing Association, Glasgow**

In 2000, Cube had 100 vacant flats in four high-rise tower blocks in the Maryhill district of Glasgow. They leased 50 of these to the Scottish Consortium for dispersed asylum seekers, but not before they had consulted extensively with local people about their concerns and fears. They also initiated a myth-busting campaign to ensure that local residents were well informed about asylum seekers, their circumstances and their entitlements. The initial success of the scheme led Cube to let a further 20 flats to a private company which is also housing asylum seekers under NASS contract.

Critically, Cube ensured that a proportion of the income derived from these two contracts was re-invested in the neighbourhood to address the concerns of all residents. Money was therefore spent on better security measures and on replacing windows. Tenants were told explicitly that this had only been made possible because of the arrival of asylum seekers and the income that came from them.

*Source: Perry, 2005*
the population of asylum seekers, and that with declining numbers of asylum applications
the system is now under less strain. As a result, they claim:

‘sow the context for housing associations is now dramatically different. The case for
continuing detachment from provision for refugees and asylum seekers with leave to
remain is no longer sustainable, given the emerging stability in the pattern and scale
of demand for accommodation by this client group and the greater stability of the
policy environment.

... those associations operating within the designated cluster areas should now feel
greater confidence in pursuing a more proactive and innovative approach to engaging
with housing provision for this vulnerable group, and to drawing on the resources
of refugee community based organisations and local communities.’ (Zetter and Pearl,
2005, p23)

Carter (2002) has listed the various potential roles that RSLs could play in asylum seeker
and refugee housing. These include:

- Bidding for NASS contracts as accommodation providers;
- Subcontracted service-level provision to NASS providers;
- Management of private sector properties for NASS contracts;
- Operating market rent schemes for refugees;
- Facilitating access to move-on accommodation;
- Training;
- Signposting refugees to refugee communities;
- Helping RCOs with capacity building (discussed further below).

Hutt (2002) surveyed 130 RSLs in Scotland between January and March 2002 to discover
what changes would need to be made before they could become more involved in refugee
and asylum seeker housing. She began by recording a great willingness to become more
involved, with landlords saying they could offer good housing, at affordable rents in
locations that would not isolate tenants, and that they could therefore widen the choices
available to refugees and asylum seekers. RSLs argued that the main reasons for their lack of
engagement were: that they had few contacts with RCOs and refugee communities; that they
lacked knowledge about refugees’ needs and refugee housing; that they did not know how
to source this advice and information; that their staff needed training; that refugees were
thought to have ‘extra support needs’ and to therefore be expensive tenants; that refugees
were only one vulnerable group trying to find housing in an under-resourced and
overstretched sector; and that organisations wanted to avoid accusations that refugees were
‘queue-jumping’ or being given preferential treatment. She also found that:

‘few RSLs have taken action to change their policies to accommodate asylum seekers and
refugees’ specific needs. The majority of RSLs think that their existing policies and
practices would be sufficient to deal with refugees...’ (op cit, p13)

Lastly, RSLs claimed that, in order to become more involved in refugee housing, they would
have to train their staff, not only to increase their cultural awareness, but also to improve
levels of knowledge about refugee and asylum issues. They would also need to change
their allocation procedures, and they would need to ensure that they had appropriate
support services in place to help tenants and applicants (e.g. interpreting facilities and multi-lingual literature). They also thought that mechanisms for sharing good practice would be invaluable.

Finally, Coulter (in Hact, 2004b) has pointed out that RSLs need to engage with refugees not only directly, but in their planning procedures. In particular, he suggests that all RSL BME Housing Strategies should explicitly address the needs of asylum seekers and refugees. And that this would require consultation with RCOs. Hact (2002a, p78) supports this view, noting that:

‘key RSL personnel..(are)..ill informed about the communities in which they work, on many occasions failing to identify the specific needs of refugee communities as distinct from the needs of more established black and minority ethnic communities.’

**Refugee Community Organisations and their role**

In reviewing the operation of the dispersal programme, Carter (2002) has concluded that NASS has ‘been weak in its strategic influence, local knowledge and in joining up the activities of dispersal agents’. Because of the latter, and the fact that their communities are in difficulty with housing, Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) have felt obliged to provide advice, information and support that cannot be accessed elsewhere (Hact, 2002a). In some cases this has been achieved through existing RCOs extending their operations into the field of housing, while - in others - needs were met by the formation of new RCOs with a housing remit. Either way, a sample of RCOs in London claimed that housing advice now formed the bulk of their advisory work (Hact, 2002a).

Zetter and Pearl (2000, p681) have researched refugee organisations and found them to be of two main types:

- national NGOs which are formally constituted, have charitable status, were often not founded by refugees or asylum seekers and which provide generic and specialist support services;
- local RCOs, which were described as:

  ‘functionally more specialised – for example, focusing on reception, or advocacy and legal support, or housing advice, or cultural and social activities. What is distinctive about RCOs at the local level is that they tend to be constituted as voluntary associations without formal legal status, and lack organisational structures and a professional core of staff.’

They found that the number of RCOs had proliferated recently, and that after 2000, much of the growth had been outside London and the South East where most had traditionally been based. Even so, many dispersed asylum seekers were still being sent to areas where no such informal support existed (Hact 2002a). Zetter and Pearl (2000; 2005) and Hact (2002a) have also considered what factors might be preventing RCOs from playing a greater role. These were numerous:

- RCOs may have a transient membership, made up of asylum seekers who may, or may not, become permanent residents;
- They had limited organisational capacity;
- They were constrained by insufficient funding and they did not have the staff to bid for additional funding. Available grants were often annual, insecure and time-consuming to
win (Hact 2002a). The short-term nature of funding militated against organisations developing infrastructure and capacity that would persuade RSLs and local authorities that they are professional;

• There was a tendency for RCOs to be short-lived since they often depended upon a handful of committed members. For example, Hact (2002a) found that 91% of a sample of London RCOs relied on volunteers as ‘case-workers’, and that some of the earliest RCOs to be created no longer existed;

• They are not seen as credible: ‘There is still a major credibility gap that RCOs have to bridge, at least in the perception of the major statutory service providers and funders, that they have neither the institutional capacity nor the professional competence to fulfil the role they wish to undertake.’ (Zetter and Pearl, 2000, p683)

• There is a high level of ignorance about their skills and the resources they have to offer;

• Tensions can develop as a result of their desire to be independent but their progressive incorporation within the system;

• Dispersal made it difficult to constitute sizeable ethnic/national communities which could support large and effective organisations;

• There tends to be little effective networking between RCOs to share experience and expertise. Part of this results from their need to compete for the same grant funding. ‘RCOs, surviving on the margins, carefully guard their information and the (occasionally) successful strategies for funding or improved recognition.’ (Zetter and Pearl, 2000, p686)

• Limited institutional capacity can mean that organisations lack quality assurance mechanisms which ensure consistency;

• RCOs lack housing expertise;

• While staff were highly committed they needed further training (Hact 2002a). They have been unable to access/fund training either in specialist matters to do with asylum and integration or generic matters to do with institutional capacity building. Hact (2002a) found that only 50% of staff offering housing advice in London RCOs had received any formal training;

• Staff were often required to multi-task and were working under exceptional pressure (Hact, 2002a);

• They don't have the size to offer economies of scale;

• They don't have assets to secure loans.

Quilgars, Burrows and Wright (2004) add a further limiting factor for some RCOs, noting that they may be unable to represent an entire nationality or ethnic group because they have political allegiances back to particular groups within the homeland.

Zetter and Pearl (2000) also felt that there were two trends within the housing system that were militating against RCOs breaking through. The implementation of internal audit and risk analysis procedures within RSLs meant that they were increasingly selective about who they work with, and it is unlikely that they would choose to partner small and financially insecure...
organisations. Pressure for ‘value-for-money' and efficiency meant that RSLs were also reducing the number of partners they worked with. Carter (2002) added a third limiting trend, noting that current policies do not favour the registration of new housing associations; RCOs would therefore find it difficult to get involved with the direct provision of accommodation.

Despite these serious limitations, Zetter and Pearl (2005) suggested that RCOs did have an important potential role in the housing and support of refugees and asylum seekers. They could:

- Help new arrivals with initial settlement;
- Provide counselling;
- Provide material support;
- Assist with move-on accommodation;
- Organise access to professional services;
- Help maintain community identity;
- Offer language and translating services;
- Provide guidance on training, employment and self-employment;
- Facilitate support for enterprise.

They went on to argue that getting RCOs more involved offers benefits for all (Zetter and Pearl 2005). Their involvement diversifies service provision and funding streams. It helps asylum seekers overcome isolation and trauma by putting them in touch with co-ethnics and co-ethnic communities and by helping them maintain a familiar cultural identity. RCOs can provide asylum seekers with meaningful activities and help them maintain their self-image. On a practical level, they can assist with local orientation and cultural familiarisation. And they can promote positive images of asylum seekers and refugees within the wider community.

How, then, do we get more RCOs involved in housing and housing service provision? There is a lively debate around whether refugee communities should go it alone in providing housing for their own needs through the vehicle of RCOs or whether more can be achieved through partnership working between RCOs and other stakeholders (Hact, 2004b). Some RCOs have formed their own housing associations and managed their own stock, but researchers seem to suggest that this route is unlikely to be the norm. Hact (2002a), for example, argue that – because Refugee Community Housing Associations (RCHAs) have developed some 10 years after BME housing associations – they have missed their chance. Over the last decade, it has become more difficult to register as a housing association as access criteria and monitoring requirements have tightened. Hact (2002a) also point out that potential new RCHAs are trying to establish themselves in a much more competitive environment than existed a decade ago. For example, in one local authority alone there were already fifty RSLs and a further twenty unregistered social landlords, and the authority was keen not to add further to this number.

Nevertheless, some RCOs have followed this route and have been successful. They have become more professional, developed internal policies and procedures, and have engaged in strategic planning (Hact, 2002a). Success has usually occurred where communities have demonstrated a clear need to the local authority. Hact (2002a) provide the example
of the Tamil community which commissioned formal needs analyses in several London Boroughs and used this evidence-base to apply political pressure. Because of this proven need, and the RCOs known efficiency, they were given properties by local housing associations to manage.

But it now seems likely, at least in the short term, that RCOs will be better suited to either indirectly providing accommodation or to providing complementary services in partnership with others. Hact (2002a) suggested a number of such roles. These were:

- Offer services to local authorities or RSLs e.g. tenant support, pre-tenancy preparation, training, guidance, or channels of communication;
- Provide housing on lease from private landlords;
- Provide deposits for those trying to access private rented accommodation;
- Subsidise rents;
- Provide hostel accommodation (for elders or single people).

Zetter and Pearl (2005) describe how such co-working with larger and longer established organisations not only helps clients, but also offers considerable rewards for RCOs. It has the potential to increase the capacity of RCOs to develop housing services appropriate to their own needs, improve standards, and help put in place performance monitoring and reporting systems that might otherwise have been weak or missing.

**Partnership working**

Key to much of what has been written above is the need for greater and more effective partnerships between different stakeholders; whether this be consortia and RCOs, RSLs and RCOs, local authorities and RCOs or local authorities and RSLs.

Perry (2005) has underscored how networks and co-working are essential to the achievement of the dual aims of refugee integration and community cohesion. He argues that co-working creates conduits for the two-way flow of information; generates points of contact; helps identify gaps in services; ensures that refugee and asylum voices are not marginalized; and aids with co-ordination. He concluded:

‘while housing providers can often be the catalyst, they will usually need partnerships with other bodies to secure better services. This is because other organisations have necessary expertise, because the range of support services needed is so wide that no single body is likely to be able to provide them all, and also because of the need to ‘join up’ services and try to close any gaps. In practice, in any area, there is likely to be a patchwork of services already in place, and it will make sense to engage with bodies providing (sic) them to identify unmet needs and develop a strategy for meeting them.’

(Perry, 2005, p87)

Wren (2004) has provided an example of how ten area-based multi-agency networks have been created in Glasgow to both co-ordinate local responses to the needs of asylum seekers, and stimulate the effective involvement of the voluntary sector.

Central to whether such partnerships will form and flourish are the perceptions that stakeholders have of each other, and in particular whether they trust other actors to meet their responsibilities in any co-working.
We have already noted that perceptions are not always positive at present. RCOs are viewed by some other stakeholders as too small, risky and unprofessional to become trusted and equal partners (Zetter and Pearl, 2000). Consortia have been accused of being remote, out of touch with the experiences and needs of the asylum seekers and refugees they service, and locked into cost-conscious ‘reactive and ad hoc programming’ (Zetter and Pearl, 2005). RSLs have been typified as being wary of extending their activities into new areas that have higher levels of risk, of being unaware of government policy and funding for refugees (Hact, 2004b) or of the potential of RCOs (Zetter and Pearl, 2005), and of ‘being ill-informed about the communities in which they work’ (Hact, 2002a). Local authorities have been characterised as overstretched, but still very powerful and not pre-disposed to co-working with smaller organisations (Hact, 2004b). And host communities have been socialised by the media to hold negative perceptions of asylum seekers (and to a lesser extent refugees).

Despite some lack of knowledge and some mistrust, hact has demonstrated that it is possible to get the different stakeholders to work co-operatively and to mutual advantage. Hact has had a number of initiatives that specifically aimed to bring together potential partners. The Refugee Housing Integration Programme aimed to: integrate the housing needs and aspirations of refugee communities into mainstream housing policy and practice; increase the capacity of RCOs to develop appropriate housing services; and develop sustainable partnership working between housing providers, service providers and RCOs (Hact, 2004b). As part of this, they offered housing and integration seminars across England in 2004 and 2005, trained regional housing advisors, and established a Refugee Housing Development Fund that sought to strengthen RCOs, increase co-working and develop specific housing projects: the expectation is that as RCOs become more professional in their approach and gain capacity, they will be more trusted by institutional partners. Hact also co-ordinated a Joseph Rowntree Foundation Refugee Housing Network that brought key housing providers together with RCOs to share experiences and good practice. And they are currently running the operational phase of the Accommodate programme that has brought together local authorities, housing providers and refugee groups in five multi-agency partnerships throughout England, and given them access to up to £50,000 over two years (Hact, 2005). Examples of successful co-working are contained in box 3 (below).

Good practice example 7

OLMEC’S SOLID FOUNDATIONS PROJECT

Olmec is a small voluntary organisation working within London. It is part of the Presentation Group, a Social Investment Agency with strong housing interests.

Their Solid Foundations Project arranges work placements in housing providers for people from refugee communities who are considering a career in housing. The benefits flow in both directions: refugees are given specialist employment experience; they also acquire contacts and knowledge that can be used later when they act as informal community housing advisors; and the housing association gains knowledge about refugee communities, their needs and who to contact within them if they need advice or help.

The Solid Foundations Project (SFP) began on 4 January 2005, having received £50,000 funding over 12 months from the Home Office Refugee Integration Challenge Fund. Funding covers a development/support worker plus all other costs.
SFP accepts referrals of refugees from four agencies, the largest of which is the Refugee Council. It is in the process of expanding the number of organisations from which it accepts referrals.

SFP originally advertised nine placements and received 40 applications from which seven people were recruited. The intention was that they would receive 3 month placements within organisations in the Presentation Group.

Each refugee was given an initial needs assessment and a Learning and Development Plan was then developed from this, taking account of their skills and career aspirations. Support and training needs were also derived from this plan.

Of the seven initial recruits, four were placed within a Presentation Group Housing Association, in a variety of positions including Finance, IT, and Property Services.

The first group of clients actually received 4 month placements, because Presentation were persuaded to extend the placements for an extra month. Clients were able to benefit free-of-charge from the training provided by Presentation as well as the SFP support.

One of the seven people has now gained work (as Community Development Assistant in a non-Presentation housing association). The other six are still seeking work but have seen an increase in the number of interviews they have received.

There were six placements in the second round, but fewer applicants. Four people were recruited, and the intention is that they will receive a 6 month placement, since this is thought to add more value to a cv than a 3 month placement.

To date, most placements have been within the Presentation Group, but the intention is to roll out the programme to include placements in suppliers and contractors of the Presentation Group. The first client has already begun work within such an organisation, namely a Law Firm: Olmec continues to provide support for this individual even though he is externally placed.

The SFP has already received a limited internal evaluation, and is due to be evaluated more fully in the near future.

(Source: telephone interview with Clare Whiting, Refugee Employment and Training Support Co-ordinator)

Good practice example 8

Carila & Mace

Carila is an organisation catering to the needs of Latin American migrants in London, most of whom are Colombians. They recognised the problems which single refugees had accessing housing, and therefore approached Mace, a small local housing association. Mace currently houses c200 people in North East London, and tenants have to become a member, as the Association is a co-operative. In their new joint venture Carila refers clients to Mace, provides translating and interpreting services, and offers long-term tenant support. Mace provides the housing units and initial support.

(Source: Lukes, 2003)
Good practice example 9

**NEW LEAF: THE SOMALI REFUGEE HOUSING PROJECT**

This project was established in 1992 in response to the arrival of larger numbers of Somali refugees in Sheffield. New Leaf is a division of a large national RSL. It aims to provide safe, secure and comfortable housing for refugees. It set aside 13 furnished self-contained flats and houses for Somalis who had received positive decisions on their asylum claims; they were offered assured short-hold tenancies for between six and eighteen months. Two Somali workers provided tapered floating support during this period, at the end of which tenants were expected to be ready to move-on.

*Source: Carter and El-Hassan, 2003*

Good practice example 10

**REFUGEE CARE**

Refugee Care was established in September 2000 by the Somali and Yemeni communities in Sheffield. It received seedcorn funding from hact, and operates from a flat provided by Sheffield City Council. Its prime function is to manage properties occupied by asylum seekers and refugees for private landlords and RSLs, but it has also won contracts from local authorities and NASS-contracted organisations to provide tenant support to asylum seekers.

*Source: Carter and El-Hassan, 2003*

Rent deposit schemes

One of the key barriers that prevents refugees accessing accommodation in the private sector is that they do not have sufficient funds to pay either the four weeks rent in advance to cover the period until Housing Benefits are payable or the bond required by most landlords to cover damage to furniture, fixtures and fittings. This bond is typically the equivalent of another four weeks rent or a lump sum of £300-500. This problem has become even more acute since the law was changed to deny refugees backdated benefits on receiving a positive decision.

Other homeless groups also share this problem, and to cater for their needs, rent deposit schemes began to be established in the early 1990s (Hact, 2002b). Initially these were very simple schemes in which a third party body would guarantee the deposit of homeless applicants, but hact (2002b) has noted that these schemes tended to develop and intensify over time. By March 2001, the National Rent Deposit Forum (NRDF), which acted as an umbrella organisation, had a membership of 200 schemes nationally.

Writing in 2002, hact (2002b, p5) argued that:

‘It is clear that rent deposit schemes developed by RCOs is an underdeveloped area and one which may be timely for expansion.’

They went on to note that several English RCOs already offered rent deposits informally and on an ad hoc basis, but that there were considerable benefits to such arrangements being
formalised. They suggested that fully developed schemes might offer a range of services, many of which were designed to overcome the resistance of landlords to taking tenants on Benefits. These included:

- screening potential tenants;
- finding accommodation and match homeless tenants to this;
- ensuring that both the landlord and property met minimum standards;
- providing advice on Housing Benefit;
- providing a written guarantee/bond that underwrites the value of the deposit;
- providing rent in advance;
- resolving disputes between landlords and tenants;
- providing support for landlords;
- providing support for tenants.

They then presented a toolkit, or Good Practice Guide, describing in some detail the Refugee Council’s recommendations for what makes a successful rent deposit scheme, how such a scheme could be started, and how it could successfully be operated. They concluded by noting good practice in Wales (an Assembly-funded scheme) and England (see box 4 below).

Good practice example 11

**BOURNEMOUTH CHURCHES HOUSING ASSOCIATION**

In England, the Home Office had funded a pilot scheme through the Bournemouth Churches Housing Association. This organisation had been helping single homeless people for six years, but agreed to extend its activities to cover refugees. They paid the deposit direct to the landlord, and this was then formalised as a loan to the refugee, repayable at the rate of £5 per month. The Association aimed to help 30 families.

*Source: Hact, 2002b*

Good practice example 12

**OXFORD HOME CHOICE SCHEME**

The scheme has provided deposits or rent in advance for 59 former asylum seekers. The scheme ensured that none became homeless, thereby not only preventing disruption and distress to the families concerned, but also saving the local authority a considerable amount of money. The scheme’s managers have calculated that rent in advance is forty times more cost effective than resolving a case of homelessness.

*Source: Perry, 2005*
Self-builds

One of the key limitations on the housing of refugees in social housing is the general shortage of stock. Another is the fear that providers have that they will be viewed as giving stock that should be allocated to ‘local people’ to outsiders, people who are recently arrived, and those who are perceived as less deserving. Both of these concerns can be addressed to a degree via self-build schemes organised by refugee communities. By building their own accommodation, refugees can undermine the argument that they are unfairly competing for scarce resources and they can add to the stock available to them. Other benefits also flow. Refugees can be (re)trained and acquire new labour market skills, they can gain an employment history in the UK, they can feel that they are contributing to society, and they can regain their independence and their sense of self-worth. Funding for such schemes could come from the Housing Corporation. Box 5 (below) describes two pioneering projects of this type.

**Good practice example 13**

**Refugee self-build in Kent**

The Community Self-build Agency is working with refugees in Kent on a Home Office-funded pilot project. Contractors will be employed to put in the foundations to the property. Refugees will receive twelve months training beforehand and will then work on site for a further 12-18 months, during which time they will receive further hands-on training. If the self-builders subsequently choose to rent one the properties, their rent will be reduced to take account of the labour they put into the project.

*Source: Lukes, 2003*

**Good practice example 14**

**Canopy Housing Project, Leeds**

The Canopy project is one of the five hact-funded pilot projects, that together make up the Accommodate programme. Canopy Housing project is a voluntary organisation that is acquiring and renovating properties for refugee families in Beeston, a neighbourhood within Leeds. Young volunteers from disadvantaged backgrounds are working alongside refugees to refurbish derelict properties. Refugee volunteers who take up the tenancies are linked with a trading arm of Canopy, so that the skills they have gained will be used to gain them permanent employment in the housing construction industry. The project has renovated seven projects to date.

*Source: Hact, 2005*
Chapter 4
Methodology

Overall
Because the research required the collection of information from a large number of stakeholders of varying types, a multi-method approach was adopted. This allowed the method of data collection to be tailored to the characteristics of each group of stakeholders.

The research also aimed to be polyvocal. Information and opinions about any given issue were never only collected from one stakeholder, or type of stakeholder, but from a range of stakeholders who might well have different perspectives and experiences.

