Opening Doors

Improving housing services for refugees and new migrants
The Chartered Institute of Housing
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hact
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# OPENING DOORS – IMPROVING HOUSING SERVICES FOR REFUGEES AND NEW MIGRANTS

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Acknowledgements

CIH and hact wish to thank both the Housing Corporation and Communities and Local Government for sponsoring Opening Doors. The sponsorship by the Housing Corporation was taken over by the Tenant Services Authority in December, 2008, when it replaced the Corporation. However, it would be appropriate to mention our gratitude to Jon Rouse, former Chief Executive of the Housing Corporation, who was particularly keen that housing associations should work more closely with refugees, and who was very supportive of the project. David Carrigan of the Housing Corporation (now at the Homes and Communities Agency) and several staff members from the Home Office or UK Border Agency also contributed to OD or gave briefings to OD partners.

CIH and hact also want to thank our partners in the eleven housing associations who joined Opening Doors, and who made the project both a productive and an enjoyable experience. The associations are listed in section 3. In several cases, the local authorities in the partner areas also contributed to the work.

In addition to staff within CIH and hact, several hact associates and independent consultants worked on aspects of Opening Doors, in particular Azim El-Hassan who was involved throughout, and Rosalind Brook, Sue Lukes and Matthew Grenier, who worked on particular aspects. These, too, were important contributors to the project.

CIH and hact

June, 2009
## Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>ALS</td>
<td>Action Learning Sets</td>
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<tr>
<td>BCHS</td>
<td>Birmingham Cooperative Housing Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMHA</td>
<td>Blue Mountain Housing Association (Stoke-on-Trent)</td>
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<tr>
<td>BME</td>
<td>black and minority ethnic</td>
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<tr>
<td>BSCA</td>
<td>Bolton Solidarity Community Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAB</td>
<td>citizens advice bureau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIH</td>
<td>Chartered Institute of Housing</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBL</td>
<td>choice-based lettings</td>
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<td>CLG</td>
<td>Communities and Local Government</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESOL</td>
<td>English for speakers of other languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWHG</td>
<td>First Wessex Housing Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gateway</td>
<td>a Home Office resettlement programme which brings refugees to the UK direct from refugee camps in third countries</td>
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<tr>
<td>HA</td>
<td>housing association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hact</td>
<td>Housing Associations’ Charitable Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCA</td>
<td>Homes and Communities Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IGP</td>
<td>Innovation and Good Practice (grant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JRF</td>
<td>Joseph Rowntree Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGA</td>
<td>Local Government Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSP</td>
<td>Local Strategic Partnership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moodle</td>
<td>an open-source learning management system (see <a href="http://www.moodle.org">www.moodle.org</a>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MRCO</td>
<td>migrant and refugee community organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHF</td>
<td>National Housing Federation</td>
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<tr>
<td>OD</td>
<td>Opening Doors</td>
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<tr>
<td>RDAs</td>
<td>regional development agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RIES</td>
<td>Refugee integration and employment service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHA</td>
<td>Staffordshire Housing Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSA</td>
<td>Tenant Services Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCAN</td>
<td>Urban Care Centre, Bolton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UKBA</td>
<td>UK Border Agency (a Home Office agency)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
1.1 **What was ‘Opening Doors’?**

Over a period of two and a half years, with backing from the Housing Corporation and Communities and Local Government, the Opening Doors project aimed to mainstream approaches to meeting the housing needs of refugees and of other new migrant communities. Jointly managed and delivered by the Chartered Institute of Housing and hact (Housing Associations’ Charitable Trust), Opening Doors built expertise among housing associations and their strategic partners in six different areas of England.

Eleven associations took part in these local partnerships and were responsible for putting Opening Doors into practical effect. Their work, developed or enhanced through the project, should continue to provide improved services for these client groups, involve local migrant and refugee community organisations (MRCOs), aid community cohesion in their localities and influence joint working through Local Strategic Partnerships and other mechanisms.

**Key outputs from Opening Doors**

- This report – which evaluates the project.
- An ‘In Brief’ summary of the project.
- An accompanying ‘toolkit’ – which provides links to a range of tools developed through or used by Opening Doors and which are intended to be useful to other housing organisations doing similar work.
- The website [www.housing-rights.info](http://www.housing-rights.info) – which gives information on new migrants’ housing entitlements both to new migrants themselves, and to housing advisors.

1.2 **A unique project**

Opening Doors was in several ways a pioneering project. First, never before has there been an attempt to work in partnership with so many individual housing associations to improve services for refugees and new migrant communities, while encouraging them to do so in collaboration with organisations from those communities.

Second, it was unusual in its methods of working. Normally, ‘good practice’ in housing is promoted through one-off publications or events. Opening Doors was innovative in aiming to develop better practice with a number of associations, over an extended period of time allowing and encouraging the associations to innovate, interchange and collaborate with others engaged in the same process, and learn together. The main tool for doing this was the ‘Action Learning Sets’ in which the participants engaged with each other and learnt from their shared experiences.

Third, Opening Doors aimed to combine CIH’s wider knowledge of the housing sector and experience in promoting good practice, with hact’s knowledge of and experience of working with refugee organisations at community level on housing and related issues.

It is important to bear in mind the unusual nature of Opening Doors in reading this evaluation. One purpose of the report is to reflect on whether the methods worked and, if so, whether they might be worth using again, in the same or in different contexts.
1.3 Purpose and scope of the report

Evaluation is important not only to enable judgements to be made as to the project’s effectiveness, but also to provide material from which other social landlords, and others working with refugee and new migrant communities, can learn. The aim of the report is to achieve both these objectives.

The report begins with a summary of key points from the evaluation and with recommendations addressed to key bodies such as CLG, the Home Office and UKBA, the Homes and Communities Agency and the Tenant Services Authority. There are also recommendations to social housing providers and to CIH and hact about following up Opening Doors.

The main sections of the report assume the reader is new to the project and describe how it was set up and what outputs were originally anticipated. It then describes what was delivered in some detail against the project’s intended outcomes, both nationally and locally.

Throughout, the report includes ‘learning points’ for those wanting to use the project’s experience in developing new or better housing and support services for refugees and migrant communities.

How the evaluation was carried out

The evaluation was carried out as a participatory process by those engaged in the project. The main source of information was an open-ended questionnaire sent to the eleven housing association partners, which encouraged them to obtain views at local level, especially from MRCOs. This was followed by discussion with partners at the final Action Learning Sets (see section 4) in October, 2008. Views were also obtained from two of the consultants involved in the project. Ideas and experience from the project have also been considered at various national forums (see section 4). Finally, Chief Executives from the partner associations were brought together in February, 2009 to discuss a draft of this report. This final version takes account of their views.

1.4 What Opening Doors delivered

The ‘headline’ outcomes from the project were these. Full details are in sections 4-7.

First, the specific housing achievements:

- A new project in Bradford, under the government’s Gateway resettlement programme, to house and support up to 94 stateless Rohingya refugees, originally from Burma, coming directly from refugee camps in Bangladesh.
- Housing allocated specifically to refugees in Nottingham (up to 48 units) and Stoke-on-Trent (40 units so far).
- Two schemes to lease private sector properties to provide accommodation for refugees and new migrants under development in the West Midlands with a target of 40 units in management by March, 2009.
- A three-year contract under Supporting People worth £434,000 per year, for a new support service in Nottingham: ‘Refugee Futures’.

Second, the strategic or organisational changes achieved through Opening Doors:

- A stronger strategic commitment to addressing the housing needs of refugees and migrants at regional or sub-regional level, especially in Lincolnshire and Southampton.
- Improved information on the customer base and – in the case of Bolton – of refugee/new migrant housing needs more widely.
Better information on housing options for new migrants in several areas, backed by the new website www.housing-rights.info

Training for housing staff on issues about refugees and new migrants, in some cases delivered in partnership with community organisations.

Capacity building for migrant and refugee community organisations in several areas, and stronger links with local refugee forums in Birmingham and Nottingham and with migrant groups in Lincolnshire.

Employment for refugees or new migrants in housing organisations or as community researchers in Stoke, Birmingham, Lincolnshire and Bolton.

Ensuring that refugee and new migrant needs are included in local community cohesion or BME strategies – for example through the ‘Community Cohesion Summit’ held in Stoke, through the Connecting Communities project in Southampton and through St Vincent’s input to BME strategies in Rochdale and Bolton.

1.5 Big aims and limited resources

As can be seen from section 2, the project was ambitious about what it would deliver. Although the achievements have been considerable, Opening Doors has not resulted in the wider changes in the sector originally contemplated. There are several lessons from this:

While OD worked very well for the eleven HA partners, it was over-ambitious to expect that action by a ‘hub’ of associations would have a much wider influence in the sector. To embed OD-style work in the sector as a whole would require wider work, based on the lessons learnt (see recommendations).

It might have been better to set out broad, less specific aims in designing the project, and then refine and deepen them in consultation with the eventual partners. In projects dependent on grant aid like this one, it would be useful if application processes which demand that outcomes are specified beforehand, allow for them to be redefined during the first stages of the project itself.

Goals could usefully have been divided into short-term ones, capable of delivery in the OD timeframe, and longer-term ones to which OD partners were committed in the future, after OD formally ends.

Work like that carried out in Opening Doors needs long-term investment in building knowledge of and relationships with refugee and new migrant communities, their leaders and advocates, and other agencies already working with them. Even after more than two years, OD partners are still going through this learning process.

Additional resources are needed if ambitious goals are to be achieved. For example, the Bradford partnership was well-placed to deliver the Gateway project, and the Birmingham partnership its private sector leasing schemes, because both were able to build on the successes of their earlier involvement in different hact programmes.

Nevertheless, OD enabled partners to ‘position themselves’ to bring in new business, such as Tuntum’s Supporting People contract, or Staffordshire HA’s ‘Bridging Communities’ project funded through the National Affordable Housing Programme.

OD was experienced differently by different types of organisation. Although the partners represented a very small sample of associations, the work showed how smaller associations with close links to communities may find it easier to adapt their work to meet new needs (such as those of refugees and new migrants), whereas for medium or larger associations it may be a small area of activity competing for attention against a wider background of organisational change (such as mergers, restructuring or refocusing of an association’s business).
1.6 A new, collaborative way of working

Did Opening Doors work as a learning process? Yes it did. We conclude that:

- Action Learning Sets (ALS) were a powerful tool that worked well in exploring a new area of work and providing encouragement, mutual learning and an element of competition between partners.
- Web-based networking tools such as Moodle are very helpful in linking geographically dispersed partners, but need more time investment if they are to be fully successful. Even so, they are best complementing, rather than substituting for, the mutual learning that was possible through the ALS.
- Providing training material was a useful element of the project but it would have been better in a more flexible form, with the partners committing to using the resources in appropriate ways within their organisations (eg different kinds of material for different kinds of staff).
- The website www.housing-rights.info not only helped OD partners but will be available as a longer-term resource (if funding can be secured).
- Although some use was made of skills and resources within the partnerships to share tasks (like staff training), this could have been much more fully developed.
- All those directly involved in Opening Doors as partners or in CIH and hact gained a lot from the project and had their commitment to working with refugees and new migrants reinforced. However, in all of the housing associations it was a challenge to secure the commitment of top level staff and of the board: some succeeded fully in this, others only partially.

