



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: MONDAY, 30 OCTOBER 2023 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Joel (Chair)

Councillor Adatia
Councillor Mahesh

Councillor Singh Patel
Councillor Waddington

In Attendance

Deputy City Mayor, Councillor Cutkelvin – Housing and Neighbourhoods

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27. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received by Cllr O'Neill and Cllr Zaman.

28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair asked members of the commission to declare any interests for which there were none.

29. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

It was noted that Cllr Waddington had identified an error with the figures associated to charges to tenants and leaseholders within the metering update and whilst it was agreed the charges would be reviewed such figures should have been accurate within the report.

AGREED:

- Subject to the above, it was agreed that the minutes for the meetings on 31 July 2023 and 19 September 2023 were a correct record.

30. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer noted that none had been received.

31. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS OR STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer noted that none had been received.

32. RETROFITTING AND CLIMATE EMERGENCY UPDATE

The Head of Service presented the report to update the commission on work being undertaken within the service to respond to the climate emergency. It was noted that:

- Energy efficiency is considered in all areas of the capital programme whereby there are various programmes within the housing division.
- The new build housing programme considers energy efficiency on a site-by-site basis but all seven sites, including Stocking Farm and the Forest Lodge Education Centre, will be developed and deliver energy performance above current building regulations.
- Housing stock is identified across ten construction types including brick, MHC and steel amongst others. Energy Performance Certificates (EPC) are assessed for properties when housing stock is let or significant work undertaken.
- The approach to existing stock is always fabric first in accordance with government policy and focusses on solid wall properties as they are thermally inefficient. 874 solid wall properties remain to be insulated but these are the most challenging, for example terraced housing.
- Brick cavity wall construction types have an average EPC of C and therefore have not been identified as a priority.
- MHC properties have been identified as priority 2, and two pilot schemes have been undertaken at bungalows in New Parks and Eyres Monsell.
- Steel frames houses are priority 3 and mainly found in New Parks. Investigations have been undertaken with a planned specification for an improvement scheme.
- Timber properties have an average rating of C, with the best performing in Rowlatts Hill, and therefore have not been identified as a priority.
- All insulation is match funded with government grants whereby the division were successful in a bid as part of social housing decarbonisation 1. A further bid has recently been submitted for 2.1. The service will continue to work with energy companies too as part of energy company obligations.
- Work is also underway by the division to explore alternatives for energy consumption post-gas.

In response to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:

- The district heating network was proposed to supply new developments and buildings. The overall total cost of DH is

comparable to the open market. The standing charge is higher because the network supplies less properties than national utility companies. If more properties are supplied by the network then economies of scale should result in standing charges decreasing.

- New social homes are being built to current insulation standards and it is anticipated that heat demand will therefore be less. Discussions with the sustainability team also recommended the use of district heating to supply some of the new social housing developments as decarbonisation pathway plans should make it a viable supply.
- Government policy has only recently allowed local authorities to build new social homes and therefore whilst sites such as Southfield Newry have been vacant for some time, since identifying the site for new social homes there have not been significant delays with bringing this forward.
- All identified sites for new social housing have their own construction programmes and some delays have been encountered with contractors going into liquidation. The service is currently out to tender to appoint new contractors to continue to deliver sites as soon as possible.
- The timetable of retrofitting properties is dependent on government funding and associated criteria usually attached to funding for what the local authority is able to deliver.
- All EPCs are visible on the government website. Any major works require an EPC assessment to be undertaken but the service is currently developing an energy IT module within its system to be able to record any improvement works and have live data on the EPC ratings of properties.
- The climate emergency is a national issue but there is not a long-term or sufficient funding commitment from government nor capacity in the industry to suitably retrofit all properties. Funding usually requires local match funding which is becoming increasingly difficult with pressures on the Housing Revenue Account. It is also cyclical over short periods and companies have therefore not invested or have left the market due to the lack of certainty and stop-start schemes.
Councillor Waddington highlighted funding available through Skills Bootcamps and proposed officers liaise with the economic development team about the potential to consider training programmes for developing skills and improving capacity in the industry locally.

