



LEX PANEL END OF YEAR REPORT 2025

THE
HARBOUR
PROJECT

With special thanks to our funder:



MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR + VICE-CHAIR

“Being part of the Lived Experience Panel is such a great thing – it is a powerful platform for change. It’s about seeing the strength in one’s journey and realising that by sharing it, you’re shaping a better world for others. Members came together, told their stories, offered suggestions and overcame barriers.

We are going to continue to listen, learn, and most importantly, to act”

Mohamed Yahya
Chair of the LEX Panel

“Being part of the Lived Experience Panel since its very beginning has been a meaningful journey for me. From the start, our goal has always been clear: to share our experiences as immigrants in the UK so that the organisation can better understand our challenges and improve its services. Over time, the Panel has changed in numbers and faces, but the purpose has remained the same, and that consistency has made our work impactful. Personally, I feel proud to have contributed to shaping services that truly respond to people’s needs.

Looking ahead, I hope the Panel continues to grow stronger, bringing together even more voices and perspectives so that our collective experiences can keep driving positive change and making a real difference in the lives of others”

Erlinda Barjamaj
Vice-Chair of the LEX Panel

KEY STATISTICS FROM 2025

12

NUMBER OF
DIFFERENT PANEL
MEMBERS

10

NUMBER OF
NATIONALITIES
REPRESENTED

11

MEETINGS HAVE
BEEN HELD

74

TOTAL MEETING
ATTENDANCES

4

BOROUGH OF
SANCTUARY
MEETINGS ATTENDED

11

TOPICS
DISCUSSED

13

KEY SUGGESTIONS
MADE

10

CHANGES MADE



TOPICS OF DISCUSSION + KEY SUGGESTIONS

The LEX Panel has met 11 times in 2025, and have discussed several key issues that are important to the asylum seeking and refugee community in Swindon. Below is a list of the topics that the Panel members have discussed:

- Personal experiences of engaging with The Harbour Project's services
- Engaging with health services and the inequalities that exist
- Challenges for refugees to find accommodation and employment
- eVISAs
- Fundraising applications for The Harbour Project
- Operational changes to enhance service delivery within The Harbour Project
- Interaction with Visitors
- The development of a 'Buddy scheme' with Trustees

A core purpose of the Panel is to offer suggestions so that The Harbour Project can change or improve its services to better support people. Below is a list of the key suggestions made by Panel members:

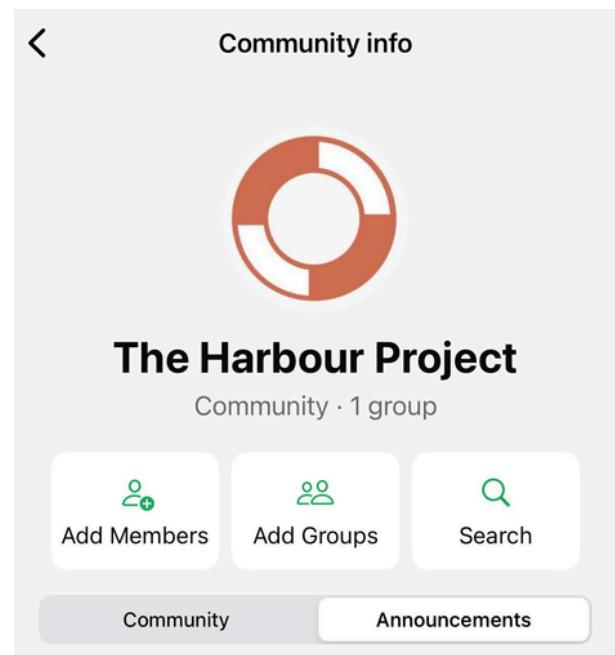
- Provide greater clarity on Harbour's role for new Visitors
- Improved registration experience for new Visitors
- Increased support with legal representation
- Continued support in key areas
- Clearer communication about the asylum process
- Provide a better distinction between 'asylum seekers' and 'refugees'
- Use of digital tools for accessibility
- Encouraging independence and self-learning
- Offer workshops to help people learn how to navigate the online Universal Credit application process and update their account anytime they need to
- Development/expansion of English class provision: online classes, a central English class registration system, casual English conversation clubs
- Work in the community to raise awareness about the asylum system to tackle current misinformation
- Offer cultural workshops
- Provide further support in reception to those who are on the front desk



