



Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee

Update on Borough of Sanctuary Programme

Date: 1 March 2024

Key decision: No.

Class: Part 1

Ward(s) affected: all

Contributors: Katya Griffin, Borough of Sanctuary Programme Manager; James Lee, Director of Communities, Partnerships and Leisure

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.

Timeline of engagement and decision-making

- Lewisham was awarded the Borough of Sanctuary status in May 2021.
- Application to retain the status was submitted to City of Sanctuary charity (the awarding body) in October 2023.
- Pre-assessment meeting between City of Sanctuary and Lewisham voluntary sector organisations and sanctuary seekers living in the borough took place in January 2024 and feedback was very positive.
- Assessment panel is due to take place on 25 March 2024.

1. Summary

- 1.1. Lewisham is UK's first Borough of Sanctuary and currently in the process of reapplying for its sanctuary status. Our key achievements to date include:
- Resettled 127 refugee households and welcomed 650 Ukrainian nationals
 - Invested in immigration advice for those with insecure status
 - All Lewisham GP surgeries signed up to the Safe Surgery scheme
 - Set up employability programmes for refugees
 - Made sure sanctuary seekers had a say in our priorities
 - Set up a system of support for people seeking asylum and newly recognised refugees
 - Set up the cross-departmental Borough of Sanctuary Strategy group

2. Recommendations

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

3. Policy Context

- 3.1. 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'.
- 3.2. 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.
- 3.3. 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.
- 3.4. 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.
- 3.5. 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

4. Background

- 4.1. Lewisham Council was awarded Council of Sanctuary status in May 2021, the first time a Council was awarded this status.
- 4.2. We developed a Borough of Sanctuary Strategy for 2020-25, approved by Mayor and

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Cabinet on 11th November 2020 (see attached Appendix 1), and appointed a Sanctuary Officer in 2020 to oversee the implementation of the strategy.

- 4.3. 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.
- 4.4. 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.
- 4.5. The Forum is a partnership and has a shared action plan, with different partners contributing to and/or leading on relevant actions as.

5. Borough of Sanctuary: Strategic Priorities

- 5.1. The following strategic priorities have been identified for our Borough of Sanctuary work: making sure the voice of sanctuary seekers is heard; working with local, regional and national partnerships and embedding a culture of welcome within the council and borough-wide.
- 5.2. Sanctuary seeker voice: Having secured a GLA grant, we have worked with a diverse group of sanctuary seekers on a co-production project. The group has reviewed our sanctuary priorities and has been working with the council teams on the three projects of their choice: employment-related networking events, after school activities for children and young people and internships for sanctuary seekers.
- 5.3. Partnership working: We have been playing a key role within local partnerships, such as the Lewisham Migration Forum and Refugee and Asylum multi-agency safeguarding partnership, which has been instrumental in advocating for vulnerable residents. We are a member of the City of Sanctuary Local Authority network steering group and an active member of the London Councils asylum working group. These networks allow us to share good practice and avoid silo working.
- 5.4. Embedding the culture of welcome: We have worked hard to ensure greater joined up working within the Council through the Borough of Sanctuary Strategy group, a group of high level stakeholders across the council. We have increased local capacity in the voluntary sector through a number of grants, such as the grant for wrap-around asylum support and mental health and wellbeing intervention. We are working to increase awareness of sanctuary issues in the borough through a resident campaign and Refugee Week celebrations e.g. Refugee Week picnic in 2023. We have developed a Borough of Sanctuary branding (please see Appendices 2 and 4), MS Teams background and promotional materials that have proven very popular with Lewisham staff and residents.
- 5.5. The following sections show how sanctuary is embedded across key areas. For a more detailed account our work please see Appendix 2.

6. Health and Wellbeing

- 6.1. All Lewisham GP surgeries have signed up to the Safe Surgeries scheme. We continue to work with our voluntary partners and the SE London ICS to support surgeries in upholding Safe Surgeries values through training, presentations at GP events and the ISC commissioning manager visits.
- 6.2. Enhanced primary care support has been provided to people in asylum contingency accommodation, including specially commissioned GP practices and vaccination outreach.
- 6.3. Wellbeing support is offered to resettled refugees which includes 1:1 and group

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therapy. This provision is soon to be expanded to people seeking asylum and those on Homes for Ukraine.

7. Housing and Homelessness

- 7.1. We have commissioned move-on support and housing advice for people leaving the asylum system.
- 7.2. Council and voluntary sector partners are working on a joined-up approach to support single people who receive refugee status, e.g. signposting to hosting schemes; making some spaces available in female only hostels for single women; system of emergency payments to prevent destitution .
- 7.3. Clear escalation route in the Housing team is established and shared with voluntary sector partners to make sure people at risk of homelessness are provided with emergency housing.

8. Children's Social Care

- 8.1. Clear pathway for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) immigration status, housing, ESOL and integration support has been established. Our service received positive feedback from Ofsted.
- 8.2. A more joined up approach between Children's Social care team and the housing team resulted in better outcomes for families.

