

Information Briefing

Report from: Councillor John Cotton, Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion, Community Safety & Equalities
Report to: Overview & Scrutiny – Co-ordinating Committee

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CITY OF SANCTUARY POLICY STATEMENT 2018-22 – UPDATE ON PROGRESS

1. SUMMARY

The aim of this progress report is to update and comment on the Birmingham City Council's commitments to being a City of Sanctuary. Birmingham City Council first pledged its support to the grassroots City of Sanctuary movement in 2015. This initial pledge has since expanded, in January 2019 the City Council renewed its commitment. In its current form, the City of Sanctuary Policy Statement 2018-22 sets out twelve commitments to promote and protect the interests of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants with their arrival and integration into Birmingham. The twelfth commitment is to annually review the council's progress and present the findings in this progress update to the relevant Overview & Scrutiny Committee and to the city's stakeholders as appropriate.

For the purposes of this report, the activity that has taken place is presented within six themes:

- **A place of welcome:** the city council facilitates the arrival of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants through various national and voluntary schemes.
- **How we work with our stakeholders and partners:** through communication and cooperation with the voluntary sector, statutory and non-statutory bodies and other local authorities, the City Council has increased the involvement of stakeholders in decision making processes and promoted cooperation and sharing of good practice.
- **Awareness of and access to rights and services:** the council ensures migrants have access to rights/services while operating on a prevention, rather than crisis driven approach to address specific issues and in turn wider integration.
- **Focus on tackling specific challenges with partners:** the City Council works with partners and engages with migrant communities to address specific issues related to healthcare and employability.
- **Taking pride in what we stand for and increasing understanding:** internally and externally, the council works to raise awareness around refugee and asylum issues, and it also supports Refugee Week.
- **Embracing, embedding, and mainstreaming:** multiple service areas have worked to ensure the needs, skills and assets of migrants are reflected in mainstream council policies.

This progress report concludes by discussing possible next steps to maintain and improve Birmingham City Council's progress on being a City of Sanctuary.

2. RECAP – CITY OF SANCTUARY POLICY STATEMENT 2018-22

In 2015, Birmingham City Council declared itself a City of Sanctuary for the first time, coinciding with announcing its pledge to resettle 550 refugees from Syria under the UK Government's Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). In 2017, it published its first City of Sanctuary Position Statement. Over the last few months of 2018, Birmingham underwent a process of reviewing, updating and expanding this commitment, resulting in the current City of Sanctuary Policy Statement 2018-22, which was ratified by Full Council on 15th January 2019.

The 2018-22 statement sets itself apart from previous iterations in three main ways. First, it puts forward a more inclusive definition of "sanctuary" than previously used. For the first time, it acknowledged the city's broader and more numerous migrant population beyond only refugees and asylum seekers. In particular amongst these, and pertinent to the time, migrants from EU countries. Second, it articulates a vision for Birmingham that encompasses key aspects of migrant integration that go beyond providing welcome and safety and work towards addressing the longer-term inequalities that can arise as a consequence of someone's own migration history or that of their family members. It is clear about the role positive integration can play in reducing inequality; for example, setting clear goals around developing pathways to meaningful and sustained employment and self-employment. Finally, and related to the previous point, it offers a step change in how Birmingham City Council frames migration and integration issues. Rather than solely focusing on understanding and addressing the needs of new communities, it encourages us to devote just as much attention to identifying and unlocking the assets and opportunities that migrants and migration bring to the city, and to recognise and promote the agency of migrants themselves in this process.

The City of Sanctuary policy statement set out twelve clear commitments, which are updated against as part of this report. The twelfth and final commitment is to continually review our progress and in doing so, to report to the relevant Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

3. PROGRESS AGAINST COMMITMENTS

This section of the report deals with the specific commitments made and the progress towards delivering them. Most of this work sits in the Refugees & Migration Commissioning team, but where possible information has also been sought from colleagues across the council for the purpose of this update.

For ease of presentation and to avoid repeating information, the commitments have been grouped according to six common themes amongst them. These themes do not feature in the original City of Sanctuary Policy Statement but are: I: A place of welcome; II: How we work with our partners and stakeholder; III: Awareness of and access to rights & services; IV: Focus on tackling specific challenges with partners; V: Taking pride in what we stand for and increasing understanding; and VI: Embracing, embedding & mainstreaming.

