

# Step Change Consortium: Learning Report

Oct 21 – March 22

**Collaborative organisations, strengthened voice,  
accessible, excellent & joined up support.**

**STEP  
CHANGE**

# Overview

As part of the guidance produced with the Step Change MEL toolkit, it recommends developing a 'learning report' separate to the Lottery report to summarise findings and address some of the key learning questions the Consortium is particularly keen to follow.

**This learning report primarily summarises the key data from the MEL tools, submitted by partners in March 2022.**

For years 2-4 of the consortium, we plan to recruit a long term 'learning partner' to:

- Enable more in depth data analysis (at consortium and individual partner level)
- Develop key consortium learning questions
- Help produce learning outputs (e.g. blogs) to enable the consortium to share work externally



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# Impact at a glance...

## Our vision

Refugees and people seeking asylum in the Greater Manchester area can access high quality support, inform decision making on issues that affect them, and are equipped with the knowledge and skills that will enable them to embrace their new lives in the UK.

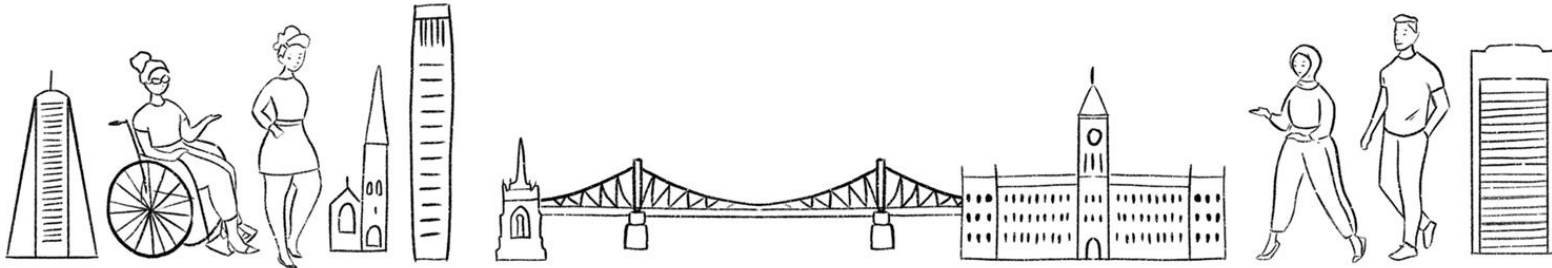
## Our purpose

To develop a joined-up and collaborative ecosystem of support for refugees and people seeking asylum across Greater Manchester.

# 2916

Asylum seekers and Refugees have been supported by the Consortium in year 1

**"I feel like everything is changing for the better. Before I felt like no one was there for me but now I feel like i am setting myself free form a lot of my anxieties and depression after the help provided."**

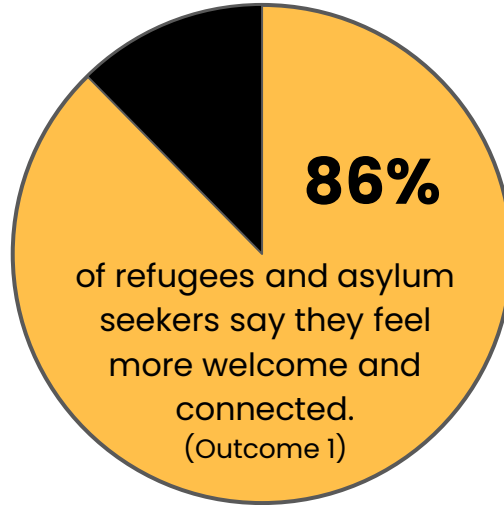


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# Impact at a glance...

**1760**

refugees and asylum seekers have secured housing, entitlements and accessed support.  
(Outcome 1)

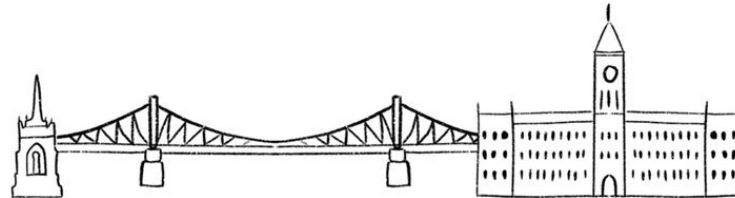


**82%** reported their wellbeing had increased through the Consortium support

**75%** said that their confidence has increased to take on new challenges independently

**64%** have increased their skills and employability

(Outcome 2)



