

Addressing the  
housing needs  
of Black and  
Minority Ethnic  
People

A DTLR (Housing  
Directorate) Action Plan

housing

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# Foreword by Lord Falconer, Minister of State for Housing, Planning and Regeneration



At the end of last year, we published the first comprehensive housing policy statement in twenty three years, *Quality and Choice: a Decent Home for All – The Way Forward for Housing*. It set out a strategy for achieving our aim that everyone should have the opportunity of a decent home.

This Action Plan further underlines our commitment to choice and quality in housing for people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. We want to design housing policies which take account of their concerns. We want social landlords to take account of them in developing their strategies and services. As part of this we and social landlords need to be alive to the fact that different BME groups often have very different needs in relation to housing provision and services.

In the six months since I have been Housing Minister I have seen the problems faced by people whose lives are blighted by racist harassment and crime, and those who feel trapped in run-down neighbourhoods and poor quality housing. Visiting such places makes clear how important it is that local strategies focus on the needs of BME communities in ways which do not exacerbate racial tensions.

We have already done a lot of work, with our partners, to address some of the issues. There has been specific guidance for social landlords on tackling racial harassment, and on involving BME people in tenant participation. More generally, the money we are putting in to social housing will ensure that all such homes will meet decent standards within a decade. Similarly the money we are putting in to regeneration and renewal will help those BME communities living in the worst neighbourhoods.

But there is more to be done. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 serves as an important reminder that we all need to raise our game. This Action Plan is our response in the important area of housing. It brings together for the first time a range of specific initiatives and actions designed to ensure that the diverse housing needs of the different BME groups in this country are better recognised, understood and addressed. The wide ranging actions here, together with the strategic plans in our earlier policy statement, add up to a significant programme to deliver a decent home for everyone.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lord Falconer', written in a cursive style.

## Our commitment

In carrying out our housing functions, DTLR will seek to:

- eliminate unlawful racial discrimination, and
- promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups.

In developing and implementing housing policy, DTLR will:

- as part of general consultation, consult black and minority ethnic groups about proposed and ongoing policies and their impact on minority groups;
- improve our information about the housing circumstances, needs, and preferences of black and minority ethnic groups, and use this in developing policy;
- monitor and review the effect of our policies on black and minority ethnic groups and check that housing and services are being accessed by all groups;
- work with other government departments and organisations to tackle BME housing issues, and those which need more than housing solutions alone.

We will train our housing staff as appropriate to deliver on these commitments.

# Introduction

In December 2000 we published a policy statement entitled *Quality and Choice, a Decent Home for All – The Way Forward for Housing*. The statement built on the earlier Green Paper and set out our strategy to deliver improvements to the quality of housing and to enhance people's housing choices.

This Action Plan complements the earlier policy statement by setting out what the Department is doing to address the housing needs and aspirations of black and minority ethnic (BME) groups. These are diverse, reflecting different patterns of migration and later demographic change, and are often complex. For example, within BME groups there may be further issues relating to gender or disability. And there may be issues relating to faith which are shared by different ethnic groups.

We believe that the general direction of policy in the earlier paper is in tune with the housing needs and aspirations of BME groups. But this document:

- brings together in a single Plan the full range of housing policies and initiatives which tackle issues relevant to BME people;
- demonstrates our commitment to improvements in line with the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000; and
- provides a baseline from which to monitor future progress.

It is in two main parts: the first identifies what we are doing already and the second sets out a Plan for further action.

The Plan is 'owned' by DTLR, and the Housing Directorate's Divisional Managers are responsible for delivery within their areas of policy responsibility. But the Department will be looking to local authorities, Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), and other housing service providers to do their part. We also rely heavily on the huge contribution being made by community groups and the voluntary sector to promote good quality housing and related services to BME groups.

The Action Plan has been drawn up under the direction of a Race and Housing Working Group under the chairmanship of the Director of the DTLR Housing Directorate. The Action Plan is part of ensuring that race and equality issues are properly mainstreamed across the Housing Directorate, though we also recognise the need to combine this with initiatives specifically targeted on BME groups.

This Action Plan is published on the DTLR housing website [www.housing.dtlr.gov.uk](http://www.housing.dtlr.gov.uk). Regular progress reports are also posted on the website.

## The main issues

We know that the needs and aspirations of different BME groups vary significantly, and that they change over time as younger generations grow up. The picture is complex. A snapshot of the main housing related problems faced by BME groups at present are:

- over-representation in unfit properties and run-down areas;
- some groups (particularly some Asian groups) are less likely to be in social housing. This can be because of a preference for owner occupation; or an inability of local authorities and RSLs to reach out to BME groups;
- under-utilisation of supported housing services because of lack of awareness or inappropriateness of the services available; services need to take cultural and religious sensitivities into account in their design and communicate these to target audiences;
- racial harassment;
- homeless applicants, including those from BME groups, often end up with the worst social housing.