I: A place of welcome

Commitment 8: We will be open and transparent in our plans and approaches for delivering and supporting resettlement schemes for refugees and asylum seekers, as well as the asylum dispersal process which operates in Birmingham. This includes being open and transparent with our citizens, as well as involving stakeholders in influencing and shaping plans and delivery for the council's pledges to:

- *Resettle 550 Syrian refugees via the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS);*
- *Support the accommodation of destitute asylum seekers, under s.95 and s.4 of the Immigration Act via the Home Office "Compass Contract";*
- *Resettle Unaccompanied Asylum Children (UASC) via the National Transfer Scheme;*
- *Accommodate children arriving in Birmingham and included in the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme;*

- *EU Settlement Scheme, as part of the UK's plans to leave the EU.*

Since the City of Sanctuary policy statement was ratified, Birmingham City Council has continued its participation in Government's main schemes to facilitate the accommodation of refugees and asylum seekers, including children. Between its launch in 2015 and the onset of Covid-19 in March 2020, Birmingham welcomed 516 refugees under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. In late February 2021, the Home Office published statistics demonstrating that this is the third highest figure of any local authority in the UK; behind only Coventry and Bradford – two of the very earliest adopters of refugee resettlement. The final 34 people to make up our 550 pledge were due to arrive in March 2020 but could not travel due to restrictions related to Covid-19. In March 2021, the UK Government announced that it had completed its 20,000 commitment to Syrian resettlement, meaning that it is not possible to welcome any further families to Birmingham under the scheme.

In March 2020, Cabinet also approved a commitment by Birmingham City Council to welcome 110 refugees as part of the new UK Resettlement Scheme (at the time, referred to as Global Resettlement). This had been announced the previous summer, with Government making a national commitment to resettle 5,000 refugees over one year, and in doing so, to be able to provide sanctuary to refugees displaced by crises on a more global scale. The launch of this scheme was frustrated by Covid-19 and by the need for Government to complete its Syrian Resettlement pledge before transitioning. Almost a year later than planned, Birmingham saw its first arrivals through this scheme in early May 2021 and has welcome 16 individuals at the time of writing. Progress is slower than hoped due to the ongoing volatile international travel situation but the 110 pledge is expected to be delivered within the year.

Over more than 20 years, Birmingham has continued to offer its voluntary participation in the national dispersal programme for destitute asylum seekers (also referred to as s.95 and s.4 accommodation). The council works closely with Home Office accommodation provider to support the identification of accommodation in Birmingham as well as the overall delivery of the Government contracts. In March 2020, the Council asked Government to temporarily pause procurement of further units of asylum accommodation in Birmingham with a view to working together with Government to resolve longstanding issues in the operation of the contracts and to lessen the impact of these issues on those accommodated by the system and the communities welcoming them. Via Birmingham Children's Trust we continue to support Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children both within our area as well as through the National Transfer Scheme.

Since mid-2019, the Council has supported plans and delivery related to the EU Settlement Scheme. This involves hosting a Working Group that coordinates efforts to increase uptake of the scheme by city's more vulnerable EU citizens who may face barriers in accessing the scheme. Since October 2020, BCC has also received direct funding from the Home Office to work in partnership to deliver better monitoring of the registration of eligible children supported by the Children's Trust, to run a document verification service, increase the availability of advice and assistance for citizens, and to deliver training and awareness raising to frontline staff. In late March 2021, the Home Office confirmed this project would be extended a further six months. As of the end of December 2020, 106,930 applications had been made to the EU Settlement Scheme in Birmingham, against an estimated EU citizen population of 90,000.

In January 2021 the UK Government wrote to local authorities regarding the new UK visa scheme for British Nationals Overseas in Hong Kong. This visa scheme is unlike refugee resettlement in that individuals themselves will choose where in the UK to settle. However, based on the size of Birmingham's existing (Hong Kong) Chinese communities, we are set to welcome a significant proportion of the national total over the next few years. Birmingham City Council is currently working with partners internally and externally to plan for this. The Hong Kong BNO scheme does not feature in the original City of Sanctuary Policy Statement given its recent announcement, but still falls within the scope of this commitment.