Questionnaires
Given the number, and geographical dispersal, of local authorities and housing associations in Wales it was decided that personal interviews with key staff members were not viable, so postal self-completion questionnaires were used instead. These have the benefit of allowing data to be collected from geographically dispersed populations at no extra cost and they also allow simultaneous data collection from a number of respondents. The main disadvantage of postal self-completion questionnaires is that they rarely have a high response rate (typically around 30%), and it is difficult to know whether those who respond are representative of the wider population or are those who have a strong (positive or negative) interest in the topic or a strong vested interest.

Questionnaires were therefore drafted for both target groups, and these were sent for consultation to both WRC and to the bodies representing local authorities (WLGA) and housing associations (WFHA). The questionnaires were then modified in the light of comments, and both bodies agreed to lend their support to the research, with WFHA actually e-mailing their members to urge them to support the work. Because the Welsh Federation of Housing Associations had previously undertaken a brief survey of their members about refugee housing, it was felt that they would only respond to a shorter questionnaire, so that questionnaire was considerably reduced in length. The questionnaires were then distributed to the Chief Executives of all 21 local authorities except Cardiff and Swansea (see below) and to the heads of 15 housing associations located in the main cluster areas of Swansea, Cardiff, Newport and Wrexham. Ten local authorities returned their questionnaires (giving a response rate of 48%). Six housing associations replied, giving a response rate of 40%.

In-depth interviews
For other groups of stakeholders, it was felt that in-depth interviews would be more appropriate and effective. Structured in-depth interviews allow the researcher to tailor each conversation to the characteristics of the respondent. They also give the respondent freedom to raise and discuss any issue which they think is pertinent. They tend to acquire information with greater depth, intensity and immediacy. And they usually have high response rates, typically 80%+. Their main disadvantage is that they tend to be expensive to administer, both in terms of travelling and interview time.
In-depth interviews were therefore undertaken with 28 stakeholders ranging from NASS housing providers to advocates of local RCOs. The intention was to ‘triangulate’ information by asking all participants about their experience, so that different perspectives on the same issue could be compared. Box 6 lists the respondents interviewed. Only one stakeholder (the NASS housing provider Leena Homes) refused to be interviewed, without giving reasons. Only one interview was undertaken with an organisation based outside Wales; this telephone interview sought to gain information about a particularly interesting example of good practice flagged up by the literature search.

Interviews took place in a variety of locations to suit respondents. These included the offices of organisations being interviewed, the offices of the Welsh Refugee Council, and University premises. All respondents gave their informed consent to participate, and to having the interview taped, for later transcription. Most interviews lasted about sixty minutes, although some were considerably longer. In the report, respondents will not be named, since anonymity was guaranteed.

Focus group

We attempted to arrange two focus groups to learn about the experience of those who had actually ‘lived the system’. The first was due to take place in Cardiff and RCOs agreed to nominate about eight asylum seekers and refugees. The focus group was to be taped, and because people from a range of ethnic groups were to participate, we had to insist that only those who could speak English be involved. It is accepted that this is not ideal, but the need continually to translate from and into a variety of languages during the focus group would have destroyed the dynamic that is the key benefit of this methodology. On the day, none of the eight respondents attended and the focus group had to be cancelled. WRC then attempted to arrange another focus group on a day when asylum seekers would already be visiting the WRC office in Cardiff. Food was provided in order to encourage attendance. In the event, only one refugee turned up, and he was interviewed anonymously. Interviews with RCO advocates (all of whom were either asylum seekers or refugees) allowed us to gain some sense of the experiences of customers, but it is readily acknowledged that RCO staff are not necessarily representative of the whole refugee or asylum seeker communities.

Representing the views of respondents

Quotes from research respondents are shown in italics and are enclosed in single quotation marks. Where it is necessary to also show the question that I asked as interviewer, my words are shown in bold italics, again within single quotation marks.

I have not altered the meaning of any quotes, but where irrelevant material has been excluded this is denoted by the following symbol ...

I have taken the liberty of ‘cleaning up’ quotations to make them read more clearly. This has only involved the removal of meaningless phrases such as ‘erm’, ‘I mean’, ‘at the end of the day’, ‘right’, ‘OK’, ‘aha’ etc.
Table 1 – Research participants interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder group</th>
<th>Job title</th>
<th>Number of interviews</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NASS housing providers</td>
<td>Operations Managers&lt;br&gt;Head of Refugee Team&lt;br&gt;Refugee Support Workers&lt;br&gt;Move on officers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Cardiff Swansea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Authority staff</td>
<td>Housing Strategy Manager&lt;br&gt;Community Cohesion Officer&lt;br&gt;Project worker</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Cardiff Wrexham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh Refugee Council</td>
<td>Move on workers&lt;br&gt;Office Managers&lt;br&gt;Manager, One Stop Shop, Housing Development Worker</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Cardiff Swansea Newport Wrexham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee Community Organisations</td>
<td>Chairs</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Cardiff Swansea Newport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith-based Community Organisation</td>
<td>Project worker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Wrexham</td>
</tr>
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<td>Housing Rights/Welfare organisations</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<td>Cardiff Swansea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Association</td>
<td>Project Manager</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Swansea Telephone interview with London-based organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugees and asylum seekers</td>
<td>Focus group</td>
<td>(see left)</td>
<td>Cardiff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RESEARCH FINDINGS

NASS housing in Wales

The move-on period

Support after move-on

Housing pathways for refugees

Improving access to different pathways: the private sector

Improving access to different pathways: local authority housing

Improving access to different pathways: housing associations

The role of refugee community organisations

Co-working

Innovative initiatives
Chapter 5
NASS housing in Wales

Asylum seekers and housing in Wales: the NASS system

NASS accommodation is provided in Wales by Swansea City and County Council, Cardiff City and County Council, Wrexham City Council, Clearsprings Management Ltd, Adelphi, and Leena Homes. M&Q provide Section 4 accommodation for those who have exhausted the asylum procedure and are awaiting a final appeal or removal. From 2006 onwards, a Birmingham-based housing association will also be providing 480 units of accommodation to NASS in Wales: although a relatively young organisation, Astonbrook has considerable experience of providing temporary supported accommodation for vulnerable groups such as ex-offenders, 16+ care leavers and the homeless. All newly-arrived asylum seekers are given a welcome pack which contains information on health and education and basic orientation, but contains no information on housing beyond the NASS system. Each local authority will also have asylum support workers who would offer assistance whilst people awaited the outcome of their applications. Some of these were singled out for particular praise by refugees who had benefited from their help:

‘Newport heads up the consortium for the asylum seekers, their dispersal and all the rest of it. They have got support workers within that consortium and they are very good. They do drop in on the asylum seeker families. ... there is one drop-in at the Salvation Army building in Newport once a week. There’s another one in a community centre where families will come and it gives them an opportunity for the children to play and also for them just to chat and be with other people and to pick bits of this information up.’

Issues, concerns and good practice

Asylum seeker and refugee respondents raised few issues about the accommodation that had been provided for them by NASS, presumably because its quality is so tightly proscribed by the NASS contract. They told us that were generally content with the quality of this housing, and its location within the cities concerned.

‘And to be honest in Newport, it is Clearsprings who are the providers and they have always been very responsive.’

‘They’ve been good?’
‘They have been good.’

An NGO worker in Swansea concurred:

‘With Clearsprings, the accommodation tends to be OK, safe, in a good state of repair.’

‘Is the same true of Leena?’
‘Yes, I think so... We do get complaints about all of the accommodation providers, I don’t think it’s more one provider than another.’
The main concern of some of the respondents was that one provider seemed to visit and inspect property without warning, even when there was no-one present, or only female children present. This had created resentment and fear.

Managing expectations

The first issue that was raised about NASS accommodation was that it created unrealistic expectations in the minds of asylum seekers about the kind and quality of housing they would receive if, and when, they gained refugee status. This was described as a problem, both by housing professionals and refugees themselves. Both felt that refugees would rarely subsequently be offered such good quality accommodation by local authorities or RSLs, and that the system was therefore setting people up to be disappointed. As one stakeholder put it:

‘the reality is that NASS has a very high specification for the property they provide for asylum seekers in the UK... So, somebody will come into one of our houses and find a well decorated house, excellent furnishings, TV, washing machine and would expect to move out of that house into a similar property provided by, as far as they are concerned, the British Government because it all falls under one big umbrella. Most people aren’t really necessarily aware of the differences between NASS, the local authority or housing association. They expect the quality of the provision to be identical. So, yes, there is a big learning curve there ...’

The impact of this on individual refugees was captured in the following quote:

‘Well, I went in with a Somali lady the other day and she took me to one of the houses that she has been offered on one of the Council estates. The flat was in a state. The walls were not decorated, there was no carpet on the floor, it was very very bare and just completely unloved and she was having to spend quite a lot of money just to bring it up to a reasonable living standard. Having come from quite a comfortable experience, to go into that, it would seem absolutely black and white. You could see the look on her face “Oh my God, what am I going to do here?” , but that is the reality.’

The same was thought to be true of the location of accommodation. Occasionally, NASS accommodation was in neighbourhoods within which refugees would rarely be able to afford to live. As one development worker in Cardiff put it:

‘My biggest issue over the last 18 months is that I’ve had more property in than I can get clients into. I can offer everybody a room in a shared house. Everyone of my clients wants a one bedroom, everybody wants it in the best area. They have no money. The housing benefit doesn’t cover the rent in that area.’

In addition, some housing professionals described how the NASS system, which takes responsibility for all household bills (e.g.utilities), provides asylum seekers with little experience of household budgeting in the UK and no knowledge of how utilities worked in the UK. This created problems when asylum seekers became refugees and had quickly to adjust to receiving and paying their own bills, and managing their own finances. As one worker put it:

‘We’ve had people coming in saying, “I want a house but I’m not paying any bills”. Well, I’m sorry then but you’re not having a house ... You go away, find a landlord that’s prepared to do that for you and we’ll come and help you, but I know none of my landlords will let you live there without paying bills. And they’ll go away and come back and say “I’ve got to pay bills, haven’t I?” . “Yes”. “But I’m only paying this much”. Well,
you consume what you pay for so if you leave the lights on ... Again, with NASS accommodation, they left the heating on 24 hours a day and the lights on 24 hours a day and they didn’t have to pay anything. There was nobody there to say. You and I know if you leave the heating on all day, you have a massive bill at the end of it and you are responsible for it.’

Another manager concurred:

‘because the NASS system sees to all of their needs basically, when they come to us, they haven’t got a clue, and they don’t want to pay bills and things like that, because they’re just not used to it ... we have quite a bit of fight with some people to get them to accept that they’ve got to ... pay bills when they go into a property agreement.’

Prepared people to make informed choices

The second issue that arose about the period in NASS accommodation was the extent to which it successfully prepared people for later life. There seemed to be two views on this issue, both of which were forcefully expressed.

The first was that it was both inefficient and unfair to provide asylum seekers with extensive orientation and induction about a possible future life in the UK, when a significant proportion would not be allowed to remain in this country. An undercurrent to this view was the feeling that telling asylum seekers about their possible entitlements might increase awareness of these to the point where migrants might choose to seek asylum in the UK in preference to other European countries. The research evidence about knowledge of welfare entitlements does not support this view of ‘asylum shopping’ (see Robinson and Segrott, 2002), but it is important to note the fears of those who expressed this view. Such a view is also in line with the government’s policy that integration should only begin at the point at which an asylum seeker gains refugee status, or leave to remain (Home Office, 2005). The way in which this view impacts can be seen from the opinion of one NASS housing provider. They said NASS asylum seekers are not informed about housing advice services at all during the period when their asylum application is being determined, nor were they briefed at all about the UK housing system and the opportunities which it might offer because this would be ‘giving people who are destined to have a negative decision false hope’. They also felt that:

‘There would be little point in us referring people who we suspect were going to have a negative decision. It would be a waste of our time and a waste of theirs and the associated agency concerned.’

The alternative view is that delaying all orientation and education until the move-on period, makes it difficult for refugees to gain sufficient knowledge sufficiently quickly to make informed choices about their futures.

‘I think that if you actually teach people, appreciate their culture and teach them about our culture, and our social system, hopefully by the time they get to refugee status, they will hopefully know what a council house means, what housing benefit is, they have no concept of that at the moment, and that is part of the stumbling block.’

The move-on period therefore becomes unnecessarily crowded and stressful. As two refugees put it:

‘They’re running around and saying “We’ve got 28 days, can you help us get a house? Can you get our National Insurance number?” and other bits and pieces and “Can you attend with us to the Benefits Agency?”’. So there is a lot of running around in that short window. They are not given any information, otherwise there would be no running
around. They would be able to say “This is what I need to do this week. Next week I may need to deal with this and then I may need to deal with this.””

‘And when they’re given 28 days to leave, you know, to leave everything now, coming back doing, what I have said, leaving his mind for work, now he say, I’m rushing now to find out about accommodation; he forget the problem of the job. Now he has to find out if my children here, the place that I’m going, how far is the school. And also, the bus station, where is it. He has to go there to find out, and then in the meantime, he need also some information, for how to cope with the accommodation issues. And, when they tell him to leave that house, he’ll become, just traumatised.’

The consequence of failing to provide people with information is that they may then not be in a position to make informed choices during the very short move-on period. One stakeholder therefore said, when asked if people were well informed about their housing options:

‘that would depend very much on the individual concerned. On the network that they are able to access in the cluster area concerned and also their own integrity, their own inquisitiveness and their own ability to access the agencies which might have the answers to those questions.’

Another said:

‘I don’t know what information (NASS accommodation provider) were giving people and I suspect it was probably minimal and probably as a housing authority we probably weren’t giving people much information either.’

And an RCO in Newport commented:

‘as far as I know, no-one from my community has turned around and said “We’ve got that information”, because in fact when we’ve had people get their status, it’s almost like starting from scratch.’

A refugee in Swansea said:

‘How much advice is given to asylum seekers by NASS about housing?’

‘I can say, nothing.’

A community worker simply said:

‘They’re not making an informed choice because there is such a short window to try and do quite a lot of stuff, to make the application. No, they don’t know the difference between housing providers.’

Possibilities of alleviating this problem were explored in the interviews and a consensus emerged that it would be beneficial if an all-Wales Housing Information pack was created and distributed to all asylum seekers during their stay in Wales (recommendations).

Support during the asylum period

Some respondents raised a third concern about the period in NASS accommodation. This was whether asylum seekers were signposted to appropriate advice and support agencies by the accommodation provider. CLEARSprings told us that – in line with their contract with NASS – they did direct asylum seekers to housing advisors such as the WRC, Cardiff City Council Asylum Seeker Homefinder Service, and Swansea Housing Options, but only when a client had received a positive decision on their asylum claim. Some refugees, and those speaking for refugees, argued that it would have been beneficial had they learned of the Welsh
Refugee Council before the move-on period, so that they could have made contact with them immediately they were given a positive decision on their asylum claim. Valuable days were lost during the move-on period finding out about the WRC, what they could offer and where they were located. One RCO even commented that lack of knowledge of what WRC could offer meant that some refugees turned instead to what they regarded as the trusted sources of friends, relatives and RCOs. As will be discussed later on the report, this might lead to problems, if these individuals and organisations are not well briefed, or do not have the capacity to help:

‘And what you also find is because a lot of people have had few dealings with WRC, probably they come in to Cardiff. They’ll come in and they’re taken over by the NASS team. And the people that they know, their NASS support officer or something, and not anybody from WRC so when they get their refugee status because they don’t know anybody here they find it difficult to come back here and they then turn to somebody in the community or they ask somebody, “you know I got this letter, what do I do?” And somebody says “Why don’t you go and see so and so, they are doing this”. So I think it’s all been by word of mouth, by people appreciating what has happened to this person. They did get a house for so and so, they helped so and so.’

The same was also said of RCOs, with asylum seekers telling us that they had not automatically been referred to an appropriate RCO on arrival in a Welsh city. While there are clearly contractual issues around which organisations are funded to support asylum seekers, it would be beneficial if all asylum seekers received an individual or group ‘welcome’ visit from the WRC before the move-on period. This would establish prior awareness of the WRC and what it has to offer and create a relationship that could be broadened and deepened later. Part of the ‘welcome briefing’ could include distribution of details about appropriate local RCOs, and dissemination of the all-Wales Housing Information Pack.

The silting up of the system

Respondents described to us how, at times, the immobility of both failed asylum seekers and refugees was in danger of choking the NASS housing system. This immobility was thought to be caused partly by the shortage of social housing and the high cost of rented accommodation in Cardiff and the poor quality and unattractive location of social housing in Swansea, but also by the gap between people’s expectations and reality that has been discussed above.

One housing provider described how young single male and female refugees who were unlikely to be offered permanent accommodation by a local authority because they were not priority homeless would instead be expected to move from NASS accommodation into temporary hostels. They felt that some of these hostels were very basic and had draconian rules and that refugees moving from NASS accommodation would have a shock. Some then returned to ‘couch surf’ with friends still in NASS accommodation and would thus get around that hostels were far inferior to NASS accommodation. As a result, even successful refugees were unwilling to leave NASS accommodation, which not only meant that the dispersal system gradually silted up, but also that accommodation providers were having to use increasingly robust move-on techniques. If they didn’t, and allowed refugees to remain in accommodation they would receive no payments from NASS, still have to pay utility bills and still have to manage the property, while also losing the income they would have derived from letting to a new NASS client.

One housing provider therefore described how they had had to become much more robust in their move-on policies:
‘We had ... a reputation of being a bit of a soft touch when it came to move on protocols. Certainly until December last year (2004), we were quite accommodating. We ended up with an awful lot of people living in our properties at our expense who shouldn’t be there, who should have been gone and we really got to a point where we needed to make a decision on whether we wanted to continue in the industry, as a business. Had we carried on with the ethos we had at that time, I wouldn’t be talking to you today. So it became untenable for us.

We had to then adopt a far more recognised approach to move on which does work for us and to be frank with you, when we adopted that, I thought we were going to need relevant assistance from outside agencies and from local constabularies. In actual fact we have had quite the opposite. We found that because of our reputation – because everyone realised the extremes we had gone to in the past to facilitate overstayers – people were actually far more positive and understanding of our stance we took than we anticipated. Unfortunately though because ... of the fact that we did always have a reputation for providing accommodation shall we say after the decision date, there are certain instances of voluntary bodies who will advise move ons, or overstayers to stay where they are until such time as they are forcibly moved out by us as a company.’

Evidence that local authorities were sympathetic to Clearspring’s plight came from the following quote:

‘Clearsprings did have a policy where they weren’t evicting people but they had so many people in their properties who had refused council accommodation and were working and not paying any rent and all the bills were being paid …’

‘And who was paying Clearsprings during that period?’

‘Nobody.’

Another stakeholder felt that a significant improvement would be if NASS kept contact with asylum seekers and refugees during the move-on period, reminding them of what they needed to do and how NASS accommodation would be withdrawn at the end of the period. In their view, simply being given an IND decision and notice to quit at the start of the move-on period did not impress sufficiently upon people the need to make alternative arrangements and the fact that support would end. They claimed that too many people did not take the notice to quit seriously, and were therefore shocked when ‘evicted’. This was confirmed by workers in Wrexham and Cardiff, who said:

‘I find some asylum seekers don’t understand, or for some reason don’t look at, what’s happening in their lives and yes sometimes they’ll come in and say “I’ve got status” and I say “Is everything alright?”, and they’ll say to me “well here’s my letter” and they show me the letter and they’ve got about three days to sort out. That’s when it becomes difficult. Because then we have to really swing into gear to see what they need and what they don’t need and soon have the headache of dealing with everything in such a short space of time.’

‘Part of the ethos of what I try to do is to give empowerment, to explain the process, to explain the system, to make people a bit more responsible, to understand that when you get a letter through, you have to react on that letter because it means something.’
Chapter 6
The move-on period

The management of the move-on process was a little different in each locality. In Cardiff and Swansea, when an asylum seeker received a positive decision they were handed over by their case-worker on the local authority Asylum Team to a support worker on the local authority Refugee Team. They will also be helped by the Homelessness Unit. In Newport, there are no dedicated refugee or asylum workers in the local authority, so assistance is provided by the generic Homelessness Unit (which came in for some criticism from respondents) and Shelter Cymru offers drop-in housing advice sessions, as does Newport & District Refugee Support Group. Wrexham has contracted out housing advice to Shelter Cymru, and refer all successful refugees to their office in the centre of town, but was unsure about their familiarity with procedures for refugees.

‘Is there a Homelessness Advice Centre in Wrexham? Or a one stop shop?’

‘We contract out housing advice to Shelter, who are also in the centre of Wrexham. We need to review with Shelter what their provision is in different languages and look at our Service Level Agreement with them but we do have a homelessness section in Market Street, which is our office in town. Homelessness applications are dealt with there.’

‘Is there an advice centre?’

‘Yes, but it’s all a bit fuzzy in Wrexham. We might say “We give somebody housing advice” but it is not a very good housing advice place ... but under the WAG Homelessness Prevention Grant which has just been announced, we are going to take on a Homelessness Prevention Officer and they will be based there with that team and doing more of that work.’

‘So somebody might be signposted to Shelter Cymru for general advice. Have they any expertise in refugee issues?’

‘Not particularly.’

‘Would they have an understanding of the 28 day period?’

‘That’s a good question and I don’t know.’

‘And do you have a good working relationship with Shelter?’

‘Yes pretty good with Shelter.’

‘And do they have a good understanding of ‘refugeeness’ and asylum issues?’

‘I think there is a poverty of knowledge around refugee and asylum issues.’

In Swansea, some new refugees would also be referred to the Red Cross Floating Support scheme funded by the Supporting People Programme (see box 8).

All NASS accommodation providers also refer refugees to the WRC. WRC provides not only the open-access One-Stop Shops in Cardiff, Newport and Swansea, but also employs dedicated move-on officers in its Cardiff and Newport offices. In the other two WRC offices
(Swansea and Wrexham) Office Managers are having to double as Move-on officers as well as fulfilling their other duties. The situation in Wrexham seemed particularly acute, with one observer noting:

‘the Section 180 money that WAG gave for move-on support when people get their status, Susan Jones was appointed to do that job but she’s finished up doing casework for asylum seekers, because the situation’s so bad on the casework. So basically nobody’s doing it.’

Some of these Move-on workers deal with individual cases, while others take a more strategic role. Furthermore, there were also local arrangements about how responsibilities were divided between service providers. In Cardiff, for example, we were told that there was an informal division of responsibility during move-on, with the local authority team assisting families and the WRC assisting single people and couples with no children.

The procedure in all the Welsh cluster areas seems to be that NASS accommodation providers direct refugees to a WRC move-on worker and – where they exist - to a local authority Refugee Team worker within the move-on period. Once the refugee has made contact with these support workers they were then taken or directed to the local homelessness unit or to the housing department.

