

West End Refugee Service

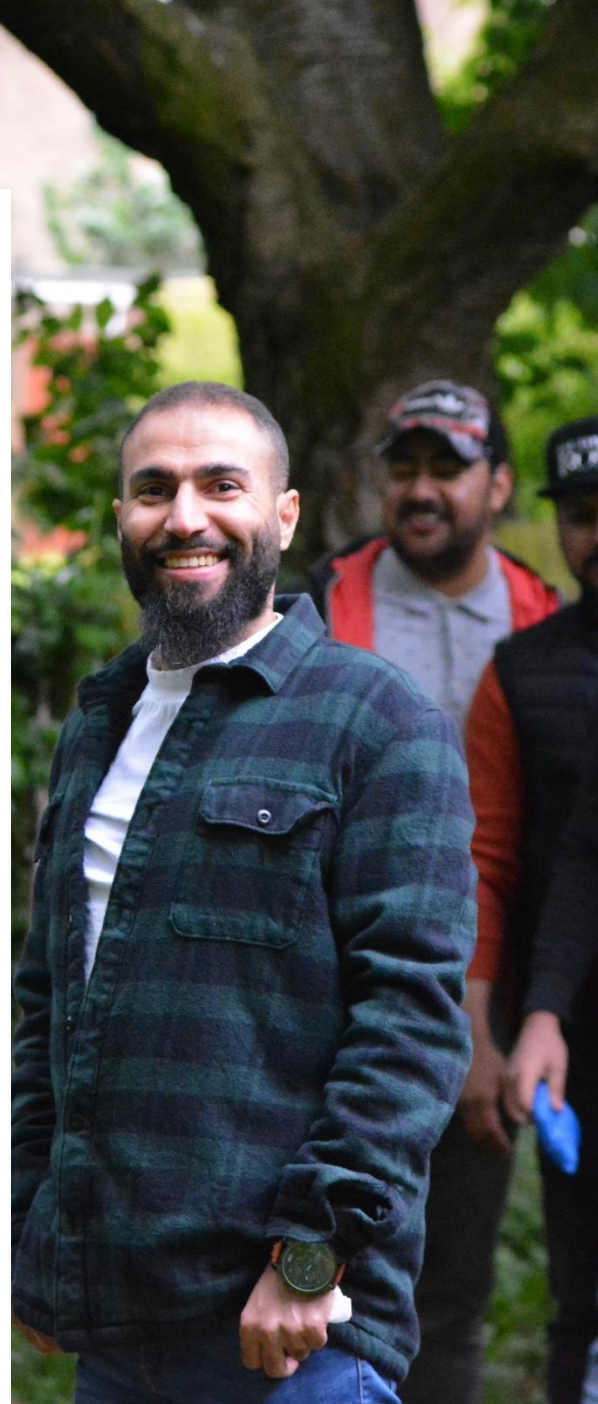
**Consultation Paper on Future Strategy
(2024-2029)**

Green Paper

Consultation from

7 December 2023 until 31 January 2024

*'A North East Charity at the cutting edge,
improving opportunities and lives for those
seeking asylum and refugees'*



December 2023

WEST END REFUGEE SERVICE

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Future Challenges and Priorities to Enhance Support for Asylum Seekers and Refugees in the Tyneside Area

I Executive Summary

With over two decades helping refugees and people seeking asylum, the West End Refugee Service (WERS) continues to build on its track record and is currently developing an ambitious 2024-2029 Strategy and Plan. This comes at a time when the asylum environment is uncertain, which is one of many reasons that WERS wishes to consult with its communities, clients, volunteers, partners, and funders, on key questions that need addressing to inform the future provision of services. The consideration of these and other questions through a consultation process will help WERS apply its many distinctive strengths to enhance the lives of those in need.

