

To: Cabinet
Date: 22 January 2025
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Council of Sanctuary Framework

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present the Scrutiny Committee recommendations for Cabinet consideration and decision
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Katherine Miles, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Lead Member:	Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities
Corporate Priority:	Supporting Thriving Communities
Policy Framework:	Thriving Communities Strategy
Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.	

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee

Introduction and overview

1. The Scrutiny Committee met on 14 January 2025 to consider a Cabinet report on Council of Sanctuary Framework. The report, which is due for consideration on 22 January 2025, recommends that Cabinet approve and adopt the draft Council of Sanctuary Framework document, including the Action Plan; agree that an annual progress update should be produced for Cabinet; delegate power to the Executive Director (Corporate Resources), in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, to amend the design of the framework document without changing the content, and to make changes to the action plan to keep it updated to developments and changes.
2. The Committee was grateful to Councillor Linda Smith (Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities) for attending to present the report as well as to Nerys Parry (Head of Housing Services), Richard Wood (Housing Strategy and Needs

Manager) and Stephen Cohen (Refugee and Resettlement Manager) for attending the meeting and answering questions from the Committee.

Summary and recommendations

3. Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, introduced the report. She noted that the document proposes a three-year action plan supporting Oxford's Council of Sanctuary accreditation. This accreditation underscores the city's commitment to welcoming refugees and asylum seekers while fostering an inclusive environment.
4. The Committee acknowledged the significant work of officers in developing a bold vision for addressing key issues faced by individuals seeking sanctuary in Oxford. They discussed several key measures and objectives outlined in the document, and raised questions about enhanced data collections, partnership development, and language and education support.
5. Members raised queries about the adequacy of data on the number of people the action plan aims to support. They asked how data collection could be refined to include precise metrics and identify specific community needs, with Officers confirming work ongoing to enhance data tracking in the form of Key Performance Indicators which will be reported on a yearly basis. With this, the Committee suggested that this reporting is formally established and that annual updates are brought to the Committee for progress monitoring.

Recommendation 1: That the Council establishes and reports on clear Key Performance Indicators for its action plan, providing annual updates to the Scrutiny Committee to monitor its progress and ensure accountability.

6. Further questions centred on the challenges in accessing English language education, with some members noting gaps in provision and barriers such as the lack of qualified tutors and digital access. The Committee noted the ongoing efforts to map current resources and address these gaps are in place through strategic partnerships and face-to-face outreach, including visits to accommodations and partnerships with County programmes to improve digital accessibility and the availability of English language tuition across the county.
7. Focusing more on the details of the document, concerns were raised about the absence of measures addressing anti-migrant violence within the report. The Committee suggested including this as a key challenge and setting out responses to prevent such violence. In addition, the Committee discussed how national policy changes impact local initiatives, urging adaptability in the action plan.

Recommendation 2: That the Council updates the document's text on National Policy Challenges to include contextual information that recognises the evolving policy environment and anticipates potential changes to national policy.

Recommendation 3: That the Council acknowledges the prevalence of anti-migrant violence by adding to the Key Challenges section of the document a list of specific responses and preventative measures addressing this key issue.

8. The Committee also noted the work the Council has commissioned to fully understand the level of need in Oxford. Noting that this key document could help foster better understanding of people seeking sanctuary and what could be done to improve their experience, the Committee recommended that the needs assessment report is made publicly available, ensuring confidential data is safeguarded where required.

Recommendation 4: That the Council releases the Needs Assessment report to the public to foster better understanding of the experiences of people seeking sanctuary, ensuring that any confidential data it contains is appropriately safeguarded.

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