



# **Improving knowledge of new communities:**

## **A brief guide for housing associations**

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## Introduction

The Opening Doors project has aimed to mainstream approaches to meeting the housing needs of refugees and of other new migrant communities. It did so for over a period of two and a half years with backing from the Housing Corporation and Communities and Local Government. Jointly managed and delivered by the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) and hact (Housing Associations' Charitable Trust), the project built expertise among eleven housing associations and their strategic partners in six different areas of England. Broadly speaking, it aimed at providing improved housing and related services for these client groups, enhancing engagement with local migrant and refugee community organisations, aiding community cohesion and influencing joint working through Local Strategic Partnerships and other mechanisms.

This report has been produced for First Wessex Housing Group by the New Communities Project at Southampton City Council, as part of the CIH/hact 'Opening Doors' Project. It is based on the experience of these two organisations in the area of new migrants, and on work the Southampton Housing Partnership has carried out to positively manage the impact of recent migration by new communities at a local level.

Positive management of migration is dependent on finding local solutions to a range of service issues. These solutions should be based on effective organisational partnerships, accurate trend information and the active involvement of new and established BME Communities in voicing their own experiences of settlement.

The report identifies learning points from the work undertaken in Southampton, and is relevant to housing associations (HAs) interested in:

1. Improving knowledge of new communities.
2. Improving customer profile monitoring of residents and others in order to improve relevance and accessibility to HA services.
3. Building relationships with communities and their community organisations.
4. Improving staff awareness of the role housing associations have in relation to new communities.
5. Pro-active Board sign-up and ownership of the agenda.
6. Useful sources of information for developing work and information about new communities.

The level and range of new migration to the UK since 2000 has been widely, if not accurately, recorded. The majority of migration from European Accession states involves younger, single people coming here for shorter periods of employment. However, there will be increasing numbers of people within new and emerging migrant communities who decide to settle longer term and who will become eligible to access a range of services including social housing.

The regulatory body for the housing association sector requires HAs to develop ways of recognising local migration trends and to implement accessible and relevant services for this increasing range of communities. All organisations have a legal duty to ensure their services are equally accessible to all communities. To achieve this, it is necessary to understand local migration trends, as well as maintaining accurate information about the profiles and needs of new and emerging communities who are already accessing services.

## 1. Improving knowledge of new communities

In Southampton, new communities include workers from European Accession states who have arrived in the UK since May 2004, people who have applied for asylum since 2000 and are awaiting a final decision, and refugees who have been granted indefinite or other leave to remain since 2000.

Southampton has a long history of migration. The 2001 census reported that the City had a population of 217,000 and a BME population of less than 9%. The 2008 mid-year population estimates indicate a population of 231,200. The range of new communities and the level of migration to the City significantly increased after 1999 and since May 2004 has been dominated by migrants from the European Accession states. There has also been steady settlement on a smaller scale of refugee communities from Afghanistan, Iraq (Kurdish), Iran, Somalia, Zimbabwe and other African countries.

To manage the impact of this migration, Southampton City Council established a 'New Communities Project' in 2004 to develop more accurate migration trend information, to work with statutory and other sector partners to develop responses to managing migration and to provide information for and establish links with emerging communities. The project has:

- Established an inter-agency New Communities Strategic Group;
- Developed a new communities inter-agency integration strategy;
- Consulted with community organisations and interested individuals from new and emerging communities;
- Employed community outreach workers from more established migrant new communities to provide information to communities and identify the needs of new communities;
- Completed formal research for Southampton Housing Partnership, entitled: 'Connecting Communities: Southampton Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Needs Research 2006';
- Developed migration trend change information for use by partner organisations and for myth-busting purposes across wider communities.

The project initially recruited outreach workers from the main refugee communities and funded an 'EU Welcome Project' in the voluntary sector to develop networks and provide information to migrant worker communities, primarily from the EU Accession States but also from some countries outside the EU. Developing links with and involving individuals from new and emerging communities, not just community organisations, has been essential in informing the strategy. It has also helped engage statutory organisations and partners to develop considered responses to managing recent migration. It has informed the collection of population and service trend change information from national and local sources, which is revised twice yearly for the New Communities Strategic Group. The team have recently participated in the Migration Excellence Project with the Improvement and Development Agency, using peer reviewers to identify improvements and produce plans for establishing more formal migration information partnerships between local organisations.

