

NRPF The Bristol Model

Bristol City Council Briefing Paper and Policy Recommendations

Executive Summary

This policy briefing is developed out of the work of Bristol Refugee Rights (BRR) and the Refugee, Asylum and Migration Policy (RAMP) Project. We have been working in partnership over the last year to look at how Bristol can better support individuals subject to No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) living in our city with a focus on listening and learning from those with lived experience and from best practise in the city and in other local authority areas. From this work a Bristol Model was developed, a vision for the support that the city wants to see for residents subject to NRPF based around four key principles: design-out destitution, a safe place to stay, informed and supported and included and involved. This model has been agreed by senior leaders in Bristol City Council including the Mayor and a range of non-statutory organisations in the city. The next step is to make the Bristol Model a reality in practise for those in Bristol. This briefing brings together the lived experience stories, best practise examples, our vision and key policy recommendations for Bristol City Council. Our policy recommendations are outlined below.



Illustrations by Laurel Molly

Supporting the Bristol Model through policy and practice

Our vision: Bristol City Council is fully committed to its vision of being an inclusive city through both policy and practice. The impact of Council policies and practice, strategy and service provision on those subject to NRPF is considered at every stage of planning and impact assessed. Council teams work in a joined up way to make sure Bristol is a great city for everyone, with clear records of individuals subject to NRPF who approach the council for support, and with expert capacity embedded and invested in at a strategic level within the council to advise and support this work.

Quick wins: Create a publicly accessible page on Bristol City Council's website outlining its commitment to individuals subject to NRPF with clear information on where they can go for help (both statutory and voluntary) and who is eligible.

In the mid-term: Rebrand the Asylum team as the NRPF team in reflection of the fact that many of the people they support do not have experience of the asylum system. As part of this re-brand we recommend ensuring that the NRPF team have the capacity and remit to focus on partnership working both internally and externally. Internally this should involve ensuring that other council departments are aware of their work and who can access their support with clear referral pathways for this to happen. Externally this should involve working more closely with the voluntary sector to look at how we can fill gaps in support in the city as well as having capacity to work at a strategic level, locally and nationally.

Design-out Destitution

Our Vision: A city where no one, irrespective of their immigration status, has to live without access to the basic necessities including shelter, food, toiletries, phone data and the ability to travel round the city to access appointments.

Quick wins: Continue to work with the voluntary sector to look at accessing funding that can allow destitution payments to continue in the city.

In the mid-term: Commission / carry out an analysis of how much is actually needed in a destitution payment to ensure access to basic necessities and work with the voluntary sector to make sure that destitution payments in the city can reach this threshold.

A Safe Place to Stay

Our Vision: Bristol City Council commissions specialist housing provision linked with advice provision to house individuals subject to NRPF while advice and support enables people to move forward with their status (as was seen in Everyone In).

Quick wins: Understand and evidence impact of current Julian Trust beds for individuals to provide evidence for future funding/ project development.

In the mid-term: Commit to work with Julian Trust or other providers to ensure that some beds continue to be available in Bristol for individuals subject to NRPF after the current short term beds at Julian Trust end.

Informed and Supported

Our Vision: A specialist advice service, which is sustainably funded, for NRPF individuals in Bristol with open access provides proactive outreach and is well publicized in the city

Quick wins: Bristol City Council's Asylum Team to commission specialist immigration advice to provide specific legal advice for Section 17 individuals. This will ensure that Section 17 families receive the best immigration advice they can and will save Bristol City Council money in the long run as families move-on from Section 17 support quicker.

In the mid-term: Commission specialist immigration legal advice service to triage NRPF individuals as soon as they become known to Bristol City Council with a view to starting their journey to resolving their immigration status as soon as possible to reduce the financial outlay of Bristol City Council as much as possible.

Included and Involved

Our Vision: Individuals with lived experience of being subject to NRPF are recognised as 'experts by experience' by Bristol City Council, are listened to and have a voice in all decisions that affect them.