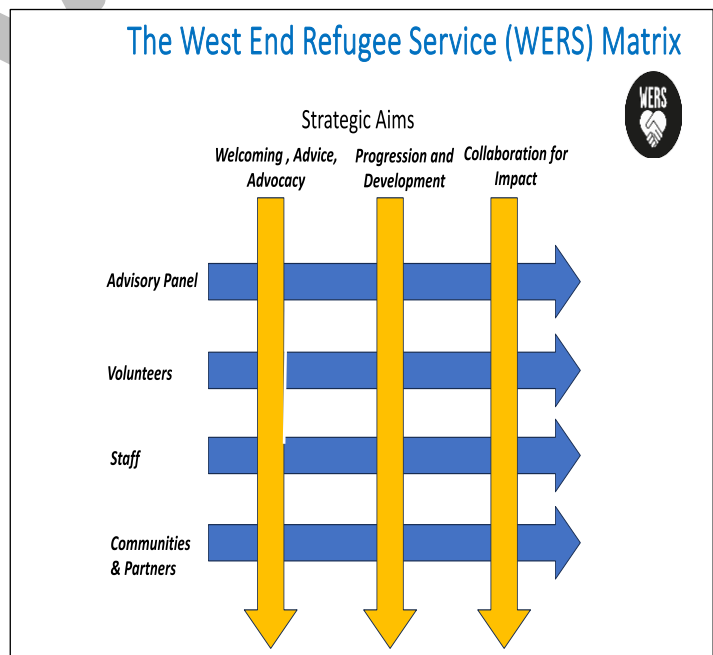
The climate emergency plus global conflicts are anticipated to significantly shape the future of migration as environmental uncertainties and volatility intensify, prompting organisation's like us to engage with stakeholders in addressing key questions to better inform the provision of services in the face of evolving migration patterns and challenges.

The engine room of the consultation has been driven and informed by our Advisory Panel who are all members with 'lived experience' of the UK asylum system. These will lead and inform key aspects of this consultation from which we will direct our bold and ambitious 5-year strategy and plan, from April 2024. This will set out our priorities to sustain our work and deliver real impact and benefit for people seeking asylum and refugees.

We hope the consultation will:

- 1) Say what we believe is unacceptable for our clients!
- 2) Go where we have never gone before!
- 3) Show how it should be done!

The Culture of WERS focuses on a strong client perspective where the platform for delivery and its operational plan is built around the WERS matrix, which integrates WERS' three Strategic aims with key stakeholder groups and our communities and partners.



II Why are we Consulting?

Our core mission revolves around effecting positive change for asylum seekers and refugees. This commitment is actualised through our programmes, the creation of opportunities for community engagement and growth, and our steadfast advocacy against systemic injustices. Central to the ethos of WERS is the profound experiences of the individuals we support. As we embark on this journey, we aspire to amplify the voices of those seeking sanctuary in the UK. **By integrating their lived experiences of the UK asylum system into our initiatives at every level, we aspire to serve as a platform for their narratives to shape our actions.**

This consultation paper, shaped collaboratively with our community and partners, presents a comprehensive overview of the current landscape, highlighting key challenges, issues, and concerns that resonate within our community, and aims to propose pathways for effective resolution. The paper delves into the intricate landscape of human displacement and the pursuit of sanctuary, focusing on the West End Refugee Service (WERS) as a catalyst for positive change for asylum seekers and refugees. Guided by our core values - **Equity, Compassion, Changemaking, and Inclusion** - our objective is to address challenges, enhance support systems, and create opportunities within the North East region for individuals seeking asylum and refugees.

This document invites your engagement, insights, and reflections as we collectively chart a path towards a more inclusive and empowered future for asylum seekers and refugees in the North East. Join us in this endeavour to reshape narratives and create a future where every voice thrives, recognising your participation is integral as we navigate this transformative journey.

III Vision & Roadmap

As a grassroots charity embedded in a community setting, WERS intends to reach out through this **green paper consultation** by sharing and understanding the distinctive strengths of the Charity and identify what local reform can achieve through its sustainable programmes. We are committed to identify and demonstrate impact through our progress and impact measures from our strategy roadmap, overseen by our Board of Trustees and accessed by people seeking asylum and refugees themselves.



