



Office of the  
Deputy Prime Minister  

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Creating sustainable communities

# Tackling Homelessness Amongst Ethnic Minority Households

## A Development Guide

Published September 2005





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Deputy Prime Minister  

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## SUMMARY

Local authorities and some housing bodies have a duty to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and to promote race equality in all aspects of their services. The purpose of this guide is to assist local authorities and their partner agencies in the development of inclusive, evidence-based and cost-effective homelessness services for their local ethnic minority populations, in order to tackle the over-representation of ethnic minority households amongst those accepted as homeless by local housing authorities.

Currently, people from ethnic minority backgrounds are around three times more likely to become homeless than their White counterparts. Amongst the ethnic minority populations, those of Black African and Black Caribbean origins are twice as likely to be accepted as homeless as those of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi origins. Such over-representation of ethnic minority households in homelessness statistics is found across all regions in England. It is therefore critical that local authorities and their partner agencies develop comprehensive strategies to better prevent and respond to homelessness in ethnic minority communities.

The present guide discusses both how to mainstream ethnic minority concerns into general homelessness strategies, and how to devise services that cater to the specific needs of the many communities that make up contemporary Britain. It aims to support local authorities in designing their homelessness strategies with respect to ethnic minority communities first by providing them with:

- background information on the legal and policy context within which local authorities have to plan and deliver their homelessness services for ethnic minority people;
- a national profile of the ethnic minority population against which local characteristics can be compared and assessed;
- evidence on the extent and main causes of homelessness in the ethnic minority communities; and
- information on the knowledge and experiences ethnic minority people have of statutory homelessness services, as well as on the pathways through which they access these services.

The guide also identifies where to find further information on these and other issues, and how to go about collecting data to ensure that services are planned to meet the most pressing needs.

Second, the guide aims to focus the activities of homelessness service providers by asking them key questions – in relation to prevention, the supply of temporary accommodation, and the provision of advice, information and assistance to ethnic minority people who are or may become homeless – and by providing them with the tools to answer these questions systematically and rigorously.

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Thus, in relation to the design of a homelessness strategy for ethnic minority people, the guide asks:

- Do you know the current ethnic composition of your local area and have you produced any estimate of how it will change over the next five years?
- Do you know the extent of statutory homelessness amongst ethnic minority people in your local area?
- Do you know how many ethnic minority households are at risk of homelessness in your local area?
- Do you have well-designed ethnic monitoring arrangements in place to assess the adequacy of current homelessness services?
- Have you identified an adequate range of ethnic minority partners to help inform, plan and deliver better services for the ethnic minority population who are or may become homeless?
- Have you used all the above information to set priorities for action and to determine targets?
- Are all your key policies aligned with the aims of reducing, preventing or alleviating homelessness amongst ethnic minority communities?
- Does a senior manager have specific responsibility for ethnic minority homelessness?
- Are the plans to tackle ethnic minority homelessness adequately resourced?

In relation to the provision of homelessness services that are accessible to all ethnic minority users, the guide asks:

- Do you have a clear written policy on translation and interpretation for ethnic minority people?
- Are documents of immediate relevance to your local ethnic minority populations readily available to them in their own language?
- Does the range of communication methods used (posters, audiotapes, videos, etc) meet the needs of the local ethnic minority populations?
- Do you have access points in areas where the local ethnic minority population live and work?
- Do you offer a broad range of access mechanisms?

- 
- Do your staff – especially frontline staff – reflect the ethnic diversity of the local population?
  - Have you identified an adequate range of ethnic minority partners to help inform, plan and deliver better services for the ethnic minority population?
  - Do you have measures in place to support and build capacity in your local ethnic minority voluntary sector?
  - Do you actively support the advocacy work provided by ethnic minority voluntary organisations?
  - Do you and all your partners use standard recording and monitoring procedures?

In relation to the prevention of homelessness amongst ethnic minority people, the guide asks:

- Do you have in place mechanisms for identifying ethnic minority people at risk of homelessness in your local area?
- Do you have strategies to ensure ethnic minority people are aware of and have access to such schemes as community regeneration programmes, renovation and home adaptation grants, rent deposit schemes, etc?
- Do you monitor the information and advice given to ethnic minority homeless applicants and the impact such advice has?
- Do you have partnerships with ethnic minority organisations that provide information and advice to ethnic minority people at risk of homelessness?
- Do you have a comprehensive strategy for tackling racial discrimination and harassment?
- Do you have in place mechanisms for assessing and addressing overcrowding amongst the ethnic minority population in your area?
- Do you know the size and ethnic make-up of your local refugee population?
- Do you have in place joint working arrangements with refugee-specific organisations?
- Are your transitional arrangements for refugees leaving NASS accommodation adequate?
- Do you have strategies for informing or educating ethnic minority communities about culturally-specific issues likely to impact on homelessness?
- Do you have strategies in place to meet the specific housing and support needs of Gypsies and Travellers in your local area?

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In relation to the provision of accommodation and support services for ethnic minority people who are homeless, the guide asks:

- Do you know the accommodation needs of your local ethnic minority populations?
- Do you monitor the types of temporary accommodation used for ethnic minority households?
- Do you monitor the length of time ethnic minority people stay in temporary accommodation?
- Is temporary accommodation in your local area: a) regularly visited by environmental health and safety officers, b) repaired promptly, c) sensitive to the needs of ethnic minority people, and d) offering a range of specialist services?
- Do you carry out an assessment of the support needs of ethnic minority homeless households?
- Are you able to provide culturally and linguistically sensitive support to ethnic minority homeless households?
- Have you identified/partnered with any ethnic minority voluntary organisation that can deliver ethnic minority-specific support services to ethnic minority households?
- Do you monitor and have policies to reduce or minimise: a) the number of times ethnic minority homeless households change temporary accommodation; and b) out-of-area placements?
- Do you ensure ethnic minority homeless households have access to all available housing options?
- Have you considered Choice Based Lettings?
- Do you have in place programmes for settling ethnic minority homeless households into temporary or long-term accommodation?
- Do you have in place arrangements to: a) improve access to private sector accommodation for ethnic minority people, b) ensure ethnic minority people can access grant aid for home improvements and adaptations, c) ensure private landlords maintain properties in good order, d) manage relations with private landlords to reduce or avoid eviction, and e) support ethnic minority households facing eviction?

The guidance that follows will help local authorities answer these questions in a positive way.



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1.0.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>11</b>
1.1.	Background	11
1.2.	The purpose of this guide	11
1.3.	The legal and policy framework	12
1.3.1.	Homelessness	12
1.3.2.	Race Equality	15
1.4.	Other relevant guides and policy documents	17
<b>2.0.</b>	<b>NATIONAL PROFILE OF THE ETHNIC MINORITY POPULATION</b>	<b>18</b>
2.1.	The ethnic minority population in the UK	18
2.1.1.	Population size	18
2.1.2.	Regional distribution	19
2.1.3.	Household size and composition	19
2.1.4.	Housing tenure	21
2.1.5.	Economic circumstances	21
2.2.	The Irish community	22
2.3.	The refugee population	23
2.4.	Conclusions	24
<b>3.0.</b>	<b>HOMELESSNESS AMONGST ETHNIC MINORITY PEOPLE</b>	<b>25</b>
3.1.	Over-representation of ethnic minority households in statutory homelessness	25
3.2.	Causes of homelessness amongst ethnic minority households	27
3.2.1.	Main causes of homelessness across the ethnic minority communities	27
3.2.2.	Factors specific to each community	27
3.2.3.	Infrequent or absent causes	28
3.2.4.	Unrecorded homelessness	28
3.3.	Knowledge of statutory homelessness services	29
3.4.	Pathways to homelessness services	29
3.5.	Experiences of statutory homelessness services	29
3.6.	Conclusions	29
<b>4.0.</b>	<b>DESIGNING A HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY FOR ETHNIC MINORITY PEOPLE</b>	<b>31</b>
4.1.	The ethnic minority-specific objectives in a homelessness strategy	31
4.2.	The strategic process	32
4.3.	Gathering information	33
4.3.1.	Who to consult?	33
4.3.2.	How to consult?	34
4.3.3.	What information to gather?	35
4.4.	Identifying problems	40
4.5.	Implementing the solutions	40
4.6.	Monitoring and evaluating outcomes	41
4.7.	Key questions	42

<b>5.0.</b>	<b>MAKING HOMELESSNESS SERVICES ACCESSIBLE</b>	<b>43</b>
5.1.	Introduction	43
5.2.	Increasing awareness of existing services	43
5.2.1.	Improving knowledge of services	44
5.2.2.	Locating access points in areas with large ethnic minority populations	44
5.3.	Making mainstream services more culturally sensitive	45
5.3.1.	Providing welcoming and inclusive facilities	45
5.3.2.	Making services available in appropriate languages	45
5.3.3.	Staffing for diversity	49
5.4.	Developing specialist ethnic minority services	50
5.4.1.	Joint working with the ethnic minority voluntary sector	51
5.5.	Key questions	53
<b>6.0.</b>	<b>PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS AMONGST ETHNIC MINORITY PEOPLE</b>	<b>54</b>
6.1.	Addressing the structural causes of homelessness	54
6.2.	Identifying people at risk	54
6.2.1.	Risk factors in the general population	55
6.2.2.	Risk factors in the ethnic minority populations	55
6.3.	The role of information and advice services	55
6.4.	Tackling racial harassment	58
6.5.	Addressing overcrowding	60
6.6.	Helping refugees who are leaving NASS accommodation	61
6.7.	Curbing domestic violence, forced marriages and parental abuse in South Asian communities	63
6.8.	Gypsies and Travellers	64
6.9.	The role of community interventions	66
6.10.	Key questions	67
<b>7.0.</b>	<b>PROVIDING ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT FOR ETHNIC MINORITY HOMELESS PEOPLE</b>	<b>68</b>
7.1.	Introduction	68
7.2.	Temporary accommodation for ethnic minority households	68
7.2.1.	The role of temporary accommodation	69
7.2.2.	Improving the quality of temporary accommodation	69
7.2.3.	Ensuring an adequate range of temporary accommodation	70
7.2.4.	Providing support in temporary accommodation	71
7.2.5.	Managing moves sensitively	73
7.3.	Settled accommodation	73
7.3.1.	Implementing Choice Based Lettings (CBL)	73
7.3.2.	Helping ethnic minority people into settled accommodation	74
7.4.	Private sector accommodation	75
7.4.1.	Maintaining and improving standards in the private sector	75
7.4.2.	Improving access to private rented housing	76
7.4.3.	Helping to keep private rented accommodation	76
7.5.	Key questions	77

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<b>APPENDIX 1: Relevant CRE Codes of Guidance and Good Practice Guides</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>APPENDIX 2: Other relevant strategies and programmes</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>APPENDIX 3: National sources of information for designing a homelessness strategy that meets the needs of ethnic minority people</b>	<b>82</b>



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## 1.0. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background

The Government is committed to tackling homelessness more effectively. Recent legislative changes and policy developments, such as the Homelessness Act 2002, “More than a Roof” (2002) and “Supporting People” (2003), attest to the Government’s commitment to addressing the causes of homelessness and to helping the most vulnerable in society.

People from ethnic minority backgrounds figure very prominently amongst the most disadvantaged in society, as well as amongst those most at risk of homelessness. In relation to many of the factors likely to increase the risk of homelessness, many ethnic minority communities fare less well than the general population. Each community also has its own distinctive socio-economic and cultural patterns and must be understood in its own terms. Failure to consider the specific needs of the various ethnic minority communities risks increasing ethnic inequalities and disadvantage by unintentionally favouring policies and practices that advantage the ethnic majority. Thus, it is important for local authorities to devise homelessness strategies that include a full appraisal of the equalities implications of each component of the strategy, and to develop a systematic approach to the delivery of culturally competent services that are responsive to the various needs of a diverse community. This requires that the structure and processes of policy making are sensitive to everyone’s needs, including people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

The Race Relations Act 1976 (as amended) places a general duty on public authorities to promote race equality. This duty means that authorities must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination, to promote equality of opportunity and to promote good relations between people of different racial groups. The duty aims to make the promotion of race equality central to the way public authorities work. This guide should help local authorities comply with their statutory duty.

### 1.2. The purpose of this guide

The purpose of this development guide is to assist local housing authorities and other key statutory and voluntary agencies in the development of inclusive, evidence-based and cost-effective homelessness strategies and services that meet the needs of their ethnic minority populations. The guide will be helpful for local authority housing departments and a wide range of statutory and voluntary agencies providing homelessness services for ethnic minority households. Specifically, it seeks to provide local authorities with:

- a better understanding of the causes of homelessness in ethnic minority groups;
- tools to profile their local ethnic minority communities;
- tools to map the needs of ethnic minority households who are or may become homeless;

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- approaches to identify the resources currently available to ethnic minority households;
  - strategies to develop appropriate and accessible homelessness services for all ethnic minority groups;
  - strategies to deliver homelessness services that truly meet the needs of all ethnic minority households who are or may become homeless; and
  - approaches for meeting legal duties on race equality.

In this way, homelessness services will be developed more rationally, with both preventative and responsive measures being based upon evidence and targeted to meet the most pressing needs. This guide is based on research conducted for ODPM in 2003. The quotes used throughout are taken from the research report, which has been published separately. Statutory guidance on the implementation of homelessness legislation is contained in the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities and is not included in this guide.

## 1.3. The legal and policy framework

### 1.3.1. Homelessness

Local authorities have to discharge their duty to homeless households in compliance with the Housing Act 1996 (“the 1996 Act”), as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 (“the 2002 Act”).

#### *Overview of the legislation*

Under the 1996 Act, local authorities have responsibilities to applicants who they have reason to believe are, or may be, either homeless or threatened with homelessness.

Under s.175 of the 1996 Act, a person is homeless if he or she has no accommodation in the United Kingdom (“UK”) or elsewhere which is available for his or her occupation and which that person has a legal right to occupy. A person will also be homeless where he or she has accommodation but cannot secure entry to it (or where the accommodation is a moveable structure (such as a caravan or houseboat) and there is no place where it can be placed in order to provide accommodation). A person who has accommodation is to be treated as homeless where it would not be reasonable for him or her to continue to occupy that accommodation. A person is “threatened with homelessness” if he or she is likely to become homeless within 28 days.

If a local authority has a reason to believe that a person is, or may be, either homeless or threatened with homelessness, they are required to make inquiries to determine whether they owe the applicant any duty under Part 7 of the 1996 Act. This assessment process is important as it enables local authorities to identify the assistance applicants may need to prevent homelessness, to help them find another home, or to get access to the best possible information and advice. In each case, local authority staff need to conduct an in-depth

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assessment interview and appropriate inquiries to determine whether each applicant is actually homeless, eligible for assistance, in “priority need” and not intentionally homeless.

If an applicant appears to be actually homeless and to meet the criteria of being eligible for assistance, in priority need and not intentionally homeless, the local authority has an immediate duty to provide some interim accommodation until they can make their decision on the homelessness case. If the housing authority does have a duty to accommodate the applicant, they must also accommodate any person who normally resides with the applicant as a member of his or her family or who might reasonably be expected to reside with him or her.

The local authority owes a lesser duty to applicants who are not in priority need, or who became homeless intentionally. In some circumstances, the local authority must secure that accommodation is available to the applicant for such period as will give the applicant a reasonable opportunity to find their own accommodation. The local authority may be under a duty to provide advice and assistance to the applicant in any attempts the applicant makes to secure accommodation.

Where an applicant is threatened with homelessness, and is found to be eligible for assistance, in priority need, and not intentionally threatened with homelessness, the local authority must take reasonable steps to secure that accommodation does not cease to be available for his/her occupation. If the local authority considers that the applicant is threatened with homelessness intentionally, or is not in priority need, the local authority owes a lesser duty to the applicant to provide advice and assistance in any attempts the applicant may make to secure that the accommodation does not cease to be available for occupation.

