



Cabinet

Title	Borough of Sanctuary Strategy
Date of meeting	12 December 2023
Report of	Councillor Zahra Beg, Cabinet Member for Equalities, Voluntary and Community Sector
Wards	All
Status	Public
Key	Non-key
Urgent	No
Appendices	Appendix A – Borough of Sanctuary Strategy
Lead Officer	Chris Munday – Executive Director, Children’s Services
Officer Contact Details	Hal Khanom – Head of Strategy and Community Participation Gemma Carmichael – Corporate Strategy Manager

Summary

In January 2023, the council passed a motion to become a Borough of Sanctuary in recognition of the work that the local authority, residents, and partners have done to support and welcome refugees and asylum seekers in Barnet. As part of our journey to becoming a Borough of Sanctuary, officers have worked with sanctuary seekers and partners to develop a Borough of Sanctuary strategy which outlines Barnet’s vision of welcome for refugees and asylum seekers. This report provides an update on the work that the council continues to do to welcome, resettle and support sanctuary seekers and an overview of our Borough of Sanctuary strategy.

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet approves the Borough of Sanctuary strategy
2. That Cabinet approves that work continue to develop a Borough of Sanctuary application for submission in the upcoming year

1. Reasons for the Recommendations

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 In recent years, local authorities across the country have seen an increase in the number of those fleeing forced displacement and seeking to find refuge and asylum in the UK. This has been true of Barnet where we have seen a high number of Ukrainians, Afghans, Hong Kongers, and asylum seekers being resettled and accommodated in the borough.
- 1.1.2 Since 2021, the council has overseen the resettlement of 64 Afghans through the Afghan Resettlement Scheme and supported them with access to key services such as housing, employment, ESOL and education. The council continues to work closely with the Home Office to support the resettlement of additional families leaving the Afghan bridging hotels. Alongside this, over the last 18 months the Homes for Ukraine team have welcomed 1,532 Ukrainians and have implemented a diverse package of support to facilitate this, including one-on-one support, employment advice and mental health support.
- 1.1.3 There are currently five hotels in Barnet being used by the Home Office to accommodate over 1,600 asylum seekers. Since 2020, the council has commissioned two local voluntary organisations, New Citizens Gateway and Persian Advice Bureau, to provide support to those residents within the hotels. This support includes ESOL classes, advice with asylum applications, support with school admissions and accessing healthcare, among other things. In addition to this, the council has put in place specialist Early Help provision and health visiting services for families and children in the hotels as well as a comprehensive package of Public Health initiatives. The council is also responsible for overseeing the care of a number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Family Services have implemented measures to enable this. This has included recruiting foster carers from a diverse range of backgrounds and offering a variety of emotional and physical well-being provision.
- 1.1.4 As of the 2021 census, Barnet had a Chinese population of 9,343 and is home to one of the largest Chinese populations of any London Borough along with one of the highest rates of Cantonese speakers in the UK. Since the implementation of the Hong Kong BN(0) visa scheme, the council has worked closely with partners to support newcomers. This has included a series of welcome parties, ESOL classes delivered in partnership with Barnet and Southgate College as well as securing £30,000 in grant funding from the GLA to deliver a 6-month project aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of Hong Kongers in Barnet.
- 1.1.5 In June 2023, Barnet Council marked Refugee Week for the first time and worked closely with the VCFS and residents to celebrate the chosen theme of 'compassion'. Throughout the week, the council amplified the work of City of Sanctuary UK as well as that of local organisations, such as New Citizens Gateway, through internal and external communications. Internal communications included a guest Chief Executive message from a Barnet Council employee of a refugee background and an appeal for a toy donation for one of the asylum hotels in Barnet. The council also held its first Refugee Week celebration in partnership with local voluntary organisations which brought together refugees and asylum seekers in Barnet for a celebratory afternoon event where there were speeches given on the topic of sanctuary, cultural performances and activities as well as cultural food.
- 1.1.6 The support made available to refugees and asylum seekers from the local authority has enabled those who have moved to the borough to have access to a range of vital services, including housing, employment and ESOL. However, the increasing number of new arrivals has brought with it challenges for local services who have sought to mobilise to respond to the unique needs of those moving into the borough and balancing the provision of services with the needs of long-term Barnet residents. In light of continual new arrivals, along with ongoing and emerging international events, Barnet Council must be prepared to respond effectively and at pace to further pressures and challenges that may arise with respect to increased numbers of people

seeking sanctuary. This includes ensuring specialist provision is available where necessary as well as working to make sure that those moving into the borough and receiving communities have opportunities to build relationships.