**Issues, concerns, and good practice**

**Timing**

Once a final decision on an asylum seeker's claim has been made, the outcome will be communicated to the NASS housing provider which is accommodating them. They will then transmit the decision to the individual asylum seeker, at the same time giving them notice to quit their accommodation. Asylum seekers/refugees will then be signposted to support agencies which will be able to help them find alternative accommodation. Only when they arrange meetings with these support agencies will the procedures for locating accommodation actually be triggered. The move-on period is currently 28 days from the issue of the initial letter, but all stakeholders agreed that the reality was usually less than this. IND was late sending out some letters, and others were forwarded by the NASS provider only after a short delay. The process of referrals to support agencies also ate into the 28 days. The net effect was that most refugees have a move-on period that is considerably less than 28 days, and occasionally as little as 7-14 days. This was often too little time to source appropriate alternative accommodation, and forced agencies into making temporary arrangements which were both more expensive, and less satisfactory for the refugees concerned. One respondent described how extreme this problem could become:

‘I mean some people they’ve had their NASS 35 telling them they’ve got to move out, and they come to see us and there’s a day left before they haven’t even had their notification from the Home Office.’

The local authority thus only becomes aware of the refugee’s need for housing well into the 28 day move-on period and has to react quickly and at very short notice. In some parts of the UK, this procedure is handled differently and more efficiently (see box 6 right).

There was general agreement that the issuing of National Insurance Numbers was improving and that this was no longer the problem that it once was. It did however still create problems for some single young men (see below), and NI numbers were only being issued with NASS35 letters for those who were getting a positive decision on first decision. For those getting a positive decision through adjudication, NI numbers were still taking some months
Good practice example 15

CLEARSPRINGS MANAGEMENT REFERRAL PROCEDURE

Clearsprings Management told us that the procedure they used for handing over refugees to local authority Housing Departments was more efficient in Bristol than in Wales. In Bristol, their close relations with the Homelessness Unit, and their role as an accommodation provider for homeless people had led them to devise a more streamlined procedure. While refugees were still directed to Support Teams, Clearsprings would simultaneously send details of the refugee and his/her needs direct to the local Homelessness Unit on a purpose-designed transfer sheet. This sheet not only forewarned the Unit that a refugee would be seeking housing in the immediate future but provided basic demographic data that would allow the Unit to start the search for appropriate accommodation. Included within this information was the number of dependents likely to join the refugee in the UK. This allows the Homelessness Unit to plan ahead and meet the long-term needs of the refugee rather than just their immediate needs.

Clearsprings felt strongly that introducing such a transfer sheet and procedure into Wales could make move-on less fraught and more efficient. They were, however, not willing to allow a copy of their transfer sheet to be reproduced in this report for contractual reasons.

Source: interview

to come through. In addition, the Benefits system did not seem to be devoid of problems, most of which stemmed from a local lack of awareness of the entitlements of refugees:

‘DWP was a constant challenge to be working with. Things have improved only then for the major workload to go to a new set of offices so we’re dealing the same set of problems, but with another office. And I think it is largely due to awareness ... you have a number of benefits available to people and there tended to be a pass the buck culture: “it’s not really our benefits section you want to be going to, it’s that one”. And that was really down to people not being aware of what refugees were entitled to.’

Informing people of their options

What is also clear is that when asylum seekers get a positive decision on their asylum claim they probably know little about the housing options open to them. They have to be briefed during the move-on period, at a time when they are also being informed about the benefits system, preparing to move, trying to find work or training opportunities and buying furniture and household effects. This period is not only a period of intense activity and learning after many months of enforced inactivity, but a period of heightened emotions. Refugees realise that their new status also marks a further move away from their homeland and the relatives and friends they may have left there. The net effect might therefore be that there are only limited opportunities to brief refugees on their housing options and the working of the housing system and put right any misperceptions they may have about entitlements. As a Cardiff local authority manager said:

‘So roughly how many times would you see a refugee during the 28 day period to talk about housing?’
‘It would depend really on each person. Obviously they have got quite a lot going on in that period so you might sort of discuss housing for five minutes with them on one appointment, and then spend an hour with them on another. But often, everything comes up altogether.’

An RCO outlined the problem in starker terms:

‘Lack of knowledge. Lack of knowledge of the whole process. The difference between the housing providers. Who is eligible to apply or not eligible to apply. Where you go for information. What application forms need to be filled out. What the waiting list is. And people kind of get put off and try to go for private rental accommodation, even though it’s very poor in a lot of instances. There’s a form to fill in, there’s a number of points you have to acquire, there’s an interview and all the rest of it. That to me is one of the biggest barriers. Language is another barrier which is linked into that.’

Another RCO described the problem and one usual outcome:

‘Would somebody during that 28 day period know the difference between housing association accommodation and Local Authority accommodation.’

‘No.’

‘So is any information given about the different alternatives and the private sector?’

‘No.’

‘So are people making an informed choice?’

‘They’re not making an informed choice because there is such a short window to try and do quite a lot of stuff. No, they don’t know the difference between housing providers.’

The Government has recently recognised that much is being asked of the refugee and of housing providers during this short period, and is trialling a longer move-on period in its Sunrise project. This allows three months for move-on, as well as tailored personal Integration Plans.

However, until Sunrise is rolled out nationally there will still be problems during move-on. In the short-term these can be alleviated somewhat if NASS, and NASS accommodation providers, take a more enlightened view. Research participants told us that Clearspings, for example, had previously not ‘evicted’ people after 28 days if there was a reasonable chance of them being found local authority accommodation. Indeed, some refugees had been allowed to remain in Clearspings accommodation for several weeks after the end of the 28 day period. Unfortunately Clearspings had had to absorb the cost of this, and had regretfully terminated this practice early in 2005. If NASS or a local authority had been prepared to meet these transitional costs then refugees could have remained within their existing housing until more permanent accommodation could be found. There was also evidence that local authorities contracted to NASS were allowing some refugees to remain in ‘NASS accommodation’ beyond the official move-on period and were prepared to absorb the cost of this. Up to a point this made sense for the local authorities, which if they evicted refugees from NASS accommodation might then have had to find them emergency accommodation, at a greater cost, in B&Bs.

Moving people around

Another issue that arose in discussions about move-on was the wisdom of ‘shuffling’ families from one local authority housing unit which they occupied when they were asylum seekers to
another similar unit when they become a refugee. This move involves administrative, financial and emotional costs. The local authority has to administer a homelessness application, source alternative accommodation, take the refugee to view this, and possibly arrange for its refurbishment. The NASS unit may also have to be refurbished after the refugee family leave it. The refugee is uprooted from a neighbourhood with which they have become familiar, children are forced to move schools, and social networks are fractured. English cities such as Leicester have pioneered leaving refugees in their existing accommodation if it’s suitable, and substituting another housing unit into the NASS stock (see Good practice example 2 above).

**Misconceptions**

The issue of refugees and asylum seekers having false expectations arises again during the move-on period, when people are having to make decisions based upon what might be faulty or out-of-date information.

A development worker in Cardiff described one example of this problem:

‘A lot of my tenants, they come out of NASS, they come to see me. I might have a three bedroom flat which needs three guys to share or whatever. They won’t go into that accommodation because they’re going to the YMCA and that’s it.’

‘**So they prefer the YMCA? Why’s that?**’

‘Because they think coming from the YMCA they’re going to get a Council flat or housing association flat.’

‘**So where’s that perception come from?**’

‘It has happened in the past. It sometimes happens now but you’re not guaranteed to get a Council flat because you live in a hostel anymore. I think in the past it was. Going back four or five years, there was a greater chance. Whereas now it doesn’t give you priority.’

Another worker in Newport commented on the step-change that existed between being an asylum seeker and a refugee and the confusion this could cause:

‘Hang about, I came into this country and I was given a house and I was given money and now that is going to stop. What’s going on? And now you are telling me that I am going to have nothing.’

And an RCO described another misconception that they regularly came across:

‘I think people don’t know that they can still qualify for social housing, even if they work because sometimes they think they can’t qualify for social housing because they’ve got a job, no matter how poor the job. They think you’ve got to be on the dole to qualify for social housing.’

Finally, an RCO described how there might be misconceptions around which agency to approach for help during the move-on period:

‘Well a lot of people as well once they have been granted refugee status, I don’t know if there is a bit of confusion or things are not quite explained or it’s the excitement, once they get that refugee status, it’s almost like, “I’ve got to move on you know I don’t want to be associated with WRC anymore” kind of attitude. You’re thinking, “I’m past the WRC”, you know, but when the reality hits you a few roads down the line and you think I have to go there.’
Chapter 7
Support after move-on

A variety of different models of support exist in Wales.

- In Cardiff refugees have access to the One Stop Shop run by the WRC, and they will also be allocated a refugee support worker from the local council. This support tends to be tapered;

- The same is true in Newport, and the support offered by the local authority team was singled out for praise by local RCOs who felt they were offering a very good service;

- In Swansea the model is rather different. Swansea refugees have access to the WRC One-Stop Shop, and they are allocated either to a local authority refugee support worker or to a support worker from the Red Cross Supporting People project. The latter is very innovative within Wales, although there is currently some lack of clarity about why certain refugees might be allocated to this project and others not, and around the boundaries between Red Cross and local authority support. The local authority came in for commendations from a local RCO:

‘Yes, I think the county council for me, are doing a good job. They are doing a very good job ... a wonderful job.’

- In Wrexham, yet another model exists that has grown out of local practice and resources. There, the local authority has little past experience of refugee resettlement. Consequently, while refugees are assisted by a Tenancy Officer, most support work is provided by the WRC and Wrexham Refugee and Asylum Support Group. The latter is a faith-based NGO, and is discussed more fully below. Despite the strengths of the latter, there seems to be duplication of services here, and some friction between different agencies which appear to see themselves as being in competition. As one participant put it: ‘There's been a long history of boundary difficulties between the WRC and RASG’.

Issues, concerns and good practice

Variations in practice

It is unclear why there are a variety of support models in Wales, although respondents argued strongly that although Wales is a small nation, it is sufficiently internally heterogeneous to need more than a one-size-fits-all policy. At present, though, the level and type of support received by a refugee is determined by the accident of which town or city NASS disperses them to. This was exemplified by a comment made about the service WRC offered:

‘I hope that that service has been standardised in XXX, which I don’t think it is across this organisation.’

‘So you think that different clients get different service in different cities?’

‘Yes, which I think is wrong.’
‘How has that come about?’
‘It’s about training, it’s about knowledge, it’s about reviewing, standardisation, which we do not have a history of at the WRC.’

Red Cross Supporting People Project
The Red Cross Tenancy Support project in Swansea seems to be both innovative and effective. It accesses Supporting People money to provide support that might not otherwise be funded. And it provides high intensity floating support for those whose needs exceed what could be reasonably met by mainstream local authority teams. The project seems to be one that could readily, and beneficially, be replicated throughout Wales. We were told that this was currently under consideration (see box 7 – below).

Good practice example 16

Red Cross Tenancy Support Project in Swansea
This project began in January 2003 and is funded through the DCLG Supporting People programme. It aims to provide extended floating support to refugees (see Chapter 3). The contract was initially for three years, but has just been renewed for a further three years.

On the roots of the project
‘We identified the need for moving-on work, there was a gap in provision in Swansea, so a lot of the work that we were doing in the beginning was before somebody had the tenancy, so it wasn’t traditional tenancy support in that respect.’

‘Because you were actually helping people find accommodation?’
‘That’s right.’

‘In the private sector and in social housing?’
‘Social housing was the main focus at that time. There was a lot more social housing around a couple of years ago. It’s obviously become a lot tighter in that housing environment. So, we’re still involved before tenancies are taken, because of the expertise that we built up at that time, or the knowledge. We still work with the Welsh Refugee Council, the councils and the resettlement workers... when people are particularly vulnerable, or when more intensive help is needed. Then we will get the referral before the actual tenancy begins, so we are still involved in moving-on work.’

On tenancy support
‘Can you tell me a little bit more about what you mean by tenancy support?’
‘It’s really tenancy support to vulnerable people... so it’s building awareness, giving people information to enable them to sustain their tenancy, informing them of bills,'
setting up utility accounts, making people aware of what bills they’ll be paying, what they’re responsible for in their tenancy. And signposting to more appropriate agencies, we don’t take on the expertise of every other agency, so we’re there as a first point of reference and as a support worker not as a case worker as such.’

‘So are you directing people to benefits agency, directing them to GPs?’

‘That’s right.’

The project has funding for two staff, although the overall Supporting People budget is under pressure as a result of recent budget cuts.

Refugees are allocated to a support worker who meets them regularly for a period of up to six months. If they continue to need support after this initial period they can be referred for an additional period. Most clients are helped for 2-3 months, but some particularly vulnerable people have been supported for 18 months.

‘Really the difficulty has been, we’ve had some extreme cases where it has been difficult to access mainstream services. Really we’re dealing with the front end. Obviously people then can be signposted, and hopefully obtain good support going into mainstream services. However that’s not always possible, and as we’re dealing with vulnerable people and as we’re a humanitarian organisation, we can’t sort of say “the contract is over now”. The Red Cross is a symbol of protection and where you can turn in crisis so the support has lasted longer but that tends to be where disability has been involved.’

On the referral system

‘And how are people referred to you?’

‘It’s always been a mixture. The traditional route was through the tenancy support unit in Swansea.’

‘The local authority?’

‘That’s right yes. And they would rely upon referrals from housing officers, who would refer to tenancy support unit, and then tenancy support then would identify that person as a refugee and refer them to us. But from day one we’ve had people referring themselves, presenting themselves at the doorstep, because obviously the symbol is known worldwide and they may well have had contact with the Red Cross in their country of origin, so we’ve always had people self-referring. And obviously the more work we do in the communities the more people self-refer. The main point of referral now is the resettlement workers, the newly appointed resettlement workers in the council.’

Refugees who need the most support will be identified by the local authority's needs mapping exercise, undertaken by a Senior Support Worker or Manager. Those refugees will then be directed to the Red Cross and given intensive support within the contract. Those who are less vulnerable will not be denied help, and the Red Cross will also offer advice to other refugees in line with its humanitarian mission.

Each refugee will have an individualised Support Plan, based on their specific needs and drawn up in conjunction with them at the outset.
The Red Cross offers multi-disciplinary support aimed at ensuring successful integration and covering issues such as housing, employment and training, health, and advice on benefits. Support is more intensive in the early period, and tapers after that. A Support Worker might visit a client two or three times per week initially. Refugees also have access to their support worker at any time (via mobile phone), although the project’s offices do not operate as a One Stop Shop. This is left to WRC.

On the kind of help offered

‘If you’re dealing with someone who is still in NASS accommodation we would be working with the other agencies to ensure that all benefits have been applied for.’

‘Are there still issues around getting national insurance numbers, or has that been resolved?’

‘It’s a lot better, it’s a lot quicker, however what we do find... it’s still very hard for our clients to gain money while that is being resolved and there seems to be a varying service, whether or not you go to the job centre, or an agency on your own, or you go with someone who is able to provide advocacy and represent them, so there is a lot of work which can be quite labour intensive, it’s not a matter of just putting the application form in, because sometimes the paperwork is very much left to one side, and the high intensity work is really representing someone and responding to requests for more information.’

‘If a person is still in NASS accommodation, in the first instance, we would try to negotiate extensions. Other than that, it would be trying to broker, for want of a better word, emergency accommodation, trying to really move on the housing application.’

‘We will give information to our clients enough to enable them to make an informed decision of whether or not they want to go into private accommodation. Obviously in some cases social housing is not available to certain cases, so therefore we would give them information on how they can access private accommodation. Where to look for it. But we don’t have any formal links with private landlords. It is something that we are aware we need to look into.’

Once someone is in a tenancy

‘It would be an element of orientation and resettlement work. So showing people round their new environment, meeting the neighbours, key services within that area and if someone has moved from a larger distance from one side of Swansea to the other, there may be new schools. If you’re dealing with a family, a GP. So it’s really putting all the services and mainstream support and entitlements and people in place.’

‘We also do practical emotional support.’

‘So you refer people to counselling services if the need arose, or do you offer those?’

‘We don’t offer a counselling service as such. We do signpost to the mainstream services, and if there are mental health issues we will signpost there.’

The project is funded to provide support for 13 families and seven single high intensity units at any one time, with a ratio of four cases per case-worker. The project has now helped over 100 cases, made up of about 270 people.
On the possibility of similar projects being established elsewhere in Wales

‘Swansea City Council really went for this particular funding stream very aggressively and were very successful. Some other authorities were much slower to look at it, by which time the pot had been distributed. And in order to pull down Supporting People money, they had to do needs mapping. There are so many other vulnerable groups, the local authorities perhaps put up other vulnerable groups as priorities.’

‘We talked in particular to Newport. But the pot is shrinking. It’s not index linked. There’s an 18% cut this year, and there could be further cuts in 2007-8. So the only way that we’re going to find new money to do new work is by stopping something, so redistributing the pot. And that’s the only way that I can see it happening.’

‘So there’s no potential for the same kind of thing you’re doing but in Newport or Cardiff?’

‘Well, I certainly still talk to Newport, and I think that if they found that they could release some money, or some new money came, then I think the refugees would be quite high up on the list, but you know that was going back a while.’

Source: interview

Involvement of the local community

The Cantle (2001) report following the disturbances in Northern cities in 2000, and the publication of the Audit Office’s early review of dispersal (Audit Commission, 2000), have ensured that much greater emphasis has been placed on the need to ensure that there are points of contact between ‘New Migrants’ and established communities. Cantle talked of the need to break down barriers between groups to ensure that they did not live separate lives. The Audit Commission described the importance of preparing communities for the arrival of asylum seekers and the subsequent management of community relations.

In Wales there are a number of examples of concerned individuals getting together to provide a welcome, a point of contact, or facilities and activities for refugees and asylum seekers. SOVA in Cardiff aimed to reduce the isolation of young unaccompanied refugees by opening a Home Office and Welsh Refugee Council-funded drop-in centre where volunteer ‘peer mentors’ offered advice and support. All the mentors were either migrants themselves or had lived in care, and were trained by the local authority (see www.sova.org.uk). Swansea Bay Asylum Support Group organised football matches to bring locals and new migrants together. And in Wrexham a concerned faith group created a drop-in centre in a local chapel that offered advice, food and an opportunity to meet local people. Some of the same activists also formed Wrexham Refugee and Asylum Support Group, which together with the Salvation Army opened another drop-in centre elsewhere in Wrexham (see box 8 – right).
Good practice example 17

**Voluntary groups in Wrexham**

The Methodist Church and Wrexham Refugee and Asylum Support Group (WRASG)

WRASG was founded in 2002 by a group of concerned people with backgrounds in care and social justice. They now staff a drop-in centre at the Salvation Army. Members of WRASG are also associated with the local Methodist Church which operates a second, separate, drop-in centre, located in a Chapel near the centre of town. WRASG now has sixteen active volunteers. Each drop-in centre opens for one day per week.

WRASG has recently created the post of Development Worker, and receives funding of £18,000-£20,000 from the local authority.

The Methodist drop-in centre provides lunch on a Thursday for refugees, asylum seekers, and local workers. On a good day they will serve 40-50 meals, and on a quiet day 15. Lunch gives people the chance to mix with and meet asylum seekers and refugees and see them as individuals rather than as a category. As one of the workers said:

‘it breaks down this awful sort of isolation and barriers and…they are able to see them as human beings… and perhaps then they’ll start to open up and be a bit more confident to speak to people.’

‘so I’m quite worried that we don’t see them as people first, that they’re just becoming numbers and statistics and pieces of paper. And the only way we’re going to deal with the situations that are arising is to get to know what the problems are, and the only way you can do that is by getting to know the people.’

Members of WRASG befriend asylum seekers and refugees, give them information about how the housing system operates and take them to apply for housing when they get a positive decision. They also take people to the Benefits Agency and help them apply for benefits. They have also attended initial interviews between refugees and private landlords to encourage reticent landlords to take on refugee tenants. And in extremis WRASG members have taken in refugees or asylum seekers who would otherwise be homeless.

WRASG has also tried to bring together partners to establish a halfway house for Section 4 asylum seekers who are awaiting removal or are unable to return to their country of origin. At present there is no provision for this group in the Wrexham area and there is evidence of real destitution

*Source: interview*

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**Proposed halfway house in Wrexham**

Another project that has created considerable interest is the proposal by Wrexham Council to establish a halfway house to assist the adjustment of refugees who are leaving the NASS system and entering both the community and mainstream housing. Although much of the groundwork for the project has been successfully completed, the project has stalled on NASS’ inability to guarantee a sufficient throughput of refugees in the Wrexham area to make the establishment financially viable (see box 9 – next page).
Good practice example 18

PROPOSED HALFWAY HOUSE, WREXHAM

When Wrexham Council consulted on the needs of refugees they were told that the key priority was half-way accommodation. The idea was that refugees would move from NASS accommodation into the halfway house where they would learn the practicalities of paying rent, Council tax and water rates and begin to get an idea of how to budget for accommodation in the UK.

There were to be three housing units, each capable of accommodating a couple.

A floating support worker would service the six people and advise them on housing, health and education.

Refugees would live in the halfway house for six months, before moving into council accommodation.

The funding for the support worker was to come from the Supporting People fund, and the accommodation was to be purchased from a dedicated social housing grant.

In the end, the scheme was stillborn because the number of asylum seekers being dispersed to Wales has fallen and therefore the number being sent to Wrexham has also fallen. There was a feeling that the throughput of refugees would therefore be insufficient to make the project viable.

Reflecting on the abandonment of the project a senior manager said:

‘But we got that far, we had all the money but it’s been agreed, reluctantly, with the Refugee Support Group and the Welsh Refugee Council, that we haven’t got the throughput of refugees to keep it viable. Well, it’s just a shame. They have done a specification and the Supporting People team have increased their knowledge and they have been in touch with hact, travelled around and gone to good practice seminars and then suddenly the throughput of refugees has dried up and yet it’s something we can’t plan for because next year, there might be dozens coming through.’

Source: interview
Chapter 8

Housing pathways for refugees

Once asylum seekers or refugees have gone through the move-on stage they are faced with a variety of housing pathways. These are summarised in Figure 8.1 (next page).

Asylum seekers who have failed to gain any entitlement to remain in the UK lose their right to social housing. Respondents told us that asylum seekers were evicted into homelessness by NASS providers in Wales, but that this was rare. Most failed asylum seekers turned to refugee or asylum seeker friends at this point and couch-surfing was common, with destitute asylum seekers sleeping on the floors or settees of these friends. NASS-accommodation providers in Wales seemed to have a relaxed attitude to this use of their facilities by unfunded guests. However, one did point out that taking in a failed asylum seeker would put an asylum seeker officially living in NASS accommodation at risk, since they were technically in breach of their agreement. Information about failed asylum seekers living rough was very scarce and anecdotal. Some RCOs in Cardiff claimed that there was a significant number of destitute failed asylum seekers sleeping rough or in hostels in Cardiff every night, and that women were included within this group. Other respondents argued that the scale of the problem was unknown because ethnic communities rarely allowed destitute asylum seekers to become homeless, and homelessness was therefore hidden. Workers in Wrexham said that perhaps 12 of the 60 asylum seekers in that town were failed asylum seekers without accommodation. Some stayed with friends where possible, but others were sleeping in cars and yet others were staying in night shelters. And a worker in Swansea thought the situation was as follows:

‘So is there an issue of rough sleeping for any asylum seeker, refugee communities?’