The Chair asked the tenant and leaseholder forum representative for comments in which he expressed concerns regarding district heating charges. It was noted that the Commission had identified issues with the figures to be charged to tenants and leaseholders at the previous meeting and that the Director for Housing note the comments when considering the appropriate energy supply for new development schemes.

The Chair highlighted that a member of the public had provided representations

around the retrofitting agenda that had been shared with her and that she was aware the concerns were being addressed by officers.

AGREED:

- The Commission noted the report.
- Comments regarding district heating charges be noted by the Director for Housing.
- Officers to liaise with the economic development team about Skills Bootcamps.

33. EMPTY HOMES UPDATE

The Director for Housing introduced the item to highlight the importance of ensuring less empty private sector empty homes throughout the city to enable more available stock for individuals seeking accommodation and preventing homelessness.

The Head of Service presented the report, and it was noted that:

- The team take an incremental approach to work with owners to bring empty properties back into use with over 88% success rate using early intervention informal techniques. 197 properties were brought back into use in the city during 22/23 using this approach.
- If there is no commitment from owners, then legal remedies such as compulsory purchase orders or negotiated offers can be pursued although usually such conversation can initiate the owner to bring the property back into use. CPOs are only used as a last resort.
- Work has increased for the team with the number of empty properties for over 18months increasing by 15% during the 22/23 year – equating to 424 at the end of March 23. The team work to bring as many properties back into use as possible but the team is made up of 2.6 officers and therefore resources are focussed in areas of need and demand.
- The team receive positive feedback when liaising with owners and it is apparent that the pandemic and cost of living crisis have had an impact on ability of owners to travel due to isolating and undertaking works to bring back into use due to financial pressures.
- The team also work with the council tax department to use data on workflows and classification of properties. Council tax can also be used to encourage owners to bring properties back into use by increasing rates if the property is empty.
- Properties have different classification which can impact the powers of the local authority, for example 28% of empty homes in Leicester are classed as second homes and therefore the Local Authority have no powers to bring back into use.

In response to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:

- Council tax increases depending on the length of time a property remains empty as referenced in the agenda pack. Checks are undertaken by the council tax team and the empty property team to identify whether a property is empty, this can be through patrolling areas or when reported and inspected.
- More devolution powers are needed for the local authority to be able to take more action to bring empty properties back into use and is a topic the Deputy City Mayor for Housing and Neighbourhoods has proactively raised and will continue to do so.
- Benchmarking has been undertaken and the number of empty homes in the city is comparable to others.
- Empty homes throughout the city can be identified into wards and this information can be shared.
- The empty homes team is a non-statutory function funded by the general budget and therefore given ongoing financial pressures, whilst additional resource may be unlikely, many other authorities are not operating such a service.
- Council tax data is utilised to identify empty properties as this is a mandatory requirement and the most reliable form. However, the team also work with other departments and gather intelligence through patch walks and reports.
- The team focus on empty properties that have been vacant for 18 months and are very successful when liaising with owners through early intervention methods. The Deputy City Mayor for Housing and Neighbourhoods highlighted that timeframes for properties stood empty and intervention have been considered but believed to be appropriate. The arrangements ensure resources are best utilised but also that the authority is not contacting owners and/or executors too soon, particularly when a property has become empty following a bereavement.

AGREED:

- The Commission noted the report.
- The Commission be provided with the additional information requested.

34. PRS STRATEGY UPDATE

The Director of Housing introduced the item highlighting that there are around 145 thousand homes in the city and fifty thousand of these are within the private rented sector. It is vital to ensure the quality of these PRS homes for residents and to attract others to choose Leicester as a place to live, the Deputy City Mayor for Housing and Neighbourhoods requested the development of a private rented sector strategy.