Quick wins: Bristol City Council continues to commit to engaging with the Bristol model and to ensuring the voices of those with lived experience are able to reach, and are listened to, by decision makers.

In the mid-term: Bristol City Council's asylum functions including the Asylum Team to review processes they have for getting feedback and hearing the voices of those supported by them and how this is used to improve practice.



Background

No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) is a condition that applies to some migrants in the UK until they have obtained a permanent settled status called Indefinite Leave to Remain or have naturalised as citizens. Most visas require a migrant to live in the UK for either five or ten years before they can apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain, so people are often subject to these conditions for very long periods. As such it affects different people and their families, such as individuals here on working visas, student visas or spousal visas, EEA Nationals, refused asylum seekers, as well as undocumented individuals in the UK. Some of these people will be new arrivals in Bristol, others may have lived here for decades. Some are on a route to settlement whilst others stay in the UK is more precarious. Migrants with NRPF are barred from accessing Universal Credit, Housing Benefit, Child Benefit, Working Tax Credit, Disability Allowance or Income-Based Job Seekers' Allowance, among others. In essence, it means that for that individual or family there is no safety net as they are not able to access mainstream benefits or housing support if they are homeless or destitute.

It is hard to get exact numbers in terms of individuals living in Bristol with NRPF. The government does not publish figures on the number of people who are subject to NRPF, but in 2019 the Citizens Advice Bureau estimated nearly 1.4 million people were living subject to NRPF in the UK. This number is only likely to grow as legislation around Brexit, potential reforms to the asylum system and the new Hong Kong visa route all increase the categories of individuals subject to NRPF.

There are circumstances where a duty to support does apply to those subject to NRPF, specifically two pieces of legislation place a duty on local authorities to support individuals irrespective of NRPF. Section 17 of the Children's Act 1989 outlines the duty to safeguard the wellbeing of children; and the 2014 Care Act includes a duty to support those with recognised care needs. This means that the cost of supporting these individuals falls upon local authorities who are unable to access any funds from central government.

Also, in recent times, there was the Covid-19 Everyone In policy - a public health response that housed all homeless people irrespective of them being subject to NRPF conditions. In Bristol this meant that just over 100 individuals, mostly EEA nationals and people who have been through the asylum system, were housed by Bristol City Council in hotels in the city during the pandemic. In keeping with Bristol's One City Approach, and despite limited resources, partnership working groups were established to ensure that those housed under Everyone In had access to a holistic package of support. The outcomes of this approach have been enormously successful, as documented in this report. The lesson of the pandemic has been that when Bristol comes together as One City to provide a holistic package of support to those with NRPF, remarkable positive change becomes possible for those individuals, often also saving money and freeing up capacity to support others for voluntary and statutory services in the long term.

Bristol Refugee Rights (BRR) in partnership with the Refugee and Migration Policy Project (RAMP) received funding from the Lloyds Foundation to look at what could be done in Bristol and at a national level to ensure that a local safety network for individuals subject to NRPF did not end with Everyone In. BRR has over 15 years experience of working with asylum seekers and refugees. We are a service led organisation and have over 10 years experience of supporting our service users to tell their stories and use them to campaign for change. We are OISC accredited and provide destitution support; we are also a founding member of the Asylum Early Action partnership. Through this funding BRR have been reaching out to communities in Bristol of people who have lived experience of being subject to NRPF. We have conducted 12 semi-structured interviews to understand the experiences of individuals subject to NRPF and to hear their recommendations for what changes would have made the biggest impact for them.

The RAMP Project has been working since 2017 to support political leaders to build consensus and make positive change on migration policy. Since 2018 the RAMP Project has seconded two advisers to work for the Mayor of Bristol, based within the Mayors Office and the City Office. In these roles they have supported the Council to take a more strategic and joined up approach to migrant inclusion, connected the Local Authority with the voluntary sector and others on migration issues, and supported the Mayor to speak out nationally and internationally. On this project RAMP secondees have been working strategically within the local authority and with regional and national partners to identify best practice in regards to NRPF support. As part of this they have carried out semi-structured interviews with five other local authorities to see what Bristol can learn from them.