‘Yes.’

‘And how big a problem is that in Swansea?’

‘I think there’s individuals, ...in terms of visibility I don’t think it’s that high. I think that people tend to rely on their networks and their communities, and what we see a lot of evidence of is particularly with asylum seekers, or failed asylum seekers are people returning to NASS housing and jeopardising the housing of their friends, by sleeping in the accommodation. I think that’s a real issue.’

‘So it’s invisible homelessness rather than visible? You’re not seeing people sleeping on the streets or in night shelters?’

‘Some people are, but I think the large majority of people are sleeping with friends and family.’

‘And largely within NASS accommodation?’

‘Yes.’

‘If you had to quantify the number of people that are in night shelters, could you give me a figure off the top of your head?’
'I think it would be quite low, and I think that's because of cultural reasons, particularly when you've got shelter with like missionaries or charities who are Christian and people have to participate in prayer and people don't want to do that, and also shelters where other people who use those shelters are drug and alcohol users, culturally it's a different experience for people. Also, the food that is on offer, people aren't confident that it's halal, so people tend not to use shelters.'

'Do you get people presenting here who are homeless, who are actually saying “Can you provide us with accommodation for tonight?”'

'Yes.'

Another Swansea organisation proffered an estimate of the scale of the problem in the city:

'And how many cases like that are..?'

'Last quarter we dealt with 15 cases.'

'Of people who were destitute?'
'Yes.'

And a refugee explained how the problem was particularly acute for those with dependent families:

‘So if at the end of 28 days you are still waiting for a house and you are evicted by NASS where do people go?’

‘If you have good relations you can go and see a friend, but if you are a big family, for example you have six children, I don’t know, if I have a, I don’t know, I don’t know which person can accept me with six children. It is not possible. Very difficult. In this situation, the usual way is the street.’

And finally, a local authority manager of refugee services even admitted:

‘If somebody turned up at a hostel, and wasn’t on benefit, would they refer them back to you?’

‘No.’

‘They wouldn’t?’

‘No. I don’t know where they go then.’

In Swansea, homeless refugees can receive clothing vouchers from the Red Cross, and in Newport the same organisation offers some food vouchers.

There is clearly a need for further research to quantify the scale of this issue, and to look into the conditions that destitute asylum seekers and some refugees are having to live in.

M&Q provide housing specifically for Section 4 cases. These are people who have exhausted all but their last right of appeal against a negative decision or are awaiting removal from the UK. M&Q, which is a national company with its Head Office in Manchester, currently houses around 180 people in South Wales, concentrated in Cardiff (50%), Newport (25%) and Swansea (25%). At the time of writing, nearly all these clients were Iraqi Kurds, and the vast majority were single young men, many of whom have been in the UK more than five years. Once evicted from mainstream NASS accommodation, M&Q can usually house them very quickly, sometimes within hours. Maximum waiting times for accommodation are about three weeks, during which time NASS will allow people to remain in their former accommodation. They are housed in HMOs rented by M&Q from private landlords through agents and a network of local contacts. The properties are a mix of modern and older buildings and are distributed throughout the city. These properties must meet strict standards laid down in the contract with NASS. Each person is provided with a single room and is also given vouchers to meet their daily needs. M&Q is also responsible for their health needs but has no duty to provide activities or refer people to RCOs. The M&Q manager said that the key issues for them were locating suitable properties and the boredom of their clients who were simply waiting to be deported.

For those who receive a positive decision on their asylum claim, there are different pathways. Which path they are allowed to take depends on whether they are categorised as priority or non-priority homeless cases. There is currently some debate about the definition of ‘priority’ and this will be discussed in a later section.

For those without priority (e.g. single men) there is little realistic chance of gaining local authority housing since new priority cases will continually be given preference to those who have been on the waiting list a long time, but are low on the list. Most single people will
have to turn to the private rented sector, and barriers to their access and adequate housing will be discussed in Chapter 9.

The priority homeless can add their names either to the local authority waiting list or to a housing association waiting list. Our respondents told us that refugees in Wales currently prefer local authority accommodation if this available, because of the later possibility of a Right to Buy. Applicants with some priority (e.g. couples without children) might currently expect to be on the waiting list for 12-18 months before receiving permanent accommodation, while those with high priority (e.g. couples with children or pregnant women) could reasonably expect to be rehoused in weeks. In the meantime, homeless applicants would be accommodated in hostels or bed and breakfast accommodation sourced by the local authority. Few thought such accommodation to be ideal, or even satisfactory. As with any other applicants to the council, refugees could express a preference for particular estates that they would like to live on. However, the likelihood that they would be offered accommodation on a particular estate depended on its popularity and the turnover of stock. Applicants thus had to trade-off desirability against availability. We were told that refugee applicants would always be taken to view a property before being asked to accept or reject it. We were also told different things about the number of offers that would be made to an applicant. Local authorities told us that they made one, two or three offers to each applicant, and if these were rejected on grounds that were not reasonable, then they would have discharged their responsibility to the applicant, and be at liberty to terminate that person's application. Local authorities told us that they had done this in the past, if they felt a refugee applicant was being unreasonable. Properties could, however, be rejected for reasonable reasons, and offers would then not count. Believing that you would suffer racial harassment on an estate, or a feeling that you would be isolated because of the distance from co-ethnic communities were thought to be reasonable reasons for declining a property. Other stakeholders told us they believed only one offer had to be made and was made, so there is clearly either some ambiguity in procedures or a lack of knowledge of them in refugee communities.

Respondents told us that some housing associations in Cardiff had accepted refugee applicants through their normal procedures, but the number of people housed in this way was thought to be very small. Waiting lists currently exceeded a year for many associations.

The barriers to refugees gaining entry to each of these housing sectors (i.e. local authority, housing association and private rented) will be described in Chapters 9 to 11, but before that, it is important to know how significant a problem housing is for refugees in Wales. For this information we depend on the RCOs and the advice centres. The impression they gave was that housing was not the most prominent issue facing their clients. More of their time was spent advising on immigration matters and employment and training opportunities than on housing. This may, of course, reflect the availability of housing advice from other sources, awareness of how to access this, or the efficiency with which local authorities handled homelessness. Refugees told us that if they could find reasonably paid and secure work, then they could usually find suitable accommodation.
Chapter 9

Improving access to different pathways: the private sector

Some respondents outlined for us the benefits of privately rented accommodation. For example, a Somali from Newport said:

‘People kind of get put off and try to go for private rental accommodation, even though it’s very poor in a lot of instances, the private rented properties. But they would rather go down that road because at least they know where they are. You know, they’ve got to come up with this amount of money each week or each month rather than there’s a form to fill in, there’s a number of points you have to acquire, there’s an interview and all the rest of it.’

The key barriers to accessing privately rented accommodation appear to be no different in Wales from the rest of the UK. There does, however, seem to be some variability in the availability of rented accommodation between the main cluster areas within Wales. In Cardiff rented accommodation was available but not affordable. In Wrexham access to private rented accommodation was very dependent upon having a job. In Swansea the position appeared to be somewhat better and RCOs there said there were few problems sourcing affordable rented property:

‘Yes, and I think the other situation with young men is often they’ve been working and do have some money of their own, so they are in a much better position financially. They don’t necessarily need to go to the bond board.’

‘Yes, so would those people who have been working have money to get into the private rented sector?’

‘I think so.’

‘So they wouldn’t come to you. They would have the deposit, they would have the rent in advance? They would just go and find themselves a room or a flat?’

‘Yes.’

Issues, concerns and good practice

Rent in advance and deposits

As with elsewhere in the UK, Welsh landlords demand some form of guarantee before letting a property. This might simply be a reference, which is – in itself – difficult for refugees who have fled their country of origin:

‘One of the barriers that used to exist was when you were actually asked to provide proof, you know references. Where do I get references?’

More frequently, though, private landlords now demanded rent-in-advance and a deposit or bond. Typically these are one month’s rent each. Finding such a large sum of money upfront is extremely problematic for refugees who may just have come out of the NASS system, may
have no savings and may not yet have gained employment or even received a National Insurance number.

These difficulties seemed to be handled in different ways in different parts of Wales. Cardiff has a well-developed scheme for providing bonds and rent-in-advance (see box 10) and we were told that few, if any, applicants had been turned down or failed to get help. In contrast, in Wrexham we were told that few refugees had yet been helped:

‘Is there a local bond board?’
‘Barnardos run a bond scheme for under 25s but there isn’t one for over 25s but the Housing Department the Homelessness Section have recently started giving bonds to homeless applicants.’

‘So that would include refugees?’
‘Yes, but we have done hardly any.’
‘Because there isn’t a demand or...?’
‘I think because we have really not got the Homelessness Prevention Officer in place and I think it is just a matter to do with training and thinking.’

This perhaps reflects the fact that we were told that asylum seekers could readily find work near Wrexham and therefore stood a better chance of having savings when they came to become refugees. The problem there might thus be less acute:

‘There are a lot of food factories in the area and that seems to be where a lot of people are getting jobs. There are agencies which pick people up and take them and they don’t particularly care whether people have got permission to work or not. So that is one thing that asylum seekers have been working illegally and so at least they do have some money when they get refugee status. So it could be that if you are given the right advice and so on, they could even save up for a deposit... You can quite soon save up if you’re working in a factory doing long shifts. You can quite soon save up £400.’

In Swansea, the limitation on availability of bonds seemed to be of a different kind:

‘What happens to them? We look at bond board provision which is quite limited in Swansea because they’ve only got one worker and she’s quite overworked.’

‘So the limit is the personnel rather than the size of the fund?’
‘Yes, I think that’s the main restricting factor.’

Managing expectations

A development worker in Cardiff made the point that after NASS accommodation, people might be disappointed by the accommodation on offer in the private rented sector. She described how most ex-NASS refugees would prefer self-contained one bedroom accommodation, but how this was not feasible on housing benefit. She therefore had to manage expectations by explaining:

‘Well, you have to start at the ground and you step up on the ladder. Once you get into employment, you are more attractive to a landlord and then if you are paying for what you want, you can basically have what you want, but under the housing benefit, we are coming in a bit short of the private rented market. So, it’s like juggling eggs.’
Prejudice on the part of some landlords

Respondents acknowledged that this existed but they said it was not a major problem, with most landlords being more concerned about the financial return on their investment than the characteristics of their tenants.

‘I haven’t really had a problem with them not taking refugees (in Cardiff). I’ve never had a problem. The problem is with the housing benefit, the lack of money.’

The perception that landlords have of the Housing Benefit system

This was more of a problem than racism, and was again motivated by real financial concerns rather than by prejudice against certain statuses of people.

‘So do landlords (in Wrexham) take people on housing benefit?’

‘Not many, no I mean it’s quite rare really to do that.’

‘Most won’t accept people on benefits?’

‘Most won’t. Agencies won’t. There are three in Newport where they will occasionally but you have to be really lucky to land on the day when they have got a house that will accept housing benefit. Most of the agencies just don’t.’

The reasons why landlords might be wary of tenants on Housing Benefits can be seen from the next quote from a Cardiff-based worker:

‘Initially, you have someone starting up a tenancy with a private landlord or an estate agent. On the first day of the month, say 1 January, you’re moving in. Your landlord wants the rent and the bond upfront... The housing benefit is usually a little bit less than they would have got from someone who’s working... but the housing benefit pays 4 weeks in arrears, so the landlord doesn’t get his rent on the 1st, he gets it at the end of the month. That’s only if the tenant has supplied all the information and there’s no problem. The landlord can’t even go to housing benefit and say, “I haven’t had my rent” and they’ll say “We’re dealing with the client, you’re just the landlord”. So that creates a big problem. They have now improved. They have a landlord liaison officer but it’s 50/50. Sometimes she’s improving the service but not as much as it should be improved.’

Another facet of how benefit cases could be difficult for private landlords is evident from the following quote from a Cardiff manager:

‘I mean...for single adults who are not priority need the 28 days can be... a problem because often people’s benefits aren’t in place by then. It will improve as they all get given their national insurance numbers with their decision, but because they haven’t got a national insurance number, they can’t get housing benefit. National insurance numbers at the moment can take 3-4 months for them to get, so if they go into private rented accommodation, landlords are having to wait a long time for their rent, and you know that is something that can put landlords off renting to refugees.’

The need to have full, not part-time work

One respondent told us that some letting agents require their tenants to have a full-time job, presumably in order to reduce their financial risk. However, refugees are very likely initially only to be able to get part-time work, until they can build up a record of successful employment in the UK.
‘I’m thinking of one case in particular, they do two part time jobs, but the difficulty there is some letting agents won’t give you accommodation unless you’ve got a full time job, so that can be quite difficult. I don’t see the difference really, and I think sometimes it’s an excuse for them not to take people that they seem to think are outside of Wrexham.’

The situation, in respect to finding full-time work seemed very different in Cardiff and Wrexham. Work can be difficult to find in Cardiff for refugees, but in Wrexham:

‘Well, a lot of the refugees are working, so it is not really a housing benefit issue, it is an affordability issue.’

Communication difficulties between landlords and tenants

Some respondents suggested that a barrier to entry and to successfully staying within the private rented sector was language and communication difficulties. Where landlords are from a different ethnic or linguistic group they may prefer not to take the risk of having tenants with whom they cannot easily communicate. Equally, if issues arise during the tenancy, these can be exacerbated by the inability of the two parties to communicate easily. As a worker in Wrexham said:

‘So rent is one barrier, prejudice is another barrier, any other barriers?’

‘I think probably, this may not be prejudice, but certainly the language barrier, if their language isn’t very good when they go in there, the whole interview could just fall apart, which is why we go with them.’

A Swansea worker agreed:

‘I think there’s probably plenty of private rented accommodation, but I don’t think it’s accessible.’

‘Why’s that?’

‘I think unwillingness to take people who are on benefits and I think unwillingness... to take people who’ve been through the asylum process, people whose English might not be good. General cautiousness about people that you can’t really communicate well with.’

The competitive nature of the Cardiff market

The property boom in Cardiff associated with its emergence as a European capital and the recent economic growth there has meant that the private rental market has become very competitive. It is no longer a sector of last resort, and this means that refugees are competing with people who have much more financial leverage.

‘Most refugees want a one bedroom flat. But most people who’ve just started work will go for a one bedroom flat, so you are competing because this is the private market. You are competing against everybody who is employed, the unemployed, everybody who knows the system, everybody who has got a past landlord who will give them a reference. So there’s a lot of competition out there for one bedroom flats and obviously because of the restrictions on housing benefit, we are in the bottom category... So it’s just like the job market: you’re up against the rest.’

High cost/shortfall in benefit

Particularly in Cardiff, the state of the housing market is such that rental levels in the private sector have become very high. The recent boom in the property market has created a
genuine shortage of affordable housing, and the social housing sector has insufficient spare capacity to absorb excess demand. Rents have therefore increased at a much sharper rate than housing benefit levels, creating an affordability gap.

The consequence of this shortfall between housing benefit levels and market rents is captured in the following two quotes from Cardiff workers:

‘Now in Cardiff, for anybody under 25, whether they are a refugee or not, you get between £40 and £45 per week for your rent.’

‘And what is the going rent?’

‘The going rent for a room in a shared house is about £200. They usually have to add about £8 a month to that rent for other costs.’

‘A refugee will come in and say “I’ve found this one bedroom flat for £600 in Cardiff Bay”. “Great”, I say. But now I know there’s no way they can have it. Housing benefit is going to pay £350. They can’t afford the extra £250 a month.’

A senior manager in Wrexham also agreed that the main issue with privately rented accommodation there was that it was so expensive.

**Poor quality of some stock**

Whilst some privately rented accommodation is of a good standard and is well maintained and managed, at the bottom end of the market this is not always the case. Landlords who do not require bonds or rent in advance often offer much poorer accommodation:

‘No, to be honest, when people use our service they go for the cheaper accommodation.’

‘They go for cheaper accommodation?’

‘Landlords they don’t ask for a bond, they don’t ask for anything.’

‘That is the very bottom of the market?’

‘Yes, they accept them on housing benefit, kept them in a room with other refugees.’

‘And that accommodation is very important? Are many people having to live in accommodation like that?’

‘I think there any many, many people live in that.’

‘So could you give me an example? How many people are living in a room?’

‘Usually it is one person per room. The quality of the house and the kitchen and the bathroom is very poor.’

‘So how many people might be sharing a kitchen?’

‘It depends, some landlords are clever they just meet the standard of kitchen, or premises, some people they don’t care, they just stuff people into one house, without any consideration to their safety or well-being.’

A worker in Newport said:

‘Usually the properties are not brilliant. They are run down, heating could be off one week, hot water could be off and they’ I’ll say “Can you ring this landlord” and I’ll say “Yes, we’ll get someone out” and you know, a mother with kids and still no-one comes out. Three or four days later it’s sorted.’
The Cardiff Homefinder project

One response to the difficulties outlined above, has been the Cardiff Homefinder project, run by the City Council. This project is fully described in box 10, but essentially aims to encourage landlords to take refugees. It does this through advocacy and development work and by reducing the risks for landlords that agree to house refugees.

Good practice example 19

Cardiff Homefinder Service

This project was funded by the Home Office Challenge Fund for two years ending in October 2004. The total cost was c £100,000. Its aim was to increase the access which refugees have to privately rented accommodation in Cardiff. It sought to do this through the employment of a Development Worker. She:

- Offered advice surgeries for refugees twice per week in three (later two) different locations;
- Explained to refugees how to locate their own accommodation in the open market;
- Administered a Bond and Deposit scheme that provides bonds of up to £250 and rent in advance to the same figure. In the first year 50 refugees were helped in this way. In the second year funding was reduced;
- Sourced a pool of rented accommodation that could be accessed by refugees;
- Persuaded landlords to take refugees;
- Acted as mediator between refugee tenants and landlords in the event of problems.

At the time of the interview the project had helped some 90 refugees over a period of 18 months. When the project was evaluated by the Home Office it was one of only eight nationwide that was granted Best Working Practice status and given four out of five stars.

Unfortunately, difficulties with the insurance meant that the Development Worker could not hold consultations with clients in her office, hence the outreach work.

Project funding ended on October 1st despite Cardiff City and County making a bid to the Challenge Fund for a third year's extension.

A flavour of the work can be gathered from the following quotes from the Project Worker:

On sourcing property

‘Small ads, agencies, going through the papers, walking the streets, talking to builders, looking for adverts and that’s how I get properties and this is the information that I try and impart to the tenants. Because what I don’t want to do is say “Here you are, you’re boxed up in this room, there you go we’ve done everything for you” and the tenant doesn’t know what’s going on, they don’t understand the tenancy agreement, they don’t understand the legal side of it. They don’t understand when they can leave and if they get asked to leave or whatever, how they can find the next property. So I run surgeries ... I will take them to an area and I will show them how to go into an
On tenancy support

‘If you want me to keep asking landlords for properties and get the properties on, I have to try and ensure a successful tenancy. Not when there’s a problem arising, “Oh, it’s not my fault”. So, I do get involved a lot more than I should get involved (a) to support the landlord (b) to support the tenant, to instill responsibility both in the landlord and the tenant and to try and save that tenancy, try and save that person in that tenancy. Because if the landlord evicts someone, they become homeless.’

‘I interview every client. I get translators in or beg borrow and steal. I market the landlords, I do the properties, I check with Environmental Services, I do pre-tenancies, I get the clients around there, explain the tenancy agreements, do the tenancies, do the bond applications, housing benefit forms and then I’ll support the tenant for the duration.’

Dealing with problems with housing benefits

‘If there are problems with a landlord not receiving housing benefits payments I would step in and ring up in six weeks and say, “Have you had any rent through”, “No I’ve had nothing”. So I’ll try and be a little bit proactive and I’ll get the tenant together, ring up housing benefit, even though with the Council I have no right into that. So I have to get the tenant with me, either on the phone or into housing benefit, go in and say, “This is the tenant. This is the property, what’s the problem?” It could be anything. Something we said on the form, proof of income, they want to prove who they are, they need more prove of ID, whatever. We’ll supply that information but it’s like a brick wall. Obviously, because of the legal side of it, if there’s no rent coming through for 2 months, somebody can take somebody to Court but that will cost the landlord another 3 months and another £400. So by me saying, “Look, I’ll keep on to housing benefit, I will make sure you get it through, I’ll persist, it gives them more confidence” and as I say, I don’t think it’s a problem with refugees. The problem more is with the benefits system.’

On liaising with landlords

‘I offer a service where if something goes wrong. What I used to say is, “If you smash the window, it’s alright”. What’s not alright is if because you smashed the window, there’s a puddle on the floor, and you do nothing about it.... Come and see us, we’ll go to the landlord, we’ll speak on your behalf, we’ll explain to the landlord what happened. We’ll ask him to get it done as cheaply as possible and you may have to pay for it or we can claim it on the insurance but rather than putting your head in the sand. It’s just trying to open up negotiations and say “This is the way you deal with it”. So it brings the landlord and the tenant a bit closer, gets them talking, gets a rapport going on and a bit more respect going on.’

‘Well, if he has a problem client and he’s got to do it all himself and he’s very frustrated and it’s very legal, time consuming, money constraints, he’s not going to take another client off you. But if you can support, if you can negotiate and if you can mediate between landlord and the thing, you can get somewhere.’

Source: interview
Chapter 10

Improving access to different pathways: local authority housing

Issues, concerns and good practice

Shortage of stock

The main problem in the local authority sector is a shortage of stock. The residualisation of this sector, the small number of new-builds and the ‘right to buy’ all mean that many local authorities simply do not have enough accommodation to meet their immediate needs. For example, we were told that Cardiff and Wrexham had very low void rates and that there were really no ‘hard-to-let’ properties:

‘Within the local authority sector, what is the void rate?’

‘Yes, it’s very low now. It’s between 1% and 2% which is what you need to allow a turnover ... Apart from a few really serious long term voids that are structurally unsound etc, we have not really got long-term voids. The turnover has dropped as well. The right to buy is still increasing so we are doing fewer lettings per year.’

‘So stock is shrinking?’

‘Stock is shrinking, yes. The situation has changed in the last 3 years.’

Others told us:

‘There’s no hard-to-let areas in Cardiff ... There’s less desirable areas but they aren’t hard to let.’

‘There is a shortage of stock in Cardiff always. There is a very high demand for accommodation in Cardiff.’

