NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

RACE EQUALITY FORUM

Tuesday, 8 January 2008

PRESENT: Councillor Scott Collins (Chair)

Lindsey Ambrose   NBC Area Partnership and Forums Co-ordinator
Mervyn Felix   Race Action, Northampton
Anjona Roy   Northants Racial Equality Council
Chris Grethe   Individual
Samuel and Christina Owusu-Akuffo, Divine Prayer Society
Pamela Crane   Individual
John Rawlings   Northampton Irish Support Group
Jim Lillis   Northants Healthcare Trust
DS Paul Colhoun   Northants Police, Hate Crimes Unit
Alice Arden   NBC Housing Strategy & Enabling Officer
Kat Westhead   Bromford Floating Support Service
Rashmi Shah   Individual
Amy-Louise White   Bromford Floating Support Service
Ellie Burgess   Bromford Floating Support Service

1. WELCOMES AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited them to introduce themselves.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Neelam Aggarwal, Jenny Campbell and Mr Mistry.

3. MINUTES

The minutes were agreed as a true record subject to the following change:

Item 10: Race Equalities Council should read *Racial* Equalities Council.

4. MATTERS ARISING NOT ALREADY ON THE AGENDA

Northants Racial Equalities Council – Update

Anjona Roy explained that the newly constituted National Equalities and Human Rights Commission encompassed the work previously undertaken by smaller groups, such as the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) and the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC). The new commission had a broader perspective with three main priorities: the promotion of good community relations; equalities and human rights and dealing with casework. The focus of activity locally was the support of victims of discrimination and harassment and assisting individuals to access judicial procedures. Equally important was the work in challenging issues relating to policy at a local and national level.

Locally, within the Racial Equalities Council (REC) work was being done to promote and support equalities in all 6 recognised strands of need, namely, disability, age, gender, religion or belief and sexual orientation as well as race. It was recognised that that there were issues that crossed over the strands and it was important that all victims of discrimination, whatever the strand, had equal access to available support. Partnership working with organisations within the Lesbian Gay and Bisexual community and Age

Concern was starting to address this. A Roy had e-mailed L Ambrose a document about equalities impact, outcome, change and monitoring and a subsequent paper was to be circulated to Forum members.

Action: L Ambrose e-mail the document to members of the Forum.

A Roy was pleased to announce that East Midlands Racial Equalities Council (EMREC) had secured funding for a regional conference to be held at the WNDC offices on 18th March. Several high-profile key speakers had already been booked to talk about racial equality in relation to regeneration and how opportunities could be provided in Northampton to maximise equalities and human rights.

Comment was made about the closing of community centres and the impact this was having on local areas. It was hoped that, as part of the neighbourhood renewal agenda, communities could be rebuilt to make a welcoming environment for all. R Shah was concerned about how the new Commission arrangements would work and that the separate, specific commissions might be weakened. It was felt, though, that a joint approach across the strands would be beneficial and there already existed a number of organisations with joint membership across a range of minority groups.

P Crane raised the issue of parking on pavements and the inconvenience caused to disabled people and A Roy explained that there was legislation to support such issues, with a statutory requirement for the County Council to carry out an equality impact assessment relating to highways enforcement matters. In fact, local authorities were required to carry out an equalities impact assessment on every policy and every amended policy. This meant that budget cuts, which would inevitably cause policy change, should generate new assessments. Individuals with a complaint could apply to complete a questionnaire (RR65) to generate an investigation and take forward discrimination issues.

The Chair commended A Roy for the work of the NREC and thanked her for her useful and informative update.

5.1   BME HOUSING STRATEGY

Alice Arden, NBC Housing Strategy Enabling Officer, distributed copies of a draft housing strategy and action plan that was addressing equalities issues in Borough Council housing. A questionnaire had been circulated to tenants to find out their needs. Research included questions about preferred language and methods for communication, disability adjustments and ethnic groups. There had been a good return and initial analysis showed a worrying shortage of larger (4/5 bedroom) affordable housing. Although there had been approximately 30% return on the questionnaire, which was considered good for this type of investigation, there was concern that people with language or reading difficulties might not have been able to complete them.[1] However, the tenants association NTACT was likely to have proof read and approved the questionnaire before distribution.[2]

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[1] **Subsequent to the meeting, the following information has been provided with regard to the return rate for the questionnaire:**
We currently have 6060 customer profile questionnaires returned, this is a return rate of 49%. Although this is exceptionally good we are going to be undertaking some more work to try to increase the return rate still further. Profile information from the forms is being uploaded to IBS (IT system). This will allow us to run reports and will flag up on the system where we should be considering individuals specific needs in the course of our day to day contact.

[2] **Subsequent to the meeting, the following information has been provided with regard to the way in which the questionnaire was devised:**
Customer profiling is considered good practice and is something a lot of organisations including local authorities do. Our questionnaire was put together having considered best practice examples from other housing organisations. The N-TACT committee were not directly involved but we did consult with the N-TACT plain language group on the draft form.

A Arden then described the proposed changes in the allocation of housing, whereby the previous points system was to be replaced by a banding system. The proposed Choice-Based Letting scheme would allow prospective tenants to have the opportunity to register an interest and then bid for the available property, based on their circumstances.[3]

In drawing up a revised housing strategy, A Arden explained that the team had looked as issues covering the delivery of housing services, black and minority ethnic (BME) matters, private sector enforcement and tenant participation. The document needed to be in place, fit for purpose and complied with so that the Council could deliver what was needed. All equality strands had been taken into account. The document was to be taken forward to the Housing Strategy Board the following month.

L Ambrose explained that the Borough Council was progressing through the required levels to achieve the Equalities Standard, which was a standard recognising the importance of fair and equal treatment in local government services and employment.

5.2   SINGLE EQUALITY SCHEME CONSULTATION BY NBC

L Ambrose distributed copies of the Borough Council's draft Single Equality Scheme, which was a document focusing on all strands of equality under one umbrella and relating specifically to Northampton. The document was currently out for consultation to find out what people wanted and the deadline for comments was 31st January 2008. Comments could be made on line at: http://www.northampton.gov.uk/downloads/SES_Consultation_response_questionnaire.doc.

6.   FACE TO FACE AND SIDE BY SIDE

The Government had launched a consultation document entitled: "'*Face to Face and Side by Side': A framework for interfaith dialogue and social action*".[4]   The consultation paper was seeking views on the development of a framework for partnership to support increased inter faith dialogue and social action. The consultation was looking at how local authorities would increase working with faith communities and implementation of the recommendations from the consultation was expected to be happening before the end of 2008. L Ambrose quoted statistics from the document, which demonstrated the diversity of faith groups in Great Britain. There was a need for meaningful interaction and understanding and this could be helped if activities and events were run by minority or faith groups and open to everyone. It was noted that the census statistics had grouped together all types of Christian, Hindu etc rather than breaking down into finer details. There was a lengthy discussion around the crossover between race, religion and belief. The general feeling was that, irrespective of race, religion, belief or any of the other minority labels, there was a general lack of respect within and across communities. The need was for education, empowerment and understanding of each other's culture, background and traditions. It was noted that to really understand others and work towards mutual respect as individuals in one overall community, sometimes people needed to look at both faith or belief and ethnicity together.

L Ambrose described how the Money 4 Youth project was involving a variety of different groups in joint projects generated by young people and which were intended to engage all sections of the community in mutually beneficial activities.

L Ambrose referred back to the consultation document and highlighted the sections to be addressed. The Chair urged forum members to ensure that they completed the consultation forms and returned them by 7th March 2008.

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[3] **Draft Allocations Scheme and Draft Access Strategy attached.**
[4] **Document and Consultation Form attached**

7. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL UPDATE

L Ambrose updated members about the Holocaust Memorial event, which was to be held during the afternoon and evening of 27th January 2008. Posters and flyers had been produced to publicise the events.

8. MONEY 4 YOUTH UPDATE

L Ambrose explained that the Youth Forum was considering projects to benefit young people and the community and would be making decisions on the allocation of the Money 4 Youth funds in March so people were advised that if at all possible the young people they worked with who may want to send in forms should do so before 15th February 2008 so as to be included in the first shortlisting for 2008-9 financial year.

9. INFORMATION EXCHANGE

1   The India Hindu Association was about to launch a bhangra and bollywood project funded by Money 4 Youth and based in Northampton East; Talking With Hands Cinema was about to start a tapestry project involving deaf and blind young people in making a tapestry about the history of the deaf community in Northampton and county and then to make a DVD to share the results and help other young people, community groups and professionals to better understand themselves and each other's needs.

2   Representatives from the Bromford Housing Group, who were attending the meeting for the first time, distributed leaflets about their service, which was for the support of people with mental health problems in housing. The main aim was to assist people make the step from supported housing to independent living. They were particularly keen to encourage ethnic and other minority groups to access their services and were eager to learn about the needs of the various ethnic communities in the town. They could be contacted by e-mail on Michelle.Burgess@bromford.co.uk, Kat.Westhead@bromford.co.uk or Amylouise.White@bromford.co.uk and were hoping to attend future forum meetings.

3   Jim Lillis announced a 'Northamptonshire Well Being Event' in April 2008.[5]

4   The Irish Support Group had some young people who were looking to make a Money 4 Youth application jointly with a Hindu organisation.

5   A photographic exhibition entitled 'Faith to Faith' was being shown at the Northampton Museum and Art gallery from 8th January to 22nd February. It featured the work of a group of Catholic, Hindu, Jewish, Sikh and Muslim teenagers from five London faith schools. The themes were faith, community and tolerance.

10. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting will be on Thursday 6th March 2008.

<div align="center">The meeting concluded at 21.05</div>

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[5] Details and information form attached.

Northampton Borough Council

Housing Allocations Scheme

Draft

For implementation April 2008

If English is not your first language or you would like to receive a copy of this document in another language or format, such as Braille, large print or audio cassette, please ring our housing helpline on 0845 330 0637 for help and advice

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1.   Introduction

This is the Northampton Borough Council's Housing Allocation scheme as required under section 167 of the Housing Act 1996. It meets the requirements, which are set out in Part VI Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) giving preference to those applicants in the greatest housing need.

The demand for secure affordable housing in Northampton far outweighs the supply, in order to maximise the supply of affordable housing in the borough the Council works closely with a number of Registered Social Landlords (RSL's), they are also known as Housing Associations. Registered Social Landlords approach the Council for "nominations" for a percentage of their homes.

Northampton Borough Council is committed to offering choice to all applicants seeking housing. This will be achieved by operating the Choice Based Lettings Scheme. Details of the scheme are set out in Choice based Lettings Scheme Guide.

2.   Objectives

In allocating its vacant properties the Council seeks to:

*   Offer as much choice as possible to customers.
*   Offer customers information and advice to enable them to make informed choices about their housing options.
*   Create an easy to understand, fair and transparent system.
*   House those in priority need as determined by the law.
*   Help prevent homelessness.
*   Make the most effective use of the local housing stock.
*   Support the principles of social inclusion and aim to meet customer expectations
*   Respond to the circumstances of vulnerable individuals in partnership with other agencies.
*   Ensure equality of opportunity in accessing the housing register and in the allocation of properties.
*   Promote sustainable tenancies and communities by acknowledging the support needs where appropriate.

3.   The legal framework

In determining the rules within this Allocation Scheme, the Council has to comply with The Housing Act 1996, as amended by Homelessness Act 2002. Additionally, the Council will have regard to case law, relevant legislation (including any amendments) relevant codes of practice and local policies

For example:

Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003
Children Act 1989
Civil Partnership Act 2004
Crime and Disorder Act 1998
Disability Discrimination Act 2005
Equality Act 2006
Freedom of Information Act 2000
Homelessness Act 2002
Housing Act 1996
Human Rights Act 1998
Race Relations Act 1976 (as amended by the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000)
Code of Practice for Racial Equality in Housing
Code of Guidance on the Allocations of Accommodation
Homeless Code of Guidance
Northampton Borough Council Domestic violence strategy

4. Choice Based Lettings scheme overview

The Council have adopted a Choice Based Lettings scheme called *Northampton Housing Solutions* (name to be agreed); this allows customers on the Housing Register to express their property and area preferences and also provides information about a range of other housing options.

