



Leeds
CITY COUNCIL

Appendix 1

Executive Board: 20 October 2021

Annual update on migration activity in Leeds



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Introduction

Our ambition under the Best Council Plan 2020-2025 is for Leeds to be the best city in the UK: compassionate and caring with a strong economy; which tackles poverty and reduces inequalities; working towards being a net zero carbon city by 2030.

We want Leeds to be a city that is distinctive, sustainable, ambitious, fun and creative for all, with a council that its residents can be proud of as the best council in the country. But most of all, in light of the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, we want Leeds to be a safe city. As part of the council's vision to be the best city we want a city where people can be active and involved in the life of their communities and able to take action for themselves to make those communities stronger.

Migrant communities are valuable contributors to the city's economy, culture and diversity and Leeds aspires to ensure people are welcomed and supported. Leeds has a long-held commitment to support asylum seekers and refugees and is dedicated to being a city of sanctuary.

The term 'migration' covers a wide range of communities from economic migrants to those seeking asylum, fleeing war and persecution. Diversity in Leeds has continued to enrich the city with 169 nationalities present and over 170 languages spoken, as indicated in the Leeds State of the City report 2021.

The council recognises the challenges in ensuring fair access for all in the city and we continue to strive to tackle inequalities through a **strategic, coordinated and inclusive approach to migration** encouraged by the Executive Board, to ensure that the voice of migrant communities is at the heart of the three pillars of Inclusive Growth, Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Climate Emergency in Leeds.

During the past year, the migration agenda has considerably grown, and at a rapid pace. We are seeing the impact of changes to legislation such as on European nationals, who were required to register to the EU Settlement Scheme by 30 June 2021; arrivals in Leeds of Hong Kong British National (Overseas) under the new visa route which was opened on 31 January 2021; asylum seekers arriving at the UK coast having made the dangerous crossing, some of whom have arrived in Leeds, and we are currently seeing arrivals of Afghan refugees to Leeds. As a compassionate city, we are working in partnership to welcome new arrivals, so they are safe and have access to basic essentials and support to settle in the city.

The Migration team is well established and represents cultural and diverse backgrounds, with migration expertise and considerable experience in community engagement with the new and settled communities in Leeds and meeting cultural and diverse needs. During the past twelve months, the team have supported services within the statutory and voluntary sector at a time when many agencies faced challenges to meet the needs of vulnerable migrant households. The team collectively spoke a range of languages including Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Italian, French, Spanish, Vietnamese, Mirpuri, Swahili, Lingala, Arabic and Afemai and facilitated access to further contacts in the wider team to support with other languages.

Migration data

The [Newcomers to Leeds report](#) highlights that in 2019 there were 8,226 new arrivals to Leeds from a total of 112 countries with a slightly higher percentage of female than male. The areas in Leeds where most newcomers are settling are in Woodhouse and Little London, University and Little Woodhouse, and Harehills South. 49% of all arrivals were from the EU and that was 9% fewer than in 2018. The top 3 nationalities were Romanian, Indian and Italian. Arrivals to Leeds increased in 2019 as 16% more people arrived compared to 2018. Arrivals from Ghana

changed the most as 338 more people arrived than in 2018. Across the UK, immigration rose by 18%.

Work The overall number of new migrant workers arriving in Leeds increased by over 1,100 to around 8,200 in 2019. This was due to increases in arrivals from most world regions, despite a fall in arrivals from EU accession countries. The greatest change in individual nationalities compared to 2018 has been an increase of almost 340 arrivals from Ghana. The level of workers from non-accession countries arriving each year remains higher than the accession group with 6,080 arriving in 2019, an increase of around 1,440 on the previous year. This group is dominated by arrivals from India. The number of new migrant workers from EU accession countries fell slightly to around 2,160 arrivals in 2019, around 260 fewer arrivals than in 2018. This group is predominantly composed of Romanian arrivals. Romania remains the top country of origin overall.

Study There were 12,780 international students registered at a Higher Education institution in Leeds in the 2019-2020 academic year, an increase of almost 1,900 overseas students compared with the previous year. Almost 85% came from outside the EU.

Protection Some asylum seekers are housed and supported in Leeds through the Home Office dispersal system. Published Home Office figures show that at the end of December 2020, 846 people were being supported in Leeds while awaiting a decision on their claim (known as Section 95 support): 798 people were being accommodated, and there were 48 people receiving subsistence-only support i.e., no accommodation. There were also around 60 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children [UASC] being looked after by the local authority at the end of March 2020. These are children who are in the UK without family and have claimed asylum in their own right. They are separate to the dispersal system for asylum seekers described above. Those granted protection by the Home Office may then stay in the area as refugees. Other groups of refugees are resettled directly from another country through other schemes. [Leeds Local Migration Profile 2020 \(migrationyorkshire.org.uk\)](https://migrationyorkshire.org.uk)

Governance

Leeds Strategic Migration Board

This board is our governance arrangement for the city and the membership is made up of stakeholders from across the city including local authority partners from Housing; Adults and Health; Children's Services; Safer, Stronger Communities, and Migration Yorkshire. Other statutory services represented on the board include the NHS Clinical Commissioning Group, the Police and the Department of Work and Pensions. The migrant third sector are present through representatives of the Leeds Migration Partnership. Mears and Migrant Help have recently joined this board.

Over the past year, the board has focused on a number of key themes and has received updates on progress being made in delivery of migration activities; updates and impact of national policy locally; uptake of EU Settlement Scheme including those young people in local authority care; Windrush; thematic discussions on asylum seekers and support; no recourse to public funds; the impact on services and approaches for partnership response; improving access to services, raising awareness and joint approaches.

The board undertook a survey covering the period September 2016 to December 2019 to highlight achievements and challenges using partner feedback to plan future sessions as solution focused meetings.

The forthcoming meeting will be dedicated to aligning priorities in responding to ongoing challenges to ensure migrants' voices are heard to influence service delivery.

The Leeds Strategic Migration Board has supported the links between the key [migration programmes](#) described in this report and the opportunities presented through the work in priority neighbourhoods where inequalities can be experienced more acutely by both migrant communities and settled communities. The board has shared good practice; lessons learned and encouraged development of key projects.

The Leeds Migrant Health Board

The Leeds Migrant Health Board is accountable to the Leeds Health and Wellbeing Board. Migrant Health Board member organisations have continued to work well together towards achieving the three existing priorities of the group during the pandemic, whilst supporting wider action to meet needs associated with COVID-19.

After a pause due to COVID-19, The Migrant Health Board was reconvened in March 2021. The group aims to review its short and long-term priorities with the intention of developing a revised action plan at a future meeting.

Progress against current priorities of Leeds Migrant Health Board:

The Migrant Health Board has committed to a number of targets around communicable diseases (including screening, case finding and management), as well as increasing access to a wider range of frontline health and wellbeing services, which aim to protect and support our most at risk groups.

Measure 1: Year on year increase in proportion of service users identifying as migrant who access relevant public health commissioned lifestyle and community development services. Monitored through asking 'UK citizen or other' question.

The Leeds Migrant Health Board has recommended improved monitoring and data collection arrangements to assess migrant access to a number of frontline community initiatives including Better Together, Rainbow Hearts a Public Health funded project designed to support female Asylum Seekers and One You Leeds which supports individuals to adopt and maintain a healthy lifestyle and positive mental health. Since April 2019 relevant Public Health commissioned services have been asked to use the LCC approved 'UK citizen or other' question in order to monitor access to services by migrant groups. This can now be analysed, trends over time assessed and services required to respond accordingly.

Measure 2: Increase identification and treatment of Latent TB by using revised screening using criteria: 16 to 35 years old - Lived, born, or visited for 6 months the WHO high incidence countries.

Target improvement- 'Year on year increase in the number of latent TB cases identified as a proportion of individuals tested'.

Since 2016 there has been a year on year rise in the numbers of individuals tested for LTBI rising from 75 (2016) to 595 (2019). The percentage of positives has varied over this time from 23% in 2016 to 12% in 2019.

Measure 3: Year on year increase in proportion of children receiving childhood vaccinations including MMR in areas of high migrant population (Leeds Postcodes LS8 and LS9).

Target improvement - 90% of children immunised against MMR1 and MMR2

Primary Care Networks have started to work collaboratively with community partners to address lower take up in priority areas. Engagement with the community is key and uptake is determined by a number of factors including – the differences in vaccination schedules in different countries, understanding how to access primary care and vaccination appointments.

Leeds Migration Partnership

Leeds Migration Partnership (LMP) is led by the migrant third sector and facilitated by Leeds City Council. It brings together individuals, groups and organisations to meet, think and share information and ensure that the voices of migrants are heard and influence decision makers. Ordinarily, the partnership raises concerns and issues to influence change through three distinct areas. These are LMP information, which takes the form of a blog; LMP Operational Group – for people to share notable practice; and LMP Strategy Group that ensures the partnership has clear priorities and goals based on what is important to migrant groups. This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Operational Group met fortnightly, providing a safe and supportive environment for those working in the migration sector to come together, share information and reflect on the challenging and rapidly changing environment COVID-19 was creating.

The financial challenge has had a significant impact on the migrant third sector at a time when the migration agenda has considerably grown. The sector has continued to respond to challenges of destitution and homelessness and be an active partner in the citywide response.

LMP partners were active members in developing the strategic approach to migration for the city. LMP Strategy group used the themes within the approach to identify priorities that the partnership could deliver, and these are Safety and inclusion; Housing; Health and Wellbeing; and Employment and Learning. This year the LMP Strategy Group reviewed the priorities, through the lens of COVID-19. It was felt the priorities were still relevant and appropriate, but that COVID-19 needed to run as a thread through them all. Some key highlights follow:

Housing

Following a halt on Home Office accommodation evictions, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in the summer 2020, the Home Office started to indicate that evictions would resume. LMP members were incredibly concerned about evicting people into homelessness during a global pandemic and therefore wrote to the then leader of the council, Cllr Judith Blake, and other elected members urging them to write to the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, to ask them to immediately halt their plans to resume evictions from asylum accommodation. This led to Cllr Judith Blake writing to the Home Secretary, asking her to reconsider evicting people into destitution during the pandemic.

Health and Wellbeing

The pausing of the Migrant Health Board and focus on COVID-19 caused some frustrations for the LMP meaning that progress towards their priorities of improving access to health for migrants and improving public messaging on health charging was impacted. The partnership has supported the council's public messaging around the pandemic and vaccine roll out and accurate and up-to-date information has been published on the blog. The Refugee and Asylum Seeker Mental Health Group meets regularly, chaired by an LMP member with a focus on improving access to mental health services and improving mental health and wellbeing.