A further addition to the existing migration strands into Birmingham is the Afghan Interpreters Relocation Scheme, which offers relocation and protection to Afghan nationals who have supported British troops during their time in Afghanistan. Local authorities were called upon urgently at the end of May 2021 to support this scheme. Birmingham City Council pledged to welcome 80 individuals which was supported at Cabinet in July. At the time of writing, 22 people have arrived into Birmingham homes and 78 in total have been matched to Birmingham properties so far. All 80 are expected to arrive before the end of September. Throughout August and September 2021, BCC has supported various Government departments in the response to developments in Afghanistan. This has included preparing contingency planning around accommodation options for evacuees arriving into Birmingham airport and Birmingham Managed Quarantine Facilities and coordinating offers of donations and support.

II: How we work with our stakeholders and partners

Commitment 6: We will continue to host and facilitate the Birmingham Migration Forum, as well as other relevant partnerships in order to bring stakeholders together across the statutory, voluntary and community sectors. This is in order to facilitate cross-sector communication, cooperation, collaboration and partnerships which can support the aims of this policy statement.

Commitment 7: We will work with stakeholders to ensure they have a voice and are able to critique and provide ideas and solutions, which can continuously improve and develop the systems and services in place to work with and support people who are asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.

Commitment 9: We will recognise the important role the voluntary and community sectors play in the city and work with them and statutory partners to develop the amount of resource and funding available in the city, which can:

- *Prevent crisis and destitution*
- *Provide accessible informal and formal opportunities for ESOL learning*
- *Enable meaningful employment and participation in the city's economy*
- *Enable engagement and connections to social and community networks*
- *Enable active citizenship in the city and its neighbourhoods*

Commitment 10: We will work with other Local Authorities in the region via the West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership and West Midlands Combined Authority, as well as other Cities of Sanctuary to develop common and consistent approaches to working with and supporting people who are asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. This includes developing shared objectives and priorities which recognise both the challenges presented by migration to the region, as well as the skills and assets. Areas which are particularly relevant are mental health, employment, skills and enterprise, as well as regional policies towards the resettlement of people who are asylum seekers and refugees. It also includes actively contributing to regional working groups covering:

- *Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme;*
- *Asylum Dispersal;*
- *No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF);*
- *Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC);*
- *Migrant Health Network*

Birmingham City Council continues to host the Birmingham Migration Forum, a large, cross-sectoral forum consisting of representatives from the city's most active organisations that work with refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. By and large, membership of the forum is open and inclusive. In between meetings, members are kept up to date on a regular basis via mail-outs. The mailing list for the Birmingham Migration Forum consists of over 220 email addresses representing in the region of 60-80 different organisations and services in the city. The forum acts as a channel for two-way communication: it enables the sharing of information and good practice as well as the opportunity to capture and take account of feedback from representatives of an underrepresented subgroup of Birmingham's

population. Over the last year, for example, the forum has been able to engage with and provide feedback on the Council's Digital Inclusion work. It also continues to be an extremely useful vehicle in disseminating information regarding Covid-19.

The forum influences the work of Birmingham City Council and particularly, the Refugees & Migration commissioning team. For example, in 2020, a Strategic Needs Assessment of Migration in Birmingham was commissioned, derived from a meeting of the Birmingham Migration Forum the previous year in which gaps in data and insight into the migration profile of the city were identified. Similarly in 2020, the Refugees & Migration team commissioned <http://www.barms.org.uk/> – an online directory for Birmingham Asylum Refugee and Migration Services – to enable organisations to more effectively work alongside and refer into one another in their work to support citizens.

The City of Sanctuary Partnership Board is the name that was given to the former New Arrivals Partnership Board in 2019, as a reflection of the important role the board plays in the oversight and delivery of the City of Sanctuary agenda. It is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion, Community Safety & Equalities. During 2020, meetings of the City of Sanctuary Partnership Board were challenged by the Covid-related priorities but, during this time – the Board's membership and Terms of Reference were refreshed to better align to both the City of Sanctuary Policy Statement and to improve the representation of the citizens within the scope of the statement. The Board's Forward Plan for 2021/22 was accepted by the group in May 2021.