WERS Vision, sets out: *'A welcoming place for people seeking asylum and refugees where they find safety, support, have their human rights respected and can access opportunities to rebuild their lives, fulfil their potential, free of prejudice'. Our mission which explains why we exist, incorporating our three strategic aims, as illustrated overleaf.*



Our **MISSION** at WERS is to work to achieve positive change for people seeking asylum and refugees through:

- our direct support services,
- creating opportunities for people to develop and thrive in their local communities,
- our work with collaborative partners to raise awareness and influence decision-makers.



OUR THREE STRATEGY AIMS



Welcoming, Advice & Advocacy

We provide advice and practical support to people seeking sanctuary and help refugees living in the North East to be welcomed and feel safe, respected and understood as members of our diverse community.



DEVELOPMENT AND PROGRESSION

Our programmes are designed to empower people seeking asylum and refugees by enhancing their skills and potential through volunteering with local partners and helping to make a meaningful contribution to society.



COLLABORATION FOR IMPACT

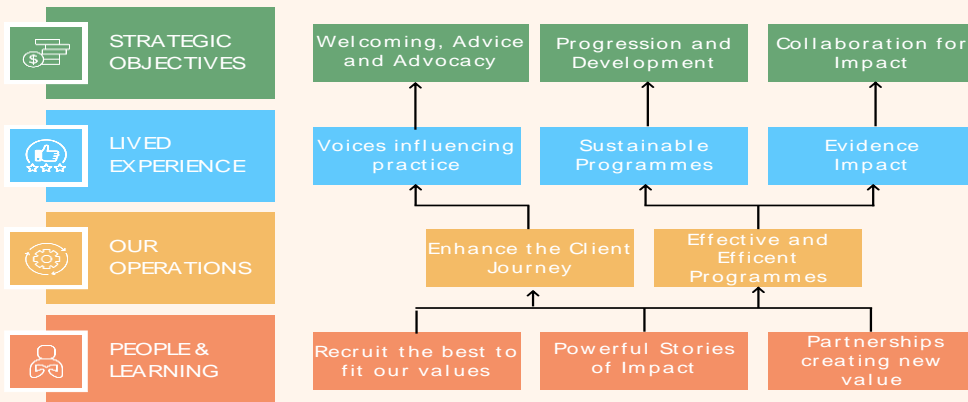
Our partnerships bring together people seeking asylum and refugees, volunteers, partners, sponsors, donors and staff to showcase the sustainable impact of our work through case studies, reports, academic assessments and evaluations.

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Service delivery will be supported by our strategy roadmap which aligns and communicates what WERS wishes wants to achieve to the external environment, through three priorities'

WERS (DRAFT) STRATEGY MAP

At WERS our Mission is to achieve positive change for asylum seekers and refugees through our direct support services, by creating opportunities for people to engage and thrive in their local communities and through our work raising awareness, promoting good practice and challenging injustices in the system.



IV Lived Voices in the North East - Our Starting Point!

WERS continues to capture and share the personal experiences of people seeking asylum and refugees that have arrived in the North East. Each experience brings its own story, and so we have a passionate desire to help those most adversely affected and build a better environment for others.

Lived experience will cover every aspect of the Consultation and will form the basis of our dialogue with our volunteers, statutory organisations, partners and funders. Internally, we have also set out an agreed set of behaviours and expectations of our workforce through our integrated teams so we are all fully aligned to the needs of those seeking asylum and refugees. As legislation and policy struggle to cope, we believe there are several changes within the constraints of the system that can make positive impact on the lives of people seeking asylum and refugees.

The voices of people with lived experience of the UK asylum system will shape the Consultation on this green paper, which has been significantly assisted through increasing levels of diversity of our staff, volunteers and Trustees over the past 6 months and the creation of our Advisory Panel.



'We celebrate increasing diversity within our team, which includes individuals from various backgrounds and skill sets. We are supported by an amazing group of volunteers and colleagues from the Advisory Panel and in partnership with our funders they help us provide excellent service to everyone we work with'.

