

Report to Cabinet

13 September 2023

Subject:	Adoption of Sandwell Borough of Sanctuary Strategy
Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Housing and Built Environment Cllr Laura Rollins
Director:	Director of Housing Gillian Douglas
Key Decision:	Yes
Contact Officer:	Housing Policy and Strategy Lead Officer, Louis Bebb louis_bebb@sandwell.gov.uk Transformation Officer, Jennifer Collins Jennifer_Collins@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That approval be given to the Sandwell Borough of Sanctuary Strategy as set out in the Appendix.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Our vision is for Sandwell to be a borough of sanctuary that welcomes those fleeing violence and persecution in their own countries and protects the rights of all migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. A 'Borough of Sanctuary' is a borough which provides a welcoming place of safety for people who are asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants.
- 2.2 We recognise that the way in which individuals and families arriving in Sandwell are supported to settle and integrate is critical to enable them to feel welcome and part of the local community. This sees benefits for all of Sandwell's residents and communities across the borough.



- 2.3 This strategy sets out the Borough of Sanctuary Sandwell Network's and Sandwell Council's commitments to welcoming and integrating individuals and families who arrive in Sandwell. This strategy co-ordinates the approach of the council and other organisations, council-wide and borough-wide, delivering services to those arriving and settling in Sandwell.
- 2.4 The strategy is for five years with a review built in after the second year to ensure our approach continues to align with our vision and objectives and sets out how partners will support those arriving in Sandwell. This will enable services to develop within a strategic framework while allowing the strategy to be responsive to any changes and progress.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>The Best Start in Life for Children and Young People</p> <p>The strategy will enable partnership working to best support children and young people newly arriving in the borough, such as language learning for children and young people. Uniquely to Sandwell, Thimble Library in Smethwick was recognised nationally as the first Library of Sanctuary. There's also a tailored pathway of support is available to newly arriving children, young people, and families as part of Sandwell's Transition, Education and Partnership Service. As part of the Borough of Sanctuary Sandwell Partnership, we want to continue to build our local offer to those seeking sanctuary in Sandwell and tailor services and provision to best meet the needs of existing and newly emerging communities across the borough.</p>
	<p>People Live Well and Age Well</p> <p>We want to ensure that asylum seekers, refugees and migrants can access a range of well-coordinated and effective services, including those that support health and wellbeing. In addition, we want to improve the social and mental wellbeing of individuals and families arriving in Sandwell through reducing social isolation.</p>
	<p>Strong Resilient Communities</p> <p>Sandwell has a diverse population made up of differing ethnicities, cultures, languages and religions. The document recognises Sandwell's responsibility to invest in the Borough of Sanctuary in order to build strong relationships between</p>



	local community groups and promoting safe and welcoming communities that are cohesive.
	Quality Homes in Thriving Neighbourhoods The Borough of Sanctuary Strategy links directly to this priority in the Corporate Plan and will provide a framework for offering a safe place for asylum-seekers and refugees to live, while recognising our leadership role in promoting integration and community cohesion.
	A Strong and Inclusive Economy Refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants bring skills, qualifications and prior experience from their countries of origin and we want to support access to education, earning and employment while recognising the legal restrictions that asylum-seekers face in being allowed entry to the labour market. We want to ensure we can bring newly-arrived individuals into the workforce and provide opportunities for language learning and transfer of skills.

4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The strategy has been developed between the Council and Sandwell's local Borough of Sanctuary network. The network is made up of local organisations (particularly the voluntary and community sector and public sector organisations), council officers, residents and councillors who support individuals and families arriving in the borough. Developing the strategy is a required step in the application process to become a recognised Council of Sanctuary.
- 4.2 Although not a statutory document, it is nevertheless a key strategy in articulating what actions we will take to continue working to ensure Sandwell is a welcoming borough for all. The strategy will interlink with the council's equality, diversity, and inclusion priorities and feed into the Sandwell New Arrivals Partnership. An action plan will be developed to sit beneath the strategy, with actions relating to key themes that relate to Sandwell' six strategy objectives.