Full details about the scheme can be found our Choice Based Lettings scheme information booklet *Northampton Housing Solutions: Your Guide*.

5. Equality and Diversity

Northampton Borough Council is committed to delivering on the general duty to promote all aspects of equality and has outlined this commitment in its Race Equality Scheme, Disability Equality Scheme and Gender Equality Scheme.

Our Housing Register will be accessible and sensitive to the needs of all taking account of age, disability, gender, race, religion and sexual orientation.

6. Data protection and freedom of information

The information you provide may be personal and sensitive as defined under the Data Protection Act 1998. Data will only be shared with third parties with your permission and then only for the purposes of assisting with your re-housing. You will be asked to sign a consent form on your housing application to enable the authority to share this information. Your personal data will also be treated in accordance with the Electronic Communications Act 2000. You have the right to see the information held regarding your application for housing.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 also gives you a right to see information on how decisions were arrived at on the scheme.

7.   Who can apply to Northampton's housing register?

Anyone aged 16 years or over can apply to Northampton Borough Council for accommodation.   Applicants under 18 will be asked to provide a guarantor. The guarantor must be a responsible adult such as a parent or other close family member or organisation such as Social services or other support agency.

8.   How to apply

Applications must be made in writing on the 'Housing Register Application' form issued by the council.   Forms are available at **The Guildhall, St Giles Square, Northampton, NN1 1DE** or any local housing office, or can be downloaded at www.northampton.gov.uk

Completed forms along with all required supporting documentation (see leaflet Appendix A) should be returned to the above address.   Alternatively any local housing office will forward the form to the Guildhall. Applicants will be issued with a receipt, keep this safe for future reference.   Applications, which do not have the necessary supporting documentation will not be accepted.

Whether an application is accepted and placed on the Housing Register is subject to the eligibility criteria and the provision of all supporting documentation.

If information is requested from the applicant and is not received within 28 days the application will not be registered. The applicant will be notified in writing all original documents will be returned by registered post and the application form and photocopies of documents destroyed.

9.   Eligibility and Exclusions

A person will not be eligible for an allocation of a Northampton Borough Council property and will not therefore be accepted on the housing register if they are defined as 'ineligible' by either of the following criteria: -

- Immigration and habitual residence:

The Housing Act 1996 prohibits the council from allocating housing accommodation to persons who are defined as ineligible by the Act or by the regulations made under the Act. Broadly this means:-

Anyone who is subject to immigration control within the meaning of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 or any other legislation, which supersedes it.

Anyone who is not habitually resident in the Common Travel Area or

Anyone who is ineligible for Housing Benefit due to his or her Immigration status.

- Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 (section 160A(7)) allows the local authority to treat a person as ineligible if the Local Authority is satisfied that:

"The applicant, or any member of his/her household, has been guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make him/her unsuitable to be a tenant"

"And at the time of the application, the applicant is still unsuitable to be a tenant because of that behaviour"

Unacceptable behaviour for these purposes is behaviour by the applicant or a member of his/her household that would – if the applicant had been a secure tenant of the Council at the time – have entitled the Council to a possession order under S84 of the Housing Act 1985 in relation to any of the grounds in Part 1 of Schedule 2, other than ground 8. Some examples of unacceptable behaviour include: -

- Noise problems
- Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse
- Abuse and harassment
- Violence or threats of violence to staff of the Council, a Housing Association or any of its agents.
- Applicant or a member of the household has been served with an Anti-Social Behaviour Order.
- Drug Offences
- Neglect or Wilful damage to Borough Council property, Housing Association property or private tenancy.
- Rent arrears serious enough to warrant an immediate possession order whether or not a Council or Housing Association tenant.
- Engagement in illegal or immoral activities

Previous unacceptable behaviour may not justify a decision to treat the applicant as ineligible if there is evidence that the behaviour has improved. Where an applicant has previously been excluded from the register and considers that his/her behaviour should no longer be held against him/her as a result of changed circumstances, he/she could make a fresh application. Unless there has been a considerable lapse of time, it will be for the applicant to demonstrate that his/her circumstances or behaviour has improved to such an extent that the application should not be excluded. Generally, an application will not be reconsidered for acceptance onto the register within 6 months of previously being excluded. These rules also apply if a member of the applicant's household is guilty of unacceptable behaviour.

In circumstances where an applicant has been accepted onto the register and it is later found that they are ineligible for allocation of social housing, the applicant will be excluded.

Prior to determining whether or not to exclude an applicant, the council will fully investigate the individual circumstances. The Council will act reasonably and consider all relevant matters before it, such as the health of applicants and any other mitigating circumstances.

There maybe exceptions, if an applicant displays anti-social behaviour that ordinarily would be sufficiently serious to obtain a Possession Order however the behaviour is attributable to the tenant's disability then these will be judged on their own merits and

with regard to The Disability Discrimination Act 2005. In such circumstances the usual rules may not apply.

Where an applicant is considered to be unsuitable to be a tenant due to unacceptable behaviour the Council will need to satisfy itself that the applicant is unsuitable at the time the application is considered. Each application will be considered on its merits and there will be no blanket policy.

Where an applicant is excluded from the register or receiving reduced priority, NBC will write to the applicant giving full reasons for the decision to exclude. The notification will inform the applicant that he/she has a right to request a review of that decision. The process for requesting a review is set out in section 40.

10   Reduced priority

In certain circumstances, even though an application has been accepted onto the register, it may receive reduced preference and be placed in Band D. This will apply where there is behaviour that raises concerns about an applicant's previous history, but is not considered serious enough to warrant exclusion.

In line with the Government's Respect Agenda, reduced priority will be given for an initial period of 6 months from application and will be actively monitored by the Council to encourage and support those applicants to address their behaviour or previous conduct. Thus the applicant will be given reduced priority until such time as they are able to demonstrate that the original issues are resolved.

In these circumstances, the applicant will be requested to provide accurate and recent information from the Police through the Data Protection Act 1998 to identify their previous conduct or give Northampton Borough written permission to request information from the police. This will ensure that any decisions regarding eligibility, exclusion or reduced priority will be made taking account of factual and up to date information for the benefit of both the applicant and our communities.

Where an applicant is considered to be unsuitable to be a tenant due to unacceptable behaviour the council will need to satisfy itself that the applicant is unsuitable at the time the application is considered. Each application will be considered on its merits and there will be no blanket policy.

Where an applicant has received a reduced priority, NBC will write to the applicant informing them of the decision and giving full and detailed reasons for the decision. The applicant has a right to request a review of the decision and the procedure for requesting such a review is detailed in section 40.

11.   False statements

If an applicant is placed onto the Housing Register on the basis of a false statement which they made knowingly or they knowingly withhold information then the applicant will be removed from the register.

If a tenancy is allocated on the basis of a false statement or information it may result in the Borough Council or other landlord taking legal action to gain possession of the property.

Any applicant who knowingly or recklessly gives false information or withholds information which Northampton Borough Council have reasonably required, could be liable to prosecution under Part 6, section 171 Housing Act 1996 and could face a fine, at time of print of £5,000.

12.   Applicants who owe housing related debts

Applicants will not generally be considered for an allocation if they have housing related debts.

Tenancy/mortgage references are requested when the applicant/joint applicant has been responsible for payment of a rent or mortgage. This will include any privately rented or social rented accommodation, or property owned by the applicant/joint applicant.

If an application is affected by housing related debt, the applicant will be notified in writing and advised that they are expected to satisfactorily address the situation before the application will be actively considered. The applicant will be encouraged to seek debt advice. NBC tenants with arrears should contact the Rent Income Section of the Housing Management Services.

Where a person who owes former tenant arrears is re-housed by the Council the former tenant arrears and other outstanding debt (including that written off), will be linked to the new tenancy account, and an arrangement made for repayment.

In exceptional circumstances the Council may consider applicants for an offer of accommodation where outstanding arrears exist. This may be where the tenant is the victim of Domestic Violence, Racial harassment or other Hate Crime or has urgent medical need. Applicants will need to demonstrate that reasonable attempts have been made to repay the debt. The Council will need to be satisfied that the degree of housing need is great and there is insufficient time or resources to clear the debt in full.

The Housing Needs Team Leader will make the decision whether to allow the tenant to move. Appeals regarding the Team Leaders decision will need to be made verbally or in writing to the to the Housing Services Manager – if assistance is required please contact a member of the Customer Services Team who will advise you of the process.

13.   Transfers

Existing tenants of Northampton Borough Council or a RSL within Northampton Borough can apply for a transfer to a different property. When considering transfer applications the Council will expect that tenants have complied with their conditions of tenancy and maintained their property in a satisfactory manner. A Housing Officer

report will be requested for all transfer applicants to ascertain whether tenancy conditions have been met.

Transfer applications will be assessed on the same basis as new applications.

Transfer applicants will also be encouraged to register for a mutual exchange under the local exchange scheme and/or the national HOME SWAP scheme as this may enhance their opportunity for re-housing.

Transfer applicants who hold an introductory tenancy and move to alternative NBC property within the introductory period will continue to be an introductory tenant for the remaining period of their introductory tenancy.

14.   Assessment and monitoring

The Banding assessment process, which is explained in Section 15 will be applied to all eligible applications and the applicant will be informed in writing of the assessment. We aim to assess complete applications within 4 weeks. The time taken to assess an application is monitored and published in our monthly service standard report which is available on our website.

Where the Council decides that a person is not eligible to be allocated accommodation and to join the housing register for any reason stated above, the applicant would be informed of this decision and the reasons for it, in writing within 5 days of the decision being made. Applicants have the right to request a review of this decision. The process is set out in section 40.

15.   Northampton's banding scheme

Applicant's circumstances are assessed and placed in one of five broad bands. In line with legislation, the greatest priority is awarded to those assessed as having the highest housing need.

Applicants with multiple needs within each band may be escalated to the higher band.

	EMERGENCY BAND
Band A	Applicants with an urgent need to move
Band B	Applicants with an identified need
Band C	Applicants with a non –urgent need to move
Band D	Applicants who are adequately housed Applicants without a local connection who are not eligible to be in a higher band.

16.   Registration date

This will be the date the applicant registered for housing. The registration date determines priority within each band.

17.   Change of circumstances

Where there is a change in an applicant's circumstances, their banding priority, will be reviewed. This may result in the applicant moving up or down within the bands.

18.   Movement between bands

As a result of a change in circumstances applicants may require a housing options interview. A change in circumstances may result in an application being moved up or down the banding scale. When an application is moved down the banding scale the registration date will remain the date that the application was originally registered. Where an application is moved up a band the date will be known as the application date and will be the date that the application was moved to the higher band. Preference within bands will be given to the applicant with the earliest registration or application date.

19.   Emergency band (time limited)

Applicants will be placed in the emergency band for a period of six weeks, during this time they will be expected to bid for suitable properties in their area of choice. If the applicant has not bid for a suitable property at the end of six-week period the applicant(s) will receive a direct offer of any suitable property within the borough. If during this six week period there has not been a suitable property available to bid for the emergency band period will be extended for a further six weeks and thereafter on a six weekly cycle. (For definition of suitable accommodation see section 21).

Emergency band applicants include:

Applicants whom the authority have accepted as being eligible homeless and in priority need (except those found intentionally homeless).

Applicants who have been subject to a Multi Agency review and where immediate re-housing is required and an agreed support package is in place.

Tenants' who have to vacate their homes within six weeks due to a Compulsory Purchase Order or NBC tenant's whose home requires major works within six weeks.

20.   Applicants whom the authority have accepted as being eligible homeless and in priority need (except those found intentionally homeless).

