Newcastle City Council

Newcastle City of Sanctuary

# Newcastle City of Sanctuary

## Council Strategy

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# Foreword

## Foreword – Cllr Paula Maines
Cabinet Member for a Resilient City

**Newcastle is a City of Sanctuary. We are a city built on solidarity, and we are proud to welcome people seeking safety. In the face of relentless Government hostility towards people seeking asylum, we do whatever we can to support people as they rebuild their lives.**

Every day we support people to overcome the huge obstacles the UK's asylum system throws in their way: the endless limbo of waiting for a decision; being banned from working and using their skills and talents; having little choice but to live in often harmful, inappropriate accommodation

We know that this is not what Newcastle stands for. Council has passed a unanimous motion to fight these anti-refugee measures, and every day, our communities work together to make our city a more welcoming, joyful place.

We have also committed to become a Council of Sanctuary, making sure that we have the foundations to humanely support people arriving in our city, making sure that they have access to support and services from day one and have opportunities to participate in and contribute to life in Newcastle.

This strategy sets out the Council's individual commitments towards the City of Sanctuary goal. It provides a common understanding of the meaning of sanctuary and a framework for its delivery by the Council. I am very pleased to recommend this strategy as the expression of our collective determination to make this Council a champion for all those seeking sanctuary in Newcastle.

Cllr Paula Maines

> **We are a city built on solidarity, and we are proud to welcome people seeking safety.**
>
> Cllr Paula Maines

# Introduction: our vision for Newcastle

**Newcastle is known as a friendly city and we're proud of the Geordie welcome that gives people a sense of belonging and community whether they're staying with us for a day, a week, or building a life here.**

We want Newcastle to be a place of safety; a welcoming city where people seeking sanctuary have access to support and services, where community links are fostered and where people can rebuild their lives from the day they arrive.

The past ten years have been turbulent and have seen reactionary policy making. Globally we are seeing unprecedented numbers of people being forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, human rights violations, and environmental damage. Nationally we see policies that are committed to creating hostility and division which create tensions at a local level. Within this context it is more important than ever that the Council provides leadership and strong governance to facilitate the conditions that support communities to offer welcome and sanctuary.

Newcastle is often cited as an example for others aspiring to become recognised Cities of Sanctuary. The ongoing efforts to build collaboration across the city, and the leadership role played by the Council in the City of Sanctuary work, are looked to as good practice.

Newcastle Council were the first council to employ a dedicated officer to work specifically on their commitment to being a City of Sanctuary. Since 2018 the City of Sanctuary Officer has provided support to develop, coordinate and evaluate the Council's City of Sanctuary approach as well as supporting organisations and institutions across the city in pursuing Sanctuary initiatives.

We've got the beginnings of something special in our city, and we know we can build on this, challenging ourselves all the time to be more accessible, inclusive, and welcoming to people seeking sanctuary.

After almost ten years of working as a City of Sanctuary, now is the time to reflect on the work to date as well as the challenges ahead and set out our vision of how we will work with our partners to face the future. We have undertaken research with teams across the City Council, with our partners across the voluntary and community sector and with people seeking sanctuary in Newcastle to develop our Council of Sanctuary Strategy. In this strategy, we will tell the story of Newcastle as a City of Sanctuary and look ahead to how we can strengthen our work and support for people who arrive in Newcastle. This draws on the insights of people seeking sanctuary, colleagues from across the Council, education, housing, the voluntary and community sector, and many more.

# Our story so far

## Why we are a City of Sanctuary

Newcastle is proud to be part of a City of Sanctuary network that builds a movement of welcome across the UK. Since beginning in Sheffield in 2005, hundreds of local councils, schools, universities, libraries, theatres and more have been awarded Sanctuary status, pledging to create a culture of solidarity, inclusivity and welcome. Newcastle is often seen as a leading voice in this network, taking a pioneering approach to coordinating a city-wide offer, and was recognised as a City of Sanctuary in 2014 with particular acknowledgement of "how effectively different organisations in the city are joined up, with good communications and co-operative working across sectors, especially through the City-Wide network."[1] We have continued to consolidate this work by providing leadership, governance and coordination.

Newcastle City of Sanctuary represents the coming together of individuals, grass roots organisations, the voluntary and community sector, organisations and anchor institutions with a shared vision to collectively welcome and support people seeking sanctuary in the city. This is illustrated by the direct actions of individual organisations and institutions such as schools working towards School of Sanctuary status, our universities applying to be Universities of Sanctuary, and a range of arts, cultural, libraries, sports and other organisations working to become recognised places of sanctuary. It is also reflected in our wider ways of working as Collaborative Newcastle.[2]

The importance of the City of Sanctuary is reflected in the Council's values to be proud, fair and ambitious. We see these values exhibited in the support across political and council leadership for the City of Sanctuary. We value the relationships and networks that have been built across the city as well as the grass roots support in local communities and want to work towards being recognised as a Council of Sanctuary.