The Head of Service in housing and Team Manager in Neighbourhood Services presented the report, and it was noted that:

- The Strategy was introduced at the end of 2021 and lots of progress is highlighted within the report from the last two years. The approach is to ensure there is a balance of support for landlords as well enforcement to improve standards for tenants.
- The sector has been impacted by external pressures since the introduction of the strategy such as the cost-of-living crisis which is impacting tenants and landlord with affordability of rising mortgages and rents – many landlords have left the market.
- The strategy is a live document and therefore the service develop new workstreams to respond to emerging issues. A key addition to the strategy is the inclusion of anti-poverty work. This includes cross-divisional working and partners to ensure a co-ordinated response with the aim to ensure residents can maximise resources to remain within their homes.
- Communication has been enhanced with website improvements including a review to ensure information is accurate and the customer journey is better. Liaison work also continues with landlords and the service will be hosting a further forum soon to provide advice and continue to build relationships.
- The service aims to work to prevent residents becoming homeless and sustaining tenancies. Despite additional pressures this has improved and prevention success is significantly higher than the national average which the service is proud to report. Where tenancies cannot be sustained, officers work to identify and secure new homes before residents become homeless but this is becoming increasingly difficult with housing shortages and increasing rents.
- Many tenancies have been created via incentive schemes, but further improvements and financial assistance is required to bridge the gap and ensure schemes remain viable in the market as housing allowances have been frozen and rents rising. Residents can retain housing applications when in support of incentive schemes to try and ensure a pathway for a longer-term affordable solution.
- Funding has been secured to train twelve officers to undertake EPC assessment of properties and specify works to landlords if energy performance of properties is inadequate. Tablets have also been purchased and streamline the process to ensure information can be added in real time when conducting visits to private rented sector properties. An online portal is also being developed to report issues and will initially be rolled out for reporting damp and mould.
- The selective licensing scheme is a notable initiative to ensure improvement of standards in the private sector – this was approved by Council in July 2022 and implemented in October 2022. A new team were established to process applications and issue licences in three areas of the city. Around two thousand licences have been issued of the estimated eight thousand in the specified areas.
- It is estimated there are around one thousand unlicensed HMOs

in the city and it is recognised this is a growing market. With the exception of the pandemic, officers proactively visit and investigate to identify HMOs. The licence fee was set in 2018 and therefore due review whereby it is envisaged the income can be utilised to operate a team to process applications and assess data of expired licences.

- A task force has been established with various teams across divisions and public sector organisations to liaise and understand conservative efforts around certain landlords or properties.
- A task force has also been established across multiple divisions to develop an action plan and corporate response to damp and mould in properties, both social and the private rented sector.

In response to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:

- Information on the website is being reviewed and housing advice packs have been improved to ensure residents are aware of incentive schemes available and expectations are managed. It was agreed details will be circulated to Members on schemes to be able to share further with residents but that they be encouraged to contact the service to discuss eligibility on a case-by-case basis.
- Homelessness Prevention Officers work with residents who are homeless to source alternative accommodation. For residents needing new homes, for example due to overcrowding, they are encouraged to look for housing and if they require a financial uplift or support to inform the housing service to be able to identify if eligibility of schemes is met or to liaise with landlords to seek to secure a tenancy.
- Almost three thousand selective licencing applications have been received by landlords and this is slowing down. The team are working with estate agents to highlight their responsibility too if managing a property which has generated further applications. The next phase will be for officers to visit areas and gather intelligence of rented properties to make tenants and landlords aware of the requirement for a licence.
- The service publishes data every six months on who gets social housing which includes average wait times for properties and bands. It was agreed that the latest data be shared with Members as well as information of where this is updated online.
- The Local Authority has no powers to control private sector rent charges despite the growing proportion of homes in the market in the private sector and increasing rents. Discretionary housing payments are used to bridge the gap between housing allowances and rent to help residents with affordability, but the preferred long-term solution would be to ensure there is more social housing.
- Hazards are identified as Category 1 or Category 2 when properties are inspected to determine to issue a licence. 29 hazards are inspected, such as excess cold, trip hazards and

damp or mould etc. Category 1 are more serious, and landlords are duty bound to remedy.

- Rent in the private sector across Leicester and surrounding areas has not had an impact of people having to relocate from the city as reported in a recent newspaper article as has been the case in some other cities.
- A joint task force has been established to focus on damp and mould in properties across the city which meets regularly, and further information will be provided to the commission in future.

AGREED:

- The Commission noted the report.
- The Commission be provided with the additional information requested.

35. MIGRATION UPDATE

The Director for Housing introduced the item to highlight as the recent census illustrated, Leicester is a growing city and is made up of many communities from around the world. The city has around 345k residents and asylum seekers make up only a very small proportion of the population.

