

Royal Borough of Greenwich

Borough of Sanctuary Policy 2023-2026





Foreword

The Royal Borough of Greenwich has a proud history of supporting refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. Anyone who seeks to make our borough their home is welcome here – no matter where you are from in the world.

Here in Royal Greenwich, we are proud to celebrate the wonderful achievements and contributions that refugees, migrants and asylum seekers have made.

Across the borough, you'll see their influence everywhere you go. You can taste it in the Caribbean and Nepalese restaurants in Woolwich, hear it in the languages spoken on our streets. You can watch it at the amazing music and dance performances at events and venues across the borough, and feel it in our community spirit.

You'll come across refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in every walk of life. You might be treated by nurses and doctors in our hospitals, or taught by teachers in our schools. You could be supported by carers in care homes, driven in buses and trains, served in shops, or cared for in hospices. Refugees, asylum seekers and migrants have helped shape our borough in so many profound ways.

That's why we're committed to becoming a Borough of Sanctuary. We want to make sure that Royal Greenwich is inclusive and welcoming, that we are meeting people's specific needs, and that we listen to and amplify the voices of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

This strategy sets out the Council's commitments towards becoming a Borough of Sanctuary. It provides a common understanding of the meaning of sanctuary, acts as a policy anchor for the wide variety of work the Council will undertake, and offers a framework for delivery.

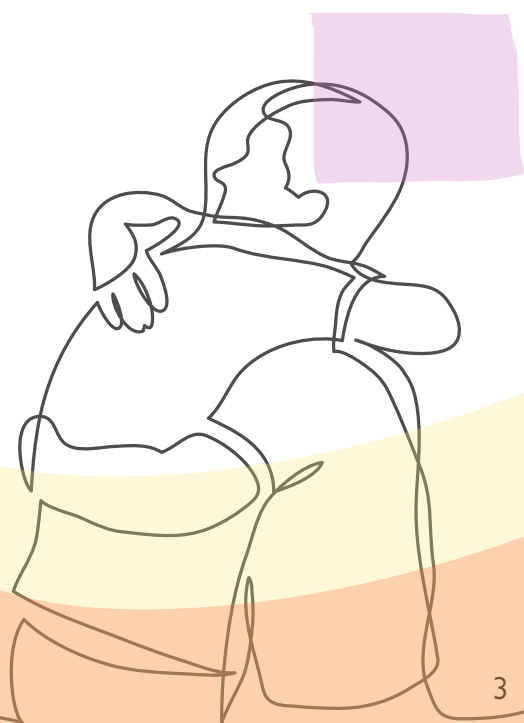
We will be making changes across all directorates and departments in order to achieve our goal. We'll be looking at our policies and procedures, while working closely with local partners and organisations to make sure our services are accessible. We'll also be identifying national policy issues where we can work collectively to encourage and enable change.

As the government continues to ramp up hostility towards refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, we must continue to fight back. And councils across the country will have a key role to play in standing up for and protecting people's rights.

Thus, I am very pleased to recommend this strategy to make this Council a champion for all those seeking sanctuary in Royal Greenwich.

Denise Scott-McDonald

Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Services



Summary

This policy has been developed to formalise The Royal Borough of Greenwich's commitment to becoming a "Borough of Sanctuary."

A Borough of Sanctuary is one which ensures a welcoming place of safety for people who are asylum seekers, refugees, migrants, and those seeking sanctuary.

The Royal Borough of Greenwich (RBG) is committed to ensuring that we not only provide a welcoming environment for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants on arrival, but also support people to settle and integrate into our borough for the benefit of the wider community.

The Council's Corporate Strategy, Our Greenwich, sets out our key objectives and priorities to develop our services and improve the lives of residents, including new arrivals and migrant communities.

Our priorities are:

Our Communities

Focusing on the Council's interaction both directly and indirectly with residents and communities

Our People

Focusing on meeting the needs of residents of Greenwich

Our Place

Focusing on developing Greenwich as a place

Our Economy

Focusing on the development of Greenwich's economy

Our Organisation

Focusing on improving how the Council works

This policy is designed to promote these priorities and sets out the Council's aims and commitments to support people who are asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants for 2023-2026. The policy is designed to sit alongside the borough's existing Corporate Plan.

Introduction

Every year, thousands of people seeking protection arrive in the UK hoping to rebuild their lives after fleeing war, persecution, and terror.

Armed conflict continues in many countries in the Middle East and Africa including Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Sudan. In February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine causing many people to flee their homes. Human rights abuses are rife in many countries across the globe, where people are subject to torture, repression, and enslavement by their own government.

