

## **Manchester City Council Report for Resolution**

**Report to:** Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee – 7 December 2017

**Subject:** Support Available to Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Manchester

**Report of:** Director of Homelessness

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### **Summary**

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide a report on the support available to asylum seekers and refugees In Manchester.
- To include case studies of asylum seekers and refugees who have received support within Manchester.

### **Recommendations**

Members of the Committee are requested to note and comment on this report.

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### **Wards Affected: All**

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### **Background documents (available for public inspection):**

Support available to asylum seekers and refugees in Manchester. Communities Scrutiny Committee – 28th October 2015

Support available to asylum seekers and refugees in Manchester. Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee – 1<sup>st</sup> February 2017

## 1.0 Background

1.1 In February 2017 Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee considered a detailed report on the support available to asylum seekers and refugees in Manchester. The report included information about support provided through the Home Office under the Asylum and Immigration Act 1999, as well as that provided by the council for example through the No Recourse to Public Funds Team.

1.2 The February 2017 report described the role and work programme of the Regional Strategic Migration Partnership (RSMP), which is hosted by the Council. This includes strategic oversight of asylum dispersal both within the city and across the wider region, and to ensure that dispersal in Manchester is well managed and does not impact adversely on existing communities and services. The report also covered other aspects of the RSMP programme including the Gateway Protection Programme; the Syrian Resettlement Programme; and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children.

1.3 The purpose of today's report is to provide information about support services available to asylum seekers and refugees in Manchester not covered in the previous report. It also includes information about support available to EEA migrants. As requested by Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee, case studies are included in the report, and speakers from the Boaz Trust, Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit, Serco and the Booth Centre have been invited to attend the meeting.

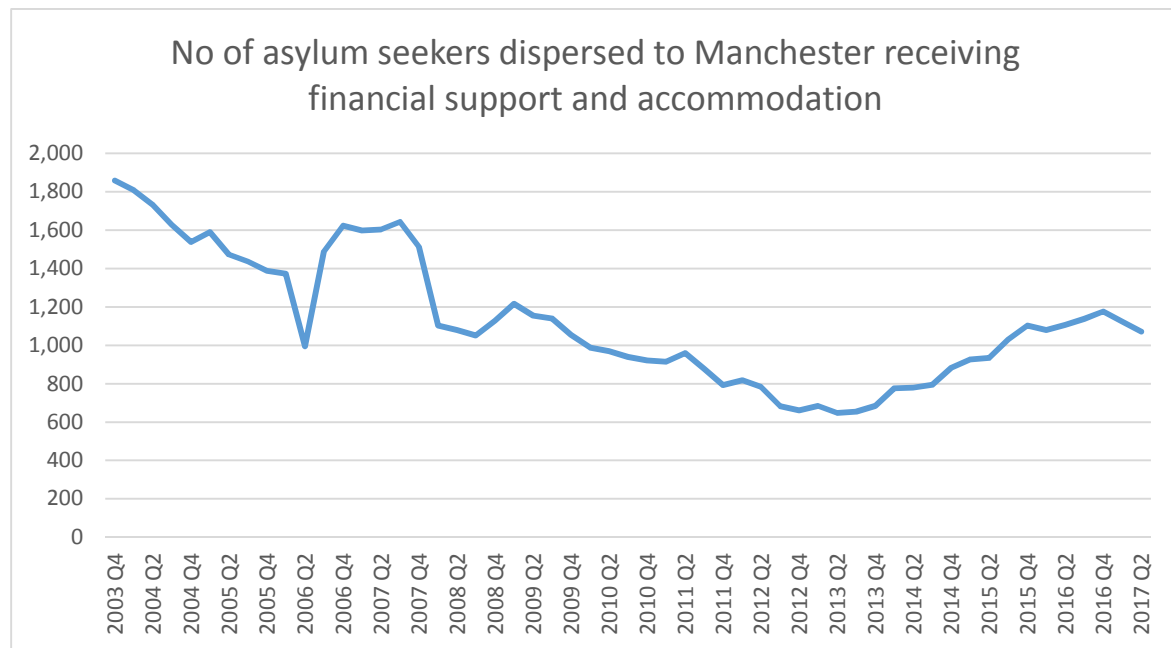
## 2.0 Asylum Dispersal within Manchester

2.1 As can be seen in the table below, applications for asylum in the UK have increased steadily from 2012 to 2015, increased significantly in 2015/16, and have fallen during the past year.

