


## LONDON BOROUGH OF WALTHAM FOREST

Meeting / Date	<b>Cabinet</b> <b>7<sup>th</sup> December 2023</b>	
Report Title	<b>Borough of Sanctuary Framework</b>	
Cabinet Portfolio	Councillor Vicky Ashworth, Portfolio Lead Member for Jobs, Social Inclusion and Equalities	
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Wards affected	All	
Public Access	Open	
Appendices	Appendix 1: Borough of Sanctuary framework full draft Appendix 2 – Equalities Screener	

### 1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 In December 2022, full council passed a motion committing to work towards becoming a Borough of Sanctuary (BoS), where migrants and people seeking sanctuary are valued and empowered to thrive.
- 1.2 Alongside community, health and local authority partners, we have now developed a draft Borough of Sanctuary framework outlining our achievements, ambitions and priorities for a 3-year period. The key aim of the programme is to tackle the inequalities and remove barriers that some of our most underrepresented communities face, with a specific focus on ensuring that the key principles of the BoS framework are embedded within all Council services and strategies.

### 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Cabinet is recommended to endorse the policy framework and principles of a Borough of Sanctuary Framework in Appendix 1.

### 3 PROPOSALS

- 3.1 Waltham Forest has a long history as a welcoming place for people wanting to make the borough its home. In December 2022, full council passed a motion committing to become a Borough of Sanctuary, where migrants and people seeking sanctuary are valued and empowered to thrive, build lives, and have the agency to make choices for themselves and their families.
- 3.2 The Waltham Forest Borough of Sanctuary Steering Group was formed in 2023 to bring together organisations active in providing support. Alongside the voices of people with lived experience of seeking sanctuary, over the last year, the group has worked together to shape our approach and will have a key role in overseeing its implementation. The group is co-led by a VCS representative. Bi-monthly meetings are chaired by Cllr Williams.
- 3.3 A range of Council, statutory and VCS initiatives already provide a strong foundation for our ambitions. These include:
  - 3.3.1 Resettlement Schemes: Comprehensive support to new residents arriving in the borough through resettlement schemes from Afghanistan, Ukraine, Hong Kong or the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS).
  - 3.3.2 Contingency Hotels: The Early Help and Resettlement teams provide wraparound in-person support to over 400 people in contingency hotels. They have been taking an active role to mitigate emergency safeguarding concerns and hold Home Office providers to account.
  - 3.3.3 Migrant Advice SPOC and Communities Team: Over 1,000 residents advised every year with initial education needs assessment followed by referrals into ESOL, adult education providers, volunteering opportunities and social integration activities.
  - 3.3.4 Education: Collaborative approaches to place all students in hotel accommodation. Registered Schools of Sanctuary supporting other schools. 16+ providers voluntarily expanding pro-bono provision for students without eligibility.
  - 3.3.5 Health: Local GP Federation has delivered training for local practices in sanctuary-informed care. Work to oversee registration of all new arrival into hotel accommodation.
  - 3.3.6 Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking Children: Commitment to find suitable accommodation, designated social worker and additional education help through the Virtual School.
  - 3.3.7 VCS commissioning and collaboration: Specialist organisations such as Waltham Forest Migrant Action support centre and Stories & Supper.

Citizens UK amplifying voices project aims to empower residents in hotel accommodation. Creating volunteering pathways and celebrating cultures of migration with the wider VCS.

- 3.3. The draft strategy framework has been co-designed with the steering group. The full document is included as Appendix 1 one in this report.
- 3.4. The framework contains six key strands to shape our work over the next 3 years. These are:
  - Education and Skills
  - Health
  - Building Communities
  - Voice
  - Shaping Services
  - Bespoke Support
- 3.5. Each strand contains a set of actions, forming an action plan included in Appendix 1. The public-facing action plan will be accompanied by an internal delivery plan to monitor and oversee progress via the steering group. Progress updates will also be provided at the Communities Scrutiny Committee.
- 3.6. The application to receive Borough of Sanctuary Status was submitted in early November.
- 3.7. Key BoS outcomes include:
  - 3.7.1. Local organisations becoming Schools, Colleges, Universities, Libraries and Community Groups of Sanctuary, thus ensuring that the ethos of welcome and support for sanctuary seekers is embedded across the borough.
  - 3.7.2. Assertively challenging media narratives and harnessing the power of council and partners comms channels to bust myths and promote the rights of sanctuary seekers.
  - 3.7.3. Working with health services to improve access and support for sanctuary seekers.

## **4 OPTIONS & ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

- 4.1 An alternative option would be to not formally pursue our commitments as a Borough of Sanctuary following the December 2022 motion. However, given our strong foundations, cross-party support for this work, and our commitment to tackling structural inequality in our borough, it was the appropriate course of action.

