



Refugee and Asylum Seeker Inclusion Strategy

ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT 2019-20

Contents

Foreword	3
Introduction	4
Key Numbers	5
Objective 1: Meeting Basic Needs	6
Objective 2: Promoting Economic Inclusion	8
Objective 3: Promoting Social Integration	10
Objective 4: Building Bristol as a Safe Haven	12
Objective 5: Influencing the System	14
Continuing Commitment	15

Foreword

Politics in Bristol can sometimes be fractious and heated. Often this is no bad thing, as different people with passionately held beliefs debate and discuss the best way forward for our city. But it is heartening as Mayor when I see an issue that unites Councillors across the political spectrum. That is what happened in our Cabinet Meeting in early March 2020 when the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Inclusion Strategy was presented for adoption. Councillors from across the Chamber were all eager to welcome the Strategy, and passionate about its implementation. And I'm sure they, along with many others in the city, will be both interested and heartened to read this report on the progress that has been made since then in putting the Strategy into action.

Of course early March 2020 now seems like a lifetime ago, and so much has changed in our world since then. The COVID-19 pandemic, and the widespread changes it has brought to every aspect of life, has of course affected the implementation of this strategy in important ways.

All Council services including those of our key partners in the refugee sector have had to adapt to new ways of working to ensure we continue to support all our communities as effectively as possible. Some of the service areas have had such pressing COVID-related challenges to address that they have had to change or put on hold some of the actions in this plan. Happily the strategy was designed to be dynamic and to be able to respond to

changing circumstances, and so we have been able to still use our plans and be flexible in a challenging context.

The commitment and flexibility shown by Council staff in doing this, and driving forward this strategy, have made me enormously proud. I would like to thank all those who have contributed to and engaged with the strategy in its first year for their hard work and dedication. I would also like to acknowledge the great work done by our voluntary sector, often in a context of limited resources. I am delighted that, through the collaborative approach of the Council and the refugee sector, positive changes are already being seen. And I am sure that through working together within and beyond the Council we will continue to live up to our designation as a City of Sanctuary and support people to rebuild their lives and to fulfil their potential.

Marvin Rees, Mayor of Bristol



Introduction

This report of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Inclusion Strategy (RAS) provides a summary of progress made during the first year of implementation. In order to implement the Strategy, a staff Working Group comprised of representatives from various departments of the council was established to assess progress against the action plan and take steps to implement the strategy. The Deputy Mayor Cllr Asher Craig has chaired the meetings with support from the Mayor's Inclusion Advisers. The Staff Working Group has met six times since October 2019, with an average of 10-12 Officers attending.

The Strategy was approved by Cabinet on 3rd March 2020. Recommending the strategy to Cabinet, Cllr Craig emphasised the strategy's purpose is to ensure that

the Council fully inhabits its role in leading a City of Sanctuary, by systematically and strategically considering how it can support refugee and asylum seeker inclusion across all service areas. It also provides a platform for increasing strategic coherence across the corporate body on refugee and asylum seeker issues.

The strategy has five overarching objectives:

- + Meeting Basic Needs
- + Promoting Economic Inclusion
- + Promoting Social Integration
- + Building Bristol as a Safe Haven
- + Influencing the System

Key Numbers

78 families resettled in Bristol through the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme

46 unaccompanied asylum seeking children supported to rebuild their lives in Bristol

20 asylum seekers attended taster session on job opportunities within the Council

40 Council staff in the Adult Social Care team trained by Bristol Refugee Rights to better understand the asylum system in the UK

30 people seeking sanctuary in Bristol housed and supported by Bristol City Council in response to the COVID-19 pandemic under the 'Everyone In' policy

30 Flash Academy app licenses purchased by the Hope Virtual School to support new arrivals develop English language skills



Objective 1: Meeting Basic Needs

This objective is about how the Council can best meet the complex needs of asylum seekers and refugees, who represent some of the most vulnerable people in our community. This is in line with our Corporate Strategy themes of ‘empowering and caring’ and ‘wellbeing’, as well as upholding the dignity and worth of every asylum seeker and refugee in the city.

