

Meeting:	Executive
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Council Priority:	A safe place to call home / Fairer Together
Wards:	All
Report of:	Executive Member for Equalities, Communities and Inclusion
Report No.	1029175

Subject: Sanctuary Grants Programme

1. Recommendations

- 1.1. To utilise government asylum dispersal and refugee resettlement grant funding to deliver a £500,000 Sanctuary Grant Programme for local projects that support refugees, migrants and residents seeking asylum in the borough.
- 1.2. To endorse the establishment of a council-led project team to ensure due-diligence for the delivery of this major grants programme and adherence to government resettlement and asylum dispersal funding requirements.
- 1.3. To approve an innovative participatory grant making approach, with 'experts by experience' shaping the delivery of the Sanctuary Grant Programme through a well-supported and informed Sanctuary Grants Community Panel.

2. Report summary

- 2.1. In late 2023, the Council became an accredited 'Borough of Sanctuary' by the UK charity City of Sanctuary. As part of gaining formal accreditation, in early 2024, we launched our new [Islington Welcomes](#) strategy setting out a three-year plan to become a more welcoming Islington where all communities thrive. Delivery of the Sanctuary Grant Programme is a stated commitment within the Islington Welcomes strategy.
- 2.2. Our work to support refugee and migrant communities, newly arrived and established, is informed by the long history of migration in Islington, a place shaped and formed by people from various communities coming together over hundreds of years (see appendix A for demographic information and recent history of refugee and migrant responses). The Sanctuary Grant Programme comes at a time when new communities have recently sought sanctuary in the borough, for example from Ukraine and Afghanistan.
- 2.3. The Sanctuary Grant Programme will use government refugee resettlement and asylum dispersal funding to establish a £500,000 fund for local projects which support refugees, migrants and residents seeking asylum in the borough. A council-led project team will ensure due diligence is applied in assessing, awarding and monitoring grants and to replicate the success of other Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) programmes already operated by the council.
- 2.4. The purpose of the Sanctuary Grant Programme is to find new and innovative ways to help organisations in Islington support refugee and migrants and to encourage connectivity between new and existing communities. To achieve the stated objective, it is recommended to adopt a participatory grant-making model, to ensure experts by experience shape and inform the grant-funding prospectus.
- 2.5. This report sets out the detail of the Sanctuary Grants Programme, including the benefits of the participatory grant making approach using a community-led panel and how this programme will be delivered by the project team in an inclusive, transparent and cost-effective manner.

3. Details of the proposal

- 3.1. Islington Council has a vision that all residents, regardless of how long they have called Islington home, will feel welcomed, included and connected to the borough. One way to help achieve this vision is to increase the number of funded projects

and initiatives in the borough that support refugees, migrants and residents seeking asylum.

- 3.2. The council actively engages in government funded refugee resettlement schemes, including the [Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy \(ARAP\)](#), [Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme \(ACRS\)](#) and UK Refugee Resettlement. The council has also received funding to support Ukraine citizens arriving through the [Homes for Ukraine scheme](#). In 2023, a limited amount of Home Office funding was made to ease pressures on the council as a result of large-scale asylum accommodation in Islington, which has been largely used to help create a welcoming response to asylum seekers living in hostel style accommodation in Islington. Much of the funding for asylum accommodation and resettlement purposes has been utilised, but some remains uncommitted. The majority of the resettlement funding received is spent directly supporting residents who have arrived via the Afghan resettlement schemes and the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Several Council departments (Children's, Community Wealth Building and Housing) have received sums from this funding given the invaluable work they do supporting these residents who have arrived via these routes.
- 3.3. We know that many residents from refugee and migrant backgrounds access local voluntary and charity sector support. VCS groups so often hold the trust of these communities, but they are also facing increasing demands on their services and precarious funding situations. Setting-up the Sanctuary Grants Programme will allow for better service provision within the borough and an increase in the community-based activities available.
- 3.4. A key element of this programme is to try to attract new and smaller organisations to apply for this funding, providing that such organisations are Islington-based, constituted and meet the Council's minimum requirements for the proposed Sanctuary Grant Programme (see Appendix C for organisational checks). Avoiding duplication of funding and supporting innovation will be assisted by the work of the project team who have mapped existing refugee and migrant services in Islington and will help support grant awards to new projects. The project team will undertake outreach work to support and encourage smaller organisations who do not currently receive funding to apply for this grant.
- 3.5. The Council's NRPF, Refugee & Migrant Service have set aside up to £500,000 from asylum dispersal and refugee resettlement funding for the Sanctuary Grant Programme, as set-out in the table below. Utilising funds from different schemes ensures the fund is reflective of the different groups welcomed to Islington. The