In addition to this, stakeholders continue to be engaged with specific projects and programmes aligned to City of Sanctuary; for example, Working / Steering Groups related to EUSS, Syrian Resettlement, Asylum Seeker Move-On, the Migration Needs Assessment, and MiFriendly Cities Active Citizenship. Opportunities are continually sought for stakeholders to be involved in decision making. Most importantly this includes the presence of key stakeholders on assessment panels for the awards of contracts and grants by the Refugees & Migration commissioning team.

Birmingham City Council has also worked hard to nurture its close ties with Birmingham's City of Sanctuary movement and its voluntary Committee, and to create opportunities for people with lived experience to influence our work. In early 2020, the Refugees & Migration team appointed an Engagement Officer with the key aim of achieving this.

The Refugees & Migration Commissioning Team regularly shares and promotes funding opportunities amongst its voluntary sector partners and stakeholders. Over 2019 and 2020, the team worked with the West Midlands Funders Network to put on a series of workshops for funders, commissioners, and voluntary and community sector organisations to develop a better understanding between groups of the landscape of funding in the city, including gaps and opportunities.

The Council plays an active role in regional networks via the West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership across Asylum, Refugee Resettlement, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, No Recourse to Public Funds and Migrant Health Leads. Further afield than the West Midlands, the Council has also worked together with local authorities through networks such as Core Cities and Inclusive Cities. In 2020, it was instrumental in the launch of the new Cities of Sanctuary local authority network, and is currently in the process of becoming a founding member.

III: Awareness of and access to rights and services

Commitment 2: We will work towards ensuring that people who are migrants and refugees who are legally entitled to be in the UK and Birmingham have access to the same support and opportunities to participate in mainstream society and the economy as citizens already residing in Birmingham. This includes ensuring that people who are migrants and refugees are knowledgeable about their rights and confident about accessing public services, particularly concerning:

- *Community safety, including domestic abuse, modern day slavery and hate crime*
- *Education and schooling*
- *Employment, welfare and benefits*
- *ESOL*
- *Health*
- *Private rented sector housing*

The Council as a whole is striving to embody a prevention- rather than crisis-driven approach and this is particularly true in the City of Sanctuary workstreams, which internally have strong links into Prevention & Community Assets commissioning and the Social Justice programme. Over the last year, the Refugees & Migration team has worked with Refugee Action and other third sector organisations on their [Principles of Early Action](#) for working with refugees. Central to this is an understanding of rights, entitlements, opportunities and responsibilities by new communities themselves. In many cases these rights are foundational and highly influential for integration outcomes in other areas, for example – housing, employment, health, and social and civic participation.

Knowledge of rights including **immigration, welfare and housing**, and access to this advice has been they key focus across the following programmes and projects:

- EU Settlement Scheme advice
- Foundation for Integration
- Local authority asylum seeker liaison / Move-on project
- Refugee resettlement Tenancy & Welfare Support Service
- Migration Friendly Cities Legal Health Checks and citizenship support for undocumented children
- Indefinite Leave to Remain Applications for Syrian resettled refugees through Central England Law Centre

Information and empowerment specifically on issues relating to **health, community safety and cohesion** have been embedded in:

- Connecting Communities project
- Some Refugee resettlement grants projects
- Joint work with the Home Office and NHS to improve safeguarding protocols within the asylum accommodation contracts
- Refugee resettlement Mental Health Awareness service

Work to encourage a better understanding of rights and options related to **employability** has included:

- Refugee resettlement Employability Support Service
- Some Migration Friendly Cities Social Innovation projects – e.g. [Migrants at Work and Transitions](#) (pp.17-18)
- Migration Friendly Cities Employability initiatives: work-ready training opportunities; work placements scheme with Interserve; careers guidance for new communities; drop-in employability sessions for new communities in the Nechells area.
- Some Refugee resettlement grants projects – e.g. Princes Trust

To build awareness of **social and civic** rights and opportunities, we have commissioned and worked in partnership with the following projects:

- Refugee Resettlement Birmingham Navigators project
- Migration Friendly Cities Social Innovation projects – e.g. Get out your Box
- Refugee Resettlement Community Days

Finally, the team has awarded grants and commissioned services to improve the availability of and access to **English language** support in the city:

- The Birmingham English Language Learning Partnership project delivered through Birmingham Adult Education Service
- Refugee resettlement grants project – Birmingham Ethnic Education Advisory Service
- 18 Migration Friendly Cities Share my Language micro grant projects

IV: Focus on tackling specific challenges with partners

Commitment 4: We will work with health partners to enable and ensure access for people who are asylum seekers, refugees and migrants to health services. This is particularly concerning primary care services, advice and support to prevent the development of more acute, long term health conditions.