In order to allow applicants that the authority has accepted a duty to re-house under Part VII (s193 (2) or s195 (2)) a reasonable preference in the choice of areas, the applicant will be given a six week period to bid on properties of their choice as outlined above.

Applicants who fail to bid within the six-week period where a suitable property in their area of choice has been available will no longer be able to participate in the Choice Based Lettings scheme and NBC will make a direct offer of a suitable property anywhere within the borough.

If during this six week period there has not been a suitable property available to bid for the emergency band period will be extended for a further six weeks and thereafter on a six weekly cycle.

If the applicant does not believe that a property is a suitable offer they retain the right under S202 to ask for a review of suitability and a Senior Homeless Officer who is independent from the original decision will make a decision on suitability. NBC will have discharged its duty, under the Homeless Persons legislation if the applicant fails to accept an offer of reasonable accommodation. The applicant's application will be placed in Band D. If an applicant is accepted on review through Section 193 (5) Part VII of the Housing Act, the time in the band will be dated from the original decision date, and not from the date of the review decision.

21.   Suitable accommodation

For the purposes of suitable accommodation, an offer will be regarded as suitable where:

The accommodation is affordable having regard to the financial resources available to the applicant and the cost of the accommodation as determined under Homelessness (Suitability of accommodation) Order 1996.

The accommodation is of an appropriate size and type to meet the reasonable requirements of the household and satisfies the need for special features to meet any limiting illness or disability that exist within the household.

The location does not deny reasonable access to family support or a specialist medical or health facility where a member of the household has a severe long term limiting illness or permanent or substantial disability where their quality of life or health would otherwise be severely affected.

The location does not deny reasonable access to a specialist education establishment for a member of the household who has particular special educational needs which would otherwise result in a severe deterioration in that person's well being.

The location is not in close proximity to a perpetrator who has threatened or caused violence or domestic violence to a household member whose life or safety would otherwise be threatened.

Band A

Applicants who will relinquish a substantially adapted or purpose built property.
Applicants who have an overriding medical need where the housing conditions are having a major adverse effect on the applicant or a member of the household. (This may include applicants who require an extra bedroom for a live in carer or medical equipment).
Applicants who have priority welfare need and require to move urgently because of a risk to their well being or health. (This includes victims of domestic violence & and hate crimes).
Applicants who are lacking one or all of these essential facilities - hot water, a kitchen, internal toilet and bathroom.
Applicants who are statutorily overcrowded as defined in Part X of the Housing Act1985.
Applicants whose home cannot be adapted to meet current or imminent mobility/ disability needs of the applicant or a member or the applicant's household.
Applicants who are under occupying Northampton Borough Council three, four, five or six bedroom homes that wish to move to smaller suitable accommodation or applicants living in adapted homes who no longer require the adaptations.
Applicants who are freeing up a place in a specialist hostel such as the YMCA or Teenage Parent Unit and are ready for independent living. (Applications will only be actively considered once a notice to vacate has been issued until that date the application will remain in Band D).
Tenants who have to vacate their homes due to a Compulsory Purchase Order or NBC tenant's whose home requires major works.
Applicants who are in priority need who hold an assured shorthold tenancy who have been issued with an effective notice that the landlord requires possession which has less than eight weeks to run.
Applicants who are living in accommodation which has been assessed as unsatisfactory and in disrepair by a Council Environmental Health Department and the issue can only be resolved by re-housing.

Band B

Applicants who are owed a duty under the Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976 and NBC service tenants who are due to retire or have their contract of employment terminated.
Applicants who are sharing Facilities (bathroom, kitchen etc).
Applicants who are two bedrooms short.
Applicants with children age under the age of 14 who are living in flats or maisonettes above the ground floor and who do not have access to a garden.
Northampton Borough Council tenants or Housing Association tenants who have been accepted by Social Services to adopt or foster and require a larger home.
Applicant who is being discharged from the Armed Forces within 6 weeks prior to that applications will remain in band D.
Applicant who is being discharged from Prison within 6 weeks (prior to that applications will remain in band D).

Band C

Applicants who require a move for less severe medical or welfare grounds.
Applicants who have a non-urgent need to move. This may include being nearer family and friends, schools or other amenities.
Applicant who is one bedroom short.
Applicants who are key workers such as Police, Fire Officers or Nurses who need to move into the area to take up employment.

Band D

Applicants who are already adequately housed.
Applicants who can afford to secure their own housing.
Applicants who are owner occupiers (see section 29).
All other applicants including those without a local connection who do not have another identified housing need.

22. Management moves/direct lets

On very rare occasions NBC may find it necessary to make a direct allocation, this means that a property may either be withdrawn from a bidding round or not advertised.

Circumstances where this would happen are:

- A tenant has to be moved urgently as there is a severe threat of violence.
- Households in the Emergency band who have failed to exercise choice through the bidding system within the timescale.

23. Council property not included in this scheme

This policy does not apply to

- Where Council property is used as Temporary Homeless Accommodation pursuant of Part 7 of the Act.
- An NBC tenant has to move urgently on a temporary basis because of fire or flood.
- The offer of a Service Tenancy.
- The letting/leasing of Council property to another agency for a specific housing purpose.
- Very sheltered housing and supported units.

24.   Medical grounds

The Housing Act 1996 states that reasonable preference on the housing register should be given to applicants who have a need to move on medical or welfare grounds.

This category includes an applicant, or member of that applicant's household, whose health is being affected by their current property, and where a move to another more suitable property would alleviate their condition or make it easier to manage.

Where it appears that there is a need to make enquiries into an applicant's medical condition the Council will refer the case to an independent medical advisor.

The applicant can provide their own medical evidence if appropriate along with a medical/welfare assessment form, which will be sent to the independent advisor. If the Medical Advisor considers that reasonable preference should be awarded then they will make a decision as to which band the applicant is placed, where appropriate, a recommendation as to property type.

Where two or more members of a household would qualify for medical priority and the levels of priority are different, the highest will apply.

Medical priority will be reviewed prior to allocation if the assessment was made in excess of 12 months previously to ensure that the award is still appropriate.

25.   Northampton Borough Council Joint Tenancies

Joint tenancies are normally granted where applicants have a long term commitment eg married and unmarried couples, civil partners, siblings, and unpaid live-in carers.

26.   Ending a Joint tenancy

One party giving notice has the effect of ending the joint tenancy for both parties. In some cases the council will consider allowing one tenant to remain as a sole tenant, for example where children reside at the property. Joint tenancy issues resulting from family /relationship breakdowns are covered in the TENANT Handbook.

27.   Access to children

Due to the demand on the NBC housing stock it is not always possible to consider a child who normally resides with another parent as part of a housing application. However, where possible, eligibility for a separate bedroom for a child will be considered.

28.   Local connection criteria

Applicants who do not live or work within the Borough will be placed in Band D with the exception of applicants who require to move into the Borough to provide care and support or to receive support for or be cared for. Applicants for whom a full housing duty has been accepted under the homelessness legislation need not have a local

connection, but such cases may be referred to another local authority in accordance with that legislation.

29. Owner occupiers

Owner-occupiers will be placed in Band D. Applicants who have sold a property within the last 5 years will be asked to provide proof of sale as well as evidence of the proceeds of the sale. An assessment will be made as to whether the applicant can afford to purchase suitable accommodation locally.

Applicants may be moved to a higher band if there is a high medical or welfare need and the applicant is unable to purchase a suitable property.

30. Local lettings policies

Local Lettings policies or plans are a tool, which can be used to stabilise an area that has specific and particular issues. The Governments' Sustainable Communities Plan states the key objectives of providing stable, settled, safe communities. This means that there may be rules around child density or number of lettings to key workers. The Council may decide to operate one or more Local Letting policies within areas of the town. The need for such schemes will be clearly defined and relate to specific areas or types of property that will benefit from this type of proactive initiative.

A Local Lettings policy may be introduced, as part of a multi-agency approach with existing local communities or in partnership with registered social landlords to take account of social factors.

Local Lettings policies will be limited in number.

31. Properties with age restrictions

NBC have a limited number of properties in various locations that have been designated as being suitable for applicants over the age of 40 only. These properties are in close proximity to some of our sheltered housing residents. Applications will not be considered for these properties if they include a person under the age of 40 or if the Council has reason to believe that there may be a conflict of lifestyle between the applicant and the sheltered housing residents in the neighbourhood.

32. Single persons accommodation

The Council currently own 6 purpose built single persons blocks of studio flats

These are:-

- Robinson House in Lumbertubs
- Paget House in Kings Heath
- Overslade House in Hunsbury
- Caledonian House in St James
- Woodstock in the Town Centre
- Dover Court in St James

These properties are subject to a Local Lettings Policy.

There are specific additional checks made on applications from young people wishing to access these blocks under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

Additionally, if the Council have reason to believe that an applicant's behaviour may have a detrimental affect on the management of these blocks or the health and safety of other tenants, then an allocation will be refused. Applicants will be informed of this decision in writing and will have the right to request a review of the decision (see section 40).

33. Sheltered housing

The term Sheltered Housing applies to a range of accommodation and tenancy related support designed to meet the housing and support needs of older people (applicants over 60) or younger people who are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance.

Before the applicant is accepted for a property that they have expressed an interest in or bid for they will be visited and assessed to ensure sheltered housing can meet the support needs of the applicant and that the appropriate level of service can be provided.

The service is based around each individuals support needs. It provides three levels of service varying from once a month for those tenants who are active and independent, to three times a week for those with moderate support needs to a daily visit for those who are frail and vulnerable. This service is provided by a team of Wardens who will ensure the appropriate level of service is maintained to meet the individual's needs.

Sheltered Housing Schemes consists of flats or bungalows, some of which are grouped around a community room where residents are able to enjoy social activities. All properties have an intercom system to enable residents to summon assistance in an emergency.

Northampton Borough Council has one very Sheltered Housing scheme; this is for more vulnerable older people who need a higher level of support.

It consists of twenty-six self-contained flats in one building, with a communal lounge, dining room conservatory and laundry room.

A warden provides tenancy support during the day, and each flat has an intercom system to summon assistance in an emergency.

A sheltered housing panel allocates Very Sheltered Housing accommodation on the basis of the assessed needs of applicants; this is outside of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme.

The council also has nomination rights to another very sheltered scheme within the Borough, which is managed by a Registered Social Landlord.

34.   Adapted/adaptable properties

Properties that have had major adaptations for tenants with a disability will be advertised as available for applicants who have a need for the adaptations. Advertised properties will include details such as whether they are suitable for a wheelchair user. The Housing Needs team will liaise closely with the Occupational Therapy Department to ensure that applicants who require adaptations receive the priority that they require.

35.   Introductory tenancies

Northampton Borough Council operates introductory tenancies.

All new tenants of the council will be introductory tenants for the first twelve months of their tenancy. Introductory tenancies can be extended for a further six months provided a Notice of Extension has been served no later than eight weeks before the tenancy ordinarily would become secure.

This will not apply to current Council tenants transferring or to new tenants who were previously secure tenants of another authority or an assured tenant of a Registered Social Landlord (Housing Association).

A tenancy will remain introductory if proceedings for possession have been started but not yet resolved.

The rights of introductory tenants differ from those of secure tenants. Introductory tenants cannot:

- Take in lodgers.
- Exercise the right to buy (although the period spent as an introductory tenant will count towards the qualifying period).
- Sub-let.
- Carry out a mutual exchange.
- Vote on matters concerning changes in policy or practice concerning housing management.

Where action is taken to end a tenancy the council does not have to prove the facts in court only that it has followed the correct procedure particularly with regard to considering any appeal against the decision to go to court.

36.   Registered Social Landlords nominations

Registered Social Landlords which are usually known as Housing Associations are non-profit making organisations providing homes for people in housing need.

Northampton Borough Council has an agreement with the RSL's that have properties in the borough that a negotiated percentage of their lettings will be to people on the Council's Housing Register.