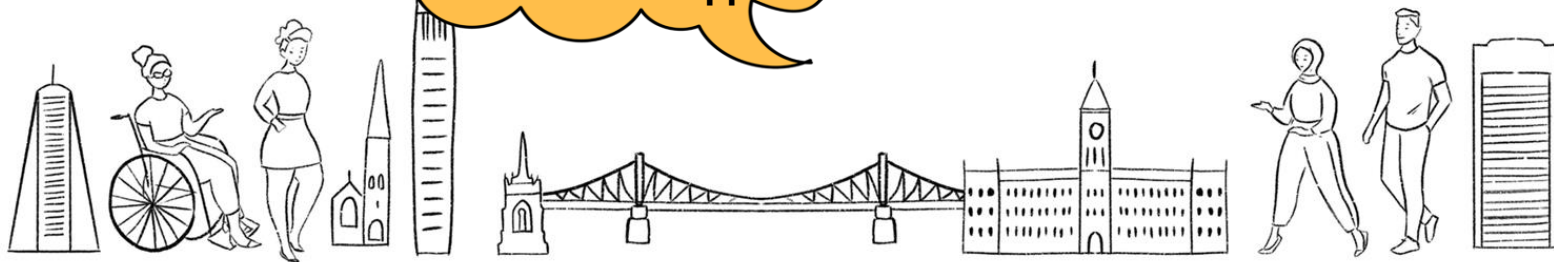
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# Impact at a glance...

**"It helped us to coordinate our work in a more organised way, avoided duplication and share our resources"**

Consortium partner, on Afghan response work

**"My confidence has increased. I am meeting more people. I feel settled and I am a lot happier."**



**100%** of respondents reported an increased sense of connection and collaboration (Outcome 3)

**12** EbE members, 8 of whom have participated in locally led influencing efforts

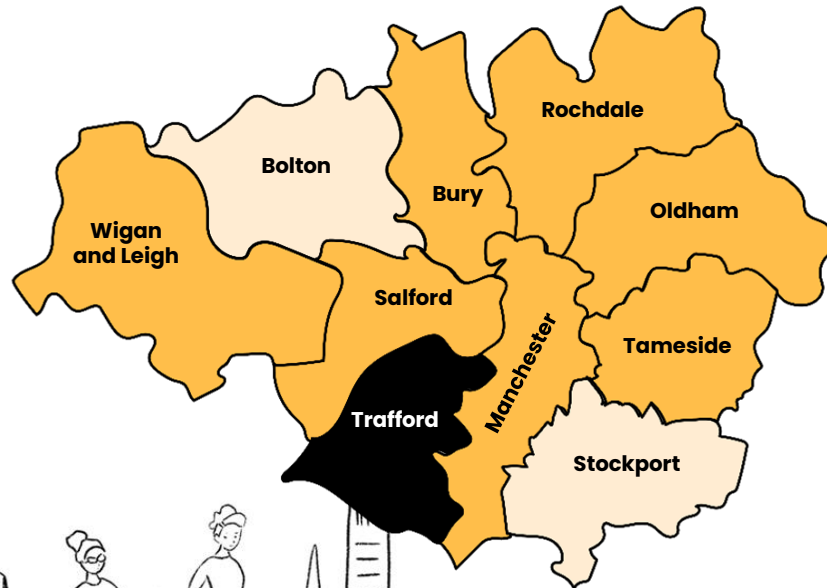
**11** significant campaigns 'moments' with numerous other smaller opportunities engaging a total of **61 organisations across GM.**

(Outcome 4)

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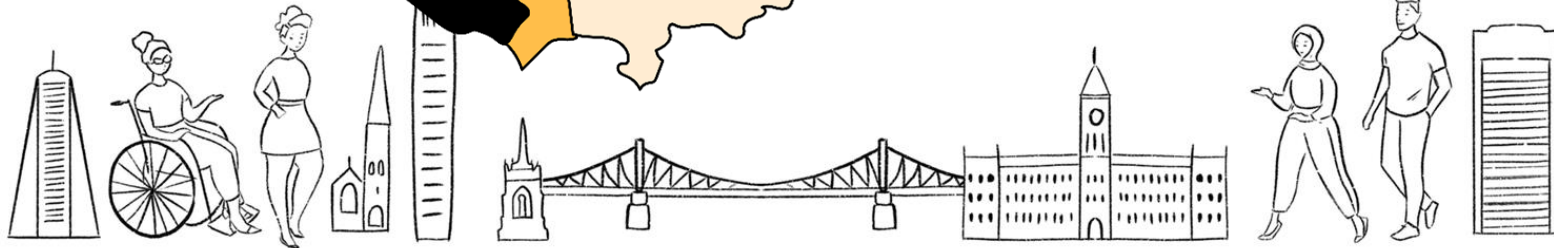
# Impact at a glance...

