WALTHAM FOREST BOROUGH OF

SANCTUARY FRAMEWORK 2023-26

Waltham Forest

FOREWORD BY CLLR GRACE WILLIAMS, LEADER OF WALTHAM FOREST COUNCIL

Innocent people, particularly women and children, are victims of violence and displacement worldwide. We are seeing concerning trends of hostility, and climate change. It is clear that sanctuary, a safe space and shelter, is needed now more than ever.

Here in Waltham Forest, we have a long history and rich culture of welcoming people and asylum seekers who have sought sanctuary in this country. The diversity of our borough is our strength and is testament to the vital role that immigration plays in the story and identity of Waltham Forest.

We all have a moral duty to ensure every child and adult has access to sanctuary.
Our communities firmly believe in the importance of welcoming newcomers to our area:
I am so proud of our community who are so generous and open to those in need of support; they continue to be beacons to those seeking sanctuary.

Like so many of us in London, my family came from elsewhere and made our home here.
My Great Grandfather was born in Jamaica and came to live in London in the 1910s, the generation before Windrush. We are so lucky to live in a borough which is welcoming, hospitable and generous.

As a Council, we take our statutory duties and responsibilities towards refugees, particularly children very seriously. Together, the council, our community voluntary sector and our public services are committed to doing all we can to provide safe shelter to those seeking sanctuary from violence and oppression. By becoming a Borough of Sanctuary, we want to underline what we have already done, and go further in our support for sanctuary seekers to ensure that everyone is welcomed into our borough, that services support people to build their lives here and that all are given every opportunity to thrive here.

Cllr Grace Williams,
Leader of Waltham Forest Council

FOREWORD BY GRACE, 18

Grace is originally from Eritrea. She arrived in Waltham Forest in 2021, after experiencing severe persecution on religious and military grounds, as being of a religious minority carries a prison sentence in her country. She sought sanctuary in the UK as an Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child (UASC). This is her story.

I didn't choose to come to Waltham Forest, but I am really glad this is where I was placed when I arrived in the UK. I have been here for two years now.

When I arrived, I felt safe and happy but also scared. It's hard to live without my mum but there is a lot of support for young people who are new arrivals. Developing social connections is so important when you are new to a country and you're on your own. Being involved with the Council's Voice of Influence service has made my life easier. This programme gives young people opportunities to have their voice heard and to shape decisions that affect them. As part of this, I've got to meet other people. We are like a family – we have cooked together, learnt together, played sports and taken trips, and we wouldn't have been able to afford these otherwise.

This is so important for young people who are new arrivals, as we have a lot of pain inside. But we can overcome this by spending time together. Whenever we have difficulties living in foster care, we talk to each other and find a solution. I was also part of a lot of other local initiatives, including the panel who met the borough's new Chief Executive.

I am very happy that I resettled in Waltham Forest, as I received a lot of support since my arrival, and I have built a lot of local community connections here. I think it is important that Waltham Forest becomes a Borough of Sanctuary.

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INTRODUCTION

Our vision for Waltham Forest as a Borough of Sanctuary is a welcoming place, where people new to the borough are valued and provided with support and advice in a way that works for them. They are able to thrive, rebuild lives, build new and join existing communities and have the agency to make choices for themselves and their families.

Waltham Forest has a proud history of welcoming refugees, sanctuary seekers and migrants, including those with insecure status. We are proud of the diversity within our borough and will continue to build a welcoming environment for people who want to make Waltham Forest their home.

Migration of all forms has enriched the culture of Waltham Forest, bringing energy and skills to create a stronger borough for us all. We know that our residents share pride in our diversity and multiculturalism. Local people have forcefully stood alongside migrants against efforts from far-right groups to promote anti-migrant, racist and divisive ideas. Most notably in 2012, when thousands of Waltham Forest residents fought off a far-right group seeking to intimidate the borough's Muslim population. This powerful stance by residents is echoed in the outstanding efforts of communities across the borough to build a welcoming environment to this day.

In December 2022, a motion was passed by the Council to join the City of Sanctuary network and apply to be recognised as an official Borough of Sanctuary. This marks a commitment to working with those with lived experience of migration and displacement, alongside local community, and statutory partners, to create a safe and supportive environment. People seeking sanctuary will have a meaningful voice in the design and the review of services we provide as we critically examine how they can best work for sanctuary seekers to achieve equal access in key areas such as healthcare, education, and employment.

Through this approach we aim to empower, support, and collaborate with organisations, individuals, and businesses to embed welcome and foster solidarity between existing communities, migrants and people seeking sanctuary. As well as acting ourselves, we will continue to speak up on issues affecting migrants and sanctuary seekers locally, nationally, and globally.

This framework is built on insights from teams across Council services, the expertise of partners in the statutory and voluntary and community sector and, most importantly, the voices of people with lived experience of seeking sanctuary, alongside many others. It sets out our ambition to build on and strengthen our work in the years ahead, welcoming all who arrive or settle in Waltham Forest.

Borough of Sanctuary Steering Group
The Waltham Forest Borough of Sanctuary Steering Group was formed in 2022 to bring together organisations active in providing support to people seeking sanctuary locally 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 the implementation of this framework. 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.