The key change in approach arising from the amendments made to the 1996 Act by the 2002 Act is the increased emphasis on activities and services aimed at the prevention of homelessness. The new Act shifts the emphasis away from a crisis management and reactive approach, to a more strategic, proactive and preventative approach with respect to homelessness.

The 2002 Act required local authorities to have carried out a homelessness review and to have published a homelessness strategy based on the results of that review by 30 July 2003. A new homelessness strategy must be published within 5 years from when their last homelessness strategy was published. The strategy should be reviewed and updated from time to time, after extensive consultation with a range of stakeholders.

A homelessness strategy should include measures which:

- aim to prevent homelessness;
- secure that sufficient accommodation is and will be available for people in their district who are or may become homeless; and
- provide satisfactory support services for people in their district who are, may become, or have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again (defined as advice, information and assistance).

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Homelessness strategies should address the needs of all categories of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Under the homelessness legislation, certain categories of households have a “priority need” for accommodation. These include households:

- with dependent children;
- with pregnant women;
- with people who are vulnerable due to old age, mental illness, handicap, physical disability or other special reason;
- rendered homeless or threatened with homelessness because of a disaster, such as fire or flood.

The Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002 extended the housing priority categories to include the following groups of applicants:

- a child aged 16 or 17 (who is not a relevant child or a child in need to whom a local authority owes a duty under s.20 of the Children Act 1989);
- care leavers under 21 years;
- people who are vulnerable as a result of having been a member of Her Majesty’s regular naval, military or air forces;
- people who are vulnerable as a result of having served a period of time in custody, which would include a person who has served a custodial sentence, been committed for contempt of court or has been remanded in custody; and
- people who are vulnerable as a result of ceasing to occupy accommodation because of violence from another person or threats of violence from another person which are likely to be carried out.

Finally, homelessness strategies should comply with the broader legal and policy context. In particular, they should be consistent with the legislation on race equality.

The First Secretary of State has provided statutory guidance to local authorities on homelessness in the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities (*“the Homelessness Code of Guidance”*), ODPM (2002).

Copies of the Homelessness Code of Guidance are available online at [http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm\\_homelessness/documents/page/odpm\\_home\\_60154.pdf](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_homelessness/documents/page/odpm_home_60154.pdf)



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### 1.3.2. Race Equality

Local authorities must discharge their homelessness duties in compliance with the following legislation on race relations.

- **The Race Relations Act 1976**

The Race Relations Act 1976 (“the 1976 Act”) makes it unlawful for a public authority to treat a person less favourably than others on racial grounds. This includes grounds of race, colour, nationality (including citizenship), and national or ethnic origin. The 1976 Act offers protection from both direct and indirect racial discrimination in the fields of employment, education, training, housing, and the provision of goods, facilities and services. Moreover, the 1976 Act specifies the circumstances under which it is lawful to set up positive action (that is, action targeted at under-represented and disadvantaged groups to redress the detrimental effects of past discrimination).

- **The Amendments to the Race Relations Act 1976**

Amendments made to the 1976 Act by the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 (“the 2000 Act”) place a new duty on local authorities to have regard to the need to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination, and to *promote* equality of opportunity and good relations between people of different racial groups. The aim of the duty is to make the promotion of racial equality central to the way relevant services are designed and delivered. The duty applies to local authorities, the Housing Corporation (which regulates Registered Social Landlords) and Housing Action Trusts.

- **Race Equality Schemes**

Every three years, local authorities, the Housing Corporation and Housing Action Trusts are required to publish a Race Equality Scheme which covers their homelessness services. The Race Equality Scheme should include the housing authority’s arrangements for:

- assessing and consulting on the likely impact of proposed homelessness strategies on the promotion of race equality;
- monitoring its homelessness policies for any adverse impact on the promotion of race equality;
- publishing the results of their assessments, consultations and monitoring;
- ensuring public access to information and services relating to homelessness assistance; and
- training staff in issues relevant to the duty to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between people of different races.

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In practice, this means that local housing authorities have to ensure that their homelessness strategies and homelessness services do not discriminate against any ethnic group and that they promote equality of opportunity and good race relations. This requires paying explicit attention to the needs of the ethnic minority communities they serve.

- **Codes of Practice developed by the Commission for Racial Equality**

The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) has responsibility for enforcing the legislation on race relations. It issues Codes of Practice to help public authorities and other bodies by providing guidance on meeting their obligations. Although these Codes do not have statutory force, they can be used in court as evidence of good practice. The CRE has produced Codes of Guidance on the following areas:

- the duty to promote race equality;
- employment; and
- housing

Currently the Codes on rented housing and owner-occupied housing are being revised.

In addition the CRE has produced non-statutory good practice guides on:

- the duty to promote race equality;
- race equality in 'Tenants' Associations;
- ethnic monitoring in employment and service delivery;
- partnerships; and
- procurement.

See Appendix 1 for more information on CRE Codes of Guidance and Good Practice.

- **Best Value**

As part of the process of modernising local authority services, the Government introduced the Best Value regime. Best Value reviews should:

- challenge why and how a service is provided;
- compare performance across a range of indicators;
- consult tax payers, service users, partners and the business community in setting up targets for service provision and delivery; and

- consider fair competition as a means of securing efficient and cost-effective services.

The Best Value regime is crucial for monitoring delivery of services to ethnic minority residents, and to improve the performance of local authorities, including their partnerships with RSLs. Best Value indicators provide some feedback on ethnic minority issues. Best Value housing and homelessness reviews must involve the ethnic minority community and reflect their views on the housing authority's performance. Inspectors will consider these issues as part of their Best Value inspection programme and reflect them in their published reports.

- **Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities**

As stated in section 1.3.1, the First Secretary of State has provided guidance to local authorities in the ODPM *Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities* (2002). This Code provides guidance on how local authorities should discharge their functions and apply the various statutory criteria. Local authorities are reminded that they must have regard to the Homelessness Code of Guidance when they are exercising their functions under Part 7 of the 1996 Act.

- **Other Strategies, Programmes and Policies developed by DTLR/ODPM**

To be fully effective and to maximise opportunities, homelessness services for ethnic minority people should be developed in close connection with many other strategies, programmes and policies. Some of the key strategies and initiatives to take into account are listed in Appendix 2.

## 1.4. Other relevant guides and policy documents

A number of guides and policy documents are highly relevant to the development of an ethnic minority homelessness strategy. These include:

*More than a Roof: A report into tackling homelessness*, DTLR (2002)

[http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm\\_homelessness/documents/page/odpm\\_home\\_601520.hcsp](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_homelessness/documents/page/odpm_home_601520.hcsp)

*Homelessness Strategies: A good practice handbook*, DTLR (2002)

[http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm\\_control/documents/contentservertemplate/odpm\\_index.hcst?n&1=2](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_control/documents/contentservertemplate/odpm_index.hcst?n&1=2)

*Homelessness Code of Guidance to Local Authorities*, ODPM (2002)

[http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm\\_homelessness/documents/page/odpm\\_home\\_60154.pdf](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_homelessness/documents/page/odpm_home_60154.pdf)

*Reflecting the Needs and Concerns of Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in Supporting People*, DTLR (2002)

<http://www.spkweb.org.uk/>

*Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Strategies: A good practice guide* (Blackaby & Chahal, 2000)

## 2.0. NATIONAL PROFILE OF THE ETHNIC MINORITY POPULATION

This chapter profiles the main ethnic minority communities in the UK:

- Indians;
- Pakistanis;
- Bangladeshis;
- Black Caribbeans; and
- Black Africans.

It also provides basic information about the Irish and refugee populations. The data point to widespread social exclusion in most of these communities and help explain why rates of homelessness are much higher in ethnic minority communities than in the general population.

### 2.1. The ethnic minority population in the UK

The term “ethnic minority” is used here to include people from visible minority backgrounds, as well as members of white minorities (e.g Irish people and Gypsies and Travellers).

#### 2.1.1. Population size

In 2001, the size of the ethnic minority population was 4.6 million or 7.9% of the total population of the UK. Indians were the largest group, followed by Pakistanis, those of mixed ethnic backgrounds, Black Caribbeans and Black Africans.

**Table 1: Size of the ethnic minority population**

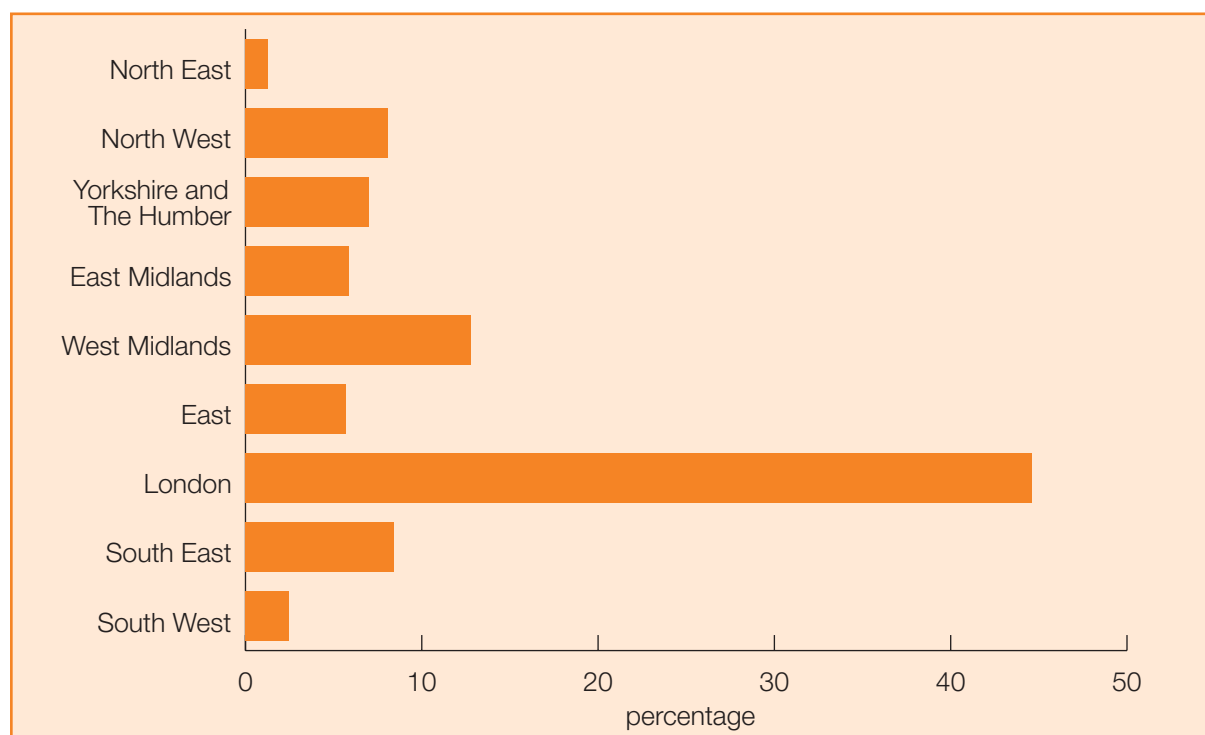
Ethnic group	Population size (000s)	% of total population
<b>White</b>	54,154	92.1
<b>Mixed</b>	677	1.2
<b>Asian or Asian British</b>	2,331	3.0
Indian	1,053	1.8
Pakistani	747	1.3
Bangladeshi	283	0.5
Other Asian	248	0.4
<b>Black or Black British</b>	1,148	2.0
Black Caribbean	566	1.0
Black African	485	0.8
Black Other	976	0.2
<b>Chinese</b>	247	0.4
<b>Other</b>	231	0.4
<b>All ethnic minorities</b>	4,635	7.9
<b>Total population</b>	58,789	100

Source: Census 2001, Office for National Statistics

### 2.1.2. Regional distribution

The ethnic minority population is largely concentrated in a few geographical areas and in the large urban centres. Nearly half (45%) of the total ethnic minority population lives in the London region, where they comprise 29% of all residents. After London, the second largest ethnic minority population is found in the West Midlands (13%), followed by the South East (8%), the North West (8%), and Yorkshire and the Humber (7%). There are also significant differences in the regional distribution of the different ethnic groups.

**Figure 1: Regional distribution of the ethnic minority population**



Source: Census 2001, Office for National Statistics

### 2.1.3. Household size and composition

Ethnic minority communities have different patterns of household size and composition. While Black Caribbean and White households are on average of identical size at 2.3 people per household, all other ethnic minority communities (except the White Irish group) tend to have larger families. Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Indian households are the largest, followed by Black Africans.

**Table 2: Household size, by ethnic group of head of household**

<b>Ethnic group</b>	<b>Average household size (number of people)</b>
White Irish	2.1
White	2.3
Black Caribbean	2.3
Other Black	2.3
Mixed	2.4
Other	2.6
Black African	2.9
Chinese	2.9
Other Asian	3.1
Indian	3.3
Pakistani	4.2
Bangladeshi	4.7
<b>All ethnic groups</b>	<b>2.4</b>

Source: Labour Force Survey, Spring 2002

In terms of household composition, South Asian people are significantly less likely to live alone than people from other ethnic minority backgrounds or from the White population. Some 90% of all South Asian families with children live as couples (with or without other family members) and few are lone parents. South Asian households are also the most likely to live in three-generational households. By contrast, 54% of Black Caribbean families with dependent children and 46% of Black African families with dependent children are lone parents. In the White population, some three-quarters of families with dependent children are couples and the remainder are lone parents.

**Table 3: Families with dependent children, by ethnic group**

<b>Ethnic group</b>	<b>Couples (%)</b>	<b>Lone parents (%)</b>
White	77	23
Mixed	39	61
Indian	91	9
Pakistani	85	15
Bangladeshi	89	11
Other Asian	90	10
Black Caribbean	46	54
Black African	54	46
Other Black	38	62
Chinese	79	21
Other	80	20
All families	77	23

Source: Labour Force Survey, Spring 2002, Office for National Statistics

### 2.1.4. Housing tenure

Housing tenure patterns vary widely between different ethnic minority groups. The Labour Force Survey (2004) indicates that Indians (74%) are the most likely to own their own homes (either outright or with a mortgage), followed by Whites (73%), Pakistanis (66%), Black Caribbeans (47%), Bangladeshis (36%) and Black Africans (27%). Indians, Pakistanis and Whites are the least likely to live in council rented accommodation, while Bangladeshis are the most likely to do so. Nearly a quarter of all Black African households rent in the private sector. These various patterns are mainly due to a combination of financial considerations, cultural norms in relation to home ownership, and the length/patterns of settlement in England. They are likely to impact on housing and homelessness-related needs in the ethnic minority communities.

**Table 4: Housing tenure in England, by ethnic group (2004) (%)**

Ethnic group	Own outright	Own with mortgage	Rent from social sector	Rent privately
White	32	41	18	10
Black Caribbean	12	35	44	8
Black African	4	23	50	24
Indian	24	50	10	15
Pakistani	23	43	18	16
Bangladeshi	9	27	52	12
Mixed	9	35	37	18
Other	11	31	28	30

Source: Labour Force Survey, 2004, Office for National Statistics

### 2.1.5. Economic circumstances

Despite some pockets of relative prosperity, the ethnic minority population is more likely to be unemployed, to live on a low income, and to live in deprived areas than the general population. This makes them more vulnerable to social exclusion generally and to homelessness in particular. Table 5 shows the differential rates of unemployment in the economically active population, by ethnic groups and gender.

