



Lewisham Borough of Sanctuary Strategy

A welcoming place of safety for all
2020–25



Mayor Damien Egan and Cllr Kevin Bonavia sign a letter to government calling for the extension of the refugee resettlement scheme, October 2018.

Our borough has a proud history of supporting refugees and migrants. The cruel concept of a “hostile environment” is anathema to us. Rather we celebrate and are strengthened by our diversity and the values we hold which enable and empower it.

As part of the Council’s Corporate Strategy commitment to be an open and welcoming borough, the Council is a founding member of the Lewisham Migration Forum which is co-ordinating the collective effort for Lewisham to become a Borough of Sanctuary, welcoming those fleeing violence and persecution in their own countries and protecting the rights of all migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees. Our aim within the forum is to persuade individuals and organisations across our borough to join us in enacting the principles of the Cities of Sanctuary movement.



The Council is also making changes across the entire organisation to create a supportive environment for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants who access our services and also to work with partners to identify national policy issues where we can work collectively to encourage and enable change. This strategy sets out the Council’s individual commitments towards the Sanctuary Borough goal, and provides a policy anchor for the wide variety of work the Council undertakes. It provides a common understanding of the meaning of sanctuary and a framework for its delivery by the Council.

I am very pleased to recommend this strategy as the expression of our collective determination to make this Council a champion for all those seeking sanctuary in Lewisham.

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Councillor Kevin Bonavia

Cabinet Member for Democracy,
Refugees & Accountability

Introduction

This strategy governs the work of officers across the Council and informs our engagement with partners. It is tied to the wider work on sanctuary across the borough and formalises the Council’s role in this work.

This document is formed of the following parts:

- Introduction
- Principles of sanctuary
- Delivery approach
- Implementation, governance and accountability
- Appendix 1: definitions
- Appendix 2: action plan template
- Appendix 3: local data

Other documents, provided they align with the principles, can and should be developed locally in individual services and divisions to support the Council’s vision to deliver services which support the borough’s sanctuary status and promote and safeguard the rights of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers.

This strategy is for five years with a review built in after the second year. This is to 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 towards the middle of the strategy term.



Photo: istock.com/FatCamera



Corporate Strategy: Open Lewisham

The Council’s Corporate Strategy 2018-2022 sets out the corporate objectives relating to making Lewisham a Borough of Sanctuary:

Open Lewisham: Lewisham is a welcoming place of safety for all, where we celebrate the diversity that strengthens us.

1. Lewisham will be a place where diversity and cultural heritage are recognised as a strength and celebrated.
 - We will publish a review of the cumulative impact of Council decisions on different groups in our community.
- We will establish an Accessibility Commission led by disabled people, which will make public services more accessible and make it easier to get around our borough.
- We will work with groups giving voice to the borough’s diverse lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+) community.
 - We will work to understand and mitigate the impact of Brexit in the borough, so we can protect jobs and opportunities for our residents where possible.
 - We will strive to make the Council’s workforce more representative of our borough’s diverse population at all levels.

2. Hate Crime will not be tolerated.

- We will actively challenge all forms of discrimination, including racism, sexism, homophobia, antisemitism, Islamophobia, ageism, and all other forms of hatred.
- We will tackle unconscious bias and support local awareness campaigns.
- We will support events that bring our community together.
- We will work closely with the police so that perpetrators of hate crime are brought to justice.

3. Lewisham will be a Sanctuary Borough, welcoming those fleeing violence and persecution in their own countries and protecting the rights of all migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

- We will become a recognised Borough of Sanctuary, working with partners to develop a pledge and practical steps we will take to welcome and include refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in our activities, and to actively seek ways of supporting them wherever we can.
- We will expand Lewisham’s refugee resettlement programme, with a target of supporting a further 100 vulnerable families from Syria and other areas of conflict.

