

Asylum and Resettlement - London Councils Survey

In May 2024, London Councils, with support from Newham Council, surveyed London Boroughs to better capture the work of London Local Authorities in supporting refugees and those seeking asylum to build new lives in the capital.

The survey captures how London councils structure and organise their asylum and resettlement teams, which directorate they sit within and the variance in team size. It also looks at which resettlement schemes boroughs support and how many London local authorities are supporting asylum seekers in hotels and dispersed accommodation.

It also considers the importance and centrality of government funding in the sustainability and continuity of London Councils support and welcome offer. Significantly, it found that 80% of boroughs said it would be either unlikely or not at all possible that they would continue to provide their service if there was to be no further government funding.

Key findings from the survey:

- Nearly all boroughs who responded support arrivals via Ukraine visa schemes (22 boroughs) and Afghan resettlement schemes e.g. ACRS and/or ARAP (23 boroughs). Sixteen boroughs support people in contingency hotels and in Dispersed Accommodation. Eight support to Hong Kong BNO Welcome Programme, thirteen support UKRS arrivals and ten support Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement scheme (VPRS)
- Most LAs (16) use a mixture of in house and commissioned services. Though, eight LAs provide fully in-house services. Of commissioned services, most LAs have commissioned local VCS organisations (16 boroughs). Eight boroughs commission private organisations (e.g., social enterprise). Only four boroughs do not commission any external organisations.
- Borough team size varies significantly: five boroughs have 1-5 FTE, eleven boroughs have a team of 6 – 10 FTE, a further five have 11-20 FTE and four boroughs have 20 or more FTE staff
- The most common forms of support offered by LAs include: Employment and volunteering advice (22), Housing and Move-on Advice (25), health and wellbeing support (23), community engagement (23) and ESOL (21). Eighteen boroughs conduct asylum hotel visits, while twelve boroughs provide DA visits. Just five boroughs provide immigration advice.
- Many boroughs seconded staff from other council departments to their teams, primarily from housing (prevention and advice service – 9 boroughs), from PRS and Social Housing (5 boroughs) and 8 boroughs have seconded staff from social work
- Nearly all boroughs who responded provide in person contact with refugees primarily through home visits (20 boroughs) and hotel visits (20 boroughs). Eighteen boroughs provide support via community hubs and drop-in sessions. Overall, twenty-one boroughs provide face to face appointments via other settings (e.g. libraries).
- In respect of funding and continuity of services, 80% of boroughs said it would be either unlikely or not at all possible that they would continue to provide their service if there was to be no further government

funding (e.g. HFU grant, Dispersal Grant etc.). Only 8% of boroughs said they would be able to continue as they currently operate.

- Boroughs reflected that **key strengths** of their current approach involved flexibility to respond, language skills in their team, providing expert advice, the capacity to adapt, creative use of funding streams, providing face-to-face contact, member and senior level engagement/ buy-in with the services, and developed partnerships with VCS organisations.
- Suggested **ways for improving** current practice included pooling resources across different resettlement schemes into the asylum space, the need for increased resource – namely equity in funding and long-term funding settlements to create permanent teams, improved data sharing (particularly for those in DA), sharing and benchmarking good practice in LAs, joining up with other teams in the council and clarity from central gov. over the uncertainty of hotel closures and the future of resettlement schemes
- **The full presentation, including infographics and direct testimonies from teams can be viewed [here](#).**

25 of 32 London Boroughs responded to the survey carried out in May and June 2024.

What does this work look like in practice?

One example of good practice in London is Welcome Newham Refugee Resettlement Service which has supported over 3000 refugees and people seeking asylum since launching in July 2022. It has built partnerships with over 30 voluntary and community organisations. Welcome Newham supports people seeking sanctuary with their health and wellbeing, access to advice and support, to realise their rights and to help them lead independent, healthy and happy lives.

The programme prioritises face-to-face interactions and is delivered via a weekly One-Stop Shop at a local Library and outreach into hotels, reducing barriers to access and building trust. The Welcome Newham team benefits from employing people who themselves have experienced resettlement in the UK and together speak 14 different languages.

Building on infrastructure developed and learning gathered during COVID-19, the Welcome Newham team was initially created to support people arriving from Ukraine. Adapting the learnings from working with Ukrainian refugees, and in partnership with voluntary and community groups, Welcome Newham crafted a matrix of support, tailoring assistance to meet the immediate needs of refugees and people seeking asylum staying in Newham.

Welcome Newham's **'Move on'** support helps refugees gain independence and prevents them becoming homeless by supporting them to open bank accounts, navigate the private rental market and access employment. The success of this approach is evident in the low percentage of Ukrainians requiring temporary accommodation (less than 4%, or 15 out of 540 people). This approach is being applied to address the current pressures of homelessness as a result of the increase in people receiving a decision about their asylum claim.

Since August 2022, over 2000 people have used the Welcome Newham One-Stop Shop for over 3000 different service requests. An evaluation cited 88% usefulness rate and 93% resolution of service requests on the day. The number one reason for visiting the One-Stop Shop is seeking housing advice followed by Universal Credit and Housing Benefit application support.

Some of the key highlights from the Welcome Newham model are:

- Over 300 households who have recently been granted a positive decision on their asylum claim have been supported in their transition away from Home Office accommodation

- 80% of refugees and asylum seekers have participated in local clubs, societies and social groups since arriving in Newham
- 86% of refugees and asylum seekers feel a strong sense of belonging to the local area
- Nearly 200 people have attended one of our finding independent accommodation workshops.
- Over 95% of people Welcome Newham have supported have registered with a GP, supported in enrolling their children into school and claim benefits if they are eligible and in need of support
- Supported over 250 people into ESOL provision
- Lead borough on organising 3 East London Job Fairs for Refugees