- 4.3 As part of developing the strategy, we have engaged with officers across the council that are delivering relevant services such as Housing Solutions, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, Public Health, Adult Social Care, Community Safety, Libraries, Childrens, Education, Employment & Skills and Community Partnerships. An internal working group has been set up which receives updates and continues to input into the strategy.
- 4.4 The local Borough of Sanctuary network was established in 2020 (<https://sandwell.cityofsanctuary.org/>) and is a network of organisations, groups and individuals pledging to build a culture of welcome across the borough as part of the national City of Sanctuary network. The network leads have been engaged throughout the process and were involved in the decision to create a partnership strategy. Through the local network, we have engaged with individuals with lived experience of seeking sanctuary in the borough and will continue to build upon this throughout the delivery of the strategy.
- 4.5 We have also engaged with City of Wolverhampton Council, Liverpool City Council, Lambeth Council and Newcastle City Council to discuss their experiences in creating and implementing Council of Sanctuary strategies and what some of the challenges and lessons that have been learnt during and after this project. This has produced some really informative feedback through collaboration with other local authorities.

Borough of Sanctuary - Partnership Strategy Workshop

- 4.6 In April 2023, the partnership undertook a consultation exercise with over 40 attendees to understand what a 'welcoming Sandwell' looks like and to establish the approach we need to take to become a borough of sanctuary for all. The consultation workshop included representation from local and national groups, residents, the council, and people with lived experience of seeking sanctuary in Sandwell to understand what issues meant the most to them.
- 4.7 During the workshop we aimed to gather thoughts and feedback on the proposed content of the Partnership Sanctuary Strategy and work together to build on suggested actions for the Council and local network organisations that will form the action plan that sits within the strategy. The consultation highlighted a need to further explore issues related to accessing healthcare, housing conditions, and communication with services and local authorities, as well as access to ESOL classes.



4.8 Summary of workshop feedback:

- Overall, support across the strategy document and action plan was relatively high, with a large proportion of the respondents either tending to agree or strongly agreeing with the strategy's overarching objectives. Please note we are still in the process of documenting all the feedback from the workshop session.
- A large cohort of attendees were from organisations operating in either Smethwick, West Bromwich, Wednesbury or Oldbury – there were no attendees from Rowley Regis or Tipton. Therefore, we intend to run additional workshops to involve partner organisations from these towns.
- Partners felt asylum resettlement across wards in Sandwell needs to be more even, as there is currently a high concentration in particular areas, such as Smethwick and St. Pauls, but less so in areas such as Newton and Blackheath. It is important to acknowledge the different identities and needs of the 6 towns in the strategy's overarching vision and also to recognise where the current infrastructure is that supports asylum-seekers and refugees including key voluntary sector groups and faith based organisations.
- Within the narrative in the strategy about Sandwell's history of resettlement and inward migration, partners felt we need to ensure we acknowledge that international migration has helped to shape Sandwell's population, communities and identity for decades.
- Partners felt anything proposed needs to be actionable and realistic.
- The Borough of Sanctuary Strategy should include more content that celebrates the partnership work that goes on in the area.
- Partners wanted Sandwell Council to play a greater role in national campaigns around migration and resettlement and the rights of asylum-seekers and refugees.

4.9 **The following joint objectives have been developed and agreed by Sandwell Council and the Borough of Sanctuary Sandwell Network:**

- The partnership will work together as a network to make Sandwell a Borough of Sanctuary. We will strive to build a welcoming place for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, whilst also promoting integration and community cohesion.
- The partnership will promote a culture of inclusion between Sandwell residents and support a mutual understanding in which longer-



standing communities feel able to understand and welcome migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

- The partnership will enhance opportunities for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers to utilise and develop their skills, to access opportunities to support themselves and their families which contributes to the social and economic wellbeing of the borough.
- The partnership will advocate the engagement of those seeking sanctuary in decision making processes at all levels and in all activities.
- The partnership will stand together against modern slavery and are committed to preventing slavery and human trafficking activities across the Borough.

4.10 Consultation

A 6 week consultation period took place from Tuesday 20 June until Tuesday 1 August. An online public consultation was published on the Citizen Space platform. Alongside this, a collective response from individuals with lived experience of migrating to and seeking sanctuary in Sandwell was received from service users of Brushstrokes.