Safety and Inclusion

Work on this area included representation at key domestic violence forums. The Domestic Violence Voice and Accountability Forum and a draft term of reference was finalised. The Forum wants the victim voice to be heard and has identified issues and gaps in information for migrant groups. LMP shared translated key messages regarding the vaccine and shielding and which are available on the LMP blog. Leeds Refugee Forum worked with 6 communities to create a short film about vaccinations into different languages.

Employment and Learning

The partnership is working in informing and supporting members about the volunteering quality mark. The LMP attendance to the Adult Learning Board will be resumed once it reconvenes.

LMP discussed the remit of the newly elected West Yorkshire Mayor with powers over a variety of areas including funding for up skilling adults for employment, bringing opportunities for LMP to influence its policies.

LMP Blog is the main tool and is maintained by the LMP Comms team. During the 12 months from April 2020 to March 2021:

- The number of people who subscribe to weekly LMP mailings has increased by **more than 15%** -from 494 to 579
- Unique users of the LMP Blog have **grown by about 25%**
- The number of sessions has also **increased by 25%**
- Over the last year, people have looked at **30% more** pages than they did in 2021
- Posts: we've averaged about 29 posts a month

It is noted that these numbers are an underestimate as in July 2020, the LMP Blog servers went down, and posts were lost from March 2020 until the last week in July.

COVID-19

The impact of COVID-19 and 'lockdown'

People from minority ethnic backgrounds have been found to be at greater risk of contracting COVID-19 and of experiencing poorer outcomes. It is therefore likely that asylum seekers and refugees from minority ethnic backgrounds have been at increased risk during the pandemic.

The most 'at risk' communities, including refugees and asylum seekers, were also more likely to experience poorer mental health during this time – in part due to the cumulative impact of trauma (experienced in their country of origin/journey to the UK), and the effect of enforced 'lockdowns'.

Additional COVID-19 funding was allocated to the council to support the delivery of a range of activities:

- Public Health commissioned physical activity opportunities and sessions to improve the mental wellbeing of asylum seekers who were being housed in emergency accommodation in Leeds for a prolonged period.
- Further funding was secured for refugee women to stay physically active during the pandemic, using a peer-to-peer approach Women's Health Matters have trained volunteers to deliver sessions to women virtually through Zoom.

During lockdown periods of the pandemic, a number of identified COVID-related communication issues were addressed:

- A grants fund was established to support organisations working with faith and culturally diverse communities. 40+ organisations received three pieces of funding; the first was for messages specifically promoting positive COVID-19 messaging focusing on safety and mental wellbeing, the second was to release capacity within the organisations for continued engagement. A third pot of funding was released in March 2021 to support vaccine messaging.
- Public Health developed and widely disseminated a range of resources in several languages, both written and using various media to promote key messages including staying safe and testing etc.

Vaccination

The Leeds COVID-19 Vaccine Inequalities Plan '*Leaving no one behind*' aims to mitigate inequalities to access and ensure that underserved populations have access to the COVID-19 vaccine close to where they live in Leeds.

As part of this citywide plan the Leeds 'Inclusion Approach' focuses on supporting 'socially excluded' groups (including asylum seekers, refugees, and people with no recourse to public funds) to access the vaccine.

A positive partnership has developed between Bevan Healthcare, Public Health (LCC), third sector organisations and the communities they work with. Planning is underway to ensure that all inclusion groups have been offered second vaccinations and boosters in September.

Recent activity includes:

- A letter in community languages sent out to all migrants and refugees in dispersed accommodation in Leeds offering them the vaccine (and registration with GPs and schools if they have children). This was supported by Migrant Community Networkers and over the phone with translators.
- The ESOL college drop-in session for ESOL students was a huge success with over 100 students vaccinated. A second session is planned for August. The interactions were effective as Migrant Community Networkers were able to offer translation support for those with limited English language skills.

Supporting the 'Inclusion Approach' is a working group which has been established to review available data by ethnicity. This includes representation from Public Health, LCC Safer, Stronger Communities' team and Leeds CCG.

The working group supports sensitive analysis of available data and developing further understanding regarding vaccine hesitancy – acknowledging that there are serious concerns about the vaccines amongst some communities and significant barriers to access.

Current work is built around 4 key strands: a citywide approach; culture and faith; place, and settings (including workplaces, for example taxi hire companies).

Communication and Engagement – COVID-19

A joined-up approach with Public Health was developed and this brought together discussions around communities and improving engagement through networks. This has included an overview of communities and languages spoken and work with targeted demographics in geographical areas. Consultation and development of government messages were (and continue to be) key to ensure that vulnerable households have access to and understand the messages in an understandable format. Intelligence led to further discussion around myth busting and targeting communities to better understand the reasons for this.

COVID-19 messages and challenges became a regular discussion item at team meetings and there are many challenges that continue to require partnership discussions. Gathering intelligence has been key to feed into relevant partnerships and to share anecdotal knowledge such as clarity around messages, the mode of circulation such as WhatsApp and how we could utilise this better and responding to stigma by building trust within communities.

Communities of Interest

The Communities of Interest network was developed to respond to COVID-19 and has become more established with a network of organisations representing groups of people who experience additional barriers. The migration team have contributed to understanding the needs of refugees and asylum seekers in particular, but have gained from the intersectionality of the network.

Forum Central continue to work in partnership with, Healthwatch Leeds, Voluntary Action Leeds and Leeds City Council to support this network of community-based organisations in order to address inequalities. The partnership supported the wider communications with the third sector and implementing actions such as the third sector outbreak plan; supporting the work around funding opportunities particularly with targeted communities. This involved community engagement to reach those who were the furthest away and having up to date and adequate resources for those where engagement is most difficult.

COVID-19 Messages to Priority Groups and Communities Task Group

The Covid-19 Messages to Priority Groups and Communities task group was established following the national lockdown to develop strong, clear, evidence-based COVID-19 messages to aid more effective communication with communities which could be championed by local leaders and communities. Co-chaired by Public Health and the Safer Stronger Communities Team, national and local restrictions, guidance and key messages were tailored taking cultural factors, language barriers, sensory impairments, and digital literacy into consideration to develop resources which better meet the needs of priority groups and communities. Key messages were communicated using a variety of formats - infographics, BSL, easy read formats, audio, video, social media, community radio stations. In addition, resources were translated/interpreted into 12 priority languages identified for the city. These resources and campaigns were made accessible to services and organisations through the council's COVID-19 toolkit and regular demonstrations facilitated access to these resources, including through the [Community Champions](#) training programme.

The Cultural Food Hub

The Cultural Food Hub was initiated to complement the Community Care Hub food offer in May 2020 and continues to support residents who need help and support with food parcels which better met their cultural needs. Delivered by Hamara and Give a Gift, access was made available through self-referral or via supporting agents to assist people not presenting via the COVID-19 support line or Leeds Welfare Support Service (LWSS). In addition, Community Care Hubs and other frontline organisations and groups supporting people with emergency food, are able to access culturally appropriate food for their organisation to redistribute. Five types of tailored food parcels are available covering: South Asian, Middle Eastern, African, Caribbean, and Eastern European backgrounds with the contents developed in partnership with referring agents to meet diverse emergency food need. The parcels do not include non-essential items or food with strict storage controls such as fresh meat. Over 24,000 food parcels, servicing over 125,000 residents have been provided since May 2020 to June 2021. Going forward the Cultural Food Hub is transitioning to a sustainable delivery model as part of the existing food infrastructure in Leeds and the emerging Community Care Hub models.

Discussions continue to take place with Public Health and others to work towards reaching out to those groups where vaccination uptake continues to be low and using evidence and intelligence to progress on engagement models.

There are many small organisations that have emerged during the pandemic and are keen to access support for their communities as they are unable to take on the burden of increasing challenges as a result of the pandemic. These challenges include access to basic essentials; loss of employment; inability to claim benefits due to loss of cash in hand jobs; facing evictions; mental health.

COVID-19 Community Champions Programme

The COVID-19 Community Champions Programme was funded by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government to develop additional capacity to support a range of COVID-19 messaging and activities to build on existing work to facilitate access to clear,

accessible and consistent information and further enhance opportunities to engage communities in system design.

The Community Champions programme created a volunteer role, and micro grant funding, which gave people the opportunity to share accurate and up to date health messages with people in their networks and local communities, with the confidence that they had been equipped with the knowledge, guidance, and safe information to be able to confidently provide access to health messages linked to COVID-19. The programme was designed to build trust and relationships through co-production and co-delivery, not only with the council, Public Health, Leeds CCG and trusted local organisations; but through the creation of meaningful opportunities for local people acting as community champions and small organisations/groups aiding local communities, to shape the local agenda and response. The approach was designed to improve knowledge and confidence to discuss and address misconceptions, counter misinformation and provide clarity on vaccinations to enable informed choice and increase uptake amongst communities.

Delivered in partnership with Voluntary Action Leeds, Forum Central and Hamara, over 75 diverse COVID-19 community champions from across the city were recruited, trained and provided with ongoing volunteer support including regular Q&A sessions with health professionals and access to up-to-date resources. This equipped champions with the knowledge and skills to facilitate quality conversations with communities and identified priority groups.

Champions have made a significant contribution toward partnership-led community engagement initiatives including the roving vaccination bus, women only vaccination clinics and enhanced testing work, which has focused on areas with higher rates of vaccine hesitancy based on their geography and demographics. Champions provided accurate information, community reassurance and signposting and evidence has proven they have been a catalyst to getting people vaccinated. For example, an intervention with Leeds City College, the largest provider of ESOL, responded to the identification of residents with English as an additional language as a population group with one of the lowest uptake rates for the vaccination. A drop-in session and vaccination clinic set up within the college enabled ESOL students, their families, and friends to access support and vaccinations with the support of multilingual community champions, many of whom are also Migrant Community Networkers. Champions significantly contributed towards vaccination uptake through this important open dialogue with diverse communities and highlighted the importance of how cultural understanding factors into people's decision making over their own health. Furthermore, community champions developed and delivered community engagement activities based on their own initiatives.

Impact from the programme include:

- **Roving vaccination bus:** 2754 people vaccinated. The team stated, *“without Community Champions the bus would not have reached as many residents, they were very useful in supporting the vaccination effort and the diversity and unique language skills of the champions offered was very helpful. Champions’ contributions helped to show how much ethnicity and culture factored into people’s decisions over their own health”*.
- **Women only vaccination clinics:** 154 women vaccinated. A woman who accessed the clinic stated, *“I wasn’t sure if this was safe for me because I am Asian. Will it protect me? Am I still going to be able to have children in the future? I have read so much on the internet and it has made me very scared. I only came today because outreach staff told me it is safe and other women from my community are also coming”*.
- **Leeds City College:** 106 people vaccinated, however the accurate number of people presented is not captured as some had a preference for a different vaccine at another site. The team stated, *“The role of the CCs was invaluable... we were able to effectively*

engage students in meaningful conversations about the vaccine and address hesitancy factors... champions were able to act from a position of cultural awareness, knowledge and experience. Where there was a match in cultural background and language between students and the champions, the interactions were positive”.