OUR SANCTUARY SEEKING POPULATION

A wide range of people come to Waltham Forest in search of sanctuary, support or a warm welcome. To ensure we are inclusive of the broad range of legal statuses, living circumstances and experience of migration held by these residents we choose to use the interchangeable terms 'people seeking sanctuary' and 'sanctuary seeker' throughout this framework. Where certain conditions, criteria or experiences only apply to subsections of this population we include specific reference to this in the pages below.

According to the latest Census (2021), **40% of Waltham Forest residents were born outside of the UK**. As of November 2023, this includes:

375
people seeking asylum, including 126 children, placed in contingency initial accommodation by central government (hotel sites).

76
people welcomed and supported through the UK Resettlement and Afghan resettlement schemes.

377
Ukrainian nationals in Waltham Forest supported via the Homes for Ukraine resettlement schemes.

49
unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking children supported through Council services.

3,500+
residents supported through the Migrant Advice Single Point of Contact (SPOC).

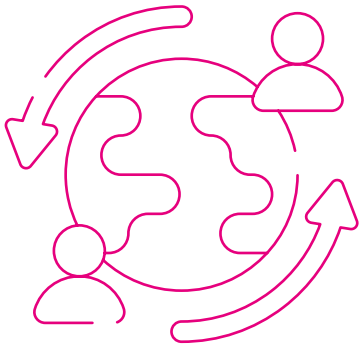
>3,000
learners benefit from free English language classes (ESOL) classes each year across a network of providers.

A huge number of residents supported through services run by the voluntary and community sector (VCS) locally.

An unknown number of migrants with insecure status who access both statutory and community services.

THE CHALLENGE

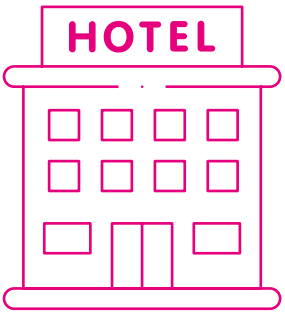
As well as the numerous barriers faced by sanctuary seekers themselves to rebuild their lives in Waltham Forest, the work to embed our commitment as a Borough of Sanctuary takes place in a challenging environment exacerbated by global, national, and localised pressures.



Global migration and national policy

Increasing global instability due to extreme weather events, conflict, and the severe social outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic, have contributed to driving levels of migration in recent years. At a national level, immigration policy directives such as the hostile environment directly affect the resources and level of support available to different groups. This effectively creates a patchwork of entitlements leading to challenges of equity for all migrants and people seeking sanctuary.

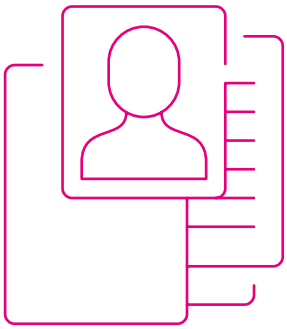
Furthermore, increasing delays to asylum claim processing time has significantly worsened residents' mental health and social outcomes whilst many are effectively left in limbo. Additionally, people seeking sanctuary are held back by the absence of the right to work which counterproductively limits the positive contribution they can make to their communities and ability to support themselves.



Use of hotels as contingency initial accommodation

In recent years, hotels have been regularly used as initial accommodation for people seeking sanctuary. Locally, since 2022, two sites within Waltham Forest have been operating for this purpose. These sites were set up rapidly, with inadequate opportunity for input or engagement from support services locally such as education and health. The use of hotel accommodation is wholly inappropriate for anything other than very short-term accommodation.

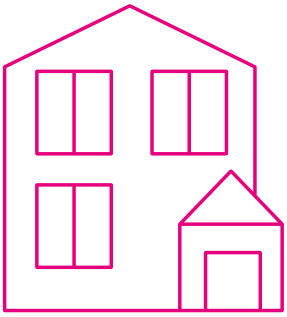
The hotel environment has exacerbated concern relating to residents' mental health, personal safety, safeguarding, educational attainment and practical needs. These sites are managed through government sub-contractor networks featuring low levels of accountability. This has led to the Council and our Borough of Sanctuary partners stepping in to provide support and campaign for minimum standards.



Outsourced and dispersed asylum accommodation and support

Local authorities are provided with very little information about people seeking sanctuary accommodated in dispersed accommodation within their area who may be in desperate need of support. Since 2012, responsibility for providing dispersed accommodation has been outsourced by government to private contractors.

This situation severely limits the ability to offer support to these new residents, influence accommodation standards, and to link them to early preventative services as part of the Council's statutory duties. This often means that residents are only able to interact with support services at the point of crisis.

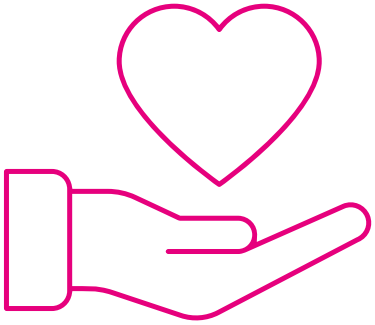


Housing demand and homelessness

Housing affordability, availability and suitability remain core challenges in practically all communities across the UK and are felt particularly acutely within London.

