

Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee Review of equalities: Sanctuary Borough opportunities and challenges

- We want every resident to trust us and our services
- We want every officer to understand how their work is equalities work
- We want every decision to be grounded in insight from residents
- We want every pound spent to have the greatest impact possible
- We want every interaction with the Council to be empowering for residents

These equality aims also reflect the intention of all the work relating to sanctuary. Sanctuary is about safeguarding and promoting the welfare of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants much as the work of the council is safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all our residents.

This all links to our Public Sector Equality Duty to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination;
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't; and
- foster or encourage good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

The EAA approach has seven stages to take officers through the process of evaluating impacts, planning mitigation and contextualising the decision in the wider council landscape. For the Sanctuary Strategy the EAA process is summarised below and on the following slides:

1. Project or decision assessment is for

The sanctuary strategy, and the framework within it. The SSCSC and M&C input points were noted for clarity on decision making.

2. Protected characteristics or other equalities factors potentially impacted

All protected characteristics plus migration experience, language, household type, income and carer status were identified as relevant due to the intersectionality we know those seeking sanctuary have.

3. Evidence to support the analysis

The evidence section normally sees the data sources outlined and explanation of why particular data was chosen. For this EAA, this set out the lack of data available and as a proxy set out limited related information and qualitative or anecdotal findings.

4. Analysis

This section sees the analysis applied to the data sources identified in Step 3. Given the lack of data, the analysis here is tentative and related to the anecdotal evidence. It also uses the lack of evidence as evidence in itself.

5. Impact summary

The impact summary is limited in the same way as the analysis due to the absence of the thread which should run from Step 1 to Step 5 – it was positive, but with that caveat.

6. Mitigation

Mitigation here addresses the data failure rather than negative impacts of the proposed strategy – it notes the need to improve our evidence base. It also acknowledges the potential risk of unintended consequences related to perceived unfairness of a sanctuary agenda and proposes the equality focussed approach as mitigation.

7. Service user journey

This aims to contextualise any single analysis in the wider council's work. In this case, improvements for residents more widely are likely to be felt as a result of any sanctuary work and most if not all services will be impacted as this is a corporate priority.

- It is clear from the process that the data is key and it will often be difficult in a new work area, where there isn't a historic evidence base, to evidence against equality impacts. In this instance, the mitigation for this is to use what is available anecdotally, and to use the lack of data as evidence in itself.
- It is essential that where the data is lacking that this is acknowledged, and that it becomes part of the action arising from the EAA itself. It may be worth including a requirement to state clearly the confidence level of any impact conclusions, to contextualise those which are based on weaker data or supposition.
- Lack of data should not be a barrier to any consideration of equalities - where there isn't the best evidence available, it's still essential that the process is followed and that decision makers are made aware of any limitations.
- Sanctuary also presents additional challenges i.e. the particular implications of disclosing immigration status, mistrust of government from conflict contexts which may make obtaining data more difficult.

- It is clear that there is huge value in this approach for thematic issues, and the inclusion of additional types of marginalisation beyond the protected characteristics can add value and unlock new perspectives.
- Work on sanctuary raises the profile of parts of the community which had previously been less visible and encourages more active consideration of the needs of these individuals.
- Sanctuary is about equality and raises the profile of equalities work, offering new perspectives and improved understanding of intersectionality, while wider equalities work provides opportunities to improve the experiences of those seeking sanctuary along with other marginalised groups – to this end the approach has been equalities focussed and will be embedded through existing corporate and equalities mechanisms.
- An equality approach also grounds the sanctuary work in mitigation of marginalisation and celebration of diversity rather than promotion of one group of residents over any other.

- Services need to start collecting data that provides insights into refugees, asylum seekers and migrants where it is relevant to their work and decisions.
- As part of the framework in the strategy, all services will be developing action plans for their sanctuary commitment and will be supported by a central officer to build their understanding and hold them to account for delivery.
- Corporate mechanisms are being used to embed sanctuary across our work, with inclusion in service planning templates, monitoring sections in consultation, in equalities tools and templates and through reporting of the council's action plans into the Corporate Equalities Board and Executive Management Team.
- Any future decisions within services relating to those seeking sanctuary should have their own EAA (or equivalent evaluation of possible impacts dependent on scale) and the expectation will be that these will be based on more robust data, collected locally for the purposes of that service's delivery, which will improve the borough-wide picture.

Next steps

