

The Council's Approach to Supporting Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Migrants

To:	Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee
Meeting Date:	23 March 2023
From:	Assistant Director for Communities, Employment and Skills, Lisa Riddle
Electoral division(s):	All
Key decision:	No
Outcome:	To consider the issues raised by the motion agreed by Full Council on 8 December 2022 relating to asylum seekers and migrants, and to agree the actions set out in this paper that define and detail the Council's role in supporting those groups.
Recommendation:	<p>The Committee is recommended to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Agree the role description of Migrant Champion, as set out in Paragraph 2.2 of the report, and appoint a Member as the Migrant Champion;b) Approve that the Council signs the City of Sanctuary pledge and continues to work towards becoming an awarded Council of Sanctuary member; andc) Support the Council making a commitment to upskill its officers who work directly with refugees and asylum seekers.

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1. Background

- 1.1 At its meeting on 13 December 2022, Full Council agreed a motion on various issues relating to support for asylum seekers, migrants and refugees.
- 1.2 The motion referred a specific action (relating to a Place of Safety pledge) to the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee for further consideration. While other actions were not referred to any specific committee, this report is intended to provide an update on work being carried out in response to the overall motion.
- 1.3 Specifically, the motion requested that key actions be taken forward, which include:
 - Establishing a member-role of 'Migrant Champion'.
 - Joining the City of Sanctuary Local Authority Network.
 - Requesting officers explore the development of a 'City of Sanctuary' type charter for use at countywide level.
 - Encouraging the Council's partners not to participate in maintaining a 'hostile environment' by providing data to the Home Office that may be used for detention and deportation purposes, (except where this is a legal obligation).
 - Developing a local, county-wide 'Place of Safety' pledge, which supports the right of all to seek services, advice, support and representation without fear of adverse consequences.
 - Joining (and encouraging our partners to join), the No Recourse to Public Funds network, a national network of local councils and experts safeguarding the welfare of destitute families.
 - Working collaboratively with the ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) Local Planning Partnerships recently established by the Combined Authority on supporting asylum seekers with English Language learning.
 - Working closely with the Local Government Association to share best practice on asylum seeker resettlement support, increase coordination in the East of England and put pressure on central Government to allocate resources especially in the most disadvantages areas.

2. Main Issues

Migrant Champion

- 2.1 The Full Council motion envisaged the Migrant Champion as 'a symbolically important role which would be the public face and embodiment of the Council's approach to and campaigning on migrant, asylum and refugee issues'.

- 2.2 It has been identified that some other local authorities have appointed Migrant Champions from among their elected members. Based on this, it is recommended that the role of Migrant Champion requested by Full Council undertake the following:
- Act as a political spokesperson for the Council on asylum and immigration issues.
 - Be a single point of contact for members on issues relating to asylum and refugeeism, raising issues to the Strategy and Partnership directorate that relate to asylum seekers and which require a strategic or policy response from the Council.
 - Being an internal advocate for asylum seekers and refugees within the Council.
 - Corresponding with political leadership at the district and city councils in Cambridgeshire around matters relating to asylum seekers, migrants and refugees, including requests to sign up to relevant networks and not to participate in creating or maintaining a hostile environment.
- 2.3 In creating the role of a Member Champion, it should be noted that:
- Many Council services are relevant to and may be accessed by asylum seekers and refugees.
 - While the Council has taken a coordination role for some asylum seeker/refugee issues (e.g., Afghan resettlement scheme, Homes for Ukraine), the national system and local partners tend to recognise those local authorities with housing allocation responsibilities as being the lead organisation for asylum and immigration issues. This is consistent with the principles of decentralisation adopted by the Council.
 - The Council has no dedicated officer capacity working on asylum and immigration issues.
- 2.4 For the reasons set out above, the original Council motion clarified that the Migrant Champion role would not act to resolve issues related to individual asylum seekers or their cases or access to services. Instead, the role would work at the symbolic and strategic level, as set out in Paragraph 2.2 of this report.
- 2.5 Subject to agreeing the proposed responsibilities, the Committee is asked to appoint a Migrant Champion.

City of Sanctuary Approaches

- 2.6 In 2022, Cambridgeshire Libraries pledged to follow the City of Sanctuary charter and it is currently in the process of becoming an awarded Library of Sanctuary. This award recognises and celebrates libraries that work hard to show solidarity and welcome those who are new to communities, including refugees, migrants, people seeking sanctuary, international students, and more. This includes creating a warm and welcoming environment, reducing barriers to access to public services, connecting people with reliable information, combating digital exclusion, and fostering opportunities for community building for both new arrivals and the settled community.

- 2.7 City of Sanctuary UK is a 'network of welcome' that works across different sectors to encourage inclusivity, solidarity and compassion for people from a forced displacement background. One of the 'sector networks' is comprised of local authorities.
- 2.8 There are two types of membership of the City of Sanctuary Local Authority Network:
- (i) To join the Network as a 'non-awarded member', the Council would be required to sign up to the vision and values of City of Sanctuary. This involves committing to:
 - Act in accordance with City of Sanctuary vision and values.
 - Apply the network principles within our work.
 - Support Cambridge City as the local City of Sanctuary.
 - Become an 'awarded member' of the City of Sanctuary in the future.
 - Work with City of Sanctuary to create new ideas for practical action and discuss how the Council can work to further support the vision and values.
 - (ii) To join the Network and achieve the status as an 'awarded member', the Council would be required to go through an appraisal process which includes the following:
 - Full Council agreeing a motion setting out its commitment to being a place of sanctuary.
 - Officers committing to work with the local City of Sanctuary (Cambridge City) and/or other refugee networks.
 - Officers committing to work with partners to identify national policy issues in order to make collective representations to the government to encourage and enable change.
 - Officers producing a written strategy (either an independent strategy or as part of a broader strategy e.g., equality, migration, etc.), which is publicly available and sets out the Council's commitment for at least three years.
 - Officers completing the application process, including an action plan to learn, embed and share practice, followed by the application paperwork, evidencing the strategy, plan and work with the local City of Sanctuary group (and/or other refugee networks) and receiving the endorsement from those groups for the award application.
- 2.9 The Council can also sign the City of Sanctuary Pledge without committing to becoming a member.
- 2.10 As noted in Paragraph 2.3, the Council does not have dedicated capacity to undertake ongoing work in this area. While some aspects of this appraisal process are self-contained

and time-limited in nature, others are less well-defined and open-ended in nature. Officer capacity allocated to this work will therefore need to be considered in the context of overall resource availability and the pursuit of other priorities.

