

Report to CABINET – 16th June 2025

GMCA Refugee Support project – Sanctuary Seekers in Oldham

Portfolio Holder:

Councillor Fida Hussain, Cabinet Member for Enterprise

Officer Contact: Matthew Bulmer, Director of Education, Skills and Early Years

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Ext. 5194

Reason for Decision

To formally accept the grant award of £276,888 from the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) on behalf of Oldham Council, for the purpose of delivering the Refugee Support Project via the Get Oldham Working programme, over a two-year period commencing in May 2025.

Executive Summary

Oldham Council has secured £276,888 from the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) to deliver a two-year Refugee Support Project starting in May 2025. Developed in partnership with Action Together, the programme will enhance support for refugees and people seeking asylum through English language education, digital inclusion, volunteering, and employment support.

The project will be delivered in collaboration with the local Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector, aiming to support 250 individuals and improve integration and employment outcomes. A detailed mobilisation plan is in place, and all stakeholders—including elected members, council services, and delivery partners—have been consulted and are fully supportive.

Recommendations

The recommendation is to accept the funding and proceed with delivery, enabling Oldham to meet identified local needs and strengthen community cohesion.

GMCA Refugee Support project – Sanctuary Seekers in Oldham**1 Background**

- 1.1 Oldham Council has secured funding from the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) Refugee Support Programme to enhance local support for refugees and individuals seeking asylum. This initiative is designed to strengthen integration, improve employability, and foster community cohesion through a coordinated, trauma-informed, and community-led approach. Given Oldham's significant and diverse asylum-seeking population, the programme responds to increasing demand for English language provision, digital skills development, volunteering opportunities, and employment support.
- 1.2 Delivery of the programme will be undertaken in partnership with Action Together and the local Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector, adopting an integrated model structured around four core components: English language learning combined with community engagement activities; Digital inclusion delivered through community-based digital skills centres; Structured volunteering pathways to promote social integration and community contribution; and targeted employment and skills support provided by the Get Oldham Working team. To ensure accessibility, additional support will be made available to cover participation-related costs, thereby reducing barriers to engagement.
- 1.3 The programme is intended to support 250 individuals, with anticipated outcomes including: 150 participants accessing English language and digital skills provision; 100 individuals engaged in structured volunteering activities; 175 participants receiving employment and skills advice, with an expected progression rate of 25% into paid employment.
- 1.4 This initiative builds upon Oldham's commitment to a strengths-based and inclusive support model, underpinned by strategic investment in trusted community organisations and collaborative structures such as the Oldham Refugee and Asylum Seeker Network. The funding will enable the expansion of proven approaches, delivering sustainable, locally embedded support aligned with the borough's Live Well principles.

2 Current Position

- 2.1 In response to an invitation from the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) for all local authorities to submit proposals under the Refugee Support Programme, Oldham Council's Economy and Skills team developed a detailed and locally tailored submission. This proposal was formulated in close partnership with Action Together, ensuring alignment with the priorities and capabilities of the local Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector.
- 2.2 Following a robust assessment process, GMCA formally approved Oldham's proposal and issued a Grant Funding Agreement (GFA), confirming the allocation of funding to support delivery over the specified period.
- 2.3 Subsequent to the funding approval, Get Oldham Working and Action Together have undertaken a series of strategic planning sessions to operationalise the delivery framework.

This mobilisation phase included the facilitation of a dedicated workshop with VCFSE partners, aimed at co-designing delivery models, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and ensuring readiness across all delivery partners.

- 2.4 As a result of this collaborative preparatory work, all parties are now fully mobilised and ready to commence delivery of the Refugee Support Project in line with the agreed objectives and timescales.

3 Options/Alternatives

- 3.1 **Option One:** Accept the Grant and Proceed with Project Delivery Under this option, Oldham Council would formally accept the £276,888 grant funding from the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and proceed with the implementation of the Refugee Support Project as outlined in the approved proposal. Delivery would be undertaken in partnership with Action Together and the local Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector. This approach would enable the Council to address identified local needs by enhancing support for refugees and individuals seeking asylum through an integrated model focused on language skills, digital inclusion, volunteering, and employment support. Accepting the funding would contribute to the borough's wider ambitions for community cohesion, inclusion, and socio-economic resilience. It would also demonstrate a continued commitment to collaborative working with local partners and the GMCA.

- 3.2 **Option Two:** Decline the Grant and Withdraw from Project Delivery Alternatively, the Council could choose not to accept the grant funding and, as a result, would not proceed with the delivery of the Refugee Support Project. While this would remove any associated delivery responsibilities or resource commitments, it would also result in the loss of external investment aimed at addressing critical support needs within Oldham's refugee and asylum-seeking population. Declining the funding may also impact future opportunities to collaborate with the GMCA on similar initiatives and could result in reputational risk or reduced engagement with key local partners in the VCFSE sector.

4 Preferred Option

- 4.1 **Option One:** Accept the Grant and Proceed with Project Delivery

5 Consultation

- 5.1 Consultation has been undertaken with all relevant stakeholders, including elected members, senior officers, and key delivery partners. Specifically, input has been sought from the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Enterprise, the Director of Economy, representatives from Finance and Legal Services, and strategic partners such as Action Together. All parties have expressed their support for the project, recognising its alignment with local priorities and its potential to deliver meaningful outcomes for refugee and asylum-seeking communities in Oldham. The feedback received has been positive, with stakeholders confirming that appropriate governance, financial oversight, and delivery mechanisms are in place. As such, there is collective agreement that the Council is well positioned to proceed, and all consultees are satisfied with the proposal and supportive of the project moving forward to implementation.