V Progress in Community Engagement

The focal points that have emerged so far from our community engagement are as follows:

a) Current Support Landscape and Rationale for Improvement

- i. We are undertaking an overview of the current services and support offered to people seeking asylum and refugees, particularly around our welcoming, advice and advocacy services and our development programmes, such as Skillsmatch.
- ii. We are identifying challenges and gaps in the existing support system on what WERS is undertaking and where signposting might be directed to collaborative partners.
- iii. We are looking at the rationale for seeking input to enhance the quality and effectiveness of assistance through dialogue, with our clients, volunteers and staff

b) Proposed Enhancements and Service Expansion

- i. We wish to present potential improvements and expanded services, such as our Weekly Welcomes, establish a more integrated approach to buddying across; Dropins, Advice and Advocacy, Skillsmatch, to our Activities and Connections Programme.
- ii. We intend to develop our vision and plan to establish Peer Advisors from lived experience of the UK asylum system.
- iii. The description of each of our enhancements and the modelling of impact with such innovations through our roadmap will help to provide a detailed description of each enhancement, including its intended impact.
- iv. We will discuss the benefits and evaluation of these changes, that bring value to the community.
- v. Building on the legacy of the flagship Skillsmatch program, there is a strong commitment to expanding this project in response to the demand and feedback from clients, **from Skillsmatch to Skillsmaster** The focus is on providing placements that not only enhance individuals' social skills but also cultivate their perspective employment skills and interests, aiming to empower them for a meaningful economic impact on society once their asylum claims are processed.

c) Collaboration with Stakeholders

- I. We are identifying stakeholders involved in asylum seeker and refugee support.
- II. We are explaining ways stakeholders can contribute to the consultation process both online and through our strategic collaboration event at our **AGM on 7th December**
- III. We intend to demonstrate examples of partnership opportunities to strengthen community involvement.

d) Addressing Cultural and Language Diversity

Diversity is a cornerstone of our community, encompassing various cultural backgrounds and languages. In this section, we delve into the significance of cultural sensitivity and linguistic appropriateness in our support initiatives. Strategies are outlined to ensure that our services are inclusive and resonate with the diverse identities of people seeking asylum and refugees.

- I. **Language Accessibility:** We commit to offering translation assistance upon request, ensuring our resources are comprehensible to diverse language speakers.
- II. **Inclusive Focus Groups:** To encourage diverse perspectives, travel expenses for focus group attendees will be covered, enabling active participation. Sessions can be conducted online or in person, with technical assistance available if required. Our recent focus group with females seeking asylum and refugees and national universities are a good illustration of the link between our work of community activity and wellbeing.
- III. **Versatile Feedback Options:** Your insights matter. You can share your feedback through any means you would like, from online and digital options to face-to-face discussions.
- IV. **Agility of our working model:** WERS aims to build upon its legacy of providing personalised support by investing in the enhancement of its infrastructure over the last 12 months. Thanks to the generosity of funders, including IKEA, we have started work on creating trauma-informed spaces within our headquarters. This investment reflects a commitment to ensuring that the internal environment is not only physically secure but also fosters a sense of safety and comfort, allowing individuals to feel at home as they receive support and services

e) Implementation Strategy

Our roadmap which will be finalised by April 2024, will incorporate an Operational Plan which will monitor measures of progress against our key programmes

V1 Outputs from initial discussions

Annexe One outlines key points that the **WERS Advisory Panel** wishes to highlight from meetings in September 2023.

Annexe Two outlines the outputs from our **Community Development Event** with our volunteers, advisory panel and staff in November 2023

Strategic Priorities

VII Strategic Objective One: Welcoming, Advice and Advocacy

WERS offers information, advice and practical support to people seeking asylum, refugees and migrants arriving and living in the local community so they are welcomed, feel safe, respected, and understood as members of our diverse community. Building on our existing arrangements, **our vision** for people seeking asylum and refugees will be achieved through the following activities:



- **Welcoming, Advice & Advocacy:** We aim to build trust with our clients by creating an informal environment that encourages open communication, allows time to open up and strengthens our connections within the community. We will further strengthen access and the level of support to our clients where they need help, such as housing, education, health, welfare, legal advice etc, where we can direct or connect to the support required. People will be able to walk in and get help which includes:
 - Immediate support with material goods such as food vouchers, sim cards, clothing, mobile phones, toiletries
 - Emotional support
 - Access to services e.g. translator, GPs, Local MP
 - Access to computers, internet, IT devices
 - Personalised casework support where WERS has expertise
- **WERS Weekly Welcome:** this forms the heartbeat of WERS by providing a connecting place for the WERS community and build a strong collective voice with our clients, volunteers, funders and partner organisations. As a grass-roots charity we are strengthening our links and relationships with the Hub Advice Project at Westgate Baptist Church and have established WERS Weekly Sessions which will enable WERS to deepen its links and impact in the local community.
- **Outreach:** Sensitive to national policy we will engage with potential clients in hotels in what we do and how we may be able to help. To improve access and the quality of legal support we intend to move towards legal accreditation in immigration (Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner Services) and propose to work closely with Justice First in Stockton and fully integrate with the wider partnership of Justice Together and the Newcastle Law Centre.

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- **Hardship fund:** we intend to continually strengthen this fund which provides regular financial and wraparound support to people seeking asylum who have received a negative decision on their asylum claim. We will continue to provide wellbeing check-ins and direct emotional support for those on the Fund.
 - **Collaboration with Partner Organisations:** we will develop pathway routes for the different types of support that we may not be able to help with directly. We will rebuild, establish and maintain connections with partner organisations to better support our clients.

Our questions to you

1) Getting better on what we already do

- a. How can we be more welcoming to make people seeking asylum and refugees feel more supported and included?
- b. What might draw people to our weekly welcomes?
- c. How might we re-energise the clothing store?
- d. How can volunteers significantly contribute to the drop-ins and provide case support?

2) Developing new services

- a. What kind of activities and programmes will make people seeking asylum and refugees more self-sufficient and confident, while still receiving necessary support?
- b. Given the changing environment, what should be our approach to outreach services to build social and ongoing support?
- c. How can we use technology to help people seeking asylum and refugees find the right support for advice and advocacy?
- d. What ideas do you have for our outreach offering to be?

3) How we work with other organisations

- a. How might our partners in the local community help our weekly welcomes?
- b. What services do you think we should be providing casework?

4) Making the biggest difference

- a. What initiatives or approaches have shown the most positive impact on the lives of people seeking asylum and refugees in the region so far?

VIII Strategic Objective Two: Development & Progression

As a grass root charity, **our vision** is particularly distinctive in supporting and enhancing the potential skills and capabilities of people seeking asylum and refugees. We believe that asylum seekers and refugees have significant unlocked potential, but the asylum system does not enable them to use their potential or capabilities. Therefore, WERS will continue to play a significant leadership role across the system by finding positive and creative ways to enable people seeking asylum and refugees to utilise their skills and capabilities. We will do this through our integrated programmes of buddying, Skillsmatch and activities and we will seek resources to maintain and enhance this work.



We aim to build trust with our clients by creating an informal environment that encourages open communication, allows time to open up and strengthens our connections within the community.

Building on the above platform, our vision will focus on:

- **Befriending & Skillsmatch:** from client, partner and volunteer feedback we intend to integrate the befriending programme from advice and advocacy , through Skillsmatch to our Activities and Connections programme. We are also looking at redesigning and strengthening our Skillsmatch programme to align skills, experience and interest to volunteer opportunities and enable people to become more independent. This vision will ensure:
 - Clients feel empowered to have a positive impact on the community (change making)
 - Clients feel they are using their skills for good and gaining valuable experience (equity)
 - Clients feel welcomed, supported and integrated in the local community in a number of sectors (inclusion)
 - WERS volunteers (Skillsmatch mentors) feel valued and rewarded for the work they do

- **Sport and cultural activities:** we intend to increasingly focus on bids where activities continue after the duration of the grants, and hence the programme becomes sustainable. Our recent success in our Activities and Connections Programme is a good

example of this approach. This grant will help us to create connections, opportunities and awareness in sport and culture with people seeking sanctuary, as we aim to support their overall wellbeing.

