

Cabinet

Monday 16 September 2024

1.30 pm

Rooms GO2A, B and C, Southwark Council, 160 Tooley Street, London
SE1 2QH

Supplemental Agenda No. 1

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Date: 6 September 2024

Meeting Name:	Cabinet
Date:	16 September 2024
Report title:	Borough of Sanctuary Framework and Sanctuary Action Plan
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Jasmine Ali, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Education & Refugees
Ward(s) or groups affected:	All
Classification:	Open
Reason for lateness (if applicable):	N/a

FOREWORD - COUNCILLOR JASMINE ALI, DEPUTY LEADER & CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, EDUCATION & REFUGEES

- I am very proud to tell you about Southwark’s Borough of Sanctuary Framework.
- As an ancient borough at the heart of London and bordered by our great river, Southwark has a long and honourable history as a place of safety for those fleeing violence and persecution.
- We have given a welcome and a home to migrant communities across the ages, from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. Our culture, cuisine, community, and spirit have been enriched a thousand-fold by citizens and families from all over the world.
- More than 40 per cent of our residents were born outside of the UK – over 121,000 people. So, we can say proudly and without exaggeration that we are one of the most diverse boroughs in the country. And one of the most harmonious!
- The very first Black Mayor of Southwark, Sam King MBE, was a community activist and campaigner. He served in World War II and then returned to Britain on the Empire Windrush in 1948. He co-founded the Notting Hill carnival. Today he is recognised as one of the key social architects of postwar Britain. This legacy can be seen in the names of public buildings, libraries, and health centres, and on plaques across the borough, paying tribute to the contributions of the bold pioneers that settled in Southwark.
- On a personal note, I moved to Southwark 25 years ago and I am so happy that I made my home here. My father was a Muslim, my mother was a Christian and my partner is Jewish. I can personally attest that our multi-faith communities make everyone welcome.

- On Southwark Council itself, 48 per cent of our councillors are from Black, Asian, and ethnic minority groups. Our Madam Mayor came to the UK as a refugee from Somalia and the MP for Peckham at the heart of Southwark arrived from Sierra Leone as a refugee at the age of five.

The Borough of Sanctuary journey

- Southwark has the third highest number of refugees in London. In 2018 a group of local voluntary sector groups and residents began working towards participating in the Sanctuary movement. In 2020 Southwark Council Assembly passed a motion committing Southwark to become a 'Borough of Sanctuary'.
- In that time, we have supported 2363 Asylum Seekers, receiving asylum support for 814 Refugees under Streamlined Asylum Processing (SAP). We supported a further 69 Refugees under various Refugee Resettlement Schemes (VPRS/ARCS/ARAP).
- Our communities came through when needed with 1668 Southwark residents registered with DLUHC volunteering to host Ukrainian guests. 341 residents have welcomed 556 Guests under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.
- We supported 223 Afghan nationals under Operation Pitting/Afghan Bridging Hotels, 1027 destitute migrants with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) Restrictions, and more than 20 refugees supported by Community Sponsorship Groups to resettle and integrate into life in Southwark.
- We were the first local authority to commission a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, focusing on the health and wellbeing needs of asylum seekers, refugees and vulnerable migrants in the borough. This work has been recognised as exemplary and our approach is being replicated all around the country.
- In Southwark we made a conscious decision to invest in our Libraries and expand our services, ensuring community spaces are available to all our residents. We were delighted to find that our Libraires and Heritage service is the first in London to be awarded Library of Sanctuary award.

Thank you.

- All along, our council has worked together with our voluntary sector partners and refugees to deliver the best possible services to people seeking sanctuary in Southwark.
- Our framework and action plan has been shaped with all our partners and people with lived experience. We all agree that the launch of Southwark's Borough of Sanctuary framework could not be timelier.
- In these times of national and global tension, our commitment to providing a safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment for all has never been stronger.

We have a strong tradition of opposing hatred in all its forms, from Islamophobia and antisemitism to all forms of xenophobia.

- Today we have a new national Labour government. We will work with the Prime Minister and Home Secretary to reform the cruel ‘hostile environment’ policy created by the previous Government. Together with the voluntary sector and our community organisations, we will reaffirm our commitment to equality, unity, and justice for all.
- I extend my deepest gratitude to all our partners from the Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers, the Southwark Refugee Communities Forum, Community Southwark, the Law Centre, Panjshir Aid, United St Saviours, Citizens Advice. I extend a special thanks too, Sally Causer, Madeleine Kelleher, Eltayeb Hassan, Pauline Nandoo, Haidi Sharifi, Sarah Thurman and Anood Al-Samerai. All our sisters and brothers who brought this work to life through their experience and valuable feedback.
- Thanks too to our officers across the council including Stephen Douglass, Clara Fiti, Mekdes Alemayehu, Pamela Abdel-Baset, Anna Reid, Danielle Wallace their fantastic team and everyone else who contributed to making this vision a reality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To note that Southwark Council was awarded Borough of Sanctuary status on 17th June 2024 under the City of Sanctuary movement. Part of undertaking the full assessment, the Council is required to have its own Sanctuary Framework and Sanctuary action plan to demonstrate its commitment to being a Borough of Sanctuary by adhering to the terms and values of the City of Sanctuary movement.
2. That Cabinet approves the 2024-2027 Southwark Borough of Sanctuary Framework and Sanctuary action plan for the delivery of services to refugee, asylum seeker and migrant communities residing in Southwark and notes the next steps set out in this report.
3. That Cabinet note the requirement of the implementation of a framework and action plan for sanctuary seekers¹ for future decision making and integration into Council’s business and budget planning process.
4. That Cabinet approves the four-year grant programme for Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) organisations working with refugees, asylum seekers and disadvantaged migrants with a total budget of 100k per year. This will be paid by the Local Authority through a number of grants already received from central government.
5. That Cabinet note the progress made against the other resolutions in the motion passed by Council Assembly on 28th January 2020.

¹ A broad term used through this document to refer to refugees, asylum seekers and migrants with varied immigration statuses.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

6. The main Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) agencies supporting asylum seekers, refugees and migrants have for many years worked in partnership to support and provide improved access to mainstream services for this target group. In 2018 the partnership, working with local residents began to explore participating in the Sanctuary movement.
7. On 28th January 2020, the Council Assembly passed a motion to declare Southwark to be a 'Borough of Sanctuary'.
8. The 2024-2027 Southwark Sanctuary Framework and action plan, governs Southwark's commitment in becoming an accredited Borough of Sanctuary and formulises its work in delivering on a Borough of Sanctuary.
9. It forms part of the Council's application for recognition as a Borough of Sanctuary by the City of Sanctuary movement.
10. The Sanctuary Framework and action plan sits alongside the priorities and outcomes of the 2022-2026 Council Delivery Plan affirming the Council aims to *'welcome migrants and refugees to our borough and work with local communities to welcome and support people fleeing persecution, conflict, and disasters'*.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED

11. To continue council work without a Borough of Sanctuary Framework and action plan.
12. The number of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees has risen significantly over the last five years, and it is likely that this number may continue to increase. To take no action would be to exclude the Council's vision of welcoming migrant, asylum seeker and refugee communities, who have unique and complex needs that may otherwise not be understood or specifically tailored to without an overarching framework to address these.
13. No specific benefits can be identified in undertaking Council work for those seeking sanctuary without an overarching policy and framework.

POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION

14. To ensure the Council has a clear framework and statement of commitment to those seeking sanctuary in Southwark:
 - i. The Council will be adhering to the City of Sanctuary movement aims and values.
 - ii. The Sanctuary Framework and action plan outlines what steps the Council and partners will take over the next three years, with indicative dates for completing agreed actions.

- iii. The Sanctuary Framework and action plan focuses on continued collaborative working with internal and external partners from VCS organisations, health bodies, education and employment providers, housing, social services, Communications, and events and public affairs.
- iv. To give assurances to partner agencies and the wider community of Southwark's commitment to those seeking sanctuary.
- v. To ensure Southwark meets the criteria for Borough of Sanctuary accreditation.
- vi. To promote the well-being and improve outcomes for all people residing in Southwark.
- vii. The Council will aim to strengthen its partnership working via the Borough of Sanctuary Multi-agency Forum (MAF) an overarching body established to monitor the Sanctuary Framework and action plan.
- viii. Stakeholders, statutory services and voluntary and community sector organisations will report into and measure the progress against our key priorities and actions undertaken through Southwark's Multi-Agency Forum (MAF).
- ix. The MAF meets quarterly and is chaired by Cllr Jasmine Ali the Deputy Leader and Lead Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Refugees and the Council's Director of Stronger Neighborhoods.
- x. All stakeholders will provide six monthly written updates on their progress on the Sanctuary Framework and action plan for review at the Multi Agency Meetings (MAF)
- xi. A newly established Experts by Experience group will also be members of the MAF and able to participate in the monitoring and review of this action plan and framework.
- xii. An annual progress report will be submitted to the Cabinet Member.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

15. In recent years, local authorities across the country have seen an increase in the number of people fleeing forced displacement and seeking to find refuge and asylum in the UK. This has been true of Southwark where high numbers of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants have settled into the borough in recent years.
16. On 28th January 2020, the Council Assembly passed a motion to declare Southwark to be a 'Borough of Sanctuary' and called on Cabinet too:

- Work with community groups to harness public support to help and support refugee, migrant and asylum seekers in Southwark.
 - Continue to celebrate the contribution of refugee and migrant communities to Southwark.
 - Continue to work with organisations in the borough who support refugees and asylum seekers in the borough.
 - Challenge anti-refugee and anti-migrant attitudes wherever they are found.
 - Lobby the government to reform No Recourse to Public Funds so that people are no longer blocked from fully participating in society for years while they wait for their status to be resolved.
17. Since the motion, the council joined the Local Authority City of Sanctuary Network which supports organisations seeking to become a Borough of Sanctuary. The City of Sanctuary Network has a clear set of criteria to assist Councils with achieving sanctuary status, based on three principles, 'Share, Embed, and Learn' in order to consider eligibility for being awarded Borough of Sanctuary status.
 18. Southwark Council successfully met these criteria and was awarded Borough of Sanctuary status on 17th June 2024, but one of the recommendations and expectations from the City of Sanctuary Network is for the council to have a clear framework and action plan to deliver on its sanctuary commitments over the next three years in order to maintain Borough of Sanctuary accreditation beyond this time.

Southwark history and context

19. Southwark has a long history of welcoming asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants from around the world, with growing numbers settling into Southwark in recent years.
20. The 2021 Census showed that 40% of Southwark residents (121,000 people) were born outside the UK, Channel Islands, and Ireland. Migration of all forms has enriched the culture and diversity of Southwark bringing vitality, skills, and experiences to create a resilient borough for us all.
21. Over the last five years Southwark has seen a dramatic increase in the number of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants settling in the borough. Driven by various local, regional, national, and international factors there has been increased demand for the provision of holistic support services to help address the complex needs of our sanctuary seeking population.
22. The council's engagement with people seeking sanctuary has taken many forms including the provision of Council run universal services, Council run specialist services, resourcing and working collaboratively with key voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations in this sector and continual engagement with refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

23. The council aims to build on these successes and set ourselves even more ambitious targets to help us realise our vision to make Southwark a place that welcomes, supports, and celebrates asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.

Growth in our sanctuary seeking population:

24. Historically, the Home Office's dispersal policy has meant that Southwark has had a relatively low number of asylum seekers in the borough. In March 2019 the Home Office's National Asylum Support Service (NASS) was only supporting 59 asylum seekers in Southwark. By March 2023 this figure had increased by 3905% to total 2363.
25. As a result of a rapid growth in the asylum application backlog and a lack of suitable dispersal accommodation the Home Office has been using hotels as temporary 'Contingency Hotels' to house asylum seekers who are receiving NASS support. This has meant that Southwark, which historically only had 1 Initial Accommodation Centre, Barry House, currently has an additional 4 contingency hotels.
26. Recent humanitarian crisis has also led to an increase in the number of sanctuary seekers from Afghanistan (as part of Operation Pitting and ARAP/ACRS schemes) and Ukraine (through the Homes for Ukraine Scheme).
27. The figures below paint a picture of Southwark's sanctuary seeking population:
- a) **2363** Asylum Seekers receiving asylum support.
 - b) **814** Refugees under Streamlined Asylum Processing (SAP).
 - c) **69** Refugees under various Refugee Resettlement Schemes (VPRS/ARCS/ARAP).
 - d) **556** Guests under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.
 - e) **223** Afghan nationals under Operation Pitting/Afghan Bridging Hotels.
 - f) **1027** Destitute migrants with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) Restrictions.
 - g) **246** Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and Care Leavers.
 - h) **1000+** refugees, asylum seekers and migrants supported by key VCS organisations in Southwark.

Sanctuary in Southwark: Our Progress

28. The council has learned through practice that it takes the collective efforts and commitment of the Council, voluntary and community organisations, local grass roots refugee and migrant communities, statutory partners, funders, and regional and national networks to achieve our vision of sanctuary.

29. The council are very proud of the work undertaken across the borough by a range of different actors, often working in collaboration, which has allowed us to lay a strong foundation as a Borough of Sanctuary.

Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)

30. We are one of the only Councils to commission a local university to undertake a thorough piece of research on the health, inclusion and overall well-being needs of asylum seekers and refugees (AS&R) living in Southwark. The council, in partnership with the South East London Integrated Care Board (ICB), commissioned the Migrant Health Research Unit at St George's University of London to carry out a health and wellbeing needs assessment for asylum seekers, refugees and those with irregular immigration status in Southwark.
31. The AS&R health & wellbeing needs assessment outlines the demographics of local asylum seeker and refugee populations, and highlights key health and wellbeing needs for these groups including: mental health, food & nutrition, infectious disease and immunisation, safeguarding, education, employment and income, housing and access to legal advice.
32. The needs assessment also highlights good practice, and ongoing barriers for access to services for asylum seekers, refugees, and those with irregular migration status.
33. The insights and recommendation from the needs assessment have enabled us to create an evidence-based Borough of Sanctuary framework and action plan.

Children First

34. All refugee, asylum seeking and migrant heritage children and young people who live in Southwark are treated as children first and foremost. This commitment represents the council's collective effort to make Southwark an exemplar of practice in reducing the social and economic disadvantages associated with having refugee, asylum seeker or migrant/irregular migrant status.
35. The Southwark Family Early Help Service (FEH) located within the MASH Team provides support for refugee, asylum seeker and migrant families ensuring that there is effective coordination of services aimed at providing comprehensive support encompassing legal advocacy, health and educational access, mental health services and a range of opportunities to promote social integration.
36. From April 2022-March 2024, Southwark Family Early Help Service (FEH) provided family assistance to 447 children and young people, totaling 207 families impacted by immigration issues.
37. In addition, approximately 71 children (32 families) received help and support through the Homes for Ukraine and Afghanistan Resettlement Schemes.