Aim of this briefing

This briefing note aims to set out recommendations to Bristol City Council based on the experiences of people who have lived with NRPF. When setting out these recommendations we fully recognize budgetary constraints faced by Bristol City Council. The primary aim of this report is to set out an ambitious vision for Bristol with short and long term recommendations of steps that could be taken to make this vision a reality. Please note that many of the lived experience stories in this document use pseudonyms to protect interviewees' identities as they wished to remain anonymous.



The Bristol Model

The Bristol Model is based on lived experiences, conversations with professionals and our expertise and sets out what we believe all individuals subject to NRPF in our city should be entitled to. Overall the Bristol Model aims to provide people with a safety net they need to survive and thrive despite their NRPF status and ensure that no-one in Bristol experiences destitution or homelessness. The Bristol Model is based around 4 key principles:

- **Design-out Destitution.** People must have access to basic goods needed to survive and thrive. This includes food, medicine, sanitary and washing facilities, the means to connect with people digitally and access to public transport.
- **A Safe Place to Stay.** People must have access to accommodation which is safe and secure and which provides them with privacy and dignity.
- **Informed and Supported.** People must have access to appropriate and specialist legal advice. People must also have access to holistic social and welfare support where needed, and support into employment where they are legally allowed to work.
- **Included and Involved.** People must have the opportunity to tell their story where they choose to, and to be actively involved in the design of relevant support services and advocacy activity.

A number of voluntary and statutory organisations in Bristol including officers from Bristol Council and Bristol's mayor have signed up to this model, pledging their support for this vision of a Bristol that includes all. It is also in line with Bristol's pledge as a City of Sanctuary to end destitution. There is already a lot of good practise in the city which is working towards the principles in this model and the aim of this model is to bring together good practice and close the gaps. **There is much more to be done if we want to make this model a reality for all Bristolians who are subject to NRPF.**

Structure of this briefing

This briefing is set out in five sections, four of which follow the principles of the Bristol model and the fifth of which: NRPF - Supporting the Bristol Model through policy and practice, outlines key service wide policy and practise recommendations for Bristol City Council which we suggest underpin the local authorities ability to fully realise each priority area of the Bristol Model. Each section of the briefing note outlines relevant lived experience stories, best practice examples both local and national and policy recommendations.

NRPF - Supporting the Bristol Model Through Policy and Practice

Lived Experience – Maria's story

Maria had been living in Bristol for about five years studying for a diploma in management with her husband who was here on a working visa when things started to go wrong. Both her and her husband's visas were subject to No Recourse to Public Funds but this had never been an issue for them as they could live comfortably on her husband's earnings. The family welcomed a new baby, but when Maria tried to return to her studies she found her college had closed down. At the same time her husband's work made a mistake on the paperwork when applying for his visa extension and he was refused. This meant the family now had no income. Meanwhile Maria really struggled with her mental health and was diagnosed with postnatal depression following the birth of their child which put a huge strain on the relationship. With no income and her marriage breaking down Maria ended up destitute and homeless. She approached Bristol City Council for help. After spending a full day in the council's Homelessness and Housing Office she was told that the council could not help her as she was subject to NRPF. The council suggested she go to the Police. Alone and with her young child in tow Maria walked through the rain to Trinity Road Police station – the Police housed her temporarily for the night and contacted the Asylum Team at Bristol City Council for help as they knew that as Maria had a young child she would be entitled to support under section 17 of the Children's Act. Maria cannot understand why the council would turn her away and make her take the terrifying and lonely journey to the Police station when it was another council department who eventually supported her.

"Information and advice is the main thing – because a lot of people don't know where to go. For example I didn't know that a place like the asylum team exists or BRR. It's knowing that there are people who might help."

