



## Community, Leadership & Libraries Committee

7 February 2023

<b>Title</b>	Refugee Resettlement and Asylum Seeker Update
<b>Report of</b>	Chair of the Communities, Leadership & Libraries Committee
<b>Wards</b>	All
<b>Status</b>	Public
<b>Urgent</b>	No
<b>Key</b>	Non-key
<b>Enclosures</b>	None
<b>Officer Contact Details</b>	Gemma Carmichael – Corporate Strategy Manager <a href="mailto:Gemma.carmichael@barnet.gov.uk">Gemma.carmichael@barnet.gov.uk</a> Will Cooper – Deputy Head of Strategy <a href="mailto:Will.cooper@barnet.gov.uk">Will.cooper@barnet.gov.uk</a>

### Summary

This report provides an update on the ongoing work that the council does to support the resettlement of refugees in Barnet and provide outreach support to asylum seekers in hotels. It also outlines the council's plans to become a Borough of Sanctuary.

### Officers Recommendations

1. That members note the report and the updates on refugees and asylum seekers in Barnet
2. That members approve of adopting the values of the City of Sanctuary network and the development of a Borough of Sanctuary Strategy

## **1. Why this report is needed**

- 1.1 Barnet is enhanced by the contribution of a range of diverse communities and this diversity has made Barnet a place of attraction for those who seek to settle in the UK. The council has worked to make sure that Barnet is a welcoming borough and so, over the last five years, we have co-ordinated several resettlement schemes to welcome and support those who have been displaced.
- 1.2 This report will provide an update on the work that Barnet Council continues to do to support refugees and asylum seekers. In addition to this, following a council motion to become a Borough of Sanctuary on 24 January, this paper will outline the future of this work towards accreditation.

### **1.3 Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme**

- 1.3.1 This scheme has now ended but under the scheme, the council facilitated the resettlement of 50 individuals since 2017. During this time, the council commissioned Barnet Homes to source accommodation and provide wraparound support for the families through a Refugee Resettlement Coordinator. This support included healthcare, education, social network, and financial stability; both benefit entitlement, and support securing and sustaining employment.
- 1.3.2 As part of this scheme, the council set up the VPRS Grant Scheme. Through this scheme families could apply for a grant of up to £5,000 to enable them to access the labour market or education, improve language skills or engage in activities that increased their sense belonging within the community. In October 2022, the council agreed to use this grant to cover the cost of citizenship for those on the scheme who wished to apply. So far, the council has received 10 applications for this and processed 8 of them.

### **1.4 United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme**

- 1.4.1 The VPRS scheme was closed to new arrivals in February 2021, at which point it became the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS). Under this scheme, the UK will offer a safe and legal route to vulnerable refugees in need of protection globally. In June 2021, the council pledged to take on 12 individuals under this scheme, but the resettlement of Afghan refugees has taken precedence.

### **1.5 Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme and Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy**

- 1.5.1 There are two resettlement schemes for people who have fled Afghanistan:
  1. Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) – an agreed scheme to make ex gratia offers to eligible locally employed staff (LES) who were made redundant as a direct consequence of the UK's military withdrawal from Afghanistan. Those on this scheme have indefinite leave to remain and can apply for British citizenship after five years in the UK.
  2. Afghan Citizen Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) – this scheme provides a route to safety for those put at risk by events in Afghanistan and will resettle up to 20,000 people at risk because they are vulnerable (women, girls, LGBT) or assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan.

1.5.2 All those brought to the UK under ARAP and ACRS have the right to work, access to education and healthcare and will be able to apply for public funds. Funding for both schemes provides coverage for health, education and integration support costs up to £20,520 per person over a period of three years.

1.5.3 The council made a pledge to resettle five families under this scheme and, to date, has supported the resettlement of two Afghan families under the ARAP scheme and two under the ACRS scheme. The council has a remaining pledge of one family. One of the key challenges of this scheme and fulfilling the pledge has been the lack of suitable accommodation for families on this scheme, who often require larger (4-5 bed) households. To address this, the council is one of several London boroughs that have signed up to the “Find Your Own Accommodation Pathway” which means that the council agrees in principle to provide wraparound support to individuals on the ACRS who find their own private rented accommodation in the borough.