The most important lesson is that housing associations can successfully adopt a completely new area of work with client groups with different and complex needs, such as refugees and new migrants. The real success of Opening Doors will be if more associations take this path. This report, the accompanying toolkit, and the follow up work to be done by CIH and hact, aim to ensure that this is the case.

1.7 Recommendations

A project such as Opening Doors inevitably opens up a range of issues such as the eligibility for services of different migrant groups, resources for tackling housing-related problems, measures to build the capacity of community organisations, and so on. However, in making recommendations, we want to focus simply on the main conclusions from the project as a whole and its lessons for future work of this kind.

We make six sets of recommendations:

1. To CLG and the Home Office. Both departments should consider how they encourage engagement by housing providers with migrant and refugee communities. For example:
   - More consideration could be given to the role of housing providers in refugee integration, including how the UKBA engages with housing associations.
   - Migrant and refugee housing needs should be included in strategic housing market assessments at local authority, sub-regional and regional levels.
   - Given that recent migrants predominantly make use of the private rented sector, housing associations could be incentivised to play a role in driving up standards in the sector, in partnership with local authorities.
   - It is clear from the experience of OD partners (and was pointed out by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion) that, although policies about refugees and other migrants differ at national level, their practical effects overlap considerably. Policies about the two groups and their integration need to be brought together to reflect the realities at neighbourhood level.
Clear and accurate information, such as that available through the OD website www.housing-rights.info, is important both to ensure that groups in need of housing are helped to access it, and to provide clarity and dispel myths about entitlements.

2. To the Homes and Communities Agency. While the Housing Corporation set out a clear priority for meeting refugee housing needs in investment decisions, there has not yet been an equivalent statement on refugee and migrant needs from the HCA. Although it does not have a regulatory role, the HCA, as the national enabling agency, should consider:

- Addressing the need for a policy statement as part of the detailed follow up to its Single Equality Scheme, in a context of increasingly diverse communities, and in which recognising a range of needs is crucial to meeting equality objectives.
- Restating the strategic imperative for this area of work which was set by the Housing Corporation, but is in danger of being lost.
- Putting this evaluation report on the agenda of an early meeting of the HCA Equalities and Diversity Advisory Group.
- Encouraging regional leads in the HCA’s Single Conversation to include in their discussions with local providers the issues of how they engage with and address the needs of refugee and migrant communities.

3. To the Tenant Services Authority. The TSA has rightly said that its priorities will be driven by tenants, but it needs to consider how to consult and work inclusively with a diverse tenant base, and indeed with potential tenants that may currently make little use of social housing. It should consider:

- How to ensure that any follow-up to the National Conversation, and the TSA’s forthcoming relationship with the National Tenant Voice, take account of the needs of all communities.
- How the TSA reaches out (or encourages providers to reach out) to communities that under-use social housing.
- How to continue to promote engagement and innovation in this field, in the way that Opening Doors has done, now that the IGP system is coming to an end, in ways that reflect the timescales essential in building up relationships with refugee and migrant communities.
- A follow-up review of Opening Doors, say after two further years, to test whether the principles are still embedded in the partner HAs and to learn how the work has further developed.

4. To the Audit Commission. The Audit Commission has already taken a lead in looking at the service impacts of new migrant communities. It should consider:

- How to ensure that impacts on new migrant communities continue to be reflected in its work, and in particular in Comprehensive Area Assessments in the main areas which have new migrant communities.

5. To housing associations, the National Housing Federation and other housing providers. Housing providers should engage with diverse communities in the areas they serve, because:

- To meet equality and diversity requirements, they should know their local population, its housing needs, whether they are being met and what role the provider can or should play in meeting them, for example through using Equality Impact Assessments.
- Through working on projects like Opening Doors, they can make a positive contribution to the government’s community cohesion and integration agendas, and in engaging diverse communities they can better address new agendas such as tackling worklessness and community empowerment.

Housing providers should also:

- Ensure that staff are trained to deal appropriately with housing enquiries from refugees and new migrants to avoid mistaken assumptions about eligibility.
• Work with migrant and refugee community organisations, and other community partners, to draw on their intelligence and support functions.
• Consider how changes to their business – such as growth or mergers – impact on their ability to work effectively with marginalised communities such as refugees and migrants.
• Consider which part of their organisation or group would be best placed to initiate this work and how it is integrated with the overall business plan, so it is not marginalised.

6. To CIH and hact. Both bodies need to consider how to build on the experience of Opening Doors, both in further work on refugee and new migrant housing issues and in terms of promoting similar collaborative methods of working between housing providers, in other fields. This might, for example, involve the development of the ‘Moodle’ web resource (see section 4) into a more permanent web resource.

1.8 Following on from Opening Doors

Apart from this report, Opening Doors has a range of other outputs which will continue to be available through CIH and hact after the project has ended. One of these will be a ‘toolkit’ aimed at other social landlords, with links to practical examples to complement this evaluation report.

The lessons from Opening Doors will be discussed by CIH and hact with the key government departments and agencies at national level. Partner associations will continue their work at local level and, for the time being, plan to maintain the links that have developed between all the partners, which enabled them to learn from each other.

Finally, CIH and hact will of course continue to be involved in this area of work, building on their experience with the Opening Doors project.
What did Opening Doors set out to achieve?

Two levels of outcomes were planned for the project. The first, overall, level consisted of five planned outcomes intended under the funding from the Housing Corporation and CLG. The second consists of the outcomes set in conjunction with the six HA partnerships, for their work at local level.

2.1 Overall outcomes expected

The expected outcomes from the application to the Housing Corporation were that, by making the business case for and promoting delivery of HA involvement in meeting the needs and aspirations of refugees and other new migrant communities, the project would increase:

1. Appropriate and decent housing options available to refugees and new migrants in all regions.
2. Integration of refugees and asylum seekers.
3. Wider utilisation of the experience and skills of refugee community organisations.

The additional expected outcomes from the Connecting Communities Plus application were to:

4. Improve access to decent housing for new migrant communities through scoping their housing needs and identifying ways in which these can be addressed.
5. Equip housing and related service providers to address housing needs of new migrant communities settling in their areas of operation, through raising their awareness.

These two sets of planned outcomes became the five overall outcomes intended from the Opening Doors project.

2.2 Detailed outcomes agreed with HA partnerships

The detailed outcomes emerged from a combination of the visits to each partner and from joint discussion at the Action Learning Sets. They are set out in Table 2.1. There are twenty outcomes, of which eleven are identified as ‘core’ outcomes.

Each partnership was able to choose the outcomes it intended to pursue locally, but all were committed to the eleven core outcomes.
**Table 2.1: Outcomes for Opening Doors local partnerships** *(NB Core outcomes are shown in grey)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information gathering/evaluation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Improved knowledge of new communities (location, demographic characteristics, countries of origin, languages, etc), their housing and related needs, and their local community organisations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Improved monitoring of the customer profiles of residents and those who use HA services, to provide evidence of extent of use by new communities and signpost problems/obstacles to be tackled.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service delivery</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Consistency of service delivery and access regardless of ethnic background.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Appropriateness and responsiveness of service delivery according to cultural differences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Improved access to social housing, for example by increasing the use of choice-based lettings systems by new communities (eg by changing criteria in the system, providing better guidance on use of CBL, publicising it in forms appropriate to new communities, identifying certain groups as ‘vulnerable’ and in need of support, etc).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Increase in allocations to new communities in own stock.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Increase in access to other services provided by HAs (eg floating support).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Evidence of embedding involvement of new communities in wider customer involvement in decision-making (will require a range of tests (eg adaptation of publicity/involvement measures to new communities [such as translation/interpreters], response by new communities to customer involvement initiatives [such as attendance at meetings], relative satisfaction levels, etc).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Increase in satisfaction with their housing by new communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Increase in satisfaction with community safety and more positive attitudes to the neighbourhood/area in which people live.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support services</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. Positive measures both to signpost new community applicants to other stock (including private sector) and/or develop particular projects aimed at new communities which respond to local needs (eg management of private sector accommodation for refugees or for migrant workers, appointment of liaison officer with new communities, development of large family properties, etc).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Implementation of a specific initiative such as Gateway.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Support for information/advice services and/or community-based initiatives aimed at improving the access to wider services by new communities, reducing social isolation and improving community relations (examples could include ‘welcome packs’, support for advice centres, cultural celebrations, etc, etc).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Building relationships with new communities and their community organisations (eg by developing wider training, administrative support or capacity building initiatives with them).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Governance and HR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15. Improved staff awareness of role of HA in relation to new communities (eg through modifications to training programmes on diversity issues, through briefing to frontline staff on eligibility for services, etc).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Provision of opportunities to people from new communities for employment and training (eg the HA has a strategy and action plan for involving new communities in placements, volunteering and developing employment opportunities, or launch of a wider employment/training initiative aimed at new communities).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Proactive board sign up and ownership of this agenda, and publicity for this in internal communications and in tenant newsletters, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Assist in meeting the association’s equality and diversity requirements (eg in inspection requirements, meeting its race relations duties, and complying with race equality legislation).</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation’s wider roles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19. Contribute to the local economy (eg encourage new migrants to stay in the area, create more sustainable communities, help local employers).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Raise the profile of refugee and migrant communities, and their housing needs, at local, regional and national levels (eg through LSPs, Sustainable Community Plans, Regional Housing Strategies, etc).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.1 The background – the issues about housing, refugees and new migration

Housing for refugees has become a significant issue for two main reasons. First, numbers of people seeking asylum grew significantly in the 1990s and peaked in 2002. Although they have since fallen sharply, they still exceed 20,000 applications per year (excluding dependents). Second, from 2000 onwards asylum seekers who want assistance with accommodation have been dispersed to regions away from London and the South-East. Although their accommodation is arranged, those who receive positive decisions on their asylum cases then almost immediately have to look for alternative accommodation, often applying for social housing or seeking assistance as homeless people. In most cases they leave asylum support accommodation with no resources, as they have not been allowed to work and the weekly allowances they have been paid are below income support levels.

The different factors – the growth in the number of cases, the initial dependence on asylum support accommodation with very limited financial help, and the unfamiliarity of many social landlords in dispersal areas with entitlements and procedures – have led many refugees to have to resort to the homelessness route to secure accommodation, or to use (often poor quality) private sector lettings, or to share with friends. Refugee homelessness has been recognised by government as a target area for prevention work, but despite some good local projects, refugees generally continue to suffer from having to use temporary, insecure or poor quality accommodation, and to make many moves in their first few years of having settled immigration status. This is reflected in national survey findings, which indicate that more than one in ten homeless families have an adult member who at some stage was an asylum seeker.1

Housing for migrants – particularly for migrant workers – has become a significant issue with the accession of new countries to the European Union from 2004. This led to 800,000 people coming to the UK and registering under the Worker Registration Scheme, and to unknown numbers coming for other reasons (eg as self-employed). Although the vast majority of migrant workers are housed in the private sector and are here only temporarily, migration has an impact on local housing markets in several possible ways, for example:

- Overall demand for private lettings may increase, stimulating growth in private lettings, pushing up rent levels and reducing the supply of low cost housing for sale.
- Landlords may take advantage of migrant workers by allowing houses to be overcrowded and/or occupied on a ‘shift’ basis, reducing standards and causing environmental problems in an area.
- Some lettings may be in former right to buy properties, which people in the area may think are still social lettings (hence concluding that migrants have ‘jumped the queue’).