Fundamental to our approach is the commitment to ensuring we have the foundations to humanely support people arriving in our city, making sure that they have access to support and services from day one and have opportunities to participate in and contribute to life in Newcastle.

# Who we support

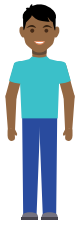
We use the term 'people seeking sanctuary' to refer to the collective experiences of anyone who has arrived in Newcastle seeking safety. Typically, this will mean asylum seekers and refugees, but includes anyone who has experienced forced migration, whatever their circumstances or the route they have taken here.

In April 2023 there were approximately 1,100 people seeking asylum in the city in 'dispersal accommodation'[3] and 600 people seeking asylum in contingency initial accommodation (hotel sites)[4]. There have been over 150 refugee families resettled via government resettlement schemes[5] and over 250 people arrived and supported via the Homes for Ukraine scheme.[6] Whilst the circumstances and arrival routes of those seeking sanctuary may change in the future, our commitment to being a City of Sanctuary will remain. The diversity of the sanctuary-seeking population we currently support in Newcastle can be found in the infographic below.

**We support an asylum population of...**

**Families**
including Families with No Recourse to Public Funds, under our Children Act Duties

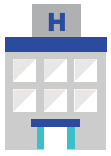
**Single People**
including single people with No Recourse to Public Funds, under our Care Act duties and via a dedicated NRPF panel



**Unaccompanied children**

**People in dispersal accommodation**

**People in contingency initial accommodation**




**We support a refugee and settled population who have arrived through different routes, including through...**

**Asylum claims with positive decisions**

**The Afghan resettlement Schemes**

**The UK Resettlement Scheme**
Previously the Syrian and Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme

**The Ukraine schemes - Family and Homes for Ukraine**

**Hong Kong British Nationals (Overseas) Route**

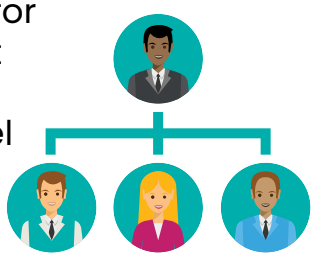
**Refugee Family Reunification**

# What we offer

Building on the foundations of collaborative working and relationships, and the dedication and empathy of people in the city, Newcastle City Council has developed a structured approach to supporting people seeking sanctuary. Since 2014, we have:

### Showed political leadership on issues affecting people seeking sanctuary

Through initiatives to mitigate some of the damage done by the asylum system and advocating for sanctuary at a local and national level

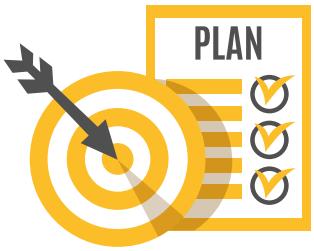


### Coordinated the City of Sanctuary approach

We have built partnerships and networks across the city and supported them to thrive

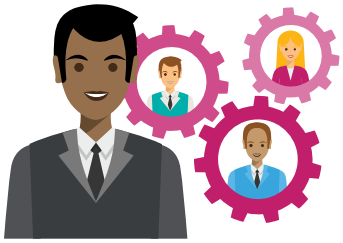
### Supported mainstream services to adapt

We have supported services to understand and adapt their provision to ensure the needs of refugees and asylum seekers are met