38. As at the end of 31 March 2024 Southwark council are supporting 52 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and 194 former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (now care leavers). This represents 13% and 29% of the total of children in care and care leaver population in our borough.
39. Alongside the fulfilment of our statutory duties in relation to Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and care leavers we provide the following specialist support:
- a) Our virtual schoolwork's proactively ensure children are in education as soon as possible and maintains strong links with colleges providing ESOL courses supporting children to learn English.
 - b) Carelink is a specialist CAMHS Service for looked after children in Southwark and has a dedicated post to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
 - c) In addition, there are embedded Clinical Practitioners in Social Work teams providing support and the Nest (a multi-agency youth mental health support project) offer a drop-in therapeutic support for Care Leavers.
40. In September 2022 Southwark had an inspection of Children's Services and in the report published in November 2022 inspectors wrote:

"Care leavers who spoke to inspectors expressed their gratitude to Southwark Council, their social workers, and their personal advisers. They all talked about how well they had been supported across every aspect of their lives. Most importantly, they are guided through the legal processes of applying for leave to remain. They told inspectors that Southwark is a 'special council' and like family to them."

41. In December 2023 Southwark had a focused visit looking at Support to Care Leavers aged 18 to 25 and in the report published on 29th January 2024 inspectors wrote:

"Unaccompanied asylum-seeking care leavers are well supported. Their health, education and cultural needs are understood by their PAs, including the impact of trauma. The provision of effective advocacy and legal advice helps to ensure that these care leavers are able to navigate successfully through the relevant processes to progress their asylum claims."

Education and Schools

42. The FEH service and the Education team have been working collaboratively to ensure a smooth and effective admissions process for refugee, asylum seeker and migrant children. The council has a dedicated lead officer working on Education Access.

43. There are a number of different types of English classes running in Southwark from beginner level to advanced levels. These include face-to-face or online classes, which are provided in a number of different organisations in the borough including at Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers (SDCAS).
44. The council has recently increased the provision of ESOL classes for our asylum seeker and refugee residents. The council recognise the importance of understanding English in enabling our sanctuary seeking population to make friends, find future employment, find better employment opportunities, assist with children's homework, build confidence in interacting with other professionals such as doctors and teachers, and prepare for higher education.
45. In April 2024, the Council presented a Borough of Sanctuary information session to primary school Head teachers encouraging schools to join our network and become an awarded school of sanctuary. We aim to encourage all schools in Southwark to become awarded schools of sanctuary by initially signing the City of Sanctuary pledge.

Supporting Asylum Seekers:

46. Since February 2023 the Council has been working in partnership with Southwark Law Centre (SLC), Southwark Refugee Communities Forum (SRCF), Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers (SDCAS), Citizens Advice Southwark (CAS) and Panjshir Aid to coordinate and mobilise a response to the Home Office's new Streamlined Asylum Processing (SAP) approach for clearing the asylum backlog. As the SAP process has evolved the partnership has been able to mobilise a system of support to help asylum seekers receiving SAP positive decisions move on to mainstream services and receive support to integrate within the community.
47. Working together, the council and its key partners have been able to mobilise a comprehensive outreach programme to raise awareness of the introduction of the SAP amongst the qualifying six nationalities; provide legal advice to those without legal representation of their own; and run weekly advice surgeries organised by SRCF, housing officers and relevant VCS and statutory partners.
48. The council has established the Asylum and Refugee Resettlement Team in December 2023 to offer wraparound support to asylum seeker residents in contingency hotels who fall under the Streamlining Asylum Processing (SAP). The Team act as a first point of contact for Clearsprings/Hotel Managers to refer asylum seekers who are receiving a decision. Resettlement Workers carry out a needs assessment and provide practical support to aid long-term integration.
49. The council is also working with VCS organisations to develop comprehensive information guides for refugees and asylum seekers in the borough to help them navigate the complex structures around them.

Resettlement Schemes:

VPRS

50. Working in partnership with key VCS organisations Southwark council has been able to participate in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). The council has been directly supporting 4 families (22 individuals) since 2018 providing one to one support to families through a dedicated Resettlement Worker.
51. Southwark Council also works with 4 Southwark based Community Sponsorship groups welcoming and supporting refugees under the Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). The committed members of Bermondsey Welcomes Refugees, Herne Hill Refugees, Peckham Sponsors Refugees and Telegraph Hill Welcomes Refugees, working with Reset UK and Citizens UK, have successfully supported over 20 refugees resettle and integrate to life in Southwark.

Afghan Bridging Hotels

52. Southwark Council, working with key partners including Panjshir Aid (a Southwark based Afghan community organisation), SRCF, SDCAS, Community Southwark, DWP, NHS and public health colleagues, was able to mobilise a swift response to provide support to 223 individuals who had been rescued from Afghanistan as part of Operation Pitting in 2021.
53. Alongside work to ensure that people's practical needs were met, residents of the bridging hotels were able to access advice, support and advocacy services from a range of providers as well as a dedicated council Resettlement Officer stationed at each of the Bridging Hotels.

ARAP/ACRS

54. The current pressures related to scarcity of social housing and the lack of affordable private sector accommodation in and around Southwark places a significant challenge to securing accommodation for families seeking to resettle under the Afghan Relocations and Resettlement Policy (ARAP) and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS).
55. So far Southwark Council has been able to offer 1 family with accommodation under the ARAP/ACRS Schemes and accepted 7 families (25 individuals) who are able to resettle in Southwark via the Government's MEARS and Find Your Own Pathway (FYOP) schemes. We currently provide integration support with a dedicated council Resettlement Worker providing one to one support to individuals and families to help them resettle in our borough. We have placed no cap on the total number of households that we can provide wrap around integration support to and hope to see this population grow.
56. Southwark council is also working with a local Community Sponsorship group – Herne Hill Refugees - as part of the DLUHC led 'Communities for Afghans' pilot project.

Homes for Ukraine Scheme

57. Since March 2022, Southwark residents have shown immense generosity and welcome to individuals and families that have been displaced from their homes because of the Russian war on Ukraine. 1668 Southwark residents registered with the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) volunteering to host Ukrainian guests under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. Of those 341 hosts have welcomed 556 Ukrainians into their homes.
58. Working with key partners and several internal departments the council has been able to mobilise a response to swiftly meet the requirements placed on Local Authorities and to provide ongoing resettlement support with allocated Resettlement Workers to guests and hosts. The scope of the Scheme has led to the establishment of a dedicated Homes for Ukraine team within the Council who continue to support new arrivals under the Scheme as well as provide packages of support to enable guests to find sustainable accommodation and rebuild their lives in the UK.

Destitution and No Recourse to Public Funds

59. In 2015, the Council established a single service for people with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). It falls on local authorities to assess the social care needs of single adults under the Care Act 2014 and/or the social care needs of children under section 17 of the Children Act 1989. The Council also supports people with NRPF under the Mental Health Act 1983 who have been sectioned.
60. This specialist service works with vulnerable individuals and families to ensure that they receive appropriate support to meet their needs while also supporting them to find pathways to independence including through the provision of access to free legal advice and representation to resolve their immigration status.

Health

61. Southwark Council's Public health team and NHS partners have put in place a number of initiatives to support the health and inclusion needs of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in the borough. These include:
- i) The Southwark holiday food and fun programme, which focuses on healthy eating incentives, supports families living in the Asylum Contingency Hotels in the borough.
 - j) Southwark public health team and community health ambassadors carried out an audit aimed to assess adherence of Southwark's primary care surgeries to Doctors of the World's "Safe Surgeries" policies. Follow up work is underway to support GP surgeries to work on the identified recommendations.
 - k) Vaccine catch-up clinics are run in IAC/Contingency Hotels supported by the Health Inclusion Team, ICB and public health. Public health has funded translated cancer awareness talks delivered by Cancer

research UK at Southwark Refugee Communities Forum in Arabic and Tigrinya.

- l) A health promotion van regularly attends key celebration events to reach the Southwark refugee, asylum seeker and migrant communities.
- m) A dedicated Health Inclusion Team (HIT) works with residents of the various Asylum Contingency Hotels and Barry House to ensure that their health needs are effectively identified and met.

Libraries of Sanctuary

- 62. In May 2024, Southwark libraries applied to become the first Libraries of Sanctuary in London and were successfully awarded this status. Southwark libraries have a proud history of welcoming asylum seeker, refugee, and migrant communities. Library services have historically undertaken outreach work to promote their services in Barry House, one of the Home Office's Initial Accommodation Centres (IAC) as well as engaging residents at local VCS organisations.
- 63. Library services previously visited a Somali refugee day centre on a monthly basis and won a Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals award called 'Welcome to your library'.
- 64. Weekly Baby and Toddler sessions are provided at Dulwich Library, offering, a games club and a homework help club for school age children.
- 65. Southwark Libraries have bought books in Spanish, Arabic, Pashtu, Farsi, Albanian and hold children's picture books in dual languages.
- 66. Libraries offer free membership to asylum seeker and refugee residents, and they are able to access free services, including books for adults and children, free computer use, free Wi-Fi, IT taster sessions, digital drop-in sessions, Go Citizen Support (practice for British citizenship test) are accessible, including events and activities for adults, children, and warm hubs.
- 67. Libraries run an annual 'Festival of Words' which is now in its sixth year. The seven-to-ten-day long programme of events has run concurrently with Refugee week for the last two years. Authors, filmmakers, and activists with lived in experience of displacement and migration attend and co-host these events.
- 68. A diverse range of data was used to inform the development of the Sanctuary Framework and action plan. This includes Home Office data, along with that used across service areas including public health and VCS organisations. Southwark's Sanctuary Framework and action was jointly shaped by the council, key voluntary and community sector partners and the voices of people seeking sanctuary.
- 69. The Sanctuary Framework sets out our ambition and commitment to build on and strengthen our work in the years ahead; welcoming all who arrive or settle in Southwark. Working collectively as a community of sanctuary we will empower refugees, asylum seekers and migrants to reach their full potential

and contribute to Southwark's community, culture and economy while thriving, and living safely and securely.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

70. It is believed the implementation of the Sanctuary Framework and action plan will ensure that key internal and external partners including the wider council has a clear framework defining its commitment to maintaining Borough of Sanctuary status.
71. The Sanctuary Framework and action plan will underpin and provide a reference point for decision making relating to the council and its business to ensure positive outcomes for those seeking sanctuary in Southwark.
72. Implementation of the Sanctuary Framework and action plan will be a key milestone in enabling the council to uphold Borough of Sanctuary status for the first time.
73. The council will be expected to re-apply for continued Borough of Sanctuary status to the City of Sanctuary Network in 2027 and will need to evidence its commitment through implementing a framework and action plan designed and tailored for sanctuary seekers.
74. Given the scale of the work already undertaken in supporting those seeking sanctuary in Southwark, and the prospect of this becoming a growing area of the council's business it would be advisable to ensure the council has a clear framework to underpin and direct its work.
75. The Southwark Sanctuary Framework and action plan 2024-2027 sets out a vision to making Southwark a place that welcomes, supports, and celebrates asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants.
76. Southwark is committed to creating a culture of empathy, understanding and inclusion across the borough by taking action to promote the rights and welfare of all people seeking sanctuary and protection by bringing communities together to address the issues that matter to them.
77. The Sanctuary Framework and action plan is supported by four high level objectives that will guide our work. These include:
 - **Stand Together:** We want Southwark to be a place of safety, support, and opportunity for those seeking sanctuary - embedding a collective message of welcome and kindness, and challenge to the wider hostile environment.
 - **Voice:** We want to celebrate the culture, diversity, and contributions of those seeking sanctuary and amplify their voices and experiences to shape positive change.
 - **Shaping Services:** We want to better understand the experiences and needs of those seeking sanctuary and ensure that services and local agencies are responding to these issues and enabling opportunities.

- **Bespoke Support:** We want to foster collaboration between different local agencies so they can respond effectively, cooperatively, and flexibly to the ongoing and changing needs of sanctuary-seekers.

78. We acknowledge that the Sanctuary Framework and action plan is just the beginning. The Sanctuary Framework and action plan sets out the strategic objectives for Southwark in supporting sanctuary seekers and we will continue to work with Cabinet, our anchor partners, and residents to ensure we deliver its ambitious vision.
79. There are no identified risks associated with implementing the Framework and action plan as it helps to cement the council's resolution to being a Borough of Sanctuary and provides a clear framework to uphold future Borough of Sanctuary status, which is the council's ambition and intention.

Policy framework implications

80. The values of the City of Sanctuary criteria fit well with the council's long-standing services to refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. The City of Sanctuary Charter: [City of Sanctuary Charter - City of Sanctuary UK](#) is well aligned with the council's ambitions of welcoming and supporting migrant and refugee communities as set out in the Council's Delivery plan.
81. Working through the application criteria provided invaluable insights on developing a Borough of Sanctuary Framework and action plan for reviewing how services deliver for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, identifying any opportunities for improvement, and gaps or barriers to services.
82. The Sanctuary Framework and action plan, affirms the Council's on-going commitment to build a protective system that treats all sanctuary seekers with dignity, compassion, and respect. While also assisting sanctuary seekers to thrive and positively integrate into Southwark's communities, ensuring that its policies and services support this commitment.
83. The council's Risk Management Strategy has established a proactive approach to the management of risks to support its strategies, day to day operations and associated activities.
84. Strategic risks are regularly monitored within the MAF working group and/or reported to the Director of Stronger Neighborhoods and the Community Support Manager who oversee sanctuary related work in the council. The proposals within this report will not impact risks or the monitoring of them and may act as controls and mitigations to better manage potential risks.
85. In line with the Children and Social Work Act 2017, the council has a duty to consider Corporate Parenting Principles. Southwark's 2021-2024 Corporate Parenting Strategy reflects the council's commitment to ensuring the most vulnerable children and young people are protected and their needs are considered in everything the council does. This includes Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) who are looked after by the council.
86. The Sanctuary Framework and action plan is committed to building a fairer future for all our children and young adults. The Sanctuary Framework and

action plan fully supports the council's Corporate Parenting Strategy in its vision that all children and young people in Southwark grow up in a safe, healthy, and happy environment where they have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

87. Performance related to the delivery of services for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are to be monitored within directorates according to specific internal controls. Other measures include regular reporting through the MAF, where quarterly updates will be provided with respect to the progress made under the Borough of Sanctuary Framework and action plan.
88. No specific new resources are proposed for the implementation of the Sanctuary Framework and action plan. It is anticipated that this process may identify the need for changed ways of working and any new resource requirement would need to be considered through the internal budget and business planning process alongside other priorities.
89. The proposal set out in this report has no direct impact on the council's sustainability strategy.

