

Briefing - Principles for Asylum Dispersal

This briefing was published by [Asylum Matters](#) and [NACCOM](#) to outline expectations for asylum dispersal.

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Purpose of this briefing

Ensuring that people seeking asylum receive adequate temporary accommodation and support while they wait for a decision on their application should be a fundamental aspect of a fair and just asylum system. However, this is often not the case, with asylum dispersal failing to adequately support the needs of those seeking asylum.

This briefing is aimed at voluntary sector organisations who are interested in working with their local authorities and other partners, so as to improve asylum dispersal in their local area. It includes a series of principles for good asylum dispersal and case studies of successful partnerships between local authorities and voluntary sector organisations. The briefing is also relevant for government, statutory, and non-statutory support services who are involved in asylum dispersal.

Introduction to asylum dispersal

What is dispersal?

The policy of dispersal of those seeking asylum accommodation in the UK was introduced by the [Immigration and Asylum Act 1999](#). Under section 95 of this act, people seeking asylum can apply for support while waiting for their claim (or appeal) to be considered. Support can be for accommodation and/or subsistence, according to their circumstances and on condition that they satisfy a destitution test.

[Regional dispersal policy](#) introduced in 2000 provided that, as a general rule, people seeking asylum should be accommodated in areas where there is a greater supply of suitable and cheaper accommodation. Nonetheless, dispersal accommodation has only so far been in areas where the local authority has agreed to accommodate people seeking asylum to a defined cluster limit, with [approximately half](#) of local authorities participating in delivering dispersal accommodation. Arrangements for asylum accommodation are different in Northern Ireland, which does not form part of the asylum dispersal system.

What is happening to dispersal?

In April 2022, the Home Office informed local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales that they [would all become asylum dispersal areas](#). This would, according to Government, allow people seeking asylum who are currently accommodated in hotels to be moved to more appropriate and cost-effective dispersed accommodation. The UK Government has committed to providing [£3,500 grant funding to local authorities](#) for each new dispersal bed occupied from 28 March 2022 and 31 March 2023. This has been designed to mitigate the impacts on local services and can be used to provide support for people seeking asylum.

Consultation on the move to full dispersal

In May 2022, [an informal consultation was launched](#) to enable local authorities and Government to discuss how full asylum dispersal will work in detail. The consultation to design the details of how the full dispersal system would operate going forward was divided into twelve regions and nations, with each area set to agree a regional plan. Upon the launch of the local authority consultation, the City of Sanctuary Local Authority Network [published a suggested response](#) for relevant authorities.

In Spring 2022, the Government organised an informal consultation process for voluntary sector organisations. This was limited in scope however, with only a handful of organisations invited to share their views and took place only

after the move to full dispersal had been publicly announced. The Home Office confirmed that primary consultation with the voluntary sector would occur through Strategic Migration Partnerships (SMPs), despite the inconsistent levels of engagement between SMPs and the voluntary sector agencies in their relevant regions.

Principles for asylum dispersal

What should be in place in an asylum dispersal area?

The strength of the dispersal support model is that it has the potential to provide people seeking asylum with accommodation that is safe and good quality, located within communities which are equipped to support them. At its core, dispersal should be a process of moving someone to a place where they can build a life and the support system should be oriented to enable integration to begin on day one. However, this is not possible when people seeking asylum are housed in institutional accommodation – such as hotels or military barracks - which are often segregated away from society, with negative impacts on [wellbeing and community cohesion](#).

It is vital that relevant authorities in areas new to dispersal follow various principles and measures to ensure that the model is delivered safely and appropriately. This includes the type and quality of accommodation offered, but also the ways that wider support systems, including the voluntary sector, are engaged.

Below is a list of principles and expectations that we would anticipate within any local authority area that is delivering asylum dispersal. A more detailed version is available in Table format and is accessible via the link in the Appendix.

<p>1. Safe and good quality accommodation within communities</p>	<p>Asylum dispersal should provide people seeking asylum with safe accommodation within communities which are equipped with the resources to support them. Refugee Action has developed a series of principles establishing what accommodation should look like for people seeking asylum.</p> <p>Property standards for dispersal accommodation should be managed and monitored in the same way as other types of accommodation, and akin to the Decent Homes Standard, with local authorities being sufficiently resourced to ensure that good quality accommodation is maintained.</p>
<p>2. Adequate legal aid advice</p>	<p>All people seeking asylum in a dispersal area should be able to conveniently and independently access good quality professional immigration advice, including free legal advice and representation (e.g.: Legal Aid) if required.</p>
<p>3. Properly funded and engaged voluntary sector</p>	<p>The voluntary sector should be recognised as a key stakeholder in delivering support locally. Local voluntary organisations should be sufficiently resourced by local authorities to meet service demand and address support issues and requirements that are not met by Government and contracted agencies (e.g., Migrant Help).</p> <p>The voluntary sector should be involved early on in setting up a new area or reviewing existing provision and properly resourced for the numbers of people arriving.</p>
<p>4. Consultation with local communities and people within the asylum system</p>	<p>There should be proper consultation with communities, including not only the local authority, but voluntary sector agencies, and people with lived experience of the asylum system.</p> <p>New dispersal areas should have a plan for community cohesion, with clearly established expectations both for those seeking asylum and those in wider communities.</p>