**Table 5: Unemployment rates, by ethnic group and gender**

Ethnic group	Men (aged 16-64) (%)	Women (aged 16-59) (%)
White	5	4
Mixed	14	11
Indian	7	7
Pakistani	16	16
Bangladeshi	20	24
Other Asian	12	9
Black Caribbean	14	9
Black African	15	13
Other <sup>2</sup>	11	9

Source: Annual Local Area Labour Force Survey, 2001/02, Office for National Statistics

2 Census 2001, Office for National Statistics.

Bangladeshis have the highest rates of unemployment, with 20% of men and 24% of women being unemployed. This compares to 5% for men and 4% for women in the White population. Pakistanis are the next highest with 16%. Unemployment rates amongst Black Caribbeans and Black Africans are also significantly higher than in the White population. The Indian population is the only group amongst the ethnic minority populations in which unemployment rates are similar to the White population.

Ethnic minority households are also much more likely than White households to live on a low income, especially after housing costs have been deducted. Housing costs make a more considerable dent in the finances of ethnic minority households than of White people, except in the case of Indians. Nearly half of the Black African population and more than two-thirds of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis live on low incomes.

**Table 6: Households on low income, by ethnic group of head of household**

Ethnic group	Before housing costs (%)	After housing costs (%)
White	16	21
Indian	26	30
Pakistani/Bangladeshi	59	68
Black Caribbean	19	31
Black Other	28	49
Other	26	36

Source: Households Below Average Income, Family Resources Survey, 2000/01, DWP

## 2.2. The Irish community

In 2001, the Irish community comprised some 642,000 people and made up 1.2% of the population of England and Wales. A distinctive feature of the Irish population is the large number of older people: one in four Irish people in Britain is aged 65 and over. This reflects the large-scale economic migration of the 1950s. In terms of their geographical distribution, like all ethnic minority groups, the Irish have always settled in major conurbations, but recent migrants are particularly concentrated in London. Within London, many Irish people are concentrated within the most deprived boroughs.

Economically, the Irish have a high rate of participation in the labour market, but they remain heavily concentrated in certain occupational sectors, reflecting historical gaps in the British labour market. Unemployment is higher among Irish men than in the general population, but roughly similar amongst Irish and other White women. The household and family structures of Irish households are also distinctive: only 12% of Irish households are married couples with dependent children and 5% are lone parents with dependent children (2001 Census). Moreover, a very large proportion of Irish households contain either single people or groups of unrelated people, reflecting lower marriage rates in all age groups and many lone pensioners. However, Irish families are also more likely to have more than five members in their household than White families.



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Nationally, 27% of Irish-born people own their property outright and 33% own it with a mortgage, while 11% rent privately and 26% rent from the social sector. The relatively high proportion of owner occupation (60%) partly reflects the top-heavy age structure of the Irish community, with many households established for long enough to have paid off their mortgage. However in London, where property prices are higher, fewer Irish people own their property and many more rely on renting, either privately or from the public sector. In addition, a significant number of Irish households are Travellers, i.e. people who lead nomadic lifestyles.

### 2.3. The refugee population

While there is no comprehensive information on the number of refugees living in the UK, Home Office data on asylum seekers provide information about the number and origins of those seeking asylum and who may become refugees.

Overall, the number of applications for asylum grew by about 4,000 a year over the past decade (except for a temporary decrease in 2001) to nearly 86,000 in 2002. However, the number of asylum seekers is now declining with the introduction of new Government policies. Home Office figures show a steady decrease over the past two years, with quarterly applications numbers fluctuating between seven and nine thousand.

Home Office figures also show that as of March 2005, there were a total of 63,480 asylum seekers in receipt of support from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). 40,370 of these people were housed in NASS dispersal accommodation, whilst a further 19,640 were receiving 'subsistence only' support, i.e. they had made their own accommodation arrangements with family or friends.

The composition and profile of the refugee population inevitably changes rapidly. Over recent years, large groups of refugees have come from the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, China, Sri Lanka, Iraq, Somalia, Zimbabwe and the Indian sub-continent, reflecting unrest in these regions. The main countries from which applications were received in the first quarter of 2005 are listed in Table 7.

**Table 7: Top ten applicant nationalities (First quarter, 2005)**

Nationalities	First Quarter 2005
Iran	850
Iraq	525
Somalia	495
China	430
Dem.Rep.of Congo	335
Pakistan	320
India	310
Afghanistan	285
Sudan	275
Eritrea	265
Other nationalities	2,930
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,015</b>

Note: Data may not sum due to rounding. Source: Home Office

Although those who are deemed destitute are provided with subsistence and/or accommodation by NASS while their application is being processed, the economic situation of those seeking asylum is largely dependent on the resources they bring with them when they migrate. Many asylum seekers are economically dependent on the state when they are accepted as refugees.

## 2.4. Conclusions

In relation to a series of social and economic indicators (unemployment, low income, housing tenure, family size and number of dependent children) likely to impact on housing needs and homelessness, most ethnic minority communities fare less well than the general population. Deprivation is particularly acute in the Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities. While precise comparisons cannot be made between the main ethnic minority communities and the Irish and refugee populations, the data suggest that both these populations also live in difficult circumstances and may be at greater risk of homelessness than the majority White population.

Despite such similarities, each community also has its own distinctive patterns and must be understood in its own terms. Local authorities need to take account of this diversity when they devise their homelessness strategies, to ensure that they address the particular needs of each community and of individuals within it.

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## 3.0. HOMELESSNESS AMONGST ETHNIC MINORITY PEOPLE

This chapter summarises research findings on homelessness amongst the ethnic minority populations. It discusses:

1. The over-representation of ethnic minority households in statutory homelessness;
2. The main causes of homelessness in the various ethnic minority groups;
3. Unrecorded homelessness in the ethnic minority groups;
4. Knowledge of statutory services;
5. Pathways to services; and
6. Experiences of services.

The results highlight the need for homelessness strategies that reflect the specific needs of ethnic minority households.

### 3.1. Over-representation of ethnic minority households in statutory homelessness

ODPM homelessness statistics indicate that ethnic minority households are around three times more likely than the general population to be accepted as owed a main homelessness duty. Indeed, while ethnic minority households account for approximately 7% of the UK population, they represented 21% of the households accepted as homeless by local authorities in 2004-05. In every region in England, the proportion of homeless ethnic minority households is greater than its regional proportion.

There are also marked differences in the rates of statutory homelessness between the various ethnic minority groups, with people of Black African and Black Caribbean origins being twice as likely to be accepted as homeless as people of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi origins.

**Table 8: Homeless households in priority need accepted by local authorities by Government Office region and ethnic group**

	Total																				
	acceptances 2004/05		North East		North West		Yorkshire & Humberside		East Midlands		West Midlands		East of England		London		South East		South West		
<b>Number of acceptances<sup>1</sup></b>																					
White	89,180	7,400	14,830	10,110	7,590	10,540	8,850	10,390	10,870	8,670											
African/Caribbean	12,430	90	450	910	380	1,160	290	8,500	400	280											
Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi	6,570	100	640	710	410	1,190	270	2,820	380	90											
Other ethnic origin	6,500	130	630	530	320	590	270	3,480	340	210											
Unknown ethnic origin	6,170	260	830	1,170	430	600	490	1,560	430	440											
<b>Total</b>	<b>120,860</b>	<b>7,940</b>	<b>17,360</b>	<b>13,430</b>	<b>9,120</b>	<b>14,050</b>	<b>10,150</b>	<b>26,730</b>	<b>12,420</b>	<b>9,680</b>											
<b>Share of acceptances within region</b>																					
White	74%	93%	85%	75%	83%	75%	87%	39%	88%	90%											
African/Caribbean	10%	1%	3%	7%	4%	8%	3%	32%	3%	3%											
Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi	5%	1%	4%	5%	4%	8%	3%	11%	3%	1%											
Other ethnic origin	5%	2%	4%	4%	4%	4%	3%	13%	3%	2%											
Unknown ethnic origin	5%	3%	5%	9%	5%	4%	5%	6%	3%	5%											
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>											
<b>Share of population Households within region<sup>2</sup></b>																					
White	93%	98%	96%	96%	95%	92%	97%	77%	97%	98%											
African/Caribbean	2%	0%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	11%	1%	1%											
Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi	3%	1%	2%	2%	3%	4%	1%	7%	1%	0%											
Other ethnic origin	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	6%	1%	1%											
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>											

Note: Totals and percentages may not sum due to rounding

1 P1E Homelessness Statistics, ODPM,

2 Census 2001, Office for National Statistics

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## 3.2. Causes of homelessness amongst ethnic minority households

The available evidence suggests that there are many causes for the higher rates of homelessness in the ethnic minority populations and for differences between the various communities.

### 3.2.1. Main causes of homelessness across the ethnic minority communities

Although there are important variations between different ethnic minority groups, generally people from ethnic minority backgrounds tend to live in more deprived material and physical circumstances. They are more likely to hold unskilled, low paid and less secure jobs, or to be unemployed than their White counterparts. A complex cycle of deprivation – which includes poverty, poor housing, overcrowding, stress, ill-health and domestic violence, among others – affects a greater proportion of ethnic minority individuals than White people. Members of various ethnic minority communities also experience additional problems, such as racial discrimination and harassment, and psychological difficulties linked to acculturation. Homelessness is bound up with these life conditions. It therefore affects a greater proportion of people of ethnic minority origins.

### 3.2.2. Factors specific to each community

Recent research<sup>3</sup> has highlighted differences between the main ethnic minority communities in their reasons for homelessness. In this study, it was found that:

- (i) Amongst South Asians, domestic violence, forced marriages and family disputes were the main causes of homelessness amongst female lone parents. The most common cause of homelessness amongst South Asian couples with children was being forced by private landlords to leave their accommodation. Overcrowding was a common housing need that contributed to homelessness: many South Asian households lived in large three-generational households before becoming homeless.
- (ii) Amongst Black Caribbeans, many young, single women became homeless when pregnancy led to family disputes, overcrowding and family and friends no longer being able or willing to accommodate them. Homelessness was due to multiple and complex problems related to child abuse, time in care, drug abuse, school exclusion, crime and mental health problems. Other less common causes included being forced to leave private rented accommodation, domestic violence and financial difficulties leading to rent arrears and evictions.
- (iii) The Black African population is extremely diverse and no clear and distinctive pattern emerged with respect to their reasons for homelessness. The main problems identified were associated with pregnancy, family tensions and relationship breakdown (often linked to difficulties in adapting to a new cultural environment) and overcrowding.

3 Gervais, M.C. & Rehman, H. (2005) "Causes of homelessness amongst ethnic minority populations"  
London: ODP.

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- (iv) In the Irish population, the main causes of statutory homelessness were domestic violence and financial difficulties leading to rent arrears and evictions.
- (v) Amongst refugees, the termination of NASS accommodation when asylum seekers are granted leave to remain was the biggest cause of homelessness. In some local authorities located in asylum seeker dispersal areas, loss of NASS accommodation was an important cause of homelessness overall. Other issues affecting refugees were racial discrimination and harassment; difficulty communicating in English; lack of knowledge of services; unrecognised physical, mental and emotional needs; and social isolation and insecurity.

### *3.2.3. Infrequent or absent causes*

A number of factors did not appear with any frequency as the “causes” of people’s current episode of statutory homelessness. Rent arrears rarely led to homelessness, except when linked to administrative problems beyond the client’s control, or to sudden and substantial private rent increases beyond the client’s means. Overcrowding, family disputes, drug or alcohol misuse, and time spent in institutions were often contributing factors, but rarely the main reason for homelessness. Mental health difficulties were generally an outcome of domestic violence or of homelessness itself, rather than a cause. Repeat homelessness was relatively uncommon in ethnic minority communities.

### *3.2.4. Unrecorded homelessness*

Interviews with community and voluntary organisations, and local authorities which were conducted as part of research to inform this guidance<sup>4</sup>, suggest that some people from ethnic minority communities who were at risk of homelessness did not approach homelessness services for help. The main issues affecting the low take-up of homelessness services (in relation to assumed needs) included:

- The lack of a strategic approach to ethnic minority populations amongst local authorities, which meant that services were not always meeting the needs of ethnic minority groups;
- The fact that many members of ethnic minority populations lacked basic knowledge about homelessness services and were not aware of their rights;
- Communication problems, which meant that those who do not speak English were less likely to approach services or to receive the most adequate service;
- Negative images of social housing, including fear of discrimination and harassment;
- Fear of being accommodated in unsuitable, “White only” areas, away from one’s own community and support networks;
- Distrust of authority, especially amongst refugees; and
- Cultural preferences for home ownership, especially in the South Asian communities.

4 Gervais, M.C. & Rehman, H. (2005) “Causes of homelessness amongst ethnic minority populations”, London: ODPM.

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While these factors do cause low take-up of homelessness services by some ethnic minority groups, it would appear that ethnic minority groups facing homelessness nevertheless manage to meet their accommodation needs through their own resources or through reliance on family, friends, voluntary and community sector services or other networks. Relatively few people from ethnic minority backgrounds are recorded sleeping rough.

### **3.3. Knowledge of statutory homelessness services**

Knowledge of statutory homelessness services varies across the communities. The same study showed that most ethnic minority groups have either basic or poor knowledge of services and are not aware of their entitlements. The exception is the Black Caribbean community, among whom many are familiar with existing homelessness services.

### **3.4. Pathways to homelessness services**

The study also showed that ethnic minority people's pathways to homelessness services are complex and varied. Some people approached their council directly and immediately for help. Others sought help from a variety of sources before ending up at the door of their local authority. Others found their own solutions without ever contacting statutory services for support. These different pathways depended in part on people's knowledge and perceptions of existing statutory and voluntary services as well as on the particular difficulties a person was experiencing. They also depended on how accessible, appropriate and inclusive services actually were.

When faced with the threat of homelessness, many people from ethnic minority backgrounds did not consider statutory homelessness services to be at the hub of local provision. For many, the voluntary sector, housing associations, and informal support networks (such as family and friends) were more likely to play a key role in resolving people's housing and homelessness-related problems.

### **3.5. Experiences of statutory homelessness services**

Reported experiences with statutory services were generally poor. The main areas of complaints expressed by subjects in the research related to poor customer service, including the negative attitudes of frontline staff, the bureaucratic nature of services, lack of consistency in advice and poor information about the progress of applications. There were also complaints about being frequently moved (usually at short notice and without explanation) to accommodation provided on a temporary basis.

### **3.6. Conclusions**

Drawing on a total of 155 in-depth interviews conducted with ethnic minority households accepted as statutorily homeless, local authority representatives, local voluntary sector

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organisations and national charities, this chapter has highlighted the fact that ethnic minority communities:

- are over-represented in statutory homelessness services;
- differ in some of their causes of homelessness;
- vary in their pathways through homelessness services;
- have specific support needs; and
- report poor experience of homelessness services.

In addition, some people from ethnic minority communities may not access services because of:

- lack of knowledge of the “system”;
- fear that services may not be sensitive to their specific cultural needs;
- fear of discrimination;
- fear or inability to communicate; and
- a preference for voluntary, community or other informal support networks.

It is therefore important for local authorities to develop comprehensive homelessness strategies and services that meet the needs of their ethnic minority populations. Unless they do so, local authorities risk exacerbating the current social exclusion already faced by ethnic minority people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and increasing homelessness in the long term.



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## 4.0. DESIGNING A HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY FOR ETHNIC MINORITY PEOPLE

This chapter discusses:

- The ethnic minority-specific objectives in a homelessness strategy;
- The process of designing ethnic minority-specific objectives; and
- The information necessary to develop ethnic minority-specific objectives and how it can be gathered.