City of Sanctuary: Charter, Vision, Values and Principles

The Council is committed to the principles and values of the City of Sanctuary movement. These are set out in their charter which can be found in full here: <https://cityofsanctuary.org/about/>

In line with their vision for the UK, Lewisham’s vision is that **Lewisham will be a welcoming place of safety for all and proud to offer sanctuary to people fleeing violence and persecution.**

The vision is underpinned by five values which Lewisham is also committed to adopting, adapted for the local context as set out below:

Inclusiveness

We welcome and respect people from all backgrounds, place the highest value on diversity and are committed to equality.

Openness

We are committed to a culture of working collaboratively and in partnership with others.

Participation

We value and recognise the contribution of all involved in making Lewisham a place of sanctuary. We aspire to ensure people seeking sanctuary are fully involved in decision making processes and are supported to become leaders within the borough and more widely.

Inspiring

We work with enthusiasm and positivity and are determined to surpass what has already been achieved to welcome refugees and people seeking sanctuary. We act as a catalyst for change by being open to new and innovative ideas and through sharing knowledge gained with others and working in partnership.

Integrity

We aspire to high standards of honesty and behaviour, and always to act in the interests of people seeking sanctuary.

The vision and values feed into the seven principles which the Council will use in the development and delivery of services.

City of Sanctuary: Charter, Vision, Values and Principles

Sanctuary Principles

We will...

Offer a positive vision of a culture of welcome and hospitality to all

Promote in our borough an unwavering commitment to equality, protecting and promoting the rights and welfare of all our residents.

Promote relationships of friendship and solidarity between local people and those seeking sanctuary

Support community development and foster good community relations, rejecting all forms of discrimination and hate crime.

Recognise and encourage partnership working

Work with our partners and communities to improve the borough for everyone who lives and works here, using our influence to create positive changes.

Identify opportunities for practical action and work on common cause issues to effect change within and across communities

Work across our services to take practical steps wherever we can to mitigate disadvantages related to being a refugee, asylum seeker or migrant.

Sanctuary Principles

We will...

Celebrate and promote the welcome and contribution of people seeking sanctuary

Proudly recognise and celebrate the diversity that strengthens our borough and continue to welcome those seeking sanctuary through our resettlement and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children programmes.

Engage people seeking sanctuary in decision making processes at all levels and in all activities

Keep at the heart of our work the idea that ‘nothing without us is about us’ and make sure those seeking sanctuary are enabled and empowered to have their voices heard.

Promote understanding of asylum and refugee issues, especially by enabling refugee voices to be heard directly

Seek to become practice leaders in our work with refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, promoting awareness and understanding across the Council, borough and beyond

Delivery approach

Sanctuary in practice

Sanctuary is applicable to all work in the Council. Being a Borough of Sanctuary is described by different people in different ways and encompasses all of the above.

At its heart, the essence of sanctuary is to act in the spirit of the Equality Act in the case of the marginalisation of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, promoting and safeguarding the welfare of these residents as the Council would any other resident.

The council has a duty in our everyday work to do our best, by, for and with all our residents. This includes those seeking sanctuary.

The aim of the Borough of Sanctuary Programme is to ensure that:

- All services are able to demonstrate consideration of the needs of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, and that reasonable adjustments have been made to accommodate them where necessary.
- The Council collects relevant data on how refugees, asylum seekers and migrants

interact with our services to enable informed decision making.

- Council services have links with relevant community organisations, to provide feedback on service delivery and explore opportunities for partnership working.
- The Council helps to build and support local capacity to support the needs of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.
- The Council acts transparently and welcomes internal and external review of our performance towards our Sanctuary goals.

We will do this by:

- Consulting with Council service leads, local stakeholders, and residents who are refugees, asylum seekers or migrants to identify the needs of this group of residents.
- Conducting a Sanctuary review of services and advising them on steps they can take

to improve the service offer for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. In line with Equalities legislation, we will expect them to adapt services if it is reasonable to do so, and the agreed steps will form an action plan.