In Newport, the picture was little better:

‘People are very, very hopeful of getting a council house. They want a council house. They don’t understand that there aren’t enough.’

The situation in Swansea seemed to be slightly better, especially if applicants were prepared to take properties on hard-to-let estates like Townhill. Many of the other barriers to accessing local authority housing stemmed from this basic shortage.

Long waiting lists

We were told that most refugees would prefer a council flat or house to other forms of accommodation:

‘So does everybody understand the difference say between local authority and housing association?’

‘Yes, most of them do yes. Because most of them want local authority because they want to be able to buy them.’
When combined with the shortage of stock, this preference means that the waiting list for non-priority, and even some priority, applicants can be very long. As a result, people can spend lengthy periods in temporary accommodation. Priority cases in Cardiff might have to wait up to 5 weeks for permanent accommodation, but for others it can be much longer. Quotes from around Wales demonstrate the variability of waiting times and the way in which some people have to spend considerable periods of time in temporary accommodation:

‘So how long would people stop in emergency accommodation?’

‘Indefinitely, it could be indefinitely, could be weeks, could be months... It could be bed and breakfast, it could be a flat that they particularly had vacant that wasn’t going to be rented out.’

‘We have people who have been in temporary accommodation for 2-3 years.’

‘And there are families in Newport that go into a hostel and are stuck there for a month or two months.’

‘Waiting for a vacancy?’

‘Yes, waiting for a vacancy. Singles go into the hostel for 6 months, 8 months in B&B.’

‘Some of our clients will be housed within a matter of days, others will be in emergency accommodation for weeks, even months.’

**Appropriateness of stock**

The shortage of stock means that local authorities may have difficulty meeting the needs and expectations of applicants, whether these be refugees or local residents.

As a result, some tenants may be dissatisfied with what is offered them:

‘And why might tenants be dissatisfied?’

‘Number of bathrooms, number of bedrooms. How many members of family are needing to share. Poor state of repair as well, even when the local authority says we’ll do your repairs, people are not happy to move into places, so I think they’re the key reasons.’

‘They moan about, I think the standard of the accommodation they are not happy about, sometimes the size of their room, sometimes the bathroom, sometimes the kitchen. There’s always something to complain about.’

A Housing Advisor described how they had to try to manage expectations wherever possible:

‘So you do the form filling and the signposting. What information and advice do you provide?’

‘We go through, obviously homeless do as well, but we prepare people by telling them what they can expect from the council. For example, people with three and four children will only get a three bedroom house and things like that. So they’re not disappointed when they’re offered a three bedroom house.’

Shortage of stock can also mean that refugees cannot be offered properties in neighbourhoods where there are pre-existing ethnic communities, specialist services and
support networks. They may also not be offered housing in the neighbourhood with which they have become familiar during their time in the NASS system:

‘**What are the main reasons why people turn down the initial offers?**’
‘Location, in areas of Swansea that aren’t desirable to them.’

‘**And what defines desirable to them?**’
‘Close to the city centre, or an area that they’ve been housed in while they’re being supported by NASS that they’re familiar with. So familiarity is a reason that is attractive.’

‘Plus refugees don’t like to go out to St Mellons. It isn’t just that they’ve heard bad reports about these areas, they’re far away, they’re far away from the hub of what is going on in the city centre.’

‘NASS housing is central and one big problem that people have is they don’t want to be put out in the estates.’

‘**And is that what’s happening if you go to the local authority?**’
‘Yes, because in Newport the majority of local authority accommodation is out on estates.’

‘So people want to live in the centre of Newport where they are going to be with their community but they want to be in a Council house and the Council doesn’t have property in the centre of Newport and they just don’t understand.’

One senior manager in Cardiff explained how the shortage of council houses meant that the NASS system had more flexibility to ensure that asylum seekers were not housed in areas which had a history of racist incidents than was the case with the council housing system:

‘With the asylum team, they’re actually going through police intelligence when they’re taking on a property just to find out that there’s no history of anything that might impact on asylum seekers but I’m not so sure if the council do that. Especially now that every house is at a premium, it’s a little bit more difficult. If we had concerns, we’d phone the local police station just to see if there is any intelligence.’

There were echoes of this in one of the Wrexham interviews:

‘**So you could be offered a property on any estate? Anywhere in Wrexham?**’
‘They generally tend to get the worst estates, most run down, because that is where the properties are available.’

‘**What preferences do refugees express in terms of where they would like to live?**’
‘The refugees, they usually express that they don’t want to go to an area that is obviously so run down because they know that they’re going to get racist abuse.’

‘**Any particular estates?**’
‘Yes. Some areas in Hightown, Caer Park.’

The same did not appear to be true in Newport:

‘Newport is very good. I have a very good working relationship with them and they are
very careful about where people are placed. So I don’t think they would put a family or whoever it is into an area where they would be unsafe or where there’s racism.’

In extreme cases we were even told that applicants might be offered no real choice over where they are housed:

‘And we tell them that you don’t really have a choice of where. Well you have a choice of where you live in the city but you don’t. I mean you know what it’s like, the Assembly says everybody has to have a choice but it’s only on paper.’

Tensions between consumer choice and community cohesion

Irrespective of whether or not a local authority has sufficient stock to meet its needs, all authorities have a difficult balancing act to achieve between meeting the reasonable aspirations of applicants and national community cohesion policy. Cantle (2001) was convinced that one of the main causes of disturbances in northern cities in 2000 was that ethnic, national and religious groups were living in communities within communities. Residential segregation and the associated segregation of lives, meant that different groups rarely had the opportunity to meet, and therefore learn about other cultures and ways of life. Separation was fuelling ignorance, suspicion and prejudice.

Local authorities therefore have a dilemma. On the one hand they wish to meet the reasonable aspirations of minorities who would prefer to live together in parts of the city where they have their own support networks, their own facilities, their own services and their own religious establishments:

‘A lot of the clientele we’re dealing with, they want to be in where their communities are, so they want to be around mosque facilities, halal food shops. The women in particular; there’s safety in numbers, so they want to be with other Somali women.’

But on the other hand they are being encouraged to prevent ghettoisation and the creation of introverted and separate communities, which might retard integration.

This tension came out clearly in the following interview:

‘In Cardiff ... Butetown is a bit of a ghetto for Somali community at the moment, and it’s getting harder and harder to get people to move out to other areas and integrate properly.’

‘Why’s that? Is that because of the strength of the community, or is that because of racism in outlying areas, or isolation?’

‘I think it’s the strength of the community. And the fact that a lot of people don’t learn English and that exacerbates it as well because they, if they live there, they don’t need to learn English, if they can find somebody else to do it so, it’s, one compounds the other. Yes, it is a big problem, because now that there’s no area in Cardiff which is no-go for anybody, it’s very difficult to get people to go out and consider other areas.’

And it was also explicitly recognised by an RCO working in Cardiff:

‘You’ve got people who say for example they get a house in St Mellons, and they say, “Oh I can’t take that house, it’s far away from the people I know”. We’ve been trying to work with our communities on this. I know a lot of people would like to be housed around the city centre, where they know they will come across people they know. That is the problem. How does the council do it, or how do the housing associations do it and still maintain the pace of housing allocation?’
But where refugees are rehoused outside ethnic areas, they may struggle to integrate. As one Swansea worker put it:

‘I think the difficulty for refugees going into social housing is that by the very nature, they’re in certain communities that can be difficult for anyone to settle in. You’re dealing with, more often than not, areas of high poverty, high turnover of tenancies, and that presents its own set of problems in addition to rebuilding a new life in a strange country.’

**Inefficiency of shuffling stock**

One potential inefficiency within the current system is that when they become refugees, people may simply be moved from one local authority property to another. Such moves can be very disruptive. They require considerable organisation by the local authority, which may also have to refurbish both properties, and they can mean that refugees have to uproot to different neighbourhoods and find new support networks. In Chapter 3 we saw how some English authorities have recognised the benefits of leaving refugees in the same property. With NASS’s approval, they withdraw that property from the NASS pool and substitute another similar property.

Refugees welcomed this possibility:

‘I think that’s a perfect idea. For the three years I’ve been here now, my children have moved to three different schools. You can imagine for them having to move from one country to another, then they come again into an area and they keep moving every beginning of the year because of the moving in the houses. Also when you stay in an area you do get to make friends, you do get to create your own relations, and that alone is important for anybody who is trying to rebuild their lives. I think I would actually applaud that and say that would be a perfect thing to do, and I think it would actually save council the hassle of having to rehouse somebody in a bed and breakfast, take them out again, and find them more accommodation and try and put them on a priority list, among a list that is so long anyway. I think that it would be a perfect way of trying to solve the problem.’

We explored the possibility of doing this in Wales. There was common agreement that it would represent best practice, and that most refugees would prefer it:

‘**Now of the people getting a positive decision, given a choice how many of those do you think would stop in their existing NASS accommodation?**’

‘I would say nearly everybody. Apart from say the single adults who are in HMOs and want the one bedroom flats. But of the families I think a lot of them would choose to stay.’

‘If the person is settled in that area and has put ties down in that area, they should be left there, because they’ve led a very unsettled way of life and it seems like another unnecessary move, and it is stressful to move, even if you’re only moving from one side of the city to another, or from one street to the other. Moving is still stressful.’

We were told Swansea looked at the possibility of leaving people in the same local authority property where possible, but this was rare, and usually only in extenuating circumstances.

‘Swansea were thinking of doing that and looking into it. Whether it happened or not, I don’t know of any examples. I think that might be something to go back to the council with and ask if they’re doing that but as far as I know they’re not.’
‘Are people being allowed to stop in the same NASS accommodation when they get status? Some local authorities do that don’t they?’

‘We’ve only ever dealt with one case where that has happened, (but) there seemed to be other forces, but that happened once. I know we’re dealing with a case now where they’re trying to make that happen again.’

‘So most people are being moved out of NASS accommodation and being moved elsewhere. Is that a geographical move or are they being given accommodation on the same estate or in the same area or are they being physically moved around the city?’

‘More often than not there’s a physical move from one estate to another.’

But we were also told that allowing people to remain in their former NASS accommodation when they got a positive decision would be difficult in the local authority sector in Cardiff and Newport, because so much of the NASS stock was privately rented:

‘It’s not feasible in Cardiff because there aren’t enough local authority properties. And of course because most of our NASS properties are with private sector landlords, it actually takes about a year to get a house on stream by the time it goes through the valuers and then back to legal services for the lease and everything to be sorted out, it’s just, it wouldn’t be a feasible option.’

‘So roughly what proportion of the NASS stock is private rented and what proportion is local authority then?’

‘I think it’s about 70% is private, and the rest is housing association and local authority.’

‘Right, so what proportion is actually local authority owned?’

‘Yes, it is quite small, 15-20%.’

‘In Newport there is no Local Authority accommodation and Newport Council and Clear Springs don’t work together to my knowledge.’

Inter-authority transfers

If local authority housing is in short supply in the main cluster areas, but less so in neighbouring authorities, there might be an argument for establishing a transfer system that would allow refugees to accept housing offers there. This possibility was explored during the interviews. There was doubt whether refugees would move out of Cardiff into neighbouring authorities unless appropriate facilities and services already existed there or were created there. And there were also fears that areas which had high void rates might not be very receptive towards incoming refugees:

‘We know there are void properties in Rhondda Cynon Taff that who will take refugees...’

‘But they don’t want to move out there?’

‘They probably wouldn’t move out there. Most of them wouldn’t anyway, and we would have concerns about some of the areas anyway.’

‘Is there a mechanism that would allow refugees to move from one local authority to another when they get status?’

‘Well it’s become very, very difficult since January when the local connection guidelines came in, it seems that most authorities are sticking to them very, very rigidly.’
‘So there’s no way you could make an arrangement with local authority XXXX say..?’
‘We may do yes …’

‘So there might be scope for some kind of mechanism around the edges of Cardiff if we had prior service development …’

‘Yes, because there have been discussions with Rhondda Cynon Taf. Because Rhondda Housing Association have got void properties and they would have been quite happy to take the people.’

‘But the issue there is?’
‘Jobs. Plus refugees like to be … near the hub of what is going on in the city centre, so you know to go out to Porth is like sending them to XXXX …’

‘We’d like to see the RCOs really being pro-active, going out and setting up services, and everything in outlying areas … I think maybe some outreach services or something like that.’

‘Have you expressed that opinion to them?’
‘Yes, yes …’

‘And what kind of reaction did you get?’
‘They’d like to do it but of course it’s funding at the moment … I think if we managed to actually get more people into outlying areas then they would have a case for applying for funding for some outreach work, but until we can get people to …’

‘So who would fund that kind of outreach work?’
‘Well, they would normally get grant aid from the Welsh Assembly, from Communities First, from the local authorities, but they’d need to show that there was a need.’

The situation might be different in Swansea, where there is a desire amongst some refugees to be near Cardiff. Again, however, refugees would have to be convinced that their needs could be met:

‘On the basis of your experience talking to people, if someone was told that they could have a property in Swansea if they waited 12 months or they could have a property in Neath next week, albeit Neath is a way from Swansea city centre, would people take that kind of offer?’

‘I think some people might. Particularly if it was Neath rather than Llanelli, because I think it’s heading in the right direction for Cardiff or London.’

‘Would that also be true of Bridgend?’

‘Yes, I think so. I think people would be very cautious though and would ask about communities, what provision their was for faith needs, for shopping. I think people would look very practically at the options before saying yes or no.’

Should refugees be a priority category?

At present all local authorities have to make individual judgements on the need of each refugee applicant, because the law does not define refugees per se as a priority group. Making such individual evaluations is a subjective process, with different authorities and
different officers possibly giving different weight to different criteria. Judgements on vulnerability are qualitative and difficult to make, even for professionals adept at recognising the symptoms. For housing officers who have little training in recognising mental health problems even among longer term residents and who are working under pressure, it must be almost impossible, particularly when the applicant might also be unaware of their mental condition, or not be prepared to acknowledge problems. For example, one local authority told us how their housing officers were effectively the first filter for medical conditions:

‘If when we first see them they tell us that they have a medical condition – depending on how serious the medical condition is – we’ll make sure that they get a homeless interview so that then the medical officer can decide whether they would have a priority need or not.’

The same authority also described how information about mental (or even physical) health might only come out by accident:

‘Although we have had one, it wasn’t actually post-traumatic stress, it was actually schizophrenia but it didn’t become apparent until he actually got his leave to remain. It was when he was coming to see me in that initial period, that the interpreter picked it up and found out he was ... I mean normally, they would have been screened while they are asylum seekers so we will know.’

A Newport worker commented on the amount of discretion involved in the process

‘Mental health is where it gets really tricky.’

And an NGO worker told us how, because a woman did not wish to discuss her experience of torture with a housing officer, the evidence that had been seen and scrutinised by the Home Office and which had led to her being given refugee status was effectively ignored:

‘She’s been tortured and she can’t bring herself to talk about that torture in such an interview ... (To be asked) “What evidence have you got to show your vulnerability?” And I would respond that the evidence is that she has been accepted by the Home Office as having been tortured and persecuted, she has been accepted not only by the Home Office but the courts in this country, and offer that as evidence, and that is not accepted as evidence by the local authority.’

One solution to this problem of measuring individual need in the refugee population could be to accept that all those who have received refugee status are in priority need. This means that local authorities would be accepting that refugee status in itself meets the spirit and requirements of housing legislation.

This idea of making refugees a priority category was suggested to us by Wrexham Council. They were enthusiastic about this and acknowledged that such a change would streamline procedures, but were well aware that the matter would have to be handled sensitively and explained carefully to local residents, who were also waiting for local authority housing. Independent support came from a community worker in Swansea:

‘Most people come having experienced trauma, turbulent lives, uncertain lives, and I think based on that, people should be recognised as priority need, because there’s complete lack of knowledge of our UK systems, and systems in Wales. People need to be identified as priority need.’

They also acknowledged, in their response to the written questionnaire, that this change would have to be made by the Welsh Assembly Government:
Mapping the field – refugee housing in Wales

**Question:** ‘What is the single change which would help you most in relation to housing asylum seekers or refugees?’

**Answer:** Welsh Assembly Government to add refugees to the statutory priority need groups for people dispersed to an area.

**The importance of training**

And the last general point to come out of the material on local authorities was agreement on the importance of training staff about the circumstances and entitlements of refugees. All the local authorities which responded to the questionnaire felt that such training and awareness raising would improve their service and make it more accessible to refugees. One respondent thus wrote:

‘We aim to train staff on housing rights of people from abroad.’

Another wrote:

‘Need for staff training in relation to asylum seekers and refugees identified in BME Housing Action Plan.’
Chapter 11

Improving access to different pathways: housing associations

As has been noted in Chapter 3, housing associations in the UK have been reticent about engaging fully with the issue of refugee housing. The postal questionnaire sent to housing associations in the main cluster areas revealed the following conclusions:

• Five housing associations had experience of housing refugees, three did not;
• Six housing associations felt they had a role to play in housing refugees, one did not, and one failed to respond;
• When asked whether they thought they would become more or less involved in housing refugees in the next two years, six responded ‘About the same as at present’, and two responded ‘A little more involved’. One commented:
  ‘Little progress to date, and apparently little action proposed.’
• When asked ‘What do you think makes RSLs, in general, well suited to housing refugees?’, the range of responses was:
  ‘RSLs are not particularly well suited to house refugees.’
  ‘I wouldn’t say we are, RSLs can however source the kind of support refugees might need.’
  ‘Clear understanding of how to focus on multiagency working, evidenced by strong local partnerships with both statutory and user groups.’
• When asked what the main limits were on the extent to which RSLs could rehouse refugees, the replies focused upon the shortage of properties and the shortage of resources. Examples include:
  ‘The number of properties we have available, and more specifically the number of suitable properties we have available.’
  ‘Resources again. People with high support needs are time-intensive. RSLs who have mostly general needs stock might not be able to develop the right service.’
  ‘Lack of suitable accommodation.’
  Another RSL mentioned that the main limit for them was knowledge:
  ‘Not knowing their requirements,’
• All the RSLs felt they had the skills and knowledge to meet the needs of refugees, possibly with some help. In particular, respondents felt that they could not possibly have expert knowledge about every cultural and linguistic group that might turn to them for housing, and that they would therefore want advice and specialist support on these issues. Some housing associations said they would appreciate training on refugee issues;
• There was little agreement about what changes might make it more likely that RSLs would house refugees. One respondent said they would need more properties in inner city areas, while another said they would need more development funding;

• Only one RSL explicitly took account of the needs of refugees when they drew up their BME Housing Strategy. When drafting these strategies, two RSLs tried to capture the needs of refugees by consulting with the WRC, three relied upon the racial equality organisations to advise them, one used consultants, and two undertook no consultations;

• When asked how the housing and support needs of refugees might differ from those of other vulnerable groups, the most common response was that there is likely to be a language barrier. Other responses included the difficulty of getting refugees accepted by local communities, the media portrayal of refugees, and the possibility that refugees might need larger houses if they lived in extended families;

• Awareness of possible sources of funding for refugee initiatives was variable. One association was aware of all four sources of possible funding listed in the questionnaire (the Refugee Community Development Fund, the Refugee Integration Challenge Fund, the European Refugee Fund, and hact), whilst at the other extreme two associations were not aware of any of these sources. Three had heard only of hact, and two were aware of hact and one other funder.

So it seems that there might be a willingness amongst local housing associations to learn more about the needs of refugees, and to respond to them. The key limitations that housing associations themselves identified to further progress were a desire for more information, training and support, and the ever-present shortage of resources and properties.

During research interviews, other respondents were also asked about housing associations and their current and future role in the housing of refugees. Some of the comments chimed with the self-evaluations of the housing associations. A housing specialist therefore commented on the difficulties enforced by the shortage of stock:

‘There is such a scarce resource with housing. To be fair, I think you are in a context where there is a real housing need because you have things like Right to Buy, Right to Acquire and all this sort of thing, the stock just isn’t there.’

The same problem was highlighted in Wrexham:

‘What about people who might not be priority homeless with the council, are they ever considered by housing associations?’

‘I have made representations to housing associations.’

‘Successfully?’

‘No.’

‘And what kinds of reaction are you getting? What are the reasons that they are giving?’

‘There’s no houses to occupy them all.’

‘Is that the only reason?’

‘That’s what they say.’

And an RCO in Newport described how the shortage of stock had led to long waiting lists:
‘It’s getting worse. It’s getting harder and harder. The housing associations are longer than the Councils, they could be three or four years, two years.’

Other stakeholders described how local housing associations had perhaps not had the opportunity to acquire the knowledge that they needed successfully to service refugees:

‘How well informed do you think they are about the needs of refugees and the circumstances of refugees?’

‘Not particularly but I’m not sure anybody is really. I am just trying to think, we have had issues with them for a while about whether they could house asylum seekers through legislation and whether they were allowed. And also migrant workers and they have had difficulty understanding what their powers are to people from overseas, including refugees I think.’

‘When you’re talking to people in housing associations are they well informed about refugees and asylum seekers?’

‘No, I’m sure they don’t know one from another. That’s true of most of the services in Wrexham.’

Another respondent thought the key barrier was not lack of awareness at senior management levels, but how this awareness was translated into practice at the front line:

‘Housing associations: are they knowledgeable about refugee issues?’

‘I would say... at a higher management level where they are looking at strategy and where they are looking at ticking boxes for BME, they are open and they are interested. Perhaps less so for those staff who are housing people, who know there is a shortage, who know the desperation of an awful lot of people. So it is the same as a doctor’s surgery, the receptionists are the ones which are not interested that you have to get past. So I would say there is a lot of information that they need.’

But external commentators also suggested additional reasons why RSLs had not been as active in the field of refugee housing as they might have been. One of the main ones was fear: fear of the unknown and fear of controversy:

‘There are certain stigma subjects and refugees is one of them. So what do we do? What we do is we keep our heads in the sand and hope someone else will pick it up and that way, we don’t have to be associated with any controversy.’

‘So the main barriers which are holding RSLs back, you think, are fear?’

‘Yes, I think fear, and not (being) quite sure how to deal with it.’

Another reason for not getting involved in refugee housing was risk. Some housing associations were thought to regard refugees as too much of a risk:

‘So when you’re liaising with housing associations, how receptive are they to the idea of housing refugees?’

‘If they’re working, I think they’re OK about that. I think their main point is “Can they pay their rent?” and quite rightly too.’

Yet another theme that arose in a number of interviews was the need for awareness-raising and better training of housing association staff in refugee issues and needs. There has clearly already been progress in this area:
‘Any scope there for training?’
‘Yes, we have a Regional Strategy Group in North Wales and we had a joint training event earlier this year on the housing rights of people from abroad and we invited the housing associations to that.’

‘And they came along?’
‘Yes. They did.’