proposed amounts from each scheme reflect the relative scale of funding awards made to the Council based on a person’s immigration route, the per-person-tariff paid and the corresponding volume of people assisted. Funding awards will be made by the project team (see 3.6 below) in partnership with the Community Panel (see 3.7).

Funding source	Proposed contribution
Afghan resettlement funding	£150,000
Homes for Ukraine funding	£300,000
Asylum Dispersal Grant	£50,000
Total	£500,000

3.6 Resettlement funding has been used to recruit positions within the Participation and Engagement and Community Partnerships Teams. The investment in staffing ensures that participation in funded resettlement schemes does not detract from existing council priorities and provides the necessary capacity to deliver the Sanctuary Grant Programme in accordance with council and grant-funding requirements.

Service Area	Main responsibilities	Resource Commitment
NRPF Refugee and Migrant Service	Running resettlement schemes and asylum hotel responses. Delivering the Islington Welcomes strategy and maintaining Borough of Sanctuary accreditation.	1 x Borough of Sanctuary project manager – delivering the Islington welcomes strategy, of which delivery of Sanctuary Grants is one part.
Participation and Engagement Team	Leading work to support the participatory budgeting approach, including designing the engagement process and delivering support to the community led panel.	1 X Participation and Engagement Officer – 2-year fixed contract.
Community Partnerships Team	Designing and implementing the grant making process. Responsible for monitoring of awards.	1 X VCS officer to manage the grant award and monitoring process – 2-year fixed contract.

3.7 A community led panel, named the ‘Sanctuary Grants Community Panel’, will be recruited by the project team to ensure that people with lived experience of the challenges faced by refugees, asylum seekers and migrants settling in the UK

inform the grant-making process. Selected panel members will receive training from the council to help them develop their skills to support the grants programme and will be reimbursed for their time.

3.8 The programme will aim to allocate the funding to groups within the financial year 2024/2025. Groups will be able to spend the funding past the financial year 2024/2025, with monitoring arrangements in place through the panel and project team to ensure the benefits of any funding awarded are realised.

3.9 The total amount of £500,000 from revenue monies is an amount that is financially significant under the council's constitution and the programme will deliver council-wide activities for the benefit of all communities, residents and wards; a Key Decision must be made by Executive for the proposal to proceed.

4. Other options considered and the reasons for recommending this proposal

4.1. The council already uses refugee resettlement and asylum dispersal grant funding to commission a range of VCS services that strengthen our collective response to the needs of residents, including those from a refugee and migrant background. Please refer to Appendix B for a breakdown of council funding for organisations providing support to refugees and migrants in Islington.

4.2. A grant-funding rather than commissioned-based approach is recommended to attract new ideas from different organisations on how they can help achieve connected and thriving communities that promote integration and social cohesion. A grant funding approach also offers the right balance of flexibility (e.g. greater autonomy for award recipients in how they deliver their programme of work, without contractual obligations) and oversight (council grant monitoring arrangements still be in place to ensure value is added). Fostering connections between new and existing communities is an important component of being a Borough of Sanctuary and supports the longer-term integration of refugees as post-arrival casework from the council scales-back. Using a combined grant amount from different resettlement and asylum schemes (see 3.5) balances existing targeted interventions for specific refugee groups with a community-led response that can help break-down potential barriers to integration in the wider community.

