



Safer Stronger Communities Committee

Report Title: Update on Borough of Sanctuary Programme

Date: 2nd March 2023

Key decision: No.

Class: Part 1 (not restricted)

Ward(s) affected: All

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Outline and recommendations

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the Borough of Sanctuary Programme, provide an update of work to date and outline our approach and some key actions going forward. It is recommended that the Committee review and comment on the update and our approach to the programme in the next year.

1. Background

- 1.1 Lewisham Council was awarded Council of Sanctuary status in May 2021, the first time a Council was awarded this status.
- 1.2 We developed a Borough of Sanctuary Strategy for 2020-25, approved by Mayor and Cabinet on 11th November 2020 (see attached Appendix 1), and appointed a Sanctuary Officer in 2020 to oversee the implementation of the strategy.
- 1.3 Our Strategy sets out a comprehensive approach to embedding sanctuary principles across all Council services so that the challenges particularly facing refugees, asylum seekers and migrants are considered and addressed in the way local services are provided.
- 1.4 To make our commitment real, we also helped create the Lewisham Migration Forum, which is comprised of local organisations that provides services and other support to migrants.
- 1.5 The Lewisham Migration Forum coordinates the collective effort behind Lewisham becoming a Borough of Sanctuary, welcoming those fleeing violence and persecution in their own countries and protecting the rights of all migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees.

1.6 The Forum is a partnership and has a shared action plan, with different partners contributing to and/or leading on relevant actions.

2. Update on the Borough of Sanctuary Programme

2.1 Further to a review of the Sanctuary Officer role, we have made a commitment to make the post permanent and rename it Borough of Sanctuary Programme Manager.

2.2 The post was recruited to in Autumn 2022, with the successful candidate in post in early January 2023.

2.3 Since being in post, the Programme Manager has been meeting with key stakeholders across the Council, Health, and the voluntary sector to gather their thoughts and views on the work to date; to identify where things have worked well and where there are areas for improvement; to identify challenges for sanctuary seekers in Lewisham and possible ways to overcome these.

2.4 The Programme Manager has also met with officers from other Sanctuary boroughs to share information and good practice and informally benchmark our performance and approach in relation to other areas.

2.5 Based on the above, the Programme Manager is developing a detailed RAG-rated workplan for the next year, identifying 'quick wins', medium-term actions and longer-term priorities. The workplan will cover a range of themes from governance, policy development and communications, to specific service areas such as Housing, Health and services to people with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF).

2.6 Examples of 'quick wins' in the workplan include updating our Council website and developing a Borough of Sanctuary MS Teams background, expediting the offer of oyster cards to children of families seeking asylum, attending existing events and activities to raise awareness of the programme, and connecting voluntary and community sector colleagues with key contacts within the Council and Health to address any concerns and resolve issues.

2.7 Medium-term priorities will include our application to renew our Borough of Sanctuary status (due in September 2023), developing our governance to maximise the buy-in of Council and Health colleagues at senior level, ensuring key policies reflect our Borough of Sanctuary values, and continuing to work with partners to jointly deliver on our priorities such as Safer Surgeries and Sanctuary Schools.

2.8 Longer-term actions (ongoing throughout the year) will include development and delivery of organisational awareness raising and training, joint work with Council service areas on four key priorities identified in the workplan such as Housing and the needs of people with NRPF and developing a robust system for co-production with Sanctuary seekers in the borough.

2.9 It is expected that the workplan will be completed by mid-March 2023 (see attached presentation by the Borough of Sanctuary Programme Manager, Appendix 2).

2.10 Alongside meeting key stakeholders and colleagues to inform the development of our workplan, the Programme Manager has continued to attend and contribute to key internal and external partnership meetings such as the Lewisham Migration Forum, the Modern Slavery & Human Trafficking Steering Group, and the working group overseeing support offered at Pentland House.