Meanwhile, the emerging climate crisis is increasingly making some parts of the world uninhabitable due to droughts, floods, and land fires. The Royal Borough of Greenwich is committed to ensuring that those arriving in our borough are welcomed and provided sanctuary.

The City of Sanctuary (CoS) movement started in 2005. Its mission is to “work to build a culture of welcome, hospitality and inclusiveness across every sphere and sector of society, so that wherever people seeking sanctuary go they will feel safe, find people who welcome them, understand why they are here, and have opportunities to be included in all activities.”

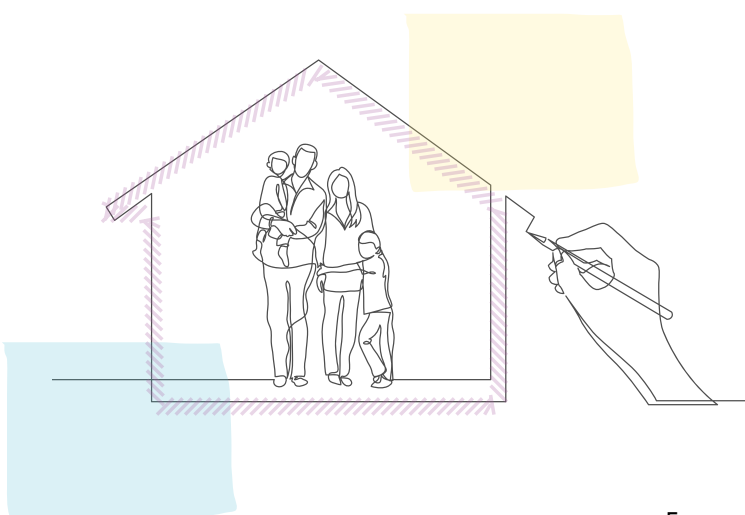
In London, it was agreed that the project should be adopted on a borough-by-borough basis.

In 2021, RBG formalised its commitment to becoming a Borough of Sanctuary. In March 2022, we formally joined the National City of Sanctuary Council Network. At the same time, RBG formally joined the local Borough of Sanctuary Partnership Group to ensure that the priorities of the movement were progressed within the borough. In Greenwich, the CoS partnership is led by the voluntary sector including the Greenwich Inclusion Project, Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network, Citizens UK, Creating Ground, English for Action, and Trinity Vineyard.

In becoming a Borough of Sanctuary, our goal is that refugees, asylum seekers and migrants are able to fulfil their potential and contribute to Greenwich’s community, culture, and economy, while living in safety and security.

In preparing this policy, RBG and partners have referred to the City of Sanctuary Criteria of Learn, Embed and Share:

- **Learn:** learning about what it means to be seeking sanctuary, both in general, and specifically.
- **Embed:** taking positive action to embed concepts of welcome, safety and inclusion. To take steps to ensure this progress remains sustainable.
- **Share:** sharing your vision, achievements, what you have learned, and good practice with other local authorities, the local community and beyond.



City of Sanctuary: Charter, Vision, Values and Principles

The Royal Borough of Greenwich is committed to the vision values and principles defined in the City of Sanctuary Charter.

Values

Our strategy is based on the Five Core Values of the City of Sanctuary Charter:

- **Inclusive:** We welcome and respect people from all backgrounds, place the highest value on diversity and are committed to equality.
- **Open:** 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 people seeking sanctuary are involved in all decision making and are supported to become leaders in the organisation, networks, and the wider movement.
- **Inspire:** We work with enthusiasm and positivity and are determined to surpass what has already been achieved. We act as a catalyst for change by being open to new and innovative ideas, sharing knowledge and working in partnership.
- **Integrity:** We aspire to high standards of honesty and behaviour, and always to act in the interests of people seeking sanctuary.

Principles

RBG's aim is to encourage individuals, organisations, and institutions in the borough to join us in enacting the Seven Sanctuary Principles. These are to:

- offer a positive vision of a culture of welcome and hospitality to all
- create opportunities for relationships of friendship and solidarity between local people and those seeking sanctuary
- recognise and encourage partnership working and network development across localities
- identify opportunities for practical action and work on common cause issues to effect change within and across communities (turning empathy into action)
- celebrate and promote the welcome contribution of people seeking sanctuary
- engage people seeking sanctuary in decision making processes at all levels and in all activities promote understanding of asylum and refugee issues, especially by enabling refugee voices to be heard directly.

Current Work and Achievements in Greenwich

We are engaged in a range of activities and projects which align with the Borough of Sanctuary principles. While some of this work occurs within the Council, some is commissioned from voluntary and community sector organisations and groups across the borough.