**8** Hubs are operational and there are plans in plan to set up two new hubs.



**The Enabler: We have made significant progress on:**

- **Setting strong foundations** for collaborative working across the consortium
- We have also demonstrated an **ability to respond dynamically** to new crisis
- Partners have reported that **communication and information sharing has improved**, with an effort to ensure in person meetings are part of consortium working



# Progress against the baseline

The baseline for the Step Change programme is the outcome of the evaluation for **The Greater Manchester Refugee Support Partnership** (GMRSP; May 2015 – April 2020; funded by TNLCF), comprising four charities: Rainbow Haven, Revive, Refugee Action and British Red Cross (Programme lead).



# The recommendations from this evaluation included:

1

GMRSP should continue to provide a basis for providing services across a coordinated network of hubs in Greater Manchester.

**Step Change work: Hub development working group and Hub transition process**

2

Define achievable project outcomes which are consistently understood, monitored and reported against, and create a client focus group across the GMRSP for the long-term feedback on the needs of Experts by Experience.

**Step Change work: Setup EbE group led by MRSN to inform GM programme**

3

Establish a Greater Manchester advocacy strategy, with the national campaigns/policy leads at the British Red Cross and Refugee Action that links the Greater Manchester agenda with their broader influencing and is centrally coordinated with advice from a partnership sub-group.

**Step Change work: 'Voice' strand of project, led by Asylum Matters explicitly working on advocacy at the local, regional and national level**

4

Coordinate approaches to TNLCF on the future of the current project and wider work supporting refugees and people seeking asylum in Greater Manchester.

**Step Change work: Step Change coordinator working with partners and Lottery as a year 2 priority**

5

Ensure a common offer for people seeking asylum and refugee to ensure early, equitable access to the services that they need where they live.

**Step Change work: Greater Manchester Offer work piece directly addresses this problem**

6

Enable staff and volunteers from across the partnership to meet together for skillshare days or training.

**Step Change work: Specific working group training (e.g. safeguarding) and training included within the Capacity Building and Development workstream**

7

Enhance the links with housing providers – asylum support and mainstream – to address issues that RAS have at the key at time of transition after receiving a decision on their asylum case.

**Step change work: 'housing' as thematic area of focus, led by Boaz**

8

Adapt GMRSP's employment support to asylum seekers to focus on preparing people for employment and creating volunteer placements in other organisations, such as sports bodies.

**Step change work: Employability as area of focus under Capacity Building and Development workstream led by Refugees and Mentors**

9

Consider whether the project would benefit from having a specifically funded specialist casework role to support the frontline operational staff across all of the partners.

**Step Change work: Discuss with partners in Year 2**

# Progress against outcome 1

**Outcome: Refugees and people seeking asylum will be able to meet their basic needs and secure their rights, through improved and earlier access to high quality, easily accessible place-based advice and support services.**

Indicator: 3600 people are assisted to secure housing, benefits and other entitlements      3000 people secure housing, benefits and other entitlements

**Amount achieved during this period**



One partner reported that working more closely with other consortium partners has resulted in smoother referral processes, and as a result, more positive outcomes for clients such as securing housing, or being granted leave to remain. Partners also reported that they were pleased with the amount of users they were able to reach in this reporting period, despite still facing the challenge of Covid restrictions which affected how they could deliver services, and access service users.

Indicator:

4620 people accessing support services and activities report that they feel connected, welcome and safe as a result of the services provided.

**Amount achieved during this period**



Note: Partners began using the MEL tools half way through the reporting year, therefore the impact data was not collected as widely as originally planned and the number of people providing feedback was lower than anticipated.