## **5 COUNCIL STRATEGIC PRIORITIES (AND OTHER NATIONAL OR LOCAL POLICIES OR STRATEGIES)**

- 5.1 The proposed Borough of Sanctuary framework serves as a crucial component in aligning with some of our Council strategic priorities, including the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy and Inclusive Growth Strategy, by addressing the systemic disparities and discriminatory practices encountered by underrepresented communities, especially migrants and individuals seeking sanctuary. This initiative inherently supports the Council's unwavering commitment to fostering a more inclusive and equitable environment within the borough.
- 5.2 The framework's emphasis on providing essential support services, including digital inclusion measures, directly reinforces the Council's Digital Inclusion Strategy, ensuring that all individuals, irrespective of their background, have equitable access to vital digital skills and resources.
- 5.3 By focusing on the key tenets outlined in the 'A Fairer and Healthier Waltham Forest: Equity and the Social Determinants of Health' report produced by Sir Professor Michael Marmot and the Institute for Health Equity (IHE), the Borough of Sanctuary framework actively engages with the specific challenges encountered by migrants and sanctuary seekers, working towards enhancing their overall well-being and social integration within the borough.

## **6 CONSULTATION**

- 6.1 The Waltham Forest Borough of Sanctuary Steering Group was formed in 2023 to bring together organisations active in providing support to people seeking sanctuary. Alongside the voices of people with lived experience of seeking sanctuary, over the last year, the group has worked together to shape our approach and will have a key role in overseeing its implementation. The group is jointly led by a community co-lead and a Council co-lead. Bimonthly meetings are chaired by the Leader of Waltham Forest Council. Cllr Ashworth, Lead Member for Jobs, Social Inclusion and Equalities, Cllr Gardiner, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, and Cllr Mitchell, Cabinet member for Adults, are also part of the steering group, who have co-designed the framework.
- 6.2 A wide range of council departments are involved in this steering group, including Communities, Early Help and Prevention, Public Health, Education, Housing, Customer Service, Adult Learning, Business and Skills.
- 6.3 External partners include NHS and ICB representatives, Doctors of the World, primary and secondary schools, local further education colleges, local food banks, faith-based organisations such as St Barnabas Church and the WF Council of Mosques, migrant-specific organisations such as Waltham Forest Migrant Action and Stories and Supper, as well as campaigning organisations such as Waltham Forest Save Our NHS.

- 6.4 Members from local VCS groups and other partners are part of the Steering Group to ensure that organisations supporting underrepresented communities, as well as smaller and grassroots groups, are represented and have a voice in the framework development and its delivery.

## **7 IMPLICATIONS**

### **7.1 Finance, Value for Money and Risk**

- 7.1.1 The Borough of Sanctuary framework has developed so that it can be implemented within the existing budgets available to relevant services. However, if in implementing the framework it is not sustainable within existing resources and officers find that additional expenditure is required, a report will be brought back to Cabinet to explain either:
- a) why the framework cannot be implemented fully; or
  - b) proposals to finance its implementation.

### **7.2 Legal**

- 7.2.1 No legal implications have been identified.
- 7.2.2 Potential legal implications on the broader work to support people seeking sanctuary will continue to be monitored.

### **7.3 Equalities and Diversity**

- 7.3.1 The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.
- 7.3.2 The overall aim of the framework is to tackle the challenges and systemic inequalities that underrepresented communities face. The programme seeks to address this across six priority areas which are Education and Skills, Health, Building Communities, Voice, and Shaping Services.
- 7.3.3 Equalities considerations have been and will continue to be a key focus for the Borough of Sanctuary Steering Group. People with lived experience of migration, including forced migration, are part of the steering group and play a key role in shaping the programme, including the framework and delivery.
- 7.3.4 The specific needs of looked after children of migrant background and of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) and care

experienced young people are an important focus of this framework across all its priority areas, which aims to ensure that every young person receives the same welcome treatment and support across the borough.

**7.4 Sustainability (including climate change, health, crime and disorder)**

7.4.1 A strand of the Borough of Sanctuary framework is dedicated to health equity. This is in response to the specific challenges facing migrants and people seeking sanctuary and will address issues identified in the Institute of Health Equity's report on health inequalities in Waltham Forest.

7.4.2 As part of our commitment to sustainability in light of the climate emergency, the Borough of Sanctuary partnership will encourage sustainable transport methods and active travel by clients and partner providers whenever possible.

**7.5 Council Infrastructure**

7.5.1 Resourcing of the programme is provided from existing resource across Strategy, Change & Communities and Early Help & Prevention.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION (as defined by Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985)**

N/A