The New Communities Project estimates new community populations in Southampton to be approximately 14-16,000 from European Accession states (the largest community is Polish), and 4-6,000 in the main refugee communities. These are only 'best estimates' based on available local and national information sources.

The information is used to indicate trend change, not specific population counts. It is available to all services in the City through the New Communities Strategic Group, to assist service planning and address issues of accessibility. It is also used to produce 'myth-busting information' to counter some of the wildly inflated population estimates and other myths, and to better inform the wider community and front line staff from all organisations.

## **2. Improving the customer profile monitoring of residents and those who use housing association (HA) Services**

The City has developed a Social Housing Partnership, consisting of Southampton City Council and its 7 preferred providers. In 2004 the Partnership established Southampton's 'Connecting Communities' Black and Minority Housing Project.

Given the significant changes resulting from recent migration, the project undertook research into the current housing needs and aspirations of Southampton's changing BME Communities in order to inform the City's 2007-2011 housing strategy. A project worker was appointed to produce the research, which was funded by the Housing Corporation. A BME steering group was also set up, with members from a variety of established and new communities. This aimed to connect housing providers in the city with local BME communities. The steering group plays a central role in this project - it is the sounding board for BME housing issues across the city, and works with Southampton's Social Housing Partnership to promote fairness and race equality in housing.

The research involved the completion of 674 BME household surveys and 7 focus groups. Using links developed with established and new communities, the New Communities project recruited, employed and trained 24 people from local established and new BME communities to conduct the interviews and assist with the focus groups. This worked well in involving local people to deliver and promote the research and enabled access to new and emerging communities who may otherwise have been difficult to engage.

The research covered household characteristics, housing needs, access to affordable housing advice, supported and adapted housing, views on the area, future housing needs and aspirations, newly forming households and recommendations for meeting the needs identified. 'Connecting Communities: Southampton's Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Needs Research 2006' was published and launched on behalf of Southampton's Social Housing Partnership.

The project has subsequently developed a housing information website:  
[www.housinginsouthampton.com](http://www.housinginsouthampton.com).

This project provides a good example of how housing organisations effectively responded to new migration trends by:

- working in partnership with other providers and organisations;
- involving new and BME communities to deliver projects;
- providing employment and training opportunities;
- accessing housing needs information from small and emerging new communities and not focusing solely on established migrant communities;
- involving BME communities in identifying needs and developing future strategies;
- utilising existing locally developed migration information.

All organisations need to know what migration trend changes are occurring nationally, regionally and locally if they are to ensure existing services are accessible to all communities, and to plan future services to meet the needs of a changing service user profile. Information about new community migration needs to be both quantitative and qualitative. Who is settling in an area? What are their declared needs, aspirations and experiences of the area in which they are settling?

The difficulties of estimating population changes resulting from inward migration have been well reported. Most recently the House of Commons Treasury Committee report outlined the consequences of such estimates on national and local level organisational planning. The Office for National Statistics has been commissioned to develop more rigorous and reliable data sets. The Local Government Association has developed a migration information tool kit for Local Authorities and partners.

For the foreseeable future service providers will need to creatively access and analyse available migration information from their own and other local sources as well as national and regional information, in order to manage the changing needs which result from new community migration. It is also necessary for housing service providers to develop their own customer profiling information systems, which can be used to identify gaps in customer profiles as well as improving communication with existing service users.

First Wessex Housing Group has introduced a system for identifying the communication needs of service users at the tenancy sign-up stage. This information identifies ethnicity, nationality, main language and literacy needs of all service users, and is automatically flagged to record preferred methods of future communication on an individual basis, as well as to inform the production of routine information and news. Budgets are also set aside within the Group's structure to respond to the different communication needs of customers, whether through the use of interpretation services or for providing information in another format, such as in audio or large print. These budgets are then reviewed and adjusted, based on likely future demand for this resource.