Community, equalities (including socio-economic) and health impacts

Community impact statement

90. The impact of the Sanctuary Framework and action plan will benefit those who are at significant risk of discrimination and structural inequalities on the grounds of race, ethnicity, culture, and religion whilst recognising that those seeking sanctuary may also have other protected characteristics.
91. The aim is to ensure the council undertakes its business with due regard to the needs of vulnerable groups and does not discriminate or create disadvantage. In terms of the council's Equality Framework 2021, the Sanctuary Framework and action plan will ensure that services provided to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are accessible and achieve outcomes consistent with the council's statutory responsibilities.
92. The Sanctuary Framework and action plan will enable the council to foster good community relations, promote social cohesion and improve the council's understanding of the needs of different communities in the borough, in order to provide services to help tackle discrimination, hate crime, inequality and to promote community safety, social cohesion and to help close the gap in outcomes for Southwark's citizens.

Equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement

93. At its core, the essence of sanctuary values is to act in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, especially in the case of marginalisation experienced by refugees, asylum seekers and migrants by promoting and safeguarding the welfare of all our residents.

94. The Council is committed to following the City of Sanctuary values, setting out the importance of inclusivity, openness, participation, inspiring, and integrity: [About - City of Sanctuary UK](#). These values sit alongside Southwark Council's values:
- Treating residents as if they were a valued member of our own family.
 - Being open, honest and accountable
 - Spending money as if it were from our own pocket.
 - Working with everyone to realise their own potential.
 - Making Southwark a place to be proud of
 - Always work to make Southwark more equal and just.
95. The Sanctuary Framework and action plan is an integral piece of work with respect to the council's vision of tackling inequalities and its commitment to welcoming those from a diverse range of backgrounds. Equalities and diversity considerations are key to the work the council prioritises to supporting sanctuary seekers.
96. The council acknowledges the unique challenges faced by sanctuary seekers and the approach taken in the Sanctuary Framework and action plan will ensure sensitivity to the protected characteristics of those seeking sanctuary in Southwark, including age, disability, race, ethnicity, faith or belief, gender and sexual orientation, parental status, and languages.
97. Decision-makers are reminded of the requirement under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) (s149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and other conduct prohibited by the Act. (ii) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and (iii) foster good relations between persons from different groups.
98. Reducing inequalities is a core principle of Southwark 2023, that supports our Equalities Framework. The Sanctuary Framework and action plan builds on this progress, and it will not negatively impact those with protected characteristics. It is expected that the Sanctuary Framework and action plan will go further to support reductions in inequality.
99. Considering the above, at this stage the recommendations are not considered to have a disproportionate effect on any protected characteristic and is not considered to have a detrimental impact on equality of opportunity under the Equality Act 2010.

Health impact statement

100. The Sanctuary Framework and action plan has been developed with a focus on supporting the improved health and well-being of Southwark's asylum seeker, refugee, and migrant residents, who often face structural and health inequalities.

101. The council has demonstrated a commitment on meeting the health, inclusion and overall well-being needs of sanctuary seekers living in Southwark by commissioning a local university to undertake a thorough piece of research. The aim was for Southwark Public Health, together with key partners and stakeholders across the council, the NHS, and voluntary sector organisations to identify the needs of sanctuary seekers and the barriers they face to accessing services.
102. The full JSNA contains nearly 50 recommendations on how to meet the health and well-being needs of refugees and asylum seekers in Southwark. The recommendations within the JSNA supported the council's aspirations of achieving Borough of Sanctuary status and provided a strong evidence-base for the Sanctuary Framework and action plan.
103. Part of the work for the JSNA researchers held two community focus groups and two interviews. The two community focus groups were held with:
- a) With local communities, including Eritrean, Latin American, Iranian and women's groups and
 - b) Asylum seekers residing at Barry House and the 4 asylum contingency hotels.
104. The Sanctuary Framework and action plan shows no potential for discrimination and takes all appropriate opportunities to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people with different protected characteristics.

Climate change implications

105. No impact. It is not anticipated that this report contributes nor presents any risk covered in the council's Climate Change Strategy. The Sanctuary Framework and action plan hopes to create more opportunities for accessible local provisions as all asylum hotels are based in Southwark. This will reduce travel emissions.
106. In a larger context, the impact of global climate change maybe associated to new displacements related to environmental disasters. This can result in Southwark experiencing increased numbers of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, seeking refuge in the years ahead related to global climatic and environmental factors experienced in other parts of the world.

Resource implications

107. There are no immediate cost implications arising from this report. Financing of the Sanctuary Framework and action plan will be contained within agreed budgets.
108. Any future resourcing decisions as part of the Sanctuary Framework and action plan will be assessed and reviewed as part of the council's normal budget process.

109. There is an annual fee of £700 for Local Authorities to be accredited as a Borough of Sanctuary and this will be resourced through existing funding streams.

Consultation

110. Southwark's 2024-2027 Sanctuary Framework and action plan is our shared vision for the borough, designed and developed in partnership with sanctuary seekers from a wide range of backgrounds and ages in Southwark, colleagues from City of Sanctuary UK as well as internal senior council officer's representative from different service areas who work and support sanctuary seekers including our key external partners from voluntary and community sector organisations.
111. The Sanctuary Framework and action plan has been developed through extensive and wide-ranging engagement and research to understand Southwark's sanctuary seeker community today considering evolving trends and needs.
112. Our approach has helped us to reflect the diversity of Southwark including the voice of our people and communities, centering this work on their needs and hopes throughout the Sanctuary Framework and action plan cycle over the next three years.

Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Assurance (CM 28.08.2024)

113. The City of Sanctuary UK is a registered charity which has a mission to provide coordination and development support for networks of local authorities regarding refugee, migrant and asylum seekers.
114. Southwark Council was awarded the status of Borough of Sanctuary on 17 June 2024 after going through the award appraisal process and gaining recognition with the City of Sanctuary Charity.
115. The status carries no legal obligations but demonstrates the Council's commitment to the values of City of Sanctuary UK.
116. The recommendations from the City of Sanctuary have been discussed and taken forward during the three-year award period. The Council will have to re-apply to renew the award at the end of the three-year period.
117. The implementation and adherence to Southwark Sanctuary Framework will be assessed as part of the renewal process.
118. The cabinet will need to ensure that the public sector equality duty in section 149 Equality Act 2010 is considered, which is to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and to foster good relations between people with protected characteristics and others.
119. The "Community, equalities (including socio-economic) and health impacts" section of this report sets out how the recommendations demonstrates compliance are inherently in accordance with the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.

Strategic Director of Resources (DBR 28.8.2024)

120. This report is requesting the cabinet to note the award of Borough of Sanctuary status to Southwark Council on 17th June 2024 under the City of Sanctuary movement; approve the 2024-2027 Southwark Borough of Sanctuary Framework and Sanctuary action plan for the delivery of services to refugee, asylum seeker and migrant communities residing in Southwark and note the next steps set out in this report.
121. The SDF notes the financial implications detailed in this report and that there are no immediate additional costs arising. The SDF also notes the recommendation to the cabinet to note the requirements of the implementation of a framework and action plan for sanctuary seekers for future decision making and integration into Council's business and budget planning process.
122. The SDF notes that the Sanctuary Framework and action plan sit alongside the priorities and outcomes of the 2022-2026 Council Delivery Plan, any associated costs and Grant funding received will be monitored as part of departmental budget monitoring process.
123. Officers' time and any other costs associated with this recommendation will be contained within existing departmental revenue budgets.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Equalities Act 2010 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents	160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH
Climate Change Strategy Climate Change Strategy (July 2021) (1).pdf	160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH
Risk Management Strategy Risk Management Strategy 2018 final.pdf	160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH
The Southwark Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s99637/Appendix%201%20Draft%20Corporate%20Parenting%20Strategy%202021-2024.pdf	Children' and Adults' Services, 4 th Floor, Commissioning Directorate 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH
Southwark Asylum Seeker and Refugee full version of Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) full version https://www.southwark.gov.uk/assets/attach/230579/The-Southwark-Asylum-Seeker-and-Refugee-JSNA-June-2023.pdf	Public Health Children & Adults services 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH
City of Sanctuary UK About - City of Sanctuary UK	City Of Sanctuary UK PO Box 384. Leeds LS26 1GJ	councils@cityofsanctuary.org
City of Sanctuary Charter City of Sanctuary Charter - City of Sanctuary UK	City Of Sanctuary UK PO Box 384. Leeds LS26 1GJ	councils@cityofsanctuary.org

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Southwark 2023-2027 Sanctuary Framework and action plan

AUDIT TRAIL

Cabinet Member	Cllr Jasmine Ali, Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Refugees	
Lead Officer	Stephen Douglas, Director of Stronger Neighborhoods, Communities Division	
Report Author	Mekdes Alemayehu Community Support Manager Pamela Abdel-Baset, Team Leader	
Version	Final	
Dated	August 2024	
Key Decision?	Yes	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Assurance	Yes	Yes
Strategic Director of Resources	Yes	Yes
Director of Stronger Neighborhoods	Yes	Yes
Cabinet Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team		6 September 2024

Southwark Sanctuary Framework

2024-2027

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Forward by Cllr Jasmine Ali, Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Refugees

I am very proud to tell you about Southwark's Borough of Sanctuary Framework.

As an ancient borough at the heart of London and bordered by our great river, Southwark has a long and honourable history as a place of safety for those fleeing violence and persecution.

We have given a welcome and a home to migrant communities across the ages, from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. Our culture, cuisine, community, and spirit have been enriched a thousand-fold by citizens and families from all over the world.

More than 40 per cent of our residents were born outside of the UK – over 121,000 people. So, we can say proudly and without exaggeration that we are one of the most diverse boroughs in the country.

And one of the most harmonious! The very first Black Mayor of Southwark, Sam King MBE, was a community activist and campaigner. He served in World War II and then returned to Britain on the Empire Windrush in 1948. He co-founded the Notting Hill carnival. Today he is recognised as one of the key social architects of postwar Britain.

This legacy can be seen in the names of public buildings, libraries, and health centres, and on plaques across the borough, paying tribute to the contributions of the bold pioneers that settled in Southwark.

On a personal note, I moved to Southwark 25 years ago and I am so happy that I made my home here. My father was a Muslim, my mother was a Christian and my partner is Jewish. I can personally attest that our multi-faith communities make everyone welcome.

On Southwark Council itself, 48 per cent of our councillors are from Black, Asian, and ethnic minority groups. Our Madam Mayor came to the UK as a refugee from Somalia and the MP for Peckham at the heart of Southwark arrived from Sierra Leone as a refugee at the age of five.

The Borough of Sanctuary journey

Southwark has the third highest number of refugees in London.

In 2018 a group of local voluntary sector groups and residents began working towards participating in the Sanctuary movement. In 2020 Southwark Council Assembly passed a motion committing Southwark to become a 'Borough of Sanctuary'.

In that time, we have supported 2363 Asylum Seekers, receiving asylum support for 814 Refugees under Streamlined Asylum Processing (SAP). We supported a further 69 Refugees under various Refugee Resettlement Schemes (VPRS/ARCS/ARAP)

Our communities came through when needed with 1668 Southwark residents registered with DLUHC volunteering to host Ukrainian guests. 341 residents have welcomed 556 Guests under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

We supported 223 Afghan nationals under Operation Pitting/Afghan Bridging Hotels, 1027 destitute migrants with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) Restrictions, and more than 20 refugees supported by Community Sponsorship Groups to resettle and integrate into life in Southwark.

We were the first local authority to commission a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, focusing on the health and wellbeing needs of asylum seekers, refugees and vulnerable migrants in the borough. This work has been recognised as exemplary and our approach is being replicated all around the country.

In Southwark we made a conscious decision to invest in our Libraries and expand our services, ensuring community spaces are available to all our residents. We were delighted to find that our Libraires and Heritage service is the first in London to be awarded Library of Sanctuary award.

Thank you.

All along, our council has worked together with our voluntary sector partners and refugees to deliver the best possible services to people seeking sanctuary in Southwark.

Our framework and action plan has been shaped with all our partners and people with lived experience.

We all agree that the launch of Southwark's Borough of Sanctuary framework could not be timelier.

In these times of national and global tension, our commitment to providing a safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment for all has never been stronger. We have a strong tradition of opposing hatred in all its forms, from Islamophobia and antisemitism to all forms of xenophobia.

Today we have a new national Labour government. We will work with the Prime Minister and Home Secretary to reform the cruel 'hostile environment' policy created by the previous Government. Together with the voluntary sector and our community organisations, we will reaffirm our commitment to equality, unity, and justice for all.

I extend my deepest gratitude to all our partners from the Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers, the Southwark Refugee Communities Forum, Community Southwark, the Law Centre, Panjshir Aid, United St Saviours, Citizens Advice. I extend a special thanks too, Sally Causer, Madeleine Kelleher,

Eltayeb Hassan, Pauline Nandoo, Haidi Sharifi, Sarah Thurman and Anood Al-Samerai. All our sisters and brothers who brought this work to life through their experience and valuable feedback.

Thanks too to our officers across the council including Stephen Douglass, Clara Fiti, Mekdes Alemayehu, Pamela Abdel-Baset, Anna Reid, Danielle Wallace their fantastic team and everyone else who contributed to making this vision a reality.



Cllr Jasmine Ali, Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Refugees

Forward by Eltayeb

It has been an incredible experience to witness Southwark become a Borough of Sanctuary, and more so I am overjoyed to have been part of a development which renders London a safer, more welcoming refuge for asylum seekers and immigrants from all over the world.

Having immigrated from Sudan in 2000, I have spent the last 20 years of my life working and living in this borough. Being part of a refugee-led organisation such as the SRCF means connecting with refugees on a deeper level, based on language, culture, or religion. This has aided refugees in communicating their confusion, fear, and lack of support in various aspects.

I have always had a passion for supporting people who demonstrate resilience and determination in the face of adversity. I feel fortunate to share my personal experience and knowledge with those on similar journeys.

I often witness refugees achieving remarkable things as they strive to rebuild better lives for themselves and their families, showing courage to pursue their dreams and make a positive impact.

I believe that their journeys demonstrate how people seeking sanctuary can rebuild their lives based on hope, courage, love, and kindness instead of fear.

SRCF has been working in partnership with Southwark Council and voluntary and community organisations since 2003. I have seen this relationship develop and I share this joint vision between my organisation, participating voluntary sector colleagues and Southwark Council to make the borough a place that welcomes, supports, and celebrates asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants.