Many people in receipt of asylum support locally are accommodated in Home Office procured accommodation. However, once granted refugee status, they lose entitlement to this accommodation and associated financial support after 7 days. In accordance with statutory homelessness duties, the Council is frequently required to rapidly respond within this period.

More recently, efforts at the national level to streamline processing times for claimants from certain countries has resulted in many people receiving refugee status at the same time. As well as the stresses this adds to housing services locally, the 7-day cliff edge places a huge stress factor onto the lives of people whose right to protection has just been formally acknowledged often before they have been given the right to access paid employment.



Health

People seeking sanctuary experience a range of structural health inequalities when compared to the general population.

Secondly, although all refugees and asylum seekers are fully entitled to free NHS care, in practice they face barriers to registration due to lack of recognised ID documents, navigating bureaucracy and health information comprehension due to developing English language ability.

Thirdly, a scarcity of specialist and culturally sensitive services such as mental health support causes excessive wait times to access care which can lead to crisis. Furthermore, the healthcare implications of the hostile environment in local settings including the current NHS charging system severely limit the accessibility of care for vulnerable migrants and embed a wider hesitancy for these groups to access formal healthcare.

Destitution and No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)

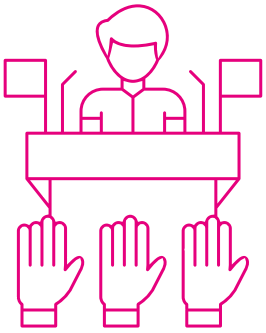
No recourse to public funds (NRPF) is an immigration condition attached to the immigration status of many people in the UK. The NRPF condition can affect eligibility for core safety net support such as most benefits, including universal credit, and homelessness assistance. In the case of people seeking sanctuary and those with insecure status, NRPF creates severe risks of destitution and exploitation within the immigration process. Among those most at risk are residents whose asylum applications have been refused but are unable to return to their home countries.

At this stage, all support is withdrawn from this group including accommodation, yet they remain blocked from support to avoid homelessness and unable to work to support themselves. Only those eligible through local authority statutory duties due to safeguarding children, disability, mental health condition or illness can access any support. Through our Borough of Sanctuary framework, we commit to reviewing our approaches to ensure this group is better able to access support locally.

Cost of living crisis and funding pressures

Current inflation levels and the wider impacts of the cost-of-living crisis are placing immense pressure on the operating budgets of local authority, voluntary and community sector services. This presents both challenges for people seeking sanctuary whose own everyday costs are increasing against limited incomes as well as challenges to ambitions to fund and grow support services for people seeking sanctuary.

At a national level, there is limited government funding available for work in this area. Despite these challenges, we will continue to work collectively to maximise the support available to all residents seeking sanctuary in the years ahead.



Political environment

In recent years, we have witnessed a rise in anti-migrant narratives in national mainstream politics and media. In other areas of the country, several hotel accommodation sites have seen protests organised by far-right anti-migration groups, which have led to violent clashes with police. The Windrush scandal serves as another prominent example of anti-migrant sentiment, exposing the deeply troubling consequences of hostile immigration policies.

It serves as a stark reminder of the need for compassionate and fair immigration policies that respect the rights and dignity of long-term residents, reaffirming our commitment to fostering a welcoming and inclusive society for all. We are dedicated to ensuring that our policies and practices reflect these values, embracing diversity and championing the rights of all residents within our community. We are committed to challenging anti-migration narratives, promoting cohesion over hostility, and actively fighting racism within Waltham Forest.

Legal support

A lack of access to legal advice and representation has further hampered the operations of the asylum and immigration sector in recent years. A backlog of asylum claims, cuts to legal aid provision and a severe lack of immigration lawyers' capacity to take on cases increasingly threatens the ability of the asylum system to function for all parties involved.

OUR PROGRESS

A range of projects and initiatives are already underway across Waltham Forest to support people seeking sanctuary. Together, this progress provides a comprehensive foundation for our ambitions as a Borough of Sanctuary.

Council

Migrant Advice Single Point of Contact (SPOC) and Communities Team

The Migrant Advice Single Point of Contact (SPOC) service, run by a partnership of the Council and local education providers, has provided over 3,500 people with holistic support including English lessons, adult education, social integration, volunteering, and employment advice. Around 1,000 residents are offered advice in community settings each year, including all 16+ people seeking asylum in contingency hotels with English language needs.

Furthermore, the service produced a Migrant Support Pack including key information for new arrivals in Waltham Forest, available in 23 languages alongside distributing mobile phones, tablet devices and SIM cards to people seeking asylum through the National Databank. The Communities Team has worked with VCS partners to fund projects supporting migrants and people seeking sanctuary. This has included community-led support with core needs such as food and clothing through widening eligibility of the Household Support Fund to people with no recourse to public funds as well as opportunities to build skills and improve health through the Health Inequalities Impact Fund.

It has also included celebrating the legacy of the Windrush Generation and Waltham Forest's 25,000 strong Afro-Caribbean community, through an annual programme of events and awareness-raising sessions with community partners across the borough.