### Built and funded targeted, specialist services

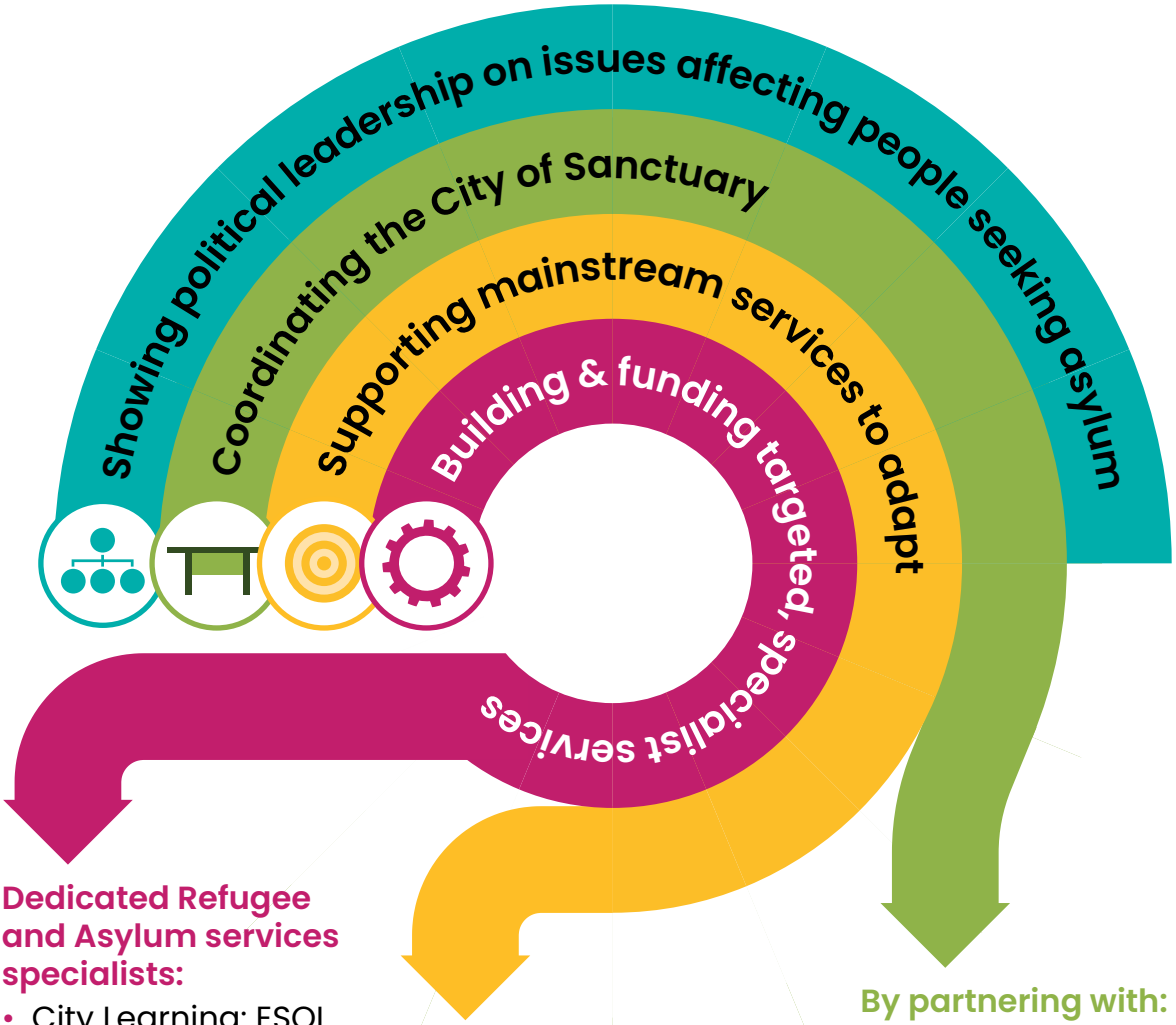
We have worked to ensure there are bespoke services that directly respond to the unique needs of people seeking sanctuary



Each of these strands help us to realise our ambition: that in Newcastle, people seeking sanctuary can access well-coordinated services, which recognise and respond to their rights and needs, from day one. They also help us to build momentum around the principle that it is everyone's business to embed our City of Sanctuary approach.

# Who's involved?

We support people and partners across the city to deliver this offer. The diagram below shows the range of partners, sectors and people involved:




**Dedicated Refugee and Asylum services specialists:**

- City Learning: ESOL
- Education: school effectiveness admissions teams
- KaleidRAScope
- LAASLOs
- NRPF panel
- Projects supported by Newcastle Fund
- Public Health
- Refugee Training and Employment Support
- Social Services: UASC and NRPF
- The team around the hotel
- YHN Refugee Services

**Via:**

- Communities and neighbourhood
- Community safety
- Cross-council migration group
- Economic development
- Education
- Employment and skills
- Health
- Housing and accommodation
- Collaborative Newcastle

**By partnering with:**

- Arts and culture
- Emergency services
- Employers
- ESOL providers
- Health and wellbeing sector
- Housing providers
- Libraries
- Private rented sector
- Sanctuary Forum
- Schools
- Sports and Leisure
- Universities and higher education
- Voluntary and community sector

## How we work

The Council's responses to people seeking sanctuary plays a key role in our aspiration for Newcastle to be a Council of Sanctuary. The City of Sanctuary approach is coordinated by the Asylum and Refugee Team within Newcastle City Council's Active Inclusion Service. The team offer direct support to people seeking sanctuary and support the wider work that goes on both within the Council and across the city. We do this through a partnership approach, offering training and advice as well as providing strategic, policy and review guidance to promote best practice.

## The environment we work in

The work to maintain and build on our recognition as a City of Sanctuary has happened against an incredibly challenging backdrop of unpredictable global crises, national hostile environment policies, and austerity related pressures facing local government and our residents, this means there are increasingly competing demands for less resources. The context for our work includes:

### Increasing levels of deprivation

Poverty has been increasing in Newcastle, which ranks in the top 10% most deprived local authority areas in England. Almost a third of children (28%) children are living in relative low-income households, whilst 56,850 residents were fed by the West End Foodbank in 2022. People seeking sanctuary are disproportionately susceptible to experiencing entrenched poverty due to the precarity of their situation.

