



Bristol City Council
**Refugee and Asylum Seeker
Inclusion Strategy**
2020

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Foreword

On the wall in the entrance lobby of City Hall hangs a plaque celebrating Bristol's status as a City of Sanctuary. We walk past this plaque every day, and it fills us with pride to lead and serve a city which prizes its ability to offer welcome and hospitality to those fleeing persecution and conflict around the globe. But it also stands as a challenge to Bristol City Council, to be proactive and vigilant in making this status real and tangible for asylum seekers and refugees in our city.

This strategy sets out how we will live up to this challenge. Refugees and asylum seekers often arrive in Bristol following traumatic experiences in their countries of origin and on their journeys to the UK. We want to ensure that these individuals are supported to rebuild their lives and make a full contribution to Bristol. We believe that the skills, experience and resilience of refugees and asylum seekers are powerful assets for our city and that their inclusion will enhance our communities. This strategy therefore sets out how the Council will do its utmost not just to meet the basic needs of asylum seekers and refugees, but also to support their full economic and social inclusion for the benefit of us all.

The experiences of those seeking sanctuary in Bristol are often shaped as much by national and international rules as they are by local policies and initiatives. Whilst we are rarely able to control these wider structures, we must play our part alongside others in seeking to shape and improve them, and this strategy also sets out our ambitions in this regard.

Working for the inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees is not the job of any one team in the Council on their own, and cannot happen in isolation from our wider efforts to lead and shape an inclusive city. That's why this strategy establishes a cross-departmental working group to share expertise and best practice from every area of the Council, and why this document has been designed to integrate with our Equality and Inclusion Strategy and the One City Plan.

We'd like to thank everyone who has been involved in the shaping of this strategy, which is the work of many hands over a long period of time. It has had input from many different elected officials and Council staff, as well as from our partner organisations across the city. Crucially, it has also been shaped by those within the Council and outside who have lived experience of coming to the UK as asylum seekers and refugees. This document has grown out of strong partnership working, and we are confident that this same spirit of collaboration will guide its implementation. For it is only by working together that we can uphold and pass on the mantle of being a true City of Sanctuary.



Marvin Rees
Mayor of Bristol



Councillor Asher Craig
Deputy Mayor of Bristol

Dedication

This strategy is dedicated to Lorraine Ayensu, who led Bristol City Council's strategic efforts with regards to refugees and asylum seekers for many years, and who passed away tragically in 2012. Her memory inspires our efforts.

Purpose

In 2010 Bristol City Council was officially recognised as a City of Sanctuary¹. There is much great work going on to co-ordinate activities supporting and empowering refugees and asylum seekers in the city, particularly through City of Sanctuary and the Bristol Refugee Forum, which bring together the numerous voluntary and community sector organisations providing services or campaigning in the field. More recently, Inclusive Cities and the One City Approach have added an additional dimension through the involvement of other stakeholders².

This strategy does not seek to duplicate or add to those cross-city, multi-stakeholder efforts.

Instead, its purpose is to ensure that the City 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 of its service areas and activities. It also provides a platform for increasing strategic coherence across the corporate body on refugee and asylum seeker issues.

Overall Objectives

A Local Authority on its own cannot guarantee that someone seeking sanctuary will be able to thrive in their new community. But we do have a corporate vision to “play a leading role in driving a city of hope and aspiration where everyone can share in its success”³. Making that real for refugees and asylum seekers requires the Council to play a number

of key roles, which together form the overall objectives that we will seek to achieve through the implementation of this strategy. The level and nature of support that the Council can provide to people is often dependent on their legal status. The definitions attached in the Appendix provide more information on the different statuses covered in this strategy.

1. <https://cityofsanctuary.org/2010/11/13/bristol-city-of-sanctuary>

2. See <https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/project/inclusive-cities/> and <https://www.bristolonecity.com>

3. <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/33620/Bristol+City+Council+Corporate+Strategy+2018+to+2023.pdf/3e7d7377-ed1f-5d67-c6ab-af49b7159a5e>

1) Meeting Basic Needs

Asylum seekers and refugees are often some of the most vulnerable people in our community, and can have a range of different and complex needs⁴. Primary amongst these are housing, education, safety and health-care. In seeking to meet these needs the Council is of course bound by restrictions of funding and also by national laws and regulations, many of which are profoundly flawed. Nonetheless, in living out our Corporate Strategy themes of ‘empowering and caring’ and ‘wellbeing’ we should be constantly striving for excellence and best practice in our service delivery and partnership working, seeking to uphold the dignity and worth of every asylum seeker and refugee in the city. The tragic deaths of Kamil Ahmad and Bijan Ebrahimi⁵ give us an added determination to continually review and improve our practices across the organisation.