This work already relates to many areas of the Council's core business and represents a strong foundation from which to develop our practice and become a Borough of Sanctuary.

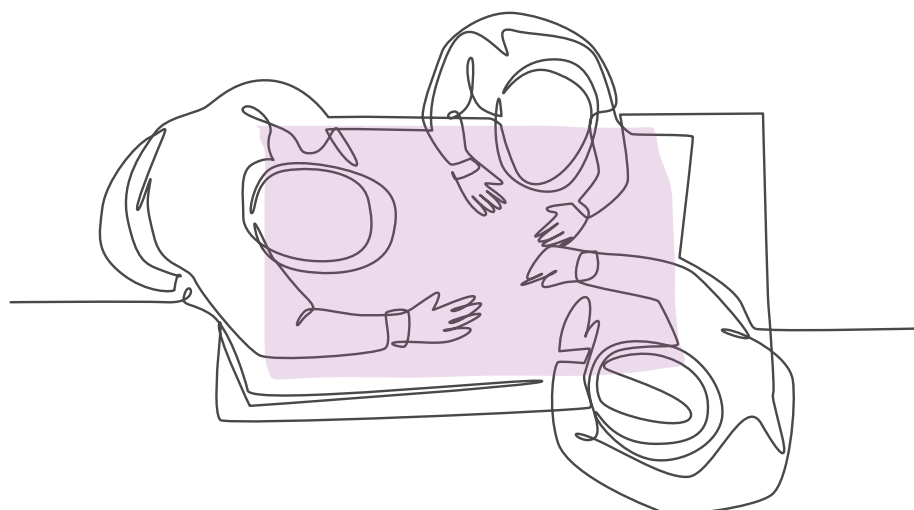
Several key initiatives are highlighted within this part of the policy, with the understanding that RBG is committed to continual learning and improvement as our services evolve.

Greenwich City of Sanctuary Partnership

RBG is a member organisation of the local partnership group with a named representative for all business relating to the group. We work with the volunteer group as well as the national local authorities' network, sharing our experiences and learning from those across the UK. The Greenwich group is a forum for learning and for identifying areas for development and improvement, whilst working to raise awareness across the community and local businesses.

[Read the full membership.](#)

[Read the pledge of support.](#)



From April to July 2021, the Greenwich partnership undertook a consultation exercise with over 100 people to understand how to become a Borough of Sanctuary. The group sought views from residents, organisations, and people from migrant backgrounds to understand what issues meant the most to them. Since then, the network has been running workshops with those who contributed to the listening exercise, co-producing solutions, and meeting as a community network. We have been exploring issues related to accessing healthcare, housing conditions, and communication with services and local authorities, as well as access to ESOL classes. In addition to this, a community outreach event was held in Woolwich to seek views from the public.

[Read a general overview of the Greenwich scheme.](#)

City of Sanctuary Local Authority Network

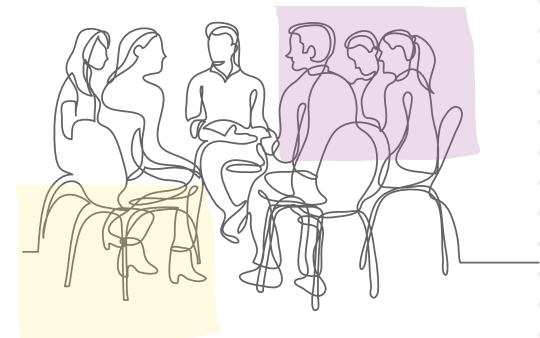
RBG has been a member of the Network since March 2022 and commits to working towards the full 'Council of Sanctuary' Award. The network aims are:

- **to support the development of a non-partisan network of local authorities that are working towards the City of Sanctuary vision**
- **to promote the embedding of a culture and practice of welcome in local authorities to support the City of Sanctuary theory of change.**



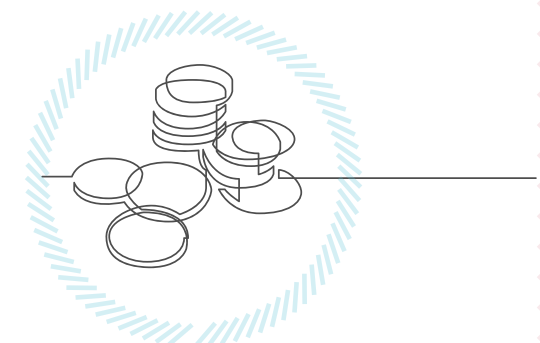
Greenwich Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants Group (GRAM)

The GRAM is a cross departmental strategic group established to provide oversight of the Council's arrangements for the support of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants arriving in the borough (including asylum dispersal and people accommodated in hotels). The group was established to ensure that the Council meets our responsibilities in relation to these groups as defined by statute and government policy. The terms of reference for the group restate RBG's commitment to ensuring that we are a Borough of Sanctuary for those who come to live here.