Commitment 5: We will work with employment and enterprise partners to develop shared priorities, plans and pathways to enable people who are migrants and refugees to be able to access meaningful, long-term employment opportunities and careers. This is recognising the professional skills, personal attributes and other assets which many people who are migrants and refugees bring to Birmingham and the region and which might be particularly applied to areas such as health and the NHS, teaching and education for instance.

Where possible, GP registration is embedded into delivery of contracts held with organisations providing welcome and orientation services to new refugees. For example, the city's resettled refugees are supported to make and attend registration appointments by Refugee Action, the Council's provider. The orientation service provided to new asylum-route refugees also includes signposting and information about GP registration or re-registration. During the pandemic, the Refugee & Migrant Centre, the Council's move-on partner, has been supporting clients to register or re-register online. During the last quarter of 2020 and the first quarter of 2021, and on an ongoing basis there has been a particular push in all comms to the migration support voluntary and community sector for organisations to be encouraging their clients to register at GPs.

Via the Refugees & Migration commissioning team and BCC Public Health, the Council supports the work of Sandwell & West Birmingham CCG in the coordination of healthcare services commissioned to support those asylum seekers accommodated across the city's Initial Accommodation sites. We also promote the Doctors of the World initiative Safe Surgeries; which increases awareness of refugees and migrants of all backgrounds to understand their healthcare rights, and increases understanding and confidence within NHS services around the healthcare entitlements of those with migration backgrounds. Through the Migration Friendly Cities project, a briefing on [healthcare charging](#) was also produced.

Over summer 2020, [18 Migrant Health Champions were trained](#) as a result of partnership working between BCC Refugees & Migration Commissioning Team and Public Health team, the Refugee & Migrant Centre, and Coventry University as part of the Migration Friendly Cities project. These Health Champions all have diverse, lived experiences of migration as well as strong community links, knowledge and languages. The Health Champions received training in basic universal public health messaging with a strong focus on service availability and access, and on debunking common myths.

They also received specific briefing sessions on the evolving Covid-19 situation in Birmingham by Dr Justin Varney, BCC Director of Public Health. The Champions have continued to be active in Birmingham and disseminate key information. Through the Refugee resettlement commissioning, BCC also commissions Birmingham & Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust to deliver culturally appropriate mental health awareness training to Birmingham's resettled refugee families.

Culminating in 2019, the **USE-IT! project** worked with migrants with overseas healthcare qualifications to offer a tailored route into employment; supporting with the cost of reaccrediting overseas qualifications and of International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exams, required by the NHS as an employer. They also supported migrants gain relevant work opportunities during the re-qualification period, to avoid skill loss. From 2018 onwards, the Migration Friendly Cities project built on this learning to offer Brokerage support for highly skilled migrants and refugees to find suitable employment, commensurate to their skills and qualifications. The project also worked in partnership with Interserve who offered work placements. Through the project, Birmingham City Council co-created careers guidance for refugees seeking to transition from A – “a job” to B – B – “a better job” or a career, including information and signposting around qualification re-accreditation.

The newly launched **Birmingham English Language Learning Partnership**, once fully mobilised, will include a hardship fund for those English learners requiring an IELTS qualification in order to enter into highly skilled employment or to re-accredit existing qualifications, such as healthcare and other sectors.

Transitions is a Social Innovation project grant funded through the Migration Friendly Cities programme. Transitions recognises the importance of aspirations of new communities when looking for work. The project is migrant-led and informed by findings that aspirations for labour market attainment of some new communities can be influenced by factors such as self-belief, how they believe their own communities are perceived by the wider city, and how peers and community members are represented in the workforce. These findings have influenced beyond the Migration Friendly Cities programme and have also played a role in how the Refugee Resettlement Employability Service is managed and delivered.