### 4.1. The ethnic minority-specific objectives in a homelessness strategy

Unless local housing authorities develop a strategic approach to preventing and tackling homelessness specifically in ethnic minority communities, services will fail to meet their needs and homelessness will continue to affect a disproportionate number of people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

To reduce ethnic minority homelessness, local housing authorities need to:

- obtain a demographic profile of current and prospective users;
- identify current use of homelessness services by ethnic groups;
- identify current resources;
- identify gaps in services and priorities for future service provision;
- identify patterns of homelessness amongst ethnic groups;
- obtain a baseline against which change can be measured;
- devise better targeted programmes for ethnic minority households in relation to:
  - the prevention of homelessness;
  - the accommodation available for people who are or may become homeless;
  - the support, information and advice given to people who are or may become homeless; and
- ensure ethnic minority issues are recognised and addressed within mainstream planning and policy developments.

To this effect, it is crucial that local housing authorities improve their ethnic monitoring systems and carry out equality impact assessments on key policies, programmes and practices likely to impact on ethnic minority people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

### Good Practice

**Sheffield** has conducted a Best Value Review of “Services to Ethnic Minority People” that covers all Council services.

**Leicester** is working towards a comprehensive overview of the housing and homelessness needs of local ethnic minority communities and is using a range of internal and external data sources to achieve this.

**Leeds** has developed a methodology for carrying out a race impact audit to assess the Council’s compliance with the Race Relations (Amendment) Act. The methodology is designed to highlight and define all functions where race equality is relevant, assess to what extent departments currently comply with the new general positive duty when carrying out their functions, assess to what extent departments currently comply with the proposed specific duties when carrying out their functions, and facilitate action planning to address gaps in meeting obligations under the new legislation.

## 4.2. The strategic process

A good strategy should determine priorities for action and help all staff and partners to understand what is needed and why. It should be based on sound evidence and extensive consultation with all relevant stakeholders. It should lead to specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timetabled (SMART) outcomes that have a clear and beneficial impact on those targeted. Such outcomes should be monitored and evaluated so that they can inform any review of the strategy and its objectives, and lead to progressive improvements. It is particularly important that homelessness strategies with specific objectives for ethnic minority populations should be kept under regular review because the circumstances and needs of most ethnic minority communities change very rapidly.

**Figure 2: The strategic process**



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## 4.3. Gathering information

### 4.3.1. Who to consult?

A successful strategy requires that everyone crucial to its success is able to contribute to its formulation and is committed to its outcomes. The earlier such involvement takes place, the greater the chance of success. Local circumstances will dictate whom to involve in the consultation process. The Homelessness Code of Guidance suggests a list of authorities, organisations and persons that could usefully be consulted in drawing up homelessness strategies.

To tackle ethnic minority homelessness specifically, additional consultation should take place with:

- ethnic minority-specific housing associations;
- ethnic minority-specific refuges and hostels;
- ethnic minority-specific resource centres/community groups;
- officers dealing with Gypsy and Traveller issues;
- community development projects and link workers;
- racial harassment victim support groups;
- faith groups;
- refugee support organisations;
- National Asylum Support Service; and
- Race Equality Councils.

Moreover, consultation should take place with both ethnic minority homelessness service users and non-users. Care should be taken to include people from all local ethnic minority communities, age and gender groups, and with different risk factors in relation to homelessness.

Finally, within the local authority, in addition to housing and homelessness officers, it would be important to consult:

- race equality officers;
- community care/community development officers;
- Asylum Seeker support officers; and
- Supporting People teams.

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### 4.3.2. How to consult?

The consultation can take a number of forms and it can be direct or indirect, depending on the people being consulted and the nature of the information sought. To be most effective, however, community consultation should be:

- early on in the planning process;
- inclusive;
- community-specific and focused;
- interactive and deliberative;
- well facilitated;
- open, fair and subject to evaluation;
- cost effective; and
- action-centred.

The views of ethnic minority stakeholders can be ascertained through such methods as:

- surveys;
- focus groups;
- interviews with representatives of ethnic minority communities or organisations;
- neighbourhood conferences;
- local consultative fora;
- citizens' juries;
- residential events;
- suggestion boxes; and
- recorded language lines for complaints and feedback.

It is not always easy to involve ethnic minority people in consultation, because of issues of language, of lack of familiarity with statutory services, of lack of familiarity with the process of consultation itself, of limited capacity in many ethnic minority organisations, of “consultation fatigue” and, in some cases, of distrust towards statutory organisations.

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To overcome these difficulties, it is best to work closely with people who know the communities well and have earned their trust (e.g. community and voluntary organisations, specialist ethnic minority agencies). This will usually mean people from a similar ethnic background as those taking part in the consultation. Moreover, the aims of the consultation need to be clearly stated and participants' expectations need to be managed from the start.

It is also good to combine different methods of consultation (some open-ended and some closed-ended; some face-to-face, some formalised and written; some ongoing and routinised, some sporadic) so that the strengths and limitations inherent in each can be offset by the others. Regardless of the preferred method, all community consultation should be framed in ways that are relevant to the people consulted, with abundant examples couched in simple language. Wherever possible, the consultation should take place in the preferred language of the participants. The issue of language is more likely to surface amongst older people, women, less educated people, and recent migrants. In the research, it was mainly Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, as well as some refugees, who required interviews to be conducted in their native language. In some Muslim groups, it may be advisable to hold different consultative events for men and women.

To maximise attendance, consultation should take place in familiar environments (such as community groups, faith organisations, youth clubs) rather than in less approachable public sector buildings or hotels.

### *4.3.3. What information to gather?*

Essentially, service providers should gather information that enables them to:

- identify problems; and
- devise effective and targeted solutions.

This requires some basic mapping of the nature of the problems and of those affected by them. It also requires an assessment of the resources currently or potentially available to address the problems identified.

Information on the following topics will certainly be needed:

- **The local ethnic minority population**

Any attempt to provide good service depends on having some knowledge of potential service users. Local authorities should work with their partner agencies to develop a clear profile of their current and projected local ethnic minority population.

There is a need to tailor the ethnic categories used to monitor services to suit the specific characteristics of the local ethnic minority communities. As a general rule, the categories should be based on the latest Census (2001), as follows:

- White
  - British
  - Irish
  - Other
- Mixed
  - White and Black Caribbean
  - White and Black African
  - White and Asian
  - Any other Mixed background
- Asian or Asian British
  - Indian
  - Pakistani
  - Bangladeshi
  - Any other Asian background
- Black or Black British
  - Caribbean
  - African
  - Any other Black background
- Chinese or other ethnic group
  - Chinese
  - Any other

Monitoring categories should be expanded according to local needs, provided they can be collapsed back into the recommended categories. It may also be advisable, for instance, to include a “Romany/Gypsy” category under “White Other” and a “Traveller of Irish heritage” under “White Irish”. For those local authorities in which NASS disperses refugees, there is a clear case for recording the country of birth of refugees, in addition to their ethnicity.

#### **Good Practice**

**Leeds** has developed a comprehensive means of monitoring the asylum seeking and refugee populations locally and is using the information to profile local groups, track changes and determine priorities for action.

The information collected and the monitoring system used should be agreed and used uniformly by all partner agencies. The type of information to be collected should include:

- size of local ethnic minority population;
- ethnic make up and country of birth;
- geographical location;

- 
- age and gender profile;
  - household size and composition;
  - household type;
  - housing tenure, type, size and conditions of dwelling;
  - housing needs and preferences;
  - households on low incomes; and
  - unemployment and poverty rates.

A number of national surveys provide information for ethnic groups identified in the 2001 Census (for important sources of national information on the main ethnic minority communities, see Appendix 3). With respect to refugees, local authorities should work jointly with National Asylum Support Service (NASS) regional officers, NASS accommodation contractors, the regional asylum seeker consortium and voluntary organisations working with asylum seekers and refugees to profile the asylum seeking population likely to be at risk of homelessness. Such joint work would provide information on the number of destitute households accommodated in the area under the 1999 Act, their country of origin, their household composition, their needs and a more detailed understanding of cultural differences between groups.

Population projections are also important because the ethnic minority population is changing fast. For instance, while there used to be very few elderly South Asian people, this is now a growing section of the ethnic minority population. Greater numbers of South Asian and Irish women are reporting domestic violence. The traditional extended family is no longer the norm in South Asian households. The majority of Black Caribbean people are now UK-born, and the needs of second and third generation people are different from those of migrants as well as those of the general population. The Black African population is the fastest growing of all the ethnic minority groups and the refugee population is perhaps changing most rapidly as a result of international relations. These factors will impact on the extent of homelessness amongst ethnic minority communities and on their service requirements. Therefore, there is a need not only to assess the suitability of current services but also to map future needs and to predict trends. Estimating future trends as carefully as possible should already be done as part of the homelessness reviews, but this needs to be undertaken specifically for ethnic minority groups.

- **Homelessness in the ethnic minority population**

Any information on homelessness in the ethnic minority population will be extremely useful, especially given the paucity of knowledge in this area. For each local ethnic minority community, information should be gathered on:

- 
- current levels of homelessness;
  - projected levels of homelessness;
  - main causes of homelessness;
  - levels of take-up of services (e.g. information and advice);
  - pathways into homelessness;
  - levels of take-up of mainstream and ethnic minority voluntary services;
  - satisfaction with services; and
  - unmet needs.

Local authorities have a duty to provide information and advice to all those at risk of homelessness. It is important therefore to estimate the total number of people from ethnic minority backgrounds who may need advice, information and support in the local area and to promote access to such assistance.

Sources of information to estimate all forms of potential homelessness include:

- estimates of ethnic minority people staying with friends/family on an insecure basis;
- records of evictions of ethnic minority tenants by the local authority and RSLs;
- hospital records of ethnic minority people homeless on discharge;
- prison/probation service records of ethnic minority people homeless on discharge;
- data on ethnic minority people with substance misuse, mental and/or physical health problems;
- rough sleeper data;
- rent arrears data;
- Community Care plans;
- young people leaving care;
- Supporting People data;
- housing needs assessment; and



- 
- ethnic minority voluntary organisations.

When information does not exist locally, research may need to be commissioned. Joint commissioning with partner agencies should be considered to reduce costs.

- **Existing homelessness statutory services**

Local authorities should review and evaluate their own services to determine whether their ethnic minority constituents may be at a greater disadvantage than other sections of the local population. Local authorities should monitor by ethnicity such aspects of service provision as:

- number of applications;
- decisions on eligibility, priority need, intentionality and local connection;
- outcomes of review panels and appeals;
- type of temporary accommodation provided;
- length of stay in temporary accommodation;
- satisfaction with temporary accommodation;
- uptake of specific local initiatives (e.g. choice based lettings, tenancy support schemes, rent deposit schemes);
- advice and information provided;
- referrals made to other agencies; and
- housing outcomes.

Data collected for the P1E statutory homelessness returns to ODPM can be used to answer some of these questions and should be the basis for developing a monitoring system, but other databases will have to be consulted or created to meet each local authority's own information needs. Data should be gathered with a clear purpose.

- **The local ethnic minority voluntary sector**

Working in partnership with the voluntary sector is particularly important in the case of ethnic minority communities (see section 5.4.1.). To ensure that the ethnic minority voluntary sector can participate fully, councils need to build a detailed profile of relevant ethnic minority voluntary agencies in the local area. This should include:

- contact details of the organisation;
- key contact person;

- services provided;
- populations targeted; and
- size of the agency.

#### **Good Practice**

**Leicester** holds regular meetings on homelessness-related issues, which involve a broad range of mainstream and ethnic minority agencies, both internal and external to the Council. The meetings have a rotating chair to ensure that all perspectives have a fair chance of being aired.

## **4.4. Identifying problems**

It is crucial that ethnic monitoring does not remain a “paper exercise” and is translated into action. In other words, ethnic monitoring should be done strategically and proactively, and not only in response to problems having been brought to the attention of managers. Once disparities or apparent problems are identified, further research and analysis may be required to interpret the observed patterns. For instance, providers may need to find out whether demand for certain services is objectively lower or higher in particular groups, or whether some failure of service provision accounts for the findings.

In all cases, the monitoring and evaluation of services should seek to identify the most pressing gaps in homelessness provision. This means that although the overall aims of homelessness strategies will be similar, their specific objectives will differ according to the make-up and needs of the various ethnic minority communities in local areas.

## **4.5. Implementing the solutions**

Making progress on curbing homelessness amongst ethnic minority populations requires a strong commitment to action. Specific ethnic minority policies and strategies only produce concrete improvements in terms of reducing homelessness or improving service provision if they are implemented effectively.

Implementing the solutions identified through research and consultation requires strong commitment at senior management level and proper resources. Specifically, it depends on having:

- clear objectives matched by SMART targets;
- a detailed action plan;
- designated individuals responsible for implementation;
- an agreed timeframe;

- 
- adequate funding;
  - appropriate internal and external communications plans; and
  - procedures for feedback and review.

#### **Good Practice**

**Sheffield, Newham** and **Leicester** have developed comprehensive housing strategies for ethnic minority communities that bring together the Councils' plans for meeting the needs of their local ethnic minority populations. The strategies have detailed and timetabled action plans and they indicate lead responsibilities for each action point.

## **4.6. Monitoring and evaluating outcomes**

The monitoring and evaluation of *outcomes* are essential to the development of any strategy. Local housing authorities are required, under the Race Equality Duty, to monitor their policies and practices for any adverse impact on the promotion of race equality. Monitoring and evaluation are also key activities in relation to the homelessness legislation and the Best Value regime.

Without ethnic monitoring, local housing authorities will never know whether their homelessness strategies and services are meeting the needs of their ethnic minority clients. Ethnic monitoring provides the diagnosis that is necessary to then provide a targeted and effective solution.

There is a strong case for conducting an independent evaluation of both the strategy itself and of specific services by a specialist ethnic minority agency, as mainstream service providers may not be aware of the ways in which their services can disadvantage certain groups.

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## 4.7. Key questions

- Do you know the current ethnic composition of your local area and have you produced any estimate of how it will change over the next five years?
- Do you know the extent of statutory homelessness amongst ethnic minority people in your local area?
- Do you know how many ethnic minority households are at risk of homelessness in your local area?
- Do you have well-designed ethnic monitoring arrangements in place to assess the adequacy of current homelessness services?
- Have you identified an adequate range of ethnic minority partners to help inform, plan and deliver better services for the ethnic minority population who are or may become homeless?
- Have you used all the above information to set priorities for action and to determine targets?
- Are all your key policies aligned with the aims of reducing, preventing or alleviating ethnic minority homelessness?
- Does a senior manager have specific responsibility for ethnic minority homelessness?
- Are the plans to tackle ethnic minority homelessness adequately resourced?

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## 5.0. MAKING HOMELESSNESS SERVICES ACCESSIBLE

This chapter discusses how to make homelessness services more accessible to ethnic minority households who are or may become homeless. It presents strategies and options to:

- increase awareness of current homelessness services amongst ethnic minority populations;
- make mainstream services more culturally sensitive; and
- develop specialist services for the ethnic minority population.

### 5.1. Introduction

To better respond to homelessness amongst ethnic minority communities, local authorities first need to ensure that services are accessible to all those who need help, information and advice with housing and homelessness-related issues. Access to local authority services is not just about whether buildings are physically accessible. Just as important is whether all potential users are aware of the services offered by the council and whether these services have been designed to cater for the specific needs and rights of different local communities and individuals.

Making homelessness services accessible thus requires a three-pronged approach:

- increasing awareness of current homelessness services in ethnic minority communities;
- ensuring mainstream services are culturally sensitive, appropriate to needs and accessible; and
- developing specialist services for the ethnic minority population.

### 5.2. Increasing awareness of existing services

Lack of basic knowledge of existing statutory and voluntary homelessness services is a major problem for many people from ethnic minority backgrounds. This is particularly the case amongst recent migrants (including refugees), the elderly, those with mental health difficulties, and those for whom English is not the first language. Councils should make every effort to increase awareness of mainstream services amongst their local ethnic minority constituents.