\*percentage of those surveyed

**“It [the service] has had a positive impact, created a supportive circle with connection to everyone. Helped me learn the language and find friends from other countries”**

**“It’s met my expectations. The social aspects, getting to know people, whether clients or employees. Rainbow Haven is a lovely place to be”**

# Progress against outcome 2

**Outcome: Refugees and people seeking asylum will have increased confidence, knowledge, skills and opportunities to embrace their new lives in the places where they live.**

Indicator: 2400 people report increased confidence to take on new challenges and opportunities independently

**Amount achieved during this period**



**“My confidence has increased. I am meeting more people. I feel settled and I am a lot happier.”**

**Another service user expressed how the service they used “makes people feel independent, not dependent”**

Indicator:

3000 people report increased well-being including during the COVID-19 lockdown

**Amount achieved during this period**

**82%**



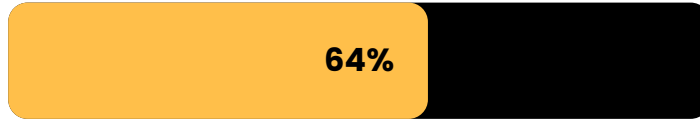
There were multiple references throughout the service user engagement in case studies and focus groups in relation to the deepened sense of isolation that Covid-19 brought adding to an already isolating situation of seeking asylum in the UK.

Some of the references to improved mental health and wellbeing related purely to the social aspect of engaging with services, feeling heard and supported as well as meeting other people and having the opportunity to engage in social activities.

**“Before, I had so much stress and depression and now after I got the house and support, I feel the stress and depression has gone, I am feeling better. The house made such a big difference. I was really struggling and fighting with my life - it was difficult staying in different houses but now I am in a nice house and I have money and I feel like I can relax. I am comfortable here in Manchester and have friends. I play cricket here and can't live without these guys. Refugee Action helped me to stay in Manchester. Refugee Action helped me to get a solicitor and now I have a solicitor who can also support me and helps with my case which was such a big issue as I did not know how to do this. They also helped with my doctor and registering for a GP.**

Indicator: 2000 people report increased skills and employability

**Amount achieved during this period**



Multiple service users noted that their engagement in services has resulted in increased knowledge in the asylum process and also understanding their own rights.

One case user noted the support they have gained in their college applications and work, which they hope will transfer to future employment opportunities. A different service user noted that frontline services are also useful in helping individuals identify the skills they already have and identify new opportunities to utilise them.

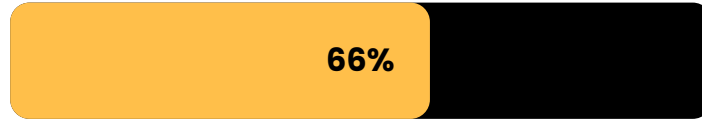
**“I have gained a lot of experience from watching how the staff at MRSN deal with certain matters and explain things for me. It has allowed me to help myself a little bit more but I always come back to them for support when I feel out of my depth dealing with certain matters.”**

**This sentiment is also relevant for the indicator on increased abilities to take on new challenges independently.**

Indicator:

840 people report increased meaningful connections with the wider community

**Amount achieved during this period**



Despite the reported increased isolation as a result of the pandemic, most service user referred to these partner organisations as 'refuges' or 'safe spaces' where they can come, make connections with others and feel more welcome and connected to their new home in Greater Manchester.

**"It's been good for my interpersonal skills, interacting with people, getting exposed to life in the UK."**

**Many service users also note increased language skills in English which can be practiced at services (or through ESOL classes). This helps in increased connections and reduced sense of isolation.**



# Progress against outcome 3

**Outcome: 25 refugee and asylum support organisations across Greater Manchester report increased collaborative working and capacity to provide sustainable, high quality, integrated services that are responsive to the needs and priorities of refugees and people seeking asylum.**

**100%**

of those who responded to the consortium reflection survey reported an increased sense of connection and collaboration as a result of the consortium and one partner reported increased skills and the ability to work collaboratively on complex themes across multiple organisations.

Notable areas for collaborative working included: the Afghan response, collective advocacy and influence activities and the hub transition and development working group.

Some partners reported a **concern for how equal the voice and contributions of all partners in the consortium are**, which was noted as likely capacity related. This feedback was received via the consortium reflection survey. In June 22, the Step Change coordinator communicated to the consortium proposed ways to address this issue of equal input.

Whilst partners have reported a strong sense of collaborative working, some have noted there is **room for improvement in terms of communicating about our work externally, influencing the wider asylum support sector and out influence on decision making structures.**

*“I think the collaborative work on Afghanistan was really positive, although I don't know if this demonstration of our value and expertise actually led to a change in local council approaches to our work.”*

Partners also noted they would like **increased input from the EbE group on programme design, influence and decision making.** During this reporting period the EbE group has been in its setup phase including: developing its ToR and working policies, conducting a digital skills and training needs analysis. The group now has the technical equipment to engage in consortium activities. The Step Change coordinator and EbE coordinator are now working to develop a comprehensive 'Programme Engagement Plan' which will ensure meaningful engagement and participation in the consortium, which is an identified priority area of work for year 2.