- 1.1.7 In recognition of the long history that Barne has of welcoming those fleeing displacement, in January 2023 the council passed a full motion to become a Borough of Sanctuary. Borough of Sanctuary is an accreditation awarded by City of Sanctuary UK to organisations who go above and beyond to welcome those fleeing forced displacement. City of Sanctuary UK is an umbrella organisation whose mission is to provide coordination and development support for networks of organisations supporting people seeking sanctuary. City of Sanctuary UK focuses its efforts on supporting organisations to welcome new arrivals, challenging harmful policy and creating opportunities for relationship building between sanctuary seekers and receiving communities.
- 1.1.8 Since the motion to become a Borough of Sanctuary was passed, in addition to the ongoing delivery of services for refugees and asylum seekers, the council joined the City of Sanctuary Local Authority Network and has engaged with refugees and asylum seekers on developing the Borough of Sanctuary Strategy.
- 1.1.9 Our Plan for Barnet 2023-26 outlines our commitment to fighting inequalities and improving life chances, ensuring that nobody is held back. It outlines the activities that we will undertake to create a place where people feel they belong, are respected, and accepted and can share their cultures. Our Resident Perception Surveys show that this is already true for many of our communities where most people say that in their local area people from different backgrounds get along well. The Borough of Sanctuary strategy extends this commitment to Barnet's current, and future, sanctuary seekers. It sets out our vision for Barnet to sustain a community and environment where every sanctuary seeker feels valued and supported. We want Barnet to continue to be a place where people can find safety from persecution and war and have access to the tools that they need to rebuild their lives.
- 1.1.10 The strategy, developed in partnership with colleagues across the council as well as a collective of refugees and asylum seekers, defines strategy as a place of protection and safety and a non-judgemental environment where prejudice is actively challenged and a positive vision of welcome is promoted. It commits the organisation to embodying the values of City of Sanctuary UK in respect to our work with asylum seekers and refugees. These are: inclusiveness, openness, participation, inspiring and integrity.
- 1.1.11 The feedback received through engagement with sanctuary seekers, along with that of colleagues, partners and City of Sanctuary UK, was used to develop four strategic priorities to underpin the work that the council does with respect to sanctuary seekers. These priorities are:
- **Inclusivity**
We foster a welcoming environment to everyone living in Barnet. All people in Barnet are supported to feel they belong, regardless of the circumstances which brought them to Barnet or how long they have lived here, creating a sanctuary of inclusivity. There are opportunities for relationship building between people living in established communities and people seeking sanctuary.
 - **Community Spirit**
- We promote a culture of celebrating diversity and unity in the community. The diversity of people seeking sanctuary in Barnet is celebrated and the voices of sanctuary seekers are amplified. The council works effectively with partners to collaborate on common cause issues.
 - **Empowerment**
We encourage personal growth and wellbeing. Sanctuary seekers are supported to access the resources and services open to them to create the safety net to rebuild their lives, as well as

the tools to make a significant contribution to Barnet life. Hate crime and prejudice are challenged and addressed in all forms.

- **Active listening**

We cultivate sanctuary through active listening. Sanctuary seekers are a valuable part of decision-making processes and the council proactively engages with refugees and asylum seekers to understand their needs, concerns, and the challenges they face. The council will listen attentively to the stories, journeys and experiences of individuals seeking sanctuary, creating spaces for them to share their needs, strengths and aspirations.

1.1.12 The Borough of Sanctuary strategy details how the council will continue to work with partners and the voluntary sector to respond to the needs of sanctuary seekers and to understand the unique needs and experiences of new and existing arrivals. Through the Asylum Seeker Strategy Group, the Borough of Sanctuary Network and the implementation of a steering group, the council will continue to work closely with key partners to deliver new and ongoing initiatives and use them as a platform by which the council can engage meaningfully with sanctuary seekers.

1.1.13 The approved Borough of Sanctuary strategy will guide our approach to working with sanctuary seekers across all service areas and will be used as the baseline for the development of an organisation-wide action plan. This will be used to ensure that in the delivery of council services, the needs of asylum seekers, refugees and migrant will be taken into account and efforts will be taken to consult and engage with a diverse range of groups on a variety of issues.

2. Alternative Options Considered and Not Recommended

2.1 Do nothing - the number of asylum seekers and refugees in Barnet has risen over the last three years and it is likely that this may continue. To do nothing would be to exclude from the council's vision a growing and diverse cohort of people who have unique and complex needs that may otherwise not be understood

3. Post Decision Implementation

3.1 The council will develop and submit an application to become a Borough of Sanctuary

4. Corporate Priorities, Performance and Other Considerations

Corporate Plan

4.1 This paper sets out steps to be taken by the council in line with its Tackling Inequalities workstream and Barnet Corporate Plan 2023-2026.

Corporate Performance / Outcome Measures

4.2 Performance related to the delivery of services for refugees and asylum seekers is monitored within directorates according to specific internal controls. Other measures include regular reporting through the Tackling the Gaps group and the Borough of Sanctuary Steering Group.