Contingency Initial Accommodation (Hotel sites)

The Early Help and Resettlement teams provide wraparound support to nearly 400 people seeking sanctuary accommodated in contingency hotels locally including individualised support for families with additional vulnerabilities. Residents have received practical support with food, personal hygiene, clothing, and transport costs as well as day trips for families and religious celebration days open to all.

Funded community projects alongside **PL84U Al-Suffa** and **The Hornbeam Centre** have created additional activities such as group cooking sessions, women's groups, art and craft sessions, conversation clubs, a weekly lunch club and expanded access to food bank support.

Safeguarding approach

The Council's commitment to protect vulnerable migrants and people seeking sanctuary regularly extends beyond core statutory responsibilities and services. For example, in response to the emergence of contingency hotel accommodation, the Council works with a local partnership of statutory partners meeting the Home Office and accommodation providers regularly to ensure vulnerable residents within this accommodation are safeguarded to the best of the partnership's ability, manage emerging risks, and ensure that issues are escalated.

On the back of serious safeguarding incidents and repeated concerns raised at these meetings the partnership has met with senior Home Office officials, lobbied the Home Secretary to call for immediate changes to hotel accommodation provision locally and challenged national plans to change housing standards for refugees, expand contingency hotel accommodation capacities and the provisions of the Illegal Immigration Bill.

On a local level, measures have been taken to comprehensively audit safeguarding in hotels, enforce licensing standards on inappropriate procured accommodation as well as securing a change of catering provider following repeated concerns at the quality and suitability of food provided to residents. National and regional media appearances by the Leader of the Council have also challenged the unworkable hotel policy in a public forum.

Resettlement Schemes

Comprehensive support is provided to new residents arriving in the borough through resettlement schemes including individuals we have welcomed to Waltham Forest through the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), the Afghan Relocations and Resettlement Policy (ARAP) and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS). Since 2022, hosts and families across the borough have welcomed Ukrainian nationals through the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

New residents arriving from Hong Kong as British National (Overseas) status holders have also been able to access support and advice with education. We plan to extend our offer in the years ahead by welcoming new residents on these schemes including work to secure properties for newly arrived families. The Council and VCS partners have jointly hosted 3 migrant welcome and support events at the Town Hall and community venues to provide early in-person access to a range of support services for new residents.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASCs) encounter a unique set of challenges that demand focused attention and care from the local authority. Beyond the hurdles faced by other vulnerable migrant groups, UASCs contend with additional complexities, often stemming from trauma and social isolation, and further exacerbated by national policies like age assessments and systemic disparities. These challenges persist even after turning 18, with the looming risks of destitution, homelessness, and intricate legal obstacles in their immigration journey. In our borough, we are committed to addressing these issues comprehensively.

Upon their arrival, we prioritise suitable accommodation, conduct thorough initial health assessments, and refer them to specialized clinics if necessary. Each UASC is assigned a dedicated social worker, with careful consideration given to matching them with foster carers who speak their language or share their background. Their integration into the education system is provided through the Virtual School. Our borough engages with the National Transfer Scheme to ensure we welcome a fair share of those children who arrive in Croydon and Kent as their point of entry to the UK. We also ensure that Merton compliant age assessments are completed when a person discloses that they have been mis-aged as an adult.

Recognising the importance of family ties, we connect these children and young people with organisations specialising in re-establishing contact with their families back home, as well as with solicitors who can provide essential assistance with their asylum claims. Our commitment is to provide unwavering support, guidance, and resources to help UASCs overcome the unique barriers they face in their pursuit of safety and a brighter future.

Education

Education providers across the borough work to provide a welcoming environment for all new students from migrant and sanctuary seeking backgrounds. Collaborative approaches between Council services and providers ensures all new children arriving into contingency hotel accommodation are placed in local schools at the earliest opportunity, with extra provision for free school meals, access to uniforms and travel cards. The Council operates a designated Virtual School to support access to education alongside a wider advice package for looked after children and young people including a cohort of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). Taking into account the specific challenges that UASCs face, over the past few years the Council has commissioned Sir George Monoux College to deliver Year 11 provision for this particular cohort of residents.

We are proud that **St Saviour's** and **St Mary's C of E Primary Schools** and **Chapel End Junior Academy** are among the first schools in London to achieve the School of Sanctuary accreditation and have since taken an active role in the sector. This has involved sharing learnings and information on welcoming families seeking sanctuary with other providers as well as hosting workshops for students and community activities such as a pantomime performance for sanctuary-seeking families locally. By widening eligibility for free school meals, additional support has been made available to people with no recourse to public funds.