V: Taking pride in what we stand for and increasing understanding

Commitment 1: We will work with partners in Birmingham, particularly the voluntary and community sectors, to raise the awareness of and public interest in issues relating to migration, people who are asylum seekers, refugees, migrants, as well as new communities. This includes supporting activities such as Refugee Week, as well as raising the awareness of council officers and Members through briefings and training.

Commitment 11: We will work with partners to identify national policy issues, where we can make collective representations to government to encourage and enable change. This is particularly where there are barriers and challenges being created which might impact on:

- *Cohesion and communities*
- *Crisis and destitution*
- *Education and employment*
- *ESOL*
- *Health and wellbeing*
- *Immigration status (of children, young people and adults)*

Birmingham City Council supports Refugee Week and have promoted the festival with audiences externally and internally through the Chief Executive's Bulletin, and on Yammer – via an “Ask me anything” session. We have published blogposts on the www.birmingham.gov.uk/cos webpages - for example, a “[morning in the life](#)” of our asylum seeker liaison officer. In Refugee Week 2020, the Refugees & Migration Commissioning team worked with BCC Corporate Comms to produce [this video](#), celebrating refugees in Birmingham. In Refugee Week 2021 BCC partnered with Celebrating Sanctuary and Near Neighbours to offer microgrants to groups and organisations wanting to come together to put on an event that would break down barriers. Cabinet Member Cllr John Cotton, accompanied by his two shadow Cabinet and other Members, [took part in a walk with refugees around Edgbaston Reservoir](#).

Over the last two years we have also increased our efforts to provide awareness raising and training opportunities to frontline staff and service leads across the Council as well as externally. Sessions have been run with Birmingham Children's Trust social workers, Adult Social Care staff, Housing & Neighbourhoods teams, and Schools Admissions. These sessions have not only increased the visibility of the workstream but have also increased the ability of staff at the Council's front door to respond appropriately to different circumstances, and to signpost into specialist advice where needed.

Close working with stakeholders across both statutory and non-statutory agencies has lent itself to identification of key national policies with consequences that can contribute to increased barriers to settling and playing a productive role in society. In July 2019, Birmingham City Council became the first in the West Midlands to pass a motion supporting the Lift the Ban campaign which seeks to lift restrictions on the right to work for asylum seekers while awaiting a Home Office decision. Cabinet Members and the Leader have written to Government on several occasions to set out concerns regarding the national policy on No Recourse to Public Funds, particularly in the context of the pandemic, and regarding standards in the Government contracts for the accommodation and support of asylum seekers in the initial stages of their claim. They have also put forward serious concerns regarding the lack of meaningful engagement with local government in setting up contingency accommodation to respond to the pressures in the asylum system throughout the pandemic and on an ongoing basis.

VI: Embracing, embedding and mainstreaming

Commitment 3: We will ensure that the needs, skills and assets of people who are asylum seekers, refugees and migrants are reflected and included in mainstream council policies and strategies.

Information was requested of relevant service leads for this section of the report. Service leads were also asked to reflect on the impact of Covid on endeavours to embed migration concerns within their work areas, as well as any suggestions or opportunities for how they may improve this element of their work going forward. Some examples of responses received are summarised below:

Adult Education

The Adult Education Service has been commissioned by the Refugees & Migration team to deliver a city-wide project to provide all migrants with information on the best English provision for their needs, according to their level of English, where they live and when they are available. This is known as the ESOL Hub. The project brings together the largest partnership of ESOL providers that includes our Adult Education Service, Further Education providers, third sector providers of informal ESOL and community groups who support ESOL in the city. The support will be provided by volunteers, information

advice and guidance staff from providers and through a mobile app. As part of this plan and aligned with our own provision, BAES is now offering workshops that help develop migrants' English language skills and their knowledge of city services. All of our courses embed citizenship elements that help learners understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens in Birmingham.

Covid-19 has had a considerable impact on English language provision and on learners. The service had to run emergency IT sessions for ca. 100 learners and successfully managed to move ca. 90% of learners to digital provision. The support continued throughout the term. Another impact of Covid-19 is that the commitment to incorporate the needs and assets of refugees and migrant within the service has become more relevant.