- **Enhanced testing areas:** 27,083 tests completed; 18,510 doors knocked; 5,003 conversations completed.
- **Community champions data cards:** recorded 389 community conversations showing the wide range of supported offered and impact of meaningful conversations.

The micro grants element of the COVID-19 Community Champions programme further increased capacity to communicate information and guidance at a hyperlocal level. The micro grants engaged with a diversity of organisations and built new connections with small grassroots groups. This maximized the skills, expertise and reach to promote key messages; health and wellbeing; and identify needs and meaningful solutions through an ongoing collaborative effort. A broad range of activity delivered engaged directly with diverse communities, priority and at-risk groups. Funded projects provide information directly to communities to educate on COVID-19 key messages and guidance; encourage safe behaviours and facilitate informed choice including regarding vaccinations. Micro grant funded projects further improved our reach into communities where we know uptake is at a lower level, by engaging in places where statutory services don't usually attend like sport, craft and faith events, and bespoke information sessions with trusted guest speakers including faith and community leaders. Street outreach projects were delivered led by organisations with strong, trusted relationships with disadvantaged and marginalised communities in areas of higher vaccine hesitancy. Dedicated workers were deployed to carry key messages and vaccination information to those who are less engaged with structured programmes/organisations. These projects engaged with people at popular local shopping facilities, hairdressers, barber shops, food take-aways and local parks etc. to engage residents who may miss general messaging.

In response to local feed-back we developed an adapted training programme to engage with people with learning disabilities, due to the particular needs of a below the radar community group. An additional 14 community champions with learning disabilities attended bespoke training co-produced with a specialist organisation and co-delivered with a trainer with learning disabilities. To complement this approach the micro grants were promoted to organisations with the experience and skills to effectively support these trained volunteers with the delivery of messages to connect with people with learning disabilities. These organisations provided 1-1 support to enable active communications within champions' communities of interest, families, and peers. The work was further extended to support adults with learning disabilities to share their COVID-19 vaccine stories with others to promote uptake and wellbeing, as well as creating resources that are being shared with other third sector organisations.

The COVID-19 Community Champions Programme reinforced our approach that communities prefer to have the information from trusted sources as opposed to just from statutory services or the third sector. Across the broad range of activity, two-way open dialogue was encouraged and facilitated to provide insights into community issues and concerns which were valuable to influence and feed into strategic decision making such as at the Vaccine Inequalities Group to inform future activity. The programme was initially time-limited, however due to the great success of the project, we are currently reviewing the programme so it can be sustained for a longer period of time in partnership with delivery providers.

Migration projects

Community Connectors project

This project was temporarily funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to support new migrant households to connect with local services and existing

communities with a focus on addressing concerns around housing, hate crime, community cohesion and health and wellbeing. By responding to these challenges, the aim was to help save costs to public services, unlock migrant capabilities, and increase capacity to promote a more integrated and socially cohesive society.

The project successfully recruited a co-ordinator and five Community Connectors from diverse communities, all of whom had previous lived experience of being a new migrant to Leeds. This project has now come to an end and has seen all five Community Connectors successfully obtain employment within the council where their skills and expertise have been retained.

During the project delivery period of 18 months, strong relationships were established with services and residents in priority neighbourhoods as each role had a designated priority neighbourhood and surrounding area within their portfolio.

The project target was to reach 100 vulnerable migrant households who experienced ongoing unresolved issues. The project exceeded the target and reached 293 households clearly demonstrating the need.

The benefits of this model allowed direct support nearer to where the service users reside or visit, such as schools, a welcome approach as this helped to reduce pressures. The learning demonstrated that people with lived experience, language, and other needs were able to relate to the communities and engage them quickly resulting in improved engagement between schools and parents by clearly communicating the needs.

Addressing ongoing unresolved cases between new migrant households and services was a key focus. The learning demonstrated that this project approach was able to understand and resolve complexities around immigration status, conditions attached to leave to remain, and barriers of language and lack of understanding of the city and systems. This prevented knock on impacts of losing employment, access to benefits, becoming homeless, mental health, safeguarding etc. thus reducing financial and resource pressure on statutory services.

Cross council and city services recognised this initiative that supported outcomes and saved money for services for new and settled migrant households. The learning demonstrated that there was a high level of unmet need in communities from both new and settled communities and lack of workforce within the council who understand the issues associated with migrant households as well as engagement.

A breakthrough on council housing policy change was achieved as the charge to non-EU migrants for proof of tenancy when applying for leave to remain has been waived – reducing the financial burden for the service users and pressure on services. The learning demonstrated that increasing inequalities exist amongst new migrant households.

A key aspect supported was to maximise benefit entitlements for many households who were unable to understand terminology and processes, by timely interventions. This saved time, money and pressure on services i.e. evictions, social work intervention, debt reduction, domestic violence concession, housing conditions and reduction of disrepair claims. Learning demonstrated that many factors contributed to the delay of achieving outcomes due to the barriers such as language and complexities including compliance with the habitual residency test, timely applications for leave to remain along with understanding eligibility for fee waivers from the Home Office.

The project assisted services to better understand their local community. A key partnership was with New Wortley Community Centre to support mapping of diverse communities in the local area which led to the recruitment of a development worker from a diverse background to

improve access to services. This demonstrated that key knowledge, information, data and engagement experience all contributed to supporting the development of the organisation on the demographics within the geographical area.

A no recourse to public funds toolkit was also developed in partnership to support statutory services to undertake assessments, for example to be used by social workers and shared with voluntary sector services. The learning demonstrated a joined-up approach to solving complex problems. During the pandemic the toolkit assisted homeless people from EU and non-EU nationalities to move on to the asylum process, EU Settlement Scheme and other accommodation.

The project connected households to the right support services in a timely manner so that crisis situations could be dealt with, for example, quick resolution on domestic violence cases by encouraging applications to the Home Office for DV concessions via social services (positive results in women fleeing violence, and accessing support, universal credit or employment within the 3-month timescale), referrals from police, faith organisations, third sector and directly from communities.

Resolving issues for asylum seekers allowed strengthening key partnerships at a local level such as directly with the accommodation provider and improved understanding of the client group. This learning demonstrated the health and wellbeing of asylum seekers being improved, who had experienced traumatic journeys and further hate crime, challenges around schooling, housing conditions and isolation. In addition, this approach improved the communication and support with the accommodation provider and associated agencies.

Working with families also helped the council to save money whilst managing the expectations of service users, for example cases such as social services supporting children under Section 17 funding. The provision is expensive as individuals are provided temporary accommodation. Resolving issues such as supporting the individuals to apply for asylum and gain financial support from the home office, resulted in saving money on accommodation and financial support provided by the council - the learning demonstrated that council services can lack clarity on next steps, and needs this type of project that cuts across the council and services to provide such support, to ensure efficiency savings across the council and moving service users on.

Employment and skills support was a priority for the majority of households when their basic and immediate issues were resolved. The project established links with employment and skills advisers; signposted to key organisations such as community hubs, We Care Academy, Citizen's Advice, NHS etc. This resulted in positive outcomes and employment. The learning demonstrated that new migration households lacked confidence (not skills) to take the first step, and further challenges were faced such as employers and mainstream employment processes that were complicated and not being able to access English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

There is a good example in how the Community Connectors started to build capacity within the third sector by identifying gaps. A third sector organisation was supported to deliver their creche services in another part of the city through developing a service level agreement, risk assessment and strengthening safeguarding policy. The support enabled the service to develop confidence and deliver a service that built volunteer capacity and income for the organisation. The learning demonstrated that more partnership support with third sector organisations can help them with sustainability and take their expertise in other parts of the city to meet the needs of local residents.

Partnerships developed with Localities, Councillors, and wider services such as housing, youth, health, schools etc. understanding issues, learning about priority neighbourhoods, challenges

faced by local residents, the offer of local services, the gaps in service provision – this added value to city priority meetings. This learning demonstrated the challenges of local services in responding to migration issues and how this approach supported conversations and outcomes.

Overall, the project has been instrumental in delivering preventative services and enhanced quality of life by reducing the risk of eviction, homelessness, debt, mental health, poverty, destitution, exploitation through criminal activity or being a victim of crime. Projects such as Community Connectors are needed across the council and statutory services to address migrant issues. Further funding would support embedding best practice and training as a longer-term cost-effective solution.

Migrant Access Programme (MAP)

In February 2020, the council's Migrant Access Programme (MAP) celebrated 10 years of a project initially funded for 18 months. During this time, over 200 **Migrant Community Networkers (MCNs)** were officially trained and equipped with the skills and knowledge to support new migrants to better access services.

In 2020-21, MAP produced 24 newsletters. These newsletters proved to be an effective communication tool and allowed MAP to centralise information on COVID-19 messages, funding/training opportunities. Most importantly, it allowed the programme to value and share positive news stories of the work of the Migrant Community Networkers which they delivered in their community and wider. MAP sees the newsletter as an excellent route to provide key information and counter negative narrative on migration and contributing to greater social cohesion in Leeds.

The MCNs Voices was introduced to allow MCNs to share their passion and knowledge in the areas that interest them. These sessions very much took a bottom-up approach of how MCNs can share their knowledge and expertise with services on strategic themes such as: Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), businesses and newer communities in Leeds, ESOL in Leeds from a migrant perspective.

Following consultation with MCNs, a range of training areas were identified that MCNs hoped to attend for development and progression. As a result, services such as the council, Proverbs31 Woman, Advonet, Hope for Justice and Think Tank delivered topics on accessing employment, writing funding applications, Prevent, advocacy, first aid and modern slavery. All the sessions were facilitated and supported by the MAP team.

The programme actively campaigns on areas that impact on migrant communities. A Hate Crime awareness session was delivered, and which was attended by over 40 participants. The opportunity to attend the 2021 Census awareness sessions led to some MCNs obtaining paid opportunity with the ONS.

Discussion on Modern Slavery has been ongoing, training was facilitated with support from Safer Leeds and Hope for Justice. 19 MCNs representing 13 countries, 8 grassroots organisations and speaking 13 different languages received training. A funding opportunity was opened to those who received training and 3 were granted funding to deliver community awareness events. An additional organisation secured funding to translate two Hope for Justice videos into Arabic and Turkish, which were circulated widely. Further work is currently under way to develop a city resource that can be accessible to communities and will be signposting to key services in Leeds.