### Financial pressures for councils

Since the beginning of austerity, it is estimated that Newcastle City Council's budget will have reduced by £345m. Costs are predicted to rise by over £30 million, with the financial situation likely to worsen under inflationary pressures, and the impact of the cost-of-living crisis. People seeking sanctuary are among the most vulnerable to the cost-of-living crisis and increasing poverty and tend to be accommodated in our most deprived wards. There is limited government funding to support the work with people seeking sanctuary locally. Where funding is available, we strive to maximise the reach of this to benefit all of our sanctuary seeking residents.

## Global crises and changing national policy around people seeking sanctuary

The unpredictability that comes with international events and crises means that there have been and will likely continue to be unexpected surges in the numbers of people seeking sanctuary globally. Alongside this comes sudden and changing national policy asks that can impact on the resources available, as well as the level of support different cohorts are entitled to, making it difficult to offer support equitably.

Through our City of Sanctuary approach we have built strong foundations and partnerships which allow us to adapt quickly to meet new challenges. The established expertise and infrastructure in the city have allowed us to respond pragmatically to urgent resettlement demands.

## Unpredictability of demand for housing and support within the asylum system

Home Office policy is that those in receipt of asylum support cease to be entitled to Home Office accommodation and financial support 28 days after notification of the granting of refugee status. This represents a rapid change in circumstances for people who may not have been in the UK for long, are unfamiliar with the systems, may have limited English language ability and who have not had access to employment and savings.

The Council has statutory homelessness duties to respond and invariably we have to meet these duties with less than 28 days' notice. We manage the transition into local housing without having to use expensive and inappropriate bed and breakfast, but this is increasingly difficult due to surges in demand for accommodation and increased competing demand for affordable housing, for example the need for re-housing due to mould and an increase in the loss of private tenancies because either landlords or tenants cannot meet the costs.

Newcastle has a dedicated 'move-on' offer for newly recognised refugees in the UK. The Asylum and Refugee team work alongside Your Homes Newcastle to support newly recognised refugees to apply for housing before their asylum support stops to reduce the risks of experiencing homelessness at the end of the 28- day 'move -on' period. There is on-going work to increase the availability of suitable accommodation for people at risk of homelessness and support is provided to ensure people are able to sustain their tenancy.

## Contingency Initial Accommodation – Hotels

Since 2020 a number of hotels have been used as contingency Initial Accommodation by the Home Office to accommodate people seeking sanctuary in Newcastle. These sites are set up rapidly with limited opportunity for consultation with the required support services such as health and education. It takes considerable resources and time for partners in the city to develop services to safely support people being placed in these sites.

Despite this, partners in the city have rallied to offer a comprehensive package of support to residents of these sites, including coordinating donations of clothing, books and toys, social and sporting activities, language courses, education links and volunteering opportunities. A holistic health offer has been developed which includes initial health assessments, GP registrations and screening, alongside dedicated mental health support, 0-19 provision, public health input and social prescribing.

## Destitution and No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)

No recourse to public funds (NRPF) is an immigration condition affecting many migrants in the UK. The NRPF condition can be attached to visas and grants of leave to remain to anyone who is 'subject to immigration control'. Many people subject to the NRPF condition are self-sufficient and this restriction does not cause a problem, but the lack of a welfare safety net means that they are always in a more precarious position if their circumstances change.

People are at risk of becoming destitute at various stages of the asylum process. However, the people most at risk of destitution are men and women whose asylum applications have been refused and who do not, or cannot, return to their home countries. At this point, the UK's asylum system withdraws all support, including accommodation, and bars people from seeking emergency homelessness support and other vital services provided by local councils. As people in this situation are not allowed to work, they are left with no effective means of survival and are forced into destitution.

Local authorities can only provide support to provide destitute migrants with NRPF with accommodation and/or financial assistance when statutory duties are engaged. For adults without children, this assistance can only be provided when the person has eligible needs for care and support due to a disability, illness or mental health condition. People who aren't eligible for support are at increased risk of exploitation because of the precariousness of their living situations.

As a council we have formalised our NRPF response so that there is an offer of accommodation for all seeking support while a Care Act assessment is undertaken. Cases are then reviewed via our NRPF Panel and where justification to continue support can be identified residents will be supported until such time as a resolution can be reached.

## Outsourced asylum accommodation and support

Since 2012 the government has outsourced responsibility for providing people seeking asylum with accommodation to private contractors. This leaves local authorities with inadequate influence on how and where asylum seekers will be housed in their areas and has led to concentrations of dispersed asylum accommodation in particular parts of the city, often in some of the most deprived wards.

We have limited powers to influence asylum accommodation standards despite the impacts that poorly managed/overcrowded accommodation has on residents and local communities.[7] It also means that we are expected to tolerate lower standards of accommodation being provided to asylum seekers than we would demand for any other resident in our city. Despite this, where we can take a place-based approach and use our regulatory powers to drive improved standards, we will.