WRC’s Newport move-on worker has organised occasional awareness raising sessions in which refugees looking for accommodation can meet staff from RSLs to discuss possibilities and procedures. This two-way dialogue not only sensitises RSLs in Newport to the needs and situations of refugees but also alerts the latter to possibilities they might not otherwise have considered. These surgeries are considered to be a success by WRC, by the refugees who participate in them and by the main housing associations that attend.

WRC’s Housing Development Officer (in conjunction with hact) has also been organising a programme of briefing sessions on refugee issues for RSLs in South Wales. Further details of these can be found in box 11 (below), and the response to them has been very positive. WRC hopes to roll them out to the other cluster areas when resources permit.

Despite this, there still seems to be further scope for staff training:

‘So there is awareness of the needs of refugees at the top of RSLs but the problem is how do we raise awareness amongst other staff?’

‘I would say so, yes.’

‘How do we crack that then?’

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**Good practice example 21**

**WRC Briefing sessions for RSLs in 2005 and 2006**

WRC’s Housing Development Officer has organised a series of awareness-raising workshops with RSLs in Swansea, Newport and Cardiff.

Each workshop lasted about three hours, and Dewi Owen provided briefings on how the asylum process works; who is (and who is not) a refugee; and how RSLs can help refugees. There was also discussion about how RSLs might work more effectively in the future with RCOs and the WRC.

At the first workshop in Cardiff on 20 January 2005, there were representatives of Glamorgan and Gwent Housing Association, the YMCA, and the local authority. Participants included the Director of Glamorgan & Gwent and the lettings staff and support workers of the YMCA and local authority.

Another session was held in the offices of Gwalia Housing Association in Swansea on the 7 December 2005. 20 of the organisation’s staff attended.

Because of the positive feedback, more of these training sessions are planned in Spring 2006. In future, these will target not only RSLs but local authority providers as well.

*Source: interview*
‘Either … pushing for refugees to be given some kind of priority where there is a rule or there is a policy … Or … open days and training sessions for frontline staff who are going to meet refugees and realise they are normal people and they have got very large needs.’

‘How much awareness is there in housing associations in Wales about BME communities and their needs?’

‘I think it is variable and I think there is a definite gap there between what housing providers are trying to do and the BME communities themselves.’

‘You told me you’ve talked to housing associations about making them more aware of the needs of refugee housing. Have you talked to most of the local housing associations in Wrexham?’

‘No, just some, because I physically haven’t got the time.’

‘Do you think housing associations in North Wales would appreciate further training from an organisation like hact?’

‘Oh, well if they could provide it free that would be good, yes!’

In addition to the WRC and hact, Wales may soon have another potential trainer. The Red Cross in Swansea told us that they were developing capacity to provide refugee awareness training to housing associations and statutory agencies, free-of-charge:

‘Mark and one of his colleagues have just completed, they’ve just qualified as trainers in refugee awareness and one of the things that we hope to do from this autumn onwards, is to offer that training, to the statutory sector, to local communities, wherever, and we then hope to also build up refugees who can help to deliver the training as well.’

And the final topic that was aired by a number of stakeholders was the likelihood of refugee groups establishing their own housing associations in Wales. The general opinion was that this might be possible in the long term after considerable development work. For example, one community spokesperson said: ‘Yes definitely but you have to make sure that the community has the capacity and has the experience otherwise it would fail’. More likely in the medium term were partnership arrangements between RCOs and RSLs, in which the former nominated applicants and provided tenancy support and the latter provided stock and property management expertise. But in the short term, the preferred route seemed to be to strike arrangements with housing associations so that they would take a set number of nominations per year from the refugee population. One model for this was the arrangement being negotiated between WRC and Charter Housing in Newport (see box 12 on next page).

‘You have already said there are no BME housing associations in Wales at present. Do you think it is likely that we will get BME housing associations in Wales?’

‘In time I’d like to think so. There are some really positive examples of BME registered social landlords in England and I don’t see any reason why that shouldn’t happen in Wales but I think that for every BME registered social landlord that has succeeded in England, another has failed… So, my feeling is yes, I would like to see it but not until we are ready for it. You have to be very clear about what your registered social landlord is about and how you are going to manage it, and financially how it is going to stack up. That is why some smaller BME registered social landlords failed because they just couldn’t survive, and there have been quite a few that have merged. They still operate
with a BME speciality but as part of a larger group structure because financially they couldn’t get it to stack up. So to be honest, I don’t think short term and I am not convinced medium term but then, I tend to think the wait will be worthwhile if and when it happens... I certainly think that there may be BME communities out there that feel extremely frustrated who would want it to happen but in terms of specific communities, I couldn’t say.’

‘Do you think there is potential for refugee housing associations in Cardiff or Wales?’

‘Yes definitely but you have to make sure that the community has the capacity and has the experience otherwise it would fail.’

Evidence from research interviews suggests that some housing associations were becoming much more active in the housing of refugees. We were told that Gwalia in Swansea had recently housed an increased number of refugees:

‘It’s really only over the last couple of months that we’ve seen quite a dramatic increase in the number of people being offered housing association accommodation.’

‘Is that with a particular housing association?’

‘Yes Gwalia. And that has been working very much with the two resettlement workers. I don’t know whether there was one specific housing stock group within Gwalia that suddenly became available for young single men. We just noticed quite a rapid increase of clients going into Gwalia housing for a while.’

And, a recent agreement between the WRC and Gwalia in Newport is indicative of a growing willingness amongst RSLs to engage with refugee housing in Wales.

**Good practice example 22**

**Charter Housing Priority Card System in Newport**

WRC’s Housing Development Officer held a series of meetings with Charter Housing Association between August and December 2005. As a result, Charter has offered a priority card scheme for up to two or three refugee families in the Newport area.

The scheme would operate in collaboration with the move-on worker at the Welsh Refugee Council in the Newport office. She would screen refugees in need of housing and refer suitable candidates to Charter.

Charter would expect those who were chosen to be in genuine need of accommodation, and has offered tenancy support, if it is required.

Those referred might include a family that needs a stable home for their children to integrate successfully or an individual who has been through a traumatic time in their original country and now needs support and stability.

*Source: interview*
Potential value

We have already noted the way in which the research literature emphasises the potential significance of refugee community organisations (RCOs) in the housing, support, and integration of refugees.

The RCO sector in Wales is unevenly spread across the Principality. There is a significant number of long established RCOs in Cardiff (as well as newly emerging groups), a small number of organisations in Newport, only a tiny number of nascent organisations in Swansea, and one emerging group in Wrexham. Despite their small number, they are all doing valuable work.

There seemed to be agreement amongst research participants that RCOs did have an important role to play in Wales:

‘I think they can provide them in a more comprehensible manner the correct information and I think they can be very valuable.’

‘Oh, yes, there is a role. I think they are good sounding board for any complaints because a lot of people don’t come directly to us to complain because people tend to be a little bit worried about what exactly we are … Do we represent the government? … So quite often … they will go to the RCO and they will complain about something which will come to my ears and then we resolve it. It is usually quite a minor issue … They are quite useful for resolving inter-area problems … and also quite good at introducing new government methodologies into communities as well. When there is a new Act or a new amendment to an Act, it is quite a good way for them to be involved with that because they can speak the same language for a start and they can get the message across far more directly than we could.’

‘I think as long as RCOs keep a very close relationship with the local authority or the central body, then… I think RCOs have a very good role to play and a useful role to play, as long as they maintain close relationships with everybody.’

Specific examples were also given of the good work that RCOs could do for their constituents, and how this work could complement the activities of the formal providers:

‘I think in particular about Cardiff, I know that (named individual) does an awful lot of work perhaps going to appointments with people … By doing some of the time-intensive work, we can do some more of the development work and cascade information to RCOs …’

‘I think, the way we are dealing with housing issues in our community is, we established very good relations with for example the YMCA. You’d be referred by our community to the YMCA…’

‘These are refugees?’
'Yes, refugees. So they stay there for one year or nine months, and they would, at the end of this, get a flat from the housing association. They would move-on. That is mainly because we got an agreement – an unwritten agreement - that people who stay at YMCA should be helped.'

'So you are able to vouch for Sudanese people that you send to the YMCA?'

'Yes, It’s not a problem. They know that when a Sudanese comes in they’re well behaved. When they leave, there will be another one and so on.'

'How closely do you work with refugee community organisations, for example you mentioned the Somali advice centre?'

'We subcontract some of our support hours to the Somali advice centre.'

'How does that work?'

'They support eight people in the Somali community.'

'So they provide everything for those eight people that you would provide to them if they were your cases?'

'Yes. Theirs is more of a low level support, because they’re not people who have newly got their decisions. They’re more likely to be people who live in the area down in Butetown and they just need a bit of support with benefits or reading their letters and things.'

'And not that support workers at the Welsh Refugee Council don’t do their work. I don’t want to say that, but there’s always that missing link, the 24/7 sort of thing that you’re talking about. People go home at 10pm, sometimes you’re thinking, it’s time we were in bed now. And sometimes they’re just telling you, today I got home from work and there was a letter saying this and this, and you’re thinking well you could have phoned me in the morning and you could have waited, but no, they have to have that reassurance before they go to bed to know that tomorrow morning they can see somebody and somebody can help them do something about it.'

'So, what kind of housing assistance do you give to your refugee clients?'

'Tenancy support but then we are kind of relying on the housing officer to try and move stuff on. If there’s issues with housing benefit, housing benefits might be cut off and you know, the family might not know what are their chances of chasing that through.'

'So how would you get involved in that? The family would come to you with a problem?'

'A lot of this stuff is where the refugee family will come around the house, knock on the door, come to the resource centre, try to get us involved.'

'And then you would take that issue up with the housing association or the housing officer and you would negotiate on their behalf?'

'Yes.'

'So in effect you are acting as a voice for the client and you negotiate?'

'Yes.'
‘Does it ever work in reverse where the housing association approaches you?’
‘Yes.’
‘And what kinds of things do they approach you for? Is it the same kinds of things, tenancy support?’
‘Yes. They may ask for advice and which agency they need to go through to maybe get a Somali interpreter for this particular family. Or “Is there any information that you can give with this issue or that issue”? Or do we know of anything going on for young people in the area for the Somali community?. People will ring up and say “Do you know of any classes and other stuff that’s going on for your community that one of our tenants could get involved in?”’

Limits on effectiveness: the external view

Respondents outside the RCO sector identified four key factors which they felt limited the effectiveness of all RCOs. The first of these was a simple lack of capacity. In Wrexham, the issue was that RCOs barely exist:

‘We have no refugee community organisations because we historically had a very small ethnic minority population.’

‘So there aren’t the networks that people can turn to for advice?’
‘No.’

One commentator explained why RCOs might have been slow to develop in Wrexham:

‘Everything is very South Wales-centric, Cardiff-centric. North Wales is left on the back burner, and on top of that you’ve got the fact that we take the smallest number of asylum seekers. We’ve always been a very mixed dispersal area, therefore it’s difficult to find enough people from the same ethnicity or the same nationality to form a group.’

Elsewhere in Wales, observers felt that Welsh RCOs simply did not have the resources, manpower or facilities to achieve their full potential. This was true throughout Wales, but particularly pronounced outside Cardiff. A housing worker in Swansea amplified:

‘Resources definitely. Places to meet. Resources in terms of computers. Meeting space is a very pertinent issue at the moment and then not many RCOs take advantage of support that’s available to them beyond the refugee sector, so they’ll meet with community development worker but as far as I know, don’t meet with many others.’

This lack of resources also meant that RCOs had to rely on volunteers. As a result, one South Wales-based housing provider simply said that the key constraints on RCOs were ‘quality of staff, then number of staff’. Nor is life easy for those who freely offer their time. They have to carve time from very busy lives to help others:

‘I think other commitments that members of those RCOs have in terms of their own life, people are still living very turbulent lives, they’ve got great intentions and have been through a lot themselves and want to assist other members of their community but are unsure where they stand in terms of their life. Other commitments such as education, work as well, legal, legal work.’

The second issue was access to funds to consolidate capacity or expand it:

‘The organisations that you are interacting with, what do you think their key strengths and key weaknesses are as co-workers?’
‘I think one of the problems, general problems is with funding ….. Because there are fairly limited funding opportunities, people are a little bit protectionist about what they do and don’t look for partnerships.’

The third issue, which is directly related to the previous two, is that RCOs are sometimes unable to afford the time or money to receive up to the minute training or to acquire the very latest specialist knowledge to deliver the advice and information that they are being called on to provide:

‘I don’t necessarily know whether they put enough time in on the homework to give the information and level of quality that might be desired.’

‘As long as RCOs maintain close relationships with everybody they have a useful role to play. But if they don’t…before you know it, you have differing information being provided by the local authority and by themselves to the refugees.’

‘RCOs need to get their facts straight.’

And the fourth issue is that organisations outside the refugee communities sometimes did not know who RCOs really represented. While they acknowledged that different refugee communities might have different needs, for some issues they felt it would be beneficial to hear a single strong voice advocating the rights of refugees and asylum seekers:

‘We’ve got Refugee Voice who’s trying to be the overarching organisation for refugee groups and I’m not sure how far exactly they’ve got, because we looked at that as part of Sunrise, and how we might interact with them but we are not really aware of how they operate and how they’re supported, whether they are the refugee’s voice.’

‘Is it your impression that Refugee Voice Wales is an effective mechanism for bringing RCOs together?’

‘I used to work quite closely with them perhaps a year and a half ago. I didn’t think they had that effect. What tended to happen back then (and this might not be representative of what’s happening now), is that the kind of stronger, more established organisations were attending and were working relatively well together. When I was working with communities directly, I was trying to encourage newcomers to attend, but they were finding themselves quite lost with it.’

‘Alienated or overawed?’

‘Probably a bit of both. They weren’t entirely sure what they were doing there or what they could learn from it, or what their role was.’

One commentator noted how there are plans afoot to create a single coherent voice for BME communities in Cardiff, with the inference that this could represent refugee groups, too.

Finally, the research interviews also provided evidence that agencies were working to expand the capacity of existing RCOs and assist the development of new ones. The WRC in Wrexham moved to new larger offices in the summer of 2005 and one of the drivers behind this relocation was to create communal workspace for nascent RCOs, as well as a learning centre for asylum seekers and refugees.

‘We worked in a very small premises, across the corridor until last week, and one of the reasons I wanted to move to bigger premises is because I want to implement a lot of what I call development initiatives. I have done a lot of work with the Fairshare money
Good practice example 23

DPIA Community Development Work in Swansea

‘So how is she trying to build capacity and what is she doing?’

‘Well, she tries to facilitate meeting places for people so for a while they fund it: groups, meeting places. Works with them on things like developing constitutions, offering training, guiding to training, information on funding, working issues such as how management committees work, how to be accountable.’

‘So generic management?’

‘Yes.’

‘Is that a permanent appointment or is a short-term appointment?’

‘Well, I think they’ve recently secured further funds but until recently they thought their funding was going to stop September, October time.’

‘She was on a one year contract, two year contract?’

‘I did the job for 2 years, and then she’s been doing it for the last year. The post was based in Cardiff and the two years I did it, I was in Swansea one day a week, for the year that she’s done it, she’s been in Swansea for 2 days a week.’

‘I was really wondering if the project was temporarily funded and if that funding ended, then what?’

‘That has been a pertinent issue recently because she’s had to say to the groups she’s been working with sorry we can’t offer funding for the time being because for a period of a couple of months they had to close down all operations and just operate on their core funding. And all the time that she’s been working with those groups, she’s been trying to say ‘you need to look at sustainable ways of supporting yourselves’. I don’t know how many of the groups reach that stage, but then groups tend to then move to somebody’s house and work from somebody’s house.’

Source: interview

…and I’m hoping to be bidding on the Fairshare for a number of projects, one of those projects is a resource centre, very small resource center. Another is shared office space for RCOs.’

The intention of WRC staff in Wrexham is to stimulate the development of a local Refugee Forum bringing together all nationalities and ethnic groups under one umbrella, before possibly later creating separate RCOs for the larger groups.

In Swansea, Displaced People in Action have a Community Development Worker that has taken it upon herself to nurture community organisations (see box 13 above).

We were also told that the Welsh consortium had an employee whose job it was to alert groups to funding opportunities and assist them in making applications, although there were clearly limits on what he had been able to achieve with the resources at his disposal:
‘His job is to find funding ... but ... not just for RCOs. It’s for organisations as well, and he was instrumental in identifying and then securing the European funding for Swansea. So his job is much wider than just RCOs.’

‘Do RCOs have direct access to him?’

‘Yes, but I don’t know how he advertises himself. I mean in Swansea the RCOs tend to come here and meet with DPIA ...’

‘So has the consortium, for example, ever organised a study day on raising funding to which RCOs are invited, or a half day or...?’

‘I don’t think so, I think what has been done is that Aled (the guy we’re talking about) put together a leaflet.’

‘In a variety of languages?’

‘No. English only I think. And then that was distributed, and it’s updated perhaps every year or every six months.’

‘Does he ever offer surgeries where people can come along or an RCO could come along say I’ve read the booklet, can I have a chat with you about the European Refugee Fund?’

‘Not that I know of, no.’

**Limits to effectiveness: the internal view**

We interviewed advocates of seven RCOs based in Cardiff, Newport and Swansea. Not surprisingly, many of the community leaders to whom we spoke identified the same barriers to effectiveness described above.

The difficulty of acquiring core funding was mentioned repeatedly:

‘You were telling me about the funding office within the consortium. And that’s all about capacity building?’

‘Yes, it’s about capacity building but the problem with that, it’s lots of small funds to do with project-based stuff. Not to do with capacity, it’s to get involved to do a volunteering project and it’s for £3,000 and £5,000. A lot of it is not for core development officer, core fund, premises, both capital and revenue and all the rest of it. Very little.’

‘Do you have any external funding?’

‘No, no. We did get funding from the Home Office which set us up in 2003. It allowed us to attend a meeting and set up a database of what was going on. Other than that we haven’t really had any funding- whatever financial assistance we’ve had has been through other organisations, other established organisations giving us some support, for example attending a workshop.’

Linked to this was the limited capacity which organisations have because of their reliance on volunteers:

‘Volunteers, they come and go. When they can spare a few hours, people do tend to say “Look, I’ll go to so and so today” and people do accompany people if it’s housing or other issues come up. You know, if the police want to talk to somebody and they can locate them straightaway and someone goes in there. There are always individuals who would give a little bit of time but with life as it is, it’s difficult and we are reliant on volunteers.’
The consequences of this lack of capacity is that organisations are not able to reach their full potential and instead have to focus on crisis management:

‘The type of work I’m doing is continuously fire fighting. There’s always people on the phone, the asylum seeker community and the refugee community, a lot of the issues they’ve got is an emergency. So if it’s an asylum seeker and it’s a solicitor and their payment doesn’t come and there’s kids in the house, there’s a gas leak in the property or there’s something going on, it’s constantly something urgent going on.’

Another consequence is that they are frequently unable to develop the specialist expertise that their clients demand, and may therefore be forced into providing advice that is incomplete, out of date or inaccurate.

‘What proportion of the advice you’re giving is on housing, do you think?’

‘Basically, every other question, every other person that we have advised is about homes. Whether they are an asylum seeker who have just arrived in Cardiff, or even when they have been allocated a house there is always this housing issue involved with that.’

‘Amongst your five volunteers have any of you got any specialist knowledge in housing?’

‘No.’

‘You haven’t?’

‘Not in the sense of having been trained in housing policy or anything like that, no.’

‘So essentially you’re a signposting organisation?’

‘A signposting organisation ... Another problem that you were asking, do we have any housing knowledge. For example, we found sometimes we signposted somebody and then you are told “No, you should actually do a b c d e”. So you end up going forwards and backwards and trying to understand, ok but I can do for this person but for that person no.’

‘Do you ever direct people to the local authority?’

‘No, we don’t send people there. We don’t know how it works there. And they don’t know also how we operate. We should establish this communication, really communication is a good issue.’

What also became clear from the interviews with RCOs was a number of issues that had not been raised by other stakeholders. These were about:

1. the desire for training and mentoring;
2. a perception by RCOs that they were somehow not trusted and seen to be credible;
3. the need to work together as a movement.

All the RCOs we talked to wanted to develop capacity and become more than simple signposting organisations. They wanted to acquire specialist knowledge that they could then pass on to their communities in their own languages and through their own channels. Evidence of this can be seen in the following quotations:

‘What I’ve always tried to do is work with for example with universities, Cardiff university, and try and see what is going on. What courses are coming up, that our people can go into. We try and make ourselves aware of what is going on, attend whatever comes up.’
Because we’re members of the WCVA and we would obviously speak to them about training courses and capacity, training of volunteers, management community structures. There’s an organisation that’s just recently moved here, a BME organisation which deals specifically with capacity and they write to us all the time because they do something around mentoring for BME communities. And we’re not able to make use of that service because we’re just dealing with day-to-day stuff we need to do.’

OK training. It is the capacity we have not to do it and we need more training. Years ago we receive the training and we need again the training for to help very well, and to have a very good knowledge about housing and accommodation.’

Do you get an opportunity to go on management courses?’

To be honest, no. Well, it’s very difficult, even though we understand that’s a huge area for us and a weakness. We want it to go, but then who’s going to do the stuff we’re doing now?’

The Housing Development Worker with the WRC has recently responded to some of these demands by organising day workshops on housing for RCOs, and these seem to have been very well received (see box 14 below).

Good practice example 24

WRC/HACT training days on housing issues for RCOs

In January 2006 WRC/hact provided a workshop for refugee community leaders from Cardiff, Swansea and Newport. The course ran over six weeks and was held at the City United Reformed Church in Cardiff. Hact provided funding and specialist consultants and trainers. Dewi Owen (Housing Development Officer at WRC) helped organise the event.

The course was delivered by Dewi Owen, staff from hact, Tamsin Stirling (an independent housing consultant), and a range of people drawn from local agencies. It was well attended.

The course content aimed to give refugee community leaders a basic knowledge of the housing and accommodation providers in Wales. It included an explanation of the Draft Refugee Housing Action Plan, an examination of the private, local authority and RSL sectors, material on domestic violence and racial harassment, an explanation of council and housing benefits and other benefits, and a briefing on Prevention of Homelessness and Supported Housing options.

Hact has delivered a similar course in parts of England and found that half of those who took part in the course have since been able to secure employment as a result of attending.

The course evaluation and feedback was very positive. In particular, it allowed refugee community leaders to network amongst themselves and forge relationships with housing providers.

Source: interview
A related issue that was discussed during the interviews was whether Welsh RCOs would appreciate opportunities for their staff to be seconded short term to work with housing providers. This would allow RCO staff to gain a detailed and up to date knowledge of how allocation procedures and priorities operated, and would also sensitise RSLs and Local Authorities to the specific needs and concerns of refugee communities. As we have seen in Chapter 3, this has been trialled in other parts of the UK to good effect. Going beyond this, we also enquired whether Welsh RCOs would appreciate the opportunity of being mentored by housing providers. Such an arrangement has the potential not only to build capacity and competence within RCOs, but also to improve awareness of RCOs, and trust in their abilities. The response to both these suggestions was very positive indeed, with every single RCO being enthusiastic about the possibility:

‘Yes because it gives people an opportunity to move on and acquire skills and it might even become a career for them.’