Responding to the pandemic was a key priority and where the programme undertook key partnership work to support city wide COVID-19-related pieces of work. The pandemic was not just a health crisis but an economic and social challenge that affects migrant households in

different ways. For example, immigration status and the ability to access public funding. In this new context, MAP had to adapt and continued to play a key role in connecting migrant communities with services during the pandemic. This implied new ways of working remotely and communicating with MCNs. The weekly online drop-ins played a key role in keeping MCNs updated on the pandemic, making sure that key messages and information on national government lockdown guidance reached newer communities across the city. This contributed to mitigating against local misinformation and fears. Over the last 12 months, 34 services from the public and voluntary sector have provided training and consulted with 351 MCNs (including repeat visits) through the weekly drop-in.

A partnership with Public Health allowed funding opportunities that resulted in 7 grass roots organisations securing funding to deliver activities, helping people to engage with services, and promote COVID-19 and vaccination messages in creative ways. Projects included online sessions with a range of communities. As part of engagement with Public Health through door knocking and supporting the roving bus over a 20-week programme, 27 MCNs attended 191 separate sessions over a two-month period.

Over the last 12 months (July 2020 to July 2021) a total of 47 drop-ins took place, with 359 MCN visits. There was a total of 43 services that attended the drop-in and a total of 54 new people attended the drop-in and who are potential MCNs at a future round of training. 41 said they would be available to engage with MAP.

A key focus on developing MCNs and achieving outcomes for services continues to be discussed through consultation and engagement.

MCNs also supported the engagement with local businesses and supported roll out of messages and information and extended the support offer to resolve issues exacerbated by the pandemic. For example, needs around cultural, language, mental health and being able to access support to enable the welfare of vulnerable households. For example, by providing healthy start vouchers to encourage access to advice and information on diet and nutrition. Door knocking during the pandemic has exposed wider socio-economic challenges such as debt, being furloughed, facing eviction and lack of healthy spaces.

Migrant Community Networkers have also attended the MHCLG funded Community Champions project (discussed in this report [above](#)) training delivered in partnership with VAL. Three of the MCNs successfully accessed the micro grants funding to deliver projects to promote vaccination and COVID-19 messaging.

Leeds ESOL Strategy

As part of the Learning English in Leeds project funded by MHCLG from 2018 to 2020, the Migration team led on the development of an ESOL strategy for Leeds which was approved by the Leeds Strategic Migration Board in October 2020 and by delegated decision in March 2021. The strategy puts forward the need for a cross sector multi-disciplinary collaboration underpinned by strong partnership working approaches. Given the complex nature of the ESOL landscape, and the opportunities presented through local control of the Adult Education Budget, it is felt the strategy needs to be led by an overseeing body which is a specialist partnership immersed in ESOL. The next steps are to explore connecting the ESOL strategy and sector with the wider skills agenda in the city and the infrastructure being set up to work with the West Yorkshire Combined Authority as they begin to deliver the Adult Education Budget from August 2021.

In response to COVID-19 the team compiled a list of online self-access learning resources for adults and children, reflecting the needs of speakers of other languages and the impact of cancellation of face-to-face English classes. These resources were posted on the Leeds

Migration Partnership Blog and were in the top two posts in the early months of the pandemic reflecting the high interest and priority given to continuing English language studies during lockdown. The resources are now hosted on the Learning English in Yorkshire and the Humber (LEYH) website and have contributed to the resources development of the site. The team also liaised with MESH and 100% Digital Leeds colleagues and NATECLA (the National Association of Teachers of English and other Community Languages) to look at resources and approaches to combat the combined barrier of English language level and digital. The team collaborated with 100% Digital Leeds on a funding bid to develop digital champions who would also support with English language learning which was co-produced with the migrant third sector. Although this particular bid was unsuccessful, the team continues to liaise with 100% Digital Leeds on similar opportunities.

The team continue to advise colleagues, projects and initiatives on accessing ESOL and working with ESOL providers across the city, for example in welcoming Afghans to the city and their likely needs in accessing English language learning in order to establish themselves and have their skills and qualifications recognised; providing appropriate advice and guidance to asylum seekers in hotels; working with Leeds City College on becoming a College of Sanctuary and to improve access to health services; working with Leeds Voices on encouraging responses to the Adult Education Budget strategy consultation and within the wider devolution consultation.

In connection with the wider team's work on the resilience of the third sector throughout COVID-19, links have been made with the council's Leeds Adult Learning commissioned providers who are mainly third sector organisations, to establish a connection with Third Sector Leeds with a view to improving their financial sustainability in light of the combined challenge of delivering online throughout the pandemic, and loss of income through the decline in traded services. The team continues to advocate for the importance of adult and community learning both to individuals and their wider community and in the context of the financial challenge and health inequalities highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The team contributed to the Migration Yorkshire toolkit on [ESOL for refugees for commissioners and practitioners](#) offering guidance and highlighting effective practice. The Language Hub grant fund was included as a case study on making a grant scheme accessible to small organisations and valuing linguistic diversity through taking a strengths-based approach.

Language Hub

Under the Learning English in Leeds project a £200,000 grant funding pot was made available with the aim of bringing new and settled communities together through activities to share skills, build relationships and have opportunities to practise conversational English. Whilst face-to-face delivery was suspended due to COVID-19, funded projects were able to adapt and keep in touch with participants, providing food parcels, data to keep in touch with friends, family and services and maintaining connections to keep the sense of community going. Through the relationships made, projects have been able to make a real difference in terms of mental health, isolation and keeping active, and in some cases have dealt with serious situations such as domestic violence, ensuring the woman was safely housed and supported. Although it was not appropriate for all projects, several were able to adapt and deliver successfully online, in some cases attracting additional funds to make this possible (see below [Mafwa Theatre example](#)).

Communication and Engagement

Windrush

An engagement event hosted by Home Office representatives took place online in August 2020 to raise awareness of the Windrush Compensation Scheme and the work of the Windrush Taskforce. Open to everyone of any nationality, the Home Office provided information on who

may be eligible for the Windrush Compensation Scheme, what kinds of losses and impacts it covers, how to apply and provide an opportunity to ask questions of Home Office staff. The Home Office also took this opportunity to apologise for the pain and suffering caused by the failings of the Home Office and raise awareness of the Windrush lessons learned independent review completed by Wendy Williams which identifies the key lessons and recommendations for the Home Office going forward.

Refugee week

Refugee Week takes place annually during a full week in June. It is led by Leeds Refugee Forum which is a refugee led organisation directly supporting refugees and asylum seekers as they begin their new lives in Leeds. The council's commitment to support this event included a small grant from Safer, Stronger Communities team and saw a series of virtual activities and a face-to-face event that welcomed the Lord Mayor of Leeds to celebrate with refugees giving an opportunity to engage with different communities.

Cross-Council Working

Local Authority Asylum Support Liaison Officer (LAASLO)

This initiative led by Leeds Housing Services provides support to asylum seekers who receive a positive decision from the Home Office to settle in the city. Leeds Housing Options work closely with Mears to help meet future accommodation needs of positive asylum cases. The LAASLO role continues to be a busy area of work for Leeds Housing Options, and also focuses on supporting family reunion homelessness cases.

Since January 2021, Leeds Housing Options have directly assessed 87 Homeless Reduction Act cases where people have been granted refugee status, and who have been given 28 days' notice to leave Home Office accommodation. At the point of when positive decisions are received Leeds Housing Options can start to work with new refugees as they have access to public funds.

Leeds Housing Options provide advice and assistance to service users as well as services and have supported 409 approaches from service users (mixture of families and single people) who had some form of humanitarian protection. This will include various schemes such as refugees once they have received a positive decision, resettlement, and asylum.

As a result of single people receiving a positive decision, it can create a challenge for those who apply for family reunion visas as appropriate accommodation has to be sourced. Leeds Housing Options work closely with service users and accommodation providers to meet needs of service users.

Our focus continues to be assessing customers, sourcing accommodation, and providing tenancy support for our network of landlords who provide housing for our refugee service users. These service users generally have language barriers and are new to the country, so the support we provide them in securing private tenancies is quite intensive.

We are adjusting to the added administration responsibilities as a result of the Refugee Integration Service funding, we are weaving these reporting requirements into the Homeless Reduction Act assessments, so all our work is captured and reported on appropriately for the city.

In terms of accommodation our pressures remain a lack of two bed private rented accommodation in the city, whilst we have seen a small increase in accommodation available to us through newer schemes such as Don Robbins, there remains a real demand for appropriate properties.

The emerging increase in customers needing support is due to several factors, the Home Office accommodation provider Mears is having to increase its asylum estate, and the standing up of hotels due to the pandemic to meet demand. The service will continue to adapt to these pressures.

Where negative decisions are received, local authorities do not have a duty to respond, however Leeds Housing Options work closely with third sector partners to ensure service users are supported.

Leeds Asylum Support Partnership

This partnership with statutory services aims to develop a coordinated and joined-up approach to responding to asylum, and the challenges and complex issues involved to ensure appropriate and effective process, systems and support are in place for people going through the journey of seeking asylum whilst resident in Leeds. Whilst the partnership aims to establish a citywide multiagency partnership working arrangement, it is currently strengthening the understanding of statutory services' response to asylum needs and the current asylum context.

Destitution

A number of concerns have arisen this year resulting in an increased risk of a rise in destitution: the suspension of Home Office decision-making during COVID-19 created a backlog in the system; the New Plan for Immigration proposes additional circumstances where the no recourse to public funds condition will be imposed; the grace period for applying to the EU Settlement Scheme ended on the 30 June 2021. In addition, COVID-19 and ongoing restrictions have increased pressures on public and third sector services contributing to capacity and sustainability concerns. The suspension or reduction of services has amplified confusion amongst people seeking asylum, those needing assistance to apply for the EU Settlement Scheme, those who need to renew their visa or leave to stay in the UK; and has reduced resilience amongst some communities in the city.

The New Plan for Immigration (discussed in more detail [below](#)) suggests that asylum seekers who arrive in the UK without invitation through a resettlement scheme will be granted a status of Temporary Protection for 30 months with a no recourse to public funds condition and no right to free health care. Homelessness and housing remain the single largest issue in the city for those who have no recourse to public funds. We have also seen through the pandemic that those in work can also easily spiral into destitution if they lose their income. Furthermore, asylum seekers and refugees often face difficulties in having their qualifications and experience recognised meaning they end up in low-skilled and precarious jobs.

Prior to the end of the grace period, EU citizens who were not exercising their treaty rights had no access to benefits and in some cases were unable to find work during the pandemic or return to their home/another EU country due to travel restrictions and therefore fell into destitution. Following the end of the grace period, as discussed [below](#), EU citizens who have not yet applied for the Settlement Scheme are now unlawfully present in the UK and at risk of losing access to benefits, employment, and other entitlements. They may, however, be able to make a late application if they can show that they have a reasonable excuse for missing the deadline, but in many cases will need support and access to legal advice to do so.