Strategies to increase awareness of services should be based on evidence about the local ethnic minority population, their levels of need and current use of services, in order to identify those most in need of information. Below are some approaches to enhancing access to mainstream services.

### 5.2.1. Improving knowledge of services

In order to improve knowledge of services, local authorities may consider:

- producing leaflets, posters, audiotapes and videos using appropriate images and translated information, and distributing them in places likely to be attended by ethnic minority people with housing and homelessness-related needs, such as:
  - housing advice centres and relevant council offices;
  - other services in contact with potentially homeless people (e.g. the police, Citizen's Advice Bureaux, schools, public libraries, GP clinics, health visitors, support workers);
  - general and ethnic minority-specific community groups (e.g. youth clubs, mother & baby groups, refugee groups);
  - general and ethnic minority-specific charitable and voluntary organisations (e.g. refugee organisations, homelessness charities, and domestic violence support services);
  - RSLs and housing associations;
  - religious centres (e.g. churches, temples, mosques, gujwaras) and local faith groups; and
  - commercial outlets.
- promoting housing and homelessness services through ethnic minority-specific media (satellite and terrestrial TV, radio, newspapers and magazines).
- conducting outreach work with the communities through:
  - seminars;
  - exhibitions;
  - roadshows; and
  - open days/evenings.

### 5.2.2. Locating access points in areas with large ethnic minority populations

Increasing access may require council services to be located in areas where the ethnic minority population lives and works. Services that are highly visible and located in busy, multi-ethnic areas are more likely to be attended by people from ethnic minority communities. Local authorities must recognise that location, opening times, transport and childcare facilities will affect the ability of particular groups to access services.

Decentralising access points may help to improve access to services, especially amongst those with limited knowledge of the area, those likely to be intimidated by large institutions, and those with restricted mobility. However, authorities that decentralise need to safeguard against deterioration in the resources and quality of such services.

Enabling different forms of access, including telephone services, email inquiries and websites, may also facilitate access in some sections of the ethnic minority communities and address concerns over possible discrimination. Mobile surgeries and home visits delivered by staff with the relevant linguistic skills may also be considered, where appropriate. However,

councils need to ensure that all access points and forms of access result in a similar quality of advice, information and support for clients.

#### **Good Practice**

**Birmingham** locates some of the homelessness information and advice services in areas with a high South Asian concentration to ensure that the Council has some visibility in these communities.

## **5.3. Making mainstream services more culturally sensitive**

### *5.3.1. Providing welcoming and inclusive facilities*

Research indicates that people from ethnic minority communities are more likely to perceive homelessness agencies and local authorities as unwelcoming and lacking in sensitivity, and that they are often afraid that they will receive bad advice and unsympathetic treatment from statutory organisations (Steele, 1997).

To counter these views and address these fears, councils should consider how to make reception areas more welcoming to all ethnic minority groups. This may include:

- having frontline staff that reflect the diversity of the local population;
- having information posters that use appropriate images and provide information on services in a range of minority languages;
- advertising translation and interpretation facilities;
- advertising complaints procedures;
- advertising procedures for preventing and responding to racial harassment;
- advertising race equality and equal opportunities policies;
- advertising relevant specialist agencies; and
- creating play areas for toddlers and children.

### *5.3.2. Making services available in appropriate languages*

There is extensive evidence that communications problems – lack of fluency in English and illiteracy in people’s own ethnic language – restrict access to statutory services in some ethnic minority groups, and particularly amongst women, older people and new migrants. Unfortunately, these may well be the people who are most vulnerable and in greatest need of support.

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Councils would therefore benefit from a strategic approach to all aspects of communications with their ethnic minority constituents. They should develop a clear policy document on the council's approach to communications with people whose first language is not English. This should include the monitoring of the languages spoken, written and read by ethnic minority applicants and their need for interpretation and translation services. On this basis, funds for multi-lingual communications should be allocated.

### **Interpretation**

Interpretation is a skill based on professional language training. It emphasises technical precision and neutrality, and is not limited to any particular working context. Interpretation is immediate and relies on oral fluency. It is liable to some degree of distortion in the diffusion and recall of information, but is more flexible and personal than written translation.

Currently, local authorities tend to meet their interpretation needs either by:

- relying on their own multi-ethnic staff;
- employing interpreters who are shared between departments;
- using outside interpretation services on an *ad hoc* basis;
- using translation and interpretation services available over the phone; or
- asking relatives and friends of clients to interpret on their behalf.

Recent evidence (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2004) suggests that people from ethnic minority backgrounds are able to determine for themselves their need for professional interpretation. For non-technical matters, most people prefer to rely on family and friends, but for technical and legal matters, most people want to have access to professional interpreters. However, they want interpreters who can empathise with them, help with understanding procedures and plead their case. The personal character, attitude and trustworthiness of an interpreter are seen as crucially important.

This suggests that local authorities can meet their interpretation needs through a number of different ways. Employing frontline staff, such as advice officers, with appropriate language skills is a sound option. It enhances communications, ensures expertise in homelessness, is readily available and inexpensive. However, language skills should be formally recognised, included in job descriptions and suitably rewarded to avoid making unreasonable demands on ethnic minority staff. Staff with no formal competence in homelessness should not be asked to interpret simply because they can speak the language of the client. Refocusing professional interpreting services so that service users can see the same interpreter each time, where feasible, would help to build the ongoing, trusting relationship between service user and interpreter that users want.



There is a case for making training in the basics of interpreting more widely available to members of ethnic minority communities who regularly act as interpreters for family members or friends. However, the practice of using relatives (in particular children) and friends should be restricted to situations that require no specific knowledge of the housing and homelessness fields, when the applicants themselves prefer to have recourse to people they know, and after the option of using a professional interpreter has been offered. This is because many people approach homelessness services for highly sensitive and private reasons (domestic violence, relationship breakdown, mental health difficulties, arrears etc) and their right to confidentiality should be respected. Moreover, children should not be burdened with such problems. Local authorities should take into account the fact that some female clients may prefer to deal with female interpreters (especially Muslim women and those fleeing domestic violence).

In local authority areas where the ethnic minority population is small, it may be worth introducing “flash” sheets (sheets on which statements of needs are translated in the main languages spoken locally, such as “I need a female Bengali interpreter”) to pinpoint language requirements of clients so that telephone interviews with appropriate interpreters can be arranged on the spot (e.g. through confidential translation and interpretation services that are offered over the phone to facilitate professional multi-lingual communication, such as Language Line) or that face-to-face interviews can be scheduled when an interpreter is available.

### *Translation*

Documents translated into relevant local ethnic minority community languages are only of assistance to those who are literate in their native language (something which cannot be assumed in some ethnic minority communities). Translations in community languages provide the advantage that they can be standardised, used repeatedly and distributed widely, but they are expensive to produce and should only be produced in response to identified community needs. The need for translated information can be identified in a number of ways, including:

- considerations of equality and fairness (for instance, complaints procedures, changes in homelessness legislation and eligibility criteria);
- evidence about the prevalence of homelessness in certain communities;
- extent of take-up of certain services;
- demand expressed by community organisations or ethnic minority people for certain materials;
- evidence from assessment forms that directly ask clients about translation or interpretation needs; and
- the need to inform potential service users about services specifically for them (for example, supported housing for older people from diverse ethnic minority backgrounds and refuges for South Asian women).

Most councils have in place rudimentary arrangements for interpretation but few have translated materials available in community languages. Yet both interpretation and translation have an important role to play to increase access to homelessness services. They should be part of a council's communications strategy with respect to the local ethnic minority population, with the role of each component being based on local needs, resources and priorities. Joint/cross-authority commissioning of translated material should be considered where appropriate to save costs.

Consideration should be given to the best format or support to use when offering translated materials. Given the high levels of illiteracy in people's own ethnic minority language in some communities, councils should ensure that alternative methods, such as videos, tapes and CDs, are used to target those sections of the community where literacy is limited.

#### **Good Practice**

**Sheffield** is undertaking a review of the quality of and access to translation and interpretation services amongst ethnic minority people. It is also assessing the range of linguistic skills available amongst frontline staff and developing policies to ensure that these skills are recognised and supported.

**Leeds** has its Homeless Guidebook, Service Standards and Complaints Procedures translated into nine community languages.

**Newham** has a written policy on translation. They ensure that translation and interpreting support is provided when there is a face-to-face interaction between the council and a customer, when the Council needs to provide core information about accessing services, and when the Council is consulting with ethnic minority users to get their views, opinions, comments and complaints. In providing translation and interpreting support, Newham also pledges not to use children as interpreters, and to have recourse to adult family members and friends only where the customer expresses this preference, after being offered the option of professional translation and interpreting support.

In **Leicester**, as well as interpreting services provided by the corporate Community Language Unit, customers can get help from Refugee Action and Language Line. Arrangements are made in advance for interpreters to be present at interviews. In addition, a number of frontline staff can speak community languages to help people coming into the Housing Options Centre, where a wide range of quality advice leaflets is available. Staff send follow-up letters to all customers who have received general housing advice, confirming the advice given.

In **Bradford**, information about homelessness and advice is translated into a variety of community languages. Assessment forms are used to establish whether applicants require translation or have any other special needs. "Flash cards" listing different community languages in their ethnic form are used with customers to pinpoint the language support required. Advice teams have bilingual Homelessness Officers.

#### **Advocacy**

While both interpretation and translation are meant to be neutral, advocacy is based on the recognition that some ethnic minority clients have linguistic, cultural and other needs that are unmet by mainstream service providers. Advocates can represent and communicate to service providers the wider interests of their clients, and advise their clients on their rights so that they can make informed choices.

“If we spot [ethnic minority] families or children who are depressed, we make sure that all the support networks are in place. Counselling referrals are made, we make sure that people have enough to eat and live and clothe themselves. We help them with their grants from the Benefits Agency and charitable grants as well. We link them up with all the relevant programmes. We liaise with case workers on their behalf, so that all the information about their case is up front, that there’s no delays and no mistakes and they know their rights, so that when an offer of permanent accommodation is made, it’s an appropriate one. We deal with accommodation if we see there’s prostitution or drugs or it’s infested with vermin and we don’t believe families should live in there. They come to us because we speak their language, but we also speak the institutional language, the jargon of local authority, as well as community languages, so we can open doors for our clients.” (community group)

Advocacy services are best provided by specialist ethnic minority voluntary agencies, but they may need to be funded and otherwise supported by local authorities.

### 5.3.3. Staffing for diversity

The ethnic minority workforce of most local authorities in England is well below the proportion of ethnic minority people in the local population (Audit Commission, 2001). This contributes to making statutory services less attractive to potential ethnic minority clients. Given the over-representation of ethnic minority groups amongst the statutory homeless, it is important that local authorities have staff that reflect the ethnic diversity of their local population in order to encourage ethnic minority clients to use their services.

Local authorities should follow the CRE’s *Code of Practice on Race Relations in Employment*, as well as the CRE’s *Statutory Guidance on the Duty to Promote Race Equality*, and regularly monitor progress on their implementation. Consideration should also be given to take positive steps to meet the requirements of the Race Relations Act, where appropriate.

In particular, local authorities must monitor the ethnic composition of their staff which should be broken down by gender, grade and location, and identify action to be taken in case of under-representation. They should have detailed policies and action plans to ensure that:

- recruitment and selection procedures are fair;
- opportunities for career progression and staff development are fair;
- race equality, cultural awareness and anti-discriminatory training are available to relevant staff;
- racial harassment and discrimination are dealt with promptly and fairly; and
- targeted and proportionate use is made of the positive action provisions of the Race Relations Act.

It is particularly important that ethnic minority staff should be well represented at senior levels and at the frontline, so that council services are seen to promote equal opportunities and to respect cultural, ethnic, racial and religious diversity.

#### **Good Practice**

**Bristol** is planning to launch a Councillor Shadowing Scheme to enable people from ethnic minority communities to play a greater role in local democracy, to ensure that Bristol has more ethnic minority councillors and that local communities engage with the authority in all areas and at all levels of governance, so that their needs are better understood and reflected by the local authority.

**Bradford** has Homelessness Officers that reflect the ethnic diversity of the local community. Staff receive training on race and cultural awareness. A comprehensive training programme is being developed to cover issues around the Race Relations Act and the Race Equality Framework. The intention is to include such training as part of the induction process for all new staff.

## **5.4. Developing specialist ethnic minority services**

Increasing knowledge of existing services and ensuring that all services are culturally sensitive are important first steps in facilitating access to services amongst the ethnic minority populations. However, to offer genuine choice and quality of care to all those in their local area, service providers also need to design services specifically for their local ethnic minority population. In local authorities where there is a very small ethnic minority population, there may be a need to develop cross-authority partnerships to ensure that ethnic minority specific needs are met. All services should be based on a sound understanding of the reasons why people become homeless in the first place, so that targeted and cost-effective responses can be put in place.

The range of local housing and homelessness-related services needs to reflect the lifestyles and experiences specific to each community. Each local authority will have to undertake its own assessment of the causes of homelessness, pathways and barriers to services amongst the ethnic minority groups in the local area to determine the precise nature of their needs. They will have to provide services that target their specific causes of homelessness, reflect natural pathways, help to overcome barriers and empower people to permanently end their homelessness. For example, in local authorities where NASS disperses asylum seekers, specific mechanisms to support asylum seekers once they are granted leave to remain in the UK and therefore lose their NASS accommodation and/or subsistence need to be introduced.

### **5.4.1. Joint working with the ethnic minority voluntary sector**

Working in close partnership with the ethnic minority voluntary sector – that is voluntary organisations led by and providing services for ethnic minority communities – is essential to delivering homelessness services that address the needs of ethnic minority populations.

“Black and minority ethnic people should have the same range of options and quality of services as everyone else. But we don’t really know how to translate that principle into a

reality. They [the ethnic minority voluntary sector] know their own communities inside out. We don't. We have to listen to them to establish priorities, to set up more effective communications, to reach out to people. In every way, we are dependent on them.”  
(council staff)

Ethnic minority voluntary organisations:

- are often the first access points for ethnic minority people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and can help mainstream organisations access ethnic minority people;
- provide services targeted at specific communities;
- can advise on making services more sensitive to the needs of ethnic minority people;
- can act as advocates for ethnic minority clients;
- have a wealth of knowledge and experience about the needs of ethnic minority people;
- are trusted by their service users; and
- are more flexible in developing innovative and person-focused services.

The ethnic minority voluntary sector provides a range of services including homeless services, housing advice, education and training, health support, mental health, services for the elderly, young people, men and women which can complement and inform mainstream homelessness services. Joint working with the ethnic minority voluntary sector can result in higher quality, more efficient and cost-effective services.

Joint working with the ethnic minority voluntary sector can include:

- exchanging information between agencies;
- offering joint training and development for staff;
- commissioning joint research or services;
- developing and agreeing common working procedures and protocols; and
- conducting multi-agency case work.

It is important to recognise from the start, however, that there are inherent difficulties in multi-agency work. The ethnic minority voluntary sector is a collection of disparate organisations with widely differing traditions, goals, ways of working and sizes. Difficulties sometimes arise because of:

- the lack of knowledge statutory services have of the local ethnic minority voluntary sector;

- lack of capacity in the ethnic minority voluntary sector;
- real differences in the working cultures and priorities of statutory and voluntary agencies; and
- mutual negative stereotypes.

To overcome such barriers, the following measures could be taken:

- gathering a detailed profile of the relevant ethnic minority voluntary sector in the local area, including:
  - contact details of the organisation;
  - key contact person;
  - services provided;
  - populations targeted; and
  - size of the agency.
- building capacity in the ethnic minority voluntary sector according to identified needs, through such measures as:
  - mainstream, ongoing funding of selected ethnic minority organisations;
  - information exchanges;
  - joint protocols;
  - secondments;
  - joint training; and
  - multi-agency casework and conferences.
- recognising that real differences in priorities and organisational cultures are a positive resource to draw on rather than an obstacle.