Local Authority Best Practise - Manchester

Manchester has an NRPF service within its Adult Social Care department. It previously had an Asylum Seekers Team but changed the name to the NRPF Team due to the growing number of people with NRPF who weren't seeking asylum. The Team has 5 members and uses a Case Management model. The NRPF team provides regular training and guidance to other teams and departments within the Local Authority, and has strong working relationships and established referral pathways to other parts of the Council. They also have partnership arrangements with other key agencies in the city (e.g. hospitals re discharge of people with NRPF). The Council has found that having a specialist NRPF team has saved significant amounts of money, cutting the cost of provision to people with NRPF from approximately £3m p/a to approx. £1.5m in five years. This is due to the ability of the team to find solutions for people with NRPF that can remove the need for LA-funded temporary accommodation and other forms of support. The Head of the NRPF Service has a strategic role regionally and nationally, representing the LA to Greater Manchester and regionally and actively participating in an Operational Working Group with the Home Office.

Lived Experience – Adam’s Story

Adam, a Polish national, had been living and working in the UK for 8 years when his relationship broke down and he decided to get a fresh start and move to a new part of the UK – picking Bristol. Adam presumed he would find work and accommodation in Bristol just as he had elsewhere in the UK. However when he arrived in Bristol Adam was sleeping rough. One morning Adam was awoken by the Police who took Adam to a homeless shelter. At the shelter he met with a young woman who talked him through his options, she told him that she could not help him with housing or money as he was subject to NRPF. Following this Adam spent one year without a home in Bristol, supported by local charities – during this time he lost all his documents. But in 2019 St Mungos were able to support him to apply for benefits and housing – he is now living in a small flat and completing a course in fork-lift truck driving to help him get back to work. Adam is not clear on all the details of his own case – but it seems highly likely that the advice he was given at the homelessness shelter was wrong and that he was eligible for support and was never subject to NRPF conditions. If he had received the correct initial advice Adam could have avoided a year of homelessness.

Local Authority Best Practise - Bristol

Bristol City Council Asylum Team provide an operational City Wide (Children and Adults) support service to asylum seekers and people in Bristol who have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). Referrals are accepted from any source i.e. Voluntary sectors, police, immigration, Education, other Local Authorities etc.

The Team is comprised of seven staff members ie Social Work practitioners, Team Managers, one Finance Officer and one Housing officer. Contact details and referrals: asylum.team@bristol.gov.uk

The Asylum Team are members of the National **No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)**. The work of the team is guided by national policy & set within a legal context, e.g. providing support for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and families, under the Children Act 1989, National Assistance Act 1948, Care Act 2014 ; Human Rights sec 3 & 8. The asylum team also undertake Age Assessment underpinned by Merton (2003) caselaw.

The team is the only specialist team of its kind in the Southwest of England & one of only a few designated teams in the UK. The team provide support & guidance to other neighbouring Local Authorities and sometimes to countries abroad.

Immigration Matter: In all cases, BCC asylum Team liaise directly with the Home Office.

Legal Representation: In all cases, the team will ascertain that service users have reputable independent legal support with their applications to Home Office for leave to remain.

Asylum Team staff work in partnership with other agencies to ensure that relevant immigration issues are understood in the context of welfare entitlements. The team provide a 'Triple agency' response combining social work, with housing procurement, direct financial support, and assistance in the event of Assisted Voluntary Return.

Financial and housing support is provided on the basis that no other source of support is available and that the service user is destitute. Although subsistence payments are set at the national, (NASS) base rate. However, the team 'add-in – top up' with discretionary payments determined by family circumstances eg disability, school educational needs, transport/bus passes, school meals, also legal fees in some extreme cases etc.

Recommendations Bristol City Council

Our vision: Bristol City Council is fully committed to its vision of being an inclusive city through both policy and practice. The impact of Council policies and practice, strategy and service provision on those subject to NRPF is considered at every stage of planning and impact assessed. Council teams work in a joined-up way to make sure Bristol is a great city for everyone, with clear records of individuals subject to NRPF who approach the council for support, and with expert capacity embedded and invested in at a strategic level within the council to advise and support this work.