Many other migrants with a no recourse to public funds condition attached to their visa/leave have faced precarity and destitution during the COVID-19 pandemic. Applying to have the no recourse condition lifted in order to access the wider welfare system was not a simple decision to make, as removing the condition has implications for immigration status, meaning that a person would have to be resident for 10 years rather than 5 to gain settlement. Those whose leave or visa expired during COVID-19 may not have had access to information on how to

extend their leave if they were unable to leave the UK, thereby becoming at risk of falling into financial difficulties, destitution and even deportation.

As part of the government's *Everyone In* scheme the council and partners continued to support all vulnerable communities' access to services, including those that are destitute and have no recourse to public funds, in line with the national guidance ensuring everyone was provided with accommodation and support during the pandemic. Leeds undertook a pilot project in collaboration with Leeds Migration Partnership to enable them to develop a business plan beyond March 2021 for LEDAS (Leeds Destitute Asylum Seekers Support) and WYDAN (West Yorkshire Destitute Asylum Seekers Network). The council supported the accommodation rent costs and the third sector provided wrap around and holistic support.

Negative cessations resumed on 19 July 2021. A negative cessation is where a decision has been made by the Home Office to cease or discontinue providing section 95 subsistence or subsistence and housing support because an individual has been refused asylum, has exhausted their appeal rights, has no children, and has not successfully applied for section 4 support. Section 4 support applies where a person has been fully refused asylum but can be supported with accommodation and subsistence if either reasonable steps are being taken to leave the UK, no viable route of return exists, for medical reasons, permission has been granted to proceed with judicial review, or there has been a human rights breach (i.e. further submissions or other outstanding immigration application is in process). The original decision of 27 March 2020 to suspend discontinuations was a precautionary measure reflecting the uncertainty of the nature of COVID-19 and the steps that would need to be taken in order to prevent movement of those receiving asylum accommodation and so help prevent the spread of the virus. Migrant Help wrote to asylum seekers in dispersed accommodation, initial accommodation and hotels to offer support.

The council is working with partners to facilitate sharing of the estimated figure for discontinuations in the city, to enable third sector services to plan and respond adequately. The council has also provided a statement to the Leeds Migration Partnership in support of funding applications to increase accommodation capacity and support within the third sector.

The best current indication of destitution numbers may be elucidated from the number of destitute service users who access destitution case work. In 2020, the two main services supporting destitute asylum seekers reported a total of 473 service users and 179 dependents who accessed casework, the vast majority of whom presented as destitute. During 2021 so far, up until July/August 2021, these services have reported 363 service users and 177 dependents. This figure suggests that people continue to experience destitution for long periods of time and are currently presenting with considerable challenges which are anticipated to worsen. It must be noted that this figure does not provide a fully accurate picture, as many people who are destitute will not access support from organisations and will be supported by the community.

NACCOM (No Accommodation Network) are working with Leeds Migration Partnership and the Leeds Homeless Charter to develop a memorandum of understanding across a range of third sector providers to further develop collaboration and pathways out of destitution.

No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)

Section 115 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 states that a person will have 'no recourse to public funds' if they are 'subject to immigration control'. This condition applies to people with leave to enter as a visitor, leave to remain as a spouse, leave to remain as a student, leave to remain granted under family or private life rules and indefinite leave to remain as the adult dependent relative of a person with settled status (where a five-year prohibition on claiming public funds applies). This means they have no entitlement to the majority of welfare benefits,

including income support, housing benefit and a range of allowances and tax credits. A no recourse to public funds panel is led by Children's Services and consists of council wide services to respond to families who fall into no recourse to public funds. The number of families that Children's Services support considerably increased during the pandemic and as a result of Brexit. Discussions are currently taking place as to how as an organisation, the number of panels can be increased to respond to the demand. Where children are not involved, Adult Social Care review NRPF cases on an individual basis in partnership with legal and housing.

Modern Slavery

The Modern Slavery Strategy and delivery plan have now been finalised by the Modern Slavery Board and, aligned with the national strategy, seeking to pursue perpetrators, prevent harm, protect victims and prepare the city by integrating modern slavery prevention and responses into service provision. The ongoing work with Adults & Health and Children's Social Work to develop internal pathways for victims has also been completed and these pathways are now active. Each of these contains measures that will ensure migrant victims are recognised and protected. Crucial to the work of the Modern Slavery Board is the new quarterly reporting which provides information to partners on the areas of the city which have the highest number of recorded modern slavery crimes, as well as providing information about victims such as the most common nationalities, age groups and exploitation types. This will also help us to understand if there are trends that relate to migrant communities. This data supports the new enhanced partnership operational arrangements, comprising of a range of statutory and third sector organisations meeting regularly to share and act upon intelligence relating to potential modern slavery crimes and victims.

Workforce development continues to raise awareness of modern slavery and ensures that staff across a range of sectors recognise the signs and know how to support potential victims. During Safeguarding Week 2021 Safer Leeds and West Yorkshire Police co-delivered online training to 200 professionals in addition to joint social media campaigns and the production of a Modern Slavery Pocketbook for Professionals. The pocketbook also includes details of organisations that can support people from migrant communities. Partners across the city have promoted the use of the West Yorkshire Police Partnership Intelligence Portal (PIP) to share intelligence with the police and PIP usage from Leeds agencies has increased.

The Migrant Access Programme and Hope for Justice have worked together to enable 18 Migrant Community Networkers representing 12 countries to participate in a modern slavery training programme. This training, delivered over 4 weeks, enabled MCNs to deliver 4 funded projects to raise awareness of modern slavery in their communities. This included the delivery of live events and the translation of an awareness raising video into Arabic. The remaining budget from this project will be used to create further video resources, likely to be in Albanian and Vietnamese reflecting the data trends of increasing numbers of victims of these nationalities.

Domestic Abuse Act 2021

The long-awaited Domestic Abuse Act received royal assent in April 2021. The Act places a duty on local authorities in England to provide accommodation-based support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation. As part of this duty Leeds has developed a Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board (DALPB) which is attended by statutory partners and chaired by Councillor Coupar. As part of the Act, there is a requirement for all Tier 1 local authorities to complete a needs assessment around support in safe accommodation for victim-survivors and their children. You can find out more in the [Statutory Guidance Framework](#). The needs assessment will be implemented in phases and will involve separate consultations with practitioners and the voice of victim-survivors, the results will inform the citywide Domestic Abuse Strategy and action plan for Leeds. The government has provided £1.8 million for Leeds to give effect to the strategy and needs assessment in the current financial year. A series of projects are being developed and are due to launch in

autumn of this year. These include additional provision within existing refuge and dispersed accommodation and enhanced support to those who chose to remain in their homes via the Sanctuary Support Scheme. The new scheme will draw on expertise of community-based organisations including Shantona, Asha, Karma Nirvana and PAFRAS to ensure the support needs of diverse and migrant communities can be met.

Migrant Domestic Violence Abuse (DVA) Victims

As the DA Bill was progressing through the Houses of Parliament, a joint briefing from 24 national Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) organisations was submitted calling for the Government to consider their position on migrant victims of domestic abuse with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) conditions in order that they could access vital support when fleeing an abusive relationship. However, this provision was not included in the Act.

The government has, however, announced a pilot support scheme (the Support for Migrant Victims Scheme) to assist those with NRPF, to be delivered by Southall Black Sisters. The government has provided £1.5 million to support this pilot.

The Seacroft Local Care Partnership has delivered a co-ordinated approach to respond to DVA at the local level. Following the success of the approach, staff from the Safeguarding and DV Team in collaboration with the Localities team and the Local Care Partnerships of HATCH, York Road and Seacroft are hosting a DVA workshop in September 2021. The aim of the workshop is to bring together local organisations and businesses to raise awareness of the issues of DVA impacting migrant and other communities within the inner east areas and look at what actions can be taken to tackle this. A similar workshop has already taken place in Inner West Community Committee and it is hoped that this will be replicated in other areas across Leeds.

Honour Based Abuse (HBA) Steering Group

The partnership carried out a quality assurance exercise on cases of honour-based abuse in Leeds based on the JTAI framework (Joint Targeted Area Inspection) used by Children's Services. Early indications of key learning were a lack of awareness of honour-based abuse and forced marriage by professionals and services. The group has now set up a workforce development subgroup to deliver HBA and forced marriage training to organisations and schools in Leeds.

Public Awareness Campaigns

The team has continued with supporting national and local DVA campaigns across all media platforms to convey the message that support is available for victim/survivors of domestic abuse throughout COVID-19 and as we come out of lockdown and restrictions are eased. Our current campaign conveys a hopeful message for victim/survivors that their situation can improve if they reach out and speak to someone they trust. This campaign consists of several different images representing how domestic abuse can affect people from a diverse range of ethnic communities with the aim of resonating with a wide range of communities living in Leeds.

We have supported the launch of the Safe Place Scheme taking place in some pharmacies and supermarkets across the City. Victim/survivors can visit pharmacies or supermarkets participating in the scheme to request a safe space and they will be taken to a private room where there are numbers of specialist domestic abuse services they can contact in private for advice and support. This is especially relevant for migrant communities who may have closer connections with local services such as these and provides a vital message that support is available.

We have provided all pharmacies and supermarkets providing safe spaces with posters and cards with the contact details for Leeds Domestic Violence Service including a poster with this

information in 13 different languages (the languages chosen for the poster were identified by the Migrant Team as the top 13 languages spoken in Leeds). We also provided a comprehensive list of other relevant support services to be displayed in the safe space including Karma Nirvana and Shantona Women's and Family Centre. We also provided a range of businesses and health services (such as food shops, hairdressers, opticians and GP practices) based in areas where there are a diverse range of communities with multilingual posters to display with information and contact details for Leeds Domestic Violence Service.

Workforce development

We have continued to provide training for professionals through COVID-19 using remote platforms. This training has included information about the impact of the pandemic on victim/survivors of DVA, additional signs and indicators to look out for, guidance about how to ask safely about abuse over the telephone and additional support services such as the Safe Spaces Scheme, Ask Ani and the 999 silent call for help. The training also explores additional barriers to disclosure and accessing support some victim/survivors may experience, including those from migrant communities. We also discuss the importance of services ensuring they are accessible and inclusive and emphasise the importance of using professional interpreters when asking about abuse.

Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) Outreach and Inclusion

The council's GRT Team make an active contribution in supporting Roma families through several partnerships through weekly drop-in and home visits. The team has strong relationships with schools and children centres and school clusters in order to bridge the gaps to universal services.