Housing

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a key priority for the Council’s Housing teams has been ensuring that homeless people including destitute asylum seekers and refugees were able to access emergency accommodation under the Government’s ‘Everyone In’ policy. But since this policy has always been a temporary measure, it was crucial that the city came together with city partners from the refugee sector to think about how people could move on from this accommodation into more permanent housing rather than simply returning to the streets.

The Housing Team therefore set up a Task Group in partnership with the refugee sector to find move-on accommodation for asylum seekers in emergency accommodation. As part of this group’s work the Housing and Public Relations Teams joined forces and supported the local charity Bristol Hospitality Network to launch an appeal to recruit more Bristolians for their hosting scheme.

This has so far resulted in 9 households agreeing to offer a place for an asylum seeker who has been in emergency accommodation while they work to secure their legal status in the UK. At a time when the national discourse on asylum seekers has been hugely toxic and dehumanising, this response shows Bristol’s true spirit as a City of Sanctuary and a place where every person should be treated with dignity and respect.

The Task Group has also worked to ensure that everyone’s needs have been met during their time in emergency accommodation, and have begun to explore options for longer-term accommodation for those with No Recourse to Public Funds status. Many people on the Task Group have commented on the value of this collaborative approach, and how relationships between the Council and the refugee sector have improved as a result of this joint working.

As well as supporting people in Council-run emergency accommodation, many BCC officers from various departments have also been involved in ensuring that asylum seekers housed in emergency Initial Accommodation run by the Home Office in Bristol are adequately supported. This includes liaising with Home Office and the housing provider Clearspings Ready Homes and ensures that issues such as outbreak management plans are in place etc.

Social Care

Ensuring that all those working in Social Care for the Council receive appropriate training and support on issues related to refugees and asylum seekers has been an important priority for the Strategy this year. Adult Social Care completed practice guidance on this topic which has been made available to all BCC staff on the Council intranet, and has been shared with managers and practitioners through the leadership and staff briefing meetings respectively. Bristol Refugee Rights were commissioned to deliver two training sessions for social care practitioners, with approximately 20 people attending each session. The Asylum team and Adult Social Care have also written and agreed sessions for BRR and other Community Organisations on the Care Act and Human Rights Act.

Adult Social Care set up a pilot Homeless Move-On service in response to Council accommodating a large number of homeless people in hotels due to Covid-19. About 100 of these individuals accommodated were refused asylum seekers and people with NPRF. This Homeless Move –On service has worked closely with Housing, Asylum team and other voluntary sector agencies to identify appropriate support and opportunities for move on.

Education

Monitoring the educational outcomes of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and seeking opportunities to improve them has been another priority goal for this year. In response to this, the Hope Virtual School secured agreement and funding for a post to support new arrivals as part of the belonging in education and attendance strategy. The Virtual School has also pioneered the use of the Flash Academy app to help newcomers learn English. HOPE VS is now part of the development group to further improve the product and facilitate better communication for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. Currently they have acquired 30 Flash app licences. There is a huge demand for this service but due to limited funds they cannot purchase more licences.

Throughout the pandemic HOPE and schools have worked together to ensure UASC have appropriate education placements, and schools have also been linked up to share good practice in working with newly arrived young people. About 15 young people were placed in schools up to Year 12.

Objective 2: Promoting Economic Inclusion

This objective is about what the Council and our City partners do to break down the barriers that asylum seekers and refugees face in integration into the labour market and applying their skills and experiences effectively in the City.

COVID and Economic Recovery

To help train and prepare refugees to secure employment, the VPRS team joined the EU funded Specialist Training and Employment Programme (STEP) partnership in March 2020. Through this programme, the VPRS plan to support 80 VPRS refugees into employment, education, or training by Dec 2022. This gives Bristol an opportunity to both learn and share good practice with other STEP programmes which have been set up in Sheffield, Leeds and Coventry.

The IMPACT programme has supported 55 refugees and non-EU migrants through either their Conversational English

Language classes, Employability skills training or creative workshops which promote inter-cultural understanding. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, all activities were delivered virtually which also helped to reach those who are facing isolation. This is vital as some people have no work experience or little or no English language skills while others have qualifications and a professional background but need a helping hand to transfer this to the UK working environment.