# Progress against outcome 4

**Outcome: Refugees, people seeking asylum and the organisations that support them have a strengthened collective voice, to ensure that decision makers understand their priorities**

Indicator:

Refugee and asylum support organisations report increased effectiveness of collaboration on advocacy work. 15 advocacy opportunities created / taken up.

**11 achieved during this period**



Over the course of this reporting period, there have been 11 significant campaigns 'moments' with numerous other smaller opportunities engaging a total of **61 organisations across Greater Manchester**.

Advocacy priorities have focused on the opposition to the Nationality and Borders Bill, challenging unsuitable accommodation for people seeking asylum and refugees (particularly Afghan and Ukrainian), Lift the Ban campaign on the right to work for asylum seekers and raising awareness of the failures of the ASPEN card and financial support for asylum seekers.

Indicator:

Increased participation & representation for VCS organisations & Experts by Experience within relevant local & city-region structures

There has been a lack of face to face meetings in the reporting period because of COVID, however there have been **19 instances of direct meetings with decision makers in Greater Manchester that we have participated in where advocacy points were made.** These were meetings with Home Office officials, officials from accommodation and advice providers, local authority officials, officials from the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and from the Regional Strategic Migration Partnership.

Throughout this time also **Asylum Matters have been supporting people locally engaging decision makers in respect of the Bill,** including through the production of a guide to engage MPs, template letters, and a guide to local lobbying of decision makers.

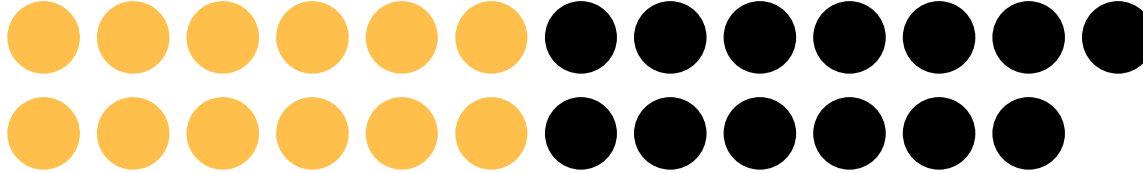
As a result of the campaigns activity, including writing letters to local leaders, on 11<sup>th</sup> March, **all ten Greater Manchester council leaders as well as the Mayor Andy Burnham made a public statement on the situation in Ukraine** showing clear support for Ukrainian refugees, and calling for an urgent review of the Nationality and Borders Bill.

The **rally event on the 21st March received public support from a number of Greater Manchester MPs** who could only not attend the event in person due to being in parliament vote on the bill.

Indicator:

Experts by experience report increased ability to participate in influencing activities. 25 experts by experience empowered to participate in local and national influencing activities

**12 achieved during this period**



There are currently 12 EbE members, 8 of whom have participated in locally led influencing efforts against the Nationality and Borders bill including participating in a Day of Action and the signing of two letters to Conservative MPs. EbE members, whilst in the early stages of the group formation and setup, have reported they have gained a better understanding of how campaigning activities work and have learnt new skills in this area. This is something they would like to continue to work on, and at some stage lead their own events which indicates a growth in confidence.

**“I have learnt how to advocate for myself to give my rights, and developed my confidence”**

**A notable success in the reporting period has been Asylum Matters collaboration with consortium member Manchester City of Sanctuary and local councillors in Salford, resulting in the unanimous passing of a council motion in Salford pledging to make it a City of Sanctuary, support for the Lift the Ban campaign to secure the right to work for people seeking asylum in Greater Manchester and elsewhere, and opposing measures in the Nationality and Borders bill. This will result in a sustained process in Salford of engagement with the City of Sanctuary movement to improve the welcome in the borough to people seeking asylum.**

**The Nationality and Borders Bill passed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2022. However, links between local voluntary sector organisations in GM and a more unified voice have been and continue to be cemented. The GM leaders' statement is an important marker for further work going forwards which would not have happened without Consortium action. Pressure has also been maintained on accommodation providers and the Home Office in relation to the experiences of people in institutional accommodation, with some local wins in terms of local authority engagement.**

# What else are service users saying?

(Insights from service users that are outside of Step Change outcomes)

Focus groups and case studies were conducted with service users in Rainbow Haven, MRSN, Manchester City of Sanctuary and Refugee Action services. There was some interesting information that is worth sharing, that sits outside of Step Change formal project outcomes.