37. Property Letting Criteria

This table shows the type of property that you are eligible for, there may be some exceptions for example when an applicant requires and extra bedroom for medical equipment or a carer. You will be advised what type of property you can bid for when you receive your assessment letter.

	Single Person	Couple	Single Pensioner or Applicant who requires ground floor accommodation	Couple Pensioner or Applicants who requires ground floor accommodation	1 Child Family	2 Child Family	3 Child Family	4 Child Family	5 Child Family	6+ Child Family
Bedsit/Studio flat	X									
1 Bedroom Flat	X	X	X	X						
1 Bedroom Bungalow			X	X						
2 Bedroom Flat					X	X				
2 Bedroom Bungalow			X	X	X	X				
2 Bedroom Maisonette					X	X				
2 Bedroom House					X	X				
3 Bedroom Flat						X	X			
3 Bedroom Bungalow						X	X			
3 Bedroom Maisonette						X	X			
3 Bedroom House						X	X			
4 Bedroom House								X	X	X
5 Bedroom House									X	X
6 Bedroom House									X	X

38.   Vulnerable people

A key requirement for ensuring the success and fairness of the Allocation Policy and CBL scheme is that all customers can access available homes and that relevant support is provided where appropriate. A full copy of our Access Strategy is available on our website, from the Guildhall and local Offices.

This strategy sets out how we will:

- Ensure that the Allocation Policy and CBL scheme is designed to meet the needs of all customers.
- Provide customers with support and advice on the process where it is needed.
- Ensure that appropriate information is readily available.
- Achieve a greater degree of collaboration between the wide range of agencies involved in providing services for vulnerable people.
- Name the organisations that have signed up to the strategy and will support their customers through the CBL process.

39.   Annual review

Each application will be reassessed on an annual basis. The Council will write to each applicant on the anniversary of their application asking whether they wish to continue to remain on the Housing Register. The applicant will be asked whether there has been any change in their housing circumstance over the previous year and requested to inform the Council.

Applicants failing to respond to the annual review within three months of the date of review will be removed from the waiting list. If the applicant subsequently contacts the Council regarding their application within a twelve month period they may request a review of the decision to remove them. Otherwise the applicant will be required to complete an application for a new assessment which will receive a new registration date.

40.   The right to review

The Housing Act 1996 Part six gives applicants the right to request a review of any decision regarding their application.

Letters notifying an applicant that they have been refused access to the Housing Register or the band that they have been awarded will state that the applicant has a right to request a review of the decision.

The request for review should be made to the Housing Needs Team Leader Northampton Borough Council, The Guildhall, St Giles Square, Northampton NN1 1DE. If you require assistance with the process please contact a member of the customer services team at the One Stop Shop at the Guildhall.

A review should be requested within twenty-one days of the date of the letter advising of the decision.

Request for reviews can be in writing or made verbally.

41.   Procedure of review

The review will be carried out and the decision and the reasons for it will be given to the applicant in writing within fifty-six days of the request being received.

Wherever possible any review of a decision shall be taken by an officer senior to the officer who took the original decision.

Northampton Borough Council Choice Based Lettings Scheme

DRAFT 1 (10 OCT 07)

Access strategy

Introduction

This is the (draft) Access Strategy for the Northampton Choice Based Lettings scheme.

CBL schemes require customers to be active in searching for vacancies and expressing an interest in available homes. Northampton BC will advertise their available homes across a variety of media and customers will be asked to express an interest or "bid" for them. The homes will be let in accordance with the Allocation Policy.

CBL schemes were piloted across the UK during 2001-2. Following the success of the pilots, government stated that all local authorities should have a CBL scheme in place by 2010.

A key requirement for ensuring the success and fairness of the scheme is that all customers can access available homes and that relevant support is provided where appropriate.

Research carried out into the initial pilot schemes found that the weakest part of the pilots was often the lack of support provided to vulnerable households. Northampton Borough Council recognises that vulnerable and excluded groups must be supported through the process.

2   Purpose of the access strategy

This strategy sets out how we will:

- Ensure that our allocation policy and CBL scheme is designed to meet the needs of all customers.
- Provide customers with support and advice on the process where it is needed.
- Ensure that appropriate information is readily available.
- Achieve a greater degree of collaboration between the wide range of agencies involved in providing services for vulnerable people.
- Name the organisations that have signed up to the strategy and will support their customers through the CBL process.

3   The Northampton Borough Council CBL Scheme

Customers will be placed in one of five bands of housing need, depending on their circumstances. Available homes will be advertised every fortnight or week (for decision), through a variety of media including the Internet.

The homes will be clearly labelled to state who can be considered for them. To be considered for the home, customers must express an interest in it (known as 'bidding') this will be via a number of media to be agreed.

The offer of accommodation is made to the applicant in the highest band (if there is more than one person in this band then the applicant who has been in that band for the longest time). Feedback will be made available to unsuccessful customers who can use this information to make realistic choices on their housing options. A very small proportion of homes will be let directly to customers without being advertised through the CBL scheme – these are known as direct lets. Feedback will be provided on the number of direct lets made.

Most sheltered homes and some homes adapted for the disabled will be advertised through the scheme. They will be clearly labelled to show who can bid for them. Supported Units Very Sheltered schemes and Extra care homes will not be advertised through the scheme.

A new Allocations Policy is being introduced at the same time as the CBL scheme.

There is a significant shortage of local authority and housing association housing within the Borough and CBL will not change that fact. We will work to manage customers' expectations and look to promote alternatives to social housing to help customers find accommodation as soon as possible.

4   People who may need assistance with CBL

CBL schemes place new demands on customers. In particular, it makes people active participants in the lettings process, encouraging them to bid for available homes. Customers will need:

- to receive information on the housing options available;
- to be able to access and have the ability to use the technology to make bids
- where necessary, have support to bid for available homes.

People from a variety of groups could find it more difficult to participate in the CBL scheme without additional support and assistance. This may include:

- Care leavers
- Gypsies and Travellers

- Homeless households
- Hospital leavers
- Hostel residents
- Older people
- People fleeing domestic violence
- People who do not speak English as their first language
- People with drug or alcohol addictions
- People with HIV/Aids and their carers
- People with learning difficulties
- People with medical needs
- People with mental health problems
- People with mobility problems
- People leaving rehab
- Police witnesses
- Pregnant teenagers
- Prison leavers
- Refugees /asylum seekers
- Under 18s

It should not be assumed that all people from these groups need support. Wherever possible we would like customers to be active participants in CBL without support, but we recognise that in limited circumstances it may be necessary to provide additional support to help customers bid for homes.

5   Supporting vulnerable people participating in CBL

Evidence from a number of pilots has highlighted that vulnerable households welcome the principle of choice and like the openness and transparency of the scheme.

We want to ensure that vulnerable people are able to:

- achieve similar or improved outcomes through the CBL process compared to the previous lettings process
- access a similar proportion and quality of available properties as they did under previous lettings systems.

When considering support needs, the following issues will be considered

- Defining levels and different types of support that may be required
- Identification of those who are in need of support
- Identification of those who would provide support
- Ensuring support providers have sufficient training and capacity to provide support
- Time scales for support to be offered to those needing assistance to bid for homes may vary
- Vulnerable people as identified by the allocation policy should have access to appropriate support to ensure that they are able to access the scheme

6   Defining support

Support for people using CBL can cover a multitude of possibilities, with different resource implications. The type of support provided is likely to vary, but could include:

- Translation of documents
- Providing documents in alternative formats such as large print
- Posting advertising flyers to housebound customers
- Enabling customers to appoint an advocate
- Enabling family and friends to bid on behalf of a customer
- Partner organisations and other stakeholders assisting customers to bid for available homes
- Auto bid facility

The amount of help and support is based on the customer's requirements.

7   The role of advocacy

Support is likely to be provided to many people from informal sources, for example, friends and family.

When there is a formal advocacy role – whether from a council team, or otherwise – a form will be needed to be signed by the customer to ensure compliance with the Data Protection Act. When acting as an advocate, it is important the advocate acts in the customer's best interests.

8   How we will ensure the scheme is accessible for all.

The following measures will be to ensure the scheme is accessible for all

During implementation we will;

- Consult with our customers and key stakeholders on the implementation of the scheme and on the Allocations Policy
- Listen to and act on the results of the consultation
- Provide training to support agencies
- Develop the Allocation policy to ensure priority is given to those in the greatest housing need

  We have procured an IT system, which has a range of features to ensure it is easily accessible

When the scheme is in place, we will ensure customers are registered with the scheme and placed in the correct housing band through:

- Providing support and assistance to customers completing an application form.

- Assessing each case on application and place the customer in an appropriate band.
- Establishing at the application stage if customers need support.
- Using medical assessment and sometimes occupational therapists to ensure that sufficient priority is given to people with medical needs.
- Write to all customers following their application, informing them of their application number, housing needs band and other appropriate information.
- Offer a review process for customers who disagree with a decision made about their application.

We will ensure information on available homes is widely available, through:

- Explaining the CBL process clearly to customers when they apply for housing.
- On the introduction of the scheme, inform customers of their housing needs and of the new processes.
- Holding a range of consultation events to promote the scheme.
- Providing property details by a variety of means
- Posting copies of a property flyer to support agencies where required.
- Providing a clear summary of the allocations policy and details of how people access the scheme.
- Staff will be able to explain information to people who may be visually impaired, who have literacy issues, or who may need guidance to bid or make decisions.
- Contacting people in most need about available homes.

We will provide information, which is clear and accessible through:

- Ensuring information is provided in the appropriate font size so it is easily read.
- Translating information leaflets into community languages, large print and Braille.
- Ensure that the website is compliant with disability discrimination legislation.
- Use clear symbols and designs in the advertising flyer and on the internet where possible.
- Use interpretation services.
- Labelling properties clearly where they have been adapted for people with disabilities.

We will assist people to bid for available homes through:

- Providing a variety of ways for customers to bid for available homes.
- Allow friends, relatives and support agencies to bid on a customers' behalf.
- Not penalising customers who refuse offers of accommodation through the scheme.

- Targeting support to vulnerable and excluded households who are not bidding for available homes.
- Involving a wide range of statutory and voluntary organisations to provide advice and support and act as advocates.
- Providing feedback to customers on the outcomes of properties they bid for.
- Providing a range of housing options as alternatives to council and housing association housing.
- Continuing to provide training and support to agencies acting on behalf of vulnerable groups.

We will monitor the scheme to ensure:

- Allocations are made to the customers in most need.
- Vulnerable customers are bidding for homes.
- Customers are bidding for homes appropriate for their needs.
- Specific groups of people are not being inadvertently disadvantaged.

We will regularly review the scheme to ensure it meets the needs of our customers and stakeholders.

9   Who else can provide support?

There is an expectation that other stakeholders will provide appropriate advice and assistance to their clients on the CBL scheme.

A list of agencies that have signed up to this strategy and will provide support and assistance to their customers will be published as an appendix to this document.

The level of support provided depends on the requirements of the customer and the role of the agency, but could include the following:

- Demonstrate how to bid for available homes
- Support their clients to bid for available homes
- Review their clients choices to ensure they are bidding for appropriate homes
- Bid on their clients behalf
- Advocate on their clients behalf
- Having copies of the property flyer displayed in customer access points.

The agencies will outline to their clients what support they can provide.

Training will be made available to organisations who are acting on behalf of their clients.

10   Confidentiality

All those engaged in the provision of support and advice will respect the confidentiality of personal information.

This means that:

- We will keep personal information secure and all our staff have a duty to keep this information confidential.
- We generally need the person's permission to share information and will need the person to confirm that they have agreed to this.
- The person has the right to refuse permission to share personal information.

All those engaged in the provision of support and advice must adhere to the guidance on issues of confidentiality.

11   Diversity and inclusion

Those providing support will ensure that the principles of equal opportunity are adhered to, in that equal access to support will be provided according to the individual's needs. We recognise that different people have different needs and we will consider this appropriately when providing support to ensure that the person is able to fully participate within the process.

