

Inclusive Cities

INTEGRATION POLICY AND PRACTICE DURING COVID-19

Newport City Council briefing

April 2021

About this briefing

Newport is a participant in the Inclusive Cities programme – a city-led knowledge exchange programme, facilitated by the Global Exchange on Migration and Diversity at the University of Oxford.

The programme aims to support local authorities to create a step change in their approach to the inclusion of newcomers at the local level. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, local authorities and their partners have had to adapt their inclusion programmes, often at speed, to support their newcomer and longer standing communities. These briefings capture the learning from these adaptations, as well as ongoing work to promote inclusion and integration undertaken between March 2020 to October 2020 (unless otherwise stated), against the five thematic areas set out in the Inclusive Cities Framework.

- Briefings from the other Inclusive Cities are available [here](#)
- The Inclusive Cities Framework is available [here](#)
- A series of policy and research briefings on COVID-19 and inclusion, arising from the programme is available [here](#).

1. Leading in the development of a shared local story of inclusion

Newport City Council and partners planned a range of face-to-face activities in relation to this area of work prior to the pandemic. Although some of this was temporarily paused because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the following activities went ahead:

- The 'Welcome in Wales' local radio and social media campaign, which aimed at increasing participation in the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) among Newport's EU population.
- The 'positive stories' campaign, which focussed on the work of BAME community networks and individuals during the pandemic. It featured on Council media platforms and was used to highlight a range of personal achievements by refugees during Refugee Week.
- The Countering Online Hate event was delivered in November 2020 in partnership with [HOPE not Hate](#) and the [Centre for Countering Digital Hate](#). The Council found that migrants are at times being blamed for the spread of COVID-19 and the housing of asylum seekers in a military barracks in Penally

also caused tensions in the local community. This event brought together communities and professionals to discuss effective strategies for countering online hate speech, particularly in relation to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.

- Newport's EU Citizens' Forum moved to a virtual platform and continues to positively engage partners across the city who are working to encourage uptake of the EUSS. The Council has plans to recommence a weekly 'EU drop-in', which had previously focussed on EUSS advice but will now have a wider remit, both to respond to the change in priorities for our communities as a result of COVID-19, and to allow wider reach in terms of engagement, which the Council hopes will lead to a greater number of EUSS applications.

2. Supporting and driving inclusive economic growth

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, work had begun in relation to embedding an inclusive agenda (and in particular the work being done as part of the Inclusive Cities programme) across the various intervention boards which

deliver the [Council's Well-being Plan](#), including those which look at skills and employment. These boards were suspended during the pandemic, but as the Council returns to business as usual, this work will recommence.

Newport has undertaken a community impact assessment which examines the impact of COVID-19 on different vulnerable communities; refugees, asylum seekers and migrants constitute a discrete group within this assessment. Focus groups were conducted with these communities as part of the impact assessment, which highlighted the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 and associated lockdown measures on them, such as the increased likelihood of unemployment, poverty and lack of economic resilience to recover. The community impact assessment is being used by the Council to inform decision making and policymaking, including the recently developed [strategic recovery aims](#).

During the discussions, digital exclusion emerged as one of the key barriers faced by migrant families, including in relation to short- and long-term economic wellbeing. The [Digital Companions](#) initiative, run by Digital Communities Wales, was explored as one of the ways of addressing this.

The impact of the pandemic on smaller, family-run businesses, often owned or run by migrants, has become apparent. The Council's Connected Communities team and economic development officers are working in partnership with a local BAME business consultant to commission a bespoke piece of work to engage with and support these businesses.

Although English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision across the city has been challenged, the Council's adult learning team is working to develop blended approaches to learning which maximise digital opportunities whilst not excluding those who do not have access to digital devices or the internet.

Throughout the pandemic, work has focussed on ensuring that migrant workers know their rights and are able to access appropriate information about safety in the workplace, employers' duties around social distancing, and their rights to benefits and other support if they are required to self-isolate. A dedicated COVID-19 'padlet' site has been established with information in several community languages to bolster ease-of-access. The Council's Community Cohesion Officer is dealing with individual enquiries on a daily basis.

In preparation for the introduction of the socio-economic duty in Wales in April 2021, the Council is reviewing its equality impact assessment processes. A decision-making toolkit is being developed as part of this, which will include a specific focus on migrant communities and be rolled out across the organisation over the coming months. The toolkit will include a suite of evidence that decision-makers should consider when developing services or policies, and will include commitments that Newport has made as an Inclusive City.

3. Connecting communities

'Welcome to Newport' is a digital app being developed in partnership with Cardiff University and the Newport Software Academy. Its aim is to give newcomers access to information and support that will assist with integration processes by connecting them to existing community groups and resources.