## **Service users noted the following were the most useful/used services:**

- Housing
- Health support
- Support with bills
- ESOL
- Mental health support through activities,
- Access to digital equipment/access
- Chasing statutory providers
- Legal support

Generally, service users felt these organisations were a space they felt safe, welcome and understood

## **Service users were asked, ' If you were in charge - what would you change?'**

- 1) **Increase visibility**, there is a real issue of people not being aware of the services in the first place. The main reason people gave for why people may not be accessing services, was due to lack of visibility. Anecdotally it was mentioned how people become aware of services mostly through word of mouth.
- 1) **Recruit those who have experience of the asylum system** "People are looking for someone they can trust to get help, and to speak to someone who has been through similar experiences"
- 1) **More legal advice** - I'd get more advisors to come in. The advisors are doing really well, but one advisor can get trapped for 3 hours with one person. The advisors here are doing tremendously well, I can't fault them.
- 1) **More influence on statutory providers** (home office, migrant help) influence the way they work
- 1) **More help on employability and education** - "people want to use their skills"
- 1) **More interpreters/languages** available
- 1) **Ensure good mechanisms for feedback for service users** as well as better systems for information gathering/storage "Have a better system in order not to repeat asking the same questions over and over again"



# Progress against the enabler

**The Enabler: A connected, sustaining and dynamic Consortium.** As part of the MEL toolkit, 'the enabler' was developed to help monitor the development of the consortium structure itself.

**Enabler Goal:** Members of the Step Change Consortium feel more connected; they benefit from shared curiosity and dynamism; the future seems more certain and service delivery is more sustainable; collective actions and achievements are celebrated, as well as the shared values and approaches that underpin them

**Enabler Output: Bi-annual reflection, analysis and celebration sessions**

Step change progress: Consortium reflection survey conducted and adaptations made in relation to EbE inclusion, equal partner contributions and consortium management transparency.

**Enabler Outcome: The future of the Consortium is discussed and an active consideration**

Step Change progress: Funding planning discussions being help with Lottery and partners, and core area focus of year 2

**Enabler Outcome: People love coming together and communicating across organisations; cross-organisational culture is improved**

Step Change progress: Feedback from partners that communication has improved, effort to ensure in person meetings are part of consortium working

**Enabler Outcome: The Consortium evidences its ability to respond dynamically to crises**

Step Change progress:: The consortium Afghan response was noted as a key success for year 1 and demonstrates collaborative working as well as dynamic responses to new crisis'

**Enabler Outcome: Even if not technically measured, the way in which service users journey through Consortium's services is recognised and celebrated**

Step Change progress: No data at present

# Main successes in year 1

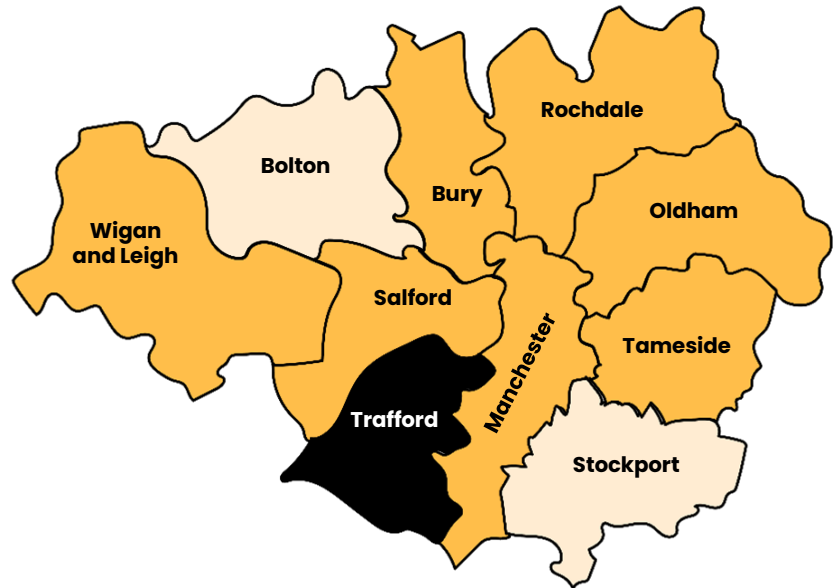
**8 Hubs are operational and there are plans in plan to set up two new hubs.** The Hub development working group has developed a 'Hub minimum offer' that stipulates the minimum services that a Hub should either provide or be able to signpost in terms of key services. This is a key development as it is a step towards establishing consistency of service provision across the GM area which is a core goal of the consortium.