- 2.11 As officers continue the work to achieve Library of Sanctuary status, it is proposed that the Council signs the City of Sanctuary pledge. A further report on becoming an awarded Council of Sanctuary member will be presented in six months, once Library of Sanctuary status has been awarded.

'Place of Safety' Pledge

- 2.12 In 2018, MPs began signing the 'MPs not border guards' pledge committing to not report constituents to the Home Office for immigration enforcement. The Council encourages its partners and elected members county-wide to sign the following Cambridgeshire-based pledge, committing to support migrants in Cambridgeshire who may be at risk of deportation or detention:

As an elected member/partner of Cambridgeshire County Council, I pledge to represent and advocate for all people living in Cambridgeshire as equal members of the local community, regardless of their immigration status. My organisation and I are safe spaces and I welcome all individuals in Cambridgeshire to seek representation free from fear of immigration enforcement. I will not report on anyone who seeks my advice to the Home Office for immigration enforcement and will ensure my office correctly handles sensitive personal information to prevent this from happening."

- 2.13 The motion agreed by Full Council in December 2022 addressed the concept of 'hostile environments', in relation to the deportation and detention of refugees and asylum seekers. The Council will continue to provide information to the Home Office where it is required to do so by law, and it encourages partners to do the same. Where there is no legal requirement to provide information to the Home Office, the Council encourages its staff and partners to consider the information they are providing, and how this information may impact the lives of refugees and asylum seekers in Cambridgeshire.
- 2.14 A letter will be sent to the leaders of the district and city councils, encouraging them to sign the Place of Safety Pledge and consider whether information they are providing may contribute to a hostile environment.

Networks and Partnerships

- 2.15 The Council sends officer representation to the Local Government Association (LGA) East of England Strategic Migration Partnership (SMP), working with other upper tier authorities to share knowledge and best practice about refugee and asylum issues.
- 2.16 Officers from across the Education department, Children's Services, Think Communities and Business Intelligence also represent the Council on the Combined Authority's recently established English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Local Planning Partnerships. The South Partnership is chaired by a County Councillor (currently Councillor Bulat), while the North Partnership has representation from a County Councillor (currently Councillor Hoy). The Partnerships bring together providers and experts with significant expertise on

supporting asylum seekers with English language learning.

- 2.17 The No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) network is a national network safeguarding the welfare of those unable to access benefits due to their immigration status. The Council is part of the NRPF network, receiving legal and policy updates, as well as the NRPF's e-bulletin. In addition, the Council receives updates from the Chair of the LGA East of England SMP, who is on the NRPF steering group.
- 2.18 The Council can further support the NRPF by contributing to consultations. Where there are opportunities to provide feedback, case studies or contribute to a consultation, the Assistant Director for Communities, Employment and Skills will be the main contact for officers, Councillors and partners.
- 2.19 The Committee is asked to support the Council making a commitment to upskill its officers who work directly with refugees and asylum seekers, so that they are able to signpost them to relevant public and voluntary sector organisations.

3. Alignment with corporate priorities

3.1 Environment and Sustainability

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.2 Health and Care

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.3 Places and Communities

The role of Migrant Champion, if agreed, will help to assist with identifying issues that face asylum seekers and refugees residing in Cambridgeshire, helping to ensure they have access to the help and support required.

3.4 Children and Young People

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.5 Transport

There are no significant implications for this priority.

4. Significant Implications

4.1 Resource Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

- 4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications
There are no significant implications within this category.
- 4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications
The implications for Equality and Diversity are outlined in section 2 of the report.
- 4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications
There are no significant implications within this category.
- 4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement
The implications for Localism and Local Member Involvement are outlined in section 2 of the report.
- 4.7 Public Health Implications
Asylum seekers and refugees are often vulnerable, experience health inequalities and poor health outcomes. The measures and support described in this paper could provide the opportunities for these factors to be mitigated.

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? Yes
Name of Financial Officer: Clare Andrews

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the Head of Procurement? Yes
Name of Officer: Clare Ellis

Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's Monitoring Officer or Pathfinder Legal? Yes
Name of Legal Officer: Linda Walker

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your EqIA Super User?
Yes
Name of Officer: Sue Grace

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?
Yes
Name of Officer: Christine Birchall

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact? Yes
Name of Officer: Lisa Riddle

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health?
Yes
Name of Officer: Val Thomas

5. Source Documents

- 5.1 [Motion agreed by Full Council Meeting on 13 December 2023 \(Agenda Item 10c – Motion](#)

[from Councillor Bulat](#)

- 5.2 [Work towards gaining Library of Sanctuary award](#)
- 5.3 [Further information of Libraries of Sanctuary](#)
- 5.4 [City of Sanctuary Charter](#)
- 5.5 [City of Sanctuary Pledge](#)
- 5.6 [MPs Not Border Guards Pledge](#)
- 5.7 [No Recourse to Public Funds Network](#)