



**Global
Exchange**
on Migration & Diversity
at COMPAS



Inclusive Cities

INTEGRATION POLICY AND PRACTICE DURING COVID-19

Sheffield City Council briefing

April 2021

About this briefing

Sheffield 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 learnings 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

Sheffield launched the '[Steel Spirit Stories](#)' campaign to capture and recognise the efforts of Council staff from diverse backgrounds in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The programme aims to recognise work across the organisation and the ways in which Council staff are going above and beyond their jobs to support the city. This page is all about recognising where staff – often unsung heroes – are showing 'steel spirit' and making a difference.

2. Supporting and driving inclusive economic growth

Sheffield is currently developing its local plan – a statutory document that will guide development in the city until 2038. It will affect what it is like to live in Sheffield's neighbourhoods, shop on its high streets, use local services, and visit different neighbourhoods, parks, countryside and other attractions. As the city emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, the value of local economic growth for bringing about fairness, inclusion and sustainability is greater than ever. The strategy is currently being

developed, following a consultation period. The draft envisions that "by 2038 Sheffield will be a fair, inclusive and environmentally sustainable city. It will be playing a nationally significant economic role at the heart of its region, with thriving neighbourhoods and communities, and have a distinct urban and rural identity."

The Council is working with the Sheffield City Region on its [Renewal Action Plan](#) as part of its planning for recovery from the pandemic. Subject to funding from central government, the plan sets out the recovery priorities for:

- **People** – supporting people to adapt to the new economy and be better able to fill higher-skilled jobs
- **Employers** – supporting businesses to adapt, survive and thrive in the new environment
- **Places** – transforming local economies to create jobs, and make towns and cities stronger

The plan has the aim of making the local economy and society:

- **Stronger** – an economic transformation to create not just a bigger economy but a better one: higher tech, higher skill, and higher value

- **Greener** – a green transformation to decarbonise the economy, improve the environment, and revolutionise transport
- **Fairer** – a transformation of wellbeing and inclusion, raising quality of life, reducing inequality, and widening opportunity

A key priority for the Inclusive Cities programme in Sheffield is in linking its work on inclusion into these broader programmes and initiatives.

3. Connecting communities

The Council has also been holding workshops with residents and Community Support Officers in areas of the city with high inter-community tensions. Insights gained through the workshops will be used to devise an action plan to promote greater integration in these tension-prone areas.

Particular efforts have been made by the Council to engage with the Roma community. Pictorial and audio messaging has been developed to increase community members' engagement with their neighbourhoods, community connectors are being identified, and a festival of dance is planned to celebrate and increase citywide visibility of Roma folk culture.

The approach is focussed on daily interactions between communities, which can often exacerbate communal tensions if not proactively managed. During the pandemic, officers have worked with environmental services and utilities providers to improve services such as waste management, which were exacerbating community tensions. Community clean-ups and volunteering are also being organised to encourage the formation of connections between communities through volunteering.

The Council is developing pictorial communications materials as well as materials in simple English to encourage better uptake of services by migrant communities. It also aims to develop communications which use positive messaging across communities to head off potential conflict between residents.

Building on the [volunteering strategy](#) published in 2018 by Voluntary Action Sheffield in partnership with the Council, Sheffield is working to maintain the momentum and energy of the city's voluntary groups, many of which were established during the COVID-19 crisis. Similarly, the Council is currently undertaking resilience mapping with voluntary organisations across the city in order to understand how community organisations can be supported to ensure that they are effective and sustainable.

4. Mainstreaming and building inclusive public services

Sheffield is currently developing its strategy for inclusive recovery through a number of 'pods' which will encourage cross-council planning through outcomes-based budgeting processes.

One of these, the Community Pod, has developed the following vision and aims:

- Thriving communities and citizens who are engaged with 'what matters to them' and enabled to find local solutions
- A wealth of community resources that people can draw upon to be independent, safe and well
- Strong, supportive, constructive, and collaborative relationships between the Council, partners and the city's diverse communities
- Reduced inequalities in opportunities, access and resources, with links to existing initiatives for preventing and tackling poverty, including early interventions
- Greater civic engagements from residents, especially around local decision making
- Cohesive and safer neighbourhoods
- Responsive, flexible & inclusive community services

5. Encouraging civic participation and representation

Between October 2019 and February 2020, the Council organised [The Big City Conversation](#) to map residents' concerns and use them to guide the Council's work plan. The initiative included an online survey, in-person events in a wide variety of locations across the city such as marketplaces, the town hall and grocery shops, and the placement of feedback boxes around the city to collect people's concerns and suggestions. The consultation received over 3,800 responses, with the Council reporting, "Sheffielders from almost every part of the city have told us that they love their parks and open spaces but want to see improvements to the levels of congestion, crime and public transport. People also said that they want to get more involved in local issues – particularly online and through local meetings and we have work to do to help Sheffielders feel more informed about local public services."

The encouragement of local democracy and engagement is a particular focus for the Council. Although the consultation work was paused during the COVID-19 lockdown, the Council is adapting the consultations to smaller, local and COVID-19 compliant events in order to continue the conversation.

Sheffield has established a race equality commission which aims to provide an independent strategic assessment of the nature, extent, causes and impacts of racism and race inequality within the city. The commission is independently chaired by Professor Emeritus Kevin Hylton from Leeds Beckett University and a number of commissioners have also been appointed. The commission will carry out short inquiries, taking evidence and making recommendations on:

- Business and Employment
- Civic life and Communities
- Crime and Justice
- Education
- Health
- Sport and Culture

Interim recommendations will be made on a rolling basis and a final report will be published in autumn 2021, so that the city can take rapid action on the critical issues identified by the commission. The recommendations will include the short- and long-term measures required to disrupt systemic issues concerning race, racism and racialised inequalities. The priority will be to identify actions that can be taken by the city itself and those that will require partnering with external organisations.

Case Study:

Taking an integration focussed approach to asylum dispersal

During the pandemic, Sheffield, like many other areas, has seen an increase in the placement of asylum seekers in hotels. This has included 105 asylum seekers being housed in one hotel in the city at very short notice to the local authority (3 days) and over 300 requests for dispersal placements in a 6-week period. The city worked closely with the Home Office to take steps to overcome the logistical challenges of putting effective support in place, including:

- Health checks (including COVID-19 testing)
- Provision of clothing, toiletries, phones
- Access to laptops
- English language classes
- Setting up a service-user forum to discuss any concerns and plan activities
- Scheduled activities including football, basketball and provision of board games
- Biweekly visits by a Public Community Support Officer to discuss any safety or other concerns and to ensure residents felt safe
- Providing a weekly update on activities

“Sheffield worked closely with the Home Office to take steps to overcome the logistical challenges of putting effective support in place.”



This case study has important implications for the promotion of inclusion at the local level. If not managed well, the dispersal of asylum-seekers to small geographical areas that lack the ability to focus on integration and inclusion can be a major challenge for local authorities.

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

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