

Council meeting, 24 January 2023

Motion: Cllr Sara Conway

Borough of Sanctuary

Council notes that:

1. Barnet is proud of its diversity and history of welcoming people from across the world to the borough.
2. There is a tradition at the heart of Barnet's communities, those of faith and of none, of working together to welcome, host, feed, clothe and support people seeking sanctuary here.
3. Barnet is enhanced by the contribution of those from a diverse range of backgrounds.
4. Over the last few years, the council has, with the support of the VCFS, residents, partners and community groups, co-ordinated the resettlement of refugees and supported asylum seekers. This has included:
 - a. Supporting the resettlement of 50 individuals through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme
 - b. Hosting 1,553 Ukrainian refugees escaping war
 - c. Resettling 4 refugee families through the Afghanistan Citizens Resettlement Scheme
 - d. Working with the VCFS to support the integration of those arriving in Barnet on the Hong Kong BN(O) visa scheme.
 - e. Provision of drop-in and other support through the Barnet Together VCFS network, Barnet Multi-Faith Forum, Citizens UK, Nisa Nashim and faith spaces like the New North London Synagogue, Finchley Progressive Synagogue and Hendon Synagogue Community Centre who work together and separately to provide welcome and practical support for refugees and asylum seekers in terms of advice and legal signposting, food, clothes, community spaces, and cultural events.
 - f. Commissioning the New Citizens Gateway and Persian Advice Bureau to support asylum seekers
 - g. Ongoing work with London-wide partners such as the GLA, London Councils, the Home Office and the London Strategic Migration Partnership to shape policy and provide insight onto the challenges local authorities face.
5. We are committed to continuing to work with partners, schools, and the voluntary, community and faith sector to create a welcoming and secure borough for those seeking sanctuary.
6. LB Barnet is currently supporting 55 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children.
7. The Borough of Sanctuary is awarded by City of Sanctuary to institutions that are welcoming to those fleeing violence and persecution in their own countries, and protecting the rights of all migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees.

Council believes that:

1. Standing up for those facing persecution, and welcoming refugees, asylum seekers and migrants is a moral responsibility that enriches our borough.
2. LB Barnet must continue to support its migrant communities and that the journey to become a Borough of Sanctuary will solidify this commitment.
3. Refugee & asylum seekers are much more likely to be subject to both criminal and sexual exploitation as well as modern day slavery.

4. We have a duty of care towards children, and vulnerable and trafficked adults in our borough, and this must extend to refugees and migrants.

Council resolves to:

1. Welcome those fleeing persecution and launch the journey to become an awarded Borough of Sanctuary by joining City of Sanctuary's local authority network
2. Embody the City of Sanctuary values of Inclusive, Openness, Participation, Inspire, and Integrity in all we do
3. Embed our organisational principles of equality and inclusion at the heart of our work with refugees and asylum seekers
4. Develop a formal approach to how we engage with, listen to and support those seeking sanctuary, including the development of a three-year strategy and accompanying action plan
5. Challenge anti-migrant sentiment wherever we find it and champion the rights and dignity of refugees and asylum seekers
6. Find more opportunities across the Council and the borough to celebrate our migrant communities, tell their stories, and promote their voices.
7. Work with local community, health, and education partners, including those with lived experience, to shape Barnet's Borough of Sanctuary ambition.
8. In addition to taking local action, we will call on the Government to:
 - a. Guarantee the safety of all children under their care
 - b. Create a proper plan for resettlement