The Royal Greenwich Community Hub

The Royal Greenwich Community Hub has been supporting people with advice and help on a range of topics from food, money issues and housing to employment, training, and social activities.



Live Well Greenwich

Live Well Greenwich is an organisation which offers health and wellbeing support for residents including refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

Greenwich Inclusion Project (GrIP)

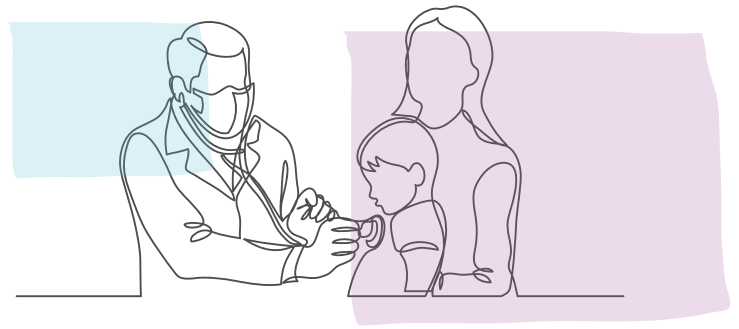
GrIP is an independent local community organisation that focuses on promoting racial and religious equality, community inclusion, freedom from hate crime, guidance, and workshops. A key aim is to challenge racism by promoting fairness, respect, inclusion, and change. GrIP undertakes planned and specific work in Greenwich to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people from different racial and faith groups.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

RBG has established a central website, Greenwich Learns, to advertise our adult and community learning provision, alongside regular promotion of these services across the Council's communication channels.

Most of the ESOL courses are pre-entry and entry-level speaking and listening with a limited number of level-one places. All learners will need to complete an initial assessment to make sure they are enrolled on a course appropriate to their needs. If their English is at a higher level, they may be referred to London South East Colleges. In October 2022, RBG started funding 30 additional weekly ESOL classes from English Action for London with 50% of places available for Ukrainians.

[Find out more.](#)



Homes for Ukraine

The scheme has resulted in a joined-up response across council departments including Health and Adult Services, Children's Social Care, the Contact Centre, Housing, Corporate Communications and Public Health, together with colleagues across a wide range of voluntary organisations and community groups. The project is overseen by a strategic and operational Task and Finish Group.

Welcome packs with information readily translated have been prepared for Sponsors and Guests in preparation for arrivals and these, together with other information, have been published on our website.

The Council has established a dedicated Resettlement Team to manage the scheme and has commissioned a wraparound service from Big Red Kick to provide support to all Ukrainians in Greenwich, irrespective of their pathway of arrival.

A welcome event took place in July 2022 attended by Ukrainian guests, their sponsors, and the Deputy Ambassador of the Ukrainian Embassy.

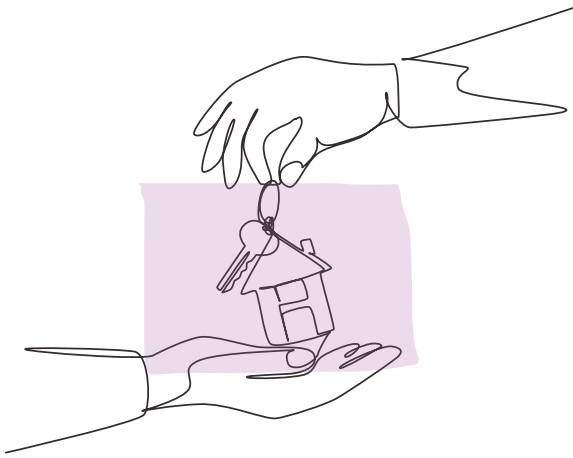


Syrian Resettlement Scheme

Nineteen families (a total of 40 adults and 35 children) have been resettled in the borough under the Syrian Resettlement Scheme, funded by the Home Office, since 2017.

The Council has been making progress to support people's applications for longer-term housing, receiving benefits, seeking employment, access to English as a Second Language, school places and GP registration. Support for families is provided by our partners, Greenwich Islamic Centre and Greenwich Inclusion Project, with two support staff working with the Council's Nil Recourse Team.

The resettlement project for Syrian families covers five years from the date of their arrival. The first two families are approaching the end of their five-year programme and are being supported with immigration applications.