In addition, under the asylum dispersal process the local authority has very little information about or control over the resettlement process of people seeking asylum being dispersed to their area. This means that we are often unaware of vulnerable people being accommodated in our city, unable to offer integration support or early preventative services and yet have statutory duties with regards safeguarding, public safety and protection.

In order to identify vulnerable residents at the earliest opportunity we have developed partnerships with key services such as education and health, so that we can offer earlier intervention to prevent crisis and support integration.

## Far right and tensions

Nationally we are seeing an increase in racism and hate crimes as well as increased activity by far-right extremist groups. Xenophobic discourse surrounding people seeking sanctuary has been amplified and become more mainstream. There has been a noticeable rise in anti-migrant activism centred around asylum accommodation. The use of hotels has provided a focal point for far-right activists to campaign locally and to promote hate and hostility. Newcastle City Council is committed to being an anti-racist organisation – one that does not just tackle inequality, but actively fights racism in our city.

Image © Simone J Rudolphi

# What we have achieved together

**In collaboration with partners across the city we have achieved a lot since 2014, despite this challenging backdrop.**

The roadmap on the following pages demonstrates the progress that the Council has made since 2014 in leading and influencing on issues affecting people seeking sanctuary; coordinating Newcastle City of Sanctuary; supporting mainstream services to adapt; and building & funding targeted, specialist services:

## ROAD MAP KEY

- Leading and influencing on issues related to people seeking sanctuary
- Coordinating the broader City of Sanctuary
- Adapting existing council services to meet the needs of people seeking sanctuary
- Developing bespoke council services for people seeking sanctuary

**The Council passed the City of Sanctuary motion,** committing to promoting the inclusion and welfare of refugees and asylum seekers in Newcastle

**Newcastle reponded positively to the Afghan ex-Gratia scheme** offering resettlement to individuals who have worked alongside the Ministry of Defence in Afghanistan

## 2013

**Newcastle was recognised as a city of Sanctuary** following appraisal by the national recognition group

## 2014

## 2015

**Government approached Newcastle to act as 'trailblazer' authority** to resettle the first families arriving under the recently expanded Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. Working with YHN we were able to rapidly mobilise and welcome the first ten families within 6 weeks

**The Council passed the Destitution motion,** providing visible leadership condemning the government policy on enforced destitution for refused asylum seekers

**Newcastle Council has funded the 'Life on Hold' project via the Newcastle fund.**This is a collaborative project between key VCS partners providing support to destitute asylum seekers

## 2017

**The cabinet approved a policy of 'Setting a Standard for Asylum Seeker Accommodation'** which included a ban on forced bedroom sharing

**Newcastle Council took over the chair of CityWide** which coordinates and supports Voluntary and Community Services partners by providing the space to work collaboratively through regular meetings, information sharing, mailings and events

**The LAASLO (Local Authority Asylum Seeker Liaison Officer) team was established** to provide support to those in the asylum system and at key points in transition

**The City of Sanctuary lead in the Council began coordinating the Sanctuary Awards.** Organisations that have achieved the award include the Universisty of Newcastle, Curious Monkey Theatre Company, Newcastle West Foodbank (the first Foodbank of Sanctuary in the UK), Kittiwake Multi-lingual Library, Newcastle City Library, and the Baltic Art Gallery

**Written evidence was provided to the Home Affairs Select Committee inquiry on asylum accommodation,** highlighting concerns over accommodation standards and calling for the 28 day 'refugee move on period' to be extended

**A dedicated City of Sanctuary lead was appointed to coordinate the City of Sanctuary approach.** In doing so, Newcastle became the first city in the UK to embed the City of Sanctuary within the local authority

**Newcastle council provided evidence to the Westminster Hall Debate on asylum Accommodation Contracts**

**A package of training and information sessions were developed** via the City of Sanctuary lead. Sessions have been delivered to a range of partners including student teachers at the University, cultural venues, libraries and Foodbanks

**The deputy leader met w the Immigration Minister to voice concerns over accommodation standards, lack of 'end to end' asylum process and lack of local authority engagement**

**Newcastle Council awarded funding from the Controlling Migration Fund to create the Newcastle Migrant Connection** to provide a space for new arrivals in the city to access to information about services, to support ESOL coordination and provide support to destitute asylum seekers

**2018**

**Four Temporary Dispersed Accommodation units were established** to reduce the risk of homelessness presented by the short transition window for asylum seekers with positive decisions moving on to refugee housing. This prevents the use of inappropriate Bed and Breakfast accommodation to house those at risk of homelessness

**The Lazeez cafe opened** offering a group of refugees their first paid employment in the UK. Based inside a local library, the cafe served middle eastern cuisine, and attracted significant local interest and support

**The Leader of the Council** wrote an open letter to Faith Leaders condemning the far right demonstrations being held in the city