During COVID-19, the team have continued providing a service through a virtual drop in with the use of social media and are supporting 35 families per week. The team has also, as a key partner contributed to Public Health England health messages and preventing myth sharing. In addition, the team will fund the launch of an ABCD (asset-based community development) project in October 2021 to target health inequalities within the Roma community. This will involve the recruitment of a Community Connector with the aim of working closely with the Roma community to tackle health and wellbeing issues linked to the wider determinants of health, poor mental health and healthy living.

During the COVID-19 response the team has been working with Bevan health care to ensure that the Roma community have access to the vaccine. Since May 2021 the GRT have visited local streets every 3 weeks offering doorstep vaccinations. The team does continue to experience some reluctance from the community, however, have been able to vaccinate 77 people. This work also provides the opportunity to promote COVID-19 messaging and continue discussions with the community about the vaccination. This is something that will continue every 3 weeks going forward.

Locality working

Migration is a key theme in the council's approach to locality working and its work in priority neighbourhoods. Close working has improved our understanding of our residents, some of the challenges and how we as a city, respond to how quickly people settle and integrate in the city. There are many great examples of this, as below:

Mafwa Theatre is a community theatre organisation working at One Community Centre with women from refugee, asylum seeker and settled communities. They use movement, voice and drama to increase confidence, improve English language and build resilient communities. They have been running weekly women's workshops since February 2018 in partnership with Leeds Refugee Forum and funded by Language Hub. They responded to Covid-19 by ending face-to-face delivery on the 13th March and transforming their 'Cooking with Parveen' project focusing

on food and femininity into a postal project. Each week they sent out a creative pack with activities, letter writing task, recipe, bus ticket, food voucher, responses from other members and a stamped addressed envelope. They sent out 274 packs to 51 women. A WhatsApp group and weekly phone calls enabled them to keep in touch with the group and keep a sense of community alive. Wellbeing funds were granted by the Inner East Community Committee to purchase smart phones and data to enable them to begin to run online zoom sessions as well as provide digital support and training to their group. 19 women benefited from this digital access support.

COVID-19 funding was granted to Proverbs 31 Woman to provide financial advice and support for migrant woman whose household finances have been affected as a result of the pandemic. Proverbs 31 Woman have been using the funding to provide support and training to women in financial budgeting, managing household income and expenditures; walking each individual household through a personalised financial plan based on their current situation and income they receive or are waiting to receive and provide information and guidance on how to access financial support.

Focus groups brought together key Roma people in the community, the council's GRT team, workers from CATCH (Community Action To Create Hope), key to discuss Roma life from their perspective.

Community Action To Create Hope (CATCH) recruited a part-time temporary staff member to take on the role as **Youth Engagement Leader** until March 2021. The overall aim was to divert young people away from offending/re-offending, negative peer groups/behaviour and provide positive activities for them to engage in. The Youth Engagement Leader conducted home/school visits and offer one to one mentoring. They also conducted outreach work, engaged with parents/carers and delivered workshops with the wider CATCH team. There was a particular focus on engagement with young people from the Eastern European communities in recognition of the language skills of the worker and their reach into the community. This post has now ended but the Communities Team and CATCH are looking to employ a new worker, subject to funding being available.

Bespoke activity in local churches has allowed joint work with the Migrant Access Programme's Migrant Community Network to use language skills to share messages and make referrals directly to POMOC (further details [below](#)). Two churches in particular; one in Harehills and one nearby in Burmantofts, have received overwhelming numbers of Roma residents accessing their support offered, primarily through food banks. During the height of the pandemic, Roma residents consistently made up around 80% of users and language became a huge barrier for the church volunteers. The support from the Migrant Community Networkers has continued for almost a year and has proved vital in making referrals to services such as POMOC.

Engagement with pastors from local Roma churches involved sharing key information around the COVID-19 vaccine and government guidance around the reopening of faith buildings as well as travel restrictions to Romania. These meetings highlighted many concerns that faith leaders had around the vaccine, namely that vaccines are not permitted within the Pentecostal church.

Pandemic response has highlighted the dependency on 'cash in hand' work, which was not available during the height of the pandemic. This led to huge numbers depending on food support from local foodbanks and schools. Feedback was received that many families struggled to navigate formal support routes and therefore opted for informal foodbanks without the requirement for a referral. Family Support Teams from schools and the Youth Justice Service provided additional support to many families.

New Plan for Immigration

As the UK departed from the EU, the UK immigration system has changed considerably. The EU free movement law no longer applied to the UK as at January 2021 and this was replaced by a new points based system for immigration. The EU Settlement Scheme (discussed [below](#)) was set up to transition between the two processes so that EU nationals living in the UK could apply to the scheme and secure their rights to residency in the UK.

The government's New Plan for Immigration was published on 24 March 2021 in which it has three objectives. To increase the fairness and efficacy of our system so that we can better protect and support those in genuine need of asylum; to deter illegal entry into the UK, thereby breaking the business model of criminal trafficking networks and protecting the lives of those they endanger; and to remove more easily from the UK those with no right to be here. The plan as set out in the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination Act 2020, includes introduction of work routes such as skilled workers, as well as supporting people from Hong Kong through the BN(O) visa route (discussed [below](#)).

The government's new 2025 Border Strategy also highlights its vision for a fully digital border. This means that the system will be designed to count who is coming in and out of the country and a US-style Electronic Travel Authorisation will be introduced to make the border more secure. The introduction of an Electronic Travel Authorisations (ETA) is due to be launched in 2025, which will enable the Government to decide whether individuals should be allowed to travel to the UK before they travel. In relation to seeking asylum and illegal migration, the plan highlights that how somebody arrives in the UK will impact their asylum claim, with anyone entering the UK illegally considered inadmissible. Further work is being carried out to better understand the impact of the New Immigration Plan at a local level and consider the risks as well as the gaps and challenges.

EU Settlement Scheme

As part of the above agreement, EU nationals and their non-EU family members had to secure a new immigration status under the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) and successful applicants were issued a digital immigration status (non-EU family members can request a biometric card against a fee). EU nationals, who had been residing in the UK before January 2021, were provided with an additional 6 months 'Grace Period' and this meant they had to apply to the scheme before 30th June 2021.

From 1 July 2021, EU, EEA and Swiss citizens and their family members are required to evidence their right to be in the UK by having obtained a valid UK immigration status. EU nationals who did not make an application to the EUSS by the deadline of 30 June 2021, ceased to have their rights protected in UK law. This includes rights to live, work, study and access benefits and services in the UK.

Whilst the deadline has now passed, there remains people who need to apply to the scheme who have not done so. Since the 1st July, the Home Office is accepting late EUSS applications (for those who were residing in the UK by the 31st December 2020) or alternatively, EU nationals can secure a valid visa under the points-based immigration system.

Failure to secure an immigration status can result in being issued a 28-day written notice by immigration enforcement. The Home Office states that it will take a flexible and pragmatic approach to accepting late applications and will look for reasons to grant applications, not to refuse them.

In relation to EU nationals residing in Leeds, previous data provided by the Home Office was 44000 residents. However, more recent data provided by the Home Office, estimated the

number of EU nationals at 32,000. It must be noted that the numbers only focus on EU nationals, and do not include non-EU family members who must equally apply to the scheme.

According to the latest Home Office data, over 55,600 applications to the EUSS were made in Leeds, which is the equivalent of 174% of the estimated EU population in Leeds. This is the highest in the Yorkshire and Humber region.

Leeds City Council has carried out significant work in partnership and this was shared to the Executive Board as part of the last update on migration in 2020.

During the first lockdown, EUSS related services were suspended (including Home Office, EU Consulates and third sector support) and this left a considerable gap for those needing EUSS support. In this context, a virtual drop in was mobilised called POMOC (Help) to support vulnerable EU nationals to access EUSS support and other services. POMOC (Help) was an idea created by a Migrant Community Networker to support EU nationals access support by overcoming barriers such as language.

This virtual drop in was led by Migration team who worked in partnership with a range of other key services including the council's Customer Access team, St Vincent's, Path Yorkshire, Kirklees Citizen's Advice and Law Centre, and Comenius Czech supplementary school. Through this partnership during the pandemic, a total of 4 drop-ins took place weekly in partnership to reach out to EU nationals across the city. A total of 180 families, equating to approximately 1080 people were supported. This drop-in also enabled access to housing, welfare, food banks and donations.

In addition to the drop-ins a range of other sessions took place including with the Spanish community in partnership with the Spanish Honorary Consul, Leeds City Council's Migration Team and Welfare Rights; Romanian – in partnership with the Romanian Consulate Edinburgh and Romanian Honorary Consul Leeds, Leeds City Council's Migration Team and Welfare Rights. These sessions were well attended. Non-EU family members sessions with the Ghanaian community were also delivered with language support and in partnership with services.

Information sessions in partnership with French and Czech Consulates, Seraphus Solicitors and LCC Welfare Rights were delivered for the French and Czech communities. Leeds successfully invited the Romanian consulate to the city through a planned COVID-19 compliant process and which successfully saw 604 applications to the EUSS and three for travel documents.

A final push to promote the EUSS and support available saw families being referred by services and additional interpreting support from the council's GRT team.

Partnership work continues to develop a model such as POMOC to engage, raise awareness and support vulnerable EU families at local hubs.

EUSS – Looked After Children

Leeds City Council's Children's Services, and specifically the social work looked after teams in the Children's Social Work Service has ensured that those looked after children that needed an EUSS application completing by the 30th June had one completed. We were pleased to announce that no child looked after has missed out on their application and we understand that Leeds City Council was one of only 3 local authorities that completed all the required applications on time. Further work is required to ensure that each application is successful, however, we remain confident that this will be the case.

Leeds City Council continues to represent at regional EUSS meetings led by Migration Yorkshire and have also taken up training opportunities that have been organised throughout the Grace Period deadline.

Hong Kong British National (overseas) HKBN(O)

In June 2020, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government informed all councils of the government's announcement of a Hong Kong Visa for British Nationals (Overseas) and the creation of a new bespoke immigration route for citizens from Hong Kong. This decision is a result of the imposition by the Chinese Government of a national security law on Hong Kong that restricts the rights and freedoms of people in Hong Kong and constitutes a breach of the Sino-British Joint Declaration. This new route allows Hong Kong citizens with British National (Overseas) status to come to the UK and live and work.

As of the 31 January 2021, people with BN(O) status could apply for a Hong Kong British National (Overseas) visa to come and live and work in the UK for an initial period of 30 months with an option to extend this for a further 30 months or 5 years.

To be eligible, applicants must have BN(O) status. There are two routes within the visa, enabling applicants to bring with them any dependent family members, providing they meet the criteria for eligible dependents. This includes a route for applicants, their partners and dependent children under 18 years of age, and a route for adult children and their partners and children under 18 years of age, providing all applicants form part of the same household. There is a charge for visas, £180 to apply to stay for 30 months or £250 to apply to stay for 5 years.