<p>5. Information sharing</p>	<p>All relevant bodies, including local authorities and the voluntary sector, should receive sufficient prior notification of the number of people being dispersed and the areas they will be moved into.</p> <p>Information sharing between the Home Office, accommodation providers, Migrant Help, local authorities, Strategic Migration Partnerships (SMPs), and the voluntary sector, should be improved to ensure that people are able to access support that they require and are entitled to.</p>
<p>6. Integration from day one</p>	<p>People within the asylum system must be fully briefed on when and where they are due to be moved and also supported when evicted from Home Office accommodation.</p> <p>Investment should be made in signposting and local information services to help new arrivals navigate local systems and services in their local area.</p>
<p>7. Trauma-informed mental health support and tailored healthcare systems</p>	<p>The Home Office should work with local health services to map out local healthcare provision in dispersal areas and ensure that everyone receiving asylum support is supported to register with a GP, as well as access specialist healthcare where needed, particularly mental health support.</p>
<p>8. Safeguarding framework</p>	<p>There should be a collective safeguarding framework between housing providers, Migrant Help, the Home Office, local authorities and voluntary sector agencies, where risks and issues are addressed proactively.</p>
<p>9. ESOL provision</p>	<p>English as a Second Language (ESOL) provision should be available to those who need it from day one.</p>
<p>10. Public transport concessions</p>	<p>The prohibitive effect of transport costs when living on asylum support must be considered, especially in areas further from major cities where services, support, places of worship and shops are located.</p>
<p>11. Move on support</p>	<p>Move on opportunities for people leaving the asylum system need to be well understood; at first around access to affordable permanent housing and ensuring local authorities act in advance of the day of eviction from Home Office accommodation, and subsequently around access to training and employment. Migrant Help does provide support over the phone with their partner Reed in Partnership, but funded voluntary sector organisations providing local knowledge and advice on a face-to-face basis is key to ensuring that people are well supported.</p> <p>The likelihood of successful move on would be hugely assisted by extending the move on period to at least 56 days (in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act).</p>
<p>12. Move on accommodation</p>	<p>It is important to consider the availability of move on accommodation. Mapping exercises should be carried out to understand the housing options for refugees and the expected demand for temporary provision. This will help to assess future demand and mitigate the risk of homelessness among people leaving the system.</p>

Good Practice Case Studies

Below are some examples of good practice in current and new dispersal areas, highlighting where the voluntary sector has been effectively and appropriately engaged and resourced by relevant authorities, as part of the local dispersal model. We will be looking to add to these case studies and welcome any examples that you would like to share.

New Arrivals Pathway (NAP)

Information sharing, Integration on day one, properly funded and engaged voluntary sector

The North East Migration Partnership (NEMP) worked with Mears (the asylum accommodation provider) to develop a consistent pathway for arrivals that was required to better link new arrivals with local services, which could help them navigate their new surroundings and access essential services as early as possible. A process was developed for Resident Welfare Managers to follow to help new arrivals and connect them with a lead support organisation. Upon receiving the referral, the lead support organisation would contact the Service User with information on the support they offer, such as help with food vouchers, school uniforms and other essentials, which are not the responsibility of Mears.

City of Sanctuary Officer at Newcastle City Council

Information sharing, Consultation with local communities and people within the asylum system, Properly funded and engaged voluntary sector

Newcastle City Council were the first local authority to employ someone to work specifically on their commitment to being a City of Sanctuary. The City of Sanctuary Officer role provides a dedicated resource to support the development, coordination, and evaluation of the Council's City of Sanctuary approach, and supports different organisations and institutions across the city in pursuing Sanctuary initiatives, including universities, schools and education departments, theatre companies, the city library service, sports clubs, and the NHS trust.

The City of Sanctuary Officer also chairs the Newcastle City Wide Multi-Agency meeting and organises and hosts a quarterly Sanctuary Forum meeting, bringing people together to share, explore and learn about the issues related to migration and seeking sanctuary in Newcastle.

The City of Sanctuary Officer is also part of the Cross-Council Migration Group and promotes the work and values of City of Sanctuary within this group. They have also been part of the development of a City of Sanctuary online training module for frontline workers, volunteers, and councillors, which offers an overview of migration and asylum within the local context.

Coventry Refugee Migrant Centre (CRMC) outreach

Consultation with local communities and people within the asylum system, Properly funded and engaged voluntary sector

Coventry Refugee Migrant Centre (CRMC) a support agency in a city that has been a dispersal area for over 20 years, is working with Warwickshire Council - which is preparing to become a new dispersal area. From the funding provided to new dispersal areas, Warwickshire Council will be seconding a member of CRMC's staff for 12 months, to help train and set up support for the people seeking asylum, who will be welcomed by that local authority.

Appendix A – Link to table formatted version of Principles for Asylum Dispersal

We have produced a table version of the Principles for Asylum Dispersal, [which can be accessed here](#).

If you have any further questions or would like additional information on anything above, get in touch with us:

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