These are mainly urban issues, and the focus of the policies set out in the Action Plan is accordingly mainly on urban areas. But we must not ignore the issues (isolation, lack of local support networks, etc.) faced by BME households in more rural areas.

Some of the problems faced by BME groups are linked to wider factors such as low incomes, poor health, lack of education and employment opportunities and options, and limited skills. All of these contribute to social exclusion which has to be addressed on a wider front than housing policy alone. This document does not attempt to set out the range of policies addressing BME issues within that wider agenda. We do however recognise the importance of joining up with other Departments and agencies to help tackle these issues.

# An overview – what we are doing already

**This section summarises the range of policies and measures currently in place to tackle the issues set out above. But there is more that can be done, either by strengthening and improving existing systems or by developing new initiatives. Proposals for doing more are set out in the following Action Plan section.**

## TACKLING THE WIDER ISSUES

We are joining up with others to work towards a service wide approach – covering education, regeneration, health, crime and so on – to tackle social exclusion. DTLR's neighbourhood renewal programme will go a long way to tackling the problems of the worst areas, where BME communities are over-represented.

A number of different DTLR initiatives have flowed from the work of the Social Exclusion Unit, in particular: written guidance and on-line advice to social landlords on tackling racial harassment and regeneration pilots involving faith groups.

The Government now has a broad based and high level Community Cohesion Working Group considering what more can be done to tackle the type of racial tensions which surfaced in some northern towns of England in the summer, and to promote equal opportunities and good relations.

Under the *Race Relations Amendment Act 2000* public bodies have a legal duty to tackle unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between persons of different races. This duty applies to local authorities, Government Departments and a wide range of public bodies, including the Housing Corporation. The Housing Corporation will cascade the essence of the duty to RSLs through its Regulatory Code and Guidance and monitor RSL performance as part of its regulatory and inspection function. Local housing authorities' performance will be assessed by the Housing Inspectorate through Best Value inspections. The Act also gives the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) the powers to enforce the legislation through the courts if necessary.

## A STRATEGIC ROLE FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES

We are encouraging local authorities to take a strategic approach to housing so that they identify needs better, plan more systematically, and work in concert with others. This will help make best use of the increased resources allocated to authorities and RSLs.

They, or their agents, should comply with certain key codes, such as the CRE *Code of Practice on Rented Housing*, the statutory DTLR *Code of Guidance on Homelessness and Allocations*, and the new *Code of Practice for social landlords on tackling racial harassment*. The first two will be revised next year which will provide an opportunity to reflect recent policies and developments.

Authorities are encouraged to work closely with BME groups in drawing up their housing strategies. But some authorities are better at consulting and engaging with partners than others. We think the current guidance to authorities could have more focus on BME issues and will be strengthening this element in guidance for next year.

High level housing strategies will need to be underpinned by local action plans. We want to see local authorities making good use of local evidence to work up solutions with their partners, and to develop an approach which makes use of targets and milestones which can provide clear evidence of direction and progress.

Finally, we are looking at how the housing strategies might help us identify both good practice in relation to housing BME groups, and those authorities who could do more for their BME communities.

## MONITORING AND DRIVING UP PERFORMANCE: BEST VALUE

The Best Value regime is crucial for monitoring delivery of services to BME residents, and driving up performance by both local authorities and RSLs.

Authorities are expected to conform to the CRE's *Code of Practice on Rented Housing* which sets out measures to eliminate discrimination and promote equal opportunities. Best Value indicators, both local and national, provide some feedback on BME issues. Best Value housing reviews must involve the BME community and reflect their views on the authority's performance. Inspectors will consider all these points and more as part of their Best Value inspection programme and reflect them in their published reports.

The Housing Corporation is in the process of setting up a similar regime for RSLs, which will focus on good practice towards BME tenants as one of five main themes.

## ALLOCATIONS AND HOMELESSNESS

Generally, it is unlawful for landlords to discriminate on racial grounds when allocating housing. Policies and procedures which discriminate indirectly are also against the law. There is a wealth of guidance in this area, the main codes being the CRE's *Code of Practice on Rented Housing* and the Department's statutory *Code of Guidance on Homelessness and Allocations*.

The CRE and academic studies indicate that three times as many BME households present as homeless compared with white. South Asian homelessness is often 'concealed' and is less accurately documented than African-Caribbean.

The Department is piloting a new approach to local authority lettings which is designed to make the process more open and transparent, and to give applicants a more active role in the choice of a home. Choice Based Lettings (CBLs) offer the opportunity to promote awareness of, and access to, local authority housing for groups whose take-up is low, for example some Asian groups.

## YOUNG PEOPLE

We know that young people from ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely to be living in deprived neighbourhoods and overcrowded conditions than young people from white households. This can affect educational achievement, because there is nowhere for young people to study at home, and have an adverse effect on health.