4.3. To achieve the objectives of the Sanctuary Grants Programme, a participatory grant making model is recommended to ensure that the programme is shaped by

the proposed beneficiaries of the project, rather than relying solely on the direction of council staff.

- 4.4. The participatory grant making model proposed has been developed based on research of projects at other councils, as well as research into funding organisations that apply a Participatory model, including Islington Giving and Camden Giving.
- 4.5. By agreeing to a participatory grant making approach led by a Community Panel, the council can demonstrate its commitment to empowering residents to shape the community in which they live, including helping residents develop the necessary skills to be community leaders.
- 4.6. The project team hope that residents will gain a range of practical skills by participating in this process such as working as a team, understanding of grant making processes, and knowledge of charities and their objectives. We want residents to have a meaningful experience and will provide references for those who complete the programme and at least one session with an I-Work coach for employment advice.
- 4.7. For the council, the participatory based approach can better support development of Council knowledge around the needs and priorities of those communities supported through grant funding, highlight barriers to participation in the grant making process, increase reach and diversity of groups funded, and develop trust between local people with lived experience of migration and the Council.

5. Key impacts and risks of the proposal

- 5.1. The **impact** of the Sanctuary Grant Programme will be to increase the number of funded projects and initiatives in the borough that support refugees, migrants and residents seeking asylum, for new and established communities. It will offer new opportunities to support Islington's vision that all residents, regardless of how long they have called Islington home, will feel welcomed included and connected to the borough.
- 5.2. It is necessary for the council to **adhere to the relevant auditing and reporting requirements** of government funding for Afghan resettlement (ARAP

and ACRS), Asylum Contingency and Homes for Ukraine programmes, as set out below:

- 5.2.1. ARAP & ACRS: Annual end of year Home Office evaluation and monitoring progress of beneficiaries' key integration indicators as per financial instructions. Years 2 and 3 funding is un-ringfenced but must be used to remove identified integration barriers.
 - 5.2.2. Homes for Ukraine: Quarterly submission to Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government of with breakdown of spend to date into categories of spending.
 - 5.2.3. Asylum Contingency: This money is un-ringfenced and there is currently no requirement to report on spend to the Home Office.
- 5.3. The Sanctuary Grant programme supports delivery of the above resettlement schemes by engaging the support of communities to find new ways of removing barriers to integration and promoting social cohesion. There is a **very low risk of non-compliance with the funding streams** set out in 5.4, but as a precaution council officers will maintain an 'award tracker' to evidence benefits realised for government reporting purposes.
- 5.4. During the project scoping stages of the Borough of Sanctuary Grant Programme, it was identified that there was a substantial resource risk for the council in pursuing a major participatory grants project in addition to existing commitments. The risk of an under-resourced council response has now been **mitigated by the establishment of the council project team**, with resettlement funding used to recruit dedicated officers in the Participation and Engagement and Community Partnership Team (see 3.6 above).
- 5.5. Risks associated with the participatory grant-making approach, led by a Sanctuary Grants Community Panel, which could in worse-case scenarios mean ill-informed or financially or politically motivated advice being given to the council, can be mitigated by the established council-led project team. The project team will **ensure a capable and well supported resident's panel** free from nefarious influence through the following actions:
- 5.5.1. An officer-led recruitment and selection process, including clear outline of expectations and requirements of panel members.
 - 5.5.2. The support of the communications team to advertise the opportunity widely and to enable a transparent application process.
 - 5.5.3. Dedicated training sessions for panel members, to ensure participants feel properly equipped and confident to make decisions.