‘That would be very attractive because housing and housing benefits is just a huge nightmare so benefits get stopped for one week because some form hasn’t been provided or something goes wrong and then the family doesn’t know until weeks later. Then they refuse to pay arrears and again. If it could be dealt with at an early stage... So that’s why secondment would be very attractive.’

‘Would the same apply with the Benefits Agency or again, do you know how that works?’

‘Well, I’ve got a rough idea but again, it would be fantastic to...Any benefit information would work very well. If opportunities existed for us to go along for training.’

On secondment:

‘That would be really welcome, I mean we always willingly open our arms to any sort of assistance or training that really helps us understand the whole working system. I think the good thing about that is apart from just learning on information that you can bring back to the community, you as an individual are also being empowered. To probably take up housing that you will probably do later, so I think we always open and welcome such ideas.’

On mentoring:

‘I think we’ve always welcomed that, like you find, what we have done for example with organisations such as DPIA is to say, OK we all sit in a meeting and take minutes and things like that. We could teach people for example how to conduct a meeting properly so that we do it professionally to invite other people so they don’t get bored. I think that is something we are actually clamouring for.’

Another key issue that RCOs raised in the discussions was that they felt that some other stakeholders did not really trust them or regard them as credible and reliable service providers:

‘We think a lot of things that we keep coming across is this thing of integrity. How much do they trust you? How much do they know what sort of work you are doing? How can they really assume, or trust that you are going to do what you say you’re going to do?’

‘Do you feel that the people who are responsible for providing funding and access to housing actually trust organisations such as yours, refugee community organisations?’
‘I don’t think so, if they trust they would give us more, some opportunities…No, for me, I think that they have to trust us, because we are here, we are doing the job. They don’t know our communities. We know them very well, we know what we need, but they have to trust us. But there is no communication with them.’

‘So because there’s no communication, there’s no trust.’

‘No trust, yes.’

One RCO told us about how they tried to raise awareness of their existence, in order to build credibility:

‘If it’s educational you go there. A seminar talking about whatever. You make yourself known there and hopefully you make the links that are missed. But it’s a learning process and we are still trying to break those barriers and tell people OK we are here.’

Finally, RCOs talked to us about the difficulties of numerous small and varied organisations working together to achieve common goals. Although all the RCOs were acting as advocates, there was a feeling that they had yet to make their voice heard, or yet to have the impact that they envisioned. This seemed to be partly because organisations were small and necessarily dealing with day-to-day issues of service delivery and even survival. But there was also a sense of disappointment that no effective overarching body or forum had emerged that could take a strategic and co-ordinating view, for example identifying shared concerns, exchanging good practice, or lobbying on issues of common concern. No-one, however, denied that numerous attempts have been made to bring groups together for networking. Refugee Voice was mentioned in this context, as was WRC’s leadership, and their provision of shared office space and facilities for RCOs at their Cardiff HQ:

‘How much does your organisation talk to, and work with, other RCOs?’

‘Ok, we talk to other RCOs when we have a meeting, every meeting.’

‘And how often are those meetings?’

‘Frequently. Each month we have a meeting.’

‘Do you ever get together in one room and say “We’re going to have half a day on housing and look at our shared problems and how we can lobby local authorities”?’

‘No, we do have meetings but they’re not consistent. It’s a patchy picture.’

‘So what do you think stops you coming together as a united force to bring about change?’

‘Resources and funds. Capacity … If RCOs could come together, if Refugee Voice Wales was far more effective, that skill would then cascade then to all the RCOs. So there would be sharing of skills, people coming through … And sharing knowledge and moving on from there.’

‘We could be far more effective if we were working with each other. We are hugely supported by the Welsh Refugee Council and I think that’s got a lot to do with the leadership of the Welsh Refugee Council and you can see a difference in how the RCOs function now, as to how they used to function. A lot of that has to be down to the Welsh Refugee Council … I think they’re fully aware that really true empowerment is people doing things for themselves.’
'The other question I then have to ask you is how much networking goes on between RCOs, and how much partnership working is there? Do you work with the Ethiopian community or the Somali community? Do you talk about putting joint bids in?'

'I must say we haven’t really been working together in a unified, coordinated way in terms of trying to get together and say let’s put in a bid for this project and do it in a sort of interlinked way and purposeful way, but the other way that I thought we could try and do it is to get together as Refugee Voice Wales, and sort of say we represent all of these sort of organisations who are interested in becoming members. Perhaps as that organisation we can try and say “OK let’s come up with a project and put in a bid”, because one of the things that (this is a personal observation and nothing to do with the organisation or anything like that), I’ve observed is that there is still a way in which the RCOs are still trying to compete instead of cooperating and complementing and working towards a particular goal. But I think it’s a learning process for us because we come from societies where there are lots of conflict and everything. The problem is trying to get us to trust each other.'

'Where would I get some information on Refugee Voice Wales? Because that sounds to be the perfect vehicle for bringing organisations together.'

'We’re struggling to constitute the organisation. Although we have somebody who is working as a secretary for Refugee Voice Wales, and he’s taking the message from them to them, like you were saying, if somebody then says “Where can I get a pamphlet or something?” we don’t have that. This is where we say let’s constitute ourselves and see how we can represent all the different members.'

'And how many members have you got?'

'When it started we have all these sort of members. 45… put their addresses and contact numbers together, and we told them “OK we’l have a monthly meeting”. But it has just gone to a situation where we are counting six or so organisations that will turn up with the same sort of faces turning up every other month. So you can see the sort of problem that we are having already.'
Chapter 13

Co-working

The issue of co-working has already arisen in several of the sections above. At the heart of this are three issues: communication, trust and credibility. As has been described in other sections above, there is clear evidence of successful co-working in Wales between and within different sectors. For example, one RCO described their co-working with the local authority as follows:

‘Yes. XXX was the key worker in Newport and I am in contact with her on a weekly basis. Whether it’s about me providing her with some information or maybe we’re sharing some information about a particular client or maybe we’re both supporting a particular client with some issue, it’s a continuous thing. We do work very very closely with them.’

A WRC worker commented on their relationship with Clearsprings:

‘Clearsprings we will see very, very regularly and we have a very good relationship with them. They do ring us regularly and we ring them regularly and they come and visit us. There is a good working relationship.’

And in Swansea there is a monthly multi-agency meeting.

There appears to be a considerable amount of communication taking place within some sectors but interviews suggested that this could be further improved, and that communication between sectors was still only starting to develop. It seems as though the establishment of various fora might reduce the need for individual stakeholders to continually re-invent the wheel, and help ‘join up’ policy and delivery. It is acknowledged, however, that active membership of such fora will impose an additional burden on organisations that are already severely stretched. They will need to be convinced very early on that attendance will deliver results that are of benefit to their staff or to their clients.

Some examples of the lack of clarity, overlap, pitfalls of inadequate communication and problems with isolationism can be seen in the next few quotes.

On the need for a strategic overview to produce strategic action:

‘I think that because there are fairly limited funding opportunities, people are a little bit protectionist about what they do and don’t look for partnerships. It’s starting to change, and there’s a lot of duplication so even though there’s a coordinating committee where everybody is supposed to share, the reality is that for example, we were doing move-on work. No-one in Swansea realised we were doing it.’

‘You would have thought that as part of the integration policy and the development of that that the whole funding issue would be looked at, because if we can see that sometimes there’s duplication then clearly we need to look at that.’

‘If we could do a bit more strategic thinking about how we put these funding bids together and do a bit of partnership working.’

‘How would you like to see that done?’
'I think by... understanding the funding opportunities that are out there and having a programme, being able to identify what the needs are currently in that place, actually looking at the funding programme and then trying to set aside time to work and build-up and discuss issues together and what strengths various organisations can bring...So in fact you’ve got people working with refugees who don’t really understand what other refugee organisations are doing, and their strengths and weaknesses, and I think we’ve got to start with that.'

On confusion about roles:

‘It’s interesting when you talk of other organisations not being aware of one another.’
‘They are aware, they don’t really appreciate exactly what each other does. And actually that’s changing.’

‘What’s the relationship between Shelly’s work and the two move-on officers here? Do they do different things, or do they do the same things?’
‘I don’t know because I don’t really know what the move-on workers do here.’

‘There’s no central point, there is no central body or central forum to do this, everyone is doing what they want, what they think.’

‘So there isn’t a refugee housing forum in Wales in the Assembly?’
‘There is a housing forum, but I don’t think many of the refugee communities are involved. It’s mainly the organisations like us, and the council.’

‘So how do you decide who does what, and who goes where?’
‘The general rule is that the council will do the housing, the housing work. Welsh Refugee Council will do the access to benefits, backdated payments, that kind of work, and then Red Cross will do the tenancy support side of things. That’s a very general rule.’

‘Right, does it work?’
‘I think it could be tighter.’

On sharing good practice:

‘How much networking is there between you and other refugee and asylum teams in, Swansea, Wrexham and Newport?’
‘Not a lot, there isn’t time. I mean we do go to meetings at the Welsh Assembly, having said that it’s about 9-10 months since the last one.’

‘Is that meeting somewhere you can put your heads together and exchange best practice, or ideas?’
‘Not really, because there’s lots to bring out that is around housing strategy in Wales, so yes, you can’t really get together and work out little bits and pieces as far as what we do.’
'Do you network with RCOs in England which may be dealing with Congolese people? So is there a Congolese association in London, or Birmingham, or Manchester?'

'Yes, in Birmingham I write them, African, Midlands African support development.'

'So are you in regular contact with them?'

'No, I asked them to send me their literature. To read more. .. I don’t know exactly their policies, I don’t know exactly how they work between me, networking enough for us....I don’t like that. We don’t have funding, .. sometimes we have some ideas but we don’t get support.'

'I just think that a lot of local authorities work in isolation, and Wrexham does as well, they never know what the authority is doing next door. You don’t have to travel thousands of miles, just share some knowledge with next door, and authorities don’t seem to do that.'

'Would you (as a WRC move-on worker) get to know about, for example, the Homefinder project? Do you get to know about the half way house in Wrexham? Do you have a monthly meeting where you and your equivalents meet up to talk about?'

'No, not really. We do meet up. There’s a couple of different things there. We meet up. The team leaders meet up but because of the kind of most of our work tends to be around NASS and supporting asylum seekers, that tends to dominate discussion. The move-on project has been in a real state of flux for the whole of its first operational year, and unfortunately in Swansea, and I know I keep going back to this, but it does underpin a whole lack of knowledge and expertise. So in terms of housing development, no there isn’t that forum within the Welsh Refugee Council, enabling people to meet once a month. Once every two months. But hopefully that is something that is going to change following the review next week.'

'That would be helpful?'

'I think that would be extremely helpful.'
Chapter 14
Innovative initiatives

Finally, it is important to mention two specific refugee ‘housing’ projects that fall outside the contexts described above. These are the hact-funded Housing Development post in Cardiff and Gwalia Housing Group’s Foundations in Maintenance Project.

The latter is an innovative project that could be both replicated throughout Wales and extended to achieve even more ambitious objectives. The project is fully described in box 15 (below and next page), but aims to both refurbish vandalised void housing association properties in Swansea, and provide asylum seekers and refugees with opportunities to acquire skills and experience in the construction trades. It is significant for four main reasons. Firstly, it improves the life-chances and economic prospects of those volunteers who participate in it. Secondly, it increases the housing stock available to all. Thirdly it allows refugees and asylum seekers to visibly put something back into local communities, thereby challenging the media myths about refugees ‘taking’ rather than ‘giving’. And fourthly, it provides opportunities for people from refugee communities to meet with members of long-settled communities in an atmosphere of mutual co-operation.

Currently the project has refurbished one house that is now used as a neighbourhood centre, but there is no reason why similar projects could not make a substantial contribution directly to putting vandalised and void properties back into residential use in areas of high housing demand.

Good practice example 24

Gwalia Housing Group’s ‘Foundations in Maintenance Project, Swansea

The project was established as a pilot in 2004 after a brainstorming session between Gwalia’s Community Initiatives Co-ordinator and a senior member of Swansea Bay Racial Equality Council. Their initial aim was two-fold: to provide refugees and asylum seekers with an opportunity to learn new skills in the construction trades or to formalise existing skills into recognised UK qualifications; and to return a badly vandalised housing association property to residential use in an area where there was a high void rate and anti-social behaviour.

Site work began in July 2004 and the property was fully refurbished by April 2005, when a decision was taken to use it as a neighbourhood drop-in centre rather than a house.

The project was funded by the Welsh Assembly (BME Social Housing Grant) Swansea City and Council, Gwalia and the Construction Industry Training Board (through its STEPS programme). It was operated with help from the Local Partnership, Life Long Learning and the Construction Industry Training Board.
The project recruited nine people, three from the local community and six via nomination from Swansea Bay Racial Equality Council. Two of the latter were asylum seekers. Each received a skills audit and then had a personal training plan developed for them. Opportunities were then provided for training in plastering, carpentry, joinery, decoration, plumbing, bricklaying, and landscaping. Volunteers worked for one day per week, for which they received only expenses and food.

The total cost of the project was £44,000, although straightforward refurbishment of the house would have cost £35,000 had it been completed by outside contractors or direct labour. The marginal cost of training nine people for a year was therefore c£9,000. All the site workers gained additional formal qualifications. Several then gained short-term placements with contractors, although at the time of writing none had gained full-time jobs. However, project evaluation states ‘trainees have improved their skills in construction and maintenance trades as well as raised their self-esteem and employability’.

17 Beaconsview Road Clase is now used as a neighbourhood drop-in centre and offers: craft classes; jobs surgeries for Action Team for Jobs; a breakfast club; a surgery for the local Health Visitor; homeopathy; a venue for car boot sales; and a meeting place for the local Management Committee.

The project has since won the ‘Inspire 2005 Adult Learning Award (sponsored by NIACE).

Key learning points:

- The scheme could be replicated throughout Wales.
- CITB would support similar projects, and STEPS money is available;
- Gwalia would participate in similar projects;
- Local people have to be involved from the outset, rather than a team being parachuted in from outside;
- It is more suited to refugees than asylum seekers, who may not be resident in the area long enough to gain qualifications;
- A project that offered full-time training might be more successful than one offering part-time training;
- It would be beneficial to engage large contractors at the outset to facilitate the progression of trainees into permanent work;
- One of the key limitations on replication is finding the right property, since void rates have recently fallen sharply in many localities. However, Gwalia alone has 20-30 properties in Swansea that could be refurbished;
- Another limitation is accessing BME communities and stimulating interest in project opportunities;
- A third limitation is the capacity of the local authority to provide trainers who not only have the necessary construction skills, but can also motivate a team.

Source: interview and site visit
There is clearly an enthusiasm for projects such as this, and even for self-build housing. For example, one Cardiff City Council employee said:

‘What about refugee self-build projects?’
‘I would love to see a refugee self-build project.’

‘Do you think there is scope for that?’
‘Yes. I’ve spoken to the self-build agency at conferences that I’ve been to and I know they are doing one in Kent, and I just think that would be excellent.’

‘Is the expertise there within the communities you are dealing with?’
‘I think we’d need to do a skills audit.’

‘What would the City Council’s attitude be to giving land to a project like that? Have they got land?’
‘I’m sure they must have. They manage to find land for housing associations, and self build is a housing association. I can’t see the County Council would try to block it.’

The second project is the appointment of a Housing Development Officer within WRC, funded by hact. As box 16 describes, the incumbent of this position (Dewi Owen) has undertaken an extensive programme of development activities, some of which have been detailed in other boxes (11, 12 and 14). Feedback to the author from participants and recipients about this initiative has been universally positive. The main comment is that they would like to see the programme intensified and offered at more geographical locations.

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**Good practice example 26**

**Hact/WRC Housing Development Officer**

This project has been funded by Hact who provided £25,000 to cover the salary costs of the first year, beginning in March 2004. Other funding is now being sought to continue the project for the next two years.

The aim of the project is to develop and support the infrastructure for refugee housing by working in partnership with key stakeholders including service users themselves.

Dewi Owen has therefore already completed the following:

- Developed closer links with private and social landlords, local authorities and homelessness departments, National Assembly for Wales Housing Division and Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) and developed partnerships with them;
- Supported and worked closely with Professor Vaughan Robinson to complete this research report on good practice in refugee housing in Wales;
- Run training sessions with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) into the issues that refugees face in looking for accommodation when they receive refugee status (see box 11);
• Supported and worked closely with the refugee move-on workers in the four cluster areas so they can develop and build partnerships in their local areas;

• Ensured that the accommodation offered to refugees and asylum seekers meets appropriate standards of health, safety and environmental quality;

• Developed links with local housing associations to encourage them to house more refugees e.g. the Charter refugee priority card scheme (see box 12);

• Encouraged a local housing association to establish a refugee housing association;

• administered, and jointly delivered a six day course to give RCOs a basic knowledge of housing issues so they can correctly advise their community members and empower themselves to lobby for better housing policies (see box 14);

• Organised housing fairs in Newport and Cardiff with the local authority and RSLs, complete with translation facilities.

Source: interview
RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendations relating to structural change
- Operational recommendations
- Models of support
- Training
- NASS and local authorities
- Private sector
- RSLs
- Adding to the stock and adding to skills
- RCOs
- Communications and networking
- Creating an evidence base
Chapter 15

Key recommendations

A wide variety of disparate recommendations could have come out of this mapping exercise, and these could simply have been listed bullet-point style, leaving the reader to decide on the relative importance of each recommendation and guess what they are designed to achieve. Instead, this chapter will begin by identifying a series of broad objectives that have come out of the research material. These higher-level objectives have then guided the selection of recommendations and have acted as an organising framework.

Underlying objectives or principles
The objectives that underpinned most demands for change during research interviews were as follows:

- Improving the efficiency of the existing system;
- Stimulating more co-working and sharing;
- Identifying best practice and replicating it;
- Creating opportunity, and avoiding zero sum games in which one person's gain is another's loss;
- Raising awareness of refugees, their needs, and their entitlements;
- Empowering refugees and their advocates;
- Ensuring that refugees are making informed choices;
- Managing expectations so that refugees are realistic about their entitlements;
- Laying solid foundations for integration;
- Creating an evidence base for future policy decisions.

All the recommendations made in this chapter address some, or all, of these objectives and Table 15.1 summarises the main recommendations and what each of these can contribute to the objectives listed above.

Recommendations relating to structural change
It is difficult to write a report about refugee housing in Wales without mentioning certain issues that are structural and would require major changes of policy. Some of these changes could be made at a Wales level, and they might be seen as presenting Wales with the opportunity to take the lead within the UK. Others changes would need to be made by the Home Office, UK-wide, and their implementation would impact beneficially upon the Welsh situation. All the current report can do in relation to these higher levels of policy is add to the evidence base suggesting that change is necessary. Recommendations in this vein include:

1. The need for more affordable housing
The relative scarcity of social housing and affordable privately rented accommodation drives the issue of refugee housing. The shortage of stock produces waiting lists, the need for exclusionary allocation procedures, sub-optimal allocations, competition with equally needy local residents, and displacement of refugees from the social housing sector into privately rented accommodation. At a time of rising demand for accommodation, the stock in Wales is actually falling, especially within the local authority and housing association sectors. This fundamental problem needs to be addressed urgently, particularly in Cardiff where there is also an affordability gap within the privately rented sector. Announcements from the Department for Communities and Local Government in May 2006 suggest that central government is now to address this problem nationally through a programme that will see up to 30,000 new affordable houses built per annum. It is hoped that many of these new homes will be in Wales.

2. The need to extend the duration of the move-on period

All of the evidence described in the literature review and arising from the Welsh research indicates that a 28 day move-on period is insufficient. It does not give service providers time to plan effectively or deliver services in the manner and to the quality that they desire. It creates unnecessary stress for all in the system. And it puts refugees under enormous strain at a time when they are already somewhat disorientated and vulnerable. The outcome of this arbitrary time limit is that refugees do not make informed choices, and service providers are continually firefighters.

The Government has recognised this, and is now trialling enhanced support following the decisions on asylum under its new Sunrise programme in areas of Scotland and England. This is to be welcomed, and the current research lends further weight to the belief that this should be adopted nationwide as soon as practicable.

3. The need to communicate better during move-on

One of the things put forcibly to us in a number of interviews with different stakeholders is that refugees are not fully made aware of the significance and finite nature of the 28 day period. They receive a letter from NASS alerting them to the need to move-on, but there will be no further reminders or reinforcement of the need to contact various people for help or make alternative arrangements. Some respondents told us that this failure to transmit any urgency, or reinforce that urgency throughout the 28 days, means that refugees are lulled into a false sense of security which is rudely shattered at the end of the period, by which time they are expected to have found an alternative home, to have furnished it, and to have arranged benefit entitlements. It was put to us strongly that NASS should enter into a continuing dialogue during the 28 days that specifies what refugees should do, how little time they have to do it, and what will happen if they do not.

4. The need to improve transitional arrangements

The current system in which refugees move out of NASS accommodation after 28 days and have then to be housed in temporary accommodation if the local authority has been unable to source appropriate permanent housing within the time period is inefficient. Nor does it begin to lay the foundations for long-term integration. Families are moved a number of times, often to inappropriate accommodation (such as bed and breakfast hotels), they have their links with neighbours and neighbourhoods severed, and their children have to uproot from one school to another, and then to another. And in some cases these moves may be from one local authority owned house to another on the same estate. It seems both more efficient and more humane to allow families to remain within their NASS home
until permanent accommodation can be sourced, and for better transitional arrangements to be put in place to ensure that providers are not financially disadvantaged.

5. **Remove delays in the benefits system**

We were told that there had been significant (if variable) improvements in the responsive of the Benefits Agency to refugee claimants. But we were also told that some refugees were still waiting several months for their initial benefits to be paid. This is a major stumbling block for access to privately rented accommodation, where many landlords are not prepared to wait three or four months for their first (retrospective) Housing Benefit payments. They would much rather let to cash renters who can pay their rent from week one.

6. **Address the affordability gap in Cardiff**

We were told that housing values in Cardiff had enjoyed such an uplift in recent years that levels of housing benefit had failed to keep pace. This means that everyone who is dependent on housing benefit is struggling to find accommodation, and this includes refugees. Given the difficulty which refugees might initially have finding employment (because of factors such as language, an inability to prove qualifications, the need to requalify, and an absence of job references) they are doubly disadvantaged in this competitive market. They will struggle to find accommodation at housing benefit levels, and they will find it difficult to become financially independent.