9. Education, Culture and Leisure

- 9.1. Lewisham Migration Forum Schools of Sanctuary working group has been set up and has begun scoping the support Lewisham schools need to support students from sanctuary seeking backgrounds.
- 9.2. Our Integrated SEND services have a 'new to the UK' protocol in place for the learners with SEND and to facilitate their assessment placements in special schools.
- 9.3. Free laptops for all secondary-aged young people in asylum contingency accommodation, financed through a local charity and coordinated by the Council.
- 9.4. Free leisure centre memberships at any of GLL (operating as Better) managed leisure centres for anyone that has been granted refugee status in the last 12 months.

10. Employment

- 10.1. A specialist employment training programme for sanctuary seekers was commissioned by Lewisham Works.
- 10.2. Based on the feedback from sanctuary seekers, a new internships programme is currently being set up by the Council in partnership with DWP.
- 10.3. The Borough of Sanctuary co-production group has been working with the Council apprenticeships and job fairs teams to make sure they meet the needs of sanctuary seekers.

11. Campaigning for Sanctuary

- 11.1. Being a Borough of Sanctuary means campaigning on national policy issues relating to migrant justice. In 2023 we campaigned on the following issues:
- 11.2. Lewisham Children's and Adult Safeguarding boards officially expressed concerns about safeguarding and lack of data sharing in a letter to the Home Office.
- 11.3. We opposed the government's 'maximisation' policy on asylum accommodation in

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multi-agency meeting with the Home Office and Clearsprings.

- 11.4. Alongside 22 London Councils, we called for better conditions in asylum accommodation by signing an open letter to the Home Office.

12. Key Future Priorities

- 12.1. Further embed Borough of Sanctuary across all directorates. This includes continuing with the work of Borough of Sanctuary Strategy Group, online and face-to-face training on sanctuary across the council and including sanctuary work in our grant conditions.
- 12.2. Hold ourselves to account. This means reviewing our progress against the agreed outcomes through the Strategy group and with our local partners, with the particular focus on the service we provide to people seeking sanctuary.
- 12.3. Make sure people seeking sanctuary play a central role in our Borough of Sanctuary activity. This means building on the work of co-production project and developing an action plan for sanctuary seeker engagement.
- 12.4. Expand our wrap-around support to people seeking asylum. This will include a mental health and wellbeing intervention and clear pathways for people leaving the asylum system.
- 12.5. Continue to stand up for people seeking sanctuary through engagement with local and national networks.
- 12.6. Continue to engage with our residents through campaigns (e.g. lamppost banners) and events.
- 12.7. For a more detailed account of our plans, see Appendix 3.

13. Financial implications

- 13.1. All costs for activities relating to people seeking asylum and newly granted refugees are 100% financed through the Asylum Dispersal Grant funding received from the Home Office.
- 13.2. All costs for activities relating to resettled refugees and those on the Homes for Ukraine scheme are 100% financed through resettlement and Homes for Ukraine Grant received from the Home Office.

14. Legal implications

- 14.1. There are no legal implications arising from this area of work.

15. Equalities implications

- 15.1. The Borough of Sanctuary work directly relates to inequalities faced by refugees and asylum seekers and steps to address this inequality.

16. Climate change and environmental implications

- 16.1. There are no climate change and environmental implications arising from this area of work.

17. Crime and disorder implications

- 17.1. Move On support newly recognised refugees aims to prevent homelessness and destitution of this group and therefore make them less vulnerable to exploitation and modern slavery.

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18. Health and wellbeing implications

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

19. Social Value implications

- 19.1. The Programme addressed in this report relates to the following Social Value objectives:
- Employment, Skills and Economy (employability programmes for sanctuary seekers)
 - Training Lewisham's future (Schools of Sanctuary work)

20. Background papers

- 20.1. Appendix 1 Lewisham Borough of Sanctuary Strategy 2020-2025
- 20.2. Appendix 2 Lewisham Borough of Sanctuary application Oct 2023
- 20.3. Appendix 3 Lewisham Borough of Sanctuary Priorities and Outcomes framework
- 20.4. Appendix 4 Lewisham Borough of Sanctuary presentation for assessment panel March 2024
- 20.5. *Please include a list of papers, documents and reports that relate to the report's subject matter with hyperlinks if the documents are available on our website.*

21. Glossary

| Term | Definition |
|--|--|
| Sanctuary seeker/ person seeking sanctuary | A more inclusive term we use in Lewisham to talk about refugees, people seeking asylum and those with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) |
| Person on no recourse to public funds (NRPF) | Someone who doesn't have access to mainstream benefits because of their immigration status |
| Unaccompanied asylum seeking child (UASC) | Children who arrived in the UK to seek asylum without their families and are looked after by the local authority. |

22. Report author and contact

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