- **Volunteering & Wellbeing Strategy:** Volunteers play a crucial role in our operations, contributing to the sustainability and community cohesion of our initiatives. Their commitment is invaluable shaping the legacy of WERS by actively participating in various aspects of our programmes. We highly value their dedication, recognising that the volunteering experience not only enriches our operations but also creates a lasting impact, fostering a sense of shared purpose and connection within the community. We intend to work closely with people seeking asylum and refugees to develop and fully own the development of our volunteering and wellbeing strategy, which will incorporate plans for; volunteering, wellbeing and community development.

Our questions to you

1) Getting better on what we already do

- a. How can we effectively use the skills and expertise of our volunteers to benefit people seeking asylum and refugees?
- b. What assurances do we provide around safeguarding?

2) Developing New Services

- a. How can we use technology to help people seeking asylum and refugees find the right support?
- b. Can you think of one change or improvement you would like to see in the next 6-12 months?
- c. How do we get befriending up and running?

3) How we work with other organisations

- a. From our clients and volunteers how might we build a team of peer advocates, so people seeking asylum and refugees are directed and informed by the knowledge of those with lived experience of the UK asylum system?

4) Making the biggest difference

- a. How will we make a sound judgement on the benefits of such programmes?
- b. Should we have a volunteer forum to enhance feedback and experience from volunteers?

IX Strategic Objective Three: Collaboration for Impact

The considerable achievements that WERS has delivered collaboratively are primarily attributed to its partnerships. These have created new value and benefits to clients, that individuals or partners cannot achieve alone. Such an approach requires:

- Mutual trust
- Pooling resources
- Letting go of historic or territorial legacies for the wider benefit
- Ensuring at the onset that we and our partners are clear and committed to ‘lived experience of the UK asylum system being at the centre of the wider system’



Our **vision** is to work in collaboration with our; people seeking asylum and refugees; volunteers; partners; sponsors and donors and staff, demonstrating impact through case studies, reports, academic assessment and evaluation. Our work with Partner organisations includes the following:

- **Awareness Raising:** Delivering talks and workshops to community groups, schools, and universities regarding the experience of refugees living in the North East, the refugee crisis, and ongoing global developments.
- **Academic Collaborations:** We will build on progress we have made with a number of universities in forming strong collaborations. We intend to further strengthen our relationships with academics in sociology at Newcastle University to target our collective work on a) lived experience of the UK asylum system and b) the impact of community integration from our programmes as a 2-way learning process.
- **Peer Advocacy (Advisors):** We will strength our dialogue with partners in the North East to develop a sustainable approach for Peer Advisors and develop this on an incremental basis. This recognises the current people seeking asylum system needs to be redesigned to be ‘fit for purpose’, driven by lived experience of the UK asylum system!
- **Dance City:** We will establish the 7 Bridges Café with Dance City, to provide food as a means and place for engagement and help to develop the skills and capabilities of those people seeking asylum and refugees.

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- **Newcastle City of Sanctuary:** We will continue to support and strengthen and influence the wider system to support those people seeking asylum and refugees so there is a joined up approach with less fragmentation and increase our presence within Sanctuary Schools.
 - **Campaign Group:** We will align the outcome of our work for effective dissemination (so it sticks!) and improve better awareness of the plight of refugees and people seeking asylum both locally and nationally through our Campaigns Committee, which strongly aligns and informs the work of Asylum Matters across the region.

1) Getting better on what we already do

- a. What might be the scope of a limited number of high impact collaborations with WERS Partners?
- b. How might we reduce duplication with Partner organisations in an informed way?

2) Developing New Services

- a. How might the different refugee organisations pool capability and resource to build a stronger system, but protect their identity?
- b. Where there is increasing demand on services, but limited supply, how might we address this?

3) How we work with other organisations

- a. What actually works from local approaches to campaigning?
- b. What type of workshops do you feel would be beneficial to run?
- c. What are the main interventions that improve awareness of asylum and its implications?