Community Centres

Most of BCC's twelve community centres are located in areas of high deprivation, with very ethnically diverse populations where newly arrived communities tend to locate. Services on offer at the centres include:

1. Nurseries, play care and after school clubs;
2. Debt & welfare advice and family support;
3. Elders and Church groups;
4. Employment support and training;

In addition, "Incredible Edible" a third sector organisation previously known as "The Real Junk Food Project" operates at two of the sites, providing community lunches on a pay-as-you-can/free basis open to any local resident whatever their status– since the start of the pandemic they have been providing a food bank service to local communities and people in need. Further, Afro-British Support Services "IMPACT" is located in the Friends Institute – this group provides welfare advice and support "to enable refugees, asylum seekers and new communities to improve the quality of their lives and to live independently and seamlessly integrate inclusively to the British society".

Cultural development

One of the service's Cultural Development Officer is well linked with the Refugees & Migration commissioning team and ensures information regarding support for refugees and asylum seekers is circulated as widely and as appropriately as possible within the cultural sector. The Celebrating Community commissioning 2018-2019 focused on engaging resettled Syrian refugees and residents (specifically adults and families) living in the Perry Barr, Northfield, Edgbaston and Erdington Districts of Birmingham. It sought to support arts activities that engaged newly arrived residents with existing communities to create an environment where all people feel safe to belong, connect, contribute and celebrate their culture. Two projects were commissioned:

1. Celebrating Sanctuary: Light-touch, 8-month, community engagement project using arts as the tool to bring people together for community cohesion. Lead artists consulted with potential participants, arts orgs and community groups in conjunction with Spring Housing introductions to refugees, to shape the project prior to session delivery. The workshops aimed to bring participants of different backgrounds together and provide a safe environment for them to engage, open up and de-stress. ESOL was introduced through Spoken Word sessions, arts and crafts, music, drumming and other activities, all of which were open to the wider community.
2. Handsworth Creatives: 'The Amal Community Arts and Cultural Programme' was a combination of community arts activities using the visual arts and cultural visits to a wide range of places

across the City. The aim was to introduce Syrian families to activities and destinations and encourage and support them to engage in the cultural life of the City.

Looking ahead, in October 2021, The Cultural Development Service will be supporting the arrival and welcoming of 'Amal' in the city – a large puppet representing the journey and migration of Syrian refugees across Europe. Plans have been delayed due to Covid-19 but we hope to host Amal in October.

Libraries

The Library Service linked with other library services in the West Midlands to develop a joint approach to working with people seeking sanctuary. This led to the development of a working group to produce the Libraries of Sanctuary resource pack which was published in May 2020. The working group included library services in the West Midlands and North West, together with national bodies City of Sanctuary, Arts Council England, and Libraries Connected. Chairing of the working group and the research and writing of the pack was provided by Birmingham.

Over the last three years, all Birmingham Library Service staff have received training in working with new arrivals, and further training is planned for as soon as is possible. Welcome Visits have been arranged for groups of people seeking sanctuary; although put on hold due to the first lockdown. The Libraries Service has also made contact with a range of local refugee community groups to understand and improve their links with the Library Service. These include Celebrating Sanctuary, the Refugees & Migrant Centre and St Chad's Sanctuary, and will include more when lockdown restrictions make this possible.

Before the first lockdown, the Service was also exploring how the Library of Birmingham could become a Library of Sanctuary, plus individual community libraries (such as Stirchley Library). Both these projects will be resumed when restrictions allow. The Service, through meetings of the Community Library Managers, has also been involved in mapping community support groups across Birmingham, and in sharing information about provision for new arrivals; which has now evolved into a gap-filling project.