Overcrowding, racism and discrimination are some of the pressures which can lead to homelessness. Young people from BME backgrounds can also become homeless because of a rejection of cultural and family traditions, which causes extreme isolation and can require considerable support. This is particularly an issue for those of Asian background.

There are considerable differences in the experiences of young homeless people from different ethnic backgrounds. Young white people are more likely to sleep rough than those with ethnic minority backgrounds, who tend to stay with friends or relatives. Homelessness is more likely to be hidden, especially amongst Asian people, who are less likely to apply to agencies for help. Where they do turn to agencies and hostels, they prefer to deal with staff from their own communities. There are however few BME-led organisations offering support and accommodation to young homeless people.

It is difficult to assess numbers; but monitoring in Nottingham, and by Centrepoint in London, shows that homelessness among young people from BME backgrounds is increasing. The Department's Supporting People programme is about supporting vulnerable groups in the community – part of this is about preventing and tackling homelessness among young people from BME backgrounds.

## OLDER PEOPLE

Our policies need to recognise the increase in the numbers of BME older people and their relative poverty and exclusion. This will be a particular issue over the next ten to fifteen years as first generation migrants work through the system.

It is of tremendous importance to older people in particular that their cultural needs and preferences are understood and respected in the provision of housing and related support services. DTLR is working with the Department of Health and other organisations to develop and implement a strategic framework to promote this (see 'Quality and Choice for Older People's Housing – a strategic framework'). Policies aimed at breaking down (undesirable) segregation will also need to weigh this aspect carefully.

Many elderly members of BME communities do not access the available support services. There are a range of reasons for this. Often they are unaware that help is available. There may be religious or cultural barriers to seeking help outside the family.

Many BME elders live with their families and an increasing number will be the owners of inappropriate homes. Home Improvement Agencies across the country offer advice on how elderly, disabled and vulnerable groups can adapt their homes to assist independent living. Through *Foundations*, the national co-ordinating body, we are pressing Home Improvement Agencies to raise awareness of their services within vulnerable and excluded groups.

## SUPPORTING PEOPLE

The Supporting People programme is about helping vulnerable people live independent lives in the community. The programme will introduce a new funding and policy framework which places on local authorities the responsibility for planning housing support services for vulnerable groups. The new framework should ensure that in future needs are assessed in a more comprehensive and consistent manner, and that service provision is better matched to need.

Most of the housing related services are provided either by RSLs or by voluntary sector bodies. A number of BME RSLs and community organisations provide services to vulnerable BME residents. Many of these are small bodies, and we are taking a number of steps to help ease their transition to the new system and address concerns about funding, and their capacity to participate effectively in the new processes.

## REGISTERED SOCIAL LANDLORDS (RSLs)

### BME led RSLs

There are currently 64 BME-led RSLs, owning/managing over 21,000 homes and employing 960 staff. Although they have grown up to serve areas where BME groups are concentrated, they house only about 10% of all BME RSL households, with the vast majority being housed in 'mainstream' RSLs. BME-led RSLs also house a good proportion of white households – 40% of their lettings.

In response to concern that BME RSLs will be disproportionately affected by the Department's rent restructuring proposals, we are currently undertaking a review of the impact of these proposals on BME RSLs

BME RSLs have also voiced specific concerns about their role in relation to local authorities' transferring stock to RSLs. This summer we set up a Community Housing Task Force to facilitate the transfer process, and they are looking at how local authorities should address BME issues within that process. Our guidance for the 2002 programme of stock transfer includes strengthened material, prepared in consultation with the National Housing Federation's BME representative, about the role of BME communities and BME RSLs.

### Race and Housing Inquiry

The recent Race and Housing Inquiry identified a gap between race equality policy and practice (see the National Housing Federation website – [www.housing.org.uk](http://www.housing.org.uk)). It challenged the Housing Corporation and the RSL sector to make changes in governance, employment, housing management, development, use of contractors and consultants, as participants in stock transfers (not just from local authorities but also between RSLs), working with BME RSLs, and working with other organisations. Our Ministers are using speeches and other opportunities publicly to endorse the challenges.

Following the Inquiry a draft code of practice on race equality is being developed which sets standards for RSLs and provides guidance on how to improve services to BME communities. Further details on the follow-up action are provided in the Action Plan section.

## RIGHT TO BUY

For many BME tenants, the barriers to exercising their Right to Buy (RTB) will be their own economic circumstances and the quality of their housing and neighbourhood. While these are wider issues which are being addressed under other programmes, we will provide RTB information in ethnic minority languages.

## OWNER-OCCUPATION/PROBLEMS OF LOW DEMAND

There is a significant amount of poor condition owner-occupied stock in run-down neighbourhoods, where owners can neither afford to improve their property, or move away. Much of this is located in the North West, Yorkshire and Humberside, and the East and West Midlands, which also tend to be areas where BME households (particularly Pakistanis) have bought property.