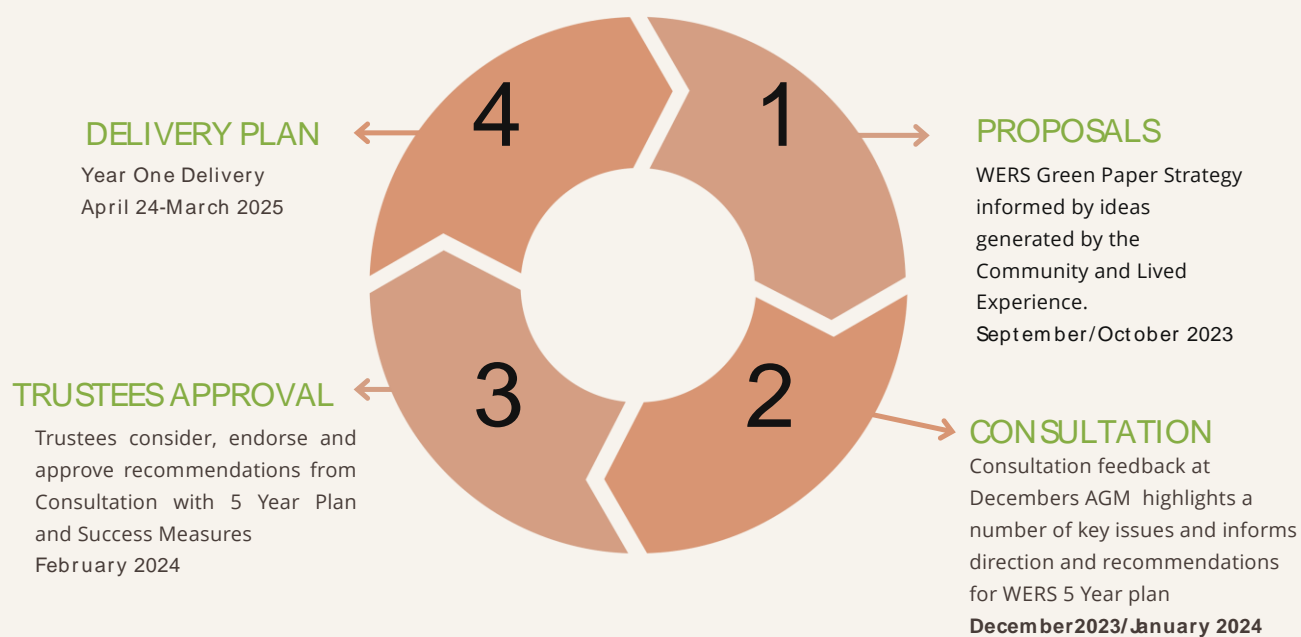
4) Making the biggest difference

- a. How should our work get disseminated and embedded at pace and scale in practice?

X Consultation Timeline

Consultation from 7 December 2023 until 31 January 2024

GREEN PAPER CONSULTATION PROCESS



XI Conclusion

From our Consultation launch on 7th December as part of the WERS Annual General Meeting, we will capture and respond to the main findings from the Consultation in December 2023 and January 2024, and share these with the WERS Community seeking endorsement and approval by WERS Trustees in February 2024. The work and process will reinforcement of the charity's commitment to collaboration and community engagement.

XII How to Contribute and Engage

Your voice matters, and we want to make it easy for you to share your thoughts, ideas, and suggestions. Here are the ways you can contribute and engage with us:

1. Anonymous Suggestion Box and contact details:

Use our anonymous form to provide your input conveniently and securely. You can also send us an email at info@wers.org.uk with your thoughts and suggestions.



2. WERS Consultation Event & Annual General Meeting:

12.00pm to 2.00pm at One Strawberry Lane on 7th December.

Join us for our for in-person discussions where you can speak your mind and interact with our team of staff, volunteers and Advisory Panel.

3. Multilingual Support:

We understand the importance of communication in your preferred language. Translations will be available in Farsi, Arabic, French, Kurdish, and Spanish. Please e-mail info@wers.org.uk to request this.

4. Learning from Others:

We're visiting other charities to gather insights on improving our services and exploring opportunities for collaboration. If you are a charitable organisation or one of our partners and would like to discuss your feedback and suggestions, please forward any ideas or suggestions to: info@wers.org.uk

Your participation is essential in shaping the future of our community. Share your experiences, suggestions, and feedback through the channels that suit you best.

Thank you for being a part of this journey!