Existing customer profile information may not reflect the community profiles of future service users and their needs, or those of users from new communities who may not be aware of services or who are unclear whether they are eligible to access services.

Information sought in relation to future housing needs may be based on historically accurate information but may not reflect longer term migration trends. For example, in Southampton between 2002 and 2004 it was estimated that 90% of the Afghan community were single young men, not families - young men who would not have an impact on social housing resources. Recent information indicates a significant increase in the number of family reunions within the Afghan and other refugee communities with resultant changes in housing needs.

Often small, but sometimes significant, trend changes can go undetected in larger scale migration information, missing the longer term implications of settlement for service providers.

Organisations should not estimate local trend changes based on national or regional migration information alone, but should in addition develop local trend information to inform future planning and service development by:

- considering what information they might already have which indicates the emergence of new communities and what information might be held by potential partner organisations;

- identifying ways of sharing potential migration trend information across partner organisations in line with data protection requirements;
- remembering that potential sources of local migration trend information can come from: school registrations, adult education registrations, ESOL course registrations, the registrar's office, Citizenship ceremonies, health providers, libraries, voluntary sector organisations which support migrants, community organisations, health services, faith organisations, the Department for Work and Pensions, national insurance applications, workers' registration scheme, the Office for National Statistics, mid-year population estimates, the Home Office, Regional Migration Partnerships, government offices of the regions, and local government associations;
- using anecdotal information from and about new community arrivals and needs and incorporating it into trend and need information collection.
- establishing 'migration information partnerships and protocols' with cross-sector organisations and the local authority, so that local trend information can be collected, collated and shared by providers;
- developing 'Social Housing Partnerships' between a range of provider organisations and the local authority to develop effective responses to the housing needs of changing BME communities. It may be easier for a partnership to provide the capacity for future projects and research;
- routinely considering migration impacts on future service provision and planning;
- linking housing associations into local and regional strategic migration partnerships like the South East Strategic Partnership on Migration.
- undertaking qualitative BME housing needs research to inform strategic planning and development of support services. This must be done on a regular basis as migration trends and needs can change quickly;
- establishing BME user advisory groups including new and emerging communities to inform 'housing partnerships' and develop organisational awareness of BME housing needs;
- ensuring existing customer registration and 'sign up' monitoring systems use ethnicity, nationality and preferred language categories that reflect, the range of communities living in the area, so that accurate monitoring can be undertaken of take up by new and emerging communities;
- making particular efforts to seek out the views of BME residents/tenants in customer satisfaction surveys in non-written formats;
- asking people about their experience of living in particular areas and using support services, through individual interviews and focus groups;
- checking that accessible communication policies include clear statements of how organisations will meet the information needs reported by service users. First Wessex's budget provision for interpreters and audio/large print formats aim to make their information accessible to a wide range of users.
- providing detailed staff guidance and training on how to prepare for and meet the needs of customers for accessible communication.

### **3. Building relationships with new communities and their community organisations**

The dangers of organisations targeting their efforts at building relationships with any community organisation, representatives or customers are well documented. Lack of coordinated consultation between service providers, over reliance on particular community organisations and community representatives or leaders who are 'not representative', tokenism, lack of homogeneity within communities, gate-keeping by community leaders, under-supported community organisations, over-surveyed, lack of capacity.

There can be a tendency for several organisations to seek similar information from communities and community organisations at the same or differing times, with little coordination with each other, or reference to what information already exists and how the information is going to be used. There is also often a lack of feedback to participants.

Consultations and surveys to be undertaken with communities need to be undertaken in a coordinated way with longer term community development objectives, not just in response to the immediate needs of the organisation conducting the survey.

The need for developing links with new communities should be built into the strategic and operational plans of the organisation to avoid a reactive approach, which seeks to achieve a particular standard or outcome at a particular time.