- 5.5.4. The ability of the council to remove members who do not fulfil their functions to the standard required.
 - 5.5.5. Declaration of interests processes to remove panel members from decision making or advice-giving processes as required.
 - 5.5.6. Continued engagement with panel representatives so that they are motivated to provide high quality advice and support to the council.
- 5.6. The **allocation of council funds will remain the sole responsibility of the council** and the programme will embed standard grant-making practice already in place at Islington Council, including:
- 5.6.1. Adherence to council and government stipulated restrictions on grant making awards.
 - 5.6.2. A requirement of bidding organisations to meet the council's minimum eligibility criteria for the award.
 - 5.6.3. A vigorous and comprehensive scoring procedure by council staff, using an award and decision-making criteria agreed with the Panel.
 - 5.6.4. Wide communication of the programme to attract a diverse portfolio of bids to support the project's objectives.
 - 5.6.5. Frequent and recurrent review of a funded project's progress, appropriate to the size of the award made.
 - 5.6.6. A two-tranche approach to payments, half following the successful application, half after successful 6 months monitoring
 - 5.6.7. A clause setting out the right to retain half of the funding if activities proposed are no taking place.
 - 5.6.8. Investment in staffing to ensure the Community Partnerships Team can deliver application and monitoring arrangements to a high standard.
- 5.7. Appendix B (list of refugee and migrant organisations funded by the council) demonstrates a clear understanding of the external organisations being funded and commissioned for specific purposes, research undertaken in preparation for the Sanctuary Grant Programme. **The council will not approve applications that duplicate or recreate services or projects already in-place** and no additional funding will be made to successful grant applicants beyond the initial amount agreed, unless subject to a separate or further round of funding.
- 5.8. Further information on the proposed organisational checks and grant criteria is provided in appendix C, please note that these are in draft form pending further developing should the Key Decision being made.

6. Contribution to the Islington Together 2030 Plan

- 6.1. The Sanctuary Grant Programme will be a central component in delivering the Islington Welcomes Strategy that is a requirement of the accreditation under the City of Sanctuary scheme. We anticipate this will significantly contribute to achieving the vision of making Islington a place of welcome and equal opportunity for all.
- 6.2. The use of the participatory budgeting approach, with in depth understanding and collaboration of listening to our refugee, migrant and asylum-seeking communities, will ensure that this funding is used to maximum efficiency in benefitting residents with lived experience of migration. Having taken care to understand the financial and legal implications of this project, we are confident that there is no better use or delivery method available to us. We are excited by the potential the programme has to create a more equal Islington where all residents thrive.

7. Consultation and community engagement

- 7.1. The Council ran a [‘Let’s Talk’ engagement programme](#) which over 6,000 residents. A key finding of ‘Let’s Talk’, as outlined in the September 2022 Community Engagement Report, was that Islington residents want to have more opportunities to shape issues that affect them. Residents had a ‘desire for more meaningful dialogue, engagement and action and more responsive council services’, and, despite pride in Islington’s inclusiveness and diversity, ‘some raised concerns about divisions and exclusion’.
- 7.2. By adopting a participatory grant making approach, the Sanctuary Grants Programme will be delivered in a way that supports resident participation in decisions that affect them, and – for this project – for people with lived experience of migration to inform funding decisions. The approach will increase council knowledge of the needs and priorities of communities supported through grant funding, highlight barriers to participation in the grant making process, increase reach and diversity of groups funded, and develop trust between local people with lived experience of migration and the council. With the support of the Participation and Engagement Team, the council can realise the benefits of the Participatory Budgeting (PB) Theory of Change, with elements of the [Global PB Research Board](#) being applied successfully in Islington.