Those aged 16+ are supported with signposting and gaining access to suitable further education opportunities or English lessons (ESOL) through the SPOC service, working closely with local providers. A range of providers locally including **Waltham Forest College, Leyton Sixth Form College and Sir George Monoux College** have gone above and beyond to welcome people seeking sanctuary through both education and wider wraparound support. They have stepped up to fund learners directly when they do not yet meet national funding eligibility as well as providing evidence to the Greater London Authority which has enabled more adults to access ESOL at a regional level. Leyton Sixth Form College in partnership with **Highams Park Food Aid**, **Citizens UK**, **local Churches**, and **Mosques** provide free activities and events for refugees, asylum seekers, residents and students, bringing together communities alongside free access to community sports facilities & clubs for residents of hotel accommodation. The **Adult Learning Service** provide a comprehensive range of courses including an ESOL offer to residents which incorporates both formal classes and Conversation Clubs offering a relaxed and widely accessible way for residents to develop their skills.

Health

In partnership with the local Integrated Care Board and NHS, Council services have worked to ensure all residents of hotel contingency accommodation are registered with local GP surgeries and embedded checks from health visitors for children. Thanks to the work of Waltham Forest GP Federation, many local GP surgeries have committed to be Safe Surgeries through Doctors of the World, by doing so agreeing to take steps to tackle the barriers faced by many migrants in accessing healthcare.

A piece of mystery shopping research undertaken by Waltham Forest Save Our NHS subsequently identified further challenges for vulnerable migrants seeking sanctuary to access GP care. Doctors of the World have delivered supplementary training to supplement these commitments and to ensure that clinical and non-clinical staff are trained on trauma informed practice.

Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)

St Barnabas Church in partnership with the **Queens Boundary Community Group** have reinvigorated a community hall to provide a welcoming and comfortable hub for activities to support people seeking sanctuary. The venue has hosted Council and VCS services as well as offering the space for residents to lead their own activities.

Waltham Forest Citizens have led a project to bring together people seeking sanctuary through community organising training. The training has empowered the group to develop confidence, skills and to organise a range of events for other members of the community including communal meals, creative workshops, homework clubs and celebrations.

The Lloyd Park Children's Charity support a wide variety of the sanctuary seeking community through their activities for children and families. As well as this, they have hosted outreach support in contingency hotel accommodation to provide residents with access to essentials, toys and cost of living support. Furthermore, the charity hosted a crowdfunder alongside the Council, raising over £10,000 towards essentials for people seeking sanctuary.

Since 2013, **Waltham Forest Migrant Action (WFMA)** have worked to provide free advice on immigration, accommodation, and welfare to migrant communities within the borough. Their weekly drop-in provides a warm and welcoming, in-person space for people from all backgrounds to access free support. In recent months, WFMA have worked to train Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) level 1 certification which will allow them to the expand the breadth of advice they can offer.

Stories & Supper have been active in Waltham Forest for six years, bringing refugees, asylum seekers and local residents together in a range of projects including weekly creative workshops, an allotment, hosting supper clubs and leading workshops in local schools.

PL84U Al-Suffa provide a welcoming environment to new residents offering food bank support, volunteering opportunities and together with **Faizan-e-Islam** and **Waltham Forest Council of Mosques** have hosted community religious celebrations for new members of the Muslim community.

OrganicLea CIC is a community market garden scheme, growing organic food on a local 12-acre site. They offer a range of volunteering and vocational training opportunities to learn about local food growing, nurture positive mental health and improve community connection. Through their 'English for Action' (EFA) course and a partnership with Waltham Forest College they support people seeking sanctuary including unaccompanied young people (16-19 years) to learn English alongside experiencing the food growing process.

Businesses

Waltham Forest is proud to be home to a range of businesses who support the needs, causes and aspirations of people seeking sanctuary through their operations. **Haven Coffee**, run by Usman who himself arrived in Waltham Forest as a refugee have embedded sanctuary principles at the heart of their operations offering both barista training programmes to people seeking sanctuary and hosting a range of comedy events celebrating artists from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

Wood Street Bakery created a free birthday cakes initiative, open to families referred through wider support services. Since 2022, they have brought joy to tens of children and their families on their birthdays, including many children from migrant and sanctuary seeking backgrounds.

TAKING ACTION

To identify key priorities for Waltham Forest as a Borough of Sanctuary over the next 3 years, we brought together the knowledge, expertise, and experiences of a range of groups.

Exploration alongside people with lived experience of seeking sanctuary, statutory services, voluntary and community partners as well as a range of council services we have identified the below actions, across 6 priorities. The priorities reflect both key areas of need and opportunities to empower people seeking sanctuary in line with our local strengths.