Year	Total applications	Total Initial decisions	Grants		Refusals	
			No	%	No	%
2012/13	22,635	17,561	6,592	38%	10,969	62%
2013/14	23,812	15,141	5,487	36%	9,654	64%
2014/15	25,202	25,812	10,349	40%	15,463	60%
2015/16	34,986	26,345	10,553	40%	15,792	60%
2016/17	28,983	24,259	8,120	33%	16,139	67%

Source: Home Office

2.2 The chart below shows the number of asylum seekers supported under section 95 each quarter from the end of 2003 up to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2017. Section 95 support is aimed at asylum seekers whose claims are ongoing, who are destitute or about to become destitute, and their dependents. Support is in the form of housing and/or basic living expenses. In Manchester, these asylum seekers are supported by Serco on behalf of the Home Office. Overall numbers supported under Section 95 within the city remain at a relatively low level compared to previous periods, and have fallen throughout 2017.



Source: Home Office

2.3 The Council continues to work closely with both the Home Office and Serco in order to ensure that asylum seekers granted leave to remain receive the assistance that they both require and to which they are statutorily entitled.

### 3.0 Support Provided by the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector

3.1 The February 2017 report to Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee briefly mentioned some of the voluntary, community and faith sector organisations that provide support to asylum seekers, failed asylum seekers, and refugees in Manchester. As well as supporting people through complex legal processes, their work includes helping people to integrate into local communities, re-uniting families, preventing homelessness, relieving destitution, reducing social isolation, and facilitating access to health and social care and wider support networks. People can also be supported into opportunities for volunteering, training and employment.

3.2 The Council funds and supports a number of these services such as Wai Yin Society, Manchester Refugee Support Network (MRSN), Somali Adult Social Care Agency, Black Health Agency (BHA), Cornerstone, Awaaz, Manchester Bangladeshi Women's Organisation, Himmat, Saheli, the Boaz Trust, Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit, the Booth Centre, and Riverside Care and Support. At Members request the remainder of this report focuses on some of these organisations in more detail, including case studies of asylum seekers and refugees who have received support.

### 4.0 Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit

4.1 Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit (GMIAU) is a not-for-profit immigration legal advice provider, working with asylum seekers, refused asylum seekers and people with no recourse to public funds, and refugees. Specialist help

and support is available to separated children and young people, women fleeing domestic violence and abuse, and men, women and children who have been trafficked. ASHA (asylum support housing advice), part of GMIAU, provide a service to people who are, or who are threatened with, homelessness and destitution.

4.2 GMIAU report a significant increase in the number of children and young people needing legal immigration advice and representation over the last 12 months, including those who are separated and have no family in the UK and children who have been trafficked. Between April 2016 and March 2017 they took on 156 new cases for children under 18. As well as representing the children GMIAU are trying to establish improved policies and practices, through training to children's social workers and others, for the reception and support in Manchester and the wider city region.

4.3 GMIAU receive funding from a variety of sources including from the Council who commission GMIAU to provide an immigration advice service to Manchester residents. This work includes receiving referrals from families supported by the Council's No Recourse To Public Funds team. Between 1st April and 30th September 2017 GMIAU have reported the following 'headline' figures for their contracted service:

- 324 families or vulnerable adults have been advised and 128 are being represented by GMIAU to the Home Office/Court;
- GMIAU represented 70 under 18 year olds;
- ASHA (Asylum Support Housing Advice) delivered 1185 one-on-one sessions including to 237 new clients, including families. The outcomes include preventing 76 people becoming homeless, securing food for 100 people and ensuring access to GP Services for 65 people;
- GMIAU provided extra support to children and young people including to 62 under 20 year olds;
- An average of 30-35 young people access the All 4 One social group and GMIAU have set up a girl's group to support victims of trafficking;
- A project established to support women who are at risk as a result of their immigration status (all of which have no recourse to public funds) has supported 46 women during this six month period.

## **5.0 The Boaz Trust**

5.1 The Boaz Trust is a charity that provides support to destitute refused asylum seekers and refugees in Greater Manchester. Boaz's core service is the provision of accommodation for destitute asylum seekers, who have had their asylum claims refused and most likely had subsequent appeals rejected. They have no recourse to mainstream public funds or housing and are not allowed to work, and are at risk of becoming homeless. Their accommodation includes shared houses, community hosting, and winter night shelters. More recently they have developed housing provision for refugees as well as failed asylum seekers. As well as accommodation Boaz provides legal advice and representation, wellbeing activities, essential items such as food and toiletries, and practical and emotional support. In 2016-17 Boaz provided a total of 21,215 nights of accommodation to 162 homeless refugees and asylum seekers from more than 30 countries.