It may be more effective to take an organisational approach to building relationships with new communities rather than focussing on individual initiatives and projects alone. This can be achieved by:

- using Board and staff recruitment to ensure new communities (as well as established BME communities) are represented within the organisation to reflect local community profiles;
- engaging existing staff from established BME and new communities in identifying effective ways of connecting with people from new communities and their organisations and to review organisational strategies and policies;
- employing sessional staff or existing customers from BME and new communities to deliver or promote customer satisfaction or other surveys, or to deliver customer support projects, for example the recruitment of 24 local people to conduct the Southampton BME housing needs research;
- including promotion of services and plans and of the organisation in general through BME media outlets and other community based organisations as part of the organisation's communication strategy. The use of 'Unity 101' a local BME radio station in Southampton, worked well to promote the findings of the housing needs research and individual housing services. First Wessex also used this medium to promote its sheltered housing and resident involvement opportunities. The Group also provided members of a local community group, most of whom were not tenants, with a tour of their offices, new development sites and schemes to raise awareness of the work of housing associations and to meet local staff;
- working in partnership with other organisations in the area at a strategic and project level to establish and develop joint links with new and emerging communities to avoid duplication and overload. First Wessex developed a service to refugees in Southampton in 2001 in partnership with the City, which

led to the provision of accommodation and a tailored housing related support service and also formed good links with agencies already working in the area;

- establishing links with faith organisations to promote access to services and knowledge about new arrival trend changes;
- setting up partnership projects to promote access for new communities to services outside housing jointly with other organisations. Examples of such services can include employment, training, community safety, health, and community cohesion.

## **4. Improving staff awareness of the role of housing associations in relation to new communities**

Understanding who new communities are and why they are here, and having access to accurate information about trends and entitlements, enables front line staff to promote services to new and emerging communities and to challenge myths and inaccurate perceptions amongst customers from established communities. For example, housing staff across organisations are in key positions to challenge the myth that people from new communities have preferential access to housing.

They can also promote access to a range of services and initiatives to contribute to the effective integration of people from new communities. Such information can be made available on organisational websites, promotional materials and as part of core staff training. The New Communities Project in Southampton has delivered training on these issues to front line housing and council tax benefit staff and others and through front line forum training.

This can also be achieved in partnership. Southampton City Council currently works with local voluntary sector organisation The Wheatsheaf Trust to deliver equalities and new communities awareness training for staff from a range of organisations in the City.

Important points to remember are that:

- migration trend information should be shared with all front line staff and where possible other service users, and should be included in existing equality and diversity training;
- migration trend information and new community-specific information should be included in core diversity training;
- all staff should attend equality and diversity training which includes information about local migration trends and new and emerging communities.

## 5. Pro-active Board sign-up

Chief Executives and Boards should understand the need for, and commit to managing their organisation's approach to mainstreaming the impacts of migration throughout their organisational structures. Positively managing the impacts of migration requires organisational leadership. It should be an integral part of the organisation's mainstream planning, service review, performance activities, and staff recruitment and retention. Where this does not happen, in future there are likely to be increasing inequalities in accessing housing for new and emerging communities who choose to settle in the UK.

Boards need to consider:

- what they and the organisation know about new and emerging communities and how population trend changes will affect their existing and future business, both in resource planning and contributing to the achievements of the services provided;
- making specific efforts to ensure their workforce reflects existing and emerging BME community profiles and how retention and progression of staff from these communities can be enhanced. Equality impact assessments are useful tools in assessing the accessibility of strategies and policies in relation to potential and existing service user profiles and migration profiles. How the organisation builds BME feedback and influence into its future planning and existing customer satisfaction monitoring can be very useful. The commissioning of the BME specific housing needs research undertaken by the Southampton Housing Partnership is a good example of how this can work;
- what procedures are in place to respond effectively to hate crime and harassment and whether there is a formal partnership approach to working with the police and other community safety partners to support affected customers. For example, Southampton has an established multi-agency risk assessment conferencing scheme involving housing associations and other services to respond to incidents of hate crime and harassment;
- whether they have sufficient access to national, regional and local population trend information to consider the organisation's response to local migration trend changes on a regular basis. Such information can also be used to ensure that recruitment and retention procedures reflect new and emerging communities in staffing groups and training needs within the organisation;
- the fact that an absence of significant numbers of new communities in official statistics in a particular locality is not a basis on which to assume there are no emerging communities who need the services of the HA now or who will do in the future.