2) Promoting Economic Inclusion

This strategy is underpinned by the fundamental belief that refugees and asylum seekers are assets to the city, and catalysts of our future growth and success⁶. These groups are often viewed through the lens of the trauma and suffering they have endured in their home countries and on their journeys to Bristol, but we must never lose sight of the fact that refugees and asylum seekers also bring with them a range

of skills, talent, enterprise, and a desire to contribute to their new home. The Council has a key role then, in partnership with others, to break down the barriers that asylum seekers and refugees face in integration into the local labour market and applying their skills and experiences effectively in their new context.

3) Promoting Social Integration

As well as being assets to our economy, asylum seekers and refugees bring with them huge cultural diversity which enriches our society. However, they often face particular barriers to engagement either due to the trauma that led to their seeking sanctuary or due to the dehumanising experience of applying for asylum in the UK. Of course the Local Authority cannot ‘deliver’ social integration for asylum seekers and refugees, but through enacting our Corporate Strategy theme of creating a ‘well connected’ city we can work in partnership with others to help asylum seekers and refugees find opportunities to build relationships and engage positively in the life of their new communities.

4) Building Bristol as a Safe Haven

UNHCR estimates that there are now over 70 million forcibly displaced people around the world⁷. Bristol must play its part in welcoming its fair share of the world’s most vulnerable people, and the Local Authority can lead the way

4. See Refugee & Asylum Seeker Needs Assessment <https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/documents/s16872/02%20Refugee%20and%20Asylum%20seekers%20Needs%20Assessment%20v4.pdf>

5. See <https://bristolsafeguarding.org/adults/safeguarding-adult-reviews/bristol-sars/kamil-ahmad-and-mr-x-june-2018/> and <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/35136/Multi-agency+learning+review+following+the+murder+of+Bijan+Ebrahimi>

6. This view is based on a raft of empirical evidence. For example, see <https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/4/6/eaq0883>, <https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/3987/reportrescueworksunlockingrefugeewomenspotential.pdf> and <https://centreforentrepreneurs.org/cfe-research/starting-afresh-how-entrepreneurship-is-transforming-the-lives-of-resettled-refugees/>

7. <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/stories/2019/6/5d08b6614/global-forced-displacement-tops-70-million.html>



in this. This means setting ambitious targets for our engagement with various resettlement programmes, as well as taking a strategic view on how best to welcome and support those claiming asylum after arrival in the UK. It also involves seeking to ensure that there is adequate legal support for those seeking to regularise their status.

5) Influencing the System

An individual's experience of Bristol is the result of multiple decisions and processes across a large number of organisations and systems. The Local Authority can play a proactive role in

engaging with key stakeholders across the city to ensure that the issues affecting asylum seekers and refugees are raised and addressed. It can also create opportunities for asylum seekers and refugees to have their voices heard, empowering them to make changes to the systems that affect them. In doing so, however, we also must recognise that we operate in a deeply hostile and flawed national and international policy environment for asylum seekers and refugees. Bristol City Council must therefore also work proactively to influence national and international decisions on these issues.

Taking the Strategy Forward

Whilst some of the above goals can be progressed within individual service areas of the Council, many of them require collaborative efforts across different departments and directorates. In order to make this strategy come to life, therefore, the Mayor's Office proposes to convene a Working Group made up of key representatives from various departments across the Council (including people with lived experience). The Working Group will be Chaired by the Mayor's Advisor on Inclusion, and will have the following key tasks:

- Assessing progress against the action plan and taking the necessary steps to move it forward
- Inviting and encouraging all Council Service Areas to consider how they could contribute to greater inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers

- Ensuring the views and priorities of asylum seekers and refugees are reflected in all Council policies and strategies
- Updating the action plan on a regular basis
- Communicating the contents of this strategy both internally and externally, and updating people on progress wherever relevant
- Ensuring that the Group's membership is sufficiently diverse and representative

One of the first tasks of the Working Group will be to establish baseline data and metrics across Council Service Areas which can then be built up over time to assess progress towards the overall objectives. The Working Group will also have the task of establishing the resourcing requirements for all new activities within the Action Plan.

Action Plan

The following Action Plan is an iterative list rather than a fixed one. That means it will evolve and develop over time, in response to ongoing feedback and as new opportunities or challenges arise. In order to ensure transparency and accountability, we will publish an Annual Review of progress against the Plan. At the same time we will also publish a new iteration of the Plan for the next year.