- Advising the Council corporately on the needs of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, and the sector that supports them within Lewisham, and developing strategies to support them.
- Building relationships within the wider Sanctuary Network and refugee sector to share good practice and work towards common goals.
- Reviewing the performance of the Council against Sanctuary goals at relevant internal and external fora.
- Ensuring services are accessible to refugees and migrants – do staff know how to access our interpretation services? Is our language clear and universal? Do we have any requirements which inadvertently disadvantage certain groups? Are we promoting our services to those seeking sanctuary?
- Considering refugees and migrants in service development – do we know which services are being accessed by people seeking sanctuary? Has there been explicit consideration of any needs these individuals may have?
- Including the specific marginalisation of refugees and migrants in their equalities considerations and adapting and amending delivery to mitigate any disadvantage – do services need to adjust their processes to avoid disadvantaging those seeking sanctuary? Do services understand the marginalisation those seeking sanctuary experience?

What this means for services

Listed below are examples of the kind of steps that services will be expected to take, and questions they will need to consider:

Delivery approach

- Listening to and understanding the experiences of those seeking sanctuary in Lewisham – do we know whether consultations include refugee, migrant or asylum seeker voices? Do we understand the service user journey of those seeking sanctuary?
- Providing the same level of service for refugees and migrants as for any other resident – do staff understand the rights and entitlements of different types of immigration status? Do services make clear how users can report any issues with the service they have received?

What this doesn't mean

This doesn't mean that any officer should act outside of the law or the Council's constitution. This strategy is superseded by any legislative or constitutional requirements.

Sanctuary is about working within these requirements in a sensitive and positive way to

promote and safeguard the rights and welfare of those seeking sanctuary.

What this means for the community

Lewisham Borough of Sanctuary has always been conceived as a partnership between statutory services and the community. We will continue to work closely with our local partners throughout the lifetime of this strategy, and aim to build a sustainable network which will continue beyond 2025.

Lewisham Migration Forum (LMF) was created to bring these stakeholders together and works towards the creation of the Borough of Sanctuary. This is an open forum for representatives of groups and organisations working with refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in Lewisham.

It will continue to have a leading role in realising our objectives as a Borough of Sanctuary through providing guidance on the issues affecting refugees, asylum seekers and

migrant residents and agreeing measures to resolve them.

We will develop and agree a Sanctuary action plan with members of the LMF which will set objectives, identify actions and allocate responsibility among partners. This will be regularly reviewed at LMF meetings and form part of the reports submitted to the Corporate Equalities Board and Executive Management Team. These action plans will run concurrently with the action plans that we develop with services, but the aims and objectives of each will inform the other.

We will also seek to build effective working relationships with a range of partners operating within the borough, including local and national organisations in the public, private and voluntary sector. We will actively look to create and pursue opportunities for partnership working, information sharing and improved service delivery with these organisations.

The overarching aim of the Borough of Sanctuary is to enhance the community

capacity within Lewisham to meet the needs of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants and help them to thrive as valued members of the community.

The impact of Covid-19 on programme delivery

Sadly, Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the situation of refugees, asylum and migrants in Lewisham. Through our work as a Borough of Sanctuary we will seek to understand this impact and develop strategies to mitigate this, both through the way we deliver services and the way we work with partners in the community.

The response to Covid-19 in Lewisham has involved a coordinated partnership between the Council and a range of community and voluntary organisations. We will aim to maintain and build upon these links to support the delivery of our objectives as a Borough of Sanctuary.

Implementation, governance and accountability

Corporate change and service review

Corporately, the needs of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants will be more formally considered. In activities like service planning, consultation and equalities monitoring you will see more reference to the needs of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants and services will be expected to consider the needs of these groups of people more explicitly than in the past.

Whenever there is a proposal for a service to be changed, withdrawn or introduced, officers should carry out an Equalities Analysis Assessment (EAA). Guidance for this can be found in the Council’s Corporate Equality Policy. While our equality duty is specifically to the nine protected characteristics named in the Equality Act 2010, officers are able to, and should, consider wider inequalities and marginalised groups.

This should include being a refugee, asylum seeker or migrant. These groups of individuals often experience inequality related to other protected characteristics like race and religion, may have fled discrimination for characteristics like gender or sexual orientation, and may also be marginalised in other ways with an intersectionality to their immigration status.