Northampton Borough Council will be undertaking an equality impact assessment to ensure that the CBL scheme and the Allocations Policy does not disadvantage customers from any particular group. Further action points may come out of these assessments.

Conclusions

The measures outlined in this strategy are designed to assist vulnerable people to access social housing. There are a number of challenges in meeting the needs of potentially vulnerable people in accessing housing. We are determined to ensure all customers through the measures outlined in this document can access the scheme.

Supported housing agencies play a key role in enabling customers to access available homes and their assistance is required to ensure their clients are assisted.

The CBL scheme will be regularly monitored and reviewed to ensure customers are able to access available homes. This strategy is likely to be updated as a result of any review.

"Face-To-Face and Side-By-Side": A Framework For Inter Faith Dialogue and Social Action

CONSULTATION RESPONSE FORM

You are welcome to use this form to record any comments or observations you would like to make in response to the consultation document.   You can access a copy of the consultation document here: http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/interfaithdialogue

Please note that use of this form is not obligatory – responses are welcome in any format. Responses to this consultation will be used by Government and key partners to develop the framework and to inform plans for implementation. If you do not wish your response to be shared with non-Government partners in this way please make this clear in your response.

**Please send your responses by email to:
interfaith@communities.gsi.gov.uk**

Or by post to:

**Towards a framework for inter faith dialogue and social action
Department for Communities and Local Government
7th Floor / Zone H9
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU**
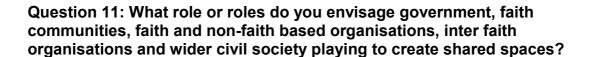
This consultation closes on 7th March 2008.

Name:	
Organisation:	
Address:	
E-mail address:	

1. STRUCTURES WHICH FACILITATE INTERACTION AND SOCIAL ACTION

Question 1: Is the balance of structures to facilitate inter faith dialogue and social action at national, regional and local level right?

Question 2: What more is needed at national, regional and local levels to facilitate inter faith interaction and social action?

Question 3: Are different approaches required at national, regional and local levels? What might these consist of? What role or roles do you envisage government, faith communities, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and wider civil society playing?

2. OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING WHICH BUILD UNDERSTANDING

Question 4: Are there appropriate opportunities in your community and your local area to learn about different faiths and beliefs?

Question 5: How do we improve opportunities for learning about different religions and beliefs and build on existing best practice?

Question 6: How best can different faith communities work together whilst retaining their distinctiveness?

Question 7: How can the lessons learned and experienced gained from inter faith dialogue and social action help to build relationships with people from different communities more widely?

Question 8: What role or roles do you envisage government, faith communities, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and wider civil society playing in building understanding about different beliefs and practices?

3. SHARED SPACES FOR INTERACTION AND SOCIAL ACTION

Question 9: What spaces are being used by faith communities for inter faith dialogue and social action?

Question 10: What barriers are there to sharing spaces?

Question 11: What role or roles do you envisage government, faith communities, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and wider civil society playing to create shared spaces?

4. CONFIDENCE AND SKILLS TO BRIDGE AND LINK

Question 12: Access to funding, leadership skills, and misconceptions about the role of faith in public life have all been recognised as issues which can limit the ability of faith communities to bridge and link. Are there other barriers in your community or local area which need to be overcome? Who needs to take action, and what do they need to do?

Question 13: To what extent does inter faith social action in your local area enable you to work side by side with people who have no religious belief? How might social action involving faith communities and wider civil society be increased and strengthened?

Question 14: What role or roles do you envisage government, faith communities, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and wider civil society playing to increase the level and scope of inter faith social action?

Question 15: How are you promoting and encouraging inter faith activity and sharing best practice? What are the best ways of encouraging more people to take part? What role might Government play to champion this?

THE CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO INTER FAITH ACTIVITY EXPERIENCED BY WOMEN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Question 16: How might the barriers experienced by women be overcome?

Question 17: What role or roles do you envisage government, faith communities, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and wider civil society in overcoming these?

Question 18: How might the barriers experienced by young people be overcome?

Question 19: What role or roles do you envisage government, faith communities, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and wider civil society in overcoming these?

Question 20: What can successful existing approaches tell us about the key building blocks needed for inter faith dialogue and social action?

Please include any others comments you might wish to make here:

"Face-to-Face and Side-by-Side": A framework for inter faith dialogue and social action
Consultation

"Face-to-Face and Side-by-Side": A framework for inter faith dialogue and social action
Consultation

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Contents

Foreword

The Government's vision for Britain is one of strong, confident communities where people of all different backgrounds get on well together. That is why building cohesion is a priority for my Department.

We have in recent years seen an increase in dialogue between different faith communities which is breaking down barriers, building understanding and strengthening relationships. We have also seen the positive changes that collaborative social action has brought about within our local communities. This growth in 'active faith' has seen faith communities putting into practice their values and teachings to enrich and benefit wider society.

In its report *Our Shared Future* the independent Commission on Integration and Cohesion set out a number of practical recommendations on how to build cohesion and a shared sense of belonging. In my initial response to the report in October I set out a ten point action plan – one of these commitments is to develop a new inter faith strategy.

In developing this strategy we are not seeking to reinvent "inter faith". We are building on a long history of people from different faith communities in the UK working together to build mutual understanding and respect and develop strong and positive relationships with one another and with wider civil society. This consultation provides us with an opportunity to reflect on how Government should support inter faith activity and the circumstances in which inter faith activity is helping to make a positive difference within local communities. Our vision is that inter faith activity will build good relations and break down barriers between people from different backgrounds through "face-to-face" interactions and "side-by-side" collaboration in shared activities, with a common purpose and a concrete outcome.

Our communities can face complex challenges and it is clear that faith communities and faith based organisations must be a part of any response that public authorities and the voluntary and community sector develop to tackle these. Public authorities are increasingly recognising the role that faith communities and faith based organisations can play in delivering on their agenda and the opportunities for developing innovative community led solutions through partnership working. But there is still work to be done to build confidence in the benefits of partnership and develop a greater understanding of the contribution faith communities can make.

There are other strong contexts for developing an inter faith strategy. The Prime Minister has stated he wants to see stronger inter faith dialogue where people find the common ground that exists between different religions and communities in the UK and the creation of local inter faith councils in every community. The Local Government White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities* also makes it clear that we want to see more local inter faith work and suggests that every local authority should have an inter faith forum, and that they should be linked closely into Local Strategic Partnerships.

My vision in developing a framework for inter faith dialogue and social action is that these partnerships and opportunities will become an intrinsic part of the way in which public authorities work with communities. As we devolve more power to local communities it is important that local authorities ensure that their democratic structures and processes support this.

In Spring 2008 we aim to publish a strategy that will clearly set out steps for delivering this vision. This consultation is the first step to achieving this.

Through this consultation we aim to find out how we can all best work in partnership with each other to increase inter faith dialogue and social action and ensure that this activity results in tangible and positive change within local communities in terms of increased cohesion, greater community empowerment and resilience to extremism in all its forms.

Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Introduction

1. Britain today is a multi faith society with people of many different faiths and beliefs and none living, working, and learning together. Faith is important to the social identity of many UK citizens, with over three-quarters of respondents to the 2001 census identifying themselves as having a religious faith.[1]

Table 1: Population of Great Britain: by religion, April 2001			
	Total population		Non-Christian religious population
	(Numbers)	(Percentages)	(Percentages)
Christian	41,014,811	71.8	
Muslim	1,588,890	2.8	51.9
Hindu	558,342	1.0	18.3
Sikh	336,179	0.6	11.0
Jewish	267,373	0.5	8.7
Buddhist	149,157	0.3	4.9
Any other religion	159,167	0.3	5.2
All non-Christian religious population	3,059,108	5.4	100.0
No religion	8,596,488	15.1	
Religion not stated	4,433,520	7.8	
All population	57,103,927	100.0	

2. At all levels of government – local, regional and national – the contributions faith communities make to community life are increasingly being recognised. The values and behaviours they demonstrate, such as altruism, respect for others, ethical behaviour and community solidarity which underpin good citizenship. Faith communities are also involved in developing and delivering a range of government policies and initiatives. The substantial number of responses made by faith communities, faith-based and inter faith organisations to the independent Commission on Integration and Cohesion revealed a broad range of work underway including projects to improve community relations, conflict resolution and mediation, family and parenting skills, health work, improving language skills and support networks. In its report – *Our Shared Future* – the Commission recognised that the support shown by faith communities for projects and networks, their community buildings and leaders on the ground, and the promotion of shared values makes an important contribution to building integration and cohesion.

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[1] Census, Office of National Statistics, April 2001.

3. The Commission asserted that the way in which relations between people of different faiths and beliefs develop in the coming years will be very important to integration and cohesion and saw inter faith activity as having an important role to play in strengthening these relationships. They recognised that much effective work was already being taken forward by a number of partners to develop relationships between people of different faiths but more needed to be done – not only to enhance the positive contribution that faith communities were already making to integration and cohesion but also to address those instances where religious identity had been advanced in divisive ways or had become a factor that had the potential to separate people from the wider community. The Commission also stated that there was a need for more constructive conversations between those who are religious and those who are not. In their responses to the Commission's interim report, faith communities and faith-based organisations said that inter faith activity should be a priority in terms of Government support for the sector.[2]

4. In October 2007 the Government announced, in its initial response to the report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, a ten point plan to build cohesion and tackle community tensions. This included the specific commitment to develop an inter faith strategy. This consultation is a first step towards this. In developing this consultation paper we have drawn upon the large number of responses made to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion in respect of faith and belief.

What is inter faith activity?

5. We understand the term inter faith activity to express meaningful interactions between people from different faith communities and between faith communities and wider civil society. The Chief Rabbi, Sir Jonathan Sacks, has distinguished between "face-to-face" and "side-by-side" relationships. We think that this is a helpful way of articulating two of the main components of inter faith activity, and use this throughout this consultation paper in the following way:

- "face-to-face": relates to dialogue which leads to faith communities having a better understanding of one another, including celebrating the values held in common as well as acknowledging distinctiveness

- "side-by-side": relates to collaborative social action (including participation in local democracy) involving different faith communities and wider civil society, which brings about positive and concrete change within local communities

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[2] *Response to the Interim Statement of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion*, Community Development Foundation, 2007. This report summarises feedback received by the Community Development Foundation from organisations in receipt of grants from the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF) and Connecting Communities Plus

6.   As inter faith dialogue and social action can help to build positive relations and break down barriers between people from different backgrounds, they clearly have a valuable role to play as part of wider efforts to build cohesion and resilience within communities to extremism in all its forms.

7.   Inter faith activity can also lead to greater community empowerment and civic engagement, as well as improvements in well-being and the creation of opportunities for people to realise their full potential through specific activities to tackle inequality and deprivation. The Government believes that inter faith social action has a particularly valuable role to play. It provides practical opportunities for people from different backgrounds to work together side-by-side with a sense of shared endeavour to address issues of common concern and improve their local neighbourhood.

Levels of activity

8.   The UK has been a pioneer in inter faith activity compared to many countries in modern times – an achievement of which all our communities can be proud. There have been significant increases in the level of inter faith activity at both local and national level in recent years and this momentum very much builds upon the decades of work undertaken by faith communities and by faith leaders. In 1942 the Council of Christians and Jews, Britain's oldest national inter faith organisation, was established against the background of the Holocaust and a determination amongst communities to combat prejudice, intolerance and antisemitism. Today there are 45 branches in existence. Other national inter faith organisations include the Three Faiths Forum, established in 1997; Alif-Aleph UK, founded in 2003; and the Christian Muslim Forum, established in 2005.