Afghan Resettlement Scheme

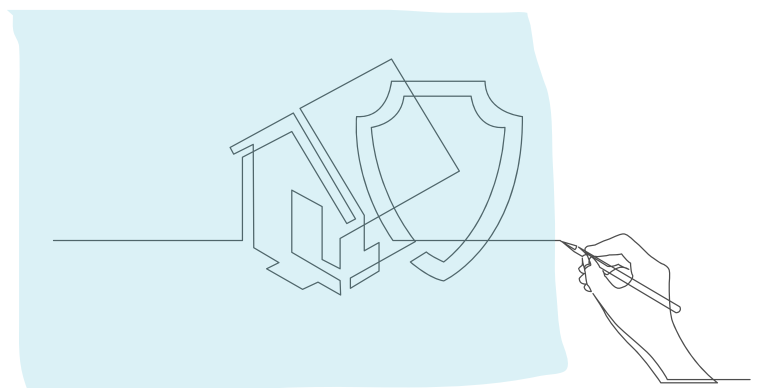
Four families have been resettled in the borough since September 2021.

The Council's intention is to receive up to 15 families. The remainder of referrals are currently living in temporary bridging accommodation across the country and will move into the borough over the coming months when suitable accommodation is identified.

Discussions are currently taking place with local housing providers and private landlords to find accommodation for the scheme, as well as with the Ministry of Defence, who has identified a potential number of vacant properties within the borough that might be suitable.

The Afghan resettlement scheme is also Home Office-funded. However, the support required is considered to be at a lower level than with the Syrian scheme. This is because the majority of the referrals (under the ARAP scheme) have previous connections to the UK, were employed by British Armed Forces and Government organisations in Afghanistan, have generally a better command of English, and all have already been in the UK for some time in bridging accommodation. Some are already in receipt of benefits, and others are in employment.

A procurement process was commenced to commission a bespoke resettlement support service for Afghan families. However, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, this has been reviewed with the intention to procure a more generic resettlement support service in the borough. This could be readily adapted for any future urgent refugee responses that may arise. In the interim, resettlement support for Afghan families will be arranged through a spot-purchase provider.



Modern Slavery

We have delivered an extensive training programme to health and social care staff working across the Council and local NHS trusts. The training is now part of the Health and Adult Services Training programme.

We have also developed an information booklet for the victims of Modern Slavery, which has been translated into Ukrainian, Russian, Romanian, Nepali and Vietnamese.

Prevent

The Council provides oversight and coordination of the multi-agency Channel Panel, which provides support and interventions for vulnerable individuals together with training and awareness for communities and partner organisations. The panel has operational links with the Safeguarding Adults Team and provides support and guidance around hate crime, which impacts asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants.

Safeguarding Adults Board

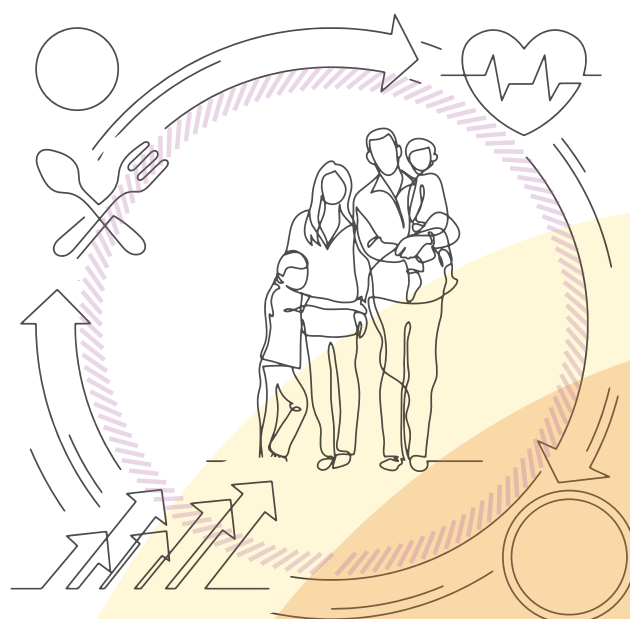
The Greenwich SAB is a multi-agency partnership board committed to ensuring that Safeguarding arrangements for adults at risk are delivered in a way which empowers communities and individuals. The aim of the SAB is to work with member organisations to create a borough which prevents abuse and neglect, whilst protecting those who are at risk or who have experienced abuse.

Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network (LRMN)

LRMN is a local organisation which receives funding from the Royal Borough of Greenwich. LRMN provides free support and advice on immigration, housing and employment to migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Additional services are funded by RBG to provide mental health and wellbeing support to Homes for Ukraine Sponsors through the delivery of specialist two-hour workshops.