The additional costs include the Immigration Health Surcharge, which is currently £1,560 for a 30-month visa, and maintenance requirements evidencing the applicant's ability to support themselves financially. The visa contains a route to Settlement or Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) as applicants are eligible to apply for ILR after 5 years. After 1 year of possessing ILR, visa holders can register as a British Citizen.

The Hong Kong British National (Overseas) Visa allows people with BN(O) status to live, work and study in the UK. Applications can be made from outside the UK but also within the UK for people with BN(O) status already residing here.

The BN(O) Visa does not require a job offer, however applicants must be able to demonstrate that they have enough funds to support themselves independently in the UK for at least 6 months. Notably, there is also a no recourse to public funds (NRPF) condition attached to the visa. However, recent changes to the Immigration Rules which came into effect in April 2021 mean that the 6 months 'maintenance requirement' will not apply to applicants already resident in the UK for more than 12 months and that visa holders will be able to apply to remove the NRPF condition from their leave should they become destitute or be at 'imminent risk of destitution'.

There is no English language requirement for securing a visa. There is a requirement to have undertaken a tuberculosis test. This can be done at designated test sites prior to coming to the UK but can also be done in the UK for those applying from within the country.

Migration Yorkshire is leading on the Hong Kong Welcome Programme in our region and Leeds City Council continue to work closely with Migration Yorkshire to better understand the impact. Statistics are available from the Home Office on the numbers of people who have applied for visas, but they are unable to provide information as to where they are settling in the UK as Hong Kongers are free to decide where they wish to live.

Internal discussions have been taking place to understand the impact in Leeds and engaging with community groups to share information and gain anecdotal knowledge of how people are settling in. Funding is only available for ESOL and those who may fall into destitution, and request that the no recourse to public funds condition is lifted. This has to be claimed retrospectively on a case-by-case basis. Local authorities are unable to apply for MHCLG funding to support people around integration and this remains a challenge. Partnership meetings will continue as people arrive and as we better understand the situation locally.

UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS)

The Resettlement team welcomed two new team members in October 2020. The Family Liaison Officer, and the Community Engagement Officer have worked tirelessly throughout lockdown and have helped to build capacity within the team.

There were no arrivals in 2020 due to the pandemic, arrivals recommenced in January 2021. In April 2021 the Home Office changed the name of the VPRS (Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme) and (Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme) to UKRS (UK Resettlement Scheme), this is an amalgamation of the schemes which also includes the GPP (Gateway Protection Programme).

Local authorities were given a one-year extension of the current contract and asked to pledge additional numbers. Leeds City Council gained approval to pledge an additional 60 people for arrivals between April 2021 to March 2022. Leeds is currently supporting 303 people (70 families) under the UKRS, this figure includes babies born here and any transfers from within the country.

From October 2020 to July 2021, 136 people or 26 families have left the programme as their 5 year support package came to an end. The majority of people on the UKRS have been supported by Refugee Council to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR); three families have independently applied without any support.

The Clinical Commissioning Group has funded a full time Wellbeing Officer post for the Resettlement Team on a two-year fixed contract. This post will begin in September 2021 and will support the wellbeing of service users for which ESOL and employment are key.

The Clinical Commissioning Group have funded the Resettlement Team to organise an event for young people on the UKRS to discuss their health and wellbeing and what support would be most helpful. The event is aimed to take place in late autumn if restrictions allow.

The Resettlement Community Grant Fund has funded three small projects recently, The Bright Dreams Project which is a sewing club, an end of year celebration for children who attended Arabic school for the academic year, and a 20-week course of ESOL.

A theatre production called 'How to be Lucky' about the life of a Syrian man who has moved to the UK has now been successfully shown in 17 schools and colleges in Leeds and will once again be going on tour in Leeds in November 2021.

The successful youth group project 'Number One Youth Group' continued virtually throughout lockdown. As the restrictions were eased football sessions gradually restarted. A group for girls was set up online due to government restrictions and proved beneficial to the girls attending. In July both groups went to South Leeds Activity Centre for the day where they enjoyed this opportunity. Boys and girls from each group also took part in film making and these films will be available to see. Activities are currently being planned for the rest of the year that will include client skill-sharing sessions and conversations clubs.

The Resettlement Team now have an allotment on Dewsbury Road for service users who wish to participate in gardening which has proved beneficial to those who suffer with their mental wellbeing as well as providing the opportunity to practise conversational English.

35 laptops were obtained and distributed to families to continue studies and online learning during lockdown and this also proved good practice.

Premier League Kicks is a national programme delivered differently depending on local need. It targets young people at risk of youth offending or those living in areas where opportunities to take part in sport/physical activity are lacking. The sessions are coached by qualified staff at Leeds United Foundation and vary depending on the activities the participants want to try. Whilst football remains the primary sport, the sessions are open to interpretation and aim to provide new opportunities for children and young people. Three different football sessions ran throughout the summer. Training and education are a key theme of the Kicks Programme, with many participants being offered the opportunity to undertake CPD/training courses, get involved in work experience, volunteering and even secure paid work with Leeds United Foundation.

There are currently 20 young people registered who are attending weekly sessions and three of the young people are just about to start an FA Level 1 coaching qualification, supported by the Leeds United Foundation with a view to carrying out voluntary or paid work with the Foundation. Leeds City Council and Leeds United Foundation Partnership offer free sessions which are open to anyone under the age of 19.

Other sports activities include tennis in partnership with Adel Memorial Sports Club which held sessions for 8 weeks. This was a pilot project for 4 girls and 4 boys from the Resettlement Youth Groups to participate in tennis coaching. Group fitness sessions for adults and separate sessions for young people were held in the park. These sessions included nutritional advice and plans for service users to follow.

Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP)

The UK has been running a scheme to support Locally Employed Staff (LES) in Afghanistan, often in dangerous and challenging situations, in recognition of their commitment and bravery shown supporting UK forces since 2013.

The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) was launched in April 2021 reflected the changing situation in Afghanistan and consequent risk to LES.

As a compassionate city we are already working alongside other councils across the region as part of the current Afghan Relocation Scheme, coordinated by Migration Yorkshire to rehouse Afghan refugees.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASCs)

A task group led by colleagues in Children's Services continues to bring together agencies from across the city to ensure UASCs needs are met.

Although the National Transfer Scheme was halted with agreement across all local authorities, it is back in place and Leeds is a fully participative member of that scheme. As ever Leeds continues to be acknowledged as a lead in good practice with all that relates to UASCs and has taken a far higher share in numbers of UASCs across the region. The current National Transfer Scheme is in place to reduce the burden of UASCs currently housed on the south coast of the UK, primarily (but not exclusively) in and around the Kent region.

Further to the National Transfer Scheme being put back in place, Leeds made a unilateral decision to reach out to the Home Office and Kent Local Authority to offer a number of UASCs the opportunity to move to Leeds and to be supported by Children's Services. This offer was

enthusiastically accepted by both the Home Office and Kent Local Authority and a number of UASCs were immediately transferred to Leeds. In summary, Leeds has welcomed 16 UASCs in the last cohort and there are ongoing plans to take more.

Although the sporadic numbers of UASCs coming to Leeds continues to be low due to the pandemic, we have seen a steady increase in numbers over the last few months due to the council taking the above initiative and transferring numbers of UASCs to Leeds.

Although the fee to support UASCs remains at £114 the Home Office has raised the amount for all local authorities that participate in the National Transfer Scheme or agree to take UASCs unilaterally from Kent. That amount currently stands at £143 per night per UASC.

Leeds along with other local authorities and Migration Yorkshire have raised a number of urgent concerns regarding young people being dispersed to hotels in Leeds, and other cities in the region whom the Home Office, in their view, have 'age assessed' as being over 18 years of age. However, in many cases when the welfare teams and social workers have visited those young people, it has become very clear that many are under the age of 18. As a result of this, many 'new' age assessments have had to be undertaken which have concluded that they are in fact minors. In some cases, decisions were made not to complete an age assessment as it was very clear that some were well under the age of 18, with one young person no older than 15 years of age. Leeds City Council, along with other local authorities in the region and Migration Yorkshire, continue to raise this concern.

Leeds Children's Social Work Service, but specifically the Children Looked After Service have supported and ran an active local football team for refugees, asylum seekers and specifically Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers (UASC's) and UASC Care Leaver's. The football team is running primarily by our Fostering Service Manager (now retired) and our social work colleagues based in the looked after social work teams. The team also (due to their success) now receives support from two other volunteers from the local community.

The football team has and is successful and currently runs three sessions every week due to its popularity. Those sessions are on a Monday, Thursday, and Sunday with the 'first 11' successfully competing in a local football amateur league on a Saturday morning. In total there are now in or around 50-70 young people and young adults participating in the sessions. That cohort also includes a squad of 16-18 playing regularly in an amateur football league, the actual league is called the 'Yorkshire Christian League' and it is registered with the West Riding County Football Association. Last year the team successfully completed in one of the League's cup competitions and were losing finalists! The young people come from a range of nationalities including (but not limited to): Eritrean, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Chad, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, El Salvador and Vietnamese.

Asylum Dispersal Contract

Mears Group is the accommodation provider for the Home Office contract and have been fully operational since September 2019. This contract split the provision of accommodation from application support. Migrant Help were awarded the contract for the Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility Assistance services (AIRE). This is a single integrated and national service for asylum seekers. All calls, no matter what the issue, will go to one single number to be assessed, where interpretation can be accessed. As well as providing support with the application process, Migrant Help will pick up any problems with asylum accommodation, liaise with the accommodation provider (Mears) and address maintenance issues within agreed timeframes.

The timeline of Mears transitioning into operational delivery saw a hotel stood up in Leeds. Whilst there has been a reduction in numbers of people arriving to the UK to seek asylum: the

number of people seeking asylum in 2021 was 9% lower than in 2020, and in 2020 was 10% lower than in 2019 (Source: Asy_D01 - [Asylum applications raised, Home Office](#)), there are significantly more asylum seekers awaiting a decision on their case. On 30 June 2021, there were around 70,905 people awaiting an initial decision on their asylum claim nationally (including main applicants and dependants) and a further 1,836 'awaiting further review' (i.e. where they have had an initial decision but where the case is not yet concluded by the Home Office). To put the figure in context, the number of asylum seekers awaiting an initial decision on their case is 7.5 times higher than on 30 June 2010 (Source: Asy_D03 – [Asylum applications awaiting a decision, Home Office](#)). Due to the pressure imposed on the system and the impact at the local and regional levels, Migration Yorkshire are carrying out some further analysis of contingency accommodation and trends.

