

Report to Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

Tuesday 11 July 2023

Subject:	Borough of Sanctuary Sandwell Strategy
Director:	Director of Housing Gillian Douglas
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1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Board considers and comments on the draft Borough of Sanctuary Sandwell Strategy

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 into their communities is critical to enable them to feel welcome and part of their local communities. 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 and Sandwell Council's commitments to welcoming and integrating





individuals and families who arrive in Sandwell. This strategy coordinates 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 objects and best enables us to support those arriving in Sandwell. This will enable services to develop with the stability of a medium-term strategic directive 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 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 and 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 We want to ensure that asylum seekers, refugees and migrants can access a range of well-coordinated and effective services, including health. 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 Sandwell has a diverse population made up of differing races, 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 local community groups and promoting safe and welcoming communities.</p>



	<p>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.</p>
	<p>A Strong and Inclusive Economy Our workforce and young people are skilled and talented, geared up to respond to changing business needs and to win rewarding jobs in a growing economy. We want to ensure we can bring newly-arrived individuals into the workforce and provide opportunities for language learning provisions and to transfer skills.</p>

4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The working strategy is being 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 work towards Sandwell becoming 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 draft 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.
- 4.5 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.

4.6 We have also engaged with Wolverhampton Council, Liverpool City Council, Lambeth Council and Newcastle City Council to discuss their own experiences in creating and implementing their own 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.

4.7 **The following joint objectives have been developed and agreed by Sandwell Council and the Borough of Sanctuary Sandwell local organisations:**

- 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.

Borough of Sanctuary - Partnership Strategy Workshop

4.7 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.

4.8 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.

4.9 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.



5 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:	<p>Many migrants, refugees and asylum seekers come from minority ethnic groups (and refugees and asylum seekers 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>
Equality:	<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</p>



	<p>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>
Health and Wellbeing:	<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:	<p>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 generates social value through empowering the community and building positive working relationships.</p>
Climate Change:	Not applicable.
Corporate Parenting:	Promoting the integration of possible unaccompanied asylum seekers and young refugees.



6 Appendices

- Appendix One: Sandwell's Sanctuary Strategy - draft
- Appendix Two: Sandwell's Sanctuary Strategy in draft – SNAC Presentation

7 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