4.3 In addition to this, quarterly updates will be given for include in the Outcomes Framework with respect to the progress under the Borough of Sanctuary workstream and accreditation.

Sustainability

4.4 The proposal set out in this report has no direct impact on the council's sustainability strategy.

Corporate Parenting

4.5 In line with the Children and Social Work Act 2017, the council has a duty to consider Corporate Parenting Principles in decision-making across the council. The outcomes and priorities in the refreshed Corporate Plan, 'Our Plan for Barnet', reflect the council's commitment to the Corporate Parenting duty to ensure the most vulnerable are protected and the needs of children are considered in everything that

the council does. This includes the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children who are looked after by the council.

- 4.6 The Government's Care Leavers' Strategy sets out seven principles that local authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and young people:
- To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people
 - To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
 - To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
 - To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
 - To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
 - For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work
 - To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living

Risk Management

- 4.7 Effective management of risk is an integral part of asset management and the Council's Risk Management Framework has established strategic and departmental risk registers.
- 4.8 There are several strategic risks that are regularly monitored and updated by the risk champion and reported to the relevant team at the council associated with refugee and asylum seeker work. The proposals within this report will not impact these risks or the monitoring of them and may act as controls and mitigations to tolerate such risks.

Insight

- 4.9 A diverse range of data was used to inform the development of this strategy. This includes Home Office Data, along with that used across service areas including Barnet Homes and Public Health. The data shows an increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers moving to Barnet in recent years and an increasing pressure on local services as a result of this.
- 4.10 In September 2022, Public Health commissioned a Migrant Health Needs Assessment which identified vast health inequalities between migrants and long-term residents. This assessment has been used to develop the Public Health Asylum Action Plan and has been used to inform the development of this strategy and the strategic priorities.
- 4.11 In March 2023, a series of workshops were held with refugees and asylum seekers, including children, to gain insight into their experiences of seeking asylum in Barnet. These workshops demonstrated that many found Barnet to be a place that has welcomed them and where they have been able to find safety and protection. It also
- 4.12 Throughout 2023, a number of workshops have been carried out with colleagues from across service areas within the council to further develop this strategy and the priorities highlighted within.

Social Value

- 4.13 The proposals within this report have no direct implications on social value but should any further procurement of services occur, social value will be considered within those contracts in line with the new social value policy.

5. Resource Implications (Finance and Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT and Property)

5.1 There are no additional cost implications with respect to approval of the Borough of Sanctuary strategy, however there may be additional activities that the council chooses to undertake with within service areas that come under the Borough of Sanctuary workstream. There is an annual fee of £550 to be an accredited Borough of Sanctuary. This would be resourced through existing funding received by central government for the refugee resettlement schemes and asylum support. This funding is currently used to oversee the delivery of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, the Afghan Resettlement Scheme and the Asylum Seeker outreach support.

6. Legal Implications and Constitution References

6.1 Under the Council's Constitution, Part 2D the terms of reference states that Cabinet is responsible for the following functions:

- Development of proposals for the budget (including the capital and revenue budgets, the fixing of the Council Tax Base, and the level of Council Tax) and the financial strategy for the Council;
- Monitoring the implementation of the budget and financial strategy;
- Recommending major new policies (and amendments to existing policies) to the Council for approval as part of the Council's Policy Framework and implementing those approved by Council;
- Approving policies that are not part of the policy framework;
- Management of the Council's Capital Programme.

7. Consultation

7.1 This strategy has been developed in partnership with sanctuary-seekers from a wide range of backgrounds and ages in Barnet, colleagues from City of Sanctuary UK as well as an internal steering group consisting of representatives from different service areas who work with and support asylum seekers.

8. Equalities and Diversity

8.1 Decision makers should have due regard to the public sector equality duty in making their decisions. The 2010 Equality Act outlines the provisions of the Public-Sector Equalities Duty which Page 11 of 12 requires Public Bodies to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
- Advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups
- Foster good relations between people from different backgrounds

8.2 The Borough of Sanctuary Strategy is an important piece of work with respect to the council's work to tackling inequalities and its commitment to welcoming those of a diverse range of backgrounds. Equalities and diversity considerations are key to the work that the council does to support sanctuary seekers and the Borough of Sanctuary strategy. The council acknowledges the unique challenges faced by sanctuary seekers and the way in which our approach must be sensitive to the protected characteristics of those seeking sanctuary in Barnet, including age, disability, race and ethnicity, faith or believe, sex, gender reassignment, language, maternity / parental status, and sexual orientation.

9. Background Papers

9.1 [Our Plan for Barnet 2023-2026](#)

9.2 [Community Leadership and Libraries Committee February 2023](#)

9.3 [Full Council January 2023](#)

9.4 [Migrant Health Needs Assessment](#)