BAME communities, including refugees and asylum seekers, have been at the heart of much of the Council's work regarding the economic impact of COVID-19. Black South West Network were commissioned to undertake research looking at the impact of COVID-19 on VCSE, BAME-led businesses, organisations and communities, and this has fed into Bristol's One City Economic Recovery Strategy.



Entrepreneurship

The Council has also looked to progress work relating to refugee entrepreneurship. The Mayor's Advisers on Inclusion have been supporting the Entrepreneurial Outreach partnership project, which has now received funding from the Home Office and National Lottery Community Fund to continue and expand. BCC in collaboration with ACH also hosted a workshop looking at the financial barriers facing refugee entrepreneurs, and have been working with partners and funders to explore a possible pilot of a sharia-

compliant finance product aimed at refugee entrepreneurs in the city. ACH brought about five refugee entrepreneurs to this workshop.

Access to Employment

In partnership with ACH, the Council hosted and run a taster session for 20 asylum seekers and refugees about job opportunities within the council, where they are advertised and the recruitment process. The Council also supported ACH to run a project aimed at recruiting refugees to attend BCC-run Job Fairs.



Objective 3: Promoting Social Integration

This objective is about activities which enable asylum seekers and refugees to feel included in all aspects of the society so that they can build relationships and contribute to the vibrancy of the City.

Volunteering

The VALUES Project has been developing a toolkit and action plan to encourage volunteering, particularly amongst young refugees and asylum seekers. As part of this project, the Council has worked closely with Barnardos to promote befriending and mentoring, including setting up an informal buddying scheme within the BCC Through Care team. Welcome pack being finalised by Asylum Team for UASC. A multi-agency meeting was also held to look at embedding volunteering opportunities for young refugees/asylum seekers across various organisations as ongoing involvement in VALUES.

Language

Working with partners to ensure that ESOL is available and accessible to refugees and asylum seekers has been a key focus since the publication of the strategy. Working in partnership with the voluntary sector, a single platform for ESOL across the city has been established, with a website now up and running. BCC Community Learning has also worked with the ESOL network to help the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) and South West Councils develop an ESOL strategy for the region that meets the needs of refugees and asylum seekers.

Community Cohesion

The Council has supported the development of the Schools of Sanctuary initiative, a number of schools working to get the award, training for 65 new Sanctuary Ambassadors and a planned primary conference. However, this work with schools had to halt due to COVID so will be picked up as soon as possible.

The Council has also continued to support work with the University of Bristol and partners on the Everyday Integration research project, leading to the development of an Integration Strategy for Bristol. This has included a 'Whose Bristol?' survey which has focused on the impact of COVID on social connection in the city.

Culture

Until COVID intervened, the Culture team organised a number of high profile events, including the World in Bristol day held at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery. 3580 people attended the last face to face celebration held in November 2019 of what migrants to Bristol have contributed, with performances by Somali, Caribbean, Syrian and Indian musicians and dancers.

Furthermore, a new partnership with Royal Museums Greenwich was established to seek feedback from migrant and refugee communities on our museum collections that relate to migration. Job descriptions/ person specifications written included that

the post holder should speak community languages eg Somali, Arabic etc as an essential requirement.

ESOL tours of M Shed and Bristol Museum & Art Gallery aimed at refugees and migrants and City of Bristol College ESOL courses are ongoing and have had excellent take up. Approximately 250 participants take part in these tours each year and of these around 50% are refugees and asylum seekers. 60% of whom have never visited a museum before neither in the UK or in their country of origin.



Objective 4: Building Bristol as a Safe Haven

This objective is about welcoming initiatives which help to fulfil our vision as a City of Sanctuary.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

A goal for this year was to assess opportunities to better support Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children in terms of their legal status when they turn 18. Children & Families Service carried out a range of activities against this target, including:

- + Recruiting specialist workers with particular expertise in the service.
- + Amending the team's recording system to create prompts and reminders regarding status and immigration process
- + Developing links with Bristol Refugee Rights and the Bristol Law Centre for 121 advice and queries on particular cases.