Eltayeb Hassan
Project Manager
SRCF



Our Vision

Our vision is to make Southwark a place that welcomes, supports, and celebrates asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants.

We are committed to creating a culture of empathy, understanding and inclusion across the borough. We will take action to promote the rights and welfare of all people seeking sanctuary and protection by bringing communities together to address the issues that matter to them. We recognise the critical role of our grass roots voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations in realising this vision. We will work in strong collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, VCS organisations and statutory partners to ensure there is a co-ordinated and proactive response to the needs and welfare of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants living in our borough. We are committed to amplifying the voices of people with lived experiences to ensure their voice influences change at local, regional and national levels.

Our Values

We are committed to following the City of Sanctuary (CoS) values:

- **Inclusivity** We welcome and respect people from all backgrounds, place value on diversity and are committed to equality.
- **Openness** We are committed to a culture of working collaboratively across the City of Sanctuary networks and in partnership with others.
- **Participation** We work with people seeking sanctuary and value and recognise the contribution of all. We aspire to ensure that people seeking sanctuary are involved in all decision making at all levels and are supported to become leaders in the organisation, networks, and the wider movement.
- **Inspiring** We work with enthusiasm and positivity and are determined to surpass what has already been achieved to welcome refugees and people seeking sanctuary.
- **Integrity** We aspire to high standards of honesty and behaviour, and always to act in the interests of people seeking sanctuary.

These values sit alongside Southwark Council's values: [The Source • Our council values & our practice principles](#)

At its core, the essence of sanctuary values is to act in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, especially in the case of marginalisation experienced by refugees, asylum seekers and migrants by promoting and safeguarding the welfare of all our residents. Engagement with sanctuary seekers and partners who support them, shapes our strategic priorities.

Our Commitment

The main VCS agencies supporting asylum seekers, refugees and migrants have for many years worked in partnership to support and provide improved access to mainstream services for this target group. In 2018 the partnership, working with local residents began to explore participating in the Sanctuary movement.

In January 2020, the Council Assembly passed a motion to declare Southwark to be a 'Borough of Sanctuary' and called on Cabinet to:

- Work with community groups to harness public support to help and support refugee, migrant and asylum seekers in Southwark.
- Continue to celebrate the contribution of refugee and migrant communities to Southwark.
- Continue to work with organisations in the borough who support refugees and asylum seekers in the borough.
- Challenge anti-refugee and anti-migrant attitudes wherever they are found.
- Lobby the government to reform No Recourse to Public Funds so that people are no longer blocked from fully participating in society for years while they wait for their status to be resolved.

This framework governs Southwark's commitment to becoming a Borough of Sanctuary and formalises Southwark's role in delivering on a borough of sanctuary. It forms part of the Council's application for recognition as a Borough of Sanctuary by the City of Sanctuary Movement.

This framework sits alongside the priorities and outcomes of the [2022-2026 Council Delivery Plan](#) affirming the Council aim to '*welcome migrants and refugees to our borough and work with local communities to welcome and support people fleeing persecution, conflict, and disasters*'.

Introduction

Southwark is located in the heart of London, one of the most globally diverse cities. People from across the United Kingdom (UK), mainland Europe and from around the world come to Southwark every year—seeking a place to live, work, study and make a home. Many people also come to Southwark each year seeking sanctuary, having fled conflict, persecution, or other inhumane treatment in their home countries.

Southwark has a long history of welcoming asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants from around the world, with growing numbers settling into Southwark in recent years. Over the last five years Southwark has seen a dramatic increase in the number of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants settling in the borough. Driven by various local, regional, national, and international factors there has been increased demand for the provision of holistic support services to help address the complex needs of our sanctuary seeking population.

The Borough of Sanctuary accreditation affirms Southwark's on-going commitment to supporting and empowering those with lived experiences of migration and displacement. The aim is for people seeking sanctuary to have a meaningful voice in the design and review of services provided to them, to achieve equal access to key areas such as healthcare, welfare services, housing, education, and employment.

Our approach is to empower, support and collaborate with statutory services, voluntary and community sector organisations and individuals to embed a welcoming environment and to foster solidarity between existing communities, businesses, migrants, and people seeking sanctuary.

Jointly shaped by the Council, key voluntary and community sector partners and the voices of people seeking sanctuary, this framework sets out our ambition and commitment to build on and strengthen our work in the years ahead; welcoming all who arrive or settle in Southwark. Working collectively as a community of sanctuary we will empower refugees, asylum seekers and migrants to reach their full potential and contribute to Southwark's community, culture and economy while thriving, and living safely and securely.

Our Population

Results of the 2021 Census on '*Demography and Migration*' showed that over **121,000** Southwark residents were born outside the UK, Channel Islands, and Ireland, encompassing **40%** of Southwark's total residents.

In addition, Southwark has experienced a drastic increase in the number of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants settling into the borough in recent years. The figures below paint a small picture of Southwark's sanctuary seeking population:

- **2363** Asylum Seekers receiving asylum support.
- **814** Refugees under Streamlined Asylum Processing (SAP)
- **69** Refugees under various Refugee Resettlement Schemes (VPRS/ARCS/ARAP)
- **556** Guests under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme
- **223** Afghan nationals under Operation Pitting/Afghan Bridging Hotels
- **1027** Destitute migrants with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) Restrictions
- **246** Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and Care Leavers

- **1000+** refugees, asylum seekers and migrants supported by key VCS organisations in Southwark.

The Challenge

Migration and displacement have long been a highly politicised issue with VCS organisations often left to pick up the pieces on the ground and provide essential assistance to people seeking sanctuary. The numerous challenges faced by people to rebuild their lives in Southwark, and the work to embed our commitment as a Borough of Sanctuary takes place in a challenging environment, intensified by international, national, and localised pressures.

Housing Demand

Housing affordability, availability and suitability remain core challenges in most communities across the UK and are acutely felt within London. The cost-of-living crisis has further exacerbated poverty and homelessness. The criticisms Local Authorities frequently face in tackling the housing crisis is an on-going national and local debate.

Like other Local Authorities across the country, Southwark housing waiting lists are extensive, and the availability of affordable private sector accommodation is scarce. Many people in receipt of asylum support locally lose entitlement to their NASS financial assistance and/or accommodation within 28 days or less after being granted refugee status by the Home Office. The Council and the VCS groups are working together; aiming to ensure that refugees are supported into mainstream accommodation. The current pressures related to the high cost of temporary accommodation and a lack of affordable private sector accommodation in and around Southwark places a significant challenge to securing accommodation.

Increasing Asylum Seeker Population

Historically, the Home Office's dispersal policy has meant that Southwark has had a relatively low number of asylum seekers in the borough. In March 2019 there were the Home Office's National Asylum Support Service (NASS) was only supporting 59 asylum seekers in Southwark. By March 2023, this figure had increased by 3905% to total 2363 (a 40-fold increase). As a result of a rapid growth in the asylum application backlog and a lack of suitable dispersal accommodation the Home Office has been using hotels as temporary 'Contingency Hotels' to house asylum seekers who are receiving NASS support. This has meant that Southwark, which historically only had one Initial Accommodation Centre, Barry House, currently has an additional four contingency hotels.

The Home Office commission Clearsprings Ready Homes (CRH) to provide asylum seeker accommodation in London and the Southeast of England. Local Authorities have no influence on the placement of asylum seeker accommodation in their boroughs, which are managed by government

subcontractor networks. These sites are set up rapidly, with little opportunity for input or engagement from support services locally such as education and health. The hotel environment has exacerbated concerns relating to residents' mental health, safety, educational attainment, and practical needs. This has led to VCS organisations, the Council and our Borough of Sanctuary partners stepping in to provide support and campaign for adequate standards to be met.

NRPF

No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) is an immigration condition usually imposed when a person has been issued leave to enter or remain for a temporary purpose, such as to visit, study or work. The NRPF condition excludes people from accessing most state benefits and services, including Universal Credit, Child Benefit, and social housing. In the case of people seeking sanctuary and those with insecure status, NRPF causes significant hardship among Londoners, affecting their health, education, housing, and access to universal services such as support for domestic abuse or when experiencing homelessness. The global pandemic exacerbated this, with many people subject to NRPF having almost no safety net of support during this time. The growing cost of living pressures will have particularly negative effects on households with NRPF, since they cannot rely on benefits or support packages when facing financial hardships.

The government introduced the NRPF policy to promote integration in society and encourage migrants to be financially independent so that they are not a burden on 'taxpayers'. However, significant evidence shows the policy is having the opposite effect, exacerbating social, economic, and racial inequalities. Only those eligible through local authority statutory duties due to safeguarding children, disability, mental health condition or illness can access any support. We commit to continually review our approach to ensure this group is better able to access support locally.

Funding

At a national level, there is limited government funding available for work in this area and current price increases are placing immense pressures on the operating budgets of the local authority and voluntary and community sector services. This also presents immense challenges to people seeking sanctuary whose everyday living costs are increasing daily against limited incomes.

Despite these challenges, the Southwark Borough of Sanctuary partnership group will continue to work collectively and collaboratively to maximise the support available to all residents seeking sanctuary in the years ahead.

Health

People seeking sanctuary experience a range of structural health inequalities comparatively to the general population. Access to health services is a major issue for these populations, because of

language barriers, difficulty navigating the health, welfare and education systems and fear of immigration enforcement by statutory services.

Limited specialist and culturally sensitive services such as mental health support causes excessive wait times that can lead to crisis or breakdowns. Implications of the hostile environment in local settings including the current NHS charging system limits the accessibility of care for irregular migrants and embed a culture of hesitation for these groups to access formal healthcare. Further work needs to be done in Southwark, to meet the needs of asylum seekers, refugees, and irregular migrants by building on existing strengths, such as the trusted role of the voluntary and community sector organisations.

In 2023, the Council commissioned a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) focusing on the health and well-being needs of asylum seekers and refugees in Southwark. The report outlines 39 recommendations across five themes on how Southwark Council, South East London, Integrated Care Board (ICB) and local partners can work together to better meet the needs of these populations.

Political Context

Over the past decade, the previous Conservative government implemented a suite of policies with the explicit aim of creating challenging circumstances for those seeking sanctuary in the UK to travel to and settle here. A narrative of attributing the many crises facing the UK to 'out of control immigration' has arisen leading to the spread of an anti-migrant attitude most acutely displayed recently with the outbreak of far-right rioting that targeted buildings associated with sanctuary-seekers.

These anti-migrant attitudes have led to continued external pressure on political parties from the media and voters to reduce net migration, resulting in the system of government we see today that remains focused on deterring migration and removing those with irregular status, as opposed to strengthening the process of integrating new migrants and refugees. The immigration control policies of the Home Office have also been embedded into public services, creating a lack of trust in those authorities striving to support sanctuary seekers. These political circumstances result in increased challenges for local authorities to sufficiently support sanctuary seekers into secure employment and housing, leaving them at risk of poor health, homelessness, and destitution.

Despite these challenges, Southwark Stands Together against all forms of discrimination. Southwark prides itself in welcoming those from around the world and is home to a diverse community, with people of many different backgrounds, cultures and faiths living side-by-side.

Legal Advice

Many people who should be able to access free, high quality immigration advice are unable to do so because of the lack of capacity within accredited organisations. Cuts to legal aid provision has

created a crisis situation as many private practice solicitors have given up legal aid work and organisations have folded due to financial pressure. This has created extreme pressure on the not-for-profit legal providers, and they report having to turn cases away daily. Access to good quality advice is essential in tackling the root cause of homelessness and destitution. The Council will review availability of legal advice services for sanctuary seekers.

Sanctuary in Southwark: Our Progress

We have learned through practice that it takes the collective efforts and commitment of the Council, voluntary and community organisations, local grass roots refugee and migrant communities, statutory partners, funders, and regional and national networks to achieve our vision of sanctuary. Throughout the responses to the various crisis, it has been clear that the skill, experience, expertise and reach of voluntary community sector organisations are crucial to the success and sustainability of efforts taken to support sanctuary seekers.

We are very proud of the work undertaken across the borough by a range of different stakeholders, often working in collaboration, that has allowed us to lay a strong foundation as a Borough of Sanctuary.

Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)

We are one of the only Councils to commission a local university to undertake a thorough piece of research on the health, inclusion and overall well-being needs of asylum seekers and refugees (AS&R) living in Southwark. The council, in partnership with the South East London Integrated Care Board (ICB), commissioned the Migrant Health Research Unit at St George's University of London to deliver a health and wellbeing needs assessment for asylum seekers, refugees and those with irregular immigration status in Southwark.

The [AS&R health & wellbeing needs assessment](#) outlines the demographics of local asylum seeker and refugee populations, and highlights key health and wellbeing needs for these groups, including: *mental health, food & nutrition, infectious disease and immunisation, safeguarding, education, employment and income, housing and access to legal advice*. The needs assessment also highlights good practice, and ongoing barriers, for access to services for asylum seekers, refugees, and those with irregular migration status.

The JSNA outlines 39 recommendations across five themes detailing how Southwark Council, NHS and VCS partners can work together to meet the needs of asylum seekers and refugees. The Sanctuary Action plan will complement the recommendations in the JSNA.

Children First

All refugee, asylum seeking, migrant heritage children and young people who live in Southwark are treated as children first and foremost. This commitment represents our collective effort to make Southwark an exemplar of practice in reducing the social and economic disadvantages associated with having refugee, asylum seeker or irregular migrant status.

The Southwark Family Early Help Service (FEH) located within the MASH Team provides support for refugee, asylum seeker and migrant families ensuring that there is effective coordination of services aimed at providing comprehensive support encompassing legal advocacy, health and educational access, mental health services and a range of opportunities to promote social integration.

From April 2022-March 2024, Southwark Family Early Help Service (FEH) provided family assistance to **545** children and young people, totalling **234 families** impacted by immigration issues. In addition, approximately **71** children (**32** families) received help and support through the Homes for Ukraine and Afghanistan Resettlement Schemes.

As of the end of 31 March 2024 Southwark Council are supporting **52** unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and **194** former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (now care leavers). This represents 13% and 29% of the total of children in care and the care leaver population in our borough.

Alongside the fulfilment of our statutory duties in relation to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and care leavers, we provide the following specialist support:

- Our virtual schoolwork's proactively to ensure children are in education as soon as possible and maintains strong links with colleges providing ESOL courses supporting children to learn English.
- Carelink is a specialist CAMHS Service for looked after children in Southwark and has a dedicated post to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. In addition, there are embedded Clinical Practitioners in Social Work teams providing support and the Nest (a multi-agency youth mental health support project) offering drop-in therapeutic support for Care Leavers.