The Head of Service presented a set of slides, and it was noted that:

- Data from the 2021 Census highlights that Leicester is one of the fastest growing cities compared with other core cities according; 41% of the population were born overseas, a 7% increase from the 2011 Census; and the city is the fourth most deprived by proportion of household.
- Residents in Leicester born in the top 10 non-UK place of birth has increased for all countries with the exception of Kenya and Zimbabwe since the 2011 Census. India as a place of birth was the largest growth making up 16% of Leicester's population, there was a 422% increase in residents born in Italy living in Leicester and residents from Romania make up 1.3% of total population.
- Large numbers of people have been entering the UK illegally using small boats – the peak in 2022. The Illegal Immigration Act 2023 is intended to look at methods of entry and managing immigration but details are still being developed. However, based on current information it does not contain the same powers to detain and deport unaccompanied asylum seeking children as it does for adults.
- The city is involved in a number of schemes to support people coming to the UK including NASS, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, Afghan, Ukraine, Hong Kong British National Overseas, Syria and the Community Support Group. Each scheme has different rules, regulation and funding. They all remain live, and people can come to the UK with the exception of

the Syrian scheme.

- The numbers of current asylum seekers in the City was shared with the commission and also the figure for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. We have 160 sponsors for the Homes for Ukraine scheme and just over 260 guests. The city committed to housing support for twelve families as part of the Afghan scheme with the families settling into the city. As of August 2023, eight thousand Afghan families were still living in temporary hotels throughout the UK and were asked to leave – most found alternative accommodation but around one thousand vulnerable Afghans remain in hotels across the county and will be asked to leave by the Home Office by December.
- All children that arrive under any scheme are placed in appropriate education as quickly as possible as schooling is important for settlement. Except for asylum seekers, schemes usually allow access to public funds. Each scheme will have different rules that can make it complex, but support is provided by services although they are under increasing pressure.
- Over the next three months there will be a speeding up of the asylum process to process claims and make a decision for applications of individuals from specific countries of origin. This is called SAP. The Home Office intend to progress and finalise 73 thousand applications nationally, including around 4.5 thousand in the East Midlands. Those with a positive outcome will need to leave Home Office accommodation and will be able to seek housing, benefits and have a right to work. Those who are unsuccessful will return to their country of origin.
- The Home Office are maximising hotel spaces which means more than one individual may be staying within accommodation. They are also seeking additional properties in Leicester.
- The potential of increased successful application in a short time period could have an impact on local services in terms of capacity and resources, particularly around housing which could lead to street homelessness but will be monitored and managed.
- Leicester has a proud history of welcoming communities and the diversity, richness and cultural development individuals bring is celebrated.

In response to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:

- The notice period for individuals who have been granted right to remain is inadequate at 21 days, particularly when all other agencies usually provide 56 days' notice in advance of becoming homeless. This is an issue both the Deputy City Mayor for housing and neighbourhoods and Deputy City Mayor for social care, health and community safety have raised in national forums and supported by other local authorities but the Home Office are not committed to extending the notice period.
- 280 additional properties are being procured by an agent on behalf of the Home Office in the city.

- Migrant Help is an organisation that support asylum seekers during their applications process through to re-settlement. It was agreed that more details would be shared with the Commission.
- Funding varies depending on circumstances and national schemes, however it is not sufficient to meet the pressures on services.

The Chair noted and agreed with comments of the Commission that Leicester is a welcoming city and thanked officers for their work despite the additional pressures on the service.

AGREED:

- The Commission noted the report.
- The Commission be provided with the additional information requested.

36. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair requested an update regarding St Clements Court. It was noted by the Director for Housing and Team Manager in Neighbourhood Service that:

- Leicester Fire and Rescue Service (LFRS) issued a prohibition notice on a block of private flats on 28 September 2023 due to failure to comply with identified issues.
- Fosse Neighbourhood Centre was mobilised as an evacuation centre and 65 flats were visited by officers to ensure residents understood the notice had been issued. 15 families were supported with temporary accommodations, some were supported by families and others chose to remain at the property in breach of the notice. LFRS had a high presence at the location and provided further engagement to those remaining to understand the situation.
- LFRS and the Local Authority have responsibility for enforcement of fire safety. The fire service has overall responsibility if a fire were to occur - the structure of the flat blocks should provide sixty minutes protection to enable a fire crew to be called, arrive, and get the fire under control. The Local Authority has responsibility to ensure each individual flat has sufficient smoke detections and self-closers on doors.
- The prohibition notice was removed on 12 October as LFRS were satisfied the owner had satisfactorily addressed issues that posed an immediate risk to life. A notice remains in place for overall improvements of the property to be addressed by the owner.