December 2023

Annexe One

Advisory Panel Outputs of matters requiring consideration in WERS 5 Year Plan (October 2023)

Table One

- **Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI):** Addressing inequality, racism, and discrimination head-on for an environment of equity.
- **Guidance and Empowerment:** Clear asylum system guidance, rights information, and accessible support pathways.
- **Inclusivity and Marginalised Groups:** Tailored support for marginalised communities, including youth, women, and people of colour.
- **Safeguarding and Empowerment:** Enhanced safety through refined measures and procedures.
- **Lived Experience and Collaboration:** Amplifying lived experiences of the UK asylum system and integrating direct input in decision-making.
- **Professional Development and Sector Enhancement:** Improving case worker training and addressing sector gaps.
- **National Collaborations for Impact:** Forging potent national partnerships for amplified change.
- **Targeted Advocacy and Core Challenges:** Focused campaigns addressing core community issues.
- **Mental Health:** Prioritising mental health support and resources.
- **Basic Needs:** Ensuring access to essential necessities for all people seeking asylum and refugees.
- **Follow-up and Actions:** Addressing the lack of follow-up and effective actions by organisations, councils, and government.
- **Recognition and Fairness:** Equitable compensation and acknowledgement for volunteer refugees and asylum seekers.
- **WERS' Role in the Journey:** Championing empowerment, empathy, and transformation.

Annexe Two: Outputs from our Community Event in October 2023

In October 2023 we ran an integrated workshop with clients, volunteers and staff to focus on the outputs from the Advisory Panel from September and to concentrate on the delivery of work activities in a) Support Work. B) Skillsmatch and Buddying c) Activities and Connections. The outputs of this workshop are illustrated in Table 2

Table 2

WERS Diagnostics

WERS Joint Staff, Volunteers & Advisory Session (24th October 2023)

<p>Vision & Integration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WERS Roadmap sets direction • Future direction is about involving people and energising Teams • WERS will be the most integrated Charity in the North East providing sustainable capabilities for those seeking Asylum and Refugees • Consultation paper for the future strategy/plan for WERS for the next 4/5 years via Lived experience • Building collaborations across the North East • Emerging initiatives with Dance City, Hub, Universities, Foundations etc • Redesign delivery time to improve responsiveness of WERS under a number of clusters (Support Staff, Skillsmatch, Activities and Connections etc) • Drawing on new funding streams i.e Lottery 	<p>Skillsmatch</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow volunteers to make partnerships with organisations • Get organisations to come to weekly welcome/event to build ORGANIC relationships with individuals from organisations (it is true that they will be taking a slight risk with our clients, so we will be leaning on the good nature of individuals) • Best time for such an event is 4-7pm, so people can join from organisations after work • Must provide food for hotel stayers, ask if someone or a group would like to cook • Voluntary opportunities for clients – legal support/healthcare role in weekly welcome? • Discussion around buddying becoming part of skillsmatch - a buddy gauges the client's skills and capabilities before recommending them to skillsmatch, and we will have good idea of a placement for them when we know individuals in organisations
<p>WERS Support Work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting up the buddying scheme - Can write a proposal as to what that needs from a legal, safeguarding point of view. • Clarity around services - What are we offering? What is the role of each of the individual components e.g. weekly welcome, drop in etc? • Reigniting the clothing store - is that something we are looking into? • Giving specialist support, additional training for staff members to provide more in depth legal support, counselling etc. • Clarity for volunteers about their role. • Clarity around signposting. • Overall volunteers seem very excited and happy to get involved, it just all needs to be clearer and people need to feel valued. 	<p>Activities and connections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of trust relations with communities and staying true to your word in support type work and community work. • Consideration of organising sports events for women and girls in near future. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertaking board games club over winter to extend to outreach in hotels and the cost effectiveness of such an approach • Joining groups at the Baltic that involve arts and crafts. • Better coordination and communication of service providers for refugees in Newcastle with providing food (including WERS) to avoid duplication. • Developing the WERS “ambassador” – whereby he would have a role in speaking publicly about WERS and its great work, strengthening the brand with a WERS T-shirt or badge <p style="text-align: right;">1</p>