The low demand for this type of housing means that households are often trapped in areas with rising crime, economic decline and poor services. Others may simply abandon their property, adding to the spiral of decline. Tackling these issues takes time, and requires more than just housing solutions. We are using regeneration programmes, such as New Deal for Communities, to turn round neighbourhoods and tackle housing problems alongside crime, education, health and employment issues.

DTLR has made a commitment to turn around the incidence of low demand by 2010. We rely on local authorities and other local and regional stakeholders such as RSLs to work together to tackle this problem (which affects social rented housing as well as owner occupied property). Solutions must be based on partnerships with local communities which involve all groups in those communities. The Department's guidance on involving BME groups in regeneration proposals, entitled *New Deal for Communities, Race Equality Guidance*, underlines this strongly and contains a checklist of practical steps to ensure local BME groups play a full part in area regeneration (see [www.regeneration.dtlr.gov.uk/newdeal/race/guidance](http://www.regeneration.dtlr.gov.uk/newdeal/race/guidance)). The introduction of Local Strategic Partnerships provides a good opportunity to bring agencies and stakeholders together to develop solutions

We are encouraging authorities to take a strategic approach, tailored to the needs of the area, and we are legislating to make it easier for authorities to target intervention on areas of poor condition private stock. This should help them clear and redevelop areas facing abandonment.

More generally, in the purchase of private housing, solicitors and estate agents have an important role to play in facilitating access. They must comply with race relations legislation. Although solicitors are free to decide whether to accept commissions, they must follow Law Society rules which require them not to refuse instructions from a client on the grounds of race, colour, ethnic or national origin. Estate Agents who fail to comply with the law can be investigated by the Ombudsman, and banned by the Director General of Fair Trading.

## THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

We are trying to improve both the standard of accommodation offered in the private sector, and the standard of management, particularly for those tenants who have little power in the market place (often those from BME groups).

We are encouraging local authority run accreditation schemes for private landlords, training for landlords, and pilot tenancy deposit schemes. We are also planning to legislate for a new control regime. This includes a system of compulsory licensing for houses in multiple occupation, where standards are often very low; and powers, mainly for local authorities in low demand areas, to introduce licensing schemes for landlords. The latter should help to combat the spiral of decline often experienced in these neighbourhoods.

## REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

Many refugees are from BME backgrounds. Last year 45,120 people were granted refugee status or given leave to remain in the UK. The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) allocated housing for 13,530 people.

We are working with the Home Office, through their National Refugee Integration Forum, to help integrate refugees into the wider community. The aim is to help people rebuild their lives and to develop their potential. In particular, DTLR is looking at how refugees can be assisted to access housing, the prevention of homelessness, and how tenancies can be made more sustainable.

A research project on dispersal (currently underway and due to report in March 2002) is exploring the impacts of the current dispersal programme on asylum seekers and local communities in order to identify effective ways of facilitating the process and which balance the needs of stakeholders. The focus will be on the experience of dispersal, rather than evaluating the policy itself. The research will help to shed light on some housing impact issues – eg the extent to which asylum seekers once granted some form of immigration status move away from the area they have been located by NASS and if so for what reason.

## IMPROVING THE EVIDENCE BASE FOR POLICY MAKING

A sound evidence base which provides reliable and comprehensive data is crucial for DTLR if we are to understand the impacts of our policies on the different BME groups, plan effectively, and monitor changes over time. Similarly, we need to encourage local authorities and RSLs to make good use of evidence in developing strategies, and setting priorities and targets.

We use mainly the Survey of English Housing (SEH) and the English House Condition Survey (EHCS) to collect information about the housing of different ethnic groups. The 2001 Census will also provide valuable information in 2003. But there are gaps in knowledge which we need to address, and we are looking at this with a view to developing further research work.

We also need to gain a better view of the satisfaction of BME householders with their housing and their neighbourhoods. In part this can come from monitoring and comparing existing data over time, but we may also need to commission surveys and feedback where there are gaps in information.

Finally, we need to remember that BME housing needs and aspirations will change as new generations grow up, as new migrants arrive, and as other social and economic factors are brought to bear. Our evidence base needs to reflect those changes over time.

## SPONSORSHIP ROLE OF DTLR AND HOUSING CORPORATION

The Department expects the professional and representative housing bodies to promote training and skills in race equality generally. The Housing Corporation, as a regulatory body, has a more active role.

We will consider whether DTLR and/or the Housing Corporation should be doing more in this area as a part of underpinning policies and in the light of the *Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000*. There may be scope to do more with others such as RICS, CIEH, CML and solicitors and estate agents.