“You’ve got to work with the voluntary sector. You can’t do the job without them because we [local authorities] are Jack and Jacquelines of all trades, and masters and mistresses of none, in the specialist BME way. So we can offer good general housing advice. We can give all the good options the specialist service might not be able to, but we wouldn’t be able to give the specialist support and have the cultural understandings that that specialist agency has. Some clients don’t want to be associated with a BME specialist project, but some say: ‘I need people of my own culture for that mutual support and understanding’. So what we wanted to do was to offer choice and letting those options come from the community, and let the community drive it.” (council staff)

A key issue to address is the various recording and monitoring systems used by the different statutory and voluntary agencies. The only way to achieve a comprehensive and accurate picture of the level of need in each community and of the specific contribution each service can make to preventing and responding to homelessness is to have identical monitoring systems and to be able to track individuals through various services. (see section 4.3.3.).

### Good Practice

**Leicester** and **Brent** have developed good engagement with many local ethnic minority voluntary sector organisations. These Councils are working to develop the ethnic minority voluntary sector's capacity to ensure that ethnic minority organisations can support them in delivering housing-related and homelessness services for ethnic minority people.

## 5.5. Key questions

- Do you have a written policy on translation and interpretation for ethnic minority people?
- Are documents of immediate relevance to your local ethnic minority populations readily available to them in their own language?
- Does the range of communication methods used (posters, audiotapes, videos, etc) meet the needs of the local ethnic minority population?
- Do you have access points in areas where the local ethnic minority population live and work?
- Do you offer a broad range of access mechanisms?
- Do your staff – especially frontline staff – reflect the ethnic diversity of the local population?
- Have you identified an adequate range of ethnic minority partners to help inform, plan and deliver better services for the ethnic minority population?
- What measures do you have in place to support and build capacity in your local ethnic minority voluntary sector?
- Do you actively support the advocacy work provided by ethnic minority voluntary organisations?
- Do you and all your partners use standard recording and monitoring procedures?

## 6.0. PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS AMONGST ETHNIC MINORITY PEOPLE

Preventing ethnic minority homelessness requires the following:

- addressing the structural causes of homelessness that affect all homeless people, but ethnic minority communities more acutely;
- ensuring that information, advice and support are both available for and targeted at ethnic minority households who are or may become homeless; and
- putting in place measures to deal with the causes of homelessness found disproportionately amongst particular ethnic minority populations, such as:
  - racial harassment;
  - overcrowding;
  - loss of NASS accommodation and support;
  - forced marriages and parental abuse;
  - nomadic lifestyles amongst Gypsies and Travellers.

### 6.1. Addressing the structural causes of homelessness

Temporary, “crisis management” responses to homelessness may exacerbate chronic homelessness and further isolate homeless households. By contrast, services that support individual and community networks and reinforce their capacity for self-help are most effective in curbing homelessness in the long-term. In recognition of this state of affairs, the Government has introduced a range of policies that will address the underlying causes of homelessness. These policies are designed to reduce poverty, increase the supply of affordable housing, provide life skills, give children a good start, reduce school exclusion, curb teenage pregnancies, regenerate run-down areas, and generally support the most vulnerable people in society. They will help to prevent homelessness in all social groups, especially amongst the ethnic minority population.

However, such policies and programmes will be most effective if those in greatest need are aware of them, take them up and are allowed to benefit from the opportunities they offer. To ensure that this is the case, ethnic minority communities should be specifically targeted. They need to have easy access to information and expert advice services in their own languages to maximise their awareness of existing help. Service providers should ensure that they provide ethnic minority people with all the relevant information and advice on available schemes, especially in relation to social, housing, educational, health and employment services. They need to link up ethnic minority people with all the benefits to which they are entitled.

### 6.2. Identifying people at risk

Successful and cost-effective homelessness prevention also depends on identifying those individuals most at risk of becoming homeless. Indeed, some of the most successful efforts at reducing homelessness have been small in scale and tailored to individual and community needs, with limited and realistic objectives (Daly, 1996).



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### 6.2.1. Risk factors in the general population

Amongst the general population, the risk factors associated with homelessness are well understood and provide a strong information base for prevention work (for example, Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2000; Kennett & Marsh, 1999; Randall & Brown, 1999; Warnes *et al*, 2003). The factors that increase the likelihood of an individual becoming homeless include:

- poverty;
- unemployment;
- family disputes and relationship breakdowns (including domestic violence);
- young or single parenthood;
- drug and alcohol abuse;
- mental health problems;
- having spent time in institutions: local authority care, prisons, psychiatric hospitals and the Armed Forces;
- lack of qualifications and school exclusion;
- previous homelessness; and
- general lack of social capital.

### 6.2.2. Risk factors in the ethnic minority population

Ethnic minority people are more likely than the general population to be affected by nearly all of the above problems, except time in the Armed Forces and lack of social capital (in some cases, extensive and strong social networks can act to ward off homelessness). Additional difficulties in accessing homelessness services and appropriate support, problems linked to racial discrimination and harassment, overcrowding, and loss of NASS accommodation (amongst refugees) explain why ethnic minority households have higher rates of homelessness than the general population.

## 6.3. The role of information and advice services

To prevent homelessness, service providers need to work jointly to increase ethnic minority people's knowledge and uptake of such schemes as rent deposit schemes, community regeneration programmes, renovation and home adaptation grants, mediation with family, landlords or neighbours, etc.

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Local authorities that are more proactive find the provision of detailed information and advice both useful to reduce homelessness and cost effective.

“When people present, we make an interim assessment about whether they’re roofless or not. If they’re roofless, we operate a system where we interview people the same day. If they’re not roofless, we go through all sorts of options with them. We discuss mediation, housing benefits, relations with their landlords or their neighbours, we refer them to other agencies that might help, all sorts of stuff and then we operate a ‘homeless at home’ system... We think that’s a more efficient system because it deals with the situation before it gets to be a crisis and also we’re not using our temporary accommodation, which is expensive. We hold them in their current place, we try to do that for no longer than 28 days, until we can sort out some permanent housing.” (council staff)

The Race Relations Act 1976 (Statutory Duties) Order 2001 places a duty on local authorities to monitor their homelessness policies for any adverse impact on the promotion of race equality. There is therefore an urgent need for improvement on such matters as part of reviews of homelessness strategies. This should begin with the development of standards for best practice in relation to the various prevention (information and advice) and support services offered.

Assessing the success of prevention activities requires evidence:

- of an actual risk of homelessness; and
- that a given intervention was instrumental in preventing homelessness.

The effectiveness of prevention activities can be assessed in relation to, for instance:

- the incidence of new cases of homelessness;
- the incidence of repeat homelessness;
- the reduction of the duration of episodes of homelessness; and
- the reduction of the consequences of homelessness for individual households.

As with the general population, housing and homelessness information and advice services for the ethnic minority population should begin with a thorough needs assessment. They should also cover such topics as:

- the structure of local statutory services;
- housing options in the social and private sectors;
- welfare and housing benefits;

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- tenancy rights and responsibilities in both social and private housing;
  - tenancy support services in social and private housing, and for home owners;
  - legal advice on overcrowding;
  - legal advice on evictions;
  - improvement grants for home owners, access to community regeneration schemes;
  - rent deposit, rent guarantee, and rent in advance schemes;
  - basic tenancy support to help tenants manage their finances, domestic duties, health, etc.;
  - mediation services (between landlords and tenants, parents and children, partners, and between neighbours); and
  - advice and access to treatment for those with substance abuse and/or mental health problems.

In addition, and depending on the specific circumstances of the households, ethnic minority people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness should be referred to appropriate ethnic minority specialist agencies and services:

- local and national ethnic minority social housing providers;
- specialist refuges and other specialist temporary accommodation;
- ethnic minority day centres and community centres;
- outreach teams and floating support;
- specialist mental health and counselling services;
- independent advice centres and advocacy services;
- racial harassment and victim support services;
- legal and immigration services;
- asylum seekers and refugee organisations;
- mentoring schemes for new immigrants and those leaving institutions; and
- befriending schemes for refugees.

If such specialist services do not currently exist locally, local authorities and partner agencies should monitor closely the need to develop them and/or work with authorities where such services may be available. Information on existing ethnic minority resources at local, regional and national levels should be readily available.

#### **Good Practice**

**Bristol** has developed good working relations with the local Race Equality Council and with SARI, a local voluntary organisation that provides support to victims of racial incidents. This partnership helps to reduce the incidence of racial harassment, to increase reporting, and to reduce repeat homelessness due to racial harassment.

## **6.4. Tackling racial harassment**

The prevention of homelessness amongst ethnic minority populations must include a strategy for tackling racial discrimination and harassment. Tackling racial harassment robustly and efficiently is essential to ensure that ethnic minority people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness feel welcome and safe in social housing and that they do not lose their accommodation because they are threatened by others. It is also necessary to help owner-occupiers and those in private rented accommodation to stay in their home in safety.

The Macpherson Report suggests that local authorities and partner agencies should adopt the following definition of a racist incident:

“A racist incident is any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person.” (Macpherson, 1999)

Statutory and voluntary agencies need to be aware that racial harassment is not only targeted at people from visible ethnic minorities. For instance, refugees from Eastern Europe, Irish people and Travellers can experience acute forms of racism and this needs to be recognised and monitored.

Local authorities should develop strong partnerships with a range of statutory and voluntary organisations to develop a coordinated approach to racial harassment that includes:

- profiling and monitoring racial incidents;
- mapping existing support services;
- developing a strategy to prevent racial incidents; and
- having a coordinated, swift, client-centred response to racial incidents.

To profile and monitor racist incidents, local authorities and partner agencies should:

- make the reporting of incidents simple and confidential;

- 
- adopt common protocols for recording cases of racial harassment, including:
    - where the racial harassment takes place;
    - to whom it is targeted;
    - the different forms it takes (verbal, personal or property abuse); and
    - the severity of the incidents.

To help prevent racial harassment, local authorities and other housing providers can:

- include a “no harassment” clause in occupation agreements;
- state clearly what robust actions will be taken against perpetrators;
- keep in contact with recent movers to establish if they are experiencing problems; and
- fit security facilities (e.g. alarm systems that get a priority response from the Police, fireproof letter boxes, surveillance cameras) where appropriate.

To respond adequately to victims of racist incidents, local authorities should:

- have a 24-hour harassment helpline with a multi-lingual help facility;
- ask victims what kind of help and support they need;
- ensure a swift response to incidents;
- refer the victim to appropriate counselling or support agencies;
- conduct emergency repairs and graffiti removal;
- put in place procedures to identify and take action against perpetrators; and
- monitor rates of positive outcomes for clients.

Local authorities may need to provide financial support to the partner agencies with which they share responsibility for tackling racial harassment.

#### **Good Practice**

**Sheffield** has a media strategy in place to publicise all court actions in relation to racial harassment, with the aim of encouraging reporting and increasing confidence in the Council’s commitment to tackling discrimination and harassment generally. The Council is also proactive in challenging negative public perceptions of asylum seekers and refugees by holding awareness-raising seminars and diffusing positive information on new communities amongst the local population.

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Other relevant information on tackling racial harassment can be found in:

- [www.raceactionnet.co.uk](http://www.raceactionnet.co.uk), a website which collates good practice on action on racial harassment from a range of local authorities;
- Tackling Racial Harassment: Code of Practice for Social Landlords (ODPM, 2001);
- Code of Practice on reporting and recording racist incidents in response to recommendation 15 of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report (Home Office, 2000);
- Equality in Housing: Guidance for tackling racial discrimination and promoting equality (National Housing Federation, 1999);
- Safe as Houses: A guide to supporting people experiencing racial harassment in housing (Lemos, 1997).

## 6.5. Addressing overcrowding

The effective prevention of ethnic minority homelessness is likely to require some action to address overcrowding. Overcrowding creates significant housing stress and is an important contributing factor in the homelessness of many ethnic minority households. The issue of overcrowding amongst ethnic minority communities is well documented (English House Condition Survey, 2001; Lakey, 1997; Murphy, 1996). The Survey of English Housing 2003-04 suggests that only 2% of White households, and 2% of Irish households are living in overcrowded<sup>5</sup> conditions. This compares to 7% amongst Black Caribbean households, 8% of Indians, 21% of Pakistanis and 26% of Bangladeshis. The precise extent of overcrowding in the refugee communities is not known, but community groups working with refugees suggest that overcrowding is very common in their client group.

Many factors explain this state of affairs: larger family sizes, extended households, poverty, lack of affordable social housing, reliance on family and friends to accommodate and cultural norms about privacy and personal space, amongst others, are likely to account for the high rates of overcrowding found in many ethnic minority communities.

Homelessness strategies should determine the extent of overcrowding in the various ethnic minority communities in their local area. Depending on the extent of the problem, local authorities may wish to:

- consider building larger properties or converting adjacent small ones into bigger units;
- consider allocating a high priority to overcrowding in their criteria for allocating Choice Based Lettings;
- adapt homes to suit the needs of extended households;

5 Survey of English Housing 2003-04 ODPM. Overcrowding is calculated using the difference from the bedroom standard which is a measure of the number of bedrooms required for each household in accordance with its age/sex/marital status and relationship of the members of the household to each other.

- 
- discuss a range of housing options for the extended household of ethnic minority applicants complaining of overcrowding;
  - assess the need for supported housing for ethnic minority elderly people;
  - assess the need for day care services and community activities for the elderly to reduce stress on the entire household; and
  - offer specialist family mediation services.

## 6.6. Helping refugees who are leaving NASS accommodation

The most common trigger of homelessness amongst refugees is the sudden loss of NASS accommodation and support upon being granted leave to remain. Good practice in relation to refugees would therefore go a long way towards reducing ethnic minority homelessness.

“With the refugee populations, there is poverty and unemployment. Some have disabilities and mental health difficulties. There is a lot of racial harassment as well, but by far, by far the main cause of homelessness has to do with their status as refugees. It’s more the status that’s affecting these people in terms of homelessness. The core problem is obtainment of the refugee status with nothing to fall back on.” (voluntary organisation)

To develop a good understanding of their local refugee populations – their culture, experiences and support needs – local authorities should work jointly with the following partners:

- NASS regional officers;
- NASS accommodation contractors;
- the regional asylum seeker consortium; and
- voluntary organisations working with asylum seekers and refugees (particularly Refugee Community Organisations).

They should seek, in particular, to improve the transitional arrangements, administrative mechanisms and support services for refugees leaving NASS. Within the current policy framework, this should entail:

- ensuring that refugee households are entitled to the full 28-day “period of grace” for vacating their accommodation and finding an alternative place to stay;
- providing refugee households with detailed information about mainstream services (e.g. health, housing, educational, employment, cultural, legal) while they are still in NASS accommodation so that they can get familiar with existing social and welfare services;

- conducting a comprehensive “exit interview” to assess immediate and longer-term support needs;
- having a dedicated caseworker to ease integration and facilitate full integration;
- ensuring that National Insurance numbers can be obtained swiftly; and
- linking people up with all relevant benefits and services when they are granted leave to remain.

Many of these recommendations have been incorporated in SUNRISE (Strategic Upgrade of National Refugee Integration Services) – the key delivery mechanism for the Home Office refugee integration strategy that was launched in March 2005. The SUNRISE approach will be piloted in three areas, and national roll out will be dependent upon the pilot evaluation. It is therefore important that local authorities take steps to improve transitional arrangements, administrative mechanisms and support services for refugees now, rather than waiting for SUNRISE to be implemented.