Meeting Basic Needs

Action	Who?	Output/ measurement	Ongoing or new activity?
Ensure plans to specifically address hate crime against asylum seekers and refugees are incorporated in our work to create a safer city.	Public Health	Lessons learned from hate crime against asylum seekers and refugees are acted on and evidence of how they have been acted on is gathered	Ongoing
Ensure that the needs of refugees and asylum seekers are adequately addressed within Public Health commissioned services and programmes.	Public Health	N/A	Ongoing
Incorporate the needs of refugees and asylum seekers into the Local Housing Strategy Implementation Plans and into the Homelessness Prevention Strategy.	Housing & Landlord Services	N/A	Ongoing
Conduct a housing needs assessment exercise in relation to asylum seekers and refugees.	Housing & Landlord Services	Housing needs assessment report	New
Work with providers of night shelter accommodation in the City to monitor numbers of refugee and asylum seeking individuals and families in emergency and homelessness provision and, if necessary, assess opportunities to create additional spaces.	Housing & Landlord Services	Number of refugees and asylum seekers in emergency housing/ hostels and street homeless	New

Action	Who?	Output/ measurement	Ongoing or new activity?
Support the development of joint protocols between Housing and the Asylum Team, ensuring a smooth transition into Housing Services when people change their legal status.	Housing & Landlord Services, Asylum Team	Joint Protocol Document	Ongoing
Work with the Race Equality in Education Group and HOPE Virtual School to explore opportunities to raise educational attainment and improve progress for refugees and asylum seekers.	Education and Skills (Education Partnership)	To be assessed by Education and Skills	New
Explore and develop the use of the FLASH academy app for UAS young people.	Education & Skills (Inclusive City)	App feedback	New
Work with Teaching Schools to support the development and sharing of best practice for EAL teaching	Education & Skills (Inclusive City)	To be assessed by Education and Skills	New
Ensure that those working in Social Care for the Council receive appropriate training on issues related to refugees and asylum seekers	Children & Families Services, Adult Social Care, Workforce and Change	Number of training/ professional development opportunities, and take-up of these opportunities	Ongoing
Establish a Task Group to assess and improve the experience of disabled asylum seekers in the city	Adult Social Care	To be assessed	Ongoing
Ensure that all relevant actions are taken following Reviews of incidents involving refugees and asylum seekers, including those related to Bijan Ibrahim and Khamil Ahmed	Collective Responsibility	Actions taken following Reviews	Ongoing

Promoting Economic Inclusion

Action	Who?	Output/ measurement	Ongoing or new activity?
Support and encourage refugees and asylum seekers into paid roles in the City Council, including apprenticeships.	Workforce & Change, Education & Skills (Apprenticeship Service)	Number of people from a refugee background working in Bristol City Council	Ongoing
Ensure that Bristol City Council models good practice in the recruitment, employment, development and retention of refugees in its workforce and to influence its contractors to do the same.	Workforce & Change	Staff satisfaction survey results	Ongoing
Ensure that BCC-run Job Fairs are accessible for refugees, and to monitor their outcomes	Education and Skills (Employment Support)	Number of people with refugee background accessing Job Fairs and gaining employment	Ongoing
Ensure that the needs of refugees are embedded in the work of the Apprenticeships Diversity Hub	Education and Skills (Apprenticeship Service)	Number of people with refugee background taking up apprenticeships	Ongoing
Ensure that refugees and asylum seekers are included in the Council's work on economic inclusion, and in the work of the City Office and City Funds.	Economic Development, Mayor's Office	Number of projects promoting economic inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers, and outcomes of these projects	Ongoing

Promoting Social Integration

Action	Who?	Output/ measurement	Ongoing or new activity?
Encourage refugees and asylum seekers to take part in democratic processes.	Legal & Democratic Services	To be assessed by Legal & Democratic Services	Ongoing
Develop a toolkit and action plan to encourage volunteering, particularly amongst young refugees and asylum seekers	Children & Families Services	To be assessed	Ongoing
Work with the University of Bristol and partners on the Everyday Integration research project, leading to the development of an Integration Strategy for Bristol	Community Development, Economic Development, Mayors Office	Integration Strategy, public workshops, briefing papers	New
Work with partners to ensure that the ESOL website and common assessment process is developed and maintained	Education and Skills (Community Learning Team)	ESOL website and common assessment tool	Ongoing
Work with WECA (West of England Combined Authority) and the SW Councils to develop an ESOL strategy for the region that meets the needs of refugees and asylum seekers	Education and Skills (Community Learning Team)	ESOL strategy	Ongoing
Ensure the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in the Council's work on libraries, culture and the arts	Bristol Culture	To be assessed by Bristol Culture	Ongoing
Support the development of the Schools of Sanctuary initiative	Collective responsibility	Number of Schools of Sanctuary, levels of engagement from existing Schools of Sanctuary	Ongoing



