

Council of Sanctuary
Housing and Homelessness
Panel Tuesday 5 December 2023



City of Sanctuary – what it is?

- City of Sanctuary is a UK based charity. Its mission statement is

“to provide coordination and development support for networks of community groups supporting people seeking sanctuary, local authorities, Sanctuary Ambassadors, mainstream organisations engaged in streams of Sanctuary and Sanctuary Awards programs that are working towards our vision.”

- *Sanctuary seekers in this context may include asylum seekers, refugees, vulnerable or undocumented migrants & other groups*



Council of Sanctuary – Key dates

- 2005 - City of Sanctuary charity started in Sheffield
- 2019 – Oxford Councillors passed a motion affirming its commitment to being a City of Sanctuary. Full details of the motion agreed [click here](#)
- 2020 – City of Sanctuary started the sanctuary ‘Award’ (accreditation) process launched to extend reach and embed an institution-by-institution approach
- 2022 – Further Oxford City Council motion for Officers to feedback on developing a sanctuary strategy and demonstrate what the Council is doing to help those seeking sanctuary in light of Ukraine/Afghan conflicts. The minutes can be found via the link - [WEB LINK](#) (minute 131)
- 2023 – Oxford Councillors confirmed intention to become accredited Council of Sanctuary at the Sanctuary Fair, a joint event with University of Oxford & Asylum Welcome. [Full press release click here](#)
- 2023 – Thriving Communities Strategy (2023-27) action included to develop a Local Authority City of Sanctuary Action Plan and ensure the City Council meets its commitment to become an accredited local authority of sanctuary

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Council of Sanctuary Local Authority Award (Accreditation)

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- *“Sanctuary Awards are provided by the network of local groups and City of Sanctuary UK to recognise and celebrate commitment to our values and vision of welcome and inclusivity and enabling them to become active participants in the City of Sanctuary network.”*

- Summary of key actions:

1. Join the CoS local authority network
2. Produce an Action Plan co-produced with sanctuary seekers and stakeholders using the *‘LEARN, EMBED, SHARE’* criteria
3. Apply for recognition via the application process, ensuring the Council's meets the relevant criteria

See attached Council of Sanctuary Award – Procedure and Criteria in Annex 1 for more detailed information



Progress to date

- Oxford City has a proud history of supporting asylum seekers, refugees & migrants in the City, there is ambition to go further. There are many challenges in supporting sanctuary seekers as more people seek refuge in the UK and Oxford from war and crisis in other parts of the world and there is a growing backlog in the number of asylum claims awaiting a decision
- In Oxford, we also have an acute housing supply issue, with many groups needing accommodation, with insufficient supply to meet the need and clear affordability challenges
- 41 ➤ Since December 2015 Oxford City Council has successfully resettled 52 refugee families that have arrived through government resettlement schemes
- Oxfordshire alongside the City and district councils have been recognised as one of the few counties that continue to support the resettling of refugees through government resettlement schemes
- In July 2023, Oxford City Council affirmed their commitment to resettle 8 refugee families per year for the next 5 years, via a paper approved by Cabinet and Council

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Progress to date (con't)

- Since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Oxford City has welcomed 424 Ukrainian guests, through hosting arrangements
- Oxford City Council is working collaboratively with Oxfordshire County Council, District Councils, and local VCS organisations to support Ukrainians, hosting a county wide team. There have been over 120 successful cases moving on from hosting arrangements with assistance from the City Council
- The Council is investing over £4million in the Local Authority Housing Fund, Round 1 & 2 to deliver at least 10 properties for Ukrainian and Afghan homeless households providing stability and security
- The Council has utilised central government funding, including the Controlling Migration Fund, to commission innovative projects to support refugees in the City including but not limited to;
 - >The school advocacy programme to help refugees navigate the education system
 - >Additional funding for therapeutic counselling
 - >Bespoke end to end refugee employment support programme



Council of Sanctuary accreditation – Key milestones

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- May 2023 – Oxford Cllr's confirmed intention to become Council of Sanctuary at the Sanctuary fair.
- May 2023 – Council listening exercise with members of public & stakeholders
- May 2023 – Staff listening exercise & workshop at housing needs meeting
- 48 ➤ June 2023 – Oxford Brookes event, Council promoted Council of Sanctuary
- June 2023 – Internal awareness raising via policy group & Lunch & Learn with Asylum Welcome
- July - Sept 2023 - Partnership meetings with Oxford Brookes (who are aiming for University of Sanctuary), University of Oxford (who have achieved University of Sanctuary status), Migrant Help, Asylum Welcome, Refugee Resource, Oxford Hub, City of Sanctuary charity and others
- Sept 2023 - Anti Racism Charter signatories workshop event
- Oct 2023 – Inclusive recruitment training



Project plan – Phase 1

- Oct 23 – Dec 23 – Asylum Welcome commissioned to undertake innovative needs assessment. Needs assessment to engage sanctuary seekers and key stakeholders via 121 interviews and focus groups
- Dec 23 – Internal sanctuary task & finish group to start
- Dec 23 – Council Officers start drafting application form
- Jan 24 - A final report (discussion paper) generated by Asylum Welcome
- Feb-April 24 - Partnership forum sessions to develop action plan, using themes from paper
- 44 ➤ April 24 – final draft application form / action plan checked by City of Sanctuary charity
- May 24 – Local elections
- June 24 – Oxford City Council cabinet (prior scrutiny lead in period) to hear sanctuary report
- June 24 – Refugee Week event to celebrate City of Sanctuary
- July 24 – Submission of application form & action plan to City of Sanctuary
- Summer 24 – Accreditation outcome & public celebration event



Any questions/feedback?



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