- 7.3. Models of Participatory Grant-making and Participatory Budgeting are used by councils across the UK including Town Councils, councils throughout Scotland and London Councils that include Haringey, Brent, Westminster and Newham¹. Learning from these approaches inform the work of the project team, it will also be the second pilot project run by the Participation and Engagement Team in Islington and one that will give residents a choice over projects prioritised for funding.
- 7.4. Community consultation and engagement with partners and residents was also central to obtaining City of Sanctuary Accreditation, with the development of the Islington Welcomes strategy supported by a Borough of Sanctuary Steering Group comprised of council staff, Councillors, VCS organisations and experts by experience. Through a range of meetings, groups sessions and one-to-one interviews, a consistent theme was the need for the council to support community engagement and funding. As an example of the views obtained, comments from participants in one workshop on the 16 August 2023 reflected that the 'Sing4Freedom Choir' was a major plus in their lives, but that there were 'concerns raised about a lack of funding'; another person commented that they 'don't need Islington Council to run the activities itself but wants Islington to support outside groups in the delivery of projects'.
- 7.5. The broad and extensive engagement and consultation undertaken by the council over recent years demonstrates the urgency to get this important funding opportunity out; money is needed to support community-based activities during a cost-of-living crisis; the voice of the local community needs to be heard and understood for value-for-money in grant-funding initiatives to be delivered.

8. Implications

8.1. Financial Implications

- 8.1.1. The Council, across all departments, spent approximately £2.3 million in 2023/24 and has allocated approximately £1.4 million across various contracts and grants

¹ [Participatory Budgeting - OSC 12.10.23.pdf \(haringey.gov.uk\)](#)

to support refugees, migrants and residents seeking asylum. These groups are funded by different departments across the Council such as the NRPF, Refugee & Migrant Service, Community Partnerships Team, VAWG team and the Children’s Department. Appendix B sets out a list of organisations funded across the Council who support refugees, migrants & residents seeking asylum. It is important to note that many refugees and migrants will also access many ‘mainstream’ services too. For example, we have not included the value of Islington Law Centre, Islington People’s Rights or RCJ Advice and Citizens Advice Islington contracts in these figures given it is not possible to determine the number of refugees or migrants accessing them.

8.1.2. The NRPF, Refugee & Migrant Service have set aside up to £500,000 for this funding pot from the following sources:

Afghan resettlement funding	£150,000
Homes for Ukraine funding	£300,000
Asylum Grant	£50,000
Total	£500,000
NB: Whilst these are the funding sources, this table does not describe which communities the funding will be allocated to, please see section 3 for the details of the proposal.	

8.1.3. Funding will be allocated to groups within the financial year 2024/2025. Groups will be able to spend the funding past the financial year 2024/2025. The funding is provided from the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme and Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy, Homes for Ukraine Funding, and Asylum Dispersal Grants. The funding for these grants is multi-year, with a total of £6.691m received to date (with additional funding possible depending on future caseload). This funding is used to meet individual and collective refugee needs. A prudent estimate of available uncommitted funding at the point of writing indicates a minimum of £0.896m is available to fund these proposals. It is possible for Finance to say with confidence that sufficient uncommitted grant is available from these three sources to fund this project.

8.1.4. The NRPF, Refugee & Migrant Service have made up to £500,000 available to support this work, but the final amount awarded will depend on the quality of the applications received and the residents’ panel decisions. The grants are expected to be between £2,000 to £50,000, but considerations will be given to those outside this range based on VCS guidance. The Council will not be liable for costs in excess of agreed grants.

8.1.5. Before applications are passed to the resident's panel, Council Officers will complete the necessary due diligence to ensure that the project meets the criteria of the application process, the proposal is feasible and represents good value for money. Unused money will be repurposed for other projects within the NRPF, Refugee & Migrant Team's remit.

8.1.6. This funding is separate to Council's 2024-2028 VCS grant programme.

8.2. **Legal Implications**

8.2.1. The Council has a general power under section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 to do anything that an individual may generally do provided it is not prohibited by other legislation and the power is exercised in accordance with the limitations specified in the Act which enables the Council to allocate the grant funding as set out in the report.

8.2.2. The various grants are being provided by the Home Office and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government further to section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003.

8.2.3. The Home Office and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government have each issued grant agreements terms and conditions the key features of which are:

Home Office

8.2.3.1. **Eligible Expenditure** – Funding provided must not be used for any purpose other than achieving delivery of the outcomes detailed in the Instruction.