9.   In 1987 the Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom was founded. Government has been a key supporter of the Inter Faith Network in recent years and the Network is the only broad national inter faith linking structure of its kind in the European Union. The Network links representative bodies of the faith communities, national, regional and local inter faith organisations, and educational and academic bodies with a focus on inter faith and multi faith issues. It works with its member bodies to contribute to community cohesion through deepening inter faith understanding and cooperation at all levels.[3] The directory of inter faith organisations produced by the Network lists 263 organisations, including 25 national, 14 regional and 217 local inter faith bodies as well as 7 educational and academic institutions with a particular focus on inter faith issues.[4] Since 2000, 183 new inter faith groups have been established with 52 of these coming into existence since 2005.

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[3] www.interfaith.org.uk

[4] *Inter Faith Organisations in the UK: A Directory*, Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom, 2007.

10. We acknowledge and welcome these achievements and the work of national and local inter faith organisations whose aim is to build understanding and respect across a range of faiths. National faith community bodies and organisations are making an important contribution to cohesion by resourcing and supporting inter faith dialogue and social action and encouraging members of their communities to participate. Together they continue to make a real difference in helping to defuse inter-community tensions and build community cohesion by providing advice and information on issues of faith, fostering co-operation on local issues, working jointly on social and educational projects, and informing policy development at the national level.

11. There has been a marked increase in the number of inter faith groups at the local level in particular. Government has contributed to this growth through targeted funding of inter faith activity delivered by faith based organisations and by organisations working with faith communities. Since 2006, the Government has invested £13.8m to enhance the capacity of faith communities to play a full part in civil society and build community cohesion through the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF). This funding has also supported inter faith activities which create trust between different groups as well as joint practical activities that bring faith communities and others together to achieve a shared goal through social action. There is evidence that faith communities are reaching out to people from a range of different faith and ethnic backgrounds: 73 per cent of Christian organisations awarded a large FCCBF grant are engaging with Muslims and 60 per cent with Hindus. 95 per cent of Hindu organisations awarded a small FCCBF grant are engaging with Christians.[5] The emphasis on integration and cohesion activities has meant that funded organisations are supported in continuing to reach beyond their own faith group.

12. The discussion paper issued in relation to the Third Sector Strategy for Communities and Local Government made clear the priority afforded to supporting the voluntary and community sector to become more sustainable and enterprising. The Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom is carrying out research into inter faith activity led by Regional Faith Forums and we have commissioned the Faith Based Regeneration Network to carry out complementary research into Regional Faiths Forums and inter faith social action. The Local Government Association, in partnership with the Inter Faith Network, is also planning research into the involvement of local authorities in local inter faith activity.

13. The Commission on Integration and Cohesion confirmed that inter faith activity has an important role to play as part of work to build integration and cohesion within local communities, and we encourage local authorities and their partners

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[5] *Response to the Interim Statement of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion*, Community Development Foundation, 2007. This report summarises feedback received by the Community Development Foundation from organisations in receipt of grants from the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF) and Connecting Communities Plus

to consider the role that inter faith activity can play as part of wider efforts to build cohesion in their local area. In October, Government announced a significant increase in investment from £2m (in 2007/08) to £50m (over the next three years) for the purpose of building cohesion in local areas.

14. Over the winter we intend to review the findings from these pieces of research and have a detailed discussion with the Community Development Foundation about the learning from their evaluation of the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund. We also intend to explore the role that different Government funding programmes might play in supporting increased inter faith activity.

15. Taken together, this research and responses to this consultation will inform our thinking about whether any additional investment might be needed to help secure a more sustainable footing for inter faith activity and how this might be deployed in the most effective way.

Developing a framework for partnership

16. Inter faith activity is dependent upon strong networks and partnerships. We would like to build a framework for partnership within and across faith communities, government, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and wider civil society which will facilitate and strengthen partnership working. This will consolidate and build upon existing achievements at national, regional and local level. As noted above, we expect the framework to be shaped in particular by the achievements and priorities of the individuals, communities and organisations working to promote inter faith dialogue and social action.

17. This consultation presents us all with a valuable opportunity to reflect on and develop our collective understanding of:

    ● our respective roles, networks and relationships and the linkages between these

    ● the building blocks which support effective inter faith dialogue and social action

    ● the structures and activities already in existence at national, regional and local levels

    ● what more is needed to widen and deepen inter faith dialogue and social action.

18. We would also like to use this as an opportunity to learn more about some of the barriers to inter faith activity – with a particular focus on those issues which currently limit the full participation of women and young people – and to hear your ideas about how we might best work together to overcome these.

19. Responses to this consultation will be used by Government and key partners

to develop the final strategy and to inform plans for implementation.

Section 1

Building cohesive communities: the role of inter faith dialogue and social action

1.1 A cohesive community is currently defined as a place where there is a sense of belonging for all communities, diversity is appreciated and valued, people from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities and strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds. In its report – *Our Shared Future* – the Commission on Integration and Cohesion proposed that we should adopt a new definition of an integrated and cohesive community as a place where there is:

- a shared contribution to a future vision

- a recognition of the contribution of settled and new communities

- a strong sense of individual rights and responsibilities

- trust in institutions locally to act fairly.

and where

- those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities

- there are strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds.

1.2 The principles introduced within the Commission's proposed new definition are an important step forward. We are currently working with key stakeholders to agree the new definition and expect to publish this in January.

How cohesive are we?

1.3 We currently measure perceptions of cohesion through the Citizenship Survey by asking people "to what extent do you agree or disagree that this local area (within 15/20 minutes walk) is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together?"[6]

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[6] Formerly the Home Office Citizenship Survey, now the responsibility of Communities and Local Government

1.4   The national picture is a positive one: in both the 2003 and 2005 surveys 80 per cent of people in England and Wales agreed that their local area was cohesive. This positive trend has continued: early findings from the Citizenship Survey 2007 show that 81 per cent of people feel that individuals from different backgrounds get on well in their area, 85 per cent of people feel they belong strongly to Britain and 77 per cent feel they belong strongly to their neighbourhood.[7]

1.5   While there is a lot to be positive about, there is no room for complacency. The Government made clear the priority it affords to building more cohesive, active and empowered communities within the recent Comprehensive Spending Review.[8] The Government's progress towards achieving this will be measured through the following six indicators:

- the percentage of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area

- the percentage of people who have meaningful interactions with people from different backgrounds

- the percentage of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood

- the percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality

- a thriving third sector

- the percentage of people who participate in culture or sport.[9]

What factors influence people's perceptions of cohesion?

1.6   Analysis of the Communities and Local Government Citizenship Survey 2005 revealed that perceptions of cohesion depend upon a combination of individual characteristics and community-level factors.

1.7   Having friends from different ethnic groups is a strong predictor for positive perceptions of cohesion, as is feeling able to influence local decisions. Individuals who engage in formal volunteering are more positive about cohesion, and are likely to feel more empowered, form networks and have more interaction with individuals in their communities that they may not be in contact with otherwise. Disadvantage (whether experienced at an individual or community level, or both) undermines cohesion, but there is evidence that local activity can build resilience

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[7]   Quarter 1 (April-June 2007) findings from the 2007 Citizenship Survey, Communities and Local Government, October 2007

[8]   PSA Delivery Agreement 21: Build more cohesive, active and empowered communities
      www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/E/9/pbr_csr07_psa21.pdf

[9]   Research shows that people taking part in cultural activities were 20 per cent more likely to know 'many people' in their neighbourhood, and 60 per cent more likely to believe that 'many of their neighbours can be trusted'. Taking Part Survey, Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS), 2006

to its effects. Feeling that you would be treated differently because of your ethnicity – particularly when coupled with feelings of racial prejudice has a strong negative influence on perceptions of cohesion.[10]

1.8   We also know that meaningful interaction between people from different backgrounds can help address negative attitudes, not only in terms of how they feel towards the specific member of the group that they come into contact with, but towards the group as a whole.[11] Contact is meaningful when:

- conversations go beyond surface friendliness; in which people exchange personal information or talk about each other's differences and identities

- people share a common goal or share an interest

- contact is sustained long-term.

1.9   The Commission on Integration and Cohesion highlighted the importance of meaningful interaction, and this is supported by analysis showing that 'bridging' social capital can have a direct and positive impact on cohesion.[12]

What is social capital?

Social capital is the 'social glue' between people, organisations and communities that enable them to work together to pursue shared objectives.

There are three categories of social capital:[13]

- **Bonding** – based upon enduring, multi-faceted relationships between similar people with strong mutual commitments such as among friends, family and other close knit groups

- **Bridging** – formed from the connections between people who have less in common, but may have overlapping interest, for example, between neighbours, colleagues, or between different groups within a community

- **Linking – derived from links between people or organisations beyond peer boundaries, cutting across status and similarity and enabling people to exert influence and reach outside their normal circles**

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[10] *Predictors of community cohesion: multi-level modelling of the 2005 Citizenship Survey*, James Laurence and Anthony Heath, 2007

[11] *Inter-group contact and integration: When, how, and why?* Professor Miles Hewstone, University of Oxford, Presentation to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, December 13, 2006

[12] *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Robert Putnam, 2000

[13] *The well-connected community: A networking approach to community development*, Alison Gilchrist, 2004

1.10 There is evidence which suggests that the majority of people feel that there is a need for people from different religious and ethnic groups in their local area to mix more. Early findings from the Citizenship Survey 2007 show that 32 per cent think that people mix enough, 65 per cent think they should mix more and 3 per cent think they should mix less.[14] The Government recognises that it cannot force people to interact with others, and would not want to do this. But meaningful interaction doesn't just happen and together we all need to help create the right conditions and opportunities which support people in developing relationships or 'bridging' with people from different backgrounds.

1.11 Cohesion can be undermined if communities bond, bridge and link together in an unbalanced way – for example where there is strong 'bonding' social capital within different communities but little 'bridging' social capital to bring them together. The Commission on Integration and Cohesion acknowledged that in some circumstances there is a need to develop bonding capital in the first instance as this can help people to develop the confidence they need to then go on and bridge with people from different backgrounds. In determining the balance between bonding and bridging activity the needs and make up of local communities need to be taken into account.

The role of inter faith dialogue and social action in building 'bridging' and 'linking' social capital

1.12 Research carried out for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2006 revealed that:

'Faith communities contribute substantial and distinctive bridging and linking social capital through their co-presence in urban areas, their connecting frameworks, the use of their buildings, the spaces that their associational networks open up, their engagement in governance, and their work across boundaries with others in the public domain'[15].

1.13 The rapid increase in the number of local inter faith groups in recent years provides evidence of a clear appetite amongst faith communities to develop strong and sustainable relationships with each other and with wider civil society. The Government is keen to capture and build upon the momentum generated by partners and to use the learning from existing approaches to build a framework for partnership which will increase inter faith dialogue and social action.

1.14 The values recognised across a range of traditions, both religious and secular, provide a firm foundation from which bridging social capital can grow and flourish. Significantly, some of these shared values were expressed in the

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[14] Quarter 1 (April-June 2007) findings from the 2007 Citizenship Survey, Communities and Local Government, October 2007

[15] *Faith as social capital: connecting or dividing?*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2006

Shared Act of Reflection developed by faith communities for the millennium.

Shared Act of Commitment and Reflection by the faith communities of the UK

Faith community representatives:

In a world scarred by the evils of war, racism, injustice and poverty,we offer this joint Act of Commitment as we look to our shared future.

All:

We commit ourselves
as people of many faiths,
to work together
for the common good,
uniting to build a better society,
grounded in values and ideals we share:

community,
personal integrity,
a sense of right and wrong,
learning, wisdom and love of truth,
care and compassion,
justice and peace,
respect for one another,
for the earth and its creatures.

We commit ourselves,
in a spirit of friendship and co-operation,
to work together
alongside all who share our values and ideals,
to help bring about a better world
now and for generations to come.

1.15 Shared values such as these can provide a useful platform from which to encourage constructive inter faith dialogue and open debate on the issues where there may be differences. They can also help inform the development of inter faith social action. This might typically involve people of different faiths and none coming together to tackle an issue of shared concern – such as a lack of play opportunities for children – and working together to achieve a positive outcome which benefits the wider local community – such as running an after school club.