## Hubs Operational:

- Rochdale
- Oldham
- Tameside (BRC)
- Bury (BRC and Eagles Wing)
- Wigan and Leigh (SWAP)
- Salford (Revive)
- Manchester (MRSN and Rainbow Haven)

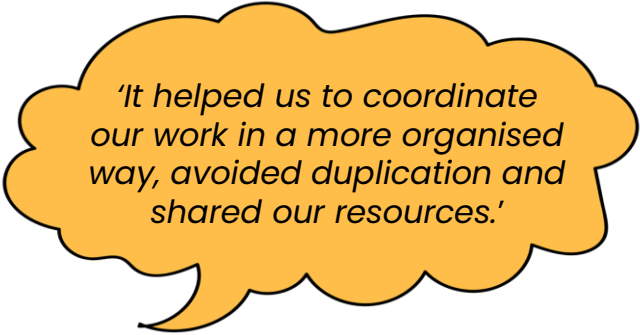
## Planned hubs:

- Bolton (BRASS)
- Stockport (led by sector 3)



## ▶ **Afghan response as an example of collaborative working**

Whilst this is good example of collaborative working, in the face of new and emerging challenges, there is a concern within the consortium in the capacity to respond to all new emerging crisis' especially considering the unprecedented global and local change we have seen over the last two years.



*'It helped us to coordinate our work in a more organised way, avoided duplication and shared our resources.'*

▶ As part of the Voice and Influencing element of the programme, there has been an impressive **local response against the Nationality and Borders Bill**, which will lay important groundwork to contest the new legislation as it is implemented. There was also significant Tory support for the Lift the Ban campaign to allow those seeking asylum the right to work.

▶ **Continuing to provide frontline services throughout the COVID-19 pandemic** has been a key success for service delivery organisations.

## ▶ **The setup of the coordination function of the consortium.**

The consortium now have communication and information sharing processes in place. There was positive feedback from partners on the progress of the consortium management. Consortium development is an iterative process, and the 'consortium reflection survey' will ensure partner feedback is taken on board.

## Case study - Collaborative working

Between November 2021 and March 2022, members of the Step Change Consortium, Manchester City of Sanctuary, Manchester Refugee Support Network and Revive, worked to provide material goods and emotional and wellbeing support for men, women and children accommodated at hotels across Manchester. The three organisations came together monthly to assess work and progress, as well as participating in the weekly hotel meetings that included MACC, Charity Liaisons plus other VCSE partners. These activities received consistently positive feedback from participants who reported increased physical and mental wellbeing.

This Afghan response is a good example of collaborative working across consortium partners, pooling knowledge and expertise in relation to working in hotels, as well as developing a stronger, collective voice that could contribute to the wider meetings on hotels.

It also demonstrates how the consortium is able to adapt and respond to new challenges in the sector, as the Afghan response work was setup in response to the August 2021 Afghan crisis, after the launch of the consortium in April 2021.

The Afghan response working group reported some key learnings in relation to working collaboratively including the need for clear objectives, roles and responsibilities, effective escalation processes and the need for funding and sustainability in crisis response work. These learnings will be extremely useful to the consortium as we enter into year 2 with many areas of collaborative work.

A blog written by Manchester City of Sanctuary and MRSN colleagues on the Afghan work can be read [here](#).

# Main challenges in Year 1

The most prominent challenge the consortium continues to face is the **incredible hostile external environment including the political environment** (Nationality and Borders Bill and Rwanda response) combined with multiple global crises such as Afghanistan and Ukraine. Partners have reported feeling that there is relentless pressure on service provider decision makers which works to favour reactive rather than proactive work. This external environment poses a challenge both on a national and local level. Partners have witnessed rapidly changing local agendas, specifically the evacuations of people from Afghanistan and Ukraine and the impact this has had on conversations around accommodation provision.

**The setup and operationalisation of the coordination function.** Due to Covid there have been few opportunities to meet in person and build relationships and develop a shared mission and collective vision. There have also been staffing changes at Refugee Action which has been a challenge reported by some partners. Partners have reported they still don't feel like the consortium is seen as a 'go to' for larger sector-wide issues in Greater Manchester. There has been a permanent coordinator now in place for 6 months and continued improvement on the operationalisation and collaborative working of the consortium is a priority for year 2.