From December 2005 all NASS accommodation contracts will be operated on a ‘per head’ rather than ‘per property’ basis. This opens a window of opportunity for local authorities to negotiate agreements with NASS providers, including the possible sustainment of refugees’ existing accommodation and avoidance of homelessness.

#### **Good Practice**

**Leicester, Sheffield, Bradford and Leeds** all have dedicated asylum seekers and refugees officers.

**Sheffield** has a “Refugee Integration Strategy” whose key aims are: to encourage refugees to choose to stay in Sheffield; to work in partnership to provide services that are of high quality and responsive to the needs of refugees; to enable refugees to play a full and equal part in the city; to raise awareness of refugees as a positive resource for all sectors and people within the city; to counter negative stereotyping and discrimination; to encourage and support the development of Refugee Community Organisations; and to ensure that the needs of refugees are integral to all local strategic planning and regeneration partnerships. **Sheffield** produces and circulates an information pack to make asylum seekers aware of the availability of Council housing and how to access it once they receive leave to remain. It also has a floating support scheme for new refugees who are Council tenants.

**Newham** has an “Asylum Project” which is located within the Social Services Department, but includes a Housing Review Team. The team provides resettlement support to service users granted leave to remain. It adopts a “joined-up” approach to re-housing asylum seekers granted leave to remain/refugee status by working closely with other Council services and the DSS to reduce the risk of homelessness. Where appropriate, clients are referred to other areas and housing providers. The integrated approach provides the opportunity for sharing leased property – increasingly important as suitable temporary accommodation becomes ever more scarce. This joined-up approach to service delivery to the borough’s asylum seekers has been called “an example of good practice” by the Audit Commission and demonstrates “excellence” according to the Social Services Inspectorate.



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## 6.7. Curbing domestic violence, forced marriages and parental abuse in South Asian communities

Domestic violence assumes specific forms in the South Asian communities. This may involve many members of the extended family taking part in or condoning the abuse. It may also involve parent-to-daughter abuse, especially when unmarried women become pregnant and in cases of forced (as opposed to arranged) marriages. These culturally-specific forms of domestic violence may require local housing authorities to devise targeted measures to respond to these problems, since these are very common causes of homelessness in all three South Asian groups. The extent of the violence experienced by South Asian women also indicates that they tend to stay longer in severely abusive situations than do most White women (Gervais & Rehman, 2005; Humphreys & Thiara, 2002; Mama, 1989). This is mainly because:

- there is greater cultural tolerance of domestic violence in some parts of these communities;
- the women do not know the support and protection structures available to them and have difficulties accessing them;
- the women are financially and socially dependant on their spouse;
- they do not want to shame their family and community;
- they fear being stigmatised and otherwise unable to cope on their own; and
- if they are subject to the two-year rule, women may fear deportation.

Evidence from the interviews with South Asian experts on domestic violence and from South Asian victims of domestic violence<sup>6</sup> suggest that service provision need to be particularly sensitive to the following:

- the different forms domestic violence assumes in the South Asian communities;
- the extensive and multiple support needs of many South Asian victims;
- the need to have all support services available in South Asian languages;
- the intensive protection women might need: more South Asian women are killed *after* they have fled abusive domestic situations than while in them;
- the rehousing of South Asian women: South Asian women will stand out and may lack support in predominantly White areas, but they will be recognised and may be at greater risk if rehoused in South Asian communities; and
- the need for life skills, literacy and job training to be tailored to the experiences and resources of South Asian women to equip them to move on to autonomous lives.

6 Gervais, M.C. & Rehman, H. (2005) "Causes of homelessness amongst ethnic minority populations", London: ODPM

Prevention work is difficult because of the private nature of domestic violence and the taboo surrounding domestic violence in some sections of the South Asian communities. In addition to the strategies already in place to prevent and respond to domestic violence in the general population, local authorities may consider working in close partnership with South Asian groups specialising in domestic violence to:

- determine when and how to offer family mediation services;
- conduct sensitive outreach work;
- provide appropriate floating support;
- put in place day centres, community centres and supported housing for South Asian elders to relieve pressure on the entire household; and
- carry out community interventions and education (see section 7.8.).

#### **Good Practice**

**Birmingham** and **Brent** have Homelessness Officers who pay regular visits to refuges for South Asian women experiencing domestic violence. They carry out Homelessness Assessments and Needs Assessments in the refuges, and work in close partnership with specialist ethnic minority service providers.

For further information, see: Humphreys, C. & Thiara, R. (2002) *Routes to safety: Protection issues facing abused women and children and the role of outreach services*, Bristol: WAFE.

## **6.8. Gypsies and Travellers**

Travelling lifestyles are not found exclusively amongst the ethnic minority population but they are more common amongst people of Irish and Gypsy/Romany backgrounds than in the general population. Homeless Gypsies and Travellers seeking caravan site accommodation may well have different or additional issues to other people seeking help under the homelessness legislation.

There is a lack of monitoring data on the numbers of Gypsies and Travellers housed by local authorities. Estimates provided by local authorities suggest that the number of Gypsies and Travellers housed in social housing is very low. Qualitative evidence from interviews with Gypsies and Travellers suggested there may be relatively low numbers of applications due to negative views of living in houses<sup>7</sup>. Gypsies and Travellers may not apply as homeless or for social housing if they assume that their distinct housing and homelessness needs will not be catered for because of the shortage of culturally-appropriate accommodation for their communities (caravan sites, accommodation suitable for extended family groups or houses in areas of high Gypsy or Traveller concentration).

7 Pat Niner (2003) Local Authority Gypsy/Traveller Sites in England, ODPM: London

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The causes of homelessness amongst Gypsies and Travellers are also specific. Gypsies and Travellers may become homeless because they have moved out of housing or left a legal site.

If they have moved out of housing, this may be for various reasons:

- relationships with neighbours – including cases of racial harassment or abuse;
- difficulty living in a house – for example because of social isolation, lack of experience of one or more members of the family in living in a house;
- cultural or psychological aversion to housing;
- risk of psychiatric damage to one or more family members from remaining in housing; and
- desire or need to adopt a nomadic lifestyle (which may, in turn, lead to a homeless application in response to threatened eviction from an unauthorised development or encampment).

Local housing authorities need to mainstream the concerns of Gypsies and Travellers in their service planning and delivery. Under new provisions introduced in the Housing Act 2004, the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers must be assessed, just as they are for the rest of the community, and a strategy put in place to meet identified needs. This will give a much clearer picture of the accommodation needs and aspirations of Gypsies and Travellers than has been available in the past, including a clearer understanding of the needs of those who are – or who are threatened with – homelessness. Guidance on needs assessment, including for Gypsies and Travellers, is currently being produced by ODPM. Guidance will also be issued on the production of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation strategies.

Finally, local authorities should consider the support needs of Gypsies and Travellers and, where appropriate, deliver targeted and culturally-sensitive floating support to prevent homelessness and repeat homelessness.

#### **Good Practice**

**Leicester** recognises that Gypsies and Travellers have distinctive housing needs. The Council is working to identify temporary sites in suitable locations across the city to accommodate Gypsy and Traveller households.

For further information, see: Johnson, C. & Willers, M. (eds) (2004) *Gypsy and Traveller Law*, London: Legal Action Group.

Gypsies and Travellers: A strategy for the CRE, 2004 – 2007

Pat Niner (2003) *Local Authority Gypsy/Traveller Sites in England*, ODPM: London

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For information about your local Gypsy and Traveller community you could contact the Traveller Education Support Services (TESS) or Gypsy Liaison Officer within your local community.

## 6.9. The role of community interventions

As recent Government policies and programmes make clear, homelessness can be tackled not only by focusing on the provision of information and advice to individuals and families, but also by broader interventions that involve the wider community.

These may be particularly useful when there is a serious knowledge gap and/or when social norms need to be addressed. For instance, in particular communities, there may be a need for community education and activities in schools, community groups and in religious institutions to increase knowledge and challenge detrimental norms in relation to such issues as:

- teenage pregnancy;
- relationship breakdown;
- domestic violence;
- forced marriages;
- child abuse;
- racial harassment and violence;
- mental health problems;
- drug and alcohol abuse; and
- stigmas surrounding homelessness.

There are strong norms surrounding these issues that mean that some ethnic minority households who are at risk of homelessness (and in otherwise distressing circumstances) may not be approaching services. The ethnic minority voluntary sector recognises these problems and has developed considerable expertise in addressing some of them, based on a sound understanding of the cultures and realities of the various ethnic minority communities. Local authorities would benefit from working in close partnership with relevant ethnic minority organisations to tackle such complex and sensitive issues.

“We need to empower the [Irish] community to recognise discrimination against White people and give them the means to fight it when they face it. I think this is particularly important with Travellers. They put up with truly unacceptable discrimination and harassment. Community groups have the know-how to educate agencies and the government, but we need resources to do that.” (Community group)

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“There is a need to work with the wider [South Asian] community and with a range of Government Departments. We work with the Home Office to raise awareness of domestic violence and forced marriages. We’ve done various campaigns throughout the last 18 months and these campaigns focus on actually getting the message across to Asian women. There are many barriers which actually stop women from reporting domestic violence and our aim was to actually overcome these barriers so women firstly feel supported and also they have the mechanism to report domestic violence, in terms of using legal injunctions, using criminal prosecution and guiding them through the process. There’s a lot of community education in schools that we do as well to increase awareness that certain behaviours may be cultural but that does not mean they are acceptable.”  
(Community group)

A comprehensive and multi-faceted programme of measures that include both individual and community-based interventions targeting the most prevalent causes of homelessness in the main ethnic minority communities would be highly beneficial.

## 6.10. Key questions

- Do you have in place mechanisms for identifying ethnic minority people at risk of homelessness in your local area?
- Do you have strategies to ensure ethnic minority people are aware of and have access to such schemes as community regeneration programmes, renovation and home adaptation grants, rent deposit schemes, etc?
- Do you monitor the information and advice given to ethnic minority homeless applicants and the impact such advice has?
- Do you have partnerships with ethnic minority organisations that provide information and advice to ethnic minority people at risk of homelessness?
- How comprehensive is your strategy for tackling racial discrimination and harassment?
- Do you have in place mechanisms for assessing and addressing overcrowding amongst the ethnic minority population in your area?
- Do you know the size and ethnic make-up of your local refugee population?
- Do you have in place joint working arrangements with refugee organisations?
- Are your transitional arrangements for refugees leaving NASS accommodation adequate?
- Do you have strategies for informing or educating ethnic minority communities about culturally specific issues likely to impact on homelessness?
- Do you have strategies in place to meet the specific housing and support needs of Gypsies and Travellers in your local area?

## 7.0. PROVIDING ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT FOR ETHNIC MINORITY HOMELESS PEOPLE

Key findings from the research:

- ethnic minority people have limited choices over both their settled and temporary accommodation; and
- ethnic minority people are not always provided with the information, advice and help they need in temporary accommodation.

This chapter discusses:

- how to tailor both settled and temporary accommodation to suit the specific needs of ethnic minority households;
- how to offer support services that meet the needs of ethnic minority households;
- how to enhance the quality of private sector accommodation; and
- how to increase access to the private rented sector.

### 7.1. Introduction

Homelessness strategies must include plans for ensuring that there is sufficient suitable accommodation available for people who are or may become homeless. To meet this duty, most local authorities provide a mixture of settled, temporary and supported housing, and they work with housing associations, RSLs, private landlords and letting agents.

This chapter considers how to tailor accommodation, as well as support services, to ensure that they meet the specific needs of ethnic minority communities. It also considers how to enhance the quality of private sector accommodation and to increase access to private rented accommodation amongst ethnic minority households.

### 7.2. Temporary accommodation for ethnic minority households

Planning the supply of accommodation needs to be based on extensive consultation in order to ensure that it meets the needs of local ethnic minority communities. In planning for this supply, local authorities need to work closely with:

- the Housing Corporation;
- ethnic minority-led and mainstream RSLs;
- private landlords;
- ethnic minority community groups; and
- ethnic minority service users.

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### *7.2.1. The role of temporary accommodation*

Temporary accommodation fulfils an important role. It provides housing:

- at short notice (e.g. for people experiencing domestic violence, people leaving home after family disputes, people being made homeless at short notice);
- while applications for housing homeless households are being considered;
- while homeless applicants are waiting for a settled home;
- while more extensive support is needed before the homeless person is ready to move on to another accommodation (e.g. people leaving institutional settings, lone mothers with infants); and
- for people with a transient lifestyle (e.g. Travellers, some rough sleepers).

However, temporary accommodation is expensive, of highly variable quality, and can be very disruptive for homeless households, especially where there are children. The use of temporary accommodation should therefore be kept to a minimum and its value should be maximised by conducting thorough needs assessment and providing extensive support to enable people to move on quickly and safely.

### *7.2.2. Improving the quality of temporary accommodation*

Local authorities have successfully met a Government target to end the use of Bed and Breakfast hotels as long-term accommodation for families with children. Over 80% of households in temporary accommodation are now in self-contained homes. The Government encourages local authorities to provide good quality temporary accommodation and has set a new target to halve temporary accommodation use by 2010. To that end, local authorities should:

- have environmental health officers visit temporary accommodation;
- carry out regular health and safety checks; and
- carry out any necessary repairs promptly.

Local authorities should also seek to ensure that they do not place a disproportionate number of ethnic minority households in the least desirable temporary accommodation, that repairs are conducted as efficiently and quickly for all those who request them (in accordance to the condition of the property), and they are made to the same standards regardless of the ethnicity of the tenants.

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### 7.2.3. Ensuring an adequate range of temporary accommodation

Being homeless is a traumatic experience that is nearly always brought about by some crisis. In distressing and vulnerable times, people want to be in familiar and supportive environments. Many ethnic minority households feel at ease using mainstream statutory services, but some prefer to be accommodated with other members of their community, where services are geared to address their distinct cultural needs, and where they feel better understood and accepted. There is a need to develop temporary accommodation that takes account of these requirements.

There is also a need to develop a range of temporary accommodation to cater to the particular reasons why households become homeless and offer the most relevant and targeted support. For instance, the accommodation and support needs of homeless African-Caribbean men with mental health difficulties may be different from those of their White counterparts and require culturally-specific services. Romany, Gypsy or Irish Traveller families may require flexible arrangements that take account of their nomadic lifestyles. Refugees may have psychological traumas that require specific care or have greater need for general orientation and support with day-to-day issues. South Asian women fleeing domestic violence may prefer to be accommodated well away from their existing social network. Each case needs to be assessed individually, but people from ethnic minority communities should have access to as broad a choice of temporary accommodation and support services as those from the general population, regardless of their reason for becoming homeless.

To that effect, local authorities should seek to:

- identify the main causes of homelessness in each ethnic minority community;
- develop both mainstream and specialist temporary accommodation;
- develop services in relation to various causes of homelessness; and
- put in place flexible working arrangements across local authorities when the local ethnic minority population does not justify specialist provisions (but see discussion of “out-of-area” placements).

Whenever possible, temporary accommodation for ethnic minority households should be located close to their:

- social network (except in cases of domestic violence or parental abuse);
- services (e.g. schools, medical care);
- employment; and
- community resources (e.g. ethnic shops, religious institutions, community groups).



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In addition, staff in temporary accommodation should take account of the needs of ethnic minority households in relation to:

- cultural identity (e.g. provide self-contained rather than shared accommodation where possible, subscribe to ethnic minority-specific TV channels, newspapers and magazines, have ethnic minority staff, play appropriate music);
- language (e.g. have staff who are proficient in the languages of residents and can act as advocates for them, translate information and house rules);
- diet (e.g. have separate food storage, preparation and cooking facilities for vegetarians and halal meat eaters);
- religious practices (e.g. respect prayer times, have dedicated prayer rooms and provide clean prayer mats for Muslims); and
- gender (e.g. be mindful of the need for separate communal rooms for some Muslim men and women, have separate bathrooms if self-contained accommodation is not available).