1.16 Linking social capital enables people to have the confidence and ability to influence the agencies and partnerships responsible for agreeing local and regional priorities and the allocation of resources – such as Local Strategic Partnerships, Urban Regeneration Companies, and Regional Development Agencies. The Government is keen to do what it can to strengthen linking social capital within faith communities in order to help ensure that inter faith social action is as effective as possible in terms of impact, reach and sustainability.

1.17 In developing Government policies which encourage inter faith activity, inclusiveness and integration we are in no way attempting to ignore or conceal the distinctiveness of different faiths and beliefs. Integration is not the same as assimilation, and it is important that we work together to tackle such misperceptions.

Section 2

Developing a framework for partnership

2.1 There is already a wide range of work being taken forward which directly supports, or is complementary to, inter faith activity. This involves contributions made by many different partners – faith communities, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and government – at national, regional and local levels.

2.2 This consultation seeks to find out how these partners can best work together to increase inter faith dialogue and social action and ensure that this activity results in tangible and positive change within local communities in terms of increased cohesion, greater community empowerment and resilience to extremism in all its forms.

2.3 This will involve understanding what we all can contribute and how we can maximise our collective input. To do this, we need to be clear about what the 'building blocks' or factors which enable successful inter faith activity are and what more we might need to do to develop these.

2.4 The Government has drawn upon observations made by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion in relation to meaningful contact as well as research carried out for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation into social capital within faith communities[16] and have identified a number of factors which might be seen as building blocks or enabling factors which support effective inter faith activity. These are briefly explored below, and your views are welcome.

1. Structures which facilitate interaction and social action

2.5 Research has found that 'one of the strongest indicators of increasing bridging and linking social capital has been the rapid growth of formal and informal associational structures within and between faith communities and the increasing connections with wider civil society'.[17]

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[16] *Faith as social capital: connecting or dividing?*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2006
[17] Ibid

2.6   At national level the Government is currently the main financial sponsor of the Inter Faith Network for the UK which, with its member bodies, promotes, links and supports inter faith work in local communities as well as at regional and national level. The Inter Faith Network: provides information and advice on building good inter faith relations; publishes resources to help people working to promote good inter faith relations and works to strengthen best practice. In addition there are over twenty national inter faith organisations now in existence including Alif-Aleph UK, the Three Faiths Forum and the Christian Muslim Forum.

2.7   With the Faiths Forum for London in the process of developing a permanent constitution and structure there will soon be eight Regional Faith Forums in existence. The North East is actively exploring how to set one up. The Regional Faith Forums have created different links and working relationships with regional institutions according to the varying regional needs, circumstances and the resources available. All of the forums aim to provide different faith communities with the opportunity to contribute to decision making at the regional level. Some have specified multi or inter faith dialogue as part of their range of activities. We are currently undertaking research to allow us to have a better understanding of the relationship between the Regional Faith Forums and other regional bodies, and how these relationships might be strengthened.

2.8   Locally there are now over 200 inter faith organisations. As with the regional forums, these have different histories, structures and aims, and the resources available to them vary considerably. In some cases, their development has been driven by the local authority – perhaps to support its work on cohesion or regeneration – in others, the impetus and resources have come from faith communities. Many local bodies are affiliated to the Inter Faith Network for the UK. The research we are undertaking as part of the strategy will also enable us to understand the extent to which local authorities are working with local faith communities.

Case Study 1: Structures which facilitate interaction

The Culture, Faith, and Youth Collective is a network of organisations delivering inter faith and cross-cultural programmes with young people in schools, colleges, universities, and youth groups. Their goal is to encourage young people to engage with each other through dialogue and community service projects, in a process that allows them to explore their own and each other's identity.

The collective serves as a vehicle to enable the member organisations to organise work more cohesively. By sharing resources and best practice they will ensure that the programmes and message reach the widest possible audience, whilst avoiding any unnecessary replication of work. Organisations within the collective use a variety of methods to break down barriers and facilitate greater interaction, such as organising cultural events, social action projects, creative arts programmes, and using other non-formal educational tools. By offering a "menu" of programmes, the collective aims to enable young people and those working with young people to choose the programmes that best suit their needs. Inter faith and intercultural work is becoming increasingly important and this is demonstrated by the vast increase in community engagement along these lines over the past few years.

Question 1: Is the balance of structures to facilitate inter faith dialogue and social action at national, regional and local level right?

Question 2: What more is needed at national, regional and local levels to facilitate inter faith interaction and social action?

Question 3: Are different approaches required at national, regional and local levels? What might these consist of? What role or roles do you envisage government, faith communities, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and wider civil society playing?

2. Opportunities for learning which build understanding

2.9   Learning about different faiths and beliefs is important as it can help people from different backgrounds to identify the values they hold in common and to have the confidence to engage with others. It can also help to tackle myths and misconceptions which can fuel suspicion, fear and mistrust, and enable people to develop an understanding of the distinctive elements of different beliefs and practices.

2.10 Schools have a key role to play in supporting their pupils to develop an understanding of different faiths, including the relationships between faiths and also the relationship between faiths and wider society. Religious education provides an opportunity to learn, not only about religions, but from religions and this is indicated explicitly in the non statutory Religious Education programme of study.

2.11 The importance of developing understanding within and between communities is highlighted by the new duty on schools to promote community cohesion and inter faith work is one area through which schools can contribute to this duty. Opportunities for inter faith engagement exist through the curriculum, extra curricula activities and collective worship. School linking is another excellent way in which schools can develop their pupils' understanding of different faiths. The recently launched School Linking Network is bringing together schools of different faiths, settings and ethnic mixes, so that young people from different backgrounds can learn from one other.

2.12 Local authorities have a significant role to play in supporting inter faith work in schools. One important way in which this can be achieved is through the support they give for their Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE). A SACRE is a locally representative inter faith body whose broad role is to support the effective provision of RE and collective worship in local schools. Examples of good practice by SACREs include facilitating inter faith activities in and between schools.

2.13 We have also seen a greater emphasis on inter faith activity in further and higher education, with regional development officers providing support for multi faith student activities and multi faith chaplains encouraging dialogue between students from different backgrounds.

2.14 It is important to acknowledge that different beliefs, cultural backgrounds and perspectives can lead to disagreement, tension and even conflict. However it is equally important to recognise that distinctiveness does not automatically mean division and that opportunities to express shared concerns, shared values and to carry out shared activities can bridge potential divides. The Commission on Integration and Cohesion recommended that a programme should be developed to increase religious literacy on the part of public agencies and we are currently considering our response to this.

Case Study 2: Opportunities for learning which build understanding

Building Bridges Pendle has developed an innovative approach to promoting Integration and Cohesion through Inter Faith Education in Primary and Secondary Schools.

Their education programmes are delivered on the ethos of asking pupils to reflect on their 'Faith or human values', which can either be based on Religious teachings or, if pupils do not follow any Religion, they can be based on teachings from their parents or guardians. On the basis of common values which are shared as human beings, the programme brings into the classroom an agenda of real world issues which children can analyse and discuss. Pupils are invited to reflect and assess their personal attitudes towards diversity, regardless of the level of ethnic and faith mix in their school. Are these attitudes amongst those which will lead to positive behaviour promoting respect and tolerance, peace and love? Or are they going to encourage behaviour which will lead to division and conflict? Questions are asked and a space requested where pupils can reflect for themselves on the consequences of not getting on with each other.

Building Bridges Pendle aims through the delivery of these programmes to reinforce a concept to young people that their actions and attitudes will impact on the future of community relations in their school, in their neighbourhood and in the wider society. They present a vision of what the probable outcomes of their attitudes towards diversity will be – either they will grow up into a community where there is integration and cohesion, or they will grow up into a community where there is conflict, hatred, misunderstanding and division. The choice is theirs.

Question 4: Are there appropriate opportunities in your community and your local area to learn about different faiths and beliefs?

Question 5: How do we improve opportunities for learning about different religions and beliefs and build on existing best practice?

Question 6: How best can different faith communities work together whilst retaining their distinctiveness?

Question 7: How can the lessons learned and experiences gained from inter faith dialogue and social action help to build relationships with people from different communities more widely?

Question 8: What role or roles do you envisage government, faith communities, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith

organisations and wider civil society playing in building understanding about different beliefs and practices?

3. Shared spaces for interaction and social action

2.15 The Commission on Integration and Cohesion identified that shared spaces – including parks, leisure centres, and shops, as well as transport networks – that are safe and well managed are important in encouraging interaction and in creating opportunities for people to pursue shared activities.

2.16 There are approximately 54,000 places of worship in the UK and they are found in all parts of all our communities from large cities to small rural villages. These spaces are used by many communities, not just faith communities, and often function as the primary resources and buildings for community spaces and essential meeting places.

2.17 Evaluation of the first round of the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF) carried out by the Community Development Foundation found that many of the organisations funded created 'everyday, often unintentional, spaces that promote integration, create safe, free and active spaces, and provide opportunities for expression, empowerment and support.'[18] The evaluation also found that there was also a need for women only spaces and provision of safe spaces for young people.

Case Study 3: Shared spaces for interaction and social action

Stranton Church, Hartlepool, Church of England (North East). The grant from the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund supported work on the Burbank Estate, which is one of the most deprived areas of the country. The grant was used to:

- Create a new residents' group to represent the 1,500 people who live on the estate. The Burbank Uniting Residents Together group represents and serves the whole population of the estate and plays a key role in fostering better community relations.

- Support a community garden initiative. A new community garden was created and is now maintained by residents, with support from the local authority.

- Organise a new 'reclaim the back lane' initiative to establish safe areas for residents and their children. This initiative was carried out by community volunteers and the local authority.

- Set up an after school club to support school children and a new project for young people to foster their input into the local community.

This work helped to establish good working relationships with local agencies, including the local authority, housing associations, the police and local

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[18] *Faith based organisations and the hidden power of local community spaces*, Malcolm James, Community Development Foundation, July 2007

schools.

2.18 The Local Government White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communitie*s recognised that when given the right opportunities more and more people proactively help to make their neighbourhood a better place to live. One of the ways this is being done is through communities taking over the ownership or management of a public asset such as a community centre, redundant school building, swimming pool or green space, to ensure that it is used in a way that best serves the needs and interests of the local community.

2.19 The Government asked Barry Quirk, Chief Executive of the London Borough of Lewisham, to lead a review to help ensure that existing powers and policies that support community ownership or management of assets are effective and that practical ways are found to overcome any remaining unnecessary barriers. *Making Assets Work: the Quirk Review of community management and ownership of public assets* was presented to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in May 2007.[19] The Review recognised the contribution that shared use of public assets or spaces can make to cohesion by creating opportunities for people from different backgrounds to come together, and that asset ownership can have a major effect in building community confidence and a sense of worth. The Government has accepted

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[19] *Making assets work: The Quirk Review of community management and ownership of public assets*
www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/makingassetswork

the recommendations of the review, and implementation is now underway.[20]

Question 9: What spaces are being used by faith communities for inter faith dialogue and social action?

Question 10: What barriers are there to sharing spaces?

Question 11: What role or roles do you envisage government, faith communities, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and wider civil society playing to create shared spaces?

4. Confidence and skills to bridge and link

2.20 Moving from 'bonding' social capital to 'bridging' and 'linking' requires confidence and knowledge both to reach out beyond the familiar in the first place, and then establish and sustain a meaningful and purposeful relationship with others.

2.21 There are some measures being undertaken to develop leadership within faith communities. For example the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and Communities and Local Government are currently working with the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) to deliver a fully-accredited Continuous Professional Development Programme for Faith Leaders. This course will help faith leaders and workers understand their responsibilities relating to a number of areas including developing the skills to engage with communities more effectively.

2.22 However there is also a need to develop confidence in communities as a whole and there may be a need for communities and Government to challenge the perspective that distinctiveness will be lost or assimilated through interactions with other strong identities.