In addition, there are small but growing numbers of migrants from new EU countries either applying for social housing or entering the homelessness route, because they intend to stay in Britain in the longer term. As with refugees, this is often happening in places unused to dealing with applications from people who are not UK nationals, and hence there are similar misunderstandings about housing entitlements.

An important reason for bringing together the two strands of the project – refugees and new migrants – was that they are increasingly seen as overlapping at local level, particularly in the many areas which are experiencing the ‘super-diversity’ referred to in the work of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion.2 Especially in the private rented sector, newcomers of different kinds are

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often competing for a limited pool of available accommodation. Both refugees and new migrants may aspire to enter social housing because of its security and affordability – and in doing so may compete with long-established white British or BME communities. And both refugees and new migrants, as newcomers in neighbourhoods, face challenges of integration and of being accepted by longer-established residents (including those from BME communities).

### 3.2 Why the project was initiated

Hact has a long-standing programme of work about refugee housing issues, including work with refugee community organisations. Among other initiatives, hact ran (with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation) the Refugee and Housing Network, which brought together senior people from social landlord bodies and other agencies to seek solutions to refugee housing needs. Two recent hact projects, *Accommodate* and *Communities R Us*, also influenced Opening Doors.

In September 2005, JRF and CIH published a good practice guide to *Housing and Support Services for Asylum-Seekers and Refugees*. The guide was published in association with hact and was launched at a joint event, which included refugee community organisations.

The Refugee and Housing Network and the JRF/CIH guide had the enthusiastic support of the Housing Corporation's then chief executive, Jon Rouse. At a hact event in the East Midlands in June 2004 he publicly expressed the view that the housing association movement could ‘up its game’ in supporting asylum seekers and refugees. After the launch of the guide in September 2005 he joined forces with then Home Office minister, Andy Burnham, and called together a meeting of larger associations, aiming to recruit ten large HAs to support refugee and new migrant groups (in particular to engage with the government’s Gateway programme) and to act as a role model for others.

Despite the efforts of the Housing Corporation, and bodies such as CIH, hact and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, a caucus of associations willing to work with new migrant groups did not emerge at that time. Instead, interest in this area of provision remained stubbornly within the small number of existing providers.

The motivation for the Opening Doors project was therefore to demonstrate the case for housing associations to engage in supporting refugee and new migrant groups, so that there can be a steady improvement in the amount and quality of housing and related services available to them.

### 3.3 The partnership between CIH and hact

Hact and CIH have worked together by combining the expertise which hact has developed through its refugee housing integration programme – especially its contact with and support for refugee community organisations – with CIH’s expertise as housing’s professional body, its contacts with social landlords and its experience in researching and producing the good practice guide.

Neither organisation had prior experience in working with other new migrant groups, but in 2006 hact bid successfully for a CLG Connecting Communities Strategic Grant to undertake feasibility work about the housing needs of non-refugee new migrants. Both CIH and hact were keen to respond to the housing issues emerging in research then being done by the Audit Commission and through the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, so the CLG and Housing Corporation agreed to combine the delivery of the two projects.

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3.4 Choosing local partners

Local partners were selected through an open bidding process in mid-2006. There were thirteen formal expressions of interest. These were narrowed down by an OD advisory group to the six groups which could be resourced through the funding available, based on criteria such as willingness to commit resources to this area of work, achieving a mix of types of landlord, and getting a balance between different geographical areas and types of housing market. Most of all, partners had to show willingness to engage in innovative work from which others could learn.

The six local partnerships which were chosen, involving a total of eleven HAs, effectively started work with an initial seminar held in October 2006. The partnerships and their locations were:

- Accent Group, Horton HA, Incommunities (formerly Bradford Community Housing Trust) and Manningham HA (Bradford)
- Accord Housing Group with the Matrix Housing Partnership (Birmingham), represented by Birmingham Cooperative Housing Services (BCHS)
- First Wessex Housing Group (Southampton)
- Longhurst Homes and Tuntum HA (Lincolnshire and Nottingham)
- St Vincent’s HA (Bolton)
- Staffordshire HA and Blue Mountain HA (Stoke-on-Trent).

The eleven HA partners have all committed staff time and have contributed in many other ways to the Opening Doors project, as will be evident from this report.

3.5 Funding streams and other resources for Opening Doors

There have been two main sources of funding for Opening Doors. The first was a grant under the Housing Corporation’s Innovation and Good Practice programme (IGP), for £150,000 over two years. The second was a grant under the Connecting Communities Plus programme (initially run by the Home Office and now Communities and Local Government) for £120,000 over three years.

The two grants were originally for separate projects but it became obvious that they should be brought together to have maximum impact. There were several reasons for this. One was that, at neighbourhood level, regardless of whether a newcomer arrives as an asylum seeker or as a migrant worker, issues of integration and relationships within the neighbourhood tend to be very similar. In addition, community-based organisations originally formed by refugees may well now be engaged with other kinds of migrant too. In housing terms, a system which a few years ago had to accommodate the dispersal of asylum seekers was now faced with the rapidly growing impact of new migration from EU accession states. A ‘round table’ meeting in February 2007, with government agencies and academic researchers, led to the refocusing of the work and the bringing together of the two, previously separate, work streams.

3.6 Timescale

The timescale of the project was originally to have been two years, beginning in April 2006. It was later extended so that it will be completed early in 2009.

3.7 Outputs promised

The outputs originally promised through the IGP and Connecting Communities Plus funding are set out in tables 3.1 and 3.2. These fall within the broader outcomes anticipated from the project which were set out in section 2.
### Table 3.1: Opening Doors – Outputs to be funded by the Housing Corporation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>HC-funded project activity</th>
<th>HAs’ activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April-September 2006</td>
<td>Set up project infrastructure</td>
<td>HAs sign up for project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use Good Practice Guide and hact expertise to prepare training framework and resource pack</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Select HAs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Launch formally at NHF annual conference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September-December 2006</td>
<td>Agreeing detailed framework and programme with HAs</td>
<td>Scoping of needs and resources locally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introductory training day and follow up with HAs</td>
<td>Setting up procedures etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 days free hact consultancy per HA to support set up training</td>
<td>Training of staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January-March 2007</td>
<td>Supporting implementation (2 days' visit)</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April-July 2007</td>
<td>Support visits to HAs</td>
<td>Continued implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August-December 2007</td>
<td>Support visits to HAs</td>
<td>Third and fourth Action Learning Sets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January-March 2008</td>
<td>Final evaluation, preparing and printing and launching final report</td>
<td>Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Final visits to HAs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project management</td>
<td>Overall management and coordination, day to day liaison with partner HAs, servicing Steering Group and partner coordination group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation and dissemination</td>
<td>Production of project briefings and website</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3.2: Opening Doors – Outputs to be funded by CLG

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>CLG-funded project activity</th>
<th>Outputs and Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feb 07</td>
<td>Design training and information material on housing access and rights for new migrants, including legal checking</td>
<td>Training designed and materials produced and checked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 07</td>
<td>Deliver training to Opening Doors partners which builds on the CIH good practice guide and incorporates new material on migrants</td>
<td>Improving knowledge, awareness, practice and engagement of Opening Doors HA staff. Agree how new knowledge will be taken forward, implemented and embedded in organisation. Agree monitoring and review processes of 6 OD members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 07</td>
<td>Prepare website information resource on housing access and rights and legal checking</td>
<td>Publish initially on hact website an information resource for HAs and other stakeholders to improve knowledge and frontline advice and information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3.2: Opening Doors – Outputs to be funded by CLG – continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>CLG-funded project activity</th>
<th>Outputs and Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mar 07</td>
<td>Work with CLG, CIH and other partners to identify where website resource information should be hosted in the longer term</td>
<td>Recommendations made and discussions entered into over longer-term hosting and updating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 07</td>
<td>Review existing Housing Corporation guidance to HAs to ensure that it is accurate in relation to legal rights and access</td>
<td>Review completed and guidance changed/updated if necessary. HAs clear of legal position in relation to new migrant access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 07</td>
<td>Produce basic leaflet on housing rights and access for frontline agencies, including legal checking</td>
<td>Basic leaflet on key housing rights for the frontline that refers them to website resource for further more detailed information. Leaflet to support word of mouth information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 07</td>
<td>Frontline advice leaflets distributed to all stakeholders</td>
<td>Improving knowledge and advice and information giving more widely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 07</td>
<td>Undertake short survey with Housing Associations</td>
<td>Setting benchmark upon which future change can be evidenced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 07</td>
<td>Hold initial discussion with six RSL groups involved in Opening Doors to explore extension of their work to focus on new migrants</td>
<td>Agreement to be part of project delivery, as extension of Opening Doors work and providing identification of pilot sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar-Apr 07</td>
<td>Local scoping visits to six RSL groups; also make contact with relevant local authorities</td>
<td>Initial assessment of local information/needs/potential and contact with any local MRCOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 07</td>
<td>Review national studies and establish housing specific picture; obtain information on on-going studies (eg JRF); brief review of available local studies</td>
<td>Assessment of: • available information on national picture • available information on local survey methods and picture • housing-related needs and priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 07</td>
<td>Produce findings of study review and invite comments, including from migrant community organisations</td>
<td>Web-based ‘Findings’ style report. Share information from available literature, posing questions and implications for housing and related services and commissioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun-Oct 07</td>
<td>Develop local project plans for obtaining information on scale/type of migration, housing-related needs and potential for tackling them</td>
<td>Develop outline local plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov-Dec 07</td>
<td>Interim report draws together local findings and identifies areas for more detailed study and/or potential local service responses that can be kick-started</td>
<td>Interim report published</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4 How the project worked at national level

As well as regular meetings with partners to set up and run the OD programme, there has been a range of outputs/activities at national level to assist the partners and promote lessons from OD more widely. These are described in this section. In each case, a summary of the views from partners is given on each activity (and where available, views from other organisations). ‘Learning points’ about each output/activity are also given.

4.1 Support material for OD partners

OD Literature Review
OD reviewed the available local, regional and national studies on new migration, focussing particularly on new EU migration. It aimed to present the available data on migration at the different levels, show evidence on local impacts and local responses (particularly on housing issues) and provide examples of methods for undertaking local surveys. The results were made available to partners (see www.cih.org/policy/openingdoors and www.hact.org.uk/downloads.asp?PageId=173), and also publicised more widely.

The motivation for the review was the sparsity of material on new migrants and of guidance on how to carry out local studies, but in practice it was little used by OD partners (one described it as ‘unnecessary’). However, the review has been referred to favourably by those engaged in research and policy-making (eg the Audit Commission and the LGA). There have been several practitioner inquiries to CIH and hact about the material.

Learning point
Practitioners find it difficult to cope with large amounts of written material even – as in this case – when it is a digest. A more basic guide (eg on surveying migrant communities) might have been more useful to practitioners, if there had been time/resources to produce one. (Such a guide has since been produced by the LGA4).

OD Training Modules
Ten training modules were prepared (see Figure 4.1), based on the material in the guide Housing and Support Services for Asylum-Seekers and Refugees, extending it to give accessible and up-to-date training material for housing staff. Again, it was produced to assist the partners but was also made more widely available (see above links). Because of the complexity of entitlements to housing and welfare benefits, the modules were reinforced by a specific training day presented by an expert in this field (Sue Lukes). There was a very positive response to the training modules and the initial training day. Most partners made use of the material and some adapted it or made it available more generally in their localities.