# The Action Plan

**This Action Plan sets out action on BME issues which is planned or proposed across our various housing policy and research areas together with the timing for delivery. As the overview illustrates there is much good work already in train. The Action Plan underlines our commitment to ensure that our future actions and those of the Housing Corporation are relevant to meeting the needs and aspirations of BME groups.**

**The Action Plan has been placed on the DTLR website: [www.housing.dtlr.gov.uk/information/bme/index.htm](http://www.housing.dtlr.gov.uk/information/bme/index.htm). It will be the baseline for regular progress reports on delivery.**

## Wider context

### *Backdrop*

- Some of the problems faced by BME Groups are heavily influenced by wider factors such as lower incomes, lack of access to employment opportunities, skills and qualifications (especially of the younger generation) which is in turn linked to poor schooling. This brings home the point that more focussed housing policies will not by themselves lead to sustainable improvements – they need to be part and parcel of a service wide approach.

### *We will therefore:*

- Continue to work closely with the other key Whitehall Departments – in particular Education and Skills; Work and Pensions, Health and Home Office (who are overseeing wider issues of community cohesion), and within DTLR, the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit.

## Local housing strategies

### *Action planned. We will:*

- Assess the adequacy of the treatment of race issues in the Housing Strategies submitted by local authorities in July 2001.
- Ask Government Offices for the Regions to give appropriate prominence to this issue in giving individual feedback to local authorities.
- Consider whether there are widespread weaknesses in the treatment of race issues in the 2001 Housing Strategies – or good practice examples – that Ministers might pick up in speeches etc. commenting on the new HIP process.
- Strengthen the guidance on responding to the needs of BME communities – including recognition of the diversity that exists within different groups in such communities – in the guidance for Housing Strategies that are to be submitted

as part of the 2002 HIP submissions – including local authorities relationships with BME RSLs.

- Consider in particular whether the statistical annexes to Housing Strategies and/or Business Plans should require information that would enable us to obtain a quantitative feel for the extent of any racial inequalities. This will be considered in the context of the data local authorities need to collect to discharge their own responsibilities under the *Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000* and having regard to the burdens that arise from data collection.

### *Timing*

- The planned action will sharpen local authorities focus on race issues over the next 6-12 months and thereafter feed into improvements on the ground.

## Best Value in Housing

### *Action planned. We will:*

- Strengthen the 2002/2003 set of national housing Best Value performance indicators in relation to BME issues by including proposals in the 2002/2003 consultation paper for:
  - extending the current BVPI on adherence to the CRE code of practice on social renting so that it additionally requires adherence to the GP standards in the code of practice for social landlords on tackling racial harassment;
  - amending the existing indicator on tenants satisfaction with the overall service provided by the landlord so that it specifically reports on levels of satisfaction for both BME and non BME groups.
- Ask the Audit Commission (through its library data base of local performance indicators) to provide the Department with information on current local indicators relating BME housing issues.
- Develop improved and more outcome focussed national indicators on BME housing in the light of better researched information on the underlying issues and drawing from local indicators – such indicators would then need to be phased in place of existing BME ones.
- Ensure that in undertaking inspections, the Housing Inspectorate and the new Housing Corporation inspection regime for RSLs, are fully briefed on the more focussed BME housing policies set out in this Action Plan; that flow from the Race and Housing Inquiry; and the requirements placed on local authorities and the Housing Corporation under the *Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000*.
- Ask the Housing Inspectorate to inform the Department of housing inspections (regardless of the overall \* rating) where inspectors have raised significant concerns about the treatment of BME issues or failure to comply with race relations legislation. Ministers to write to such authorities seeking improvement.

*We propose to:*

- See if the Housing Inspectorate has sufficient material from its activity thus far such that a report could be produced of the good and bad practices in relation to BME communities identified through inspections. Disseminate any (good practice) action plans that have been formulated locally following Best Value Reviews.

*Timing*

- Continuous work, but with the aim of being able to demonstrate increased focus and tangible improvements at the local level by the end of the current Best Value Review 5 year cycle in 2005.

## Allocations and Homelessness

*Action planned. We will:*

- Ensure research on Choice Based Letting (CBL) pilots evaluates impacts on BME groups – crucial is whether CBL schemes benefit or disadvantage BME communities and if the latter what the barriers are and how they might be overcome through scheme design and or other means.
- Underline, in revising the statutory *Code of Guidance on Homelessness and Allocations*, the importance of ensuring that local authorities' allocation schemes do not discriminate, directly or indirectly, against BME groups – in particular in the way in which schemes operate in practice so as to avoid fuelling (undesirable) segregation and in landlords producing information on allocations and choice based letting approaches in a range of ethnic languages appropriate to the area and accessible to BME people.
- Ensure that the guidance also (in relation to homelessness) identifies issues of relevance to BME groups.
- Reinforce the need to consider the particular needs of BME groups and review the appropriateness of services for them in a forthcoming good practice handbook for local authorities to help them review homelessness and produce local strategies (in line with the new duty in the *Homelessness Bill*).

*Timing*

- We will initiate consultations on a draft revised *Code of Guidance on Allocations and Homelessness* early in 2002. Evaluation of the CBL pilots is being undertaken over a two year period with concluding findings due in 2003.