**The Deputy Leader wrote to the Minister of State for Immigration** calling for urgent action to support and extend the current refugee move on period which all too often leaves newly recognised refugees homeless and destitute

**Specialist posts were created within education Directorate to support international new arrivals.** This included two specialist posts within the admissions team, an EAL lead and a dedicated educational psychologist

**The Council passed a motion calling for right to work for asylum seekers supporting the 'Lift the Ban' campaign**

## 2019

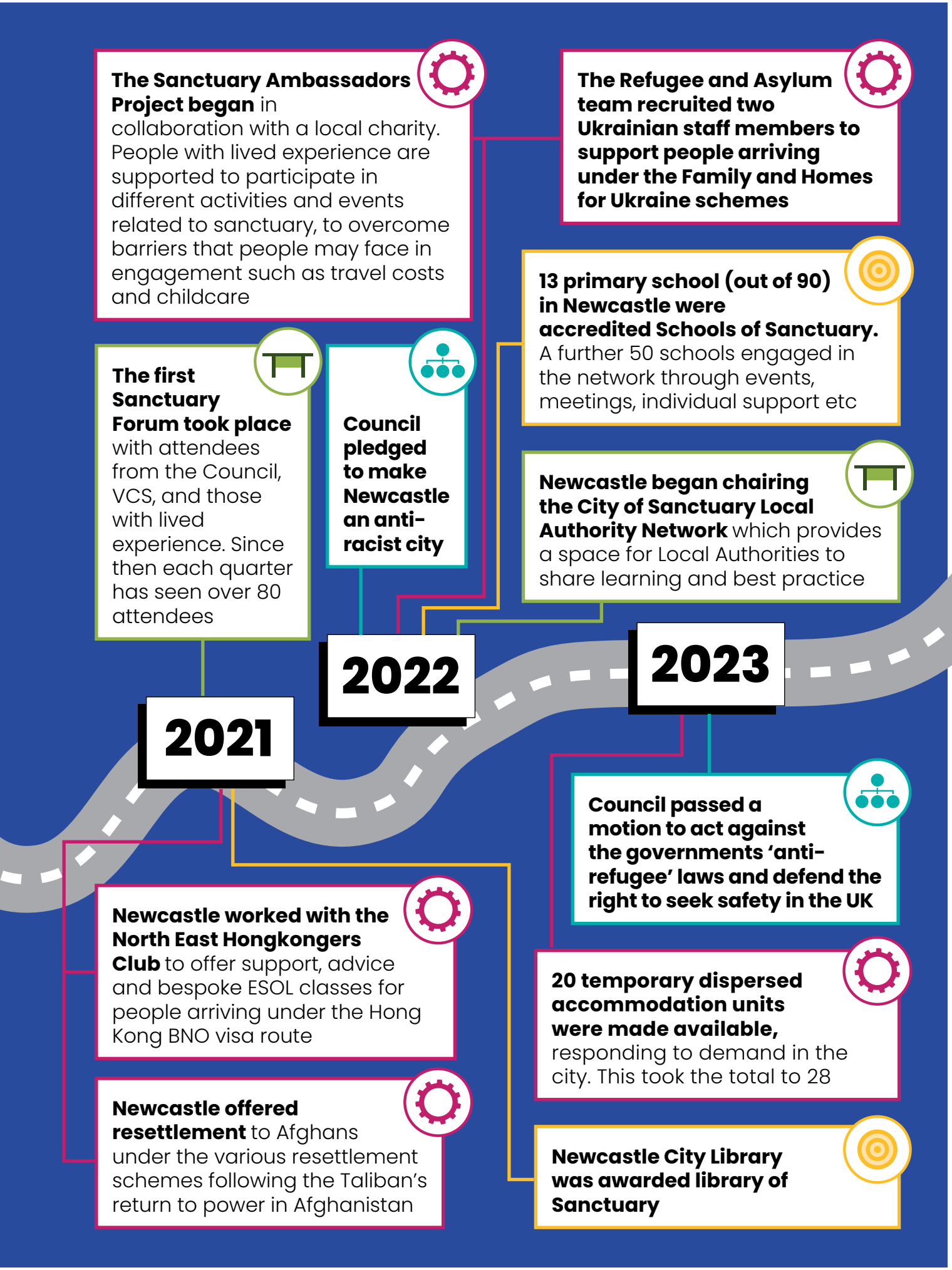
## 2020

**Four additional temporary Dispersed Accommodation units were acquired,** taking the total to eight, and helping respond to unpredictable housing demand and prevent homelessness

**Through ESOL for Integration Fund** Newcastle successfully sought funding to support ESOL coordination and to increase provision

**A strategic response to asylum hotels was established** with partners to manage risks, support mobilisation and facilitate ongoing service delivery to residents in hotels

**Additional resource was deployed to ensure that children accommodated within hotels were provided with a school place**