Figure 4.1 The Training Modules

1. **The Challenge** – Who are asylum seekers, refugees and new migrants (basic facts)? Why is housing such an important issue?
2. **The people** – who they are/what their needs are (in more detail); how they come to the UK and the processes (eg asylum, Gateway) that govern their entry/acceptance.
3. **The legalities** – legal basics and entitlement to social housing, help under homelessness legislation and housing benefit.

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4. **Partnerships – working with migrant and refugee community organisations (MRCOs)** – how to locate them, how they can help to inform your service development, their potential role as partners and service providers, practical examples of partnerships involving MRCOs and what they have achieved.

5. **Housing** – How are asylum seekers, refugees and migrants accommodated? – the different stages, different issues for single people, unaccompanied children, etc.

6. **Destitution** – why it occurs, what issues arise, ways in which HAs can help, potential partnership approaches.

7. **Support services: basic support** – using as examples the Sunrise approach, and longer-term support model set out in the CIH guide.

8. **Support services: gaining access to wider support** – ESOL, health, job-related training, etc.

9. **Community integration** – information about newcomers, improving understanding, creating local networks, making people feel secure, etc (including material from hact’s Accommodate and Communities R Us projects.)

10. **Another option: Gateway** – the government channel for accepting refugees direct from other countries, and how it works.

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**Learning points**

It is difficult to produce training material of the right detail for different levels of an organisation. Rather than fixed modules, it might have been better to produce a more flexible set of work sheets that could have been more readily adapted by local trainers, combined with guidance on how this might be done.

Some partners made more use of the materials than others, which demonstrated the need for expertise in developing and delivering in-house training or guidance from CIH/hact on this.

In a fast-moving field, the training modules would ideally also have been updated. They remain a useful resource at the end of the OD project, but will lose their value unless kept up-to-date.

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4.2 **Collaborative work with partners**

**Moodle web resource**

CIH established an online learning platform for the OD partners, which proved invaluable in exchanging material between ALS sessions, in consulting partners as the work proceeded and in documenting OD as it developed:

‘An excellent resource, somewhat underutilised.’ (Tuntum)

Partners were also able to post examples of their own documentation for use by others.

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**Learning point**

Best use is made of a resource of this kind if it is established at the outset, with initial training in how to use it. All communication should then be through the web resource (rather than through emails, for example). It also needs proactive leadership to stimulate and maintain interest.

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**Action Learning Sets**

A programme of Action Learning Sets (ALS) was developed to support the overall delivery of Opening Doors. The aim of the ALS was to bring the partners together at planned intervals to share knowledge and experience and collectively identify challenges and solutions around both the delivery of the Opening Doors programme and their wider key objectives in this area.
Because ALS was such an important element of Opening Doors, it is described in detail as an annex to this section (see p28).

**Learning points**

Action Learning Sets are a useful and relatively inexpensive tool which could be used by groups of social landlords with a common interest in developing new products or services, especially where there is limited prior knowledge or expertise.

Partners can develop their own learning experience through practice, aided by good planning and an effective facilitator. The style and format can be adapted to suit the needs of the group. For Opening Doors partners, having a separate space for information provision and update meant that the actual ALS day could focus on co-learning and an exchange of ideas and perspectives.

The Moodle web resource complemented the ALS work and was used to obtain feedback on previous sets and support the planning of future ones, share good practice and maintain networks.

**Joint setting of OD goals at local level**

One specific outcome of an ALS (in April, 2008) was the development of the twenty detailed outcomes for use at local level which were described in section 2. These were found to be very useful by partners:

‘When we formulated the core outcomes we could then demonstrate tangible progress more easily.’ (Tuntum)

However, several also commented that it would have been much better to have developed these at the outset.

**Learning point**

In a collaborative project of this kind, partners must make a decision on when exactly they will agree the detailed outcomes expected. Ideally, this should be done at the outset – but at this stage it might be difficult as many partners may be unfamiliar with the practicalities. It may therefore be useful to have provisional outcomes agreed at the outset, but with a clear understanding that these will be fully reviewed at an interim stage, once partners are in a better position to see the full potential of the project.

### 4.3 Support for partners’ local activities

**Structured visits to partners**

All of the partners received one-to-one visits in the first part of 2007 to help them establish their programmes. The consultants representing and briefed by CIH/hact were an expert on HA organisation/business planning (Rosalind Brook) and an expert on refugee/migrant housing issues (A. Azim El-Hassan).

One partner said that the visits were:

‘Very useful and welcomed.’ (Tuntum)

Overall reaction to the visits was mixed, suggesting that different partners wanted different forms of assistance. The visits did however help the overall project planning and injected greater clarity and realism about the expectations that the national project partners – CIH and hact – could place on local HA partners.
Learning points

Structured visits of the kind carried out are relatively expensive and time-consuming. While potentially valuable, it would be useful to get as close agreement as possible between partners as to what they expect from the visits and hence what consultancy help would be best engaged.

Visits might have been better timed after partners had homed in on the specific outcomes they were aiming for, so that the advice was more tailor-made.

Action plans at local level

Within the budget, each of the six partners was allocated up to £1,200 to enable them to develop and implement action plans, including aspects such as support for local MRCOs.

With support from the CLG Connecting Communities Plus funding, it was possible to support further work in three of the partner areas solely on migration issues. Funding of up to £4,000 each was available to undertake feasibility work with local stakeholders and new migrant communities that would scope and propose practical housing solutions.

The local action plans, their outcomes and learning points are described in detail in section 5.

Overall response to the action plans was mixed. On the one hand, some partners felt the sums involved were too small to be significant. On the other, partners clearly had difficulty (in some cases) finding the time to develop and execute projects.

Learning points

Many of hact’s other projects include a more significant element of grant making. Hact has identified that this provides more leverage to encourage activity and prioritisation of areas of work – particularly those relating to vulnerable and marginalised groups that might otherwise not feature fully in an organisation’s work plan.

Funders could consider the added value of being able to form a grant agreement with participants in this type of project, in addition to the main grant to a body like CIH or hact.

Support for development of Gateway schemes

At national level, the Home Office has a programme called Gateway which aims to resettle several hundred refugees each year directly to the UK from refugee camps overseas. The programme has already been successfully pursued in several local areas, although overall numbers have been small (from April 2003 until the end of 2007, just over 1,000 refugees had been resettled). Several OD partners had an interest in pursuing Gateway at local level and one – St Vincent’s – had already been involved in Bolton’s Gateway programme.

The Home Office has also been interested in promoting Gateway more widely, partly because – as pressures on housing have increased – it has become more difficult to find local authorities willing to allocate their own housing resources. In 2006, the then Chief Executive of the Housing Corporation, Jon Rouse, and the responsible minister in the Home Office, Andy Burnham, held a meeting with several housing associations with the aim of persuading them to support Gateway. It was therefore an obvious potential focus when Opening Doors started, provided housing association partners could secure the necessary agreement from the relevant local authority.

Through OD, partners were encouraged to investigate Gateway: for example, it was the subject of one training module, and partners in Bradford visited Bolton to see the experience of St Vincent’s and of Bolton MDC in accepting Gateway refugees. Later, in April 2008, Home Office representatives explained the current Gateway scheme to all OD partners.
One partner (BCHS) described the promotion of Gateway as ‘excellent’ and another (Blue Mountain) as an example of practical help to take initiatives forward at local level. In the event though, only in one area (Bradford) was Gateway pursued to a successful conclusion. But this is a considerable achievement given the extent of the commitment required if Gateway is to work. In practice, it will be the main outcome of the OD work in Bradford.

4.4 Wider activity at national level

Migration seminar
As a result of the additional ‘migrant’ dimension to the project, a successful symposium was held at CLG in October, bringing together OD partners and a range of experts/interested bodies to discuss the ‘state of play’ on integration of and housing-related issues concerning new migrants.

Submission to Migration Impact Forum
CIH and hact collaborated in the preparation of a submission by Joanne Roney (then of Sheffield City Council) to the government’s Migration Impacts Forum, chaired by ministers, whose January 2008 meeting considered housing-related issues. The submission made several references to the OD work (see www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/651075.pdf).

Session at CIH National Conference
The Harrogate conference in June, 2008 had a specific session drawing on OD work – Immigration and Housing – at which speakers included hact’s Heather Petch and OD partner Sarfraz Hussain, as well as Joanne Roney as a member of the MIF (see above).

Other publications or initiatives featuring OD work
These have included the following:

- Examples from OD partners informed (and were used in) the new CIH guide to Community Cohesion and Housing sponsored by the Corporation and published in October 2007.
- CIH and hact made a joint submission to the CLG Select Committee inquiry into Community Cohesion and Migration, drawing from the OD work.
- Inside Housing, 18/5/07, included a double page feature on Opening Doors, particularly in relation to its potential to develop Gateway schemes. The Housing Corporation, CIH and hact were all quoted.
- The Building and Social Housing Foundation led a ‘consultation’ on migrant worker housing at Windsor Castle in June, 2008, which involved Heather Petch as a participant and drew partly on the experience with OD. The BSHF report Home from Home – Addressing the issues of migrant workers’ housing has a range of detailed recommendations, including recommendations to housing associations.
- CIH, in collaboration with one of the OD partners (Matrix), published A Guide to Engaging Muslim Communities by John Perry and A Azim El-Hassan in June, 2008, again drawing in part on OD experience and examples.
- CIH and hact, jointly with Shelter, wrote in October, 2008 to the Communities and Local Government Secretary, Hazel Blears, and to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights, expressing their concerns about the effects on refugee and new migrant integration of the draft Immigration and Citizenship Bill.
- Inside Housing published a further feature article on OD (7/11/08) with examples of partners’ work.
Migrants and housing network

Trustees of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation have made an in principle decision to fund a new network from 2009. This would be organised by hact, building on and expanding the focus of the Refugee and Housing Network, which ended in 2003.

Housing rights web resource

A web-based information resource on entitlement to housing and welfare benefits for refugees and different classes of migrant was developed through the OD work, building on training module 3. It was launched in September, 2008 (see www.housing-rights.info). The website was welcomed by partners but also more widely:

‘Congratulations to all involved.’ (Tudor Trust)

‘This is a very interesting and potentially useful resource which I have shared with other colleagues.’ (Rob Cooper, Norfolk Supporting People team)

The East of England Development Agency, which has been very active in engaging with migrant worker issues, is committed to ensuring that the organisation chosen to deliver a website they are commissioning on behalf of several other RDAs, incorporates and links to the CIH/hact housing rights website. The Lintel Trust in Glasgow is also actively considering with CIH Scotland how to extend the site to cover Scotland (and possibly, as a result, Wales and Northern Ireland).

So far (end of March, 2009) the site has had almost 18,000 ‘hits’.

Learning point

If well-used, the housing rights web resource could be a very valuable source of accurate guidance on housing entitlements for housing organisations. It would be useful to continue to obtain feedback on it, and to examine ways of promoting it more widely, not only within the housing sector but among new migrants. Resources will be needed to update it after 2009.