Building Bristol as a Safe Haven

Action	Who?	Output/ measurement	Ongoing or new activity?
Work with stakeholders to seek a strategic approach to the numbers, location and integration of asylum seekers and refugees dispersed in the City through Home Office provided accommodation	Mayor's Office, Housing	N/A	New
Monitor the volume and levels of immigration and asylum advice needed in the city, and work to address gaps	Neighbourhoods & Communities Services	To be assessed by Neighbourhoods & Communities Services	Ongoing
Assess opportunities to better support Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children in terms of their legal status	Children and Families Services	N/A	New
Take every possible action to fulfil our commitments to resettle unaccompanied asylum seeking children (e.g. through the Dubs scheme)	Children and Families Services	Number of children resettled in Bristol through the Dubs scheme	Ongoing
Resettle 100 families from the Home Office Vulnerable Person's Resettlement scheme and vulnerable children's resettlement scheme by April 2020	Adult Social Care	Number of families resettled	Ongoing
Support and encourage community groups to sponsor refugees through the Community Sponsorship programme	Mayor's Office	Number of sponsor groups and families resettled through community sponsorship	Ongoing
Work with stakeholders to develop a more strategic approach to supporting people during the 'move-on' period immediately after they receive refugee status	Housing, Asylum Team, Mayor's Office	Number of people presenting as homeless/needing emergency accommodation at the end of their move- on period	New

Influencing the System

Action	Who?	Output/ measurement	Ongoing or new activity?
Lead the Inclusive Cities project in Bristol, convening key stakeholders in the city to make progress on the inclusion of newcomers	Mayor's Office	Inclusive Cities Action Plan	Ongoing
Ensure that the voice and needs of refugees and asylum seekers are included in key internal plans including the Corporate Strategy and the Equality and Inclusion Strategy.	Mayor's Office, Equality and Inclusion Team	Strategy documents	Ongoing
Ensure that the voice and needs of refugees and asylum seekers are included in wider city plans and activities, including the One City Plan, City Office and City Funds	Mayor's Office	N/A	Ongoing
Ensure that Council officers are represented on key VCSE provider forums to ensure joined up working with the refugee providers e.g. ESOL Network, UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children) Forum and Refugee Providers' Forum	Collective responsibility	N/A	Ongoing
Ensure the Council's continued engagement with City of Sanctuary, supporting their campaigns and contributing to taking their work forward	Collective responsibility	N/A	Ongoing

Action	Who?	Output/ measurement	Ongoing or new activity?
Keep the voluntary and community sector informed on progress and seek advice on where key services are not inclusive or informed, and facilitate training and learning opportunities for service improvement	Collective responsibility	N/A	New
Take positive action to ensure refugees are included in initiatives address representation at all levels of the Council (e.g. Stepping Up)	Workforce and Change	Number of people with refugee background taking part in Stepping Up and similar programmes	Ongoing
Seek to influence the Government to expand its refugee resettlement programme beyond 2020	Policy	Government resettlement targets	New
Work with Core Cities and others to promote campaigns for policy changes that will improve the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees (e.g. 'Lift the Ban')	Policy, Mayor's Office	N/A	Ongoing
Use Bristol's influence on the international stage to advocate for positive changes to policy for asylum seekers and refugees	Mayor's Office, International Team	N/A	Ongoing

Further Information

For further information, or if you have any feedback on this strategy, please contact David Barclay – David.barclay@bristol.gov.uk

Appendix - Definitions⁸

Refugees

The definition of a refugee according to The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees is:

“A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”

In the UK, a person becomes a refugee when government agrees that an individual who has applied for asylum meets the definition in the Refugee Convention. At this point they will ‘recognise’ that person as a refugee and issue them with refugee status documentation. Usually refugees in the UK are given five years’ leave to remain as a refugee. They must then must apply for further leave, although their status as a refugee is not limited to five years. For the purposes of this strategy, the definition of ‘refugee’ also covers those who have received refugee status in a country other than the UK and subsequently moved to Bristol.

Asylum Seeker

A person who has left their country of origin and formally applied for asylum in the UK but whose application has not yet been concluded.

Refused Asylum Seeker

A person whose asylum application has been unsuccessful and who has no other claim for protection awaiting a decision.

⁸. These definitions have been largely taken from those used by the Refugee Council - <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/refugee-asylum-facts/the-truth-about-asylum>