Councillor Waddington highlighted she had visited the property as it is located within her ward and noted concerns that whilst many tenants were able to leave, others chose to remain in the property in breach of the notice as they had pets.

Members agreed with concerns around fire hazards and maintenance of the property and the Commission requested a detailed report on history associated to management and enforcement of St Clements Court.

AGREED:

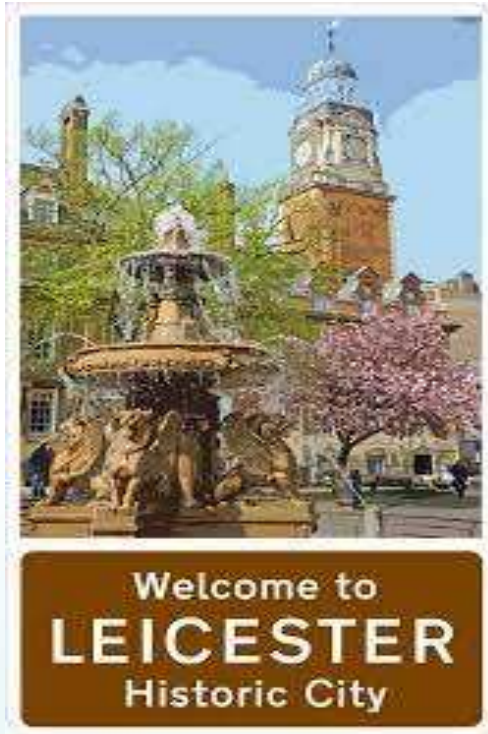
- The Commission noted the verbal update.
- The Commission requested a detailed report.

The Director for Housing highlighted the annual rough sleepers count usually takes place in November and Members were invited to participate.

37. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair noted there had been a change to future meeting dates.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 20.18.