#### **Good Practice**

**Sheffield** monitors its current support services and prioritises the development of services for older people in ethnic minority communities where few or no targeted support schemes exist.

**Sheffield** and **Leicester** actively support bids from RSLs which provide housing types/sizes that meet the housing needs of ethnic minority communities. These Councils are consulting ethnic minority communities to determine culturally appropriate design standards for new accommodation. They are exploring opportunities to target commuted sums to ethnic minority-led RSLs in order to address the specific needs of ethnic minority clients.

**Leeds** and **Bradford** are in a 'cross-authority group' with the other West Yorkshire Authorities (namely, Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield). These authorities have a strong tradition of working together. This benefits, most particularly, ethnic minority communities as well as other people who have rare or complex needs. Better services can be planned and delivered more efficiently and economically by pooling resources together, especially in areas with low ethnic minority concentration, where there is not a sufficient number of people to justify specialist provisions.

#### **7.2.4. Providing support in temporary accommodation**

Local authorities have a key role to play in minimising the disruption and maximising the value of the time ethnic minority households spend in temporary accommodation. Effective support at this critical stage can have a radical impact on the household's ability to move out of homelessness permanently and to lead a settled and fulfilling life.

To provide the most effective support, local authorities and their partners should seek to increase the household's potential for self-help and autonomy in the longer-term. To that

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effect, they should conduct in-depth assessments, inquiring into such issues as need for help with:

- English language lessons;
- translation, interpretation and advocacy;
- help with day-to-day issues (form filling, basic daily living skills, etc);
- orientation, information and advice;
- drug/alcohol support;
- physical/mental health services;
- parenting and childcare support;
- counselling;
- education/training/skills;
- support with job searching; and
- tenancy support.

The support should be offered in an appropriate language and based on a sound understanding of the culture and the psychological needs of the individual.

The Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities (2002) states that authorities should ensure that babies and children placed in temporary accommodation have the opportunity to receive health and developmental checks from health visitors and/or primary care professionals. More generally, care should be taken to settle ethnic minority households in their new environment, as some will be totally unaware of the services available and how to access them. Access to English classes and general orientation – indicating public transport facilities, Post Offices, Job Centres, schools, ethnic shops, religious institutions, etc – will be particularly important in the most recent ethnic minority communities.

#### **Good Practice**

**Leicester** has purpose-built temporary accommodation where high quality services are offered to cater for a wide range of needs, including: English language lessons; interpretation and advocacy; help with day-to-day issues (form filling, basic daily living skills, etc); orientation, information and advice; counselling services; excellent crèche facilities; and a “breakfast club” to promote healthy living.

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### 7.2.5. *Managing moves sensitively*

In London, where nearly half of the ethnic minority population lives, one in six homeless households in temporary accommodation may be placed outside their home borough (Audit Commission, 2003). Movements between authorities are common elsewhere too. This creates considerable difficulties, especially for families, who may not be able to integrate their children in school, may not be able to keep their employment, may lose their ties to their community and may experience racial harassment in the new environment. All these factors seriously hinder the chances of successfully moving out of homelessness quickly and may have other long-term detrimental effects. For instance, children may get poorer exam results, the entire family may live in greater poverty or experience poorer health, all of which could result in future social exclusion.

It is therefore critical that local authorities should seek to keep “out-of area” placements and transfers across areas to a strict minimum (except when this is advisable for the safety of the applicants, such as in cases of domestic or racial violence, abuse or harassment). Local authorities should carefully assess the potential risks associated with placing particular ethnic minority households away from their normal residential area. Advance notice of the transfers should also be given whenever possible. Local authorities should also monitor the ethnicity of those placed out of area to assess whether some groups are unfairly treated and to redress the situation.

## 7.3. **Settled accommodation**

Ethnic minority households have restricted choices in terms of where they live. Below average income and above average family sizes (except in the Black Caribbean community) seriously limit their housing options. Lack of knowledge of housing options also contributes to restricting choices. Moreover, concerns over security and safety mean that some ethnic minority people prefer to be located in multi-ethnic neighbourhoods and may reject areas with a reputation for racial harassment and violence. These objective constraints are sometimes exacerbated by stereotypical views of residential preferences held by housing officers, which result in ethnic minority homeless applicants not being informed about the full range of housing options available to them.

### 7.3.1. *Implementing Choice Based Lettings (CBL)*

In order to overcome some of these problems, local authorities should consider the implementation of Choice Based Lettings (CBL). An ODPM-funded evaluation of 27 CBL pilot schemes found that the new system was generally greeted with enthusiasm. Participants felt a sudden opening up of choice and greater control over their housing situation. Moreover, the scheme has led to the letting of properties that had been vacant for some time. It has also shown that homeless households are more flexible in their residential choices than is usually assumed. This has had a positive impact on ethnic minority homeless households in particular, increasing their access to a wider range of properties by challenging the assumptions frontline staff held about their preferences for certain areas.

“Before CBL was introduced, Asian people would go into a housing office and say, ‘I’m interested in a three bed property’. Probably with the best intentions, staff may not recommend to them places where there is no existing Asian community. So that was narrowing their frame of reference and their choices because they didn’t know about the whole range of properties available and about other areas that they might actually be interested to go to. With CBL, it’s all there that information, people can register and browse, they can see everything and make their own choices. People can decide to go somewhere where they wouldn’t have dreamed of before, because they simply didn’t know about it...”[Our choice based lettings system] has been brilliant in terms of getting BME people on the waiting list and it has increased lettings into social housing, previously it was abysmal amongst the South Asian communities.” (council staff)

Thus, Choice Based Lettings seem to offer a range of advantages which impact positively on ethnic minority populations. CBL:

- increase ethnic minority access to a broader range of properties;
- make the allocations procedures more transparent and increase confidence in statutory services;
- empower ethnic minority people to make decisions over where they live;
- encourage tenancy sustainment in the longer term; and
- help create sustainable communities.

#### **Good Practice**

**Sheffield, Bradford** and **Brent** operate a Choice Based Lettings service with appropriate language provision, outreach work with ethnic minority community organisations and website access to ensure that ethnic minority people can make informed decisions about their future housing options.

### **7.3.2. Helping ethnic minority people into settled accommodation**

It is important to provide help for ethnic minority households moving to both temporary and settled accommodation. Given that many experience difficulty communicating in English, are not familiar with welfare services, are not familiar with the new area, may be fearful of racial attacks, may need to settle children into schools, and feel generally vulnerable, more attention needs to be devoted to how ethnic minority households are settled into their new accommodation. Effective settlement support services can go a long way towards ensuring that tenancies are not lost due to lack of support and, therefore, towards preventing repeat homelessness. Homelessness services and Supporting People teams should work in close partnership to help families settle and sustain independent living.

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## 7.4. Private sector accommodation

Ethnic minority people are over-represented in poor quality private housing (DETR, 1998). Local authorities and their partner agencies have a key role to play in improving problems of disrepair, poor amenities and safety, especially in inner urban areas where the ethnic minority population is most heavily concentrated.

Local authorities also have a role to play in enabling access to private sector housing for ethnic minority people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, as well as in managing relations with landlords to reduce and avoid evictions.

### *7.4.1. Maintaining and improving standards in the private sector*

Programmes to provide home improvement grant aid and other practical support to owners of poor quality housing would have a beneficial impact on many ethnic minority people, especially in the Indian, Pakistani and Irish communities, where home ownership is common but the quality of housing is often very poor. Local authorities should identify sub-standard housing in their area and monitor the level of grant aid allocated to local residents to ensure that ethnic minority home-owners take up all available opportunities for home improvements. Home adaptations and improvements may also enable ethnic minority families to keep their own homes despite changing needs (e.g. new child, disability, ageing family members).

Improving standards in the private rented sector would also have a disproportionately positive impact, especially in the Black Caribbean and Bangladeshi communities, where many rent their accommodation from private landlords. Many ethnic minority households become homeless because they live in sub-standard rented accommodation and face being forced to leave when they complain to their landlords of serious disrepair or acute environmental health problems.

Local authorities can ensure adequate standards in private rented housing and therefore prevent homelessness through:

- grant aid to private landlords;
- community regeneration schemes that target the most deprived areas;
- close work with environmental health officers;
- tough enforcement action to improve sub-standard accommodation; and
- voluntary accreditation schemes to certify that landlords have reached agreed standards.

### Good Practice

**Sheffield** is carrying out an analysis of the current uptake of grants and assistance in the private sector, and publicises the schemes in the ethnic minority communities where uptake is lower, to make sure that all people in private housing have equal access to support. The Council also runs advice and information services, a home handy persons scheme and an equity release scheme to support older owner occupiers and enable them to continue living in their homes without having to worry about the price of house repairs.

#### *7.4.2. Improving access to private rented housing*

Given the large proportion of ethnic minority households living on a low income, together with unease in relation to social housing in some communities, schemes to promote access to private rented accommodation are likely to be highly beneficial to ethnic minority people who are or may become homeless.

Such schemes include:

- landlord forums to discuss problems and devise joint solutions;
- housing advice and help with housing options;
- rent deposit and rent guarantee schemes;
- rent in advance schemes;
- help to access the Social Fund;
- help with claiming housing benefits;
- more efficient administration of housing benefits (“fast track” scheme);
- “top-ups” if housing benefits cannot cover rent; and
- partnerships with letting agents to facilitate ethnic minority access to private accommodation.

#### *7.4.3. Helping to keep private rented accommodation*

Across all ethnic minority groups, some households become homeless because they are evicted or forced to leave their private rented accommodation. This cause of homelessness could be reduced through a proactive approach by local authorities. This could entail:

- basic tenancy support to help tenants manage their finances, domestic duties, health, etc.;
- mediation between landlords and tenants;

- legal advice to both landlords and tenants to inform them of their rights and responsibilities; and
- financial help (discretionary one-off payments and top-up payments).

If the loss of private rented properties cannot be avoided, local authorities should begin to take action to find a suitable alternative accommodation from the moment they are notified of a potential problem.

For further guidance see:

Audit Commission (2001) *Housing benefit administration: Learning from inspection*.

DETR (2000) *Harassment and illegal eviction of private rented tenants and park home residents*.

National Rent Deposit Forum (2001) *Starter pack for rent deposit guarantee schemes*.

Rugg, J. (1997) *Opening doors: Helping people on low income secure private rented accommodation*.

## 7.5. Key questions

- Do you know the temporary and settled accommodation needs of your local ethnic minority populations?
- Do you monitor the types of temporary accommodation used for ethnic minority households?
- Do you monitor the length of time ethnic minority people stay in temporary accommodation?
- Is temporary accommodation in your area:
  - regularly visited by environmental health and safety officers?
  - repaired promptly?
  - sensitive to the needs of local ethnic minority people?
  - offering a range of specialist services?
- Do you carry out an assessment of the support needs of ethnic minority homeless households in temporary accommodation?
- Are you able to provide culturally and linguistically sensitive support to ethnic minority homeless households in temporary accommodation?
- Have you identified/partnered with any ethnic minority voluntary organisations that can deliver ethnic minority-specific services in temporary accommodation?
- Do you monitor and have policies to reduce or minimise:
  - the number of times homeless households change temporary accommodation?
  - out-of-area placements?
- Do you ensure ethnic minority homeless households have access to all available settled housing options?

- 
- Have you considered Choice Based Lettings for ethnic minority homeless households?
  - Do you have in place programmes for helping ethnic minority households into their temporary or settled accommodation?
  - Do you have in place programmes to:
    - improve access to private sector accommodation for ethnic minority people?
    - ensure ethnic minority people can access grant aid for home improvements and adaptations?
    - ensure private landlords maintain properties in good order?
    - manage relations with private landlords to reduce and avoid evictions?
    - support ethnic minority households facing eviction?



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## APPENDIX 1: RELEVANT CRE CODES OF GUIDANCE AND GOOD PRACTICE GUIDES

The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) has produced a wide range of Codes of Guidance and Good Practice documents that are highly relevant to the development of Homelessness Strategies for ethnic minority populations. The complete and up-to-date list can be obtained from the CRE website: [www.cre.gov.uk](http://www.cre.gov.uk).

The following short list provides some of the most directly relevant documents.

- **The Duty to promote race equality**

Code of Practice on the Duty to Promote Race Equality (2002) (statutory code)

The Duty to Promote Race Equality: A guide for public authorities (2002)

Race Equality and Procurement in Local Government (2003)

Public Authorities and Partnerships: A guide to the duty to promote race equality (2004)

Ethnic Monitoring: A guide for public authorities (2002)

- **Race equality for employers**

Code of Practice for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Promotion of Equal Opportunities in Employment (1984) (statutory code)

- **Race equality in housing**

Code of Practice in Rented Housing: For the elimination of racial discrimination and the promotion of equal opportunities (1991) (statutory code)

Code of Practice in Non-Rented (Owner-Occupied) Housing: For the elimination of racial discrimination and the promotion of equal opportunities (1992) (statutory code)

Room for All: Tenants' Associations and racial equality (1993)

- **Race equality standards for local government**

Equality Standard for Local Government (2000) (obtainable from the Employers Organisation)

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## APPENDIX 2: OTHER RELEVANT STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMMES

### Council-wide

- Diversity and Equality Strategy
- Race Equality Scheme
- Local Strategic Partnership and Community Strategy
- Best Value Performance Plan
- Plan for e-government

### Housing

- Housing Investment Programme and Strategy
- Housing Corporation/Government Office of the Regions Regional Statement
- Unitary Development Plan
- Annual Lettings Plan

### Regeneration

- Neighbourhood Renewal Plan/Neighbourhood Renewal Fund Delivery Plans
- Single Regeneration Budget/New Deal for Communities Delivery Plans
- Town and village plans

### Support for vulnerable people

- Supporting People Programme
- Quality Protects programmes
- Community Care Plan/Charter
- Service plans for families with children, older people, young people, people with disabilities, people with institutional backgrounds

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- Action plan on Children Leaving Care
  - Action plan on reducing teenage pregnancy

## Health

- Health Improvement Programmes
- NHS Hospital Trusts and Primary Care Trusts Local Delivery Plans
- Drug Action Team Action Plan

## Work and poverty

- Anti-Poverty Strategy
- New Deal
- Learning and Skills Council Strategic Plan

## Young people, education and training

- Children and Young People's Partnerships Strategic Plans
- Education Development Plan
- Early Years Plans/Sure Start Delivery Plan
- Learning and Skills Council
- Connexions agency strategy

## Crime

- Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships Strategy
- Youth Offending Strategy
- Community Safety Strategies
- Policing and Performance Plan

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## APPENDIX 3: NATIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR DESIGNING A HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY THAT MEETS THE NEEDS OF ETHNIC MINORITY PEOPLE

### Census 2001

Held every 10 years the Census is a count of all people and households in the UK. Data is available for each local authority area and can be obtained from [www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk).

### Labour Force Surveys

The Labour Force Survey is a quarterly survey of 60,000 households living at private addresses in Great Britain. It provides information on the UK labour market. Information can be obtained from [www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk).

### Survey of English Housing

This is an annual survey of 20,000 households. Data are collected on the type of accommodation, household and personal characteristics, tenure, second homes, moves, repossessions, satisfaction with the accommodation and area, waiting lists for council or housing association housing, owner occupation, social sector tenants, and private renters. Information can be obtained from [www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk).







This guide aims to assist local authorities and their partner agencies in the development of inclusive, evidence-based and cost-effective homelessness services for their local ethnic minority populations, in order to tackle the over-representation of ethnic minority households amongst those accepted as homeless by local housing authorities.

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