8.2.3.2. **Monitoring and Evaluation** - Council must monitor the delivery and success of the Project throughout the Funding period to ensure that the Purpose is being met and that the Instruction is being adhered to.

8.2.3.3. **Breach and Clawback** – if the Council fails to comply with any of the conditions set out in the Instruction, then the grant may be reduced, suspended, or payments withheld, or the Home Office/Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government may require all or any part of the relevant payments to be repaid by the Council.

8.2.3.4. **Cessation of funding** - Home Office/Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government reserve the right to cease making payments if it has reasonable grounds to believe that there has been fraud or deception.

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

- 8.2.3.5. **Funded activities** – the Council must use the funding to carry out specific activities set out in the Homes for Ukraine guidance (the **Guidance**), including completing all 5 safeguarding and accommodation checks.
- 8.2.3.6. **Reporting** – the Council must provide regular data returns (including Section 151 Officer quarterly returns) in relation to the Homes for Ukraine Scheme as set out in the Guidance.
- 8.2.3.7. **Overpayment** – where the amount of grant paid to the Council exceeds the Council's actual pressures (based on number of guests resident in the borough), the difference shall be repaid to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

8.2.4. The Council must ensure that the application and eligibility criteria for these grants are clear and precise and supported with robust rationale. For example, if small organisations are likely to be given preference, then the definition of "small organisation" should be disclosed at the outset. The Council should also be able to demonstrate the reasoning as to why the grant is broken down in the way proposed (for e.g. between Afghan resettlement, Homes for Ukraine and Asylum grant projects).

8.2.5. The Council must ensure that it, and any subsequent recipients that enter into grant agreements with the Council to use such funding, comply with the terms for the respective grants, including a general obligation to use the funding for the specified purposes and ensuring that it complies with the Public Contract Regulations 2015 when procuring works, goods or services using the grant funding. The best way to satisfy this obligation is for the Council to ensure that the terms of the Home Office and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government grants are largely mirrored in the grant agreements entered into between the Council and grant recipients (particularly in relation to eligible expenditure, compliance with laws and clawback).

8.3. **Climate Change and Environmental Implications**

8.3.1. The grant programme in itself has minimal environmental impacts. However, the grants will be used to fund activities that are likely to have a range of environmental impacts, most of which will have resulting carbon emissions. These include energy and water use in buildings, the purchase of goods with supply chain impacts and the generation of waste.

8.4. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

8.4.1. An equalities impact assessment (EIA) has been completed to help the council understand the impact of the grants programme on residents in the borough,

particularly those with protected characteristics. The new grants programme aims to support the overarching Council priorities of addressing inequality, promoting community cohesion and supporting the most vulnerable residents.

- 8.4.2. The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.
- 8.4.3. The full EIA completed on 24 April 2024 is included in Appendix D of this Key Decision report. The main findings of the EIA are that there are no anticipated negative impacts on any groups within Islington, the grant will positively impact refugees, migrants and asylum-seeking groups, and particularly positively impact those with intersectional identities with other protected characteristics within this.

9. Timetable for implementation

- 9.1. The project timeline is in three phases, recruitment and training of the Community Panel starting September 2024, launching the grant scheme for applications in January 2025 with decisions on the grant applications made by the panel by March 2025, followed financial administration of successful grants and monitoring and evaluation of projects from April 2025 (Appendix E).

Report authorised by:

Director of Homes and neighbourhoods, Jed Young

Date: 1 August 2024

Executive Member for Equalities, Communities and Inclusion

11 October 2024

Appendices:

- Appendix A – The borough we know today, demographic information, summary of refugee and migrant responses, history of sanctuary.
- Appendix B – A list of VCS organisations funded across the council
- Appendix C – Organisational checks and grant criteria, please note these are in draft form, they will be developed subject to the Key Decision being made.
- Appendix D – The completed and authorised Equality Impact Assessment, for reference.
- Appendix E – The high level project plan, key timescales for the proposed Sanctuary Grants Programme.

Relevant decisions / reports:

- None

Background papers:

- None

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