In September 2022, Southwark had an inspection of Children's Services and in the report published in November 2022, inspectors wrote:

“Care leavers who spoke to inspectors expressed their gratitude to Southwark Council, their social workers, and their personal advisers. They all talked about how well they had been supported across every aspect of their lives. Most importantly, they are guided through the legal processes of applying for leave to remain. They told inspectors that Southwark is a ‘special council’ and like family to them.”

In December 2023, Southwark had a focused visit looking at Support to Care Leavers aged 18 to 25 and in the report published on 29 January 2024, inspectors wrote:

“Unaccompanied asylum-seeking care leavers are well supported. Their health, education and cultural needs are understood by their PAs, including the impact of trauma. The provision of effective advocacy and legal advice helps to ensure that these care leavers are able to navigate successfully through the relevant processes to progress their asylum claims.”

Streamlining Asylum Processing (SAP) Response

Since February 2023, the Council has been working in partnership with Southwark Law Centre (SLC), Southwark Refugee Communities Forum (SRCF), Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers (SDCAS), Citizens Advice Southwark (CAS) and Panjshir Aid to coordinate and mobilise a response to the Home Office’s new Streamlined Asylum Processing (SAP) approach for clearing the asylum backlog. As the SAP process evolved, the partnership has been able to mobilise a system of support to help asylum seekers receiving SAP positive decisions move on to mainstream services and receive support to integrate within the community.

Often asylum seekers have no real understanding of their rights and entitlements. The short timeframe that asylum seekers are given to move on from NASS accommodation and financial support (28days or less), has resulted in an increased risk of homelessness and destitution.

Working together, we have been able to mobilise a comprehensive outreach programme to raise awareness of the introduction of the SAP amongst the qualifying six nationalities; provide legal advice to those without legal representation of their own; and run weekly advice surgeries organised by SRCF, housing officers and relevant VCS and statutory partners.

The Council has established the Asylum and Refugee Resettlement Team in December 2023 to offer wraparound support to asylum seeker residents in contingency hotels who fall under the Streamlining Asylum Processing (SAP). The Team act as a first point of contact for Clearsprings/Hotel Managers to refer asylum seekers who are receiving a decision. Resettlement Workers carry out a needs assessment and provide practical support to aid long-term integration.

Resettlement Schemes

VPRS

Working in partnership with key VCS organisations Southwark Council has been able to participate in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). The Council has been directly supporting **4** families (**22** individuals) since 2018 providing one to one support to families through a dedicated Resettlement Worker.

Our Council also works with 4 Southwark based Community Sponsorship groups welcoming and supporting refugees under the Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). The committed members of Bermondsey Welcomes Refugees, Herne Hill Refugees, Peckham Sponsors Refugees and Telegraph Hill Welcomes Refugees, working with Reset UK and Citizens UK, have successfully supported over **20** refugees resettle and integrate to life in Southwark.

Afghan Bridging Hotels

Southwark Council, working with key partners including Panjshir Aid (a Southwark based Afghan community organisation), SRCF, SDCAS, Community Southwark, DWP, NHS and public health colleagues, was able to mobilise a swift response to provide support to **223** individuals who had been rescued from Afghanistan as part of Operation Pitting in 2021. Alongside work to ensure that people's practical needs were met, residents of the bridging hotels were able to access advice, support, and advocacy services from a range of providers as well as a dedicated Council Resettlement Officer stationed at each of the Bridging Hotels.

ARAP/ACRS

The current pressures related to scarcity of social housing and the lack of affordable private sector accommodation in and around Southwark places a significant challenge to securing accommodation for families seeking to resettle under the Afghan Relocations and Resettlement Policy (ARAP) and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS).

So far Southwark Council has been able to offer **1** family with accommodation under the ARAP/ACRS Schemes and accepted **9** families (**39** individuals) individuals and families who are able to resettle in Southwark via the Government's MEARS and Find Your Own Pathway (FYOP) schemes. We currently provide integration support with a dedicated Council Resettlement Worker providing one to one support to individuals and families to help them resettle in our borough. We have placed no cap on the total number of households that we can provide wrap around integration support to and hope to see this population grow.

Southwark Council is also working with a local Community Sponsorship group – Herne Hill Refugees - as part of the DLUHC led 'Communities for Afghans' pilot project.

Homes for Ukraine Scheme

Since March 2022, Southwark residents have shown immense generosity and welcome to individuals and families that have been displaced from their homes because of the Russian war on Ukraine. **1668** Southwark residents registered with the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) volunteering to host Ukrainian guests under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. Of those **341** hosts have welcomed **556** Ukrainians into their homes.

Working with key partners and several internal departments the Council has been able to mobilise a response to swiftly meet the requirements placed on Local Authorities and to provide ongoing resettlement support with allocated Resettlement Workers to guests and hosts. The scope of the Scheme has led to the establishment of a dedicated Homes for Ukraine team within the Council who continue to support new arrivals under the Scheme as well as provide packages of support to enable guests to find sustainable accommodation and rebuild their lives in the UK.

Destitution and No Recourse to Public Funds

In 2015, the Council established a single service for people with **No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)**. It falls on local authorities to assess the social care needs of single adults under the **Care Act 2014** and/or the social care needs of children under section 17 of the **Children Act 1989**. The Council also supports people with NRPF who have been sectioned under the **Mental Health Act 1983**.

This specialist service works with vulnerable individuals and families to ensure that they receive appropriate support to meet their needs while also supporting them to find pathways to independence including through the provision of access to free legal advice and representation to resolve their immigration status.

Health

Public health and NHS partners have a long history of working to support the health and inclusion needs of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in the borough.

A dedicated Health Inclusion Team (HIT) works with residents of the various Asylum Contingency Hotels and Barry House to ensure that their health needs are effectively identified and met. Vaccine catch up clinics are run in IAC/Contingency Hotels supported by the Health Inclusion Team, ICB and public health. A health promotion van also regularly attends key celebration events to reach the Southwark refugee, asylum seeker and migrant communities.

The team also run Southwark holiday food and fun programme, which focuses on healthy eating incentives, supports families living in the Asylum Contingency Hotels in the borough as well as organising community feasts.

The public health team continue to run a wide range of awareness raising events and activities to engage and inform various stakeholders. Recent examples include funding a translated cancer awareness talks delivered by Cancer research UK at Southwark Refugee Communities Forum in Arabic and Tigrinya and producing two mental health signposting resources outlining mental health support available for the general public as well as specific services for AS&R. The team are also currently delivering a training offer to Council teams as well as statutory and voluntary and community organisations working with asylum seekers and refugees (AS&R) groups on Mental Health First Aid and Suicide Training.

The team, along with community health ambassadors, carried out an audit to assess adherence of Southwark's primary care surgeries to Doctors of the World's "Safe Surgeries" policies. Follow up work is underway to support GP surgeries to work on the identified recommendations.

The Southwark asylum seeker and refugee health and wellbeing group meets monthly, bringing together key health and public health stakeholders and monitoring the progress of the JSNA recommendations.

Education

The FEH service and the Education team have been working collaboratively to ensure a smooth and effective admissions process for refugee, asylum seeker and migrant children. The Council has a dedicated lead officer working on Education Access.

There are several different types of English classes running in Southwark from beginner to advanced levels. These include face-to-face or online classes, which are provided in a number of different organisations in the borough including at Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers (SDCAS).

We plan to increase our provision of ESOL classes for our asylum seeker and refugee residents. We recognise the importance of understanding English in enabling our sanctuary seeking population to make friends, find future employment, find better employment opportunities, assist with children's homework, build confidence in interacting with other professionals such as doctors and teachers, and prepare for higher education.

In April 2024, the Council presented a Borough of Sanctuary information session to primary school Head teachers encouraging schools to join our network and become an awarded school of sanctuary. We aim to encourage all schools in Southwark to sign the pledge to become awarded schools of sanctuary.

Libraries

Southwark Libraries were awarded Libraries of Sanctuary status in May 2024; the first Libraries of Sanctuary in London. Southwark libraries have a proud history of welcoming asylum seeker, refugee, and migrant communities.

Library services have historically undertaken outreach work to promote their services in Barry House, one of the Home Office's Initial Accommodation Centres (IAC) as well as engaging residents at local VCS organisations. The service previously visited a Somali refugee day centre monthly and won a Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals award called 'Welcome to your library'.

Weekly Baby and Toddler sessions are provided at Dulwich Library, offering, a games club and a homework help club for school age children. Southwark Libraries have also bought books in Spanish, Arabic, Pashtu, Farsi, Albanian and hold children's picture books in dual languages.

Libraries offer free membership to asylum seeker and refugee residents, and they can access free services, including books for adults and children, free computer use, free Wi-Fi, IT taster sessions and digital drop-in sessions. In addition, access to eBooks and eAudio, magazines and newspapers, press reader (online magazines and newspapers from around the world), Go Citizen Support (practice for British citizenship test) are accessible, including events and activities for adults, children, and warm hubs.

Libraries run an annual 'Festival of Words' which is now in its sixth year. The seven-to-ten-day long programme of events have run concurrently with Refugee week for the last two years. Authors, filmmakers, and activists with lived in experience of displacement and migration attend and co-host these events.

Libraries work alongside City of Sanctuary (CoS) to host a pan London networking event for authorities who are in the application process or intending to apply for Libraries of Sanctuary award to offer an opportunity to share good practice and ideas.

Voluntary & Community Sector

Southwark has a vibrant voluntary, community sector dedicated to supporting refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants and a range of projects and initiatives are already underway across Southwark to support people seeking sanctuary.

VCS partners provide invaluable services to sanctuary seekers on a wide range of topics such as immigration, housing, employment, education, health, and integration. Our key partners in the development and delivery of our Borough of Sanctuary vision and priorities include:

Southwark Law Centre (SLC): SLC was founded in 1976 and provides high quality, specialist legal advice and representation in the areas of asylum/Immigration discrimination, education, employment, housing, public law, welfare rights, planning, and Windrush compensation claims for those who cannot afford to pay for this.

Southwark Refugee and Communities Forum (SRCF): SRCF is a refugee-led organisation established by residents with lived experience in Southwark. SRCF enables the voices of refugees to be heard and to develop mutual support between newly arrived asylum seekers and refugees and established communities.

Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers (SDCAS): SDCAS aims to promote the well-being of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants and provide safe spaces for service users to access free,

holistic services. This includes providing free lunches, advice and support around health, housing, immigration, education, and employment including co-ordinating a range of social and well-being activities.

Citizens Advice Southwark (CAS): Established in 1939 when CAS first opened, CAS generalist volunteers provide asylum seekers, refugees and migrants advice and information on immigration issues. CAS also have a specialist immigration caseworker who assists services users who have more complex immigration issues.

Panjshir Aid: Panjshir Aid is a non-profit organisation based in Southwark, which works to support the welfare and integration of refugees and asylum seekers, particularly those from Afghanistan. Afghans settled in Britain run Panjshir Aid.

Community Southwark: The umbrella body for the voluntary and community sector in Southwark. Community Southwark support charities and community groups with advice, training, and volunteers. They work to connect organisations to each other, funders, and decision makers to make change, together.

The Council aims to work closely with our local partners throughout the lifespan of this framework and aim to continue building a sustainable network beyond 2027.

Taking Action

Bringing together the expertise, knowledge, and experience of wide range of stakeholders, we have been able to identify four key priority areas to focus on in order to achieve our vision of Southwark as a Borough of Sanctuary.

The insight and recommendations gained from [Joint Needs Assessment \(JSNA\)](#) have provided a strong evidence base to enable the development of a well informed and needs led Borough of Sanctuary Framework and action plan.

The Council will focus on the following four high-level objectives, which will be delivered via the Council's Sanctuary Action Plan:

Stand Together

- We want Southwark to be a place of safety, support, and opportunity for those seeking sanctuary - embedding a collective message of welcome and kindness, and challenge to the wider hostile environment.

Voice

- We want to celebrate the culture, diversity, and contributions of those seeking sanctuary and amplify their voices and experiences to shape positive change.

Shaping Services

- We want to better understand the experiences and needs of those seeking sanctuary and ensure that services and local agencies are responding to these issues and enabling opportunities.

Bespoke Support

- We want to foster collaboration between different local agencies so they can respond effectively, cooperatively, and flexibly to the ongoing and changing needs of sanctuary-seekers.

Monitoring Progress

The above four high-level objectives will form the basis of a live action plan to be updated regularly as new challenges and opportunities are identified relating to changes in the local, regional and the national landscape. This approach supports flexibility to respond to emerging issues over time while working on core concerns that are likely to be more permanent.

Stakeholders, statutory services, and voluntary and community sector organisations will report into and measure the progress against our key priorities and actions undertaken through Southwark's Multi-Agency Forum (MAF).

The MAF meets quarterly and is chaired by Cllr Jasmine Ali the Deputy Leader and Lead Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Refugees and the Council's Director of Stronger Neighbourhoods. All stakeholders will provide six monthly written updates on their progress for review at the Multi Agency Meetings (MAF).

A newly established Experts by Experience group will also be members of the MAF and able to participate in the monitoring and review of this action plan and framework.

Internally an annual progress report will be submitted to the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and political cabinet.

An accessible version of the Southwark Sanctuary Framework and Sanctuary Action Plan and annual progress reports will be publicly available, with presentations at local events aimed at wider engagement.