## **1.6 British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) visa**

1.6.1 The BN(O) visa scheme is part of the UK government’s response to China’s failure to live up to its international obligations in with respect to Hong Kong and offers those ordinarily resident in Hong Kong a route to settle in the UK to live, work and study. The visa is being offered with a lower fee than other visas and provides a 5-year route to citizenship if they meet requirements and British Citizenship 12 months after settlement. With a Chinese population of 9,343 as of the 2021 census, Barnet has one of the largest Chinese populations of any London borough. It also has one of the highest rates of Cantonese speakers in the UK. It is reasonable to expect that this figure has continued to grow since the 2021 census was carried out.

1.6.2 The council has worked closely with Barnet-based wellbeing charity Meridian Wellbeing and the New Citizens Gateway to support the integration of Hong Kongers. This has included supporting Hong Kongers through providing health and wellbeing advice and support, hosting monthly Welcome Parties, and providing socialising opportunities for newcomers. In January 2023, in partnership with Meridian Wellbeing, the council submitted a bid for £30,000 in funding from the Greater London Authority to support a 6-month project aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of Hong Kongers in Barnet. This includes a series of mental health workshops, fitness classes and socialising opportunities. In addition to working with Meridian Wellbeing to provide wellbeing support, the council has, in partnership with Barnet & Southgate College, facilitated the delivery of ESOL classes to 71 individuals on this visa so far. There will be another round of classes taking place in spring 2023.

## **1.7 Homes for Ukraine**

1.7.1 The local authority is responsible for the administration of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme – this scheme enables Ukrainians to come to the UK and stay for a period of three years, being entitled to full benefits, and allowed to work. This scheme allows for individuals to ‘sponsor’ to gain approval to accommodate an individual or household from Ukraine. As part of this scheme, the council is responsible for data sharing, carrying out sponsor checks (accommodation, DBS verification and safeguarding), education provision, service referrals, support with work and benefits, homelessness assistance and community integration.

1.7.2 Central government has provided local authorities with the following funding:

- £200.00 “welcome” payment for each Ukrainian
- £10,500 per person to councils on first year
- £500.00 “thank you” payment to sponsors
- Additional funding for education services

1.7.3 So far, Barnet has welcomed 988 Ukrainians through this scheme which is overseen and co-ordinated by the Strategy and Engagement Team with support from Environmental Health inspectors, Barnet Homes inspectors, HR, the Children's Safeguarding and MASH Team and Finance. The council is also co-ordinating several initiatives to support the integration and independence of Ukrainians settling in Barnet on this scheme:

Housing:

- Working with Barnet Homes to develop a package to incentivize landlords to consider renting applications from Ukrainians. This will prevent guests from presenting as homeless and reduce the pressure on temporary accommodation services
- Currently procuring BEAM, an innovative project that supports refugees, to carry out a project to support Ukrainians into the private rented sector.

Employment and Education:

- Working with BOOST to look at how the council can work with Ukrainians to transfer their skills and qualifications so that they are able to work here
- Working with Barnet and Southgate College to provide ESOL classes
- Supporting employment via our dedicated Ukrainian employment officer who provides support with accessing employment and CV writing

Integration:

- Running a Facebook group to bring together guests and build social connections between them
- Using financial reserves to create an integration grant that we can pay directly to families to support their journey to independence (for example, accessing a course)
- Employing a Ukrainian welfare officer, located in Colindale, who provides a one stop shop to help with interpretation and accessing services

## **1.8 Asylum seekers**

1.8.1 Barnet is home to five hotels being used to accommodate asylum seekers before dispersing them into accommodation. These hotels are located across the borough and as of 18 November 2022, there were 1108 individuals across the four hotels – this is a rise from 901 the year before.

1.8.2 Since November 2021, the council has used Covid emergency funds to commission New Citizens Gateway and Persian Advice Bureau to provide outreach support in hotels. This support includes access to a range of activities, drop-in advice sessions, advocacy support and ESOL classes. Family services also run an onsite Stay and Play session for under-fives in the Colindale site on a weekly basis. In March 2022, the

Strategy and Engagement Team recruited an Asylum and Refugee coordinator to administrate this support and manage the VCS commission.