**Key services have faced extremely challenging circumstances caused by Covid preventing face to face support, as well as an increase in demand for services. Service delivery partners are reporting regularly having to 'fill the gaps' of the failures of other services. There is also a real issue with staff and volunteer burn out and being being capacity.** One partner noted 'practically, emotionally, personally and organisationally, I think most of us have felt we are at or beyond our capacity to 'do more' at points throughout the year. There are so many competing priorities for all of us – in terms of our time and energies'. Staff and volunteer wellbeing is a theme that is being addressed through the capacity building and development workstream in year 2.

**Meaningful engagement of the EbE group in programme development and implementation has been a year 1 challenge.** It is noted in guidance regarding the inclusion of EbE groups, or any co-production work that the earlier you involve a group, the easier it is to involve them in the programme. The combination of the timing in which the group was set up, with the fact the group are voluntary and only meet twice per month has proved quite difficult regarding meaningfully engaging the group in the consortium. The EbE group has made significant steps in terms of setting up a ToR and relevant policies, developed a training programme, addressed digital inclusion needs; they are still in the early stages of identifying thematic priorities within the consortium. This is a priority for the Step Change coordinator and EbE coordinator in the early part of year 2.

# Key Learnings in Year 1

**We have learnt as a consortium that in order for Hub developments to be successful, there needs to be a transition period, with support plans and openness for hybrid models of working that supports the capacity building of the locally led organisations.** Whilst the principle of Hub development is that it is beneficial for them to be held by local organisations who are based in the community, and well connected to other local services, in practice this can be challenging. One example of this is that while some volunteer-led organisations may deliver excellent services and activities, they may not wish, or have the capacity for the administrative and reporting elements of receiving funding from a consortium such as Step Change if for example they are mostly volunteer-led with minimal administrative staff.

In the last six months, there has been an unprecedented sequence of crises including the Afghan response, Ukraine crisis, Nationality and Border bill passing into law and the partnership with Rwanda to offshore asylum claims. This set of external circumstances creates a 'fighting fires' mentality for a sector that is already stretched and makes it very challenging for partners to engage in projects that are aimed at long term strategic development and change. **One learning from the perspective of the consortium coordination therefore is the need for projects such as these to be adaptive in nature, ensuring there is resource and flexibility within the project structure for change in direction and priorities recognising that new crises will emerge and require response.**

Meaningful engagement of the EbE group in the programme activities and work streams has been challenging. **The learning for the consortium as guided by the Refugee Action EbE programme team is that EbE work takes time, multiple different mechanisms and approaches to enable participation and regular check-ins with the group to provide feedback.**



# Ways we share learning with the consortium

## **Working Groups**

Through bringing together partners who are interested in specific themes. Current working groups include: safeguarding, hub development and GM Offer.

## **Consortium information sharing**

Monthly updates, tools and meetings

## **Learning outputs**

Blogs (1 produced to date on Afghan response)

## **MEL tools and learning reports**

Opportunity for data collection and learning for consortium and individual partners

# Year 2 programme priorities

In our first year as a consortium, we have consolidated and started working towards our collective goals. We have also setup a structure that will allow strengthened collaborative working and responding to key issues facing asylum services in Greater Manchester.

Going forward, we want to

- continue to develop and connect asylum support service provision across GM to ensure all have access, no matter their postcode
- strengthen our relationships with key decision makers, including local authorities, Greater Manchester Combined Authority and the Regional Strategic Migration Partnership and find ways to work collaboratively.
- share externally about the successes and challenges of our work
- continue to work collaboratively with asylum support VSOs and create more opportunities for engagement with the consortium and;
- ensure those with lived experiences of asylum services are heard, and shape the provision of services and responses in the GM region.

# Learning needs and next steps...

In this first phase of data gathering and analysis we have received a huge amount of data from partners. This is great. What we have learnt however is that we need a bit more support in this area to ensure the data is analysed and shared.

**For years 2-4 of the consortium, we plan to recruit a long term 'learning partner' to:**

- Enable more in depth data analysis (at consortium and partner level)
- Develop key consortium learning questions
- Help produce learning outputs (e.g. blogs) so enable to consortium to share externally about its work

**Some examples of consortium learning questions could include**

- 'What are the main trends we are seeing across the sector'
- 'What does a service user journey look like from arrival and journey through various services in GM region