The Council is involved in the 'Dragons Community Partnership' alongside Gwent Dragons rugby. The Partnership seeks to deliver a programme of activities to build confidence and encourage physical activity, including sessions with local refugee families, and work with children from migrant backgrounds in schools. The programme is also being used to encourage the use of the Welsh language outside of formal education settings, and will explore the role of Welsh language in creating a shared sense of identity across communities.

4. Mainstreaming and building inclusive public services

As mentioned above, Newport is resuming its efforts to embed inclusion work, in particular that which is being facilitated through the Inclusive Cities programme, across the Council's intervention boards. The Council's new [Strategic Equality Plan](#) also sets specific goals in relation to developing an Inclusion Strategy for the city.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted some of the greatest inequalities faced by migrant communities and brought opportunities to respond, at pace, to some of these challenges at the local level. This response has included:

- Extending the offer of free school meals to people with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) status
- Provision of housing to people with NRPF status
- Rollout of digital devices and Wi-Fi to all families with school-aged children who are digitally excluded, including for the provision of language and technical support to parents of English as an Additional Language (EAL) pupils
- Piloting of BT vouchers across Wales for asylum seekers and refugees, providing six months of unlimited data
- Establishing an NRPF referral mechanism to a newly established multi-agency forum providing support to vulnerable families
- Development of specific communication channels (e.g., WhatsApp groups, 'padlet' site, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) specific e-bulletin, voice note information in community languages)
- Establishment of a specific Socially Vulnerable Groups meeting in partnership with the Council's Health Department which focusses on developing the test, trace, protect programme in a way which is accessible to refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, and the rollout of messaging in accessible formats

5. Encouraging civic participation and representation

The Council has established a BAME forum which is chaired by the Leader of the Council, specifically in response to the Black Lives Matter campaign, but also to support the delivery of priorities set out in Newport's new [Strategic Equality Plan](#). One of the objectives of the plans is to build a representative workforce in the Council, and an operational delivery group has recently been introduced to support this work. The group is working towards improving the quality of data about the demographics of Council staff, taking positive action to improve representation, and creating a workplace culture which attracts, recruits, develops and retains diverse members of staff.

The Council has also established its first BAME staff network with around 20 members. The network's priorities are to improve the quality of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training for the workforce, boost representation at all levels throughout the Council, and review relevant HR policies.

Case Study: Community impact assessment

The Council has recently undertaken a community impact assessment (CIA), which is focussed on understanding the impact that COVID-19 has had on some of Newport's most vulnerable communities. The assessment draws on national and local research and insights from targeted engagement to highlight the ways in which COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted people from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Findings from the CIA were used as a basis for a series of community focus groups with LGBTQ+ people, disabled people and carers, children and young people, Welsh speakers, asylum seekers, refugees and migrants and BAME communities to both 'sense check' the findings and further explore lived experiences during the pandemic.



The CIA is currently being used to shape the Council's recovery aims and has been shared with service areas across the organisation in order to ensure that findings are considered as part of any decision or policymaking activity.

A budget of £100,000 has been secured from Aneurin Bevan University Health Board to support a participatory budgeting programme, which has now commenced. A community steering group has been established to develop this programme, which will ensure all funds are allocated to community projects which respond to the needs identified in the CIA, and positively impact the community groups who have been most affected by the pandemic.

“The assessment highlights the ways in which COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted people from different socioeconomic backgrounds.”

INCLUSIVE CITIES

Inclusive Cities is a knowledge exchange initiative supporting UK cities and their local partners to achieve a step-change in their approach towards the inclusion of newcomers.

Drawing on innovative ideas and practices from Europe and the United States, Inclusive Cities aims to support the development of an approach to inclusion which is strategic across the city administration. This approach consistently uses positive messaging to develop an inclusive narrative for the city which informs and drives practice and is local authority led, working in close partnership with business, public and voluntary sector organisations to achieve shared goals.

Inclusive Cities is supported by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

www.compas.ox.ac.uk/project/inclusive-cities

THE GLOBAL EXCHANGE ON MIGRATION AND DIVERSITY

The Global Exchange on Migration and Diversity is an ambitious initiative at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) opening up opportunities for knowledge exchange and longer term collaboration between those working in the migration field.

www.compas.ox.ac.uk/global-exchange

ABOUT

This briefing was authored by Heather Powell (Newport City Council), Jacqui Broadhead (COMPAS) and Denis Kierans (COMPAS).

Thanks to Ragini Khurana for her assistance.

CONTACT

For more information contact

Denis Kierans (COMPAS)

denis.kierans@compas.ox.ac.uk