- 1.8.3 There is currently no funding available from central government to provide support to asylum seekers in hotels, however the Home Office is currently carrying out a New Burdens Assessment which will look at the funding models for local authorities who support asylum seekers. This is a cost data-gathering exercise that will enable the Home Office to better understand the new burdens placed on local authorities because of the Full Dispersal Model and will be used to inform future funding arrangements.
- 1.8.4 The Covid emergency funding used to commission the outreach support provided to asylum seekers in the hotels will run out at the end of financial year 2022-23. For the coming financial year, a review of existing service budgets will be undertaken, and services will be re-procured to reflect available funding. It is still the intention of government to decommission contingency hotels as soon as possible, so the need for ongoing funding beyond this is not certain.
- 1.8.5 To support the council's work in supporting asylum seekers in hotels, Barnet is also one of eleven local authorities taking part in a GLA funded initiative called the Asylum Welcome Programmes Design Lab. This programme brings together local authorities to develop and trial pilots in their borough to support asylum seekers.

## **1.9 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children**

- 1.9.1 Young people aged under 18 who enter the country seeking asylum are classified as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and must be looked after by the children's social care services. As of 1 January 2023, there were 55 UASC in our care. This compares with 72 UASC looked-after on 31 March 2021. Barnet is currently supporting 131 former UASC (18+), this is 41% of the current care leaver cohort. Between June 2022 and December 2022, the LA received 12 UASC via the National Transfer Scheme. Within this cohort, 2 children were accommodated by the LA with a family member. Since January 2022, the LA has received 4 referrals from the police in relation to UASC in police protection, of these one was a missing child returned to another LA. Three UASC also self-presented in the LA area.
- 1.9.2 Barnet is currently participating in a pilot scheme which seeks to provide UASC with provision for their substantive asylum interview to take place in a safe, secure and young people focussed setting, avoiding the need for the child to travel to the HO, typically Lunar House. For Barnet UASC, where possible, interviews are now taking place at the O&U Leaving Care Hub in North Finchley.

## **1.10 City of Sanctuary**

- 1.10.1 City of Sanctuary UK is an umbrella organisation whose mission is to provide coordination and development support for networks of organisations supporting people seeking sanctuary. In addition to this, they facilitate events, activities, and initiatives in

partnership at a UK level, ensuring good communication and the sharing of best practice across the City of Sanctuary networks, and work to raise the profile of City of Sanctuary overall. On 24 January, a council motion was passed which outlined the council's plans to become an awarded Borough of Sanctuary. Following this motion, the council is now a non-awarded member of the local authority network, and the Strategy Team are developing an application for Barnet to become an awarded Borough of Sanctuary.

1.10.2 By seeking to become a Borough of Sanctuary, the council is committing to sharing the values of City of Sanctuary UK and embedding these into the council's approach to this work. These are:

1. Inclusive – welcoming people from all backgrounds
2. Openness – working collaboratively across networks
3. Participation – working with people seeking sanctuary and valuing their contribution
4. Inspire – working with enthusiasm and positivity
5. Integrity – aspiring to high standards of honesty and behaviour

1.10.3 As part of the work the council is doing to become an awarded Borough of Sanctuary, the Strategy and Engagement Team is beginning planning to develop a Borough of Sanctuary strategy. This strategy, coproduced with partners, Barnet communities and refugee and asylum groups, will formalise the council's vision towards welcoming those seeking sanctuary and how the council will work with partners to achieve this. A new Borough of Sanctuary group is being established to inform and co-ordinate some of this work.

1.10.4 A key part of strategy development will include ensuring that the experiences and insights of refugees and asylum seekers in Barnet are heard as well as those who work with them and residents in receiving communities. This work is underpinned by the key principles of the Council's Community Participation Strategy:

- We go where people are
- We learn through doing
- We listen
- We are transparent, accessible and open
- We value community power

1.10.5 As well as several engagement activities held across Barnet with various groups, the strategy team will also co-ordinate a Leader Listens event with asylum seekers. As part of this event, the Leader of the council will meet with asylum seekers and outreach support workers to listen to their key concerns. These conversations will be used to inform the council's strategy.

1.10.6 On 19 January, a Migrant Health Needs Assessment was presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board. This paper outlines several recommendations for how the council and its partners can better address the health needs of asylum seekers, this includes improving training staff to work with asylum seekers, supporting trauma-focused interventions and improving access to health services.