Southwark Sanctuary Action Plan 2024-2027

Objective 1: Stand Together		
We will make Southwark a place of safety, support, and opportunity for those seeking sanctuary - embedding a collective message of welcome and kindness, and challenge to the wider hostile environment		
How we will work to meet the objective	Lead service(s)	Timescales
<p>We will set up a Multi-Agency Forum (MAF) which will be a partnership of statutory and VCS organisations, including council departments and health providers. Senior officers from within the council and from other statutory agencies e.g., Health and DWP will be invited to MAF meetings to share information and create a network of buy-in and inclusion to sanctuary values.</p> <p>Ensure clear and consistent structure and purpose of partnership forums and any related working groups/subgroups.</p> <p>People with Lived Experience to be represented on the MAF</p>	<p>Cabinet Member for Childrens, Education and Refugees to chair MAF.</p> <p>Secretariat: Senior Cabinet Advisor.</p>	<p>By August 2024</p> <p>By October/November 2024</p>
<p>The Sanctuary Operational Meetings was established to enhance focus on the delivery of operational work. The Sanctuary Operational meetings will enable the council and VCS organisations to monitor emerging trends, evaluate performance, and plan future or emergency service delivery.</p> <p>The Sanctuary Operational meetings will review and monitor risk in relation to crisis/project mobilisation working groups set up to manage immediate community risk issues, for example the council's response to the far-right disorder, Rwanda response, and e-visa.</p>	<p>Director of Stronger Neighbourhoods to chair Sanctuary Operational meetings.</p> <p>Secretariat, Divisional Business Manager for Director of Stronger Neighbourhoods.</p>	<p>By August 2024</p>

<p>We will set up subgroups working on specific issues such as health, influencing change, events, asylum response, and experts by experience group, education, and provision of legal advice.</p> <p>Ensure well-resourced partnership forums meet regularly, have set agendas, minutes, and action points clearly identified with timely follow through</p>	<p>Management Team, Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p> <p>Secretariat; NRPF Business Support Officer</p>	<p>By end of 2024</p>
<p>We will run engagement sessions with various Council departments and other local institutions to spread the message of Sanctuary and share good practice guidance on creating a culture of welcome and inclusion.</p>	<p>Management Team; Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p>	<p>Set up by November 2024 and run on an ongoing basis.</p>
<p>We will support individual council services, schools, colleges, VCS organisations and employers to become places of sanctuary.</p>	<p>Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p>	<p>Annual target of 4 organisations per year to gain recognition as a place of sanctuary and/or sign a sanctuary pledge</p>
<p>MAF meetings will include an information exchange on Government policy and discuss any joint initiatives or responses to consultations and research. We will challenge central government policy that creates a hostile environment for migrants and sanctuary seekers.</p>	<p>Policy & Public Affairs Officer</p> <p>Strategy & Impact Strategy & Communities</p>	<p>On-going reviewed 6 monthly by MAF and influencing change sub-group.</p>

<p>We will contribute to the development of City of Sanctuary movement. Continue to be part of CoS LA steering group, ensure regular attendance of TNMs, contribute to discussions, participate in events, and work with other local authorities on specific issues.</p> <p>Work with MAF to develop a strategic approach to awareness raising initiatives and events</p>	<p>Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p> <p>Strategy & Impact Strategy & Communities</p>	<p>On-going reviewed quarterly by MAF and events sub-group</p>
<p>Ensure a broader set of officers and councillors are involved in awareness raising events and initiatives.</p> <p>Where events are VCS led, utilise council comms team and resources to support those</p>	<p>Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p>	<p>On-going reviewed quarterly by MAF and events sub-group</p>
<p>We will build a relationship with the local press to increase the number of positive sanctuary seeking stories published in the Borough</p>	<p>Policy & Public Affairs Officer</p> <p>Strategy & Impact Strategy & Communities</p>	<p>First meeting with representative of Southwark News by November 2024, ongoing thereafter to be reviewed 6 monthly by Cabinet Member & MAF</p>
<p>Objective 2: Voice</p> <p>We will celebrate the culture, diversity, and contributions of those seeking sanctuary and amplify their voices and experiences to shape positive change</p>		
<p>How we will work to meet the objective</p>	<p>Lead service(s)</p>	<p>Timescales</p>
<p>We will develop a Southwark Experts by Experience Group in collaboration between the Council and VCS partners to offer sanctuary seekers a voice.</p> <p>We will ensure that diverse voices and lived experiences are included in decision making and service planning related to specialist services for this group.</p>	<p>Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p> <p>Southwark Refugee Communities Forum (SRCF)</p>	<p>Group set up by October/November 2024</p> <p>The Experts by Experience Group to provide 6 monthly feedback at MAF meetings in monitoring the framework and action plan</p>

<p>We will 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.</p> <p>We will ensure that people with lived experience can feed into influencing change seeking to influence policy change on a local regional and national level.</p>		Ongoing (determined by reviews of existing services or the development on new projects and initiatives)
<p>We will ensure a consistent presence for Borough of Sanctuary projects through communication channels, sharing the stories, successes, and challenges of residents with lived experience.</p>	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	Ongoing reviewed at MAF and by Lived Experience Group
<p>We will build on cohesion and support at a community level to challenge negative narratives through active myth busting.</p>	<p>Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p> <p>Strategy & Impact Strategy & Communities</p> <p>Key VCS partner/organisations.</p>	Ongoing reviewed at MAF and by Lived Experience Group
<p>We will include a regular agenda item on national policy updates so that as a partnership we can agree on responses.</p>	<p>Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p> <p>Strategy & Impact Strategy & Communities</p>	Ongoing reviewed at MAF and by Lived Experience Group
<p>We will develop ongoing engagement with local residents to keep them informed about Borough of Sanctuary initiatives.</p> <p>This to include website updates and annual events e.g., Refugee week celebrations, Thank You events, community feasts, workshops, and other community engagement events.</p>	<p>Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p> <p>VCS partners/organisations.</p>	<p>Website updated by December 2024-January 2025</p> <p>Refugee week events in June 2024 and subsequent years</p> <p>2 Community feasts per year</p>
<p>We will raise our influencing profile with government by using our influential voice as a Borough of Sanctuary to demonstrate our innovative work in political spaces, establishing ourselves as a reliable source of expertise for policy change and implementation in the asylum area.</p>	<p>Policy & Public Affairs Officer</p> <p>Strategy & Impact Strategy & Communities</p>	Ongoing to be reviewed 6 monthly by Cabinet Member & MAF

Objective 3: Shaping Services

We will ensure that Council services and local agencies adapt and develop services that are shaped by the needs and experiences of sanctuary seekers and provides opportunities for their positive development.

How we will work to meet the objective	Lead service(s)	Timescales
We will ensure all relevant Council strategies are aligned with sanctuary principles and include consideration of sanctuary seekers.	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	On-going reviewed 6 monthly by MAF
We will ensure the use of inclusive language in council communications. This will include developing translated early intervention resources.	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	By January/February 2025
Southwark's Sanctuary website needs to be updated to detail various support available in the community. Translatable pages will be included. Ensure the NRPF webpage is clearer and more accessible.	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	By December 2024-January 2025
Ensure a broad set of council services contribute to the Sanctuary Action Plan, and actions end up in workplans for council officers. Ensure services from leisure, housing, community safety and emergency services and adult safeguarding are involved in the Sanctuary Action Plan.	Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.	On-going reviewed 6 monthly by MAF

<p>We will establish consultation and co-production groups with sanctuary seekers, on specifically identified projects to decide on projects that are meaningful to them with relevant teams within the Council including other partners.</p>	<p>Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p>	<p>The Experts by Experience Group set up by October/November 2024.</p> <p>1st co-design/co-production pilot to be set up by March/April 2025</p>
<p>We will review availability of legal advice services for sanctuary seekers and other groups. Exploring opportunities to support expansion of provision as well as pathways to access and to provide residents with information about their rights.</p>	<p>Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p>	<p>By April 2025</p>
<p>We will embed sharing of information in MAF to provide greater insight into the needs of the Asylum Seeker, Refugee, and migrant population on Southwark.</p>	<p>Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p>	<p>On-going reviewed 6 monthly by MAF</p>
<p>We will run regular Operational meetings with VCS partners, the Deputy Cabinet Leader, and senior officers to work collaboratively in addressing operational issues.</p>	<p>Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p>	<p>Operational group currently in place</p> <p>On-going progress reviewed 6 monthly by MAF</p>
<p>We will run annual shared learning days to share good practice with other local authorities, VCS agencies and other stakeholders</p>	<p>Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p>	<p>Annually starting in 2024</p>
<p>In May 2024, Southwark Libraries were awarded Libraries of Sanctuary status, the first libraries of sanctuary in London.</p>	<p>Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p>	<p>On-going progress reviewed at MAF</p>

<p>We will work with library services to raise awareness of issues faced by sanctuary seekers, offering support and participation opportunities, and contributing to a culture of welcome in the wider community.</p>	<p>Libraries and Heritage Services</p>	
<p>Housing and destitution to be strengthened. We will run refugee housing working group with refugee organisations and homeless charities.</p> <p>Housing officers to benefit from cultural and unconscious bias training.</p>	<p>Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p> <p>Housing Solutions Resident Services</p>	<p>On-going progress reviewed 6 monthly by MAF</p>
<p>We will build relationships with new political representatives who have influence on government to place pressure on decision-makers to secure the national policy change needed to better shape our services</p>	<p>Policy & Public Affairs Officer</p> <p>Strategy & Impact Strategy & Communities</p>	<p>On-going to be reviewed 6 monthly by Cabinet Member & MAF</p>
<p>Objective 4: Bespoke Support</p> <p>We will foster collaboration and coordination between different local agencies to enable the provision of effective specialist community-based support with the flexibility to meet the changing needs of asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants in Southwark</p>		
<p>How we will work to meet the objective</p>		<p>Timescales</p>
<p>We will allocate a dedicated Council officer to coordinate the work of the Borough of Sanctuary.</p>	<p>Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p>	<p>By October/November 2024</p>

<p>We will work in collaboration with voluntary and statutory sector partners to provide coordinated holistic support for asylum seeker, refugee, and migrant families within the borough.</p>	<p>Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p>	<p>Coordination mechanism to be set up by December 2024</p> <p>On-going to be monitored in MAF and various sub-groups</p>
<p>We will set up a new Southwark 4-year grants programme for VCS organisations working with refugees, asylum seekers and disadvantaged migrants with a total budget of £100k per year.</p>	<p>Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p>	<p>By January 2025</p>
<p>We will maintain the outreach service to provide support for asylum seekers in initial accommodation.</p>	<p>Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p>	<p>On-going to be reviewed and monitored at MAF and fortnightly SAP sub-group</p>
<p>We will work with partners to provide digital support to access vital information such as BRPs.</p>	<p>Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure alongside key VCS organisations.</p>	<p>By December 2024</p>
<p>We will work with partners in education and the VCS to increase the local provision of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses.</p>	<p>Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p>	<p>By July 2024</p>
<p>Key officers to attend drop ins and to undertake outreach activities with key partners, to learn about the issues and people seeking sanctuary and how to better support them.</p>	<p>Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p>	<p>On-going</p>

<p>This will be part of induction training of new relevant officers which will include shadowing key organisations to understand how they operate.</p> <p>We will acknowledge the expertise of VCS organisations and consider 'lunch and learn' sessions and peer to peer training, e.g., immigration law training by SLC, refugee and asylum seeker awareness training by SRCF and SDCAS</p>		
<p>Training will be provided for all front-line Council officers in understanding the needs and rights and entitlements of asylum seekers, refugees, and vulnerable migrants.</p> <p>On-line training for key staff, especially front-line officers is available.</p> <p>Enable local refugee organisations to co-create the online learning module and compensate for time dedicated to this.</p>	<p>Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p>	<p>On-going</p>
<p>We will review Modern Day Slavery and Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) pathways for sanctuary seekers.</p>	<p>Southwark Violence Against Women & Girls Project Officer</p> <p>Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p>	<p>By March/April 2025</p>
<p>We will assess the progress of the recommendations documented in the JSNA alongside Public Health, NHS, VCS, and the Council.</p>	<p>Stronger Neighbourhoods, Environment, Sustainability & Leisure.</p>	<p>On-going to be reviewed and monitored at MAF and monthly health sub-group</p>

<p>Public Health will commission a health outreach service to target health inclusion groups including vulnerable migrants.</p>	<p>Public Health Children and Adults Services</p>	<p>On-going to be reviewed and monitored at MAF and discussed at monthly health sub-group</p>
<p>We will expand engagement with our allies with influence in the asylum policy area and contribute to their existing campaigns to secure meaningful policy change at a national level.</p>	<p>Policy & Public Affairs Officer Strategy & Impact Strategy & Communities</p>	<p>Ongoing to be reviewed six monthly with Cabinet Member & MAF</p>

Case Studies

Samira's story: This case study follows the experience of Samira, a single, 45-year-old Eritrean woman who was faced with homelessness as a newly granted refugee from the Brit Hotel in Southwark. Samira had been living in the hotel for roughly a year and two months waiting for her asylum decision when she received her eviction letter. As a native Arabic and Tigrinya speaker, she did not initially know what the letter meant as it arrived in English. It was only when the hotel receptionist explained to Samira what the letter meant that she understood. Samira told us that she felt instant fear as she had no information on what would happen to her once her stay at the hotel came to an end.

Samira attended the housing surgery hosted by Southwark Refugee Communities Forum. She was made aware of the housing surgery by the receptionist at her hotel after she had received her eviction letter. The housing surgery provided Samira with the opportunity to meet face-to-face with the Southwark Council Housing Solution team and with Kineara, an organisation that helps people to access privately rented accommodation. The surgery also provided interpreters for Samira in both Arabic and Tigrinya.

As Samira was not deemed a 'priority need' by the council, finding housing in the private rented sector remained her only realistic option. With the help of Kineara, Samira arranged a viewing for a room in a privately rented property. Samira is now housed in a 3-bedroom shared house in Brixton with two other Eritrean women. Samira told us that she does not know what she would have done if she had not had access to the housing surgery. She has described her experience of the surgery as positive and that the staff made her feel safe. We were also able to provide Samira with bedding and other household essentials to help her settle into her new home.

Southwark Refugee Communities Forum sat down with Samira once she had been housed to give her the opportunity to share her experience of the surgery and the impact it had on her housing situation. The interview was conducted with the help of the Forum's Arabic interpreter.

Khadijeh Story: a 34-year-old Iranian woman, had been living in the Best Western Hotel in Peckham for two years with her husband and their two children aged 9 and 17 when they received their eviction letter. Khadijeh's eviction date, gave the family 5 days to leave. Khadijeh described the moment she received the notice as disorienting and very stressful. She recalls that the stress from the situation impacted her eating and that she fell sick.

Khadijeh had already visited the housing surgery prior to receiving her eviction letter to register with the council. She had discovered Southwark Refugee Communities Forum when on a walk with her friends from the hotel, shortly after they had been moved there. Khadijeh was aware that she needed to update her case worker with a copy of her eviction letter once she received it. As it was Friday

evening when Khadijeh received her letter she was unable to get in touch with anyone from the council and knew that she would have to wait until Monday.

Khadijeh made a call to the council and informed them of her eviction letter. The council assured her that they would provide her family with temporary accommodation. On the day of her eviction, Khadijeh had not received an update from the council regarding her family's move. Anxious about their next steps, Khadijeh decided to attend the housing surgery where she knew that she could contact the council. While at the housing surgery, it was arranged for Khadijeh and her family to be housed in a 3-bedroom house in Lambeth.

Khadijeh expressed immense gratitude to the Forum for hosting the housing surgery and said that the most helpful part of the surgery was providing a space where clients could access help face-to-face help. She said that she felt that all staff members wanted to help her and that she had recommended the surgery to all her friends in a similar position.

Having been accommodated, Khadijeh is able to continue her studies and take her GCSE maths exam this summer. Khadijeh, who was a high school teacher in Iran, hopes to use her skills to become a primary school teaching assistant.