Quick wins: Create a publicly accessible page on Bristol City Council's website outlining its commitment to individuals subject to NRPF with clear information on where they can go for help (both statutory and voluntary) and who is eligible.

In the mid-term: We have come across many examples of great work by the Asylum Team, which is hugely appreciated by those with NRPF. But we have also heard from many places that the team is under-resourced and that its work is often disconnected from other efforts and conversations about NRPF. We, therefore, propose that BCC rebrands the Asylum Team as the NRPF and Asylum Team in reflection of the fact that many of the people they support do not have experience of the asylum system. As part of this re-brand, we recommend ensuring that the NRPF team has the capacity and remit to focus on both internally and externally partnerships. Internally this should involve ensuring that other council departments are aware of their work and who can access their support with clear referral pathways for this to happen. Externally this should involve working more closely with the voluntary sector to look at how we can fill gaps in support in the city as well as having capacity to work at a strategic level, locally and nationally.

We also recommend that BDD

- increase human resources by recruiting:

- A full-time Social Worker

- A unit coordinator to provide admin support as a lot of social work time is taken up with admin tasks;

- A family support worker;

- Additional accommodation options that are suited to the Team's needs (flexible, available on an emergency basis, provision of support staff on-site).

- Upgrade the current IT systems which is no longer fit for purpose. For example, recording on LCS, the children's database, would cohere with the fact that the Asylum Team provide support to families as Section 17 Children in Need. This would enable colleagues across childcare services to view the Team's involvement, which at present they cannot do. But if the Team were to remain the adult system LAS then some basic adaptations will be necessary to ensure the team's involvement is recorded more accurately.

NRPF – Design out Destitution

Lived Experience – Marta's Story

Marta came to the UK to seek sanctuary from persecution in her country of origin. Like many asylum seekers her experience of seeking sanctuary in the UK has been difficult and her initial claim was refused by the Home Office. While she is working with a solicitor to gather the evidence required to submit a fresh claim Marta has been reliant on a friend in Bristol for somewhere to stay. With no access to any income and without the right to work Marta has been surviving on the destitution payments handed out by local charities and by visiting and volunteering at charity foodbanks where she can access a hot meal, weekly essentials and toiletries. While Marta is extremely grateful for all the help she receives she wants people to understand that it is not actually possible to live off of £10 per week (the standard destitution payment amount). She would love to see a future in Bristol where people can access payments that would allow them to be independent and not have to rely on the charity of others.

Best Practice: What is already happening in Bristol?

A number of charities across Bristol have established funds which they give out in weekly destitution payments to those with no access to any other money due to NRPF conditions. While a vital lifeline these payments are low, often around £10 per week. Through the partnership working established during Everyone In and continued by this project Bristol City Council were able to access £50,000 of funding from National Government in the summer of 2021. They have partnered with the existing voluntary sector infrastructure to increase the supply of destitution payments to those in Bristol who are living with nothing due to being subject to NRPF. Through the Bristol Refugee and Asylum Seeker Partnership (BRASP) - voluntary sector organisations are working collaboratively to ensure this money is distributed fairly and reaches the most in need.

In addition to these destitution payments Bristol is home to an extensive network of voluntary sector organisations designed to meet the basic needs of those left destitute in the city including those subject to NRPF from food banks, to free hot meals to free shops. Bristol City of Sanctuary also coordinates a fund used to pay for bus travel for individuals who have been through the asylum system to support them to access vital appointments distributed by BRASP partners.



Recommendations Bristol Council

Our Vision: A city where noone, irrespective of their immigration status, has to live without access to the basic necessities including shelter, food, toiletries, phone data and the ability to travel round the city to access appointments.

Quick wins: Continue to work with the voluntary sector to look at accessing funding that can allow destitution payments to continue in the city.

In the mid-term: Commission / carry out an analysis of how much is actually needed in a destitution payment to ensure access to basic necessities and work with the voluntary sector to make sure that destitution payments in the city can reach this threshold.