Action planning

This strategy will inform an action plan with each Council directorate and division setting out how they are working to improve and develop their service offer for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. The format for this action plan is laid out in Appendix 2. The action plan will be monitored centrally.

Governance and decision making

The corporate board for sanctuary is the Corporate Equalities Board. The scrutiny committee for sanctuary is Safer Stronger Communities Committee.

Reports will be made twice yearly to the Corporate Equalities Board on the action plan – once at the start of the financial year when service plans have been finalised and actions refreshed, to report on year progress and new targets, and once in the third quarter of the year to monitor delivery in-year. Following reporting at the Corporate Equalities Board an update on progress and key issues will be presented to the Executive Management Team.

Directorate Management Teams will need to ensure that each directorate is working on their actions and will be accountable to the Corporate Equalities Board and ultimately the Executive Management Team for their progress.



Lewisham Sanctuary Conference, June 2019

Appendix 1: Definitions

There are some core concepts that this strategy centres on which need to have a common meaning across the Council. These are defined for the purpose of this strategy as set out below:

Key Term	Description
An asylum seeker, or a person seeking asylum	An asylum seeker, or a person seeking asylum, is someone who has left their country of origin and formally applied for asylum but whose application has not yet been concluded, where asylum is protection or safety given by a government to people forced to leave their own countries for fear of persecution
A refugee	<p>A refugee is someone who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. has a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and ii. is outside the country of their nationality; and iii. is unable, or owing to their well-founded fear unwilling, to avail themselves of the protection of that country. <p>In the UK, a person becomes a refugee when government agrees that their application for asylum meets this definition (taken from the Refugee Convention) and recognises them as a refugee. The other route for refugee status in the UK is to be accepted onto one of the dedicated resettlement schemes prior to arrival.</p>

Key Term	Description
UASC	UASC stands for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and refers to children who are outside their country of origin seeking asylum, are separated from parents and relatives, and are not in the care of someone who is responsible for them in a guardianship role.
The Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Scheme, Vulnerable Person’s Resettlement Scheme, or the Global Resettlement Scheme	The Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Scheme, Vulnerable Person’s Resettlement Scheme (both up to 2020/21) or the Global Resettlement Scheme (from 2020/21) refer to specific programmes where the Home Office and United Nations Human Rights Committee identify the most vulnerable refugees for resettlement. The refugee resettlement programme is how we refer to this programme in the Council, where we accept referrals to welcome and resettle these families.
A migrant	A migrant is someone who has moved from one country to another, not for reasons of asylum or refuge. Often the move is for work, education or to be with family. People may also move to alleviate significant hardships that arise from natural disasters, famine or extreme poverty.

Appendix 2: Action Plan Approach

The action plans will be held in excel format. The below provides the information headings in an accessible format for indicative purposes.

Reference	_____
Directorate	_____
Division	_____
Service area	_____
Action	_____

Owner	_____
Milestones	_____

Status	_____
Date added	_____
Date due	_____
RAG rating (with date)	_____
Comments (with date)	_____