‘Reach In’ project

This project builds in part on the experience with OD and on the CIH/hact partnership. Funded by the European Refugee Fund, the project will develop and deliver a work placement scheme for refugees in housing organisations. Of the eight social landlords committed to taking part, three are OD partners (BCHS, Blue Mountain/Staffordshire and St Vincent’s).
Annex to section 4: Action Learning Sets (ALS)

The programme originally envisaged four Action Learning Sets to be completed by February 2008. In fact, the four were spread over a slightly longer period and the last was held in October 2008.

What are Action Learning Sets?

Action Learning Sets are a tool to support the development of skills and knowledge by exploring solutions to real challenges and issues faced.

Set members support each other to come to a decision about the way forward with collective challenges. At subsequent sessions set members have an opportunity to report back on progress and reflect on how their chosen solution had worked in practice.

Someone with experience acts as a facilitator, managing the process of collaboration and developing a framework that meets the needs of the individuals and of the group.

At the outset, the planned objectives were to:

- set clear objectives for partners
- highlight key challenges
- share knowledge and expertise
- develop the new approaches to working needed as part of OD
- apply them in practice
- reflect and feed back on successes
- reflect and understand where things haven’t worked
- refine action plans
- capture knowledge and learning and disseminate both to the group and to a wider audience.

How Action Learning Sets worked

The first session introduced the concept of action learning, agreed some common terms of reference and identified a range of common challenges. The list of challenges was then prioritised by collective agreement and the topic areas for the next learning session were set. The following two sessions focused on breaking down the identified challenges, considering potential solutions, sharing experience and practice and capturing a range of action points for each partner organisation to take back to their workplace and to address. The final session focused more specifically on evaluation and review of the OD programme.

Common challenges identified through ALS

The following were the specific areas considered by the OD partners during the course of the ALS programme. Some were considered in more detail than others. This was determined by the priority and importance attached by the partners.

- making, evidencing and evaluating the business case
- working with MRCOs
- mapping/profiling communities
- organisational culture – particularly where stock transfer is involved
- coalition building within organisations
- conflict between core activities, regulation and inspection
- conflict between government policy drivers and delivery in practice
- making a case for incremental work to achieve longer-term benefits
- funding solutions and opportunities
- developing action plans.
**Example of action learning in practice**

The following are examples of the range of activities that were developed by the group from shared learning and discussion. Each of the partners was able to implement several of the ideas in their own organisation, and reported back on what worked and what didn’t to help shape and inform practice further. The activities relate to one of the core challenges identified by the group – making the business case.

- Develop core training for all staff – focus on understanding key issues and myth busting – use case studies and real stories to humanise/personalise issues. In addition, use OD training modules to set out legal basis and improve staff knowledge.
- Briefing day for policy makers and senior staff – overview and case studies.
- Appoint an OD ‘champion’ from within the board.
- Identify change agents within the organisation.
- Set up an advisory panel to influence the board.
- Positive media/press strategy – raises profile in organisation, sector and with government agencies (such as HCA and TSA).
- Show board/staff recent television item on Gateway.
- Recruit (volunteers) from local community – positive impact on organisation and community.
- Invite one board member to ALS session.
- Create DVD with range of vox pops, positive media, etc.
- Produce/use existing myth-busting leaflet – for staff and customers.
- Develop a quality mark ‘refugee/ community friendly’ – organisational accolade.
- Take board members out into local communities – hold board meetings in community centres.

**Response to ALS**

Partners were strongly supportive of the ALS:

‘*An invaluable exchange of experiences and ideas.*’ (BCHS)

‘*Particularly valuable.*’ (Longhurst)

The ALS were very productive because:

- Partners wanted them to take more time – they asked that they be combined with the project meetings and that both these events take place over two days not one, to get maximum benefit from the time together.
- Partners wanted to hold the ALS in the partner areas, combining them with brief visits to projects. The second ALS was therefore held in Bradford and the final one in Nottingham. A post-project ALS is to take place in Salford/Bolton.
- As part of the project meetings held in advance of the ALS days, partners specifically wanted to include a session with Home Office representatives on the Gateway programme. This took place in Bradford (as Bradford partners are particularly interested in Gateway). A further specific session took place around the new UK Border Agency’s Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES) and the implications of the establishment of the two new housing agencies – TSA and HCA.
- Holding the sessions in different locations allowed partners to see practical projects taking place in those areas.

The ALS sessions have not only been an information exchange but have reinforced the enthusiasm and commitment of the staff involved, who clearly sometimes face an ‘uphill task’ in getting action on refugee/migrant issues within their organisations.
This section describes in turn each of the six partnerships and their intentions in taking part in Opening Doors. It then outlines the work done and what was achieved in each case.

### 5.1 Accent Group, Horton HA, Incommunities and Manningham HA (Bradford)

**The partners**

The four Bradford-based associations shared both a commitment to work with Bradford’s long-established ethnic minority communities and a willingness to explore ways of providing improved services to both refugees and new migrants. Bradford was a dispersal area for asylum seekers and three of the partners worked together in one of hact’s five *Accommodate* refugee housing partnerships.

More recently Bradford has experienced wider migration from the EU and other regions. Despite the scale of recent population change, however, limited data were available to judge housing needs. Accent were working with the local authority to improve local data.

The partners brought current experience of varying kinds which was relevant to OD:

- Incommunities has several years’ experience of housing and working with asylum seekers.
- Horton HA has a specialist service, Bevan House, providing homelessness and related assistance to asylum seekers and refugees, which became the one stop service for newly recognised refugees as part of the *Accommodate* project.
- Manningham is a specialist association providing mainly large family accommodation, and involved in several community cohesion initiatives.

All partners are party to the Bradford choice-based lettings scheme, Homehunter. The scheme had been successful in promoting social sector lettings to BME communities. Although at the time of starting Opening Doors, experience in promoting lettings to refugees and new migrants was more limited, this has now grown.

**The work**

The Bradford partners originally aimed to use Opening Doors to develop a cross-organisational protocol on dealing with the needs of asylum seekers, refugees and new migrants, increase lettings to those groups, create more mainstreamed housing provision and encourage participation in initiatives aimed at providing construction industry job opportunities to minority groups.

However, in Bradford, unlike the other five areas, OD partners identified one specific but major outcome – the implementation of a Gateway scheme in Bradford which (it was later agreed) would accept 94 stateless Rohingya refugees, originally from Burma, directly from refugee camps in Bangladesh. This became the dominant output from the OD work and is in the course of being delivered as this report is in preparation.

> ‘The Opening Doors partnership has galvanised the forces for good within our local housing associations to deliver Bradford’s Gateway Protection Programme.’ (Anil Singh, Chief Executive of Manningham HA)

Achievement of a successful Gateway scheme required the following key steps:

- The partner associations working together with Bradford MDC to prepare and make the case for Bradford to engage with the Gateway programme.
- Drawing on the experience of OD and *Accommodate* partners in Bolton, who had already run a Gateway scheme (Bradford representatives visited Bolton in April, 2008).
OPENING DOORS – IMPROVING HOUSING SERVICES FOR REFUGEES AND NEW MIGRANTS

• Convincing politicians of the business case for being part of the Gateway programme, eg that Gateway would bring resources to make fuller use of existing facilities, that it would enhance the city’s reputation, etc.
• Working with Bradford MDC to consider the demands that would be placed on services apart from housing (mainly education and health), and how these would be coordinated (using the extra resources available through Gateway).
• The main Bradford associations agreeing to contribute units for the housing of the refugees, including Accent, Brunel, Incommunities, Manningham and Places for People.
• Manningham and Horton, as OD partners, formally contracting with the UKBA to take on Gateway.
• Planning greater use of existing services for refugees through Gateway, eg Horton HA’s Bevan House advice centre and support team, and the Kickstart business enterprise support service.

Lessons from OD in Bradford include:
• The lack of additional resources associated with OD resulted in ad hoc resourcing via three key partners – Accent, Manningham & Horton.
• Manningham HA felt that practical engagement with MRCOs proved difficult in Bradford because no meaningful role or resources for them were identified.
• The skills and experiences of refugees in Bradford are largely untapped, with obstacles presented in relation to qualifications, inability to verify paper qualifications left in the country being fled, lack of acknowledgment of their work experiences and lack of opportunities to participate in the labour market. Gateway may provide the catalyst to begin to tackle these issues (which have been tackled in other areas).
• The need to ensure constructive engagement with local authorities – both officers and members – in planning Gateway as early as possible in the process.

‘If you invite people to collaborate, it takes a lot of time and energy: attention to detail, calling meetings, taking minutes, sorting agendas.’ (Anil Singh, Chief Executive of Manningham HA)

**5.2 Accord Housing Group with the Matrix Housing Partnership (Birmingham)**

*The partners*

The work of Accord Group (and associated Matrix Housing Partnership) has been led by BCHS, a specialist member of the group that works on cooperative and community-based housing projects.

BCHS and Accord HA had earlier worked with the Midland Refugee Council (MRC) to develop their private sector leasing scheme, which had been providing accommodation for refugees for many years but faced considerable difficulties. Although BCHS did not succeed in helping MRC to turn the initiative around, the learning provided valuable experience as well as local knowledge of and relationships with MRCOs in Birmingham. A positive outcome was a placement scheme for refugees to give them work experience, which led to one being offered a permanent post with BCHS.
The group is also a partner in hact’s Accommodate West Midlands project, which has provided resources (£90K from CapacityBuilders and the European Refugee Fund) to develop the private sector leasing scheme, together with capacity building of MRCOs who are involved in referrals and/or supporting services.

**The work**

There have been three main areas of work:

- **Building links with and supporting organisations working with refugees and new migrants and providing capacity building for them and for MRCOs**
  - Developing a regional partnership (Accommodate WM) with three refugee support organisations: ARC (Asylum and Refugees Council, Birmingham), Brushstrokes (Sandwell) and RMC (Refugee and Migrant Centre, Wolverhampton).
  - Running an ‘access to housing’ capacity building programme for committee members and staff from the organisations, including two residential workshops in October, 2007 and March, 2008 funded by the Accommodate project.
  - The development of other partnerships including work with Birmingham City Council’s Wardlow Road Refugee and Asylum Seeker Resource Centre.
  - Working with regional partners to deliver a targeted training programme for eight MRCOs in 2008, including an accredited ‘Training for Trainers’ course for eight trainees (also funded through Accommodate).

- **Embedding support for refugees in the wider work of the Accord Group**
  - Ensuring that the Opening Doors programme was supported by and reported to appropriate Accord/Matrix committees and strategy groups.
  - Active participation in a number of regional support networks and forums.
  - Accord’s equality and diversity strategy was revised to embody clear commitments to refugees/migrants. And is now being reviewed again alongside the group’s community cohesion strategy.
  - A customer profiling project being implemented across the group in 2009 which will identify ‘new arrivals’.
  - Specific work with BCHS-supported co-ops, to raise their awareness about and levels of support for refugees; this led to more allocations to refugees and more involvement by them in co-op committees.
  - Staff training course developed (using OD modules) for delivery late 2008/early 2009.
  - Two refugees directly employed by BCHS; Accord Group has now signed up to the Reach In project (see section 4).