## **6.0 Riverside Refugee Resettlement Service**

6.1 In recent years there has been an increase in the number of refugees becoming homeless, most frequently in the weeks or months after they receive leave to remain. Many approached the Council for a homeless assessment, and under the current homeless legislation only refugees who were in priority need were given a homeless duty. This meant a growing number were sleeping rough, and therefore the Council decided to commission a new service to prevent refugees from becoming homeless.

6.2 The Riverside Refugee Resettlement Service started in May 2017 and works with households in Serco accommodation once they have been given 28 days notice. As well as finding accommodation, usually in the private rented sector, Riverside provides other support including help with applying for NI numbers and welfare benefits; help to open a bank account; emergency food supplies via food banks; and referrals to health and well-being services, including mental health services.

6.3 Since May 2017 Riverside has received referrals for 78 households– 50 single people, 25 families, and 3 couples. So far 45 households have been found accommodation, most of these single households as families are proving more difficult to accommodate. The Riverside service has significantly reduced demand both on the Council's homeless service and rough sleeper services in the voluntary sector.

6.4 The Homeless Reduction Act that comes into effect from April 2018 means that all people who have no priority need, including refugees, will need to be provided with help and advice at the prevention and relief stage of homelessness. Having this project means that Manchester City Council has an already effective and established pathway for refugees and is meeting this part of the Act.

## **7.0 The Booth Centre**

7.1 The Booth Centre is a long established charity in the city supporting homeless people and rough sleepers. As well as asylum seekers and refugees, the Booth Centre supports EU and EEA migrants who are often homeless as a result of losing short term and insecure employment and stringent benefit restrictions.

7.2 The Booth Centre is commissioned by the Council and the other GM authorities to provide an EEA Reconnection service for single EEA migrants who are rough sleeping, homeless or at risk of homelessness in the Greater Manchester area. The service provides information and guidance to workers from across Greater Manchester about how to support homeless people from EEA countries, particularly around reconnection to their home country. The Booth Centre provides face to face advice, support and guidance for EEA migrants – this includes options for obtaining benefits, getting employment, or returning home. Where appropriate the Booth Centre helps people to return to their home country within the EEA in order to prevent or alleviate homelessness, including arranging and funding travel documents, visits to embassies and transport back to their home country. Where people decide not to return they can access the Booth Centre's other services

including advice about benefits, housing and accessing health services, our job club, work placements, ESOL classes and education, training and wellbeing activities.

7.3 Between April and September 2017, the Booth Centre provided face to face advice to 78 EEA migrants, taking the total of EEA migrants attending the Centre since April 2016 to 447. Between April and September 2017 the GM EEA Reconnection service has returned 32 people to other European countries and reconnected 4 EU migrants to friends/family or jobs within the UK. In addition the service has helped 15 people to gain employment, 2 people to enter the National Referral Mechanism, 7 to secure emergency accommodation, 2 to secure supported housing, and 4 moved into independent tenancies.

## **8.0 Conclusion**

8.1 Asylum seekers, failed asylum seekers, refugees, and EEA migrants can face a range of legal, practical and emotional issues. It remains important to ensure that they receive the right help and support to which they are entitled whilst they are in Manchester. This in turn will help to maintain good community relations and also support people to realise their potential and contribute to the social and economic fabric of the city.

8.2 It remains important that the Council and its partners recognise the important role that the voluntary, community and faith sector plays in ensuring that newly arrived international migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, are appropriately supported.

## **Appendix 1 – Case Studies**

### ***Taken with permission from the Boaz Trust Annual Report 2016-17***

David fled Ethiopia fearing persecution. He came to the UK but was refused asylum and became homeless, destitute and seriously ill. The Boaz Trust was able to support David and help him make progress with his asylum claim.

Here's what David said about the difference Boaz made in his life:

"Before I came to Boaz, I remember I was praying not to suffer more than this. I was homeless and hopeless. I wasn't accepted in my home country or in this foreign country. I was very sick at that time and I was very stressed. I had lost all my hope. When I came to Boaz I first stayed in their night shelter. Boaz directed me to a GP. I was diagnosed with diabetes. Until then I didn't know and it was very bad. I needed an eye operation otherwise I'd lose my sight. I moved into a Boaz house and Boaz gave me money for food, medical things and bus fares. In the house I could rest. That made a big difference. Being in a house was great because the kitchen gave me room to prepare the right foods. I needed an operation to save my sight, which the doctor organised for me, and Boaz arranged for a taxi to take me to and from the hospital for this. Boaz gave me a lot of support. They stopped me being homeless and hungry and stood up for me. They gave me hope, advising me about the asylum process. They gave me accommodation and treated me like a human. They helped reduce my stress including me in different activities like ESOL, swimming, visiting places, and family night get-togethers. All this support takes you out of stress, problems and daily worries. I stayed in the house for a year. Since I got my refugee status I've been able to get going with my life. I've been able to think about things when before I couldn't. At the moment I am at University studying marketing. I am looking forward to completing my education and starting work. I am really delighted. I am living. There are no words to thank Boaz, and thank you is not big enough for what Boaz did for me."

## **GMIAU Case Studies**

### **GMIAU Case Study 1**

We took on the case of a Manchester family – with the mother and the father having different cases. The couple were living together and had 3 children. The father had mental health issues which meant that Manchester children's services became involved. The father was suicidal and threatened to kill his children if they were forced to return back to Ghana. Social services took the threat seriously and initially moved the father away from the children. The father was returned back to live with the family when it became clear the deportation was not immediate but with proviso that a) any decisions by the home office were sent to us and served on him by social services and b) constant monitoring by social services of his condition.

Home Office agreed to serve decisions on the GMIAU caseworker only. They were both refused status. We informed social services and they arranged for a team of people to go around to tell him, making sure that the mother and children were out. We assured them that we were going to appeal and deportation was not imminent.



We lodged the appeal and argued at appeal that if the family were removed the mother would have to make sure that the children had no contact with father and that they would never see him again. We provided reports about the lack of social services support in Ghana and argued that if the family were allowed to remain in the UK the children could live with both parents because a) the father's mental health would stabilise and b) there was support available in the UK

We won the appeal and got status for the whole family. They are all now settled and living together. The father is receiving the treatment he needs and the children are doing well in school. We are particularly pleased with this outcome. We put in hours of work but, with the support of social services, we kept the family together and the risks to everyone are dramatically reduced.

## **GMIA Case study 2**

A woman with a young son came to our drop-in. She had no means of support and was being evicted from her accommodation the following day. One of the immigration caseworkers made an immediate human rights application for leave on the basis of her situation and the student social worker made a referral to the no recourse team. The team were struggling to find her somewhere to stay so we liaised between the private landlord, the bailiffs, children's services, the no recourse team, and a food bank to make sure that they had the means to survive and stay safe for the next few days. The family have now been granted status and we are applying to have the public funds restriction removed from their leave.

## **Riverside case studies**

### **Riverside Case Study 1**

Client Name: SK, female, aged 28.  
Household composition: Single  
Country of Origin: Eritrea  
English language fluency level: None

SK was referred to the Refugee Service on the 6th of October 2017 and was assessed by the Support Worker on the 10th of October 2017. SK is a female with severe PTSD and displayed a lot of anxiety during her assessment. SK does not speak English and can only converse in her native language; Amharic. SK was not able to complete the assessment as she did not have her biometric ID card or her Leave to Remain documents. She was also quite confused and upset during the assessment as she was not able to understand the process relating to her move from her Serco accommodation.

SK gave the number of a Support Worker from City Hearts which is an anti-trafficking organisation. The organisation works with clients that have been referred under the national referral framework. The Support Worker from Riverside liaised with City Hearts and the Home Treatment Team to make a referral to supported accommodation due to SK's high support needs.

SK was assessed for accommodation at Richmond Fellowship. A member of the Home Treatment Team and the Riverside Support Worker accompanied SK to give their input in support of the client's application. The Home Treatment Team provided SK with an interpreter from M4 who was also present at the meeting.

SK was offered a place at Richmond Fellowship on the 13th of November 2017. Riverside also liaised with the Serco Housing Officer to get an extension for SK whilst awaiting a decision from Richmond Fellowship. It is anticipated that SK will be moving in to her self-contained flat on the 27th of November 2017.

The Riverside Support Worker, a member of staff from City Hearts and also the Home Treatment Team will be helping SK to move into her accommodation by providing practical support such as accompanying SK on the day of the move and providing her with an interpreter so she is able to sign her tenancy agreement.

## **Riverside Case Study 2**

Client Name: HB, female, aged 38

Household composition: Married with 3 sons under the age of 18

Country of Origin: Libya

English language fluency level: None

HB was referred on the 28th of September 2017 to the Riverside Refugee Service. She was assessed by the Support Worker on the 4th of October 2017. HB's husband was awaiting decision relating to his asylum claim so he would still have to remain in Serco accommodation whereas HB and the three sons had been given their 28 day notice to vacate the property.