Appendix 3: Local data

Figure 1: Nationality

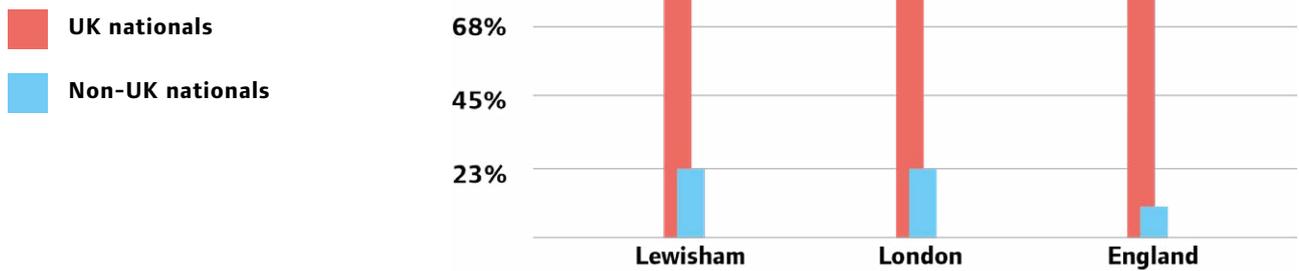


Figure 2: Long Term International Migration

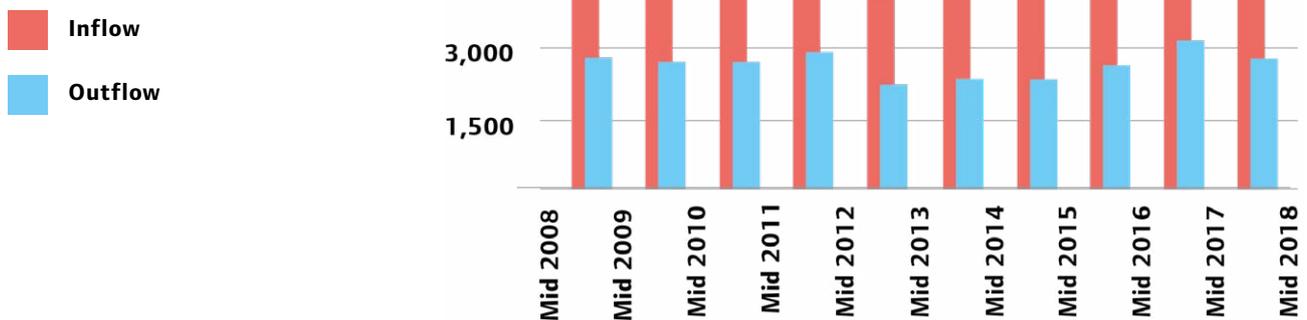
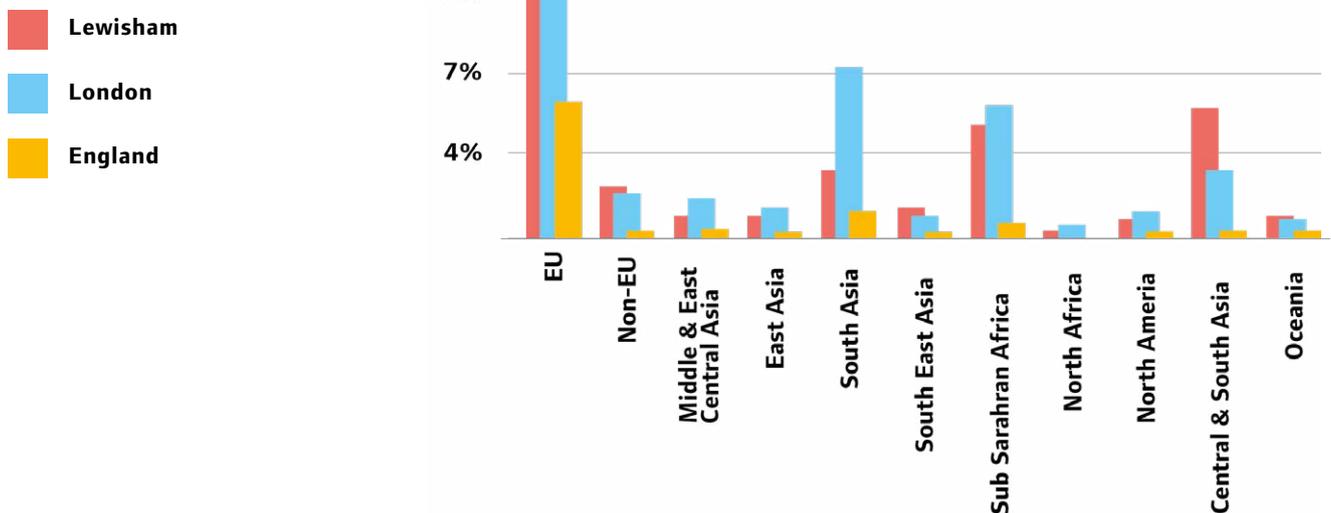


Figure 3: Country of birth excluding UK



Contact Us

**If you have any questions about this
Borough of Sanctuary Strategy
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