Neighbourhood Advice & Information

The NAIS service provides a fully comprehensive service to all citizens of Birmingham which includes advice on entitlement to welfare benefits. As part of the Foundation for Integration project with the Refugees & Migration Commissioning team, NAIS offers a wrap-around service designed to ensure migrants residing in Birmingham maximise their benefit entitlement, access local services and integrate within local communities and be good neighbours. Where appropriate NAIS advisors signpost migrants to such organisations as Birmingham Adult Education Service for improving English language skills and to the DWP or other local employment support providers for training and employment opportunities. The service also includes securing interpretation via the Brasshouse Centre. The NAIS service has continued to offer its wrap around advice service to migrants referred to it during Covid-19, doing so over the telephone rather than face to face. Covid-19 has reduced the number of referrals into the service. It is hoped this will improve with return to face-to-face delivery. The wider NAIS team of advisors would be keen to access any training and upskilling around this important area that can be provided by relevant council officers.

Public Health

Vulnerable migrants are one group within the ‘vulnerable groups’ dimension; one of the four population dimensions where health inequalities affect populations. This is therefore extremely relevant to BCC’s work to reduce health inequalities. In recognition of this, Birmingham City Council Public Health has co-designed a service specification with the Refugees & Migration team to commission research that helps the city better understand the profile and needs of migrants here. This is now managed within the Refugees & Migration commissioning team but Public Health remains a key stakeholder and sits on the Steering Group, whilst also providing governance and oversight within the City without Inequalities workstream. The COVID-19 pandemic has widened health inequalities and vulnerable migrants are a group which may have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Therefore, this will be incorporated into Public Health’s Inequalities workplan, with this group (communities of identity) as part of the Covid recovery workstream. Through the City without Inequalities workstream, Public Health will actively map work that BCC is already working towards improvement of migrant health (e.g. Suicide Prevention, Covid-19 community messages work) and identify gaps where Public Health can add value and influence.

4. NEXT STEPS

The update presented to Overview & Scrutiny represents a great deal of work over the past two and a half years, but also the scale and scope of the ambition in this area. There is further work that can be done, some of which is in progress and some of which requires the appropriate consultation and governance processes to take place before it can be shared. This falls into three categories, outlined below. These suggestions have been informed through a workshop with colleagues across the Council.

Addressing gaps – where progress is behind or insufficient

- It is generally felt that further work is required to address the specific challenge highlighted in Commitment 5, *to develop shared priorities, plans and pathways to meaningful employment and self-employment*. Although this report puts forward examples of good practice and successful interventions in this area, it is recognised and relevant partners is required. This was supported by the workshop, which identified the need for better data capture around the skills, qualifications and aspirations of new refugees in the city, as well as a designated working group looking at pathways into jobs and careers for new communities. We also need to further explore the role of businesses and Birmingham’s Social Value Charter in realising this commitment.

Furthering our progress – where we are making good progress but could do more

- Part of Commitment 1 relates to *raising the awareness of council officers and Members around issues related to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants through briefings and training*. While there are examples of this taking place, the HR department is now also working towards a designated e-learning for Council staff on this subject.
- Commitment 3 is to *ensure that the needs, skills and assets of people who are asylum seekers, refugees and migrants are reflected and included in mainstream council policies and strategies*. This is a particularly ambitious commitment that demands a whole-council approach to embracing the City of Sanctuary agenda. Options are being explored to achieve this.

Enhancing the existing Statement – where we may be able to go above and beyond

- While the City of Sanctuary Policy Statement 2018-22 clearly set out the vision for the city and commitments in relevant areas, how the vision is operationalised could be further developed.

For example, and subject to the correct governance processes, a strategy for new communities and integration would create a clear action plan to accompany this vision. This could accompany the next iteration of the Policy Statement, which will be prepared over the next year in time for the end of 2022.

- In its current form, the Statement is clear about the importance of ensuring our stakeholders have a voice and are able to influence design and delivery of services. These commitments could be improved by being explicit about the need to include experts by experience in this.
- It has been recognised through the workshop that housing pathways for new communities remains a complex and serious challenge. This forming a commitment in its own right would allow better attention on this important issue.
- Reflecting on the last year of Covid-19 and the support the Council has offered vulnerable citizens, the workshop also indicated a strong need for the destitution that can be faced by people with No Recourse to Public Funds to be addressed in the City of Sanctuary Policy Statement. Although the Council cannot commit anything that constitutes Public Funds for Immigration Purposes to this group, it can commit to working with partners and the public to explore approaches to relieving the impacts of this particular kind of destitution.

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