- **The development of private sector leasing schemes (and other projects) to house refugees**
  - Two schemes have been developed in Birmingham under the Accommodate project. One is with Wardlow Road Refugee Home Options service, and delivered 15 units by December, 2008. One is with the Asylum and Refugee Council, and delivered five units by the same date. A third scheme with Brushstrokes and Sandwell Homes is under discussion, and BCHS is tendering for a project in Wolverhampton which could involve the Refugee and Migrant Centre there. The target is 40 units by March 2009.
  - BCHS has provided specific support in terms of systems and procedures to ARC and also to the Bolton Solidarity Community Association.
  - BCHS is also providing advice and guidance to several other hact-supported housing projects.
  - Matrix actively promoted a Gateway project in the West Midlands but was unable to secure local authority support.

In participating in Opening Doors, BCHS and Accord had the advantage of being able to build on their work within hact’s Accommodate programme, so they already had experience of working with refugee groups.
Lessons from Opening Doors for BCHS, Accord and Matrix include:

- They believe that the housing association sector is at a crossroads. On the one hand, investment/developmental and regulatory imperatives are driving the sector towards bigger and bigger groupings, which are moving the strategic leadership away from local communities and specific need groups. On the other hand, housing needs and priorities are becoming more diverse and more complex requiring a close knowledge of local circumstances if they are to be dealt with.

- How can these two conflicting directions be reconciled? There are no easy answers but good local intelligence and genuine partnership working are crucial. Opening Doors has helped to facilitate this. The intention is to sustain and build on the work in future.

- Hact should continue to highlight progressive ways of working that challenge the monolithic and rigid approaches that often seem to result from national investment programmes and regulatory systems.

- While BCHS/Accord/Matrix welcomed the idea of developing a Gateway scheme in West Midlands, this proved difficult to sell politically. Gateway therefore remains a major challenge, even if pursued enthusiastically by an association with a ‘track record’ of working with refugees.

Overall, BCHS felt that it had been important to operate at both a strategic and an operational level in implementing Opening Doors. Refugees and new migrants have pressing housing needs and the onus on housing associations is to work with refugee organisations to find practical and appropriate housing solutions.

Learning points

BCHS and Accord had the advantage of being able to build on their work within hact’s Accommodate West Midlands project, so they already had experience of working with refugee groups, as well as resources to deliver. Through OD, they built on this in the ways just described. They also had experience with private sector leasing. Other HAs may not have the same advantages but BCHS’s model might be ‘exportable’ to other areas if there were ways of sharing their experience with other HAs who want to pursue a leasing model along these lines.

In 2009 hact will be sharing their experience with other HAs who want to pursue a leasing model in collaboration with refugee or migrant groups. This will build on existing work in the field by the London Housing Foundation and Crisis.

5.3 First Wessex Housing Group (Southampton area)

The partner

First Wessex is one of the major housing groups in the Hampshire, Southampton and Portsmouth areas, including both well-established local traditional associations (Portsmouth HA) and stock transfer bodies such as Atlantic and Pavilion.

The group has had great success in housing and supporting individuals who have obtained refugee status following the launch of an accommodation-based service to refugees in July 2001, in partnership with Southampton City Council’s City Asylum Seekers Team (Southampton was originally an asylum seeker dispersal area). The group currently has six units for approved refugees. The service is funded through Supporting People and has achieved 6 ‘B’ grades through the Quality Assessment Framework. Accommodation and support are provided for up two years. Each client completes a support plan with staff and this is regularly reviewed. The aim is to enable the client to achieve independence and successful integration into the community.
The group has made a major contribution to the local Connecting Communities project which sought to identify the housing and support needs of Southampton’s minority ethnic communities, especially newly arrived groups such as refugees and migrant workers. In addition, the city council has established a New Communities team whose remit is to assess the needs of and begin to coordinate service delivery for Southampton’s new migrant communities.

Opening Doors was seen as a logical follow up to the data-gathering and partnership work which had been established through the Connecting Communities project. One important aim was to embed the recent work in the mainstream activities of local associations, given that the New Communities team only had limited-term funding (until the end of 2008/09).

**The work**

For First Wessex, the period of what should have been intense activity through OD coincided with a time of considerable change within the organisation. So in order to meet the objectives of OD, the brief for local action was revised, to focus on working with Southampton City Council to produce a simple toolkit to assist HAs in their work with new migrant communities, based on the experience of the Southampton New Communities team.

This toolkit will ultimately help meet several of the key OD aims by:

- improving knowledge of new communities
- ensuring pro-active board sign up
- improving the monitoring of customer profiles of residents and those who use HA services
- building relationships with communities and their community organisations
- improving staff awareness of the role housing associations have in relation to new communities
- identify useful sources of information for developing work and information about new communities.

The completed toolkit is available on CIH and hact websites.

The overall picture for refugee/migrant-related services for First Wessex, at the close of the OD programme, is as follows:

- For FWHG, and therefore potentially for other general needs HAs, the needs of specific groups that are not already mainstream, and therefore require specialist support, are in competition with other demands and commitments within the organisation; they find it difficult to gain recognition as a ‘core’ activity.

- If these needs are also in competition with the needs of other, and sometimes larger, groups in the locality, then it is a challenge to obtain ‘buy-in’ from colleagues and external partner organisations, including local authorities, in targeting the housing needs of new migrant communities.

- In terms of refugees, following a fall in demand for the accommodation-based service in Southampton along with the internal review of care and support services across the First Wessex Housing Group, it was concluded at a strategic level that this specific client group is one with specialised needs which would benefit from support from an organisation more focused and better placed to meet these needs.

- For this reason, the group entered into discussions with the Southampton Supporting People team with a view to moving the direct provision of the refugee support service out of the group and into the business of a more specialist provider. FWHG would continue to act as landlord and provide the buildings as part of this work but the direct support within this accommodation as well as in the wider community would be delivered by an external locally based provider.
OD has highlighted, through First Wessex, the difficulty which many medium-large associations find in prioritising and embedding this area of work, given its specialist nature, especially if major change such as a merger or other restructuring is taking place.

This can be the case even if – as with First Wessex – the association has considerable experience in housing and support for refugees, and operates in a strategic environment (the Southampton New Communities Strategy and BME Housing Strategy) which is recognised as a leader in its field.

5.4 Longhurst Homes and Tuntum HA (Lincolnshire and Nottingham)

The partners

Longhurst and Tuntum are (respectively) a traditional association and a BME association, both operating in the East Midlands. They are not formally linked but have collaborated in the past and came together in the Opening Doors project to share the strengths of a mid-size, developing HA with a smaller, specialist one with particular experience of working with minority ethnic groups.

Unlike the other partnerships, this one had two geographical focus points: Nottingham (where the main emphasis was on housing and support services for refugees) and in Boston and Spalding in Lincolnshire (where the emphasis was on the needs of migrant workers in the agriculture and food-processing industries).

Tuntum had led on the establishment of a BME Leadership Forum in Nottingham. It was also engaged in discussions to ensure that Nottingham’s choice-based lettings scheme was responsive to refugee needs (Nottingham has been an asylum dispersal area). It wanted to explore the possibility of securing units from different social landlords to provide the basis for a housing-with-support service for refugees, as well as bidding for funding to provide a floating support service.

Longhurst intended to build on work it had already done around the impact of migration on Boston and nearby areas, including some contact with employers. It wanted to explore possible work to improve housing conditions, eg in the private rented sector or in collaboration with employers.

The work

The main strength of the partnership was the collaboration between the key staff involved in the two organisations who were driving the OD project, plus some joint training between Tuntum and Longhurst staff (facilitated by the director of OD partner, Blue Mountain Housing Association).

The partnership had four main aspects to its action plan: better understanding of and improved service access for refugee/migrant communities, specific service developments to meet refugee needs in Nottingham, exploratory work on the housing needs of migrant workers in Boston/South Lincolnshire, and mainstreaming OD-related work in the region:

- **Understanding of and monitoring of service access for refugee/migrant communities**
  - All Longhurst/Tuntum staff received training on refugee/migration issues, based on the OD modules – Longhurst reports a significant change in the attitudes of staff, who were much less accustomed to working with new communities.
  - Longhurst have changed their approach to collecting data on their customers, to improve their knowledge of migrants’ use of services.
Tuntum has made strong links with the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum so as to develop its relationship with refugee community groups.
Longhurst has had difficulty in contacting migrant worker groups, but is in touch with two local groups.

**Meeting refugee housing and support needs in Nottingham**
- Tuntum has reached agreement with eight HAs to provide six properties each for refugee rehousing (Nottingham is a former asylum dispersal area with a significant refugee population); the first units have now been made available and have been let (outside the local CBL system).
- Tuntum used the impetus given by its participation in OD to help secure a major, three-year Supporting People contract for a refugee support service (‘Refugee Futures’) in Nottingham; the contract started in October, 2008. The bid was made jointly with the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum.

**Engaging with migrant worker housing issues in Boston/S Lincs**
- A new housing leaflet is being produced, aimed at new communities in Lincolnshire.
- A survey of migrant worker housing needs is underway and partially complete. (It complements an earlier, more general survey across S Lincs.) It was carried out by employing a member of a migrant community. Results so far show considerable dissatisfaction with existing accommodation.
- Longhurst are planning to engage more actively with local authorities and other housing providers to take forward the findings from the OD research/engagement work.

**Mainstreaming refugee/migrant issues**
- Tuntum and Longhurst sponsored Refugee Week in Nottingham (and will do so again next year), involving staff in ten events during the week.
- Both organisations have also taken part in the Caribbean Carnival, which is in any case a traditional part of Tuntum’s work in Nottingham.
- Through the OD project, Longhurst have made efforts to influence the sub-regional housing strategy.
- Also through OD, refugee and migrant housing needs are now better reflected in regional policy, e.g. through the housing strategy for BME communities in the East Midlands, and through the CIH regional housing manifesto.

**Learning points**
Longhurst found the key lessons learned from the project from the viewpoint of a general needs HA were that migrant workers were a potential group of new customers whose needs they had not addressed, yet clearly there was a business case for doing so. It appears from the initial findings of the research that migrants in the area have not accessed social housing to any significant degree, despite a significant desire to do so. Longhurst wants to better understand the reasons for this, although an apparent lack of knowledge of housing rights appears to be a contributing factor.

Longhurst felt that the contact with the migrant community, through the worker they employed, had been very productive. The worker is now a community engagement officer with the county council, and the links continue.

Tuntum felt their biggest lesson is that it is much better to work with organisations already working with MRCOs. This way, the HA gained from the experience of those already working with refugees, but was also able to bring the fresh viewpoint of a BME-focused body which previously had not worked in this field.

5.5 St Vincent’s HA (Bolton)

The partner
St Vincent’s HA in Bolton already had experience of working with refugees through the Gateway programme led by Bolton Community Homes, a strategic housing partnership of which St Vincent’s is a member. Through its Urban Care Centre in Farnworth, St Vincent’s has delivered a wide range of services to build confidence, develop skills and promote community harmony. The HA manages two foyers and in Manchester they have been able to support young refugees and asylum seekers. It provides a seconded support worker to the Bolton and Bury Gateway programme and has developed good relationships with BME community organisations in Bolton.

St Vincent’s is an HA with a strong commitment to work with asylum seekers and refugees, and it wanted to use Opening Doors to build on this and extend it to dealing with new migrants. It wanted to improve the data available on the needs of migrant communities and ensure that the commitment to this area of work fed into all the association’s systems and those of partners. It wanted to ensure the local choice-based lettings scheme was accessible to refugees and migrants. It wanted to raise staff awareness and improve staff training.