1.10.7 This strategy will formalise our approach and ensure that the council embeds the City of Sanctuary Principles across the organisation to achieve the following outcomes:

- Create opportunities for relationships between people living in receiving communities and people seeking sanctuary
- Communicate a positive vision of welcome
- Empower those seeking sanctuary to be part of the decision-making processes
- Promote understanding of asylum and refugee issues
- Mobilise support for campaigns which aim to make a difference to the lives of those seeking sanctuary
- Facilitate partnership working and network development across places of sanctuary and support collaboration on common cause issues
- Celebrate the contribution and culture of those who settle in Barnet

## **2. Reasons for recommendations**

- 2.1** To update the Community Leadership and Library Committee on the progress made in relation to supporting refugees and asylum seekers in Barnet
- 2.2** That committee recognises the council's intentions to become a Borough of Sanctuary and note the commitment of the local authority to formalise its commitment to welcoming those seeking sanctuary

## **3. Alternative options considered and not recommended**

- 3.1** Not relevant in the context of this report

## **4. Post decision implementation**

- 4.1** That the local authority works with partners, residents, and refugees/asylum seekers to achieve Borough of Sanctuary status and develop a Borough of Sanctuary vision, strategy and action plan that will enable the council to continue to support the integration of refugees and asylum seekers

## **5. Implications of decision**

### **5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance**

5.1.1 Becoming an awarded Borough of Sanctuary is one way in which the council can realise its corporate vision to improve community participation and ensure that Barnet is a borough in which all of its communities can thrive and are celebrated. This programme of work will be reviewed throughout the implementation of an accompanying action plan to the strategy.

### **5.2 Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)**

- 5.2.1 The strategy calls for a new approach towards supporting the integration of refugees

and asylum seekers in Barnet. Central government funding enables the council to provide support for those on refugee resettlement schemes, as defined in the above sections.

- 5.2.2 For those who are housed in contingency hotels, the relevant service areas will review available funding streams to support future pressures. Funding levels will be incorporated into the re-procurement of services.

### **5.3 Legal and Constitutional References**

Under Article 7 of the constitution this committee is responsible for general consultations and engagement policy not linked to projects under the terms of reference of other committees.

### **5.4 Insight**

- 5.4.1 Insight is essential to understanding communities across Barnet, including refugee and asylum communities. Insight will be used extensively to inform the Borough of Sanctuary strategy and action plan to ensure that actions are targeted based on the data we have.

### **5.5 Social Value**

- 5.5.1 The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2013 requires people who commission public services to think about how they can also secure wider social, economic, and environmental benefits. Before commencing a procurement process, commissioners should think about whether the services they are going to buy, or the way they are going to buy them, could secure these benefits for their area or stakeholders.

### **5.6 Risk Management**

- 5.6.1 The council has an established approach to risk management, which is set out in the Risk Management Framework. Risks are reviewed quarterly and any high level risks are reported to Policy and Resources Committee.

### **5.7 Equalities and Diversity**

- 5.8 Pursuant to the Equality Act 2010, the council is under a legal obligation to have due regard to eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act; advancing equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant 'protected characteristic' and those who do not share it; and fostering good relations between persons who share a relevant 'protected characteristic' and persons who do not share it. The 'protected characteristics' are: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy, and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The council also has regard to the additional protected characteristic of marriage and civil partnership even though this does not apply to certain parts of the public-sector equality duty.

- 5.9 The work the council is undertaking to support refugees and asylum seekers advances our work in equality and diversity by ensuring that the council is engaging with a vulnerable minority in the borough and working to address their needs.

### **5.10 Corporate Parenting**



5.10.1 There are no implications for Corporate Parenting in relation to this report.

## **5.11 Consultation and Engagement**

5.11.1 Consultation and Engagement fundamental to this work and the council will endeavour to involve residents and communities as far as possible in the development of this work.

## **5.12 Environmental Impact**

5.12.1 None in the context of this report

## **6. Background papers**

**6.1 Community Participation Strategy** [Community Participation Strategy final cleared CLLC 311022.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

**6.2 Equality Policy** <https://engage.barnet.gov.uk/5904/widgets/17571/documents/13587>

**6.3 Migrant Health Needs Assessment**

[Microsoft Word - 2023 January - Migrant Health Committee HWBB Report - 06.01.23.docx \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)