The Community Partnerships Team supported the consultation to increase the number of residents and community groups we heard from by promoting the consultation across their networks, providing paper copies where required and supporting individuals to complete the consultation online. The aim of the consultation was to include as many different voices and points of view as possible.

4.11 The consultation was promoted and shared with community groups and residents by:

- Presented to and shared across the Sandwell New Arrivals Partnership
- Newsletters shared to the Sandwell Borough of Sanctuary partners
- Shared via housing forums and networks such as the Homelessness Forum, the West Midlands Housing Officer Group, and the Housing Partnership Forum
- Shared via wider networks that the council are engaged with such as the Health and Wellbeing Board, Faith Leaders Group, Community Safety Network, and the Sandwell Advice Providers Network
- Shared across an internal cross-directorate officer working group for officers to distribute across their networks and with the staff Equalities Diversity and Inclusion Networks
- Shared via internal communications- newsletters, Members updates



- Leaflets and posters distributed to Libraries, OCH Reception, West Bromwich Town Hall, to community groups via the Community Partnerships Team and to tenants at our first Tenant Conference
- Communications shared via social media and via Gov Directory mailing list
- Shared by wider organisations across their online platforms and networks (e.g. SCVO, Sandwell Churches Link)

4.12 In total, we received a total of **119** responses to the Sandwell Borough of Sanctuary Strategy public consultation (online and through both workshops and focus group events).

In addition, responses were also received from elected members when the strategy was presented to the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny (SNAC) Board on 11th July 2023.

4.13 Consultation Findings

In various feedback formats, quantitative and qualitative data has been gathered to help shape and inform the Sandwell Borough of Sanctuary Strategy. The below provides a summary of the consultation feedback – however, if the reader would like a more detailed breakdown of the consultation findings and each individual question, they can read the accompanying 22-page Sandwell Borough of Sanctuary Strategy Consultation Report (Appendix Two):

- The public consultation contained 10 multiple choice questions – 2 relating to how welcoming Sandwell is, 3 relating to both the document’s overall vision and strategic aims, and 5 questions in response to the main priorities set out for the Borough of Sanctuary partnership.
- Each question asked the respondent whether they agreed with a particular theme in the Borough of Sanctuary Strategy, with options of ‘strongly agree’, ‘somewhat agree’, ‘neither agree nor disagree’, ‘somewhat disagree’ and ‘strongly disagree’.
- Support across all questions was fairly high, with respondents either tending to agree or strongly agree with the priorities of the partnership. The average agreement was 63%, demonstrating a reasonable level of support for the Sandwell Borough of Sanctuary Strategy overall.
- Across all priorities for the partnership, the most well received amongst respondents was *‘the partnership will enhance opportunities for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers to utilise and develop their skills, to access opportunities to support themselves and their families*



which contributes to the social and economic wellbeing of the borough', which generated a 65% agreeance overall.

- The response with the lowest level of support was when respondents were asked if they thought Sandwell is a welcoming place for those resettling.

Within the public consultation, respondents were given the opportunity at the end of every priority, and for the strategy as a whole, to feedback anything they felt was missing or any point they particularly wanted to emphasise. This produced a range of responses, with a number of key words and phrases emerging repeatedly.

The top 5 phrases were:

- 1. Community** – respondents stressed the importance of ensuring there are opportunities for migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers to integrate within their local communities.
- 2. Support/Services** – respondents emphasised that there needs to be a provision of adequate resources to ensure Sandwell is able to support migrants, refugees and asylum seekers across all areas of the Borough.
- 3. Language** – concerns were raised regarding the language barriers those resettling face in accessing services across Sandwell.
- 4. Housing** – many respondents were supportive of housing as a means of ensuring those resettling are able to do so safely.
- 5. Work/Employment** – respondents wished to see individuals resettling engaging in employment and volunteering opportunities that utilise their experience, qualifications, and transferrable skills.

4.14 Detailed contributions and amendments:

The consultation also highlighted a number of additional suggestions which have been considered and adopted in the final version of the Sandwell Borough of Sanctuary Strategy.