HB cannot speak English so her husband acted as her interpreter. The process of rehousing was explained to the client on assessment. The client was visibly distressed as she wanted to avoid presenting at the council at all costs due to her concerns regarding possible change of schools if they were to be placed outside of Manchester.

HB was supported to make a claim for her National Insurance number and Job seekers allowance. HB's husband was vital throughout the whole process as he speaks English at an adequate level; so was able to interpret and attend appointments with his wife at the Job Centre.

HB and her family are entitled to a four bed property. After searching and calling many letting agents and landlords a property was found for the family that would accept Housing Benefit. HB's husband was able to provide a guarantor. The landlord liaised with the Riverside Refugee Service and the Brokerage Team at Manchester City Council to gain further information about the family and their finances. After the landlord completed his due diligence he was happy to proceed. The Riverside Refugee Service applied for a month's rent in advance plus a bond from the City Council. The Support Worker liaised between the client, landlord and the council to secure the tenancy as well as arranging the signing of the tenancy to support the client and the landlord in order to put their mind at ease. The client was supported

throughout the process and also informed of the benefit cap due to the family composition and entitlement to benefits.

HB moved into the property on the 27th of October 2017 with her family. The Riverside Refugee Service helped HB to claim Housing Benefit and also Discretionary Housing Benefit as part of the support package.

## **Booth Centre Case Studies**

### **Booth Centre case study 1**

Januz came to the UK from Poland after a relationship break down. He began working for a recruitment agency for two weeks. He left as he was not paid and he then went to work for a different agency. The agency offered a job working in a warehouse and accommodation closer to the workplace. Everything was fine for the first five weeks until he was robbed of his ID and wallet. His employer did not allow him to have access to the internet or a phone and so he escaped and was signposted to the Booth Centre. We referred him to Hope for Justice as a trafficking case but he decided not to pursue this. We got him into the Church Night Shelter and he started attending our activities and volunteering. We helped him to secure a full time paid job at Prêt à Manger and he now has a room in a shared house.

### **Booth Centre Case Study 2**

A Hungarian couple came to the UK after they were promised work in London. They paid their flights themselves to get here and worked in London at a Chip shop, whilst staying at a flat which was too expensive. After a few months, they were offered a job in Bolton as flats are cheaper there. In Bolton, they lived in a very small and damp flat costing £90 per week, the man was working as a maintenance man receiving only £30 per week as the money for the rent was taken from the salary. He developed health problems (asthma) due to living in the damp environment. After two and a half months in Bolton, he was told that the job has finished and that they don't have any other work for him. The couple had to leave Bolton and were found by Transport Police at Piccadilly train station. The Transport Police brought them to the Booth Centre, where they asked to be re-connected to Hungary, which we organised

### **Booth Centre Case Study 3**

Peter came to the UK from Spain more than seven years ago. He had a partner and was working. However, he ended up in prison for a few months and on probation and his partner broke up with him. He came to Manchester to look for work, was first staying with his sister but later ended up sleeping rough. In autumn 2016, he approached the Booth Centre to find accommodation and to get help sorting out his passport so that he could look for work. We got him a place in the Church Night Shelter as he had no benefit entitlement and he started attending the centre on a daily basis, taking part in most of our activities and developing his skills. Organising an appointment with his embassy, we found out that he could only get an emergency travel document and not a passport as he was wanted in his home country for assaulting a police officer many years ago. Without a passport he can't work legally in the UK and so we encouraged him to go back to Spain to sort out this historic

offence. A month later he came back with a new passport and having dealt with the offence. We got him back into the Church night shelter while he looked for work and he joined our volunteering programme. Using our connections with Prêt à Manger, we helped him secure a full time paid job and were then able to help him to get a room in a shared house, using a Big Change Grant to pay for the deposit and rent in advance. Peter still accesses the centre on his days off and will receive support from us if he needs it.

#### **Booth Centre case study 4**

A Portuguese national came to the UK last year in order to look for work. After a few weeks, he approached the Booth Centre looking for accommodation. We helped him to apply for JSA and referred him to the Church Night Shelters, whilst supporting him to find work. He eventually got a job via an agency but was paid irregularly and below the minimum wage and additionally had to spend a large part of his earnings on public transport to get to work. He therefore could not afford to look for a room in a shared house. When his situation didn't improve after several months he decided to go back to Portugal. The Booth Centre arranged his travel back.