The work
St Vincent’s action plan had four main components: raising staff awareness, improving access to housing, providing training/employment opportunities (and using these to develop links with MRCOs), and mainstreaming OD-related work within St Vincent’s and in the parts of the North West where St Vincent’s operates:

- **Raising staff awareness**
  - The OD training modules were specifically adapted for local use, and PowerPoint presentations developed (based on the modules).
  - So far, five training sessions have been held with staff, with more planned.
  - Staff have access to the OD housing rights website.
  - Training will be delivered to board members.

- **Improving access to housing**
  - Collaborated in survey of all HA/LA tenants in Bolton and in migrant worker research – this will result in a local action plan based on the findings.
  - Set up system to capture migrant/refugee use of homelessness service – links to homelessness action plan and improved signposting service.
  - Customer profile of all existing tenants carried out in January, 2009.
  - Resource packs being produced in partnership with Bolton Community Homes and CAB, and a housing advice leaflet for migrant workers.
  - Setting up a database of services for use by frontline staff.
  - Two focus groups using a translator were held with Polish/Lithuanian migrants in Farnworth, Bolton, to explore housing issues highlighted in the migrant worker research (see above) in more depth.

- **Providing training/employment opportunities and working with MRCOs**
  - St Vincent’s already runs its Urban Care Centre (UCAN) in Bolton, aimed at refugees; its remit is being extended to other migrants. It has a range of courses including ESOL, healthy eating, etc.
  - A driving course run from the UCAN has been extended to take a further 15 refugees, seven from Gateway; a volunteer ran a theory course at BRASS (Bolton Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support).
  - A new ESOL course is being established which will have modules on health and wellbeing, education and skills, and access to employment, combining language training with other ‘Skills for Life’.
Other planned output from OD was to collect information from asylum seekers and refugees for a ‘myth busting’ project, but it proved difficult to get people to tell their stories. All UCAN users are offered an appointment with an Employment and Training Officer and several of these have led to employment; an employment ‘open day’ was held at the centre in November, 2008. Clients are also signposted to the CAB migrant worker integration project – so far there have been 53 referrals. Activities are planned in conjunction with BRASS (Bolton Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support), the Shamwari project, the Migrant Worker Forum and MRCOs. In Manchester, St Vincent’s foyer also works with asylum seekers and refugees, and has had nine in the last 12 months.

Mainstreaming OD-related work
- St Vincent’s board has ‘signed up’ to the OD work and the priorities involved.
- Refugee and migrant needs/issues have been included in the HA’s updated Equality Scheme.
- The wider ‘vision’ for St Vincent’s commits to creating more sustainable neighbourhoods (incorporating work with refugees/migrants). This has recently been approved by the board.
- St Vincent’s actively contributes to the BME housing strategy in Rochdale and the action plan following the migrant worker study in Bolton.
- St Vincent’s hosted a visit by Bradford OD partners to see Bolton’s experience with the Gateway scheme (Bolton has since accepted ten Iraqi families through a further phase of Gateway).

Learning points
St Vincent’s believed that given the constraints, and the resources that would be needed to succeed across all the geographical areas where the HA works (the whole of the North West), it was best to concentrate on working in Bolton where the HA has good partners and there is a pre-existing Gateway project, with Bolton Community Homes providing leadership for this work.

The Urban Care Centre model works very well with these communities because it is an informal service and people feel comfortable approaching the HA through it. The centre has been the basis for wider partnerships, for example the link with the CAB who have a project worker specifically for new migrant integration.

The Urban Care Centre is backed by Bolton Community Homes, and is an example of effective partnership between an LA and HA, as well as being a demonstration of how an HA can contribute to a strategic housing partnership.

Within St Vincent’s as an organisation, the OD project has helped to raise awareness among staff and improve their knowledge on the issues refugees and migrant workers face, particularly because St Vincent’s actively and creatively used the OD training materials.

5.6 Staffordshire HA and Blue Mountain HA (Stoke-on-Trent)

The partners
Staffordshire HA had a strong commitment to work with BME communities, and has a close partnership with the local BME HA, Blue Mountain. Through their partnership they wanted to further extend their commitment to providing services to refugee and new migrant communities in Stoke-on-Trent. SHA/Blue Mountain had already involved BME communities in the governance of the associations and created a BME advisory panel to help guide Opening Doors and similar activities, acting as a critical friend to the two associations.
Like St Vincent’s, an early priority was to improve local data on new communities and their needs. It was also important to embed the commitment to these communities in the wider work of Blue Mountain and SHA, as well as extend it to the work with local partnerships. So far in Stoke-on-Trent, the priority had been to meet refugees’ needs and new migrant needs had not been addressed. SHA/Blue Mountain wanted to ensure more equal treatment. A choice-based lettings scheme had also been implemented without much attention being given to the needs of refugees/new migrants.

SHA/Blue Mountain were keen to improve staff training in this area. They also wanted to offer work experience opportunities to refugees/new migrants.

**The work**

The partnership’s initiatives under OD mainly related to the work of SHA, widening its perspective to take a much more active role in meeting the needs of refugees and new migrants. The work covered four areas: staff awareness and profile, improved housing access, contact with/support for MRCOs and mainstreaming OD-related work in Stoke-on-Trent and more widely:

- **Raising staff awareness and profile**
  - New training carried out among all staff.
  - Courses also offered to other local HAs.
  - New internal resource established on housing rights/entitlements to guide staff.
  - Have positively encouraged applications for posts from refugees/migrants; applications have increased and one staff member has been recruited.

- **Improving housing access for refugees and migrants**
  - New census of tenants carried out and results presented to the board.
  - Ways of monitoring ethnicity among customers have been changed to reflect local diversity and also to record if someone has refugee status.
  - The ‘Bridging Communities’ project has so far led to 40 homes being acquired, refurbished and made available to refugees; others are in the pipeline. SHA’s participation in OD was felt to have been influential in the success of the funding bid.
  - Customer leaflets updated and made more useful to refugees, in appropriate languages.
  - Regular information sessions are being held with refugee tenants, to help improve their knowledge of/access to local services.

- **Contacting and supporting MRCOs**
  - Support has been provided to a local Polish group to help it to develop further and obtain funding for its activities.
  - A Community Advisory Panel was set up in the course of the OD project, which includes several refugee members, to critically assess, challenge and support the HA’s work.

- **Mainstreaming OD-related work in Stoke-on-Trent and more widely**
  - BMHA leads the local (Stoke) BME Housing Strategy group and has ensured it embraces OD-related work.
  - BMHA’s Director is a member of Stoke’s LSP and there are BME representatives on all Stoke LAAs.
  - The Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder (‘Renew’) has undertaken research on new migrant needs.
  - BMHA/SHA held a very successful local ‘Community cohesion summit’ attended by 120 people from local organisations, at which OD-related work was a key theme.
  - Local liaison work has been carried out (eg with ward councillors) to explain refugee housing needs and the associations’ work, in areas where refugees are being rehoused.
  - BMHA’s Director has spoken about OD-related work at the CIH conference and on other platforms to raise awareness of refugee/migrant issues locally, regionally and nationally.
BMHA's Community Advisory Panel has held several joint discussions with SHA's board which have been extremely positive and productive. Good relationships, based on openness and mutual respect, have been built up between members of the Advisory Panel and the SHA board. The work of the panel is not only influencing BMHA/SHA services but also building the leadership potential of Advisory Panel members.

**Learning points**

BMHA believes it is difficult to assess whether some of the progress with refugee housing initiatives has been 'because of' the OD project. Certainly, OD has been helpful to give a strategic framework but has been less helpful at a local level to take initiatives forward. However, OD has helped in providing the impetus to getting a 'better deal' for refugees and new migrants in a sometimes hostile political environment (Stoke has nine BNP councillors).

BMHA also believes that if partners had been more pro-active in making requests for advice on taking forward specific initiatives, such as Gateway, this could have proved useful and worked well.

The local BME housing strategy has provided a local strategic framework around which to actively champion refugee (but more widely BME) housing and support issues.

It would have been helpful to have had a clearer objective to try and influence chief executives/board members to take ownership of the issues in order to mainstream the agenda.
6 Lessons for work with refugee and new migrant communities

6.1 The importance of working with migrant and refugee community organisations

It was a fundamental component of Opening Doors that partners should be equipped with knowledge about migrant and refugee community organisations (MRCOs), skills about working with MRCOs would be shared, and OD partners would make contact with and begin to support and learn from the experience and community knowledge of MRCOs.

Hact has had considerable experience of working with MRCOs. This work has been a key element of earlier hact projects, and partnerships between housing providers, strategic bodies and refugee community organisations were the platform of hact’s flagship Accommodate project, in which a number of the OD partners had been involved.

In addition to hact’s experience and support:

- The CIH guide provided introductory material on MRCOs for the OD partners, and suggested forms of partnership between social landlords and MRCOs.
- The OD training modules had a specific module on MRCOs to enable partners to promote a wider, if basic, understanding of their role.
- While the OD project was in progress, hact published a guide to working with MRCOs in the provision of public services, and this guide illustrates the vast range of work being done by longer-established MRCOs, and therefore the potential which newer MRCOs might have if their capacity can be built over time.

6.2 How far did MRCOs feature in the OD partners’ work?

As can be seen from the detailed outputs described in the previous section of the report, there was some success in engaging with MRCOs. The main highlights were:

- The various elements of BCHS’s work in the West Midlands, including involvement of MRCOs in leasing schemes, supporting them through training programmes and their role in training Accord staff.
- Indirect involvement of MRCOs, through the local refugee forum, in the bidding for and running of the ‘Refugee Futures’ support service in Nottingham.
- Activities in Bolton based around St Vincent’s Urban Care Centre, involving collaboration with MRCOs.
- Blue Mountain’s support for a Polish MRCO and its involvement of MRCOs in its Community Advisory Panel.

However, this involvement fell short of hact and CIH’s ambitions for MRCO involvement in the OD project. Some of the biggest successes, for example, were grounded in pre-existing relationships and availability of additional resources via hact (eg in Birmingham) and/or strong strategic leadership for partnerships with new communities (eg in Bolton).

The questions therefore arise as to why this was the case, whether it was too ambitious to expect a greater level of MRCO involvement, and what lessons there are for future projects of this kind?

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6.3 Responses of OD partners

Some responses from OD partners summarise the challenges that arose:

- **Blue Mountain:**
  
  ‘It has been difficult to really involve MRCOs. Many are small and emerging. Even the more established MRCOs struggle with funding and therefore sustainability. They require lots of practical help to sustain themselves. Without helping them with sustainability (funding, premises, expertise, systems) it is difficult to ask them to help us and get involved with our projects. Although we were successful in helping a local Polish group, changes in their management structure, their other genuine and pressing commitments (irregular agency work, going back home to Poland, dealing with benefit/tax problems) made it difficult for us to work with them.

  ‘We would have liked this to have really been a more positive and sustainable outcome – helping communities help themselves – for them to be their own voice is very powerful. But it is difficult unless there is dedicated officer and financial support for them.’