Actions taken in response to consultation feedback:

Response Received	Action Taken
Victims of violence, exploitation and modern slavery and our offer to them as a partnership needs to be included within the strategy.	Included an additional objective for the partnership in relation to modern slavery. Also, we have now expanded our definitions section (Appendix 1) in



	order to include Modern Slavery and Trafficking victims, setting out the scope for who the strategic document and who it is aimed at.
Acknowledgement of Windrush Generation needs to be included into this strategic document.	Included an additional section in the strategy to acknowledge the Windrush Generation in Sandwell.
Strategy needs to acknowledge that there are pockets in Sandwell where new arrivals aren't made to feel part of the community.	Further information added into Appendix 2 to accompany the resettlement map in order to show how Sandwell Council will help to ensure a holistic approach is adopted so that all those resettling can integrate into their community, no matter what part of the Borough they live in.
All resettling individuals must be part of the political decision-making process to truly reflect our community needs and the problems they face.	Under the objectives for the partnership on page 11, we have added that 'The partnership will challenge and question policy changes at a local, regional, and national level that support the rights and needs of asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants. We will assist and educate those seeking sanctuary as to what rights and entitlements they do have'.
Language support must be integrated into the strategic aims of this document.	In our strategic objectives (p.13), we have added a strategic commitment of providing language learning for adults (ESOL) and committing to this. We have also added a strategic commitment of providing language learning for children and young people.
I think accessibility is the key challenge. Transport is expensive for people resettling in Sandwell.	We have added the following onto our strategic outcomes 'We will work to ensure there is a cohesive transport model across the six towns that helps to promote social connectedness.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Social connectedness and accessibility to services -Access to and affordability of public transport -Clear information about public transport and how to get around the borough -Signposting to wider support services and community activities’.
The strategy should acknowledge that systems are complex. Even with language support it is difficult to explain and navigate the systems for schools, housing and other council services.	Under the objectives for the partnership on page 13, we will add ‘We will enable individuals and families to settle in Sandwell by sharing information and signposting to wider support services and community activities’.
Greater emphasis needed on community cohesion within the strategic objectives of the document.	<p>In our strategic objectives (p.13), we have added in that ‘we will work with communities to build relationships, support each other, and celebrate communities and culture.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Building welcoming communities -Taking part in community activities -Create more opportunities for community enterprise -Sharing and celebrating communities and cultures’.
Housing support needs to be mentioned within the strategy.	<p>We have expanded on our commitment where ‘We will take a holistic approach and support individuals throughout their housing journey’. Adding...’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Wrap around support for transition from temporary accommodation -Support individuals and families to feel safe and at home -Provision of affordable and quality homes -Provision of move-on accommodation’.



In addition, recommendations were also received from elected members when the strategy was presented to the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny (SNAC) Board on 11th July 2023.

Recommendation	Action Taken
That the Director of Housing considers the feasibility of embedding ESOL tuition for asylum seekers and refugees into the Borough of Sanctuary Sandwell Strategy.	An action planning workshop is taking place with partners to look at how this can be incorporated in the partnership's action plan that will sit beneath the strategy
That the Director of Housing considers the inclusion of the educational needs of asylum seekers and refugees under eighteen years old within the Borough of Sanctuary Sandwell Strategy including SEND, transport and language needs.	An action planning workshop is taking place with partners to look at how this can be incorporated in the partnership's action plan that will sit beneath the strategy
That the Director of Housing explores the cascading of consultations via town based community teams to increase response rates and to all Members.	There has been good cross-borough engagement in the consultation, but we do recognise that we need to support asylum-seekers, migrants and refugees across the whole borough, including in neighbourhoods where people have been less likely to settle.
That the Borough of Sanctuary Sandwell Strategy is publicised as part of the Windrush and 50 years of Sandwell celebrations.	Currently working with Sandwell's Communications team on how we can publish and promote this strategic document once it is finalised.