**The Sanctuary Ambassadors Project began** in collaboration with a local charity. People with lived experience are supported to participate in different activities and events related to sanctuary, to overcome barriers that people may face in engagement such as travel costs and childcare
**The Refugee and Asylum team recruited two Ukrainian staff members to support people arriving under the Family and Homes for Ukraine schemes**
**13 primary school (out of 90) in Newcastle were accredited Schools of Sanctuary.** A further 50 schools engaged in the network through events, meetings, individual support etc
**The first Sanctuary Forum took place** with attendees from the Council, VCS, and those with lived experience. Since then each quarter has seen over 80 attendees
**Council pledged to make Newcastle an anti-racist city**
**Newcastle began chairing the City of Sanctuary Local Authority Network** which provides a space for Local Authorities to share learning and best practice
2021
2022
2023
**Council passed a motion to act against the governments 'anti-refugee' laws and defend the right to seek safety in the UK**
**Newcastle worked with the North East Hongkongers Club** to offer support, advice and bespoke ESOL classes for people arriving under the Hong Kong BNO visa route
**20 temporary dispersed accommodation units were made available,** responding to demand in the city. This took the total to 28
**Newcastle offered resettlement** to Afghans under the various resettlement schemes following the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan
**Newcastle City Library was awarded library of Sanctuary**

> Newcastle has been at the vanguard and very supportive of [national] sanctuary initiatives. Having paid staff driving the agenda has been incredible... It is exemplar of good work.
>
> Regional City of Sanctuary Coordinator

# Where we are going?

**For over ten years we have been collectively building the City of Sanctuary approach. It is now time to reflect on what has been achieved and create a vision for the next stage of the journey.**

## Creating our strategic priorities: who we heard from

To inform this strategy we looked at previous research[8] and gathered the perspectives of key partners in the City of Sanctuary, including representatives from:

- People seeking sanctuary
- Adult and Children's Social Care
- Education
- Health
- Housing
- Economic Development
- Active Inclusion
- Schools of Sanctuary
- ESOL providers
- Voluntary and Community Sector partners
- City of Sanctuary UK

We spoke to people with lived experience over several focus groups, to understand their experience of arrival and seeking sanctuary in Newcastle. We heard primarily from people seeking asylum, living either in contingency or dispersed accommodation across the city. Many described feelings of uncertainty and frustration, however many also had a sense of optimism and hope for their futures in Newcastle with many keen to volunteer, study and work in the city when given the opportunity.

Following this, the strategic priorities and recommendations were further developed through testing with the Sanctuary Forum, and with targeted focus groups for settled refugees and others within the Council. These were then incorporated into a strategy for how Newcastle can work as a Council of Sanctuary.

# The four strategic priorities

**We have developed four strategic priorities to support the next phase of Newcastle City of Sanctuary.**

## 1. Voice: We will create more opportunities for people seeking sanctuary to have their voices heard

We will create opportunities for people seeking sanctuary to have their voices heard about the issues that affect them.

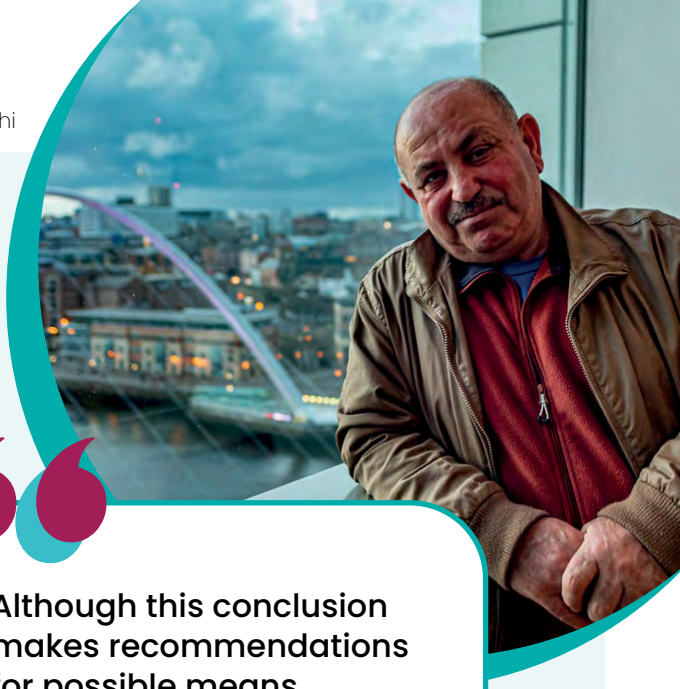
We will ask questions and listen to feedback about the way our services are delivered to make sure that they are accessible and inclusive. We will involve people seeking sanctuary in the development and delivery of services recognising that the best way to support people is to understand their circumstances and lived experience. We will develop a structured approach to facilitating feedback from people seeking sanctuary and partners – hearing about where, when, and how things haven't worked well – and will use these learning opportunities to help improve the support offered to individuals, our collective understanding and to enable service improvements.