- **Manningham.** Partners’ involvement was indicated as having been ‘genuinely quite limited’. In part this was felt to be because:

  ‘MRCOs which are weak, under-funded and without proper state sponsorship via a cogent government agency are deemed to fail. Hact should establish proper sponsorship of MRCOs via UKBA, the CLG and possibly the HCA.’

- **Longhurst:**

  ‘From our research work through the CABs we have recognised that it would probably be more effective to get feedback from migrants through one-to-one interviews and feedback. We used a member of the new migrant worker community who had previously conducted research with migrants to extend our survey that we started with the CAB. Through her work and contacts we gained access to members of the new migrant community, through someone known and trusted. We feel that this is an important lesson for us from the project as we were unable to simply contact established groups, as there were few if any groups of this kind.’

At the same time there were also positive experiences:

- **Tuntum:**

  ‘By becoming involved with Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum we were able to form a consortium with them and another organisation called Co-operative Community Action (CCA) to apply for and gain the floating support contract for refugees in Nottingham, valued at £434,000 a year, for three years.’

- **BCHS:**

  ‘Partnership building is critical. BCHS found three strong primary partners and worked productively with all three. But after capacity building work had been completed, the basis for the partnership has had to be revisited and will probably continue in two of the three cases. The work with local MRCOs brokered through the primary partners is being rethought so that there is a focus on meeting the needs of individual groups. The main lesson is that partnerships have to be built over time and there has to be something in the partnership for everyone. When large established HAs partner with small insecure MRCOs, then great care has to be taken to get the balance right and to overcome preconceptions.

  ‘If you get it right then the benefits are exponential!’
6.4 Why so little involvement?

The factors in the success (or lack of it) in partnerships with MRCOs can be summarised as these:

- **Geography.** Although there are believed to be over 1,000 refugee community groups in England, and a much smaller but unknown number of migrant groups, they are strongly concentrated in London (particularly) and in certain large cities such as Birmingham, Sheffield, Leeds, Leicester, etc.

- **Nature of local MRCOs.** Some cities and smaller towns have limited numbers of MRCOs which in many cases are relatively young organisations without the experience and stability of the longer-established MRCOs in London and larger cities.

- **Partners’ levels of experience.** Of the OD partners, the most successful in building relationships with MRCOs was BCHS, which also had the longest experience of working with them, especially on housing issues, through previous hact programmes with considerable investment via hact. Some other OD partners had some limited experience; some had none at all.

- **Nature of the OD partner organisations.** Another interesting difference was that OD partners who were more successful tended to be smaller and in some cases to have staff profiles not dissimilar to the mixed communities where they were working or aiming to work. One partner who worked to change the staff profile to better reflect local communities found they then began to have a stronger basis for partnerships with community organisations. Other important factors were the extent to which an HA already had a culture of working with communities, and whether an individual at a sufficiently senior level within the partner HA was willing to ‘champion’ the OD work and secure commitment to it from the wider organisation.

- **Time.** The OD project has been running for two years, but even this is not long enough to gain the confidence of MRCOs, and begin to work constructively with them. This is particularly the case in areas like Lincolnshire where MRCOs might be only just emerging and/or be transitory themselves.

- **Resources.** Resources play a huge role in engaging small organisations, both the resources available to the HA to do the work, and resources for the MRCO to engage. Although it is not possible to say that extra resources would necessarily have created more engagement (because a lot depends on the OD partners themselves), lack of resources may have been an obstacle – which it was difficult for them to overcome.

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**Learning points**

It is difficult to set up a project which is introducing a new area of work with refugee and migrant groups to HAs which have limited experience so far, and at the same time expect them to develop productive relationships with MRCOs in a relatively short time.

MRCOs who invest time in developing a relationship with (say) a housing association may expect quick results, when in reality these are difficult to provide. However, it is a good strategy to try to achieve some ‘quick wins’ so as to encourage MRCOs to continue to participate, even if housing outcomes might take much longer to achieve.

However, part of the reasoning behind OD was to provide seed corn funding, so that partners can get started in this area and then can build on their OD work. It is crucial that this happens, although hact’s and CIH’s involvement with OD partners in the future will inevitably be very limited and therefore this expectation is based on trust.

There is merit in following up a partnership like OD with other work, which builds on that partnership. In some cases (Bradford and Birmingham), OD built on other hact work, and the new hact project, *Reach In*, builds on some of the OD partnerships.
The wider conclusion from this is that projects such as OD need to recognise the time scale required to build effective partnerships with MRCOs. The frameworks for funding and evaluating projects need to adapt accordingly. There would be value in re-evaluating the OD partnerships, say in two years’ time, to assess how they have developed.

There is also a whole government agenda on the issues of community empowerment, refugee and migrant integration, and third sector commissioning, which should firmly embrace MRCOs and continue to encourage the involvement of social landlords in more (and more ambitious) relationships with MRCOs. It is important that CLG, the HCA and the TSA combine to take forward this involvement.
7. What did Opening Doors achieve at national level?

This section revisits the five main aims set for the OD project overall (described earlier in section 2), summarises the achievements and gives the comments of OD partners; it then assesses whether the aims were met overall, and what lessons were learnt.

7.1 Appropriate and decent housing options available to refugees and new migrants in all regions

**Achievements**
There were specific achievements in providing both new accommodation and support services to refugees (particularly) in several of the partnership areas.

**Comments by partners**

- **BCHS.** “A key area for us. We were determined to increase the supply of housing for refugees/new migrants and had mixed success. The most productive work was where we supported two refugee organisations in developing their own business model.”

- **Longhurst.** “We found it most difficult to contribute to the first aim of the project in relation to new migrants and felt that local authorities would be better placed to implement new housing options for new migrants, as they can command resources and have a greater influence over local stakeholders, particularly employers.”

- **Tuntum.** “This aim was a bit too ambitious and as a result we believe all partners initially set goals that were unattainable. However, it was useful in that we were then able to set realistic goals as to how to achieve this aim as a part of setting the core outcomes. Thus we haven’t fully attained this aim, but we are all on the way. Especially Tuntum – as we have secured over 40 properties from eight HAs in Nottingham to be let outside the CBL system.”

- **St Vincent’s.** “We can respond locally but there is a huge amount of work to do on a national level. The raising of the profile and success of Gateway is the best way to ensure that refugees get the right support and accommodation, but this doesn’t tackle the needs of new migrants which is a whole different issue.”

**Was the aim achieved?**
In the narrow sense of applying the aim to the OD partners, in most cases it was. In the sense of having a broader impact across all regions, the aim was too ambitious.

**Learning points**

In the wide sense in which it was expressed, the aim was too ambitious for a project of this kind.

However, as a demonstration of what a small number of HAs could achieve in a relatively short time, the aim worked well.

Success in this area across most of the partnerships demonstrates that this element of OD was ‘playing to the strength’ of housing associations – their capacity as providers of accommodation – even when they were working with a need group which in many cases was new to them.

One significant gap in most partner areas was however the difficulty of tackling poor conditions in the private rented sector. It would be important to try to fill this gap in a future project, because of the significance of the sector to many new migrants.
7.2 Integration of refugees and asylum seekers

**Achievements**

Again, there were specific achievements in several of the partnership areas, as shown in section 5, although much more limited in scope than those around provision of accommodation. In a general sense, all partners made efforts – and were starting to have success – in removing barriers to housing or support services in their own organisations (see below).

**Comments by partners**

- **Tuntum.** “By tapping into new arrival hubs we have been able to signpost other partners that we work with such as training agencies.”

- **BCHS.** “Opening Doors has broadened our understanding of the opportunities/barriers around integration. Our housing projects are designed to address this by widening the supply/location of housing and by making community connections. It is a bit early to measure success. But this has also informed our wider work and interestingly refugees are beginning to play a significant role in several co-ops of which they are members.”

- **St Vincent’s.** “This is a massive job and is ongoing. The HAs that work directly with communities will have a head start in working with refugees and asylum seekers within their community cohesion policy, but there are many that don’t. There are also a lot of partner agencies working with these groups that HAs need to link with. We’ve found that certain groups get a lot of their support from within their own community and appear to be content with this until they hit a crisis, eg losing their job/home. This is when our Urban Care Centre comes into play as a drop in advice service.”

**Was the aim achieved?**

In the narrow sense of applying the aim to the OD partners, in some cases it was. Given the nature of the project compared with the scale of the integration task, OD could only expect to make a small contribution.

**Learning points**

HAs can readily identify with a goal of improving integration, and can respond within their own staff and services in imaginative ways.

One or two OD partners became broader champions of the integration agenda. This is a role which more HAs could play within their cities and regions.

There is an issue about which team should take the lead in this kind of work, in a medium or large HA with several different departments. In HA groups, there is also an issue as to whether one HA should take the lead. For example, the part of an HA or group that provides support services might already have a relationship with refugees or new migrants as clients, but the team or group member that has community development skills might be the more appropriate starting point for OD-type work.

Opening Doors included too few HAs to comment definitively on this issue, but partners with a strong community orientation, even if not already working with refugees/migrants, appeared to have an advantage.

7.3 Wider utilisation of the experience and skills of refugee community organisations

This was dealt with in section 6.
7.4 Improve access to decent housing for new migrant communities through scoping their housing needs and identifying ways in which these can be addressed

See below.

7.5 Equip housing and related service providers to address housing needs of new migrant communities settling in their areas of operation, through raising their awareness

The outcomes under 7.4 and 7.5 are dealt with together.

**Achievements**

This aim began to be achieved but in many ways the work was only starting, given the scale and complexity of the challenge. For example, St Vincent’s had the benefit of wider survey work taking place in their region to which they could contribute (and follow up in depth in their focus groups). However, it will take time to assess needs and respond to them appropriately.

As mentioned above, most partners took active steps to train staff, remove barriers, improve monitoring systems and change their advice/information provision in their own organisations, to give new migrants more equal access. There were signs of this starting to work through into lettings.

**Comments by partners**

- **BCHS.** “Broadening access is a key challenge for the social housing sector. In the West Midlands, apart from a handful of mainly HA projects, there is little evidence of a general move to meet the housing needs of new arrivals. There is evidence aplenty and a strategic commitment in the Regional Housing Strategy – but few local authorities have taken it on board.”

- **Longhurst.** “Our plan to undertake some research into housing needs and aspirations was supported by local authority partners and if we are able to successfully extend our research this may have a small part to play in helping to shape the new Regional Housing Strategy in relation to migrant worker housing issues. This in turn could lead to alternative housing solutions.”

**Was the aim achieved?**

It would be fairer to say that some partners started to achieve this aim, and the ones which had a firmer basis for the work in pre-existing partnerships or knowledge of new migrant communities were able to move forward more quickly.

A significant obstacle in helping migrant worker communities (particularly) is their current reliance on the private rented sector and prevailing perceptions that social housing is difficult to access, or that they are ineligible for it.

**Learning points**

As a proportion of migrant workers decide to settle in the UK, they are likely to become dissatisfied with conditions in the poorer quality private lettings where many now live, and will want to access social housing. Social landlords could do much more to help them to be aware of their eligibility for social housing.

None of the OD partners, apart from BCHS working with refugee groups, had so far developed models for working with the private rented sector to offer improved conditions and better management. There appears to be considerable scope for doing this if it can be made to work in business terms.

Building links with migrant worker groups, and then responding to their needs, all take time. The experience of OD partners is valuable to others who might be considering starting down this route.