NRPF – A Safe Place to Stay

Lived Experience – Dana's Story

Dana arrived in Bristol as a refused asylum seeker as he had some community connections in the city. Dana was homeless, sleeping in a tent in Eastville Park. He survived through handouts from the Kurdish community and local Kurdish owned restaurants. His health was poor and he struggled to access the support he needed. Dana tried to make contact with the Home Office to regularize his immigration status but without help, and with the difficulties of sleeping rough, Dana was unable to do so successfully.

At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic Dana was housed by Bristol City Council in a hotel as part of Everyone In. Through partnership working between Bristol City Council and local voluntary sector partners Dana started receiving weekly destitution payments and was supported to find a solicitor to work with him to submit a fresh asylum claim. With a fresh claim submitted Dana would be eligible for asylum support accommodation and payments. In the hotel Dana saw a 100% improvement in his health and he was able to access the help he needed for the first time. The evidence required to submit a fresh claim took a long time to gather so as 2021 approached and Everyone In was wrapping up Dana was worried that he might be made street homeless again. Thankfully Bristol Hospitality Network were able to offer Dana a temporary space to stay in the city until he was able to submit his fresh claim and move on to asylum support accommodation. Thanks to the respite provided by Everyone In and the partnership work around his case Dana now has the support he needs to move forward with his immigration case.

Lived Experience – Vasile's Story

Vasile had lived in the UK for around 6 years when the Covid-19 pandemic began – in this time he had worked in various jobs cash in hand but had never received a national insurance number. He also had never had fixed accommodation. At the start of the pandemic he was sleeping rough with his wife in Bristol. His wife was ill and had been diagnosed with lung cancer and was receiving treatment in hospital. Vasile was housed in a hotel by the Everyone In scheme for the first time Vasile was able to adequately meet his basic needs with somewhere to wash, clean his clothes and cook small meals. Sadly his wife's health continued to deteriorate and she died in January 2021. Through casework with voluntary sector partners Vasile was supported to make an application to the European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS) to regularize his status in the UK. As Vasile had been in the UK for more than 5 years he should be eligible for settled status which would allow him access to benefits and housing support. But Vasile had very little documentary evidence of his time in the UK and is concerned that his application may not be successful or that he will be given pre-settled status (for those who have been in the UK less than 5 years) which comes with the NRPF condition. Just months after his wife's death while still waiting to hear a response from the Home Office with regards to his EUSS application Vasile, the Everyone In scheme ended and Vasile was sadly street homeless again.

Local Authority Best Practice: Newcastle

Prior to Covid, Newcastle had a post which was Migration, Refugee & Asylum Lead. In response to the Everyone In scheme they established an NRPF Panel led by Adult Social Care and made up of The Director of Adult Social Care, social workers, a senior Council solicitor and pro bono solicitors and representatives from civil society (particularly Action Foundation). This Panel was very successful at helping the 46 people in Newcastle with NRPF who were accommodated under Everyone In to move on successfully. The Council was able to raise funding to support people with NRPF through a Street Zero campaign focused on ending rough sleeping. This was particularly successful at attracting donations from businesses, some of which were then used to create holistic support for people with NRPF.

Good Practice: What is already happening in Bristol?

As bed spaces under the Everyone In scheme came to an end in the spring of 2021, Bristol City Council and its voluntary sector partners who had been working hard to support the individuals under Everyone In were determined that individuals would not have to return to the streets. Julian Trust were able to use some of their funding to commit to providing nine bed spaces for NRPF individuals in the city over the coming months – and these spaces can be extended for a year. The wrap-around case work meetings established in Everyone In continue to bring voluntary and statutory sector partners together to ensure those housed by Julian Trust can access the best advice and support about how to move on out of destitution, thereby also freeing up bed spaces for others.