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3. Update on Safer Surgeries

- 3.1 A key part of the Lewisham Migration Forum's joint action plan is the Safer Surgeries initiative.
- 3.2 The Safer Surgeries Initiative was developed by Doctors of the World and aims to address the barriers faced by many migrants in accessing health care.
- 3.3 GP surgeries are encouraged to sign up to become Safe Surgeries. A Safe Surgery can be any GP practice which commits to taking steps to tackle the barriers faced migrants in accessing healthcare. At a minimum, this means declaring the practice a 'Safe Surgery' for everyone and ensuring that lack of ID or proof of address, immigration status or language are not barriers to patient registration.
- 3.4 A toolkit has been developed by Doctors of the World to help surgeries improve their practice. It lays out seven steps for practices to help ensure that everyone in their community can access the healthcare they're entitled to.
- 3.5 The Safer Surgeries initiative was introduced in Lewisham in early 2021. A letter informing practices about the scheme and encouraging them to sign up, was sent out to practices in February 2021. The letter was signed by Doctors of the World, Lewisham Council, the CCG and Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Forum (LRMN). This was accompanied by press releases and social media posts.
- 3.6 By May 2021, 20 surgeries had signed up to the scheme.
- 3.7 Following recruitment to the new Borough of Sanctuary Programme Manager post in January 2023, the scheme has been reviewed with the ICS lead for practices and the Migration Forum.
- 3.8 While 20 of the current 36 surgeries are still signed up to the scheme, anecdotal evidence from partner organisations and feedback from patients indicates that practices do not always follow through with best practice.
- 3.9 Possible reasons for this may include lack of information flow through to all practice staff, staff turnover, and lack of take-up of training opportunities provided.
- 3.10 In discussion with our health colleagues and Migration Forum partners, our actions to increase take-up of the scheme and embed Safe Surgeries in all practices are as follows:
- December 2022: LRMN and Doctors of the World delivered an online training session, attended by over 30 staff across Lewisham surgeries
 - 23rd February 2023: Borough of Sanctuary Programme Manager and Doctors of the World to have a stand at the borough-wide GP surgery training day. Safe Surgeries posters for patients and reception staff to be distributed to all delegates attending.
 - End of February 2023: Follow up email signposting all Safe Surgeries resources and training to be sent to all GP practices
 - April-June 2023: ICB Primary Care Commissioning Manager to visit all surgeries, check that Safe Surgeries posters are visible and remind staff on Safe Surgeries principles
- 3.11 It is hoped that the above plan will encourage take-up of the scheme by all surgeries and ensure monitoring of improvement.

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- 3.12 Further to visits by the commissioning manager, we will review progress with the Migration Forum.
- 3.13 We have recently applied to London Council for funding to engage sanctuary seekers in co-production of our ongoing strategy and action plan. If successful, we hope to involve a cross-section of sanctuary seekers in review and further improvement of Safer Surgeries.

4. Recommendations

- 4.1. It is recommended that the Committee review and comment on the update and our approach to the programme in the next year.

5. Policy Context

- 5.1. Lewisham's Corporate Strategy for 2022-26 sets out four key values, one of which is that we respect all people and communities. Our strategy states 'We have a proud history of actively working to tackle inequalities, both across the borough and within the Council, and we will continue to build on this in everything we do'.
- 5.2. Our priority, Open Lewisham, commits to celebrating Lewisham's diversity, ensuring that we are a representative and inclusive council and workforce. It also specifically commits to maintaining our status as a Borough of Sanctuary and London's leading borough for refugee resettlement.
- 5.3. Our Borough of Sanctuary strategy commits to working across our services to take practical steps wherever we can to mitigate disadvantages related to being a refugee, asylum seeker or migrant.
- 5.4. A key aim of the strategy is to ensure that all services are able to demonstrate consideration of the needs of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, and that reasonable adjustments have been made to accommodate them where necessary.
- 5.5. We have committed to doing this by ensuring services are accessible to refugees and migrants. We will ensure:
- staff know how to access our interpretation services
 - Our language is clear and universal
 - Remove requirements which inadvertently disadvantage certain groups
 - Promote our services to those seeking sanctuary

6. Equalities implications

- 6.1. The Safer Surgeries Programme directly relates to health inequalities faced by refugees and asylum seekers and steps to address this inequality.

7. Crime and disorder implications

- 7.1. There are no direct crime and disorder implications from this programme of work.

8. Health and wellbeing implications

- 8.1. The Programme addressed in this report directly impacts on the health and well-being of refugees and asylum seekers..

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9. Report author(s) and contact

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10. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Lewisham Borough of Sanctuary Strategy 2020-25

Appendix 2 - Borough of Sanctuary Presentation February 2023 – Ekaterina Griffin, Borough of Sanctuary Programme Manager

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