## Housing and young people

*Action planned. We will:*

- Take forward the development of housing-related support for young people as part of the Supporting People programme. This can play a crucial role in helping vulnerable young people sustain a tenancy.

- Issue a 'handy guide' on black and minority ethnic issues in housing support early in 2002, which includes guidance on young people and care-leavers with support needs. The provision of specialist BME services to young people will be monitored by DTLR to allow us to track the development of the sector over time.

### *Timing*

- As above – see also under the 'Supporting People' heading for other action being taken forward under the umbrella of the Supporting People programme

## Housing and older people

### *Action planned. We will:*

- Look at the scope for improving the provision of information (both written and community based) in ethnic minority languages. This will be pursued by a Housing Advice sub-group of the Housing and Older People Development Group – the group established by DTLR and the Department of Health to act as a focus for carrying forward work on older people issues.
- Ask Government Offices for information from 2001 local authority housing strategies that reflect the needs of older people and examine the information to see what it reveals about how far cultural, service and choice needs are being met (see also under the local housing strategies section). This will be particularly important, for example, in relation to programmes absorbed by Supporting People and the provision of sheltered housing. Elderly BME people have historically found it difficult to access such services.

### *Timing*

- Ongoing work.

## Supporting People

### *Action planned. We will:*

- Produce a guide for both local authorities, mainstream providers and the BME sector, (the *Handy Guide – Equal but Different*). This will include an assessment of needs and delivery of services to BME residents. Additionally the guide will set out the opportunities and risks presented by the Supporting People programme, the needs of specific BME groups and objectives of local authorities in meeting needs.
- Ensure that the Supporting People BME Sub Group is consulted on the development of this guidance.
- Ensure that the Supporting People BME Sub-Group has a continuing role during the lead up to formal implementation of the Supporting People programme, contributing to areas of policy development and to the communications strategy.
- Organise joint workshops aimed specifically at the BME sector. These will target small organisations which are particularly vulnerable from the change to a new funding regime for support services.

- Raise the issue of support services for BME people through the 'statement of key priorities for local authorities' which is planned for publication annually following implementation of Supporting People.
- Ensure there is relevant distribution of funds to small organisations likely to be affected by the Supporting People programme. Priority will be given to voluntary organisations, community groups and BME led organisations. The purpose will be to facilitate involvement of small community based housing support providers by:
  - building capacity and capability of the voluntary sector support service agencies so that they are able to participate effectively in the development of Supporting People strategies;
  - promoting models for the participation of small support agencies in shaping local Supporting People planning and implementation frameworks;
  - identifying obstacles that hinder the involvement of small support agencies in preparing for Supporting People.
- Monitor the impacts of the Supporting People programme on BME groups post formal implementation.

#### *Timing*

- The *Handy Guide* on BME issues will publish early in 2002. The joint workshops are planned for 2002/03. The Supporting People programme will be formally implemented from April 2003.

## Registered Social Landlords

#### *Action planned. We will:*

- Ensure that Ministers publicly endorse the challenges in the Race and Housing Challenge report through speeches and other opportunities.
- Complete by the end of 2001, a review of the impact of rent restructuring reforms on BME RSLs.

#### *And the Housing Corporation will:*

- Work up proposals to incorporate race issues in its Regulatory Code and supporting materials, along the lines of expecting all RSLs to make tangible and measurable progress on indicators such as:
  - % of lettings to BME households;
  - BME tenant satisfaction compared with white tenant satisfaction
  - dealing with racial harassment;
  - % of Governing Body appointments which are BME;
  - % of staff (stratified into senior/middle/junior) which are BME;

- application of the above to contractors, consultants and tenants/residents associations.
- Secure progressive implementation, for example:
  - systems for collecting monitoring data to be in place by April 2003
  - weaknesses/shortfalls against regulatory targets to have been identified, and remedial action plans put in place, by April 2004
  - measurable improvement in the areas of weakness/shortfall to have happened by April 2005.
- Make clear that sanctions (cessation of ADP funding, possibility of statutory action) may be taken against any RSL not achieving the 2003, 2004, or 2005 target milestones.
- Underpin the above actions with good practice guidance and toolkits.

#### *Timing*

- Various, as mentioned above.

## Stock Transfers and the Community Housing Task Force

#### *Action planned. We will:*

- Work , through the Community Housing Task Force (CHTF), with all partners in the transfer process so as to ensure the needs and aspirations of all BME communities are addressed throughout the stock transfer process. In so doing the CHTF will recognise the important role that BME RSLs have to play in helping to ensure the needs of BME people are understood and met.
- Raise awareness of the need actively to engage the BME community and BME RSLs in developing options. Our commitment here is clearly underlined in the September 2001 *Housing Transfer Guidance for the 2002* programme.
- Require local authorities and tenants groups to work actively with BME RSLs who will offer expertise in identifying issues within BME communities and help to deliver practical solutions for the benefit of the whole community.