Bristol Hospitality Network (BHN) - is a well established local charity providing hosted accommodation with wrap around case work to support undocumented individuals who have been through the asylum system to have a safe place to stay while they work with a solicitor to regularise their status. During Everyone In - Bristol City Council worked closely with BHN to help them advertise to find more local hosts to try and prevent any individuals with experience of the asylum system from returning to street homelessness.

Recommendations Bristol City Council

Our Vision: Bristol City Council commissions specialist housing provision linked with advice provision to house individuals subject to NRPF while advice and support enables people to move forward with their status (as was seen in Everyone In).

Quick wins: Understand and evidence impact of current Julian Trust beds for individuals to provide evidence for future funding/ project development.

In the mid- term: Commit to work with Julian Trust or other providers to ensure that some beds continue to be available in Bristol for individuals subject to NRPF after the current short term beds at Julian Trust end.

NRPF – Informed and Supported

Lived Experience – Zena's Story

Zena had been living and working in Bristol for many years on a working visa which was subject to NRPF when she had her first daughter. When her daughter was about 1 years old Zena's relationship broke down, with a young daughter she was no longer able to work and she found herself destitute. The Police referred Zena to the asylum team at Bristol City Council who housed her and her young daughter in a hostel – Zena and her daughter would spend the next 3 years sharing one room in this temporary accommodation. Zena's daughter was British and so she inherited her father's citizenship. This allowed Zena to register as a Zambrano carer and start a 10 year route to British Citizenship – her visas on this route however continued to be subject to NRPF. Over the next decade Zena would have 2 more children, one of which has severe autism – Zena worked when she could but with her childcare responsibilities this was often impossible. Zena was navigating a complex immigration system largely unguided without adequate legal advice she made applications to the Home Office alone, and often faced long waits and rejections. Zena was often unaware of what legal options were available to her to challenge her NRPF conditions and to support her applications to remain in the UK with her family. Zena sought support from many places, The Citizens Advice Bureau, local food banks, her children's school but none of them had the specific immigration knowledge to advise individuals who are subject to NRPF. Meanwhile Zena struggled to get the support she required for her disabled son and was repeatedly told that as she did not receive disability allowance her son was not eligible for help. For Zena the thing that would have made the biggest difference for her and her family would have been somewhere to go to get advice and support that specifically understands

"No-one tells you that you can change NRPF. Social services can't give legal advice. I was always trying to figure stuff out by myself. Even today I got a letter from the Home Office about an application I need to fill in, I called social services to ask if they can help but they can't."



Lived Experience – Mounish and Mo's stories

Mounish and Mo both arrived in Bristol from different countries on different visas. What united their experiences was that they were both fleeing persecution in their country of origin: Mo because he was LGBT and Mounish because of his political activities. Neither Mo nor Mounish accessed legal advice on their arrival in the UK and neither was aware of the asylum system. They were both terrified to approach any authorities in case they were sent home. When each of their visas expired they did not return to their country of origin but remained in Bristol living undocumented. They were both able to access some support from their communities here in Bristol: food from local restaurants, a sofa to sleep on, but for Mo in particular he also spent many years sleeping rough in Bristol's parks. For both of them this time has had a huge impact on their physical and mental health. It was only when they were both separately arrested by immigration enforcement teams that they finally accessed legal advice and put in asylum claims. Both then experienced how hard the asylum system can be, with both of their initial asylum claims being refused. With the support of Bristol Refugee Rights' Pride Without Borders group Mo has now received his refugee status and is looking to a future in which he can settle work and feel safe in the UK. Mounish on the other hand remains undocumented, he is working with a solicitor to put in a fresh asylum claim but in the meantime his future remains uncertain. One of the reasons cited by the Home Office for rejecting his initial claim was that he was in the UK for so many years before making his application. For both Mo and Mounish if they had accessed advice sooner their stories might have been very different.

Good Practice: What is already happening in Bristol?