Education and Skills

Health

Building Communities

Voice

Shaping Services

Bespoke Support

Education and Skills

Ref.	Action	Timescale
ES01	Review and expand adult education and employment training opportunities for migrants and people seeking sanctuary. Ensure English language provision (ESOL) is accessible to those with different immigration status, ages, childcare provision needs or access needs in a wide range of both statutory and community settings across the borough. Expand migrant-led provision, including ESOL teacher training, across the borough. Explore informal accreditation for Conversation Clubs and other types of classroom-based facilitation. Bring education, employment, and volunteering advice into informal community settings through the Migrant Advice Single Point of Contact (SPOC) service.	12 Months
ES02	Educate and empower council teams and local businesses about opportunities to employ migrants and sanctuary seekers, including through myth-busting on migrant entitlements with businesses as well as job brokers. Host careers events for migrant audiences alongside opportunities to offer business start-up support and advice for migrants and sanctuary seekers.	24 Months
ES03	Build on existing outstanding work in Early Years, Primary, Secondary and Further Education settings to expand the number of registered Schools and Colleges of Sanctuary alongside training and support to achieve this accreditation. Develop and share guidance packs and staff training on welcoming families seeking sanctuary, ensuring that every child and young person receives the same welcome treatment and support across the borough.	24 Months
ES04	Work with local private education and training providers to ensure that they sign up to the City of Sanctuary charter and that quality of provision is standardised across the borough.	36 Months
ES05	Continue to provide evidence to central government and the Greater London Authority to review eligibility for people seeking asylum to access AEB-funded courses including funding for non-accredited provision for 16-19 year olds, and addressing quality concerns in some types of training provision.	36 Months
ES06	Support job transition pathways for refugees with professional experience and qualifications into local frontline roles including healthcare workers, teachers, and social workers. Work in partnership with the NHS and schools as local employers.	24 Months

Health

Ref.	Action	Timescale
H01	Support every GP practice to become an accredited Safe Surgery through Doctors of the World. Work with partners to ensure clinical and non-clinical staff are trained on principles of refugee needs alongside regular monitoring of progress.	12 Months
H02	Work with partners to grow the local capacity for trauma-informed therapy in English and other community languages.	12 Months
H03	Work with health partners to expand the availability of medical information and interpreters for appointments in additional languages.	12 Months
H04	Work with health partners to create effective systems responding to health needs of sanctuary seekers arriving in the borough including initial health assessment, access to primary care, infectious disease assessment and treatment, and catch-up vaccinations.	12 Months
H05	Proactively challenge the healthcare implications of the hostile environment in local settings through advocacy and culture including the current NHS charging system and improved access to primary care for vulnerable and undocumented migrants.	12 Months

Building Communities

Ref.	Action	Timescale
BC01	Empower and support local institutions to become registered places of sanctuary including libraries, arts, community and faith organisations.	24 Months
BC02	Continue to convene the Waltham Forest Borough of Sanctuary Steering Group, which will meet regularly to bring together partners and foster collaborative approaches to challenges	36 Months
BC03	Build capacity and empower local Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations and initiatives providing support to migrants and people seeking sanctuary.	36 Months
BC04	Collaborate with the VCS to develop effective pathways into volunteering, participation and social activities for migrants and people seeking sanctuary. Alongside creating opportunities for residents to volunteer to support sanctuary seekers locally.	36 Months
BC05	Work with local leisure, sports and culture providers to review and expand the discounts and concessions offered to sanctuary seekers. Embed the needs of sanctuary seekers within the new leisure and sport strategy.	12 Months

Voice

Ref.	Action	Timescale
V01	Ensure a consistent presence for Borough of Sanctuary projects through communication channels, share the stories, successes, and challenges of residents with lived experience. Share the brilliant work underway to build cohesion and support at a community level to assertively challenge negative media narratives through myth-busting, including bystander intervention-style training for partners and residents.	36 Months
V02	Embed a wider role for people seeking sanctuary in decision-making and insight gathering at all levels of council activity such as resident focus groups, citizens assemblies, insight surveys and strategy development. Including developing greater and deeper understanding of our sanctuary seeking population and how they access services as well as gaps in provision for vulnerable groups such as support for migrants with insecure status.	36 Months
V03	Continue celebrating cultures and build community cohesion through organising, facilitating, and promoting public events including Refugee Week and Windrush.	36 Months
V04	Continue to call out and challenge central government policy that creates a hostile environment towards migrants. In particular, holding the government and their partners to account to provide reliable and high standards of safeguarding for children and vulnerable adults in contingency accommodation. Act as a lead Local Authority on joined-up campaigning for migrant rights. Share learning and expertise through sanctuary networks at a London, regional and national level including the City of Sanctuary Local Authority Network.	36 Months

Shaping Services

Ref.	Action	Timescale
SS01	Ensure all relevant Council strategies are aligned with sanctuary principles and include consideration of sanctuary seekers. Review incorporation of sanctuary principles into the Council's Equality Objectives, to ensure their needs including the use of inclusive language are considered by services when policies or services are changed.	36 Months
SS02	Expand education and support to help sanctuary seekers to navigate the housing system. Including monitoring the number of migrants and people seeking sanctuary who are sleeping rough and using intelligence to target support.	36 Months
SS03	Develop and deliver staff training open to all Council services, Councillors and core community partners to embed understanding of Borough of Sanctuary ambition alongside the experience and needs of people seeking sanctuary.	12 Months
SS04	Alongside partners, review processes and customer journeys of people seeking sanctuary accessing key services such as social care, health, housing, and education. Including a review of online content, accessibility of written communications and a wider offer in community languages.	12 Months
SS05	Review entitlements for refugees, people seeking asylum and those hosting under sponsorship schemes.	12 Months
SS06	Review the process for applying for discretionary support grants and criteria such as Local Welfare Assistance from the point of view of a sanctuary seeker.	12 Months