#### *We propose to:*

- Further promote the needs of BME communities by considering proposals for the active involvement of BME people and BME RSLs in stock transfer and disseminating experience in the form of good practice guidance.

#### *Timing*

- The Housing Transfer guidance for the 2002 programme was issued on 28 September 2001. It seeks expressions of interest by 9 November and formal

applications to be with the Department by 11 January 2002. During this period local authorities and their partners will be expected to engage with CHTF in developing their transfer proposals. Those securing a place on the programme will be notified in March 2002 with schemes completing, subject to tenant support, by March 2004. The need for further research will be considered in the context of the 2002/03 research programme and having regard to other priorities.

## Right to Buy

### *Action planned. We will:*

- Ensure that new versions of booklets summarising Right to Buy and Rent to Mortgage schemes, and related information, are fully available in an appropriate range of ethnic minorities' languages; consulting standard representative organisations to achieve fullest coverage.

### *We propose to:*

- Consider the merits (and scope in the face of other priorities) of undertaking research to gain improved information on the kinds of properties sold under the RTB with aim of exploring anecdotal evidence that local authorities have been left with fewer family-size properties, and whether this has had a disproportionate effect on ethnic minority tenants.

### *Timing*

- New versions of the Right to Buy and Rent to Mortgage scheme booklets will be available from mid-2002. The research, subject to the relative priority of this proposal and the availability of funding, will be taken forward as part of the 2002/03 research programme.

## Owner occupiers – help to owners of poor housing

### *Action planned. We will:*

- Carry forward our commitment in the National Action Plan for Neighbourhood Renewal to turn around the incidence of low demand by 2010; invest an additional £1.8bn in housing and regeneration programmes over the period 2001/02 to 2003/04.
- Look at the feasibility of setting a baseline of the incidence of low demand by ward level by 2002.
- See through to conclusion our reforms designed to give local authorities far wider freedom on how they give assistance for the repair and conversion of poor condition private housing. Authorities will be able to tailor schemes to meet the needs of specific ethnic groups, for example by offering loans that do not require the borrower to pay interest.
- Issue new guidance to underpin the reforms and as part of that cover BME issues more extensively. The strong home ownership aspirations of some BME groups

make private sector renewal an important area, particularly in the north. As part of evaluating the reforms we will look at their impact on BME groups.

### *Timing*

- Following overwhelming support for the reforms flowing out of the consultation undertaken in the Spring/Summer 2001, the reforms and supporting guidance will be introduced during 2002 using the Regulatory Reform Act procedure.

## Private rented sector

### *Action planned. We will:*

- Ensure, in the work that the Department undertakes to encourage a variety of voluntary approaches in the sector (eg local authority landlord accreditation schemes, training for landlords, pilot tenancy deposit schemes), that the special needs of BME groups are underlined.
- Use the powers that the Secretary of State has, under the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban development Act 1993 to approve any code of practice designed to promote desirable practices in the management of residential property, to impress on professional bodies the need for their codes of practice to fully address BME issues.

### *We propose to:*

- Examine whether there is a conspicuous under-use of the Rent Assessment Panels on the part of any particular BME groups and if so what action might be taken to redress this. We will continue efforts to increase BME membership on the Panels.

### *Timing*

- Continuous in terms of the Department's engagement with the private rented sector. The RICS and Association of Retirement Homes Managers are currently working on updates of their codes of practice. Timing of an examination of Rent Assessment Panels is subject to resources and other priorities.

## Refugees and asylum seekers

### *Action planned. We will:*

- Continue to work with the Home Office and National Asylum Support Service (NASS) through the National Refugee Integration Forum (and relevant sub-groups) to ensure housing issues are fully taken into account in this important area. In particular, how refugees can be assisted to access housing; the prevention of homelessness; and how tenancies can be made more sustainable.
- Consider the results of the research project on dispersal of refugees, and review policies where appropriate.

### *Timing*

- The research project reports in March 2002. Work on NRIF is ongoing.

## Gypsies and Travellers

### *Action planned. We will:*

- Deliver on the Gypsy Site Refurbishment Programme (GSR). This £17m three year programme (2001-2004) is aimed at helping local authorities maintain the existing network of local authority Gypsy sites. Grant is awarded on a competitive basis in response to annual bids submitted by local authorities.
- Complete research (already underway) to look at the availability, quality and management of local authority Gypsy sites. The research will provide information about site closures and pitch losses as well as looking at the maintenance and management of sites. It will also look at site provision, both in terms of what already exists and future need. The findings will feed into future policy development and spending reviews.
- Revise the existing joint DTLR/Home Office *Good Practice guide on Managing Unauthorised Camping* – and in so doing ensure that the revised guide provides a valuable tool for local authorities, the police, and other agencies (and indeed the Traveller and settled communities) in formulating and implementing effective strategies.

### *Timing*

- As mentioned above for delivery of the GSR grant programme. Findings from the sites research are due in Summer 2002. Revision of the good practice guidance on unauthorised camping will be completed by March 2002.