Tabarak's Story: a 49-year-old Syrian woman had been living in the Best Western Asylum hotel in Peckham with her 15-year-old son for two years and three months when she received their eviction notice. Thanks to conversations amongst residents at the hotel, in addition to flyers distributed in the hotel, Tabarak was aware of the Housing Surgery organised by Southwark Refugee Communities Forum (SRCF) in collaboration with Southwark Council, and that she could seek help for herself and her son to find housing. Their notice period was only 15 days, which Tabarak described as having left her very nervous. Tabarak was nervous about being moved somewhere unfamiliar, and that her and her son would have to start anew, a feeling all too familiar to her.

Tabarak attended the Housing Surgery and made a Homelessness Application with Southwark Council and the help of one of the Forum's Arabic interpreters. Tabarak expressed that it would have been very difficult for her without the Surgery as she does not speak fluent English. Tabarak described the Surgery as some sort of miracle for the residents of her hotel. Tabarak feared that the surgery would close before she received her eviction notice as she was only aware that it was a temporary service. The surgery and SRCF became a sanctuary to her, and a place that she felt comfortable in amongst all the change in her life.

Client P's Story: *'Eventually they introduced the centre to me. I came in that day with no hope. I was helped, supported by Southwark Day Care for Asylum Seekers (SDCAS). Through my journey, everything that I passed through, I have my papers. I lost my confidence throughout the journey, but I gained my confidence, and I was sharing my story with everyone, especially women, because we think back home that only men can be our whatever. So, it is only what they do or what they say*

that we can follow. But the power that we have when we have that confidence, we believe in what we can do. It's even more than what they can do for us. It actually helped me, it empowered me".

Client A's Story: a 35-year-old Nigerian national presented at Southwark NRPF service in 2020 with her 3-year-old and 3-month-old children, requesting support as she was facing destitution and homelessness.

Client A came to the UK on a student visa in 2009; however, the academic institution went into liquidation and in the process Client A lost her student visa eligibility. Client A then began to seek support from her friends, working various jobs to support herself.

Client A was residing at different addresses as she did not have a fixed abode and finally exhausted all her support options. The father of her children was not able to support the children as he was also an overstayer. Although both of Client A's children were born in the UK but are Nigerian nationals due to their parents' nationality.

Client A was then referred to the NRPF service by an outside organisation in 2020, requesting support with accommodation and financial support under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. Client A had an assessment with the NRPF service and was deemed destitute. The NRPF team provided support with accommodation and monthly subsistence.

Client A applied for a fee waiver to the Home Office as she was not able to manage her Home Office or legal fees to regularise her stay in the UK. The NRPF team provided her a letter confirming the local authority was supporting her.

The NRPF team supported the family until Client A's immigration matter was resolved. In 2024, Client A was granted leave to remain with recourse to public funds; her caseworker advised Client A to apply for mainstream benefits and had referred Client A to Southwark social housing. Client A was extremely happy with the support she was provided by her caseworker and the NRPF Team overall.

Client M's Story: along with his wife and three children, Client M arrived in the UK from Nigeria on a Student visa. Client M's visa duration was for one year, but it was extended for another three years.

Client M studied Business Management for one year, before beginning his Postgraduate studies. Client M was awarded a Master's in Business Administration.

Client M was employed as a Bed Manager in a local hospital and was sponsored by the Trust under the Tier 2 work visa. Client M was given five years to work with the same employer. However, there were errors made by the HR department. The certificate of sponsorship to obtain his work permit which the HR hospital gave him was the wrong code, meaning the code did not match his job

description. This then affected Client M's immigration status, resulting in Client M without legal stay in the country. Client M tried several solicitors, but no one was able to assist.

Client M's family were residing in a bedsit accommodation in Southwark. Client M and his family were eventually evicted from this property, as the landlord was not permitted to sublet the property.

Client M approached the NRPF upon eviction and him and his family were placed in temporary accommodation by the council. Client M was referred to an immigration solicitor by NRPF team. Following the immigration legal referral Client M finally received his leave to remain in the UK with recourse to public funds.

Client M is now employed by a local Hospital and his wife works as a software engineer for Tech Company. Client M and his family expressed their immense gratitude to Southwark council for assisting them in a time of need.

Key Definitions

- **Sanctuary seekers:** a broad term used through this document to refer to refugees, asylum seekers and migrants with varied immigration statuses.
- **Asylum seeker:** a person who has applied for protection from a state under the 1951 United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees on the grounds that if they returned to their country of origin, they are at risk of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political affiliations, or membership to a particular social group. They remain an asylum seeker whilst their application (or appeal against refusal of their application) is pending. If an application is successful for asylum, they are legally recognised as a 'Refugee'.
- **Refugee:** a person who has fled their own country because they are at risk of serious human rights violations and persecution. Refugees have a right to international protections and are defined and protected under the 1951 Refugee Convention on the Status of Refugees. This can be obtained by successful application for asylum to a country which is a signatory to the 1951 Convention or the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). In the UK refugee status currently grants a person five years leave to remain, and refugees gain the right to work, claim benefits, access mainstream education and housing.
- **Migrant:** There is no international legal definition of a migrant, but the terms refer to a person who leave their country of birth or residence to settle (migrate) to another country. Some migrants leave their country because they want to work, study, or join their family. Others feel they must leave their country because of poverty, political unrest, natural disasters, or other serious circumstances that exist there.
- **Initial accommodation centre (IAC):** short-term housing, usually in a hostel-type environment, that can be full-board, half-board, or self-catering, for asylum seekers who need accommodation urgently.
- **Contingency IAC/ Hotel:** initial accommodation opened since 2019 under the new Asylum Accommodation and Support Services Contracts (AASC), usually in re-purposed hotels, barracks or hostels.
- **Bridging accommodation:** includes all accommodation procured by the Home Office for the purpose of providing temporary accommodation for those brought over to the UK as a result of events in Afghanistan/Operation Pitting following the fall of Kabul in August 2021
- **UASC:** unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are children and young people who are seeking asylum in the UK but who have been separated from their parents or carers.

- **Section 95:** financial and/or accommodation support provided by the Home Office's National Asylum Support Service (NASS) for asylum seekers who are destitute while they wait for a decision on their asylum claim.
- **Section 98:** Provision of emergency accommodation and assistance for destitute asylum seekers who have submitted an application for NASS section 95 support,
- **Section 4:** NASS Support provided to a small number of asylum seekers who exhaust their right to appeal, but are destitute and unable to leave the country despite taking all reasonable steps to do so.
- **Dispersal accommodation:** Primarily self-catering accommodation, provided under Section 95 of the 1999 Immigration Act, designed for long-term stays until a decision is made on an asylum case.
- **Family Early help (FEH):** A Southwark Council department responsible for supporting families and young people with needs beyond the level that universal services can address.
- **Integrated Care Board (ICB):** South East London ICB, brings together partners involved in planning and providing NHS services.
- **Health Inclusion Team (HIT):** A medical team under the Guy's and St Thomas NHS Foundation Trust focused on inclusion health.
- **No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF):** The state of being unable to claim benefits that are classed as 'public funds' in the UK due to a person's immigration status.

Meeting Name:	Cabinet
Date:	16 September 2024
Report title:	Allocation of Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Funding
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Helen Dennis, New Homes and Sustainable Development
Ward(s) or groups affected:	All
Classification:	Open
Reason for lateness (if applicable):	n/a

FOREWORD - COUNCILLOR DENNIS, CABINET MEMBER FOR NEW HOMES AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Neighbourhood CIL is an essential tool for building confidence in the planning process and ensuring that communities across Southwark see direct benefits from growth and development in the borough. The amounts accrued via Neighbourhood CIL mean that we have the capacity to deliver exciting and innovative infrastructure projects which go beyond what we can fund via smaller pots such as Cleaner, Greener, Safer, whether that is projects to improve greening and biodiversity, improve the public realm, enhance play provision, support community safety initiatives or deliver Streets for People. To date, our Local Neighbourhood CIL has funded significant projects such as Marlborough Sports Gardens, Surrey Docks Farm and Lavender Pond Nature Reserve, with exciting plans in development for Alexis St Park and Leyton Square, to name just a few. These are projects that would not have been possible without funding from development in Southwark. The proposal set out in this Cabinet Report is for a further round of allocations to be made under a slightly amended framework, ensuring that proposals are aligned with our Southwark 2030 goals and principles, and that allocations are of a significant size to achieve impact and to cover project management costs. Conscious that proposals are at different stages of development, the process aims to be flexible enough to both bring projects forward quickly where appropriate, but also to enable ward councillors to facilitate discussions in the community about priorities for the funding. Looking to the future, we are aiming to align the Neighbourhood CIL process with our wider plans for Neighbourhoods, with a view to bringing a proposal to Cabinet next Spring. I am excited about all the ideas that will come forward over the coming months and to seeing these delivered in our parks, on our streets and on our estates.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

Recommendation(s) for the Cabinet

1. To agree minor changes to the existing process that will allow for allocations of funding collected as Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy through the planning process as set out in paragraph 18 to 23 below. In summary this process will result in project allocations of funding in the ward or neighbourhood in which the funding is generated, assessment of project allocation against Southwark 2030 goals, a minimum level of project funding and a streamlined approval process where local priorities are already agreed.
2. To note that a report setting out a draft revised Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy allocation process will be presented to Cabinet in March 2025 prior to consultation and adoption in September 2025.

Recommendations for the Leader

3. Vary the executive scheme of delegation to delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for New Homes and Sustainable Development to approve individual Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy projects for a year in accordance with the framework set out in paragraphs 18 to 23 of this report.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4. There is a need to set out a process to allocate funding collected as Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy through the planning process in order to mitigate the impact of development.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED

5. Under current policy, the funding needs to be spent within the ward in which the associated development is taking place. The approach proposed follows a similar one to that successfully used in 2020 which generated over 1000 project ideas.
6. An alternative approach would have been to introduce a wider policy change which would have required public consultation. The approach proposed allows for a swift round of allocations whilst as set out below starting a process of the wider policy change.

POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION

7. It is anticipated that following Cabinet, a twin track process will be adopted (see flow chart in Appendix 1) reflecting that there may be some well developed and supported projects which can move forward quickly. In wards where there is agreement with ward councillors on a list of such projects, these will be submitted to officers and assessed. In wards where there is no list of agreed

projects, or where there is still a remainder of funding to be allocated, consultation will take place, led by ward councillors with the community to develop projects for proposal and assessment. Subject to the approval to Recommendation 2 above, following officer appraisal, the approval of these individual projects will be delegated to the Cabinet Member for New Homes and Sustainable Development. Allocations for this round of Neighbourhood Community CIL should be assessed by officers by March 2025. Funding agreements will ideally all be in place by Spring 2025.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Community Infrastructure Levy

8. Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is the sum of funding collected from major development sites across the Borough to pay for the implementation of new infrastructure to support the growth of communities. CIL is split into strategic CIL (70% of receipts) which is spent on Borough-wide infrastructure projects such as the train station improvements. The remainder is made up of Neighbourhood CIL (25% of receipts and administration of CIL (5% of receipts).
9. CIL is used to mitigate the impact of new development and an uplift in population on a local area, and is a key tool to manage growth. CIL can be used to fund a wide range of infrastructure, including transport, flood defences, schools, hospitals, and other health and social care facilities as set out in section 216(2) of the Planning Act 2008, and regulation 59 Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 (as amended) ("CIL Regulations"). This definition allows the levy to be used to fund a very broad range of facilities such as play areas, parks and green spaces, cultural and sports facilities, academies and free schools, district heating schemes and police stations and other community safety facilities. This flexibility gives councils the opportunity to choose what infrastructure is needed to deliver their local plan. It should be noted that charging authorities may not use the levy to fund affordable housing.
10. Local authorities must spend the levy on infrastructure needed to support the development of their area. The levy is intended to focus on the provision of new infrastructure and should not be used to remedy pre-existing deficiencies in infrastructure provision unless those deficiencies will be made more severe by new development. CIL is for capital expenditure rather than revenue expenditure and any revenue requirements from delivering capital projects must be met from existing budgets.

Development of the CIL allocation process

11. The foundations for CIL allocations were based on two cabinet reports, and a set of scrutiny committee recommendations. A report was taken to cabinet on the 11 December 2018 proposing to allocate funds collected by the end of financial year 2017-18 to priority projects put forward by the relevant community council meeting (replaced by ward meetings). The report also included an agreement on pre allocations of funds to specific projects, some of which have now been successfully delivered as such as the improvements to Surrey Docks Farm.

12. The overview and scrutiny committee (“OSC”) called in the December 2018 cabinet report on 21 January 2019 and recommended that lists of CIL projects are checked with community councils to identify potential discrepancies. OSC also recommended that the requirement that projects eligible for neighbourhood CIL funding should be identified in the council plan or included in the council’s capital programme should be abolished. The committee determined that CIL is intended to mitigate the impact of development at a very local level by addressing locally identified needs and that the neighbourhood portion of CIL should be spent in the ward or locality in which it has been collected, to ensure that the effects of development are mitigated where development has taken place.
13. A second follow up cabinet report on 18 June 2019 set out that Neighbourhood CIL would be allocated by developing local Community Infrastructure Plans (“CIPs”) to ensure that Neighbourhood CIL supports growth and tackles inequalities. The CIPs contained four strategic priorities, three of these from the social regeneration charters and each ward area developed an additional theme to guide key areas of need within the ward(s). The recommendations made by ward councillors for CIL allocations totalling £5,335,554 across 63 projects were agreed by Cabinet on 8 December 2020 and 19 January 2021. If the recommendations of this report are accepted, the Cabinet Member would not be bound by CIPs approved to date and any decisions about allocation of local CIL would instead be made in accordance with Southwark 2030 priorities.
14. A further report to Cabinet on 10th July 2023 allocated a further £1,413,000 of Neighbourhood CIL to six projects in order to fund additional costs and enhance delivery.
15. A report on Strategic CIL was presented to Cabinet on 6th March 2024.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

16. Of the previously approved projects, 6 are now assessed as unlikely to proceed with their current allocation. This releases a further £356,731 for reconsideration as per the process set out below. Some of these projects may still proceed with additional resources.
17. The current Neighbourhood CIL allocation per ward is as follows

Ward	New Amount (£)	Reallocation (£)	Total (£)
Borough and Bankside	4,135,817		4,135,817
Camberwell Green	16,648	7,000	23,648
Champion Hill	156,851		156,851
Chaucer	725,205	200,000	925,205
Dulwich Hill	108,533		108,533
Dulwich Village	189,927		189,927
Dulwich Wood	219,662		219,662
Faraday	73,515		73,515
Goose Green	168,888		168,888

London Bridge and West Bermondsey	2,545,025	35,000	2,580,025
Newington	448,934		57,483
North Bermondsey	3,480,283		3,480,283
North Walworth	2,360,264		2,360,264
Nunhead and Queens Road	112,786		112,786
Old Kent Road	2,670,236		2,670,236
Peckham	96,679		96,679
Peckham Rye	89,524		89,524
Rotherhithe	1,436,199		1,436,199
Rye Lane	211,985	104,731	316,716
St Georges	2,319	10,000	12,319
St Giles	44,260		44,260
South Bermondsey	530,518		530,518
Surrey Quays	471,968		471,968
Total	20,298,026	356,731	20,644,757

18. Rather than setting out a series of neighbourhood priorities, this allocation process will use the series of goals as set out in the Southwark 2030 Strategy agreed by Cabinet in July 2024. These are:
- Decent homes – people live in safe, well-maintained homes. To deliver this, we will improve the standards of council, social and private rented homes; increase the number of genuinely affordable homes in our borough; reduce the number of people who are homeless or live in overcrowded housing.
 - A good start in life – children and young people have a great childhood that builds on a solid foundation for adult life. To deliver this, we will support families to give their children the best start in their early years, improve outcomes for children who face disadvantage and ensure all young people can participate in positive activities.
 - A safer Southwark – crime is low and people feel safe. To deliver this, we will make our borough safer by tackling crime and anti-social behaviour hotspots and their causes, reduce violence against women, children and young people and improve trust and confidence in local policing.
 - A strong and fair economy – ensuring everyone can benefit from Southwark’s economic strength and growth. To do this, we will create even more good jobs and apprenticeships and help Southwark residents into them, support people out of poverty and low pay and ensure our town centres thrive and serve our whole community.
 - Staying well – ensuring that people across our whole community can have good health and wellbeing. To do this, we will ensure every child and adult can get the mental health support they need when they need it, help more people stay well, reducing the health inequalities across our community and improve the wellbeing of people with long-term conditions and disabilities and their carers.
 - A healthy environment – our environment is clean, green and healthy. To

do this, we will create more green space and biodiversity for our community to enjoy, help people and business switch to health, clean and green transport and make our buildings more energy efficient with clean, green power.