Bespoke Support

Ref.	Action	Timescale
BS01	Continue proactive and comprehensive local support offer to residents arriving in the borough through central government initiatives such as the UK resettlement scheme (UKRS), Afghan Resettlement, Asylum Dispersal Scheme and Hong Kong (BNO) visa programme.	36 Months
BS02	Grow and publicise a wider migrant-specific information, advice and guidance offer for all residents such as Migrant Hubs and bespoke services in community embedding opportunities for people with lived experiences to lead on service support.	36 Months

BS03	Review existing support available to people with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) and UASCs specifically, ensure entitlements are effectively communicated across all local services as well as learning from best practice in other Local Authorities.	36 Months
BS04	Ensure continued support for specialist community services and opportunities to build resilience and skills for underrepresented groups and those who are at higher risk of discrimination, including LGBTQIA+ residents, as well as women and girls. For example, Ashiana Network's services for women and girls affected by domestic abuse, sexual violence, forced marriage, homelessness, and female genital mutilation, as well as women with NRPF. Review Modern Slavery and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and Hate Crime support pathways from a sanctuary seeker's perspective. Ensure a well-promoted and clear process for reporting hate crime to emphasise a zero-tolerance approach on hostility to migrants in the borough.	24 Months
BS05	Review availability of legal advice services for sanctuary seekers and other groups who have been discriminated against by unfair immigration policies, such as residents from the Windrush Generation. Alongside community partners, explore opportunities to support expansion of provision as well as pathways to access, and to provide residents with information about their rights, including compensation if applicable.	36 Months
BS06	Develop and deliver a Refugee Housing Programme to offer both 'move-on' support to newly recognised refugees and accommodation for residents through resettlement schemes. Appoint a dedicated Refugee Accommodation Officer to provide bespoke housing support.	12 Months
BS07	Work alongside the emerging Waltham Forest Food Partnership to ensure specific initiatives focus on the needs of migrants and people seeking sanctuary, in relation to accessing food, and engaging in the wider local food system.	12 Months

Monitoring progress

These actions will together form a live action plan to be updated regularly as new challenges and opportunities are identified due to changes in the local, regional, and national landscape. Regular reporting, measurement, and assessment of progress against these priorities will be undertaken through the Waltham Forest Borough of Sanctuary Steering Group.

Get involved

If you are interested in supporting our ambitions as a Borough of Sanctuary, please get in touch on connectingcommunities@walthamforest.gov.uk

KEY TERMS

This framework includes a range of key terms relating to immigration. To build a collective understanding for the purpose of this framework and the future of Waltham Forest as a Borough of Sanctuary, they are defined below:

Key Term	Description
A person seeking asylum or asylum seeker	A person who has left their country of origin and has formally requested protection in another country. They are waiting for the outcome of their asylum claim which will decide if they are legally recognised as a refugee.
Refugee	A person who receives a positive decision on their asylum claim, they have been recognised as a refugee under the UN Refugee Convention. They have a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion in their country and are entitled to protection. In the UK, people initially receive five years' refugee protection to stay in the country and the right to work, after which they can apply for indefinite leave to remain.
Migrant	A person who moves from one country to another, for a range of purposes including work or study, or to reunite with family. This term also includes people with specific vulnerabilities, such as those with insecure immigration statuses.
A Person Seeking Sanctuary/ a Sanctuary Seeker	A collective term to refer to everyone who is a refugee, person seeking asylum, or someone with No Recourse to Public Funds, regardless of their background and immigration status.
Resettled Refugee	A refugee who has been offered a permanent home in a country while still outside that country. In the UK, people who are resettled here are already recognised as refugees prior to their arrival in the country, and they do not go through the asylum system. They are flown to the country where they are offered a permanent home. Refugee resettlement and the asylum system are separate. Refugees who are resettled are usually identified as refugees in camps near to their country of origin.

Key Term	Description
Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)	A child who is outside their country of origin to seek asylum. They are separated from parents and relatives and are not in the care of someone who has parental responsibility. They are looked after by the Local Authority.
A Person with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)	Someone who is not entitled to most public benefits due to their immigration status, e.g., a student, someone on a spousal visa, a visa overstayer. The term 'no public funds' will be stated on their residence permit, biometric residence permit (BRP), or digital status.
Indefinite Leave to Remain	Indefinite leave to remain is how you settle in the UK. It's also called 'settlement'. It gives you the right to live, work and study here for as long as you like and apply for benefits if you're eligible. You can use it to apply for British citizenship.

APPENDIX 1: WHO IS INVOLVED

The diagram below illustrates the breadth of voluntary, community and faith organisations offering dedicated services and projects for people seeking sanctuary in Waltham Forest.

These dedicated services work hand in hand with a wider network of voluntary, community and faith sector organisations as well as statutory services delivered through the Council and NHS providing support to sanctuary seekers in their communities:

Healthcare

- **Access to services**
- **Specialist services**

Healthwatch WF
Advocacy, influencing and public engagement.

Research and service delivery monitoring.

Doctors of the World
Safe Surgeries Accreditation, specialised Stratford GP clinic.

Advocacy, Campaigns and Research.

Education and Employment

- **ESOL**
- **Further Education**
- **Job skills and advice**

MTC Learning
Education provision to migrant audiences incl. ESOL.