7. **Open a debate in Wales about achieving equitable access for refugees within the local housing allocations system**

The Homeless Persons (Priority Need) (Wales) Act of 2001 enlarged the group of people to whom local authorities owed a full homelessness duty. This means that priority needs cases now account for two-thirds of all those accepted as statutorily homeless, and there is less capacity to house those who are non-priority cases. It is an invidious task for local authorities to decide which refugees are vulnerable and should be treated as a priority for housing. Further exploration is needed as to how improvements can be made to ensure equality of access to social housing for refugees. This could include a debate as to whether refugees should be treated automatically as in priority need in Wales. However, the debate should engage RCOs, as well as being be sensitive to opposition to special treatment.

8. **Open a debate in Wales about when integration should begin**

The Home Office has made the decision that integration should begin on the day that refugee status is awarded. This contentious decision, which was not supported by the Refugee Council or by hact, has a number of severe negative consequences. Asylum seekers receive no orientation information on the UK housing system, how it operates or what it can and cannot offer. And they receive no information on what accommodation they might reasonably expect to receive, given their individual circumstances. As a result, their expectations are formed from rumour, speculation, and myth, and often bear little relationship to the reality of UK refugee housing. What is more, when the move-on period comes around, they are expected to absorb a huge amount of information about housing, benefits, utilities and life in mainstream UK in a very short period, when they are already stressed and destabilised. It is hardly surprising that people are not making informed choices or are simply leaving others to make choices for them. If integration foundations were to be laid during the asylum period, much of this chaos and unrealistic expectations could be avoided.
It is accepted that briefing all asylum seekers about housing in the UK and how to access it does waste some resources when only a proportion will ultimately remain in the country. But these costs are surely less than those incurred through the delayed or retarded integration of refugees. It is also accepted that telling asylum seekers about possible housing entitlements might encourage other people to migrate and seek asylum: but only if the news that they learn is good. Much of this report has been about the problems which refugees have finding appropriate accommodation in Wales. If briefings were realistic, such information would be unlikely to encourage further migration and could actually serve to undermine some of the unfounded perceptions that many asylum seekers have of the entitlements on offer in the UK.

Wales, as a socially inclusive nation, could choose to begin preparation for integration at an earlier stage. It could brief people during the asylum period, and ensure that refugees in Wales have a less traumatic move-on and therefore an easier transition to integration. Some of the operational recommendations listed below take up this theme in a more practical way.

**Operational recommendations**

9. **Earlier signposting to WRC**

One of the ways in which refugees could be given a better start in Wales and empowered to make informed choices about their (housing) futures, would be if they were directed to WRC earlier than move-on. All asylum seekers should be directed to the WRC on arrival in Wales, and WRC could provide workshops on welfare entitlements in the UK which would not only aim to transmit accurate information, but deliberately bust myths surrounding what housing refugees can reasonably expect to have access to. Going beyond this, if WRC and RCOs had additional resources (Pre-Tenancy Workers), they could visit all arriving asylum seekers in their new homes to welcome them, make contact and establish trust and credibility.

10. **All-Wales housing information pack**

Stakeholders recommended distribution of an information pack to all asylum seekers describing the basics of how the housing system operates in Wales, and what refugees might reasonably expect to receive when they come to move-on. Such a pack should be distributed four or five months after asylum seekers arrive in Wales, when people had become acclimatised to their new situation and might be more receptive to new information

‘Anyone who goes into social housing, on day one you are presented with so much information and form filling and then you get information overload and after half an hour, most people just do not want to know any more so there is a danger that you can be supplied with too much information on day one and the documents end up disappearing somewhere in the cupboard or under the stairs or wherever they go, they go and they never get referred to because there is too much overload information in the early stages.’

The pack would need to be user-friendly, clearly written and realistic, and it should be available in a variety of different languages. It should contain generic information on how housing markets function in the UK, information on possible housing pathways for refugees, the roles of different housing providers, how providers assess need and priority, and realistic information on waiting times and rent levels in the main cities of Wales as well as information on current housing benefit levels. Such a pack should be structured as a series of inserts so that information can be updated regularly and relatively cheaply. Responsibility for distributing it should either become part of the NASS contract or be contracted to others
(the WRC Pre-Tenancy Workers). It could be funded by the Assembly, by NASS or through an application to one of the refugee funds or to act. It could be produced by WRC or by Shelter Cymru. It could build on some of the local initiatives, such as the leaflet produced by Wrexham some years ago on housing.

**Models of support**

11. **Provide pre-tenancy support**

The Pre-Tenancy Workers would not only welcome asylum seekers to Wales and distribute the All-Wales Housing Packs, but they would also be responsible for pre-tenancy education and orientation. This would prepare asylum seekers to become active and engaged citizens. Orientation would include specific local information about the likelihood of getting local authority or housing association accommodation, but also advice on the Benefits system, how the utilities work and are charged in the UK, the availability locally of rent bonds, and how to budget financially in the UK context. The workers could also advise on how to report race crimes or harassment. And they could provide information on the education system and how to access it, and the UK labour market. While this information would be redundant for those eventually returned to their country of origin, it would prepare those who remain in Wales much better for life here. The Pre-Tenancy Workers could also direct, or take people to local RCOs, to ensure they have access to informal and community support networks.

Such pre-tenancy work would also produce efficiency gains. We noted earlier how the NASS system was sitting up as a result of people’s unwillingness to leave NASS accommodation for what they regarded as ‘inferior’ local authority and privately rented accommodation. Accurate orientation should bust some of the misconceptions that underpin such behaviour.

12. **Wider diffusion of the practice of medium term floating support**

The literature, and most experts, agree that consistent medium-term floating support is the ideal. One-to-one tenancy support that provides advice and signposting across a range of disciplines is the best facilitator of successful integration. The Red Cross appear to be providing just that in Swansea, using Supporting People money. Ideally similar support would also be available elsewhere in Wales. Perhaps the Assembly could seize the opportunity to take a national lead, build on Red Cross’ work and develop and fund an all-Wales model of floating support that could be delivered throughout all the cluster areas. It is highly likely that the short-term costs of such provision would be recouped through more effective and more rapid integration of refugees in the medium term, and through greater community cohesion.

13. **Explore the potential of half-way houses**

The work which Wrexham did on the feasibility of providing a half-way house to smooth the disturbance of move-on was valuable, even if the project did not eventually materialise. The concept should be further explored nationally to see whether such accommodation could provide an invaluable transition for either single men who would stand little chance of accessing social housing under the current system, or for particularly vulnerable groups (e.g. those with mental health issues or physical disabilities). Each of the main cluster areas could have such accommodation with perhaps a single all-Wales centre for those with special needs.
14. **Greater role for active citizens**

WRASG and DPIA provide exemplars of what can be achieved by groups of concerned and committed individuals. They are to be congratulated on what they have achieved in Wrexham and South Wales, respectively, through harnessing the time and energies of concerned citizens. Means should be found to disseminate this good practice more widely and to encourage the participation of more local citizens in welcoming and integrating refugees. In particular, the feasibility and value of buddying and personal mentoring schemes should be fully researched in order to assess their potential in Wales.

**Training**

15. **Training RCOs to provide impartial housing advice**

Earlier sections of the report have noted how asylum seekers and refugees often trust their co-ethnics (and the organisations created by them) more than mainstream organisations. Even where this is not the case, refugees may test advice given to them by ‘officials’ by comparing it with advice from RCOs or co-ethnics. Consequently, all the RCOs that were interviewed said that a significant proportion of their workload was to do with housing and housing advice. While this informal resource is to be welcomed and encouraged, RCOs also said that they did not have the time to keep abreast of the latest developments in housing and admitted that they might therefore be giving advice which was dated or even not entirely accurate. One recommendation that would address this problem is for local authorities, housing associations and the Benefits Agency to offer funded secondment opportunities for vetted RCO workers. This would allow them to gain the knowledge and experience that could then be disseminated within their communities. It also – and entirely beneficially – offers opportunities for work experience that might lead to new careers. For the same reason, the workshop sessions on housing that WRC/hact currently organise for RCO staff should be intensified and continued, as should the ‘converzatione’ that allow RCO staff to meet housing providers to discuss issues of mutual concern. All of the initiatives described above have received universal and enthusiastic support from all stakeholders interviewed.

16. **Training for frontline local authority housing staff**

A number of refugees and refugee groups, as well as certain local authorities argued that local authority housing staff would welcome and benefit from greater cultural awareness training and training in the specific entitlements and circumstances of refugees. They would then be in a position to handle enquiries from refugees and their cases in a more confident, sensitive and knowledgeable way. Such training could be led by CIH Cymru or by WRC/hact, with input from Shelter Cymru, the Red Cross, and paid RCOs/refugees, and could become part of training associated with BME housing strategies. If organisations could be persuaded to work together, there might even be a single all-Wales course with agreed content which could then be delivered by different providers within a national training consortium.

17. **Training for frontline RSL staff**

Some RSLs we interviewed said that before they could play a larger part in the housing of refugees in Wales they needed better to understand refugees, their needs and their legal statuses and entitlements in the UK. As with local authority training, this could be provided by a number of different organisations (including, in this case, the Welsh Federation of Housing Associations) or by a national consortium with an agreed syllabus. Core modules/sessions could be written to cover generic material (Who is a refugee? Different legal statuses etc) with specialist modules being written for RSLs, local authorities, or other
groups (see below). Again, we recommend that RCOs and refugees are involved in the drafting and delivery of this training.

18. Training for frontline DWP staff

The same training elements could also be used for DWP staff. Although the Department was not interviewed for this research, a number of individual and corporate stakeholders said that they felt that the level of knowledge in DWP about refugees, their circumstances and their legal entitlements was insufficient, and that this was currently creating problems in certain parts of Wales.

NASS and local authorities

19. Quicker referral mechanisms

A number of interviewees described how the current mechanism for referring people who have just received a positive decision on their asylum claim to the main housing providers is too long-winded and loses the refugee valuable time during move-on. Notwithstanding the recommendation above that move-on should be lengthened from 28 days to 3 months, there are still grounds for simplifying this mechanism so as to speed referral. Clearspings described how in other parts of the UK they had developed a referral system in which basic information about the refugee (and their family) and their likely future housing needs was passed direct by Clearspings to the homelessness unit as soon as Clearspings knew of the positive decision. They estimated that this might cut up to a week out of referral time, and had devised a referral sheet that was simply faxed by them to the homelessness unit. Unfortunately they declined to make a copy of this form available ‘for contractual reasons’, but something similar could be adopted in Wales very quickly, at minimal cost and with immediate benefit.

20. Allow refugees to remain in the property they occupied under NASS support

Several interviewees argued that the practice of moving a family from one council house that they had occupied when asylum seekers to another very similar council property when they became refugees was both inefficient and disruptive. As has been described in the literature review some English local authorities have come to the same conclusion and have found ways of allowing families to remain in the same house while substituting another similar property into the NASS pool. Apparently NASS has agreed to such arrangements. There seems to be general agreement in Wales that such a practice would be highly desirable, but - as yet - only Swansea has experimented with doing this, and then only in exceptional cases. While the scope for large scale change is limited in Cardiff, because only 25% of NASS stock is local authority owned, there seem to be few barriers to introducing such a policy across all the cluster areas of Wales, and many potential benefits.

21. Facilitate inter-authority transfers of refugees

While refugee and asylum seeker populations in the UK are mobile (Robinson and Hale, 1989; Robinson, 2002), and there is anecdotal evidence of the same within Wales (see below) there seems to have been little attempt to encourage or stimulate mobility from areas of housing stress to areas of housing surplus within Wales. Some (Robinson, Andersson and Musted, 2003) have even argued that the whole national dispersal programme is simply an attempt to push asylum seekers from high cost parts of the country to regions where they can be housed more cheaply regardless of the impact that this has on the asylum seekers concerned. That is not what is being recommended here. Instead, what is being recommended is a properly funded and negotiated mechanism that would allow refugees in
Swansea, for example, to apply for council housing in Neath, Port Talbot or Bridgend if that would allow them to acquire permanent accommodation more quickly and also be nearer to Cardiff. Implicit in this would be thorough investigation of whether these new areas were appropriate and safe, the presence of outreach workers, and funds for the development of satellite branches of RCOs in the new areas.

**Private sector**

22. **Further development work with private landlords**

Given that there is currently insufficient social housing in Wales to meet the needs of all priority groups, and a growing private rented sector, it seems obvious that refugees will have to rely more upon this housing tenure in future. However, we have already discussed how there are barriers to accessing this sector, and these need to be systematically dismantled. The Cardiff Homefinder project provided an excellent example of what was possible with limited funding, but unlimited energy, and it was sad to note that at the time of the field research (Summer 2005), this project was under threat from lack of funding. The strength of this project, and the person who worked on it, was that she was not desk- or process-bound, but used initiative and entrepreneurship to search out opportunities, persuade landlords and agents, and ensure that landlords had good experiences with refugee tenants. The project (and its spirit) should be replicated in all the cluster areas as a national initiative funded by WAG. The project workers could be given a common set of objectives and measurable targets, and be networked to ensure the sharing of good practice, methods, and written materials.

**RSLs**

23. **Further development work with RSLs**

Feedback suggests that the dialogue that the WRC Housing Development Officer has developed with RSLs in Cardiff has been very beneficial, and there is now a much greater understanding at a management level of refugees and their needs. These awareness raising sessions should be intensified and provided outside South East Wales. They would encourage RSLs to engage with refugee housing, prioritise refugees as clients, and see past the ‘risks’ and ‘costs’ they might perceive as being attached to refugee clients.

24. **Expand the priority card system**

The awareness raising work described under recommendation 23 above, and further one-to-one negotiations have led Charter Housing to offer priority cards to several refugees per year in Newport. These are nominated by WRC. This is a breakthrough arrangement that should be replicated with other housing associations in all the cluster areas of Wales. Such bilateral agreements not only create opportunities for refugees, but further raise awareness, undermine negative stereotypes that might otherwise prevent access, and build trust. By providing permanent accommodation for people who might otherwise only have access to temporary accommodation such schemes also facilitate integration.

**Adding to the stock and adding to skills**

25. **Refugee self-build projects**

Gwalia's Foundations in Maintenance project in Swansea provides a superb example of a win-win proposition. A derelict house was returned to use. Asylum seekers (and people from BME communities) were seen to be, and were actually, putting something into the community within which they lived through creating a community centre that was used
by all. And those who worked on the project acquired marketable skills and qualifications that empowered them, gave them choices and facilitated integration. This project should be replicated throughout Wales, after suitable discussions with the Construction Industry Training Board, and intensified through WAG funding. In the short term, similar projects could restore significant numbers of vandalised houses to habitation or could provide office space for RCOs outside Cardiff, coincidentally aiding community cohesion through contact and co-operation. In the longer term, there is no reason why refugee self-builds could not be established, sponsored by RCOs, and providing new-build accommodation for those communities.

**RCOs**

26. **Build capacity in existing RCOs**

Virtually all the literature and the majority of the field research points to the potentially valuable role that RCOs can play in the housing of refugees. The main barrier that prevents them engaging with this role, at present, is capacity.

At the heart of the capacity problem is funding. RCOs rely on volunteer labour, because they cannot afford to pay people to become professionals in a given field. Welsh RCOs need both advice and help on how to access mainstream UK and EU funding and a pot of money that is exclusive to Wales. The former could be facilitated by either the Consortium or WRC offering workshops on funding opportunities and making funding applications. The latter would have to be provided by WAG as a development initiative.

RCOs also told us they need, and would appreciate, access to training that would allow them to expand their capacity and capabilities. This training needs to be generic (financial management, managing and minuting meetings, health and safety, human resources law) and specific (housing, benefits). WAG funding could allow RCOs to access the plethora of management courses that are already available in Wales. And secondment opportunities with RSLs, local authorities or DWP could assist with the latter.

Most RCOs also told us that they would welcome a formal mentoring arrangement with organisations such as RSLs. These could provide RCO staff with opportunities to acquire specialist knowledge and marketable skills, but could also offer opportunities for generic training and putting into practice competences acquired in external training courses. They would also help RSLs gain trust in RCOs and their abilities, and create personal contacts that would facilitate the flow of information and advice long after the mentoring arrangement had ceased.

27. **Stimulate RCOs or refugee fora in Swansea and Wrexham**

While it is important that the well-established RCOs in Cardiff continue to add to their competences, other cluster areas in Wales currently have few or no RCOs. This disadvantages the refugee populations that live there and ensures that the support that people receive is often a result of the accident of which cluster area NASS originally allocated them to. There is a strong case for continued and better resourced efforts to develop new and fledging RCOs in Swansea and Wrexham. DPIA has done some excellent work on this already, and WRC Wrexham's ideas of beginning with an all-group Refugee Forum in that town also seems sensible. 'Communities First' have been supportive in Swansea, offering shared workspace and IT equipment. Perhaps the new member of staff recently appointed (March 2006) by WRC to undertake development work with RCOs could pick up these excellent early initiatives.
28. **WAG networking fund for RCOs**

Whilst it is imperative that RCOs are established and become progressively more capable, one of the key ways in which they can acquire knowledge, experience and support is through networking with other RCOs that have already been through growing pains and have faced similar problems to those being experienced now in parts of Wales. There was evidence that RCOs did try to talk to each other within Wales, but there was no similar evidence that Welsh RCOs had the time or resources to network with their longer established counterparts in England. Most would welcome this opportunity but said that they simply could not afford to travel to see their fellow workers in England. In some cases this may well have led to Wales reinventing the wheel rather than learning from the longer-established English RCOs.

Given the relative cheapness of pre-booked train fares (£35 for a return trip to London from Swansea), a relatively small WAG RCO networking fund could achieve a great deal. Funds could be allocated by competitive bidding using a standard on-line application form that would require RCOs to specify the purpose of the trip and the intended outcomes. After meetings, organisations might then also be required to enter a paragraph on a public on-line database describing who they had met and what the subject of their discussions had been and what the main learning points had been. This would not only provide a useful record of the totality of links between Welsh and English RCOs, but also flag up good practice and contacts that have applicability beyond the confines of a single ethnic group.

29. **Seminars on fund-raising for RCOs**

One of the strongest conclusions of this report is that RCOs can play a central role in refugee housing in Wales but are not currently able to do so because of their lack of capacity and specialist expertise. The key cause of this is insufficient access to funds. While we were told that the Consortium has a worker who advises on fund-raising and access to funding, we could find no evidence that this person or any other organisation had yet organised workshops on fund-raising. Such workshops and perhaps an e-mail newsletter of funding opportunities, closing dates, and contact details would be invaluable to RCOs and relatively inexpensive.

**Communications and networking**

30. **Effective single policy voice for all refugees in Wales**

Several individuals and organisations have done their best to create a single mouthpiece for refugee groups in Wales and they are to be commended for the efforts they have made. However, we have been told by a variety of stakeholders that Refugee Voice is not yet functioning as it might. It is not thought to be capturing the views of all refugee groups. Nor is it cascading information down about policy developments and initiatives. It has yet to actively share good practice. And it is not acting as a unified campaigning organisation or pressure group to bring issues to the attention of policymakers. This research has not investigated why this might be so, but it would be highly beneficial if this organisation, or another, could act as a single voice and an ear for all refugees in Wales.

31. **On-line library of best practice**

This report has identified a number of initiatives and procedures in Wales that represent good practice, or even best practice. It is essential that this practice is widely disseminated and adopted, even if it means modifying models to make them more suitable for local circumstances. At present, it seems as if stakeholders are sometimes unaware of what is going on in other parts of Wales and are even reinventing the wheel. Some of this relates to
the traditional difficulty of North-South communications in Wales, but there is also an absence of mechanisms for communicating and disseminating experiences and practices.

One suggestion that has been made by WAG in the past is for the establishment of a national on-line library of best practice that could be accessed by all stakeholders free of charge. This would not only describe projects, but specify their objectives, how outcomes have been measured, where funding came from, and provide contact numbers of people who could furnish further details. Tai Pawb would be the obvious organisation to create, and manage such a library, with WRC providing advice and assistance on content. When Tai Pawb was interviewed for the research (in July 2005) they said they would be willing to do this, but had not yet been able to prioritise the necessary resources.

32. Strategic meetings for WRC move-on staff

It is clear that the WRC staff involved in move-on are already overstretched, and that some are having to fulfil roles well beyond those originally intended. Having said that, there seemed to be no obvious mechanism to allow them to meet in order to discuss strategic issues or to compare notes on practice and outcomes. Because of this, it could be argued the service has fragmented, with different levels and types of service being offered in each locality, and that opportunities for co-operation and dissemination of ideas have been lost. Quarterly or bi-annual ‘awaydays’ would allow such communication, create more of a sense of community and shared purpose, and help ensure that WRC is providing a similar service in all the localities in which it operates. Such meetings would need to be tightly chaired and each would need to have a central theme, in addition to more general sessions to allow broader discussion.

33. An annual conference for all stakeholders

There also seemed to be a need to improve communication and dissemination of ideas across the sector and between the different types of stakeholders. Although WRC/hact have arranged successful bilateral meetings for RSLs and RCOs, there might be value in organising a broader annual event that brings together people and organisations from right across the sector, including everyone from the Consortium to RCOs. Such a meeting could provide briefings on new UK-wide and all-Wales developments, launch research initiatives and findings, and brainstorm national problems. It would also provide people with the opportunity to network outside their own organisation or sector.

Creating an evidence base

As the literature review in Chapter 3 makes clear, there is still much that we do not know about the refugee population of Wales, their reasons for being here, their needs and aspirations, and their lived experience. Without such information, policy formulation will be based upon supposition, anecdote and filtered information. Two particular issues cry out for immediate research.

34. Research on secondary migration or driftback from and into Wales

While NASS data allow us to profile the asylum seeker population that is dispersed by that organisation to Wales, we know next to nothing about whether people choose to stay in Wales when they get a decision on their asylum application or whether they choose to leave Wales. Nor do we know much about whether asylum seekers receiving positive decisions in England might then choose to move to Wales. Research into these two conjoined issues would provide a much firmer foundation upon which Welsh policy could be built. It would provide us with a clearer picture of how many refugees there are in Wales who might need
assistance with integration, where that demand is located, and what the characteristics are of those people, and therefore an indication of their needs.

35. **Research on homelessness and destitution**

The research clearly flagged up that homelessness amongst the refugee population in Wales is believed to be a problem, and a problem that is growing. Unlike in London, however, there is no information on the real scale of this problem, its geographical variability, or its impact upon the refugees concerned, or the organisations that have to manage the problem. Research needs to be undertaken on this issue urgently.
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**Mapping the Field**

This report describes the outcome of a short scoping project commissioned by hact and the Welsh Refugee Council in May 2005, which had three aims:

- to identify the main gaps and weaknesses in provision of refugee housing in Wales;
- to consider how these gaps might best be filled, perhaps by mapping over best practice of refugee housing from elsewhere in the UK;
- to ascertain the extent of co-working and collaboration, and to highlight key barriers to greater co-operation.