Over the past two years, the number of hotels stood up by the Home Office in Leeds has increased to 4 to meet demand. The decisions to procure hotels are taken by the Home Office without consultation with the local authority, and at short notice. The council has, and continues to work closely with Mears, local ward members, statutory services and the voluntary sector to provide local support and engagement.

There have been several outbreaks of COVID-19 across the hotels, and discussions with Public Health England, and local support from Public Health, CCG, Bevan Healthcare and Migration team have strengthened a local partnership response.

Residing in a hotel during the pandemic has further impacted on mental health and wellbeing and lack of face-to-face activity to progress asylum claims. During the pandemic the Home Office have resumed and halted negative cessations on several occasions because of COVID-19 restrictions and high court judgements. This has caused further unrest and confusion amongst asylum seekers and services that support them. Further discussions are taking place with health partners to respond to the health and wellbeing needs of asylum seekers.

The council's Migration team has built positive relationships with Mears and developed a structure to support those asylum seekers in dispersed accommodation and hotels who require additional support. This includes support around a range of issues including health, mental health, safeguarding, hate crime, anti-social behaviour, access to community activities and donations. Asylum seekers in dispersed accommodation were contacted via a letter developed in partnership with CCG and Public Health in the top 10 most relevant languages for this cohort to make contact if they required support around accessing healthcare, schools, and other services. Through this communication, those that made contact were provided with support and information. The feedback also evidenced where projects had joined up for example some asylum seekers attending ESOL classes were aware of the vaccination information and clinical sessions which had been arranged at the college.

Leeds continues to represent at regional meetings led and facilitated by Migration Yorkshire and have worked closely with colleagues to raise concerns, share challenges and good practice.

As a result of recent events, the city has seen an increase in the procurement of properties for asylum seekers due to the demand for houses under Operation Oak. This is a Home Office initiative to reduce the numbers of asylum seekers residing in hotels and to ensure dispersal into a home environment. The council has been working closely with the Home Office and Mears to improve the protocol and the information on which decisions to obtain properties is made. The process will be kept under review to continually develop the process and information. The council has and will continue to work with the Home Office and Mears to ensure that suitable homes are provided for those asylum seekers in need as part of the overall housing needs of the city whilst ensuring that appropriate housing standards are maintained as part of the procurement process.

Asylum Support Payments Enablement (ASPEN) Card

In May 2021, the Asylum Support Payments introduced a new payment card for service users. Whilst the new card functions in a similar way to the previous card it was under a new provider. The idea was to dispatch the cards to service users on 10 May 2021 ready for funds to be switched over and cards to be used for the first time on Monday 24 May 2021. This transition resulted in several challenges for both service users and Migrant Help who were inundated with calls for support as service users were left without access to funds. Community Connectors were able to respond and resolve cases where asylum seekers in dispersed accommodation in Leeds were affected.

Following this the Home Office carried out a lessons learned review with Strategic Migration Partnerships on the ASPEN rollout and Migration Yorkshire responded on behalf of the region.

International Relations

Leeds continues to support its migration work through international links, notably through the city's membership of the **EUROCITIES network** and the **Intercultural Cities network**. These networks allow Leeds to share best practice on urban policy linked to migration with international partners across Europe and the rest of the world. Playing an active role in EUROCITIES and the Intercultural Cities Network initiatives, helps us contribute to raising our profile as a city that is firmly on the map as being a successful UK city.

EUROCITIES

Leeds is halfway through its mandate as chair of the EUROCITIES working group on Children and Young People. Through Leeds' role as chair, the working group is organising a joint event in October 2021 with the EUROCITIES working group on Migration which will focus on the topic of *Migrant children in cities: inclusion and rights at a local level*, exploring how European cities have put in place specific support offers for migrant children and their families.

Leeds is also a key partner at the Roma Inclusion Working Group and presented as guest speakers at this year's meeting to discuss Roma in schools, maintaining attendance, challenges and sharing good practice.

Intercultural Cities

In 2019, Leeds joined the Intercultural Cities Network (ICC), a Council of Europe initiative which encourages policy innovation around the context of diversity. Through membership of the network, Leeds was able to benefit from an in-depth analysis (ICC Index Report) [Leeds, United Kingdom - Intercultural City \(coe.int\)](#) of inter-culturalism in the city across several key indicators such as education, neighbourhoods, public services, business, culture, commitment, and public space.

Building on the results of the Index report, Leeds has created an Intercultural Cities Steering Group which will oversee the implementation of an intercultural action plan. There are also plans to host a visit from the Council of Europe in February 2022 to further showcase Leeds' approach to inter-culturalism.

The council's International Relations and Safer, Stronger Communities teams have been working closely to promote and celebrate the rich cultural diversity in Leeds, something that was considered particularly important after the end of the Brexit transition period. This included [a pillar of the Global Leeds campaign dedicated to Leeds' international communities](#). Working in partnership with the ICC network, Leeds has also supported the global campaigns for World Refugee Day and World Day for Cultural Diversity.

Migration Yorkshire activities

Funding has been secured to coordinate and develop a new regional Refugee Integration Strategy and Refugee Integration Forum during the period 2021-2022. The aims of this work include a range of key aspects such as building on the existing strong partnership working, collaboration and good practice across the region; to forge new links between the public sector, voluntary organisations, employers and other stakeholders; to establish refugee integration as a priority for the region's key stakeholders; to enable the region to develop sustainable refugee integration services; to help improve outcomes for refugees and asylum seekers and, in particular, tackle social isolation, develop more social connections, and enable refugees to fulfil their potential here in Yorkshire and Humber and, to develop refugee participation and leadership.

This opportunity gives the region a chance for collective commitment to refugee integration. This has been taking place through a region wide debate and what integration means to each of us including refugees and asylum seekers. As a result, going forward the region can offer more opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers; more joined-up approaches to service planning and delivery; more coordination between the public, voluntary and business sectors; more funding for voluntary and community organisations; more and better evidence of refugee integration; more awareness of the needs and assets of refugees and asylum seekers. The Migration team have directly contributed to discussion with Migration Yorkshire to work in partnership to strengthen existing, and building new networks and partnerships including volunteering, employer engagement, ESOL and much more.

Introduction to Migration Yorkshire Training

Leeds Safer, Stronger Communities Team commissions Migration Yorkshire to **co-deliver a programme of training** for practitioners in the council and wider. Last year the team co-delivered two training sessions: one for council officers and a separate session for elected members. Both were well attended with the officer training having a waiting list of over 70 people. Officers who attended the training represented a wide variety of council services including: wellbeing, mental health social work, Adult Safeguarding, learning disabilities, Missing in Education/attendance improvement, learning and outreach, housing, ASB, domestic violence, Active Leeds, Taxi and Private Hire Licensing, showing the need for training to understand the impact of migration. A further two sessions are planned to take place later in the year.

Migrant Information Hub

The Migrant Info Hub was created by Migration Yorkshire at the start of the pandemic to offer resources and information to service providers in the region. It focused on supporting people with different migrant backgrounds to stay safe, connected and informed during the pandemic, and to help reduce the harmful impacts of the virus on people's lives across the region. In addition, Migration Yorkshire continue to facilitate a COVID-19, Communications and Communities meeting between local authorities in the region to share insights and good practice in relation to COVID-19 and migration.

Connecting Opportunities

The project has now been delivering an employment and integration service for new migrants from across Leeds City Region since July 2017. Early in 2021 a funding extension was successfully confirmed to enable the project to continue to deliver for a further two years until March 2023. Connecting Opportunities is funded by the European Social Fund and the Community Fund and works with ten voluntary sector organisations that specialise in working with migrants offering one to one keyworker, employment/training, mentoring/befriending, English Language and mental health/well-being support. In Leeds, the project is being delivered by Path Yorkshire, The Children's Society, SOLACE, LASSN (Leeds Asylum Support Seekers Network) and Touchstone and led by Migration Yorkshire (Leeds City Council).

Over the past year, due to COVID-19 restrictions all project staff, volunteers and participants had to quickly adjust and learn to deliver services using a variety of online tools and communication methods. Partners having the ability to quickly purchase Wi-Fi and loan digital devices to participants/volunteers was invaluable in enabling the project to continue to provide support to participants throughout this time. There were many challenges that came to the forefront from increased isolation, lack of IT skills, food poverty, reduced well-being, and limited access to other services, which the project staff had to focus on providing additional support for during this time. However, a positive impact has been that participant IT skills have improved, the project still continued to support migrants into work and online delivery of services has provided more flexible access for participants from across the whole region.

Up to 31st March 2021, in Leeds, the project had worked with 538 participants (39% total project participants from across Leeds City Region). 65% were female; 82% aged 22-49 years and 12% were 21 years and under. The top 5 nationalities supported from Leeds were Iranian, Sudanese, Egyptian, Indian, and Eritrean with 43% having refugee status. Referrals initially dropped at the beginning of 2020 but quickly increased in 2021, with 26% being self-referrals from individuals themselves and 17% from third parties, from 52 different agencies, including Jobcentres, RETAS (Refugee Education Training Advisory Services), PAFRAS (Positive Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers), British Red Cross and ENGAGE. In terms of provision accessed: 67% Leeds participants have accessed ESOL and 40% accessed mentoring and befriending activities. Of those participants, that have exited the project, 53% have moved either into jobs and/or external training/education.

Migrant English Support Hub (MESH)

The Migrant English Support Hub has been supported by the council's Migration team since its inception and maintains the partnership with the team through the work on the Leeds ESOL Strategy. Since becoming a charity in October 2018, MESH has gone from strength to strength, securing funding via Migration Yorkshire from MHCLG and councils across the Yorkshire and Humber region to recruit a staff team and web developer to roll out the approach first adopted in Leeds to map provision and develop a dynamic and comprehensive website listing all ESOL opportunities in the region, the Learning English in Yorkshire and the Humber website www.learningenglish.org.uk.

MESH is a partner on the Refugee Integration Yorkshire and the Humber project which is providing further funding to develop the website and network, such as producing locally-relevant ESOL resources, a directory of self-access learning resources and resources for teachers, continued networking opportunities for ESOL teachers across the region and enhanced analytical information for local authorities to assist with coordinating and planning ESOL provision. MESH and the approach first piloted in Leeds have received national recognition in strategy documents produced by both NATECLA (the National Association for Teachers of English and Community Languages) and LWI (the Learning and Work Institute) and several regions across the country including the Greater London Authority are looking into replicating the approach. MESH and the Learning English in Yorkshire and the Humber website is a great example of a local solution which has become sustainable through clarity of approach, continued learning and evaluation, and strength of partnerships with the council, universities, third sector and a wide range of stakeholders whose feedback guides the project.