During Everyone In - Bristol City Council and relevant statutory partners worked together to establish wrap-around casework meetings to support the long term sustainable move on options of those housed through Everyone In. These meetings utilised the resources of established voluntary sector agencies including Bristol Refugee Rights, Bristol Hospitality Network, The Red Cross, St Mungos and local advice centres to try and ensure that those housed in Everyone In were given advice and support on how to change their circumstances either through regularising their immigration status in order to be able to access housing and financial support or, for those with permission, through looking for work.

Local Authority Best Practice – Coventry

Coventry is unusual as a UK Local Authority in that it has a specialist Migration Team of approximately 20 people. This team sits within Public Health and includes a number of secondments from other LA teams (e.g. employment). The Team was founded on the Council's Refugee Resettlement Programme, and has since expanded through a number of programmes, all of which are externally funded (mostly from EU or UK national government funds).

Having this specialist team allows Coventry Council to be proactive in engaging with civil society locally, and in experimenting with innovative service delivery. As part of the Council's funding of advice services locally, the Law Centre has a £400k p/a contract with bespoke expectations in regards to immigration advice, including for those with NRPF.

Recommendations Bristol Council

Our Vision: A specialist advice service, which is sustainably funded, for NRPF individuals in Bristol with open access provides proactive outreach and is well publicized in the city.

Quick wins: Bristol City Council's Asylum Team to commission specialist immigration advice to provide specific legal advice for section 17 individuals. This will ensure that section 17 families receive the best immigration advice they can and will save Bristol City Council money in the long run as families move-on from section 17 support quicker.

In the mid-term: Commission specialist immigration legal advice service to triage NRPF individuals as soon as they become known to Bristol City Council with a view to starting their journey to resolving their immigration status as soon as possible to reduce the financial outlay of Bristol City Council as much as possible.



NRPF – Included and Involved

Lived Experience – Victoria's Story

Victoria came to the UK to work and reapplied each year to have her working visa extended – after years of living in the UK in 2010 her application was mysteriously declined by the Home Office. Undocumented she was now completely reliant on friends in Bristol for support. In 2015 Victoria had a son – for many years she and her son slept on sofas in Bristol until she finally found out about the Asylum Team and started to access section 17 support. She is now working with a solicitor to regularize her status in the UK. Victoria's health is poor and she suffers with anxiety. She struggles to access the medical care she needs as she doesn't want to be honest with professionals about her situation. She finds life with her son hard as she is afraid to take him to groups in case they ask her about her immigration status. She also feels frustrated when she sees all the headlines about worker shortages as she is here and desperate to work. When asked what would make the biggest difference for her and others in similar situations she says being listened to by people in power who could make the long term decisions that would allow people like her and her son to live full and independent lives here in the UK.

“Children are innocent in this. They don't belong in any other place. The only place they know is here. My son does not even speak my language.”

“There are people here with skills. People who want to work but don't have the right. People who could fill those positions in care jobs, in nursing if they were given the training and the opportunity to do so”.

Lived Experience - Azwer's Story

Azwer came to the UK to seek sanctuary in 2009 but it took him more than 10 years to get his case accepted by the Home Office who granted him refugee status in 2019. During that time he had to put in several fresh claims and spent time in and out of destitution as an undocumented refused asylum seeker subject to NRPF. Azwer found both the legal and community support he needed to survive this difficult time here in Bristol. When he looks back over his 10 year journey to safety and security in the UK some of the key moments that made the experience more bearable and left him wanting to call Bristol a home are the times in which he saw solidarity from or was listened to by those in power in the city. Azwer remembers attending a protest walk with a local politician and feels that that feeling of them being 'beside us' is something he wants to make sure Bristol continues.

Recommendations Bristol Council

Our Vision: Individuals with lived experience of being subject to NRPF are recognised as 'experts by experience' by Bristol City Council, are listened to and have a voice in all decisions that affect them.

Quick wins: Bristol City Council continues to commit to engaging with the Bristol model and to ensuring the voices of those with lived experience are able to reach, and are listened to, by decision makers.

In the mid-term: Bristol City Council's asylum functions including the Asylum Team to review processes they have for getting feedback and hearing the voices of those supported by them and how this is used to improve practice.