We will encourage active participation of people seeking sanctuary in the implementation of this strategy as we know the lived experience of residents in our city will be invaluable in identifying the issues and solutions.

We will provide routes for people to speak up and be heard – such as the Newcastle City of Sanctuary Forum, Sanctuary Ambassadors and will work with our partners to support this, and through outreach, such as the Community Champions network.

> **There are some faults which need to be heard…if we do not talk about those issues then who will**
>
> Person seeking sanctuary, focus group discussion

Image © Simone J Rudolphi



**Good practice examples:**

## Bridges, Bonds and Belonging

In 2020 the Refugee and Asylum Team commissioned Northumbria University to undertake some research examining the experiences of people seeking sanctuary in Newcastle. This research sought to amplify the voices of people who had recently arrived in Newcastle, to understand the places that were important to them, their experiences and the skills they hoped to use. The recommendations that came out of this report have been worked on as part of the ongoing commitment to being a City of Sanctuary.

> **Although this conclusion makes recommendations for possible means of making further improvements to services, there should be no doubt that Newcastle has already exceeded its own aspiration to be a City of Sanctuary**
>
> Bridges, Bonds and Belonging report[9]

## Sanctuary Ambassadors

The Refugee and Asylum team amplifies the voices of people with lived experience through a Sanctuary Ambassador project delivered in Partnership with a local charity. The project supports lived experience ambassadors overcome barriers that they may face in engagement, such as travel costs and childcare. It builds individuals capacity and resilience through training and support and provides opportunities for ambassadors to influence and shape the sanctuary approach.

Image © Simone J Rudolphi

> **I have been involved in the Newcastle City of Sanctuary… I have been able to share my experiences… I feel respected and was listened to.**
>
> Person seeking sanctuary, focus group discussion

## 1. Voice: NEXT STEPS...

| What are we going to do? | Why is it important? | What will this look like? |
|---|---|---|
| **Create opportunities and space for people seeking sanctuary to have their voices heard and experiences inform how services are delivered in the city** | We know that people seeking sanctuary may have unique challenges and needs. Services work best when they are aware of and equipped to support with these specific needs.<br><br>People seeking sanctuary are often prevented from voicing their needs due to language barriers, poor mental health, fears of impacting their immigration claim, past experiences of racism, or complaints not being acted on. | • Frameworks are in place and ensure that within council services we routinely facilitate feedback from people seeking sanctuary<br>• We routinely provide opportunities for residents and service providers to feed in to exception and escalation reporting mechanisms<br>• Services have been, and are continually adapted based on what people seeking sanctuary have fed back – for example, allowing enough time for appointments for people with EAL, providing sufficient translation services |
| **Create opportunities for people to utilise their skills and play an active role in the city** | We know that people seeking sanctuary may have barriers preventing them from being able to fully utilise their skills and participate in the opportunities that are on offer in the city.<br><br>People thrive when they have the opportunity to build bridges, bonds and connections with those around them. Communities flourish when people can share experiences and skills with one another. | • Our services are inclusive and accessible<br>• Additional services within the Council will use the good practice developed through Libraries and Schools of Sanctuary to consider how their services can be improved to meet the needs of people seeking sanctuary |

| What are we going to do? | Why is it important? | What will this look like? |
|---|---|---|
| **Provide routes to speak up locally and nationally** | People seeking sanctuary want their voices to be heard on the injustices that affect their lives.<br><br>Without calling for policy change such as Right to Work for asylum seekers, people seeking sanctuary will continue to be economically and socially marginalised. | • The Sanctuary Ambassadors project provides opportunities and routes for people to speak up<br>• We support people to campaign and share their stories to influence local and national policy change<br>• We work with partners to increase the impact of these voices – for example Imix and Asylum Matters |

## 2. Leadership: We will provide positive leadership, supporting and advocating sanctuary in our city

Newcastle is a city that cares, and we endeavour to support those who need our help. We are committed to building on our status as a City of Sanctuary and will mitigate national government's policies which contribute to a hostile environment where we can. We will show leadership, offering people a warm welcome to Newcastle, as well as celebrating and promoting the crucial contribution made by people seeking sanctuary in Newcastle.

As a city, we want to see a more just approach enacted, both within Newcastle and beyond. As a council, we endeavour to implement a place-based approach to sanctuary which reflects our shared values. For us, this means that where we have scope to make decisions relating to sanctuary locally, we will. It also means that we'll work collaboratively as a city, to ensure people receive the support they need.

Externally, we will use our voice within the national City of Sanctuary network to share our experience of creating a more just system and encourage others to adopt similar practices.

> **When I heard the Councillor talking about welcome and being a city of sanctuary, I felt happy to be in Newcastle – it is so important for people like me to hear that they are welcomed.**
>
> Person seeking sanctuary, following the inaugural Sanctuary Forum 2022