## **6. Useful links for migration information and housing practice relating to new migration.**

### **Sources of migration information**

Home Office

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

Local School Census

Source: Local Authority Education Services

Access: restricted to local authorities but access may be through LSP's and LAA's using a data sharing protocol. LA's normally collect pupil data according to traditional BME categories. However some local authorities have now extended this to include nationality data.

National Insurance Numbers Data at local authority level

Department for Work and Pensions

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/tabtool.asp>

A NI number is needed whether you are working or seeking to go on benefits. As such this is one of the most comprehensive sources of data on overseas nationals arriving in this country.

Office of national statistics

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/>

Resource guide on local migration statistics

Local Government Association

<http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pagelid=1308142>

UK Border agency

<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

WRS data for the A8

Local Government Analysis and Research

<http://www.lgar.local.gov.uk/lgv/core/page.do?pagelid=1>

Nationals from the 8 East European Countries who joined in 2004 have to register once they have found employment. Quite detailed data can be obtained on age, nationality, gender, type of occupation, number of dependants

### **Housing Practice Relating to New Migration**

Audit Commission: Focusing on Citizens, users and diverse communities.

[http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports/NATIONAL-](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports/NATIONAL-REPORT.asp?CategoryID=&ProdID=0168CA25-997E-4d82-A40A-49440D2CA04F)

[REPORT.asp?CategoryID=&ProdID=0168CA25-997E-4d82-A40A-49440D2CA04F](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports/NATIONAL-REPORT.asp?CategoryID=&ProdID=0168CA25-997E-4d82-A40A-49440D2CA04F)

Audit Commission diversity scheme 2006-2009

<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/aboutus/diversity/diversityconsultation.asp>

BME Spark award winning projects

[http://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/bmespark\\_awards\\_06.pdf](http://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/bmespark_awards_06.pdf)

Chartered Institute of Housing

Good Practice guide; Equality and Diversity

<http://www.cih.org/>

CLG Briefing. Housing and regeneration act.

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/strategiesandreviews/housingandregenerationbill/>

Commission for Racial Equality. Statutory Codes of practice on Racial Equality in Housing.

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/Documents/Race/Services/Code%20of%20practice%20on%20racial%20equality%20in%20housing%20England.pdf>

Department for Communities and local Government

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/>

Housing and support needs of asylum seekers and refugees

Joseph Rowntree trust

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/491977.pdf>

Housing Corporation. Black and Ethnic Minority action plan

<http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.3843>

Housing Corporation. Black and Minority ethnic achievement plan 2005-8

[http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk/upload/pdf/BME\\_030805.pdf](http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk/upload/pdf/BME_030805.pdf)

Housing Corporation. Guidance and good practice

<http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk/server/show/nav.494>

Housing Corporation. Involving BME staff

[http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk/upload/pdf/IAPG\\_Equality.pdf](http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk/upload/pdf/IAPG_Equality.pdf)

Housing Corporation. Single Equality Scheme

[http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk/upload/pdf/Fresh\\_annual\\_report.pdf](http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk/upload/pdf/Fresh_annual_report.pdf)

Housemark

<http://www.housemark.co.uk/>

Internal Audit programme guide: Equality and Diversity and Good practice note 8 on Equality and Diversity Housing Corporation

<http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.13164>

Joseph Rowntree foundation: Immigration and social cohesion in the UK

<http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialpolicy/2249.asp>

*Positive Action Training in Housing* schemes were developed to help redress the under-representation of people from black and minority ethnic communities ...

[www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/housing/331.asp-53k](http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/housing/331.asp-53k)

Southampton New Communities website

[www.sotonnewcom.org.uk](http://www.sotonnewcom.org.uk)

Southampton Social Housing Partnership website

<http://www.housinginsouthampton.com/>

### **Further Sources of Information**

Euro Cities (Social affairs forum integration website)

<http://www.eurocities.org/main.php>

Housing rights and immigration status

fact and CIH

[www.housing-rights.info](http://www.housing-rights.info)

IPPR (Institute of Public Policy Research)

<http://www.ippr.org/>

ICAR (Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees)

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

National housing federation

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