The Council has also sought to take every possible action to fulfil our commitments to resettle UASC (e.g through the Dubs scheme). As of 16th June 2020 there were 46 UASC children in care. This equates to 7% of the Bristol's whole children in care population. Between 2019 and 2020 Bristol welcomed 24 UASC compared to 13 the previous year.

Resettlement

The Council had a target of resettling 100 families from the Home Office Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme by April 2020. The VPRS team resettled 78 families, which is 366 people, 27 additional people are supported by the scheme through family reunion or families who have had babies in the UK.

A holistic package of support was provided to these families including help related to health, education, language and job opportunities. The Government also supports the Community Sponsorship programme where charities can register with the Home office to resettle families. In Bristol two groups have resettled families and an addition group will resettle a refugee family in 2021.

Unfortunately, the VPRS and VCRS were suspended in mid-March 2020 due to COVID-19. Three families which were due to arrive in March 2020 will now arrive by March 2021.

Move-on Support

The Strategy set out a goal to work with stakeholders to develop a more strategic approach to supporting people during ‘move-on’ period immediately after they receive refugee status. There is now an improved line of communication with the Home Office and Council on people who have received a positive decision on their case. This helps the Housing team and agencies to plan and support people not to fall into destitution immediately after their status has been regularised.



Objective 5: Influencing the System

This objective is about proactive steps taken by Council in engaging City partners to influence national and international systems and policy changes which affect the inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees.

Partnership Working

The Council has continued to lead the Inclusive Cities project in Bristol, convening key stakeholders in the city to make progress on the inclusion of newcomers. This has included feeding into the development of the #WeAreBristol campaign to ensure the participation of people with a refugee background, as well as continued work to engage with other cities on best practice.

The Mayor's Inclusion Advisers and representatives from some service areas have continued to take an active part in different strategic for a related to refugees and asylum seekers and this has helped to improve good working relationship between council and the voluntary sector, and other national organisations such as the Home office.

Advocacy and Influencing

The Mayor initiated a joint letter through the Core Cities in support of the #LiftTheBan campaign on giving asylum seekers the right to work, which was featured in the media. He has also written open letters to both the former and current Home Secretary on the same issue. More recently the Mayor wrote to the Prime Minister highlighting the impact of No Recourse to Public Funds policy on people in Bristol, particularly in light of the impact of the COVID pandemic.

As an active Board Member of the Mayor's Migration Council, the Mayor continues to advocate for cities' views to be considered on discussions around asylum seekers and refugees by national governments and international bodies e.g. UN. Bristol has been deeply involved in the Global Compact on Refugees discussion, and the Mayor has been featured in national and international media on migration issues. The Mayor has been consistent in advocating for the diversity of voices in the environmental justice movement and the need to explore the nexus of Migration and Climate Change.

City of Sanctuary

The City of Sanctuary principles and values are the backbone of this strategy and the objective is to ensure they are embedded across all service areas. The Council has continued to support the City of Sanctuary movement in a number of ways, including:

- + The Mayor hosting the Ambassadors of Sanctuary schools conference.
- + Endorsing and supporting the Dignity Not destitution campaign.
- + Joining City of Sanctuary gatherings and events.
- + Reaffirming our commitment to tackling climate change and migration, the Mayor hosted Our Community and Our Climate Conference.
- + Supporting the 10 point joint letter from City of Sanctuary about the impact of COVID-19 on people seeking sanctuary.

Continuing Commitment

This report demonstrates that despite the enormous challenges of COVID-19, the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Inclusion Strategy has led to a wide variety of concrete actions and progress in its first year of implementation. However, there is no doubt that there is much more to be done to make Bristol fully inclusive for all those seeking sanctuary in our city.

In light of this, the Staff Working Group is currently leading a process of reflection within Bristol City Council which will lead to a refreshed Action Plan for this strategy for 2021-22. Through this we will continue to strive to achieve our vision of “a welcoming and safe City for all, where refugees and asylum seekers are able to rebuild their lives from the day they arrive.”