Organic Lea
Horticulture education provision to migrant audiences incl. ESOL.

Haven Coffee
Barista training for refugees. Cultural events celebrating refugee artists.

Zubeda Welcome
Financial support for children's Islamic Education.

ELATT
Education provision to migrant audiences incl. ESOL.

Information Advice and Guidance (IAG)

- **Advocacy and legal advice**
- **121 support**
- **Welfare and housing guidance**

Citizens Advice WF
Welfare, work, debt, housing, and legal advice.

Work Rights Centre
Workers rights and employment justice. Specialism with Eastern European communities.

Shelter
Campaigning, housing, advice, advocacy and legal support.

Direct Support

- **Practical item donations**
- **Children and families support, activities and celebrations**
- **Food and cooking events**

St Barnabas Church

Queens Boundary Community

Salvation Army

The Lloyd Park Children's Charity

Hornbeam

WF Council of Mosques

Cornerstone Church

PL84U Al-Suffa

Walthamstow Toy Library

Faizan-e-Islam

Care4Calais

Specialised Support

- **Restricted in-depth offered to specific groups**
- **Tailored help for specific groups**

Kiran Support Services
Safe supported housing for South Asian women and children who have experienced domestic abuse.

Ashiana Network
Advice, advocacy, counselling, and refuge for women at risk of forced marriage and honour-based violence incl. those with NRPF.

ELOP
Holistic and therapy support to LGBT communities incl. LGBTQ+ asylum support group.

Culture, Sport and Leisure

- **Sports and Arts**

Leyton Orient Trust
Inclusive sports and activity sessions.

Capital Kids Cricket
Inclusive sports and activity sessions.

Salaam Peace
Bringing together diverse communities through sport.

London Wildlife Trust
Connection with nature at Walthamstow Wetlands.

Campaigning

Stories & Supper
Storytelling, cooking, and allotment growing sessions. Workshops in schools and colleges.

WF Migrant Action
Weekly in-person Support Centre. Immigration, welfare, accommodation, and signpost to legal advice.

WF Citizens
Community organising training to support migrant-led campaigns and activities.

WF Save Our NHS
Advocacy campaigns and service delivery monitoring incl. mystery shopping.

WF Stand Up to Racism
Cultural activities and campaigning.

APPENDIX 2: STORIES OF SANCTUARY

Refugee Resettled from Afghanistan

I used to work as a translator for the British Army in Afghanistan. Since November 2021 I have been accommodated in Chingford Mount by the Home Office and I have tried my best to make a contribution to my local community in Waltham Forest.

I always wanted to help others, especially those refugees who don't know English very well, so I joined local communities to support them to make life easier for them. I want to help everyone, not just refugees, so I want to come up with something good and permanent help.

I tried to pursue my higher education in Dentistry because I was a student of the Dentistry faculty, but it seems impossible to start from where I left off in this country. Now I am trying to become a dental nurse. I found a dental nursing course but I am looking at options to pay for this course as higher education is very expensive.

Refugee Resettled from Syria

It was a nice day when I arrived in the UK, sunny and lovely weather. I have been here for eight months. I had to start over in my life, doing my paperwork and registration in medical places. I started to integrate into the community and discover new areas.

I have been studying English, Maths and ICT courses in the college and sometimes I go to the conversation club in the libraries. I started volunteering with a charity called PL84U Al-Suffa food bank and my relationships began to expand as I made new friends.

Now I'm looking after my family, and I'm doing my best on my education to have a good future.

Former Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child

I have finished University and got my degree in Electrical Engineering and Power Electronics. I am pleased to have my degree and the financial support to help with the costs of studying.

My Leaving Care Coach helped me to find and decorate my own place. I like my home and being there.

Former Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child

I was 15 when I fled because of the war. The UK was not a pre-planned destination, but it was where my journey took me. At a reception centre, a very kind lady introduced me to a boarding school where I did my entrance exam and was offered a full scholarship.

During holidays I stay with my foster carer in Waltham Forest. I felt a little cautious before I first met her and her family as the only male in an all-female household. The first day that I went to her house, I felt at home. Everything was so smooth and calm.

She has helped me to learn a lot of independent skills. We cook together and I do my chores. When I arrived, she took me to local shops and taught me to communicate with different people.

Former Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child from Afghanistan

My journey was hard, I am originally from Afghanistan, but I was getting threatened by the Taliban movement and knew I had to leave the country.

When I came to the UK, things changed for me, I felt loved and that someone cared about me again.

My foster parents lived in Afghanistan in the past. I was happy because it was easy to communicate in my language, but they also helped me to learn English. I enrolled in college which helped my confidence and gaining friends that I can trust.

Refugee Resettled from Ukraine

We arrived in Walthamstow in May, fleeing from the war and destruction in our country, Ukraine. Every time when we had troubles, I knew I could count on our local community.

In August, my son and I moved into our new apartment - we will rent it for the next year.

My son has a music scholarship and goes to St. Pauls Cathedral School. He has passed Grade 6 at the Royal Schools of Music recently. At the moment he is preparing for his 13+ exams.

We are building a new life here, after having lost all we had.