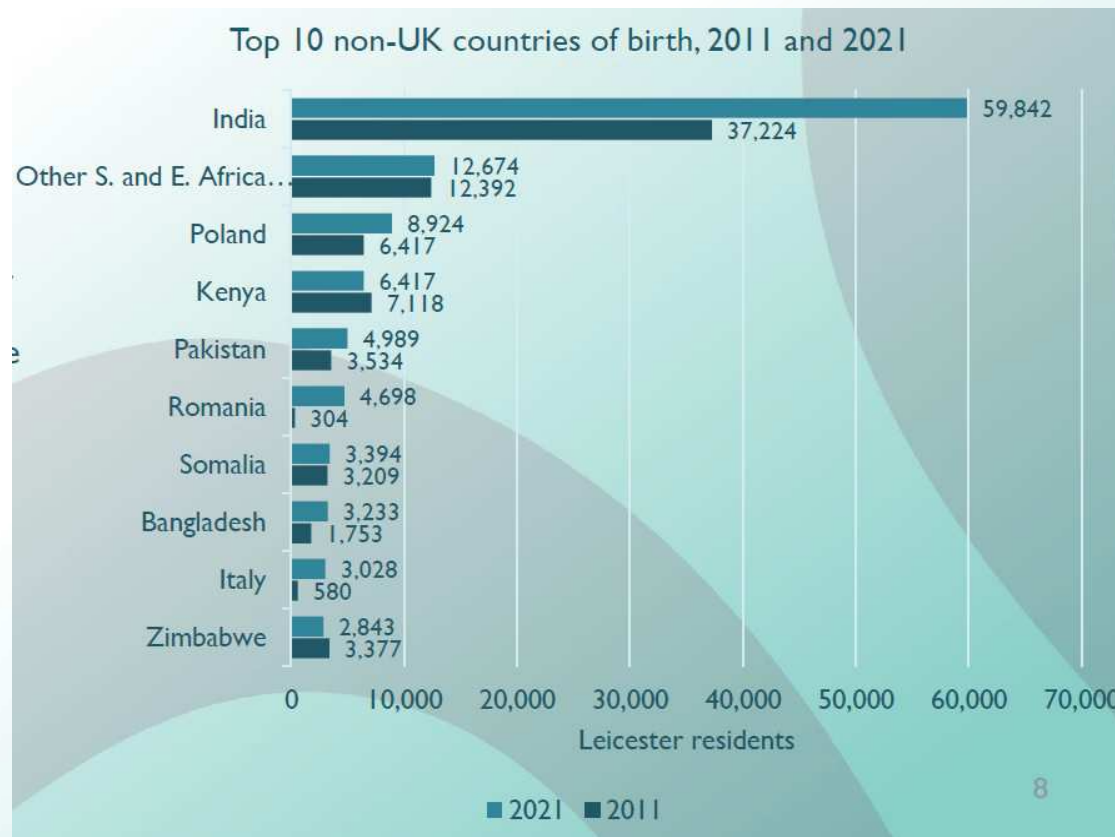


Immigration, Migration & Asylum in Leicester City

Census 2021 Data

- Leicester is one of fastest growing Local Authorities in England
- Leicester is the 3rd most densely populated Local Authority outside of London
- Leicester population grew faster than all of the England core cities between 2011 and 2021.
- Between 2001 and 2011 almost 12,000 additional households were created, an increase of 10.8% which is more than the national and regional average
- At the 2021 census, 41% of Leicester's population were born overseas which is an increase of 7% since 2011
- Leicester is the 4th most deprived upper tier Local Authority by proportion of household (census data)

Top 10 non-UK countries of birth in Leicester City between 2011 and 2021 census data



- Compared to 2011 there are 22,618 more residents born in India
- Romanian and Italian populations have seen the biggest growth in the City since 2011 which is similar to Britain over all
- Poland and Bangladesh have also seen sizeable increases in the City

Asylum

- The UK has a small number of legal routes to claim asylum
- Large numbers of people continue to enter the UK illegally in small boats
- The peak was in 2022 when we saw 44,774 people enter the UK in small boats
- The Illegal Immigration Act 2023 is still under development and does not provide the authorities with the same powers for children (UASC)

Small Boat arrivals 2023		
Month	Total	Running Total
January	1180	1180
February	1173	2353
March	840	3193
April	2153	5,346
May	1664	7,010
June	3824	10,834
July	3299	14,133
August	5369	19,502
September	4729	24,231

Asylum and related schemes operating within Leicester City

- Asylum
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)
- Ukraine schemes
- Afghan schemes (ARAP/ACRS)
- Hong Kong British National Overseas (BNO)
- Syrian scheme (VPRS)
- Community Support Group

Education, benefits & looking for work

- All child arrivals under any scheme are placed into appropriate educational placements
- Other than asylum and UASC all schemes provide recourse to public funds which means that people are supported to claim benefits and find work as soon as possible to help them settle in the UK
- Most asylum seekers are unable to work or claim benefits until they are granted refugee status

Funding

- Complex picture across all schemes with individual funding arrangements for each area
- The funding varies and changes often and can be complex to claim
- Particularly under UASC and Asylum the funding provided is insignificant in relation to the actual costs on local services

In the next 3 months the Home Office will process the following asylum claims (SAP):

- 73k nationally
- 4.5k in the East Midlands

Alongside policies to deliver:

Hotel maximisation & additional 280 dispersed properties for the City

Implications of SAP

- Availability of affordable housing
- Staffing availability to assess cases
- Temporary accommodation availability and costs
- Potential increase in street homelessness
- Health care availability
- Re-filling of hotels and accommodation with the next group to be assessed as boat crossings remain high
- No additional support or funding to get people employment ready

Leicester City Council has always been front and centre in offering a place of sanctuary and support to those fleeing violence and oppression across the globe.

We have been a dispersal city for Asylum Seekers since 2001 and the richness of culture that this and other arrivals have added to our already diverse and multi-cultural city is something of which we are all proud.

Our commitment to supporting people remains strong while acknowledging the pressure that the numbers of individuals in these groups are placing on local services