That the Director of Housing explores the inclusion of female health care, including access to sexual health and period products within the Borough of Sanctuary Sandwell Strategy.	An action planning workshop is taking place with partners to look at how this can be incorporated in the partnership's action plan that will sit beneath the strategy.
That training is provided to Members to increase awareness and better inform decision making in relation to the Borough of Sanctuary Sandwell Strategy.	This will be addressed at the All Member Briefing once the strategy has been finalised.
That the Director of Housing explores the adoption of a holistic approach when progressing the Borough of Sanctuary Sandwell Strategy.	Agreed.

5 Alternative Options

5.1 Not available.

6 Implications

Resources:	Delivery of the strategy will be through existing resources where possible. Council-wide resources may also need to be identified to deliver the strategy.
Legal and Governance:	Whilst there is not a legal framework for migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers have "specific needs and rights which are protected by a particular legal framework". The Sandwell Sanctuary Strategy Action Plan will provide oversight ensuring the local authority and stakeholders support this legislation, in addition to monitoring of the delivery of actions against the key objectives. Unless there are major legislative changes or significant service changes this strategy will be reviewed every five years.
Risk:	Many migrants, refugees and asylum seekers come from minority ethnic groups (and refugees and asylum seekers



	<p>may have fled persecution in their homeland because of their race). People from minority ethnic groups can be at particular risk of discrimination and persecution.</p> <p>Because migration and resettlement is such a contentious issue both in local and national government, there is the potential risk of some political backlash from residents. In more extreme cases, we may also need to consider hostile behaviour from local far-right political groups.</p>
<p>Equality:</p>	<p>The strategy will interlink with the council's equality, diversity, and inclusion priorities.</p> <p>Race- The strategy aims to make Sandwell a more welcoming place for all ethnic minority groups, including newly arrived and well-established communities.</p> <p>Religion/ belief- The strategy will link into the work Public Health are carrying out with Sandwell's Faith Network. The local Borough of Sanctuary Network works closely with faith groups and communities across the borough, which will feed into developing the strategy.</p> <p>Age- A strategic approach is necessary to meet the housing needs of Sandwell's growing younger population, whilst also considering Sandwell's older population too. The action plan will include actions that benefit individuals and families of all ages arriving in Sandwell. There are actions that relate to each of Sandwell's six strategic objectives, that focus on the Best Start in Life for Children and Young People and actions that relate to people of working age for instance.</p>
<p>Health and Wellbeing:</p>	<p>The proportion of those in poor health in Sandwell is significantly higher than the national average. With the significant health issues in the borough, we know the strategy can play a key role in ensuring individuals and families access to the support and services they need to improve their quality of life.</p> <p>Indirectly, the benefits of positive partnership working will contribute to improving levels of social isolation seen throughout communities and encourage social integration between newly arrived and existing communities.</p>



Social Value:	A large part of social value in this strategy is about creating communities in which people feel safe and welcome. The strategy aims to enhance and build upon existing community cohesion and inclusivity. Working in partnership with the local Borough of Sanctuary Network will improve service delivery and increase the reach and accessibility of services. Engaging with local community groups and individuals with lived experience throughout the process has generated social value through empowering the community and building positive working relationships.
Climate Change:	Not applicable.
Corporate Parenting:	Promoting the integration of possible unaccompanied asylum seekers and young refugees.

7 Appendices

- Appendix One: Sandwell Borough of Sanctuary Strategy
- Appendix Two: Consultation Report – Sandwell Borough of Sanctuary

8 Background Papers

- City of Sanctuary Local Authority Network
<https://la.cityofsanctuary.org/>
- Council of Sanctuary Award Procedure and Criteria
<https://cdn.cityofsanctuary.org/uploads/sites/166/2021/08/Council-of-Sanctuary-Award-Minimum-Criteria.pdf>
- National Census 2021 England and Wales
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E08000028/>
- Migrant Health in the West Midlands, Public Health England
https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/7890/phe_migrant_health_in_the_west_midlands_february_2017.pdf
- Migration Statistics Briefing, West Midlands Migrant Strategic Partnership
<https://www.wmsmp.org.uk/data/>
- Politics, Governance and the Shaping of Smethwick Since 1945
<https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/6890/>
- Social and Public Service Impacts of International Migration at the Local Level



https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/210324/horr72.pdf