6 Financial Implications

- 6.1 This report is seeking approval to accept the Grant from GMCA to enable the Get Oldham Working Service to deliver the Refugee Welcome Programme. The amount of Grant awarded to GOW is £276,888 and has been allocated to be spent as per the table below:

Activity over the next 2 years	£
Grants to VCFSE groups and organisations to deliver community-led English Language Education and Community Activities	40,000.00
Grants to VCFSE groups and organisations to deliver digital inclusion and skills	20,000.00
Grants to VCFSE groups and organisations to deliver Refugee Welcome Volunteering opportunities with wrap around support	40,000.00
Action Together - Volunteer Centre Staffing (inc on costs) 0.7FTE	58,000.02
Individual Participation Support Costs	12,000.00
Oldham Council - Get Oldham Working Specialist Employment and Skills Advisor 1FTE	82,902.99
Action Together Grant Administration and VCFSE Co-ordination	23,984.99
Total	276,888.00

- 6.2 These posts are a mix of Action Together posts and existing posts within the Get Oldham Working Service and will be required to cover the project for 2 years.
- 6.3 The funding will be paid 20 days after the grant agreement is signed off and will require quarterly monitoring reports. The Grant can only be spent on eligible expenditure and must be spent by 31st May 2027. As the Grant recipient, any underspends to the programme must be reported to GMCA and may be clawed back as per schedule 1 of the agreement so close monitoring will need to be undertaken by Get Oldham Working and the other providers.

Catherine Dunkerley - Accountant

7 Legal Implications

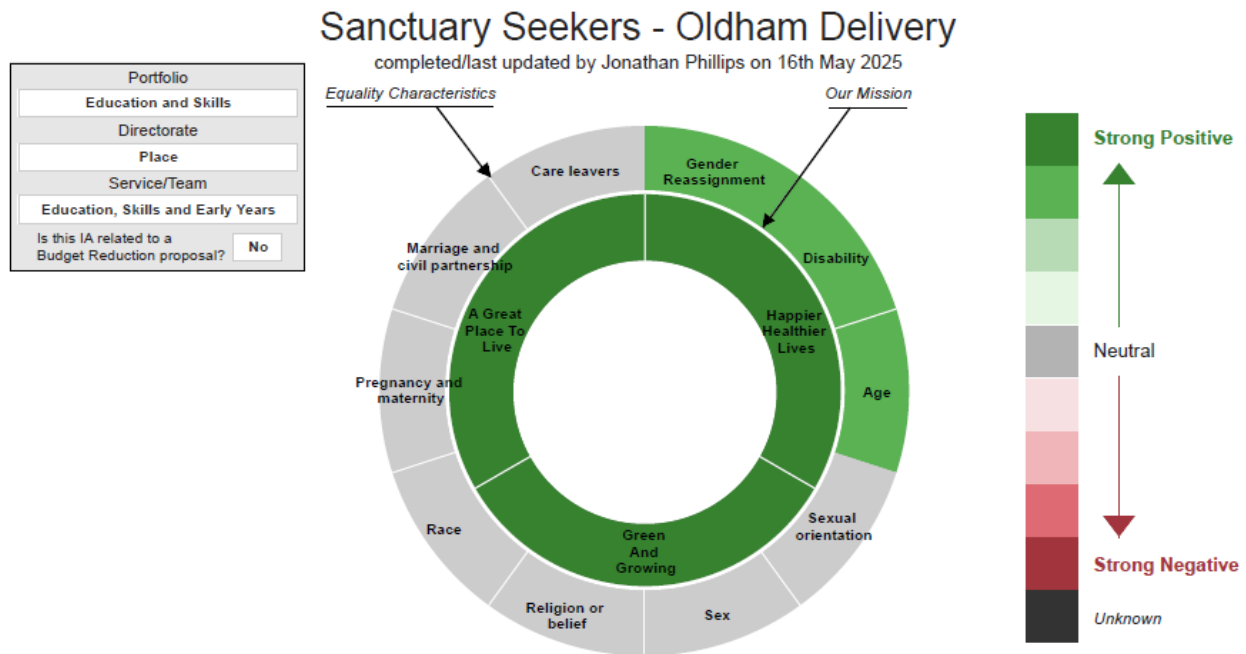
- 7.1 The proposed funding will over an important service to vulnerable individuals in the borough and will help towards their integration into the local community. There needs to be compliance monitoring of the use of the grant funding to maintain that service delivery is satisfactory. Before transfer of any funds to Action together and / or any other providers the service should liaise with Legal service colleagues to make sure that any required grant funding agreement with Action together and other providers are satisfactory and complete. (Alex Bougatef Interim Borough Solicitor)

8 Procurement Implications

- 8.1 This is understood to be grant funding allocation and relates to a joint bid into GMCA, as requested by GMCA – for which the criteria was that the Council must work with and co-design the scheme with the local VCFSE sector agency. In Oldham, this is Action Together. Therefore based on the above information provided to CPU, there are no procurement implications.
- Jasmin Banks-Lee, Commercial Procurement Unit

9 Equality Impact, including implications for Children and Young People

9.1 Yes



10 **Key Decision**

10.1 Yes

11 **Key Decision Reference**

11.1 EDS-06-25.

12 **Background Papers**

12.1 n/a

13 **Appendices**

13.1 n/a