2.23 We know that faith is an important driver behind volunteering and civil renewal activities. The 2005 Citizenship Survey found that 52 per cent of people who actively practised a religion participated in civic activism and civic consultation compared to 45 per cent of people who did not.[21] There are over 23,000 religious charities working in England and Wales and many faith-based organisations play an important and distinctive role in the voluntary and community sector providing essential services to local communities. Research has shown that the faith based and inter faith organisations rely heavily upon volunteers and that there is a need to support and develop access to existing voluntary and community sector/third sector networks. However there is some

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[20] *Opening the transfer window: The government's response to the Quirk Review of Community management and ownership of public assets* www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/322579

[21] Citizenship Survey, Home Office/Communities and Local Government, 2005. Civil renewal activities include: civic activism (involvement in decision making about local issues or services, or the actual provision of these services); civic consultation (active engagement in a consultation about local services); and civic participation (wider forms of engagement in democratic processes, eg contacting an elected representative or signing a petition)

anecdotal evidence that working in partnership with these networks can at times be difficult.

2.24 We have been working with the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action and the Church Urban Fund on producing a short leaflet of case studies and good practice guidance for partnership working between voluntary and community sector and other third sector infrastructure bodies and local faith communities.

2.25 The recent consultation on the future role of the third sector in social and economic regeneration highlighted that faith based organisations (amongst others) felt that they are disadvantaged, particularly in relation to accessing mainstream grant funding.[22] The Commission on Integration and Cohesion also recognised this as an issue and recommended that a set of clear guidelines be developed to enable Local Authorities and others to award public service contracts to faith based bodies. The Commission identified that the Faithworks Charter[23] illustrates some of the ground it would be useful to explore. The Government hopes to make a response to this recommendation in January 2008.

2.26 In October 2007, Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Association published *An Action Plan for Community Empowerment: Building on success*. This sets out a joint action plan for widening and deepening empowerment opportunities locally; supporting and enabling people to take up empowerment opportunities; and strengthening local representative democracy. It contains over 20 actions towards giving citizens and communities a greater say in the policies and services that affect them and their local areas, and feedback will be used to shape the ongoing cross-government programme. Comments and views are requested by 19 January 2008. You can find out more about the Action Plan and details of how to feed in your views here:
www.communities.gov.uk/communities/communityempowerment/actionplan/

2.27 We will be exploring how the actions set out in the Action Plan can help support increased inter faith activity at the local level, and encourage you to contribute your views.

2.28 The Local Government White Paper: *Strong and Prosperous Communities* included a commitment to ensure the sound involvement of the third sector in local strategic partnerships (LSPs). To help fulfil this commitment, Communities and Local Government has recently opened consultation on a draft document entitled *Principles of representation: A framework for effective third sector participation in Local Strategic Partnerships*. This makes reference to two key reports into the involvement of faith communities in LSPs.[24] Faith

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[22] www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/third_sector_review/Third_sector_review_final_report.aspx

[23] www.faithworks.info/Standard.asp?id=7432

[24] The two reports referenced are: *Faith in LSPs?*, Churches Regional Network, December 2006 (this relates to faith

communities are encouraged to contribute to that consultation which is open until 12 February 2008. Further details about the consultation can be found here:
www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/principlesofrepresentation

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Case Study 4: Developing the skills and confidence to bridge and link

The Churches' Regional Commission in the North East (FiNER Project) helped faith communities in the North East have a better understanding of how they can engage effectively with local authorities and public services. The project organised a number of events and workshops for faith communities, local authorities, public and voluntary sector organisations. The main aim of these events was to engage faith communities in strategic planning and to develop a coherent strategy of engagement for the North East faith sector. Through participating in these events many faith communities developed a better understanding of how they could contribute to local strategic agendas; the events also helped to increase the 'religious literacy' in civic structures. The workshops fostered discussion and dialogue and enabled the faith and the public sector representatives to meet and explore opportunities for their future work together.

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involvement in LSPs in the North West, London, East of England and North East); and, *Faithful Representation: faith representatives on local public partnerships*, Church Urban Fund, September 2006

Question 12: Access to funding, leadership skills, and misconceptions about the role of faith in public life have all been recognised as issues which can limit the ability of faith communities to bridge and link. Are there other barriers in your community or local area which need to be overcome? Who needs to take action, and what do they need to do?

Question 13: To what extent does inter faith social action in your local area enable you to work side by side with people who have no religious belief? How might social action involving faith communities and wider civil society be increased and strengthened?

Question 14: What role or roles do you envisage government, faith communities, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and wider civil society playing to increase the level and scope of inter faith social action?

Question 15: How are you promoting and encouraging inter faith activity and sharing best practice? What are the best ways of encouraging more people to take part? What role might Government play to champion this?

The challenges and barriers to inter faith activity experienced by women and young people

Specific barriers experienced by women

2.29 Research carried out by the Inter Faith Network has revealed that women who seek to play a full role in inter faith activity often face a number of barriers including lack of time, lack of support from their family and the wider community, and the ways and attitudes of some men.[25] Other issues identified include the small number of female faith leaders, cultural and language barriers, lack of knowledge or misinformation about other faith groups and lack of leadership skills.

2.30 The barriers experienced by some women in participating in inter faith activity has led to suggestions that there is a need for them to create their own spaces for inter faith activity with minimal involvement from men. The provision of some 'women only' inter faith activities may also help to engage a greater number of women, particularly those who may find it difficult to access activities where men are present. At the same time, communities and public bodies need to identify ways in which women can be empowered to participate in general inter faith activity.

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[25] *Women's Inter Faith Initiatives in the UK: A Survey*, A report by Fatheena Mubarak for the Inter Faith Network for the UK, 2006

2.31 There are inter faith initiatives which aim to empower women, and as a result of the support received from the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF), more projects are supporting women in learning new skills, building networks, increasing their social capital, taking on leadership roles and influencing decision making[26]. This has led to women feeling better able to effect change in their local area. Organisations supported by the FCCBF have also demonstrated they can act as spaces of active engagement for women – within both their own communities and their wider local community.

Case study 5: Women taking part in inter faith activity

Fusion Youth Project, West Midlands

Fusion Youth Project, West Midlands has developed services that enable young women of different faiths to access information and develop skills so that they are empowered to help themselves. It also helps young people to become aware of their role and contribution within their local areas, which will help support community cohesion. Jane Andrews, Senior Youth Worker explained: *'Fusion Youth Project works with young women from many faith traditions. The project helps the teenage young women to develop their self-esteem and establish their identity both as an individual and as part of the communities they belong to. The provision of self-help groups aids them through this period of their lives and equips them to deal with conflict and tensions which they might face in the future.'*

Question 16: How might the barriers experienced by women be overcome?

Question 17: What role or roles do you envisage government, faith communities, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and wider civil society playing in overcoming these?

Specific barriers experienced by young people

2.32 Inter faith activity can offer young people 'vehicles' to deliver outcomes such as regeneration projects and community based initiatives. It can also be an effective way of giving leadership skills and opportunities to young people, delivering services which benefit the wider community, promoting cohesion and breaking down barriers. It is therefore vital that opportunities are available for young people to take part in inter faith dialogue and social action.

2.33 Research carried out by the Community Development Foundation into the impact of FCCBF funded projects revealed that young people often feel that they are not listened to, that their views do not count, and that they lack the experience to get involved. Organisations supported by FCCBF have acted as focal points of active

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[26] www.cdf.org.uk/SITE/UPLOAD/DOCUMENT/Research%20and%20Evaluation/report_surveys_of_women_final_version.pdf

engagement and participation both within faith groups and with the wider community - leading to feelings of empowerment and a better perception of the ability of young people to effect change.

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2.34 The Government believes it is important to address the barriers to full participation experienced by young people and empower them to play a positive role in the design and delivery of inter faith activity. Attention should be given to the provision of appropriately signposted spaces that young people deem to be safe and engaging - and that capitalise on their potential to participate in civil renewal and empowerment activities.

2.35 In July 2007, the Government published *Aiming high for young people: a ten year strategy for positive activities*. This aims to ensure that all young people have access to the support and opportunities they want and need to make a positive contribution to society. The strategy identified that positive activities, particularly volunteering and inter-generational activities, can help to build better relations across the generations and between different groups of young people. Over the winter we will be exploring how the strategy might support the greater involvement of young people in inter faith activities.

Question 18: How might the barriers experienced by young people be overcome?

Question 19: What role or roles do you envisage government, faith communities, faith and non-faith based organisations, inter faith organisations and wider civil society playing in overcoming these?

Developing the evidence base for inter faith activity

2.36 In order to develop our understanding of how we can all better support inter faith social action, we have commissioned the Faith Based Regeneration Network to carry out a short piece of research to explore the contribution that faith based social action makes to bridging and linking social capital.

2.37 The Inter Faith Network is working with the Faith Based Regeneration Network on two inter related pieces of research exploring the role of Regional Faith Forums in relation to inter faith dialogue and social action, and the relationships between Regional Faith Forums and other regional bodies.

2.38 The Local Government Association, in partnership with the Inter Faith Network, is also planning research to explore the involvement of local authorities in local inter faith activity.

2.39 We will use the findings from these pieces of research and your responses to this consultation paper to inform the framework for partnership.

Question 20: What can successful existing approaches tell us about the key building blocks needed for inter faith dialogue and social action?

Section 3

Next steps

We are working to publish a final strategy in late Spring 2008 as follows:

17th December 2007   Consultation opens

February 2008
Findings from research into Regional Faith Forums and Inter faith social action expected

7th March 2008   Consultation closes

Late Spring 2008
Publish final strategy and summary of consultation responses

By end 2008   Detailed implementation underway

Section 4

Your views

The consultation period runs from 17th December 2007 to 7th March 2008.

Responses to this consultation will be used by Government and key partners to develop the final strategy and to inform plans for implementation. If you do not wish your response to be shared with non-Government partners in this way please make this clear in your response.

You can read this discussion paper and download a consultation response form through the Communities and Local Government web site: www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/publications/consultations

Please send your comments by email to:
interfaith@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Or by post to:

Towards a framework for inter faith dialogue and social action
Department for Communities and Local Government
7th Floor
Zone H9
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU

Any queries about this discussion paper should be sent to this address, or, preferably, to the email address above.

Hard copies are available from Communities and Local Government Publications PO Box 236, Wetherby, West Yorkshire LS23 7NB. Tel: 08701 226 236. Fax: 08701 226 237.
Email: communities@twoten.com

A summary of responses to this consultation will be published by 1 June 2008 on the Communities and Local Government website: www.communities.gov.uk

Section 5

The consultation criteria

5.1   The Government has adopted a code of practice on consultations.

5.2   The criteria below apply to all UK national public consultations on the basis of a
document in electronic or printed form. They will often be relevant to other sorts
of consultation. Though they have no legal force, and cannot prevail over
statutory or other mandatory external requirements (eg, under European
Community Law), they should otherwise generally be regarded as binding on
UK departments and their agencies, unless ministers conclude that exceptional
circumstances require a departure.

1. Consult widely throughout the process, allowing a minimum of 12 weeks for
   written consultation at least once during the development of the policy.

2. Be clear about what your proposals are, who may be affected, what
   questions are being asked and the timescale for responses.

3. Ensure that your consultation is clear, concise and widely accessible.

4. Give feedback regarding the responses received and how the consultation
   process influenced the policy.

5. Monitor your department's effectiveness at consultation, including through
   the use of a designated consultation co-ordinator.

6. Ensure your consultation follows better regulation best practice, including
   carrying out an Impact Assessment if appropriate.

5.3   The full consultation code may be viewed at:
www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/Consultation/Introduction.htm

5.4   Are you satisfied that this consultation has followed these criteria? If not, or you have any other observations about ways of improving the consultation process please contact:

Albert Joyce
Communities and Local Government Consultation Co-ordinator
Zone 6/H10
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

or by e-mail to:
albert.joyce@communities.gsi.gov.uk

5.5   Please note that responses to the consultation itself should be sent to the addresses shown in Section 4.