HOW HAS HARBOUR RESPONDED

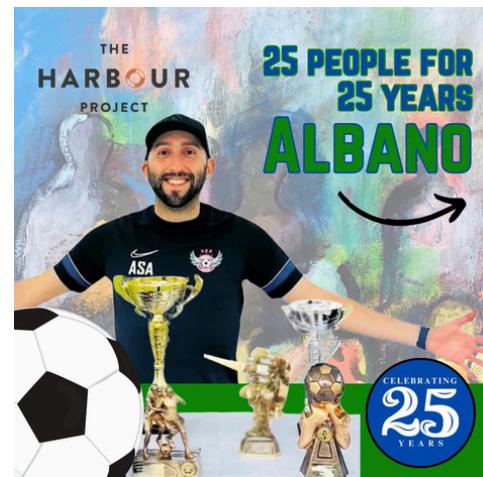
Whilst implementing changes in a timely manner can be difficult due to the availability of funds, the team's capacity or the need for careful planning, we have taken the Panel's suggestions on board. Below details how The Harbour Project has tried to respond to the LEX Panel's suggestions:

- **Harbour's role + registration** – We reviewed our registration process to focus more on developing trust and understanding of who The Harbour Project is and what we do before asking for paperwork and personal information
- **Continued support in key areas** – In October, our staff team discussed our current operations to decide on what areas to prioritise and continue offering to our Visitors. We have successfully applied for funding from Boost Charitable Trust for football training, Souter Charitable Trust for the cafe, and AB Charitable Trust for Advice services – these are some of our key services
- **Support in reception** – We introduced a notice board at reception telling people to give their name and to sign-in
- **Increased support with legal representation** – We have conducted lots of research into how we can develop our immigration advice capacity – working with Refugee Action, Bristol Law Centre and South West Immigration Alliance to understand the financial and operational implications. Mohamed and Micael completed IAA Level 2 advice training in September. They aim to complete the exam in February 2026.
- **Digital tools** – We introduced a WhatsApp community group so Visitors can stay engaged and informed on what is happening at The Harbour Project



HOW HAS HARBOUR RESPONDED (CONTINUED)

- **Development of English classes** – We are currently working with English teachers to reduce the wait time for classes. We did a shout-out for more English teachers to volunteer at Harbour
- **Independence and self-learning** – We are developing a 'Buddy Scheme' amongst Panel members and Trustees to increase understanding of governance and to create a progression pathway from LEX Panel to Trustee Board
- **Raising awareness** – We are working with a consultant to develop a Communications Strategy that will help us raise awareness about the work that we do. Our '25 Heroes' social media campaign has been happening
- **ADDITIONAL** – In October, we put on a 'Health Month' for Visitors to learn more about how to engage with different NHS services



CHALLENGES

As this has been the first year of the LEX Panel's existence, there was always going to be some challenges along the way. This is because this was a new project, new responsibilities for the Panel members, and a new way of organisational development for The Harbour Project. Below lists some of the key challenges this year:

- Consistent engagement from Panel members
- Notifying the group if a Panel member cannot attend
- Room availability for meetings
- The availability of Panel members who are also staff members at The Harbour Project
- Consistent and effective note taking of meetings
- Gaining wider input from other Visitors (outside of the LEX Panel) / starting Visitors in the Lead
- Sourcing funding needed to implement suggested changes
- The time it takes to implement suggested changes
- Starting the 'Buddy Scheme' with Trustees
- Leadership team feeding back to Panel members about changes made and organisational progress

“THE CHALLENGES WE ARE FACING INCLUDE HOW TO GET OUR MEMBER'S AVAILABILITY AND ROOMS AS WELL SOMETIMES IF THE MEETING IS ON THE DAYS THERE ARE ACTIVITIES AT THE HARBOUR”

“ONE OF THE MAIN CHALLENGES HAS BEEN NAVIGATING THE DIVERSITY OF THE GROUP. WHILE THIS IS ALSO A STRENGTH, IT SOMETIMES REQUIRES EXTRA EFFORT TO ENSURE THAT EVERYONE FEELS EQUALLY HEARD AND UNDERSTOOD”

SUCCESSES

Although there have been some challenges along the way, the establishment of the LEX Panel has been a resounding success. It has been a fantastic addition to The Harbour Project, and the insights that Panel members have offered are extremely valuable. Below are the key successes from this year:

- Establishment of the group and diversity of Panel members (gender, age and nationality)
- Panel members have reflected on their own experiences with Harbour, offering key insights into the experiences of people within the asylum system
- Panel suggestions have led to operational changes being adopted:
 - A new registration process focussed on gaining trust and developing understanding of our services
 - Providing more support for our Front Desk volunteers
- Panel suggestions have led to strategic changes being pursued:
 - Working towards delivering IAA Level 2 immigration advice to better support our Visitors (including submitting asylum appeals)
- Panel members have offered their insight to support the development of services external to The Harbour Project:
 - The Health Inequalities project with Dr Ros Petrie
 - Borough of Sanctuary application process with Swindon Borough Council

**“OUR MONTHLY MEETING AND
VOUCHERS IS A GREAT
SUCCESS”**

“SO FAR EVERYTHING SEEMS TO BE GOING VERY WELL. THE GROUP WE HAVE FORMED HAS MANAGED TO CONNECT AND BECOME FAMILIAR WITH EACH OTHER QUICKLY. WE ARE ALL OPEN TO LISTENING AND LEARNING FROM ONE ANOTHER. EVERYONE'S INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES CONTRIBUTE TO THE PURPOSE OF THIS GROUP, WHICH IS TO EXPRESS OUR LIVED PERSPECTIVES, IN ORDER TO HELP IMPROVE HARBOUR IN THE WORK THAT IT DOES”

KEY LEARNINGS FROM 2025

This has been the first full year of the Lived Experience Panel. There has been lots to learn and develop over the past 12 months, and plenty to take forward into 2026. From The Harbour Project's perspective, key learnings for Panel members have been to understand more about the organisation's finances, fundraising challenges, the role of the Trustee Board and how decisions are made. For the Panel members, there has been significant learning of how to work within a group, respect each other's cultures, experiences and values, and to use your voice to make changes. Below are direct quotes from Panel members about what they have learned:

“LISTENING TO THE DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW, THEN TAKING A DECISION BASED ON THOSE IDEAS AND PERSPECTIVES. ALSO, I LEARNED FROM MEMBERS’ EXPERIENCE AND SHARING EXPERIENCE THAT WE ARE SHAPING BETTER WORLD FOR OTHERS”

“LISTENING AND SHARING DIFFERENT POINTS, EXPERIENCES AND IDEAS. I LEARNED HOW IMPORTANT WORK TOGETHER AS A TEAM AND TAKE DECISIONS POSITIVELY”

“I HAVE LEARNED THE VALUE OF COLLABORATION, ACTIVE LISTENING, AND SHARING DIFFERENT PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITHIN A GROUP. THIS HAS HELPED ME UNDERSTAND DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES AND HOW COLLECTIVE INPUT CAN LEAD TO POSITIVE CHANGES. MOST IMPORTANTLY I HAVE LEARNED HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO CREATE SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SPACES WHERE EVERYONE FEELS HEARD AND SUPPORTED”

“I LEARN A LOT OF THINGS AND I LISTEN TO MY COLLEAGUE AS WE WORK TOGETHER TRYING TO ADDRESS THE ISSUES THAT ASYLUM SEEKER AND REFUGEES THEY FACING IT AND TRYING TO SPEAK BEHALF OF THEM AND FIND SOLUTIONS FOR THAT”

LOOKING TO 2026

2026 will be the second year of The Harbour Project's Lived Experience Panel. It is vital that we collectively learn from the challenges and successes from 2025 so that the group continues to be a valuable member of the Harbour family. There is room for improvement and we must work together to continue developing. Below is a list of some suggestions for 2026:

- Agree to have Panel meetings on the same day each month
 - Most likely the last Friday of each month
- A quarterly meeting between Panel members and Harbour's leadership team is arranged to discuss feedback on progress / changes
- A Panel member presents to the Trustee Board about progress / suggestions once per year
- Work with Nan (Operations Manager) to establish quarterly Visitors in the Lead sessions – first ones to be completed by March 2026
- Work with Emma (Chair of Trustees) to establish the 'Buddy Scheme' – pairings to be arranged by March 2026
- Work with Tom (CEO) and Mia (Fundraising Officer) on developing positive case studies to tackle misinformation
- To be involved with more fundraising – possibility of a Panel member joining Fundraising sub-committee
- To be involved with more training opportunities – possibility of a public speaking course
- Take pictures at each meeting