Allocations should also be in line with the Southwark 2030 guiding principles:

- Reducing Inequality – We will ensure that we utilise our funding to help address inequalities and deliver a more equal society.
- Empowering People - There are huge strengths in the people and organisations across our borough. We want to empower these strengths so that everyone can live a good life.
- Investing in Prevention - Decisions about resources will be directed towards support and interventions that prevent rather than respond to crises.

19. It is proposed that a minimum level of funding of £50,000 per project is set apart from by exception as this would bring wider neighbourhood benefits and secure staffing resourcing needed for delivery. In wards where the total budget is below £50,000 consideration will be given by ward councillors as to whether small scale projects will be submitted or to wait until a future date when more funding has been generated in that ward. Projects will need a distinct site, distinct scope and output, clear budget, delivery route and timetable. Allocations will need to have a clear route to project delivery even if only funding part of the process.
20. The process is set out in Appendix 1 to this report. Ward members will be responsible for prioritising the projects to be assessed by officers. Once assessed recommendations will be made to the Cabinet Member for New Homes and Sustainable Development for approval.
21. In a number of wards key projects have already been identified and developed, and have the support of ward councillors and the community. Under these circumstances, ward councillors may propose projects as soon as they are able and submit them to officers for assessment.
22. In the wards where there is not an agreed list of projects, or where there is still a remainder of funding to be allocated, ward councillors may invite residents, businesses and community organisations together to propose project ideas. Ward Councillors will then submit priority projects to officers for assessment, with some rationale for their submission, including how they help achieve the Southwark 2030 goals and principles.
23. The 2019 Cabinet report proposed that those wards generating an average of over £250,000 per annum over a 3-year rolling period (a maximum of £750,000 over 3 years) should consider the wider neighbourhood needs and discuss plans with relevant wards. For the purpose of this round of allocations, councillors representing wards which have accrued in excess of £1m should

demonstrate that they have taken into account the needs of the wider neighbourhood and discussed proposals with adjacent ward councillors.

24. In order to speed up the process of allocation of funding, it is proposed that the authority to approve the individual projects be delegated to the Cabinet Member for New Homes and Sustainable Development. This will mean that those projects which have already been prioritised locally, once assessed by officers, can be presented for approval from October rather than needing to wait for the next available Cabinet meeting. Further projects will be approved once they have been agreed locally and assessed by officers. It anticipated that the assessment of all projects to be funded under this round will be completed by March 2025.
25. It is anticipated that there will be a change to the process of Neighbourhood CIL allocation following this Cabinet report to reflect the work on Neighbourhoods and the creation of a single funding pot. Any funds accrued after the date of this Cabinet report or left unallocated from this current round will be distributed under the new framework and work to develop the new framework will begin in parallel with the aim of presenting a report to Cabinet in Spring 2025. Consultation will then take place leading to a final revised policy being adopted by Cabinet in September 2025.

Policy framework implications

26. The approach proposed here is in accordance with the previous Neighbourhood CIL allocation process and only slightly amended. The proposals will be assessed against the strategic priorities set out in the Southwark 2030 Strategy.

Community, equalities (including socio-economic) and health impacts

Community impact statement

27. The individual Neighbourhood CIL project proposals will be assessed against the Southwark 2030 goals.

Equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement

28. Section 149 of The Equality Act 2010 imposes a general equality duty on public authorities (the Public Sector Equality Duty)(“PSED”) in the exercise of their functions, to have due regard to the need to:
 - Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it
 - Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
29. For the purposes of the PSED the following are “protected characteristic” considerations:

- Age
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation.

30. The PSED duty and implications for groups with protected characteristics will be considered further as the projects are developed and delivered.
31. As set out in paragraph 16 above, the bids for funding will be assessed against the Southwark 2030 goals. The report on Southwark 2030 to July Cabinet stated that the EINA had assessed that Southwark 2030 would not negatively impact those with protected characteristics and it is expected that it will go further than the council's existing work to support reductions in inequality, particularly for certain racial groups, and children and young people.

Health impact statement

32. The assessment of the individual Neighbourhood CIL projects will include an assessment against the Southwark 2030 goals which includes the promotion of health and well being.

Climate change implications

33. The assessment of the individual Neighbourhood CIL projects will include the contribution that the project is making to respond to the climate emergency.

Resource implications

34. The funding available per ward is set out in paragraph 15 above. The administration of this process will be undertaken by officers in Planning and Growth.

Legal implications

35. See report from the Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and Assurance) below.

Financial implications

36. The funding available per ward which has already been received by the council is set out in paragraph 17 above. These figures are in accordance with the council's financial accounts.
37. Future reports will need to be brought to Cabinet Member for New Homes and Sustainable Development for approval for individual Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy projects for a year in accordance with the framework set out in this report.

38. Detailed work and reconciliation will be carried on an on-going basis to ensure that there are sufficient CIL finance available to fund the projects against the latest expenditure projections.
39. Any staffing and other costs connected with this report will be contained within existing revenue budgets.

Consultation

40. The process for allocation Neighbourhood CIL, with a couple of small amendments as set out above, is in accordance with the existing council policy. The individual projects will need to demonstrate a level of local community support. As set out above it is proposed that the Neighbourhood CIL policy is amended next year with a draft for consultation being produced by March 2025.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Assistant Chief Executive (Governance & Assurance) – NST050924

41. As the report explains, Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is the sum of funding collected from major development sites across the Borough to pay for the implementation of new infrastructure to support the growth of communities. CIL is split into strategic CIL (75% of all payments) which is spent on Borough-wide infrastructure projects such as the construction of new tube stations, and local or neighbourhood CIL (25% of all payments).
42. Currently, local CIL is allocated following Community Infrastructure Plans (CIPs). This report proposes to no longer require the development of CIPs and subsequent decision-making with regard to local CIL to be made in accordance with CIPs, but instead seeks to delegate the Cabinet Member for New Homes and Sustainable Development authority to allocate and reallocate existing local CIL identified in paragraph 17.
43. Council Assembly on 14 July 2021 approved a change to the council's Constitution to confirm that all decisions made by the council will consider the climate and equality (including socio-economic disadvantage and health inequality) consequences of taking that decision. This has been considered at paragraphs 27 and 33 above.
44. The Public Sector Equality Duty ("PSED") is set out at section 149 of Equality Act 2010 and requires the council to have due regard in the exercise of its functions (including decision making), to the need to:
 - a. Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation or other prohibited conduct;
 - b. Advance of equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristics and those who do not share it;
 - c. Foster good relations between those who share a relevant characteristic and those that do not share it.

45. The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
46. Officers have considered the council's PSED under section 149 of the 2010 Act at paragraphs 28-31 of this report. Officers have concluded that, at the proposed change in approach to local CIL allocation is not considered to have any adverse impacts on persons with protected characteristics.
47. Regulation 59(1), Community Infrastructure Regulations 2010 provides that: "A charging authority must apply CIL to funding the provision, improvement, replacement, operation or maintenance of infrastructure to support the development of its area." The relevant definition of infrastructure is at s.216(2) of the Planning Act 2008: "infrastructure" includes: (a) roads and other transport facilities (b) flood defences (c) schools and other educational facilities (d) medical facilities (e) sporting and recreational facilities, and (f) open spaces. This is a broad definition as it is an inclusive list, and not exclusive.
48. The Planning Practice Guidance provides that the levy can be used to fund a wide range of infrastructure, including transport, flood defences, schools, hospitals, and other health and social care facilities. As the report at paragraph sets out, the definition of infrastructure allows CIL to be used to fund a very broad range of facilities such as play areas, open spaces, parks and green spaces, cultural and sports facilities, healthcare facilities, academies and free schools, district heating schemes and police stations and other community safety facilities. The change in flexibility gives Cabinet Member for New Homes and Sustainable Development the ability to determine and agree which specific projects local CIL should be applied to within the aforementioned legislation and policy framework set out.
49. The recommendations of this report fall within the powers of Cabinet in accordance with paragraph 27 Part 3B of the council's constitution which sets out that Cabinet is responsible for all cabinet matters even if not expressly set out in that part of the constitution. This decision by Cabinet is in line with previous decisions taken by Cabinet which set out the council's framework or policy that should underpin the allocation and expenditure of local CIL.

Strategic Director of Resources (FC24/013)

50. The report requests cabinet to agree the changes to the existing process CIL allocation process as detailed in first recommendation and to note the second recommendation.
51. The report also requests the leader to vary the executive scheme of delegation to delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for New Homes and Sustainable Development to approve individual Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy projects for a year in accordance with the framework set out in paragraphs 18 to 23 of this report.

52. The strategic director of finance notes the resource implications and financial implications and notes that the council has received the related funds and they are available for the purposes outlined in this report.
53. The proposed allocations per ward as reflected in the table in the report above, represent an increase in council's capital expenditure and will be reflected as budget variation in the next capital budget monitoring report to cabinet.
54. Staffing and any other costs associated with this recommendation are to be contained within existing departmental revenue budgets.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

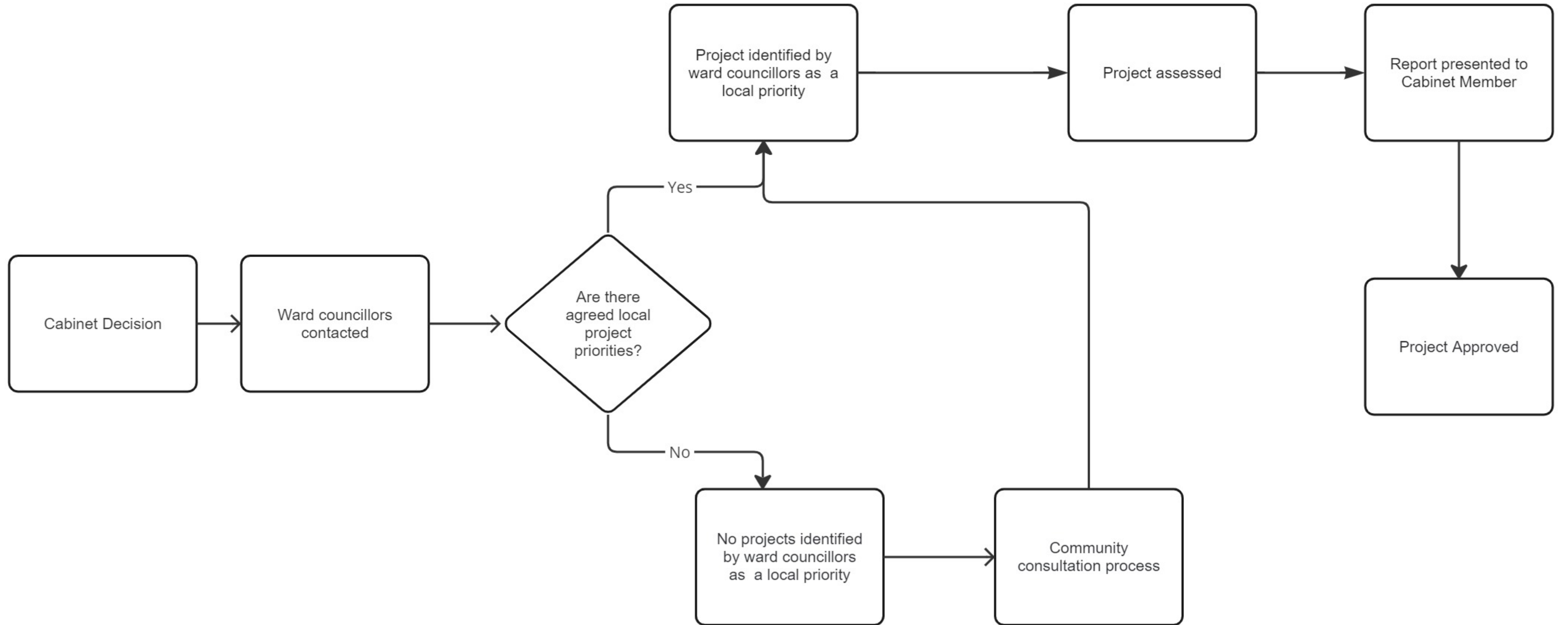
Background Papers	Held At	Contact
None		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Local CIL process diagram

AUDIT TRAIL

Cabinet Member	Councillor Helen Dennis – Cabinet Member for New Homes and Sustainable Development	
Lead Officer	Clive Palfreyman Strategic Director of Resources	
Report Author	Neil Kirby, Head of Sustainable Growth	
Version	Final	
Dated	5 September 2024	
Key Decision?	Yes	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Assistant Chief Executive Governance and Assurance	Yes	Yes
Strategic Director of Resources	Yes	Yes
Cabinet Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team		5 September 2024



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