Race Equality Scorecard

The Council commissioned Runnymede to produce its own Race Equality Scorecard report to include statistics on outcomes for different ethnic minority groups, by sampling data in the following seven areas: criminal justice, education, employment, housing, civic participation, support for the voluntary sector, and health. Following interpretation of the data and findings, the Greenwich Inclusion project is delivering services contracted by the Council, including work intended to increase awareness and understanding among decision-makers, service providers and local communities of race and faith inequalities and the needs of people with protected characteristics.



Refugee Week

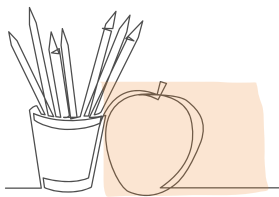
The Royal Borough of Greenwich is proud to support the annual Refugee Week festival celebrating the amazing contributions of refugees and runs a series of events every year. In 2022, these included three events by the Protein dance company, a special screening of the “There and Here” documentary, together with artist and refugee-led dance and arts and crafts workshops. The National Maritime Museum also ran a series of activities and events, and hosts the ‘Migrant Stories’ permanent museum collection. RBG will be working with the local Borough of Sanctuary Partnership to develop a programme of events for June 2023, and each year thereafter for the course of this strategy.

Plumstead Community Law Centre

The Plumstead Community Law Centre is part-funded by the Council and provides free support and legal advice on immigration, housing and employment to all Greenwich residents including migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

Blackheath Conservatoire

Blackheath Conservatoire is a local organisation which receives funding from the Council to deliver art, ESOL, conversation and social evenings for Ukrainian adults.

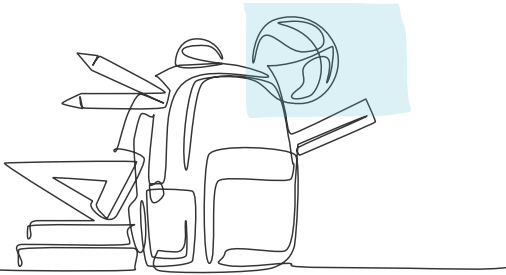


Citizens of the World Choir CIC

RBG funding supports this organisation to produce social media videos about hosting, art, and wellness projects for Ukrainian adults, and supported places in the choir.

B Young Stars

The organisation receives council funding to provide a Maths and English homework club with physical activities and social support.

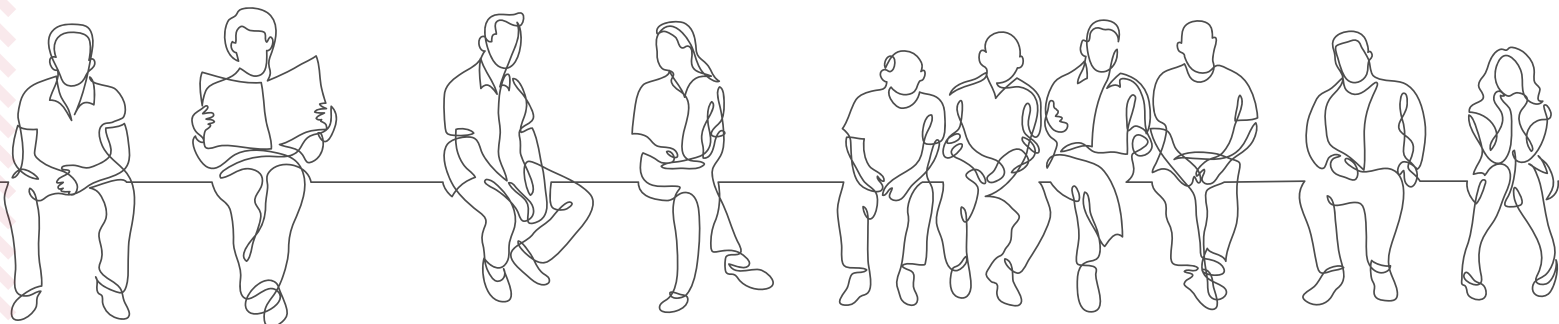
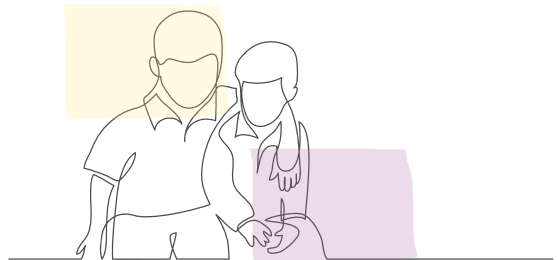
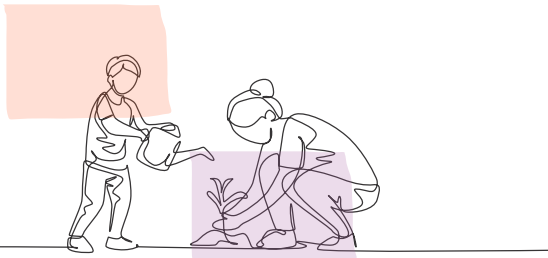


Mental Health HQ CIC

Mental Health HQ is a local group which is funded by the Council to deliver wellbeing-themed activities supporting mental and emotional health for 40 families.

Trinity Vineyard Welcome Churches Project

Trinity Vineyard Church supports asylum seekers and refugees in Woolwich. The project produces welcome boxes including toiletries, stationary, books and leaflets about the area. Project volunteers regularly meet with beneficiaries and help them navigate the local area or provide informal social opportunities.



Service Development and Delivery

We will develop and improve our services with the values and principles of sanctuary being applied to all areas of the Council.

We will therefore ensure that our services do the following:

Consider the needs of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants

While making sure we regard statute and central government policy, at a local level we will also consult with council service leads, local stakeholders, and residents, including groups which support and involve refugees, asylum seekers and migrants to make sure needs are met. To ensure this happens, considerations around the relevant groups will be embedded in council policies and eligibility criteria to ensure clarity and fairness. We will maintain a dedicated strategic oversight group (known as the GRAM) to ensure good practice, and respond to emerging issues relating to asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants. The GRAM will work in partnership with the local Borough of Sanctuary Partnership Group to support decision making. Staff training will be vital to ensure council departments understand the needs of those seeking sanctuary and how to provide the highest possible services.



Establish links with relevant community organisations to promote partnership working and co-production

This process will be supported and enabled through the local Borough of Sanctuary Partnership and the City of Sanctuary Local Authorities Network. The Council will listen to the experiences of people seeking sanctuary in Greenwich, and work to understand the “customer journey” for those who come to live here. As part of this, the Council will need to engage and listen to those with lived experience and ensure this informs the work of the GRAM. The GRAM will also ensure council representation at all partnership meetings.

Build and support capacity to meet the needs of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants

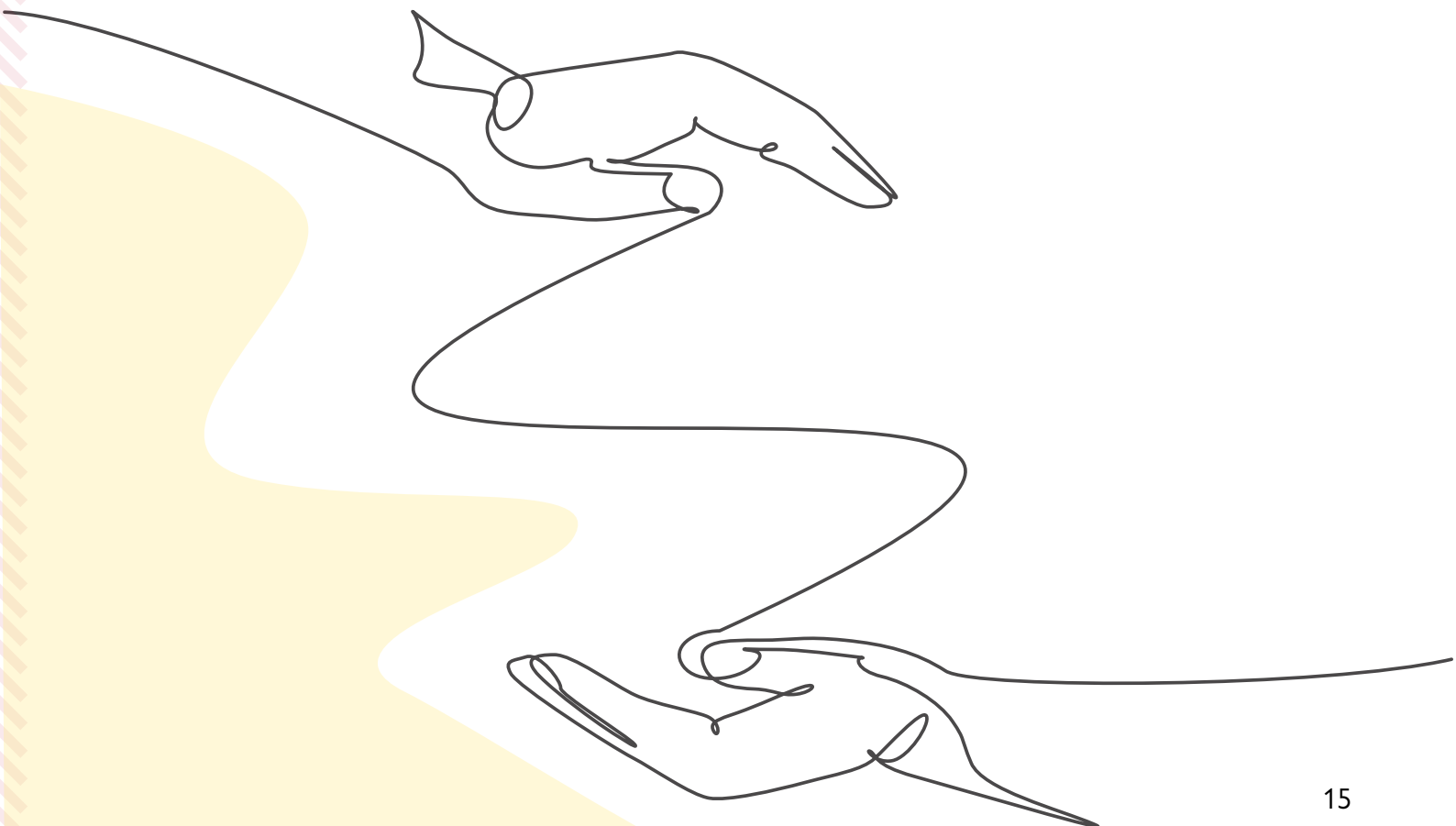
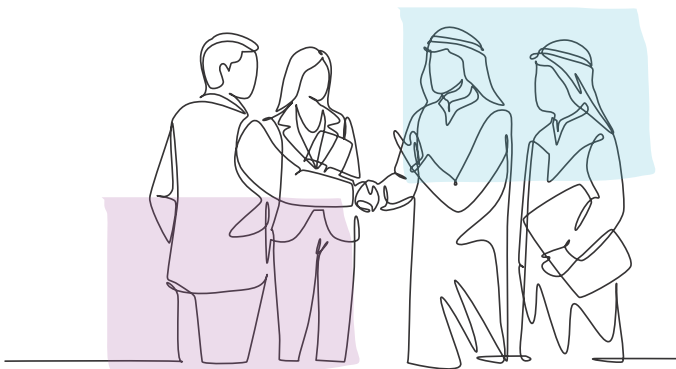
This will be monitored and evaluated through the GRAM, ensuring clear communication and engagement with the wider council. We will aim to provide an equal quality of service for all residents, ensuring that staff understand the rights and entitlements of all refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, while all council departments will set out how they are working to improve and develop their services. This will include consideration of a specialist housing officer to support resettlement. In addition, the Council will work to recognise the strengths and opportunities arising from the arrival of migrants who can enrich the local workforce.

Communicate clearly to promote transparency

This will be enabled through the GRAM to ensure clear and responsive corporate communications on all matters relating to sanctuary. Communication must be accessible and clear, and information must be translated when required. The Council will also ensure that welcome/orientation information toolkits are made available for people arriving in Greenwich.

Collect relevant data to inform decision making and monitor performance

This will enable the Council to monitor emerging trends, evaluate performance and plan future service delivery. In addition, the Council will review data sharing protocols to promote the best possible working with partner agencies. The Council and the GRAM will also need to consider data and information sharing policies to promote joint working across the partnership.



Appendix 1: Definitions

Asylum Seekers

Asylum seekers are people who have claimed asylum under the 1951 United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees, on the grounds that if they returned to their country of origin, they have a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political belief, or membership of a particular social group. They remain an asylum seeker whilst their application (or appeal against refusal of their application) is pending. If an application for asylum is successful, they are granted “Refugee” status.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

These are children who come to the UK to claim asylum but are not accompanied by an adult. These children are accommodated by local children’s services as Children in Care.

The ages of UASC are assessed according to guidance provided by the Home Office, with reference to relevant case law when applicable. This assessment is conducted by the Local Authority.

Refugees

Refugees are people fleeing armed conflict or persecution for whom it would be too dangerous to return to their home country. Refugees are defined and protected by the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Refugee Protocol. In the UK, refugees are people whose asylum claims have been granted. They may be entitled to remain for a time-limited or indefinite period, depending on their circumstances. Refugees are legally permitted to work and access welfare services and benefits including housing, education, and other public services.

Migrants

Migrants choose to move to a new country (without the risk of threat from their country of origin) and often this decision will be made to improve their quality of life. Migrants do not experience the same risks associated with returning home as refugees and are subject to UK immigration laws and processes. As a result, whilst many migrants are living in the UK legally, some may not have the legal right to be in the UK. The latter do not have rights to public services, housing, or employment.