## Research – improving the evidence base

### *Action planned. We will:*

- Undertake a review of ethnicity and housing to assist in developing further work (eg surveys and gathering feedback on BME satisfaction with housing) where there are particular gaps in the evidence base.
- Publish a brief guide to recent research and guidance.
- Incorporate ethnic diversity across all aspects of the DTLR housing research programme.
- Commission work by the end of 2001 (through the Urban Policy research programme) on demographic change in relation to ethnicity; multicultural life in the city; and expanding ethnic differentials in life experiences.
- Consider the possibility of boosting sample sizes for some ethnic groups in our major surveys to determine whether it is practical and affordable, and if so commission technical development work.
- Examine data from the 2001 Census. This will provide a valuable additional resource in its own right and will inform the Survey of English Housing and English House Condition Survey analyses.

### *We propose to:*

- Consider, with the Housing Corporation, what additional information might be needed to raceproof policies (see the 'Getting our own house in order' section). Care would be needed not to overburden landlords and tenants.
- Consider research that might be needed to inform good practice guidance to social landlords on the information they should collect locally on BME issues to inform their local housing strategies (see under the 'Local housing strategies' section for other action planned on local housing strategies).
- Commission further work if additional specific topics are identified as priorities for further investigation during 2001/2002.

### *Timing*

- The review (first action bullet) will report before the end of 2001. Findings will inform development of the Housing and Urban Research Programmes for 2002/2003 and beyond. Other deadlines as above. Data from the 2001 Census will become available in 2003.

## Sponsorship role of DTLR and the Housing Corporation

### *Action planned. We will:*

- Discuss with the CIH/LGA/HC/NHF what more might be done to enhance existing programmes and initiatives so as to better reflect training, skills and equality in employment practices among those who work in the housing field.

### *We propose to:*

- Consider whether enhancement in this area could/should be underpinned by some form of accreditation in relation to BME related training and skills which could be formally recognised and promoted by the Department and other leading housing organisations.

### *The Housing Corporation will:*

- Produce, once the necessary Orders are made, a Race Equality Scheme embracing all its functions such as regulator, investor, employer, purchaser of goods and services, commissioner of research, etc, influencer (of central government, local authorities, RDAs, health authorities, etc), and as public enquiry desk and, more generally, disseminator of information.
- Produce action plans to meet the challenges laid down for the Corporation by the Race and Housing Inquiry Challenge Report (see also under the *Registered Social Landlords* section).
- Respond to the recent report on the Housing Corporation's BME/diversity record as an employer 'Am I Included?' by way of a timetabled action plan.

### *Timing*

- The Department's action on housing will be taken forward in line with the wider DTLR programme of work in response to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. The Department is aiming to produce initial RRAA action plan by the end of 2001.
- Discussions with the CIH/LGA/HC/NHF about enhancement of existing training/skills programmes for housing professionals and operatives will be initiated by the end of 2001/early 2002.
- The Housing Corporation aims to make measurable progress in the areas covered by its Race Equality Scheme (mentioned above) by March 2003.

# And finally...

## Getting own house in order

- Alongside the review of policies and research we recognise the need to ensure our working practices within the DTLR Housing Directorate are effective – in particular in bringing about better coordination of work on race and housing issues and having clear arrangements for raceproofing of policies and research.
- More widely across the Department, action is in hand (in response to the *Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000*) to incorporate ethnic diversity into DTLR work. A Diversity and Equality Unit has been established with DTLR with a strong remit on race equality and so as to help Divisions deliver on both staffing and programme issues. A Race Equality Scheme will be published next spring as required by the RRAA2000, and we will continue to monitor the proportion of ethnic minority staff employed by the Department at each grade.
- All Divisions within the Housing Directorate have recently participated in diversity training.

### *Action planned. We will:*

- Commit ourselves, working in liaison with the Diversity and Equality Unit, to a programme for implementing race proofing of policies and research across the DTLR Housing Directorate, including:
  - assessing what information on impact and outcomes is necessary to race proof housing policies – eg in terms of data collection and analysis; feedback from BME groups, representative bodies, etc;
  - putting in place mechanisms for identifying high priorities and tackling them early on;
  - awareness raising and guidance for staff in Housing Directorate on BME issues;
  - reinforcing the process by building in a series of checks to ensure BME issues are given due consideration:
    - when major policy options, or changes of direction, are put to Ministers;
    - when research specifications are drawn up;
    - when regular annual bidding rounds or similar exercises are carried out;
    - prior to publication of any external material on housing, from White Papers through to information leaflets;
    - through the inclusion of an objective on implementing race proofing in divisional level objectives.

*Timing*

- Work on these changes will be put in hand before the end of 2001. New arrangements to be fully operational by April 2002 and regularly monitored thereafter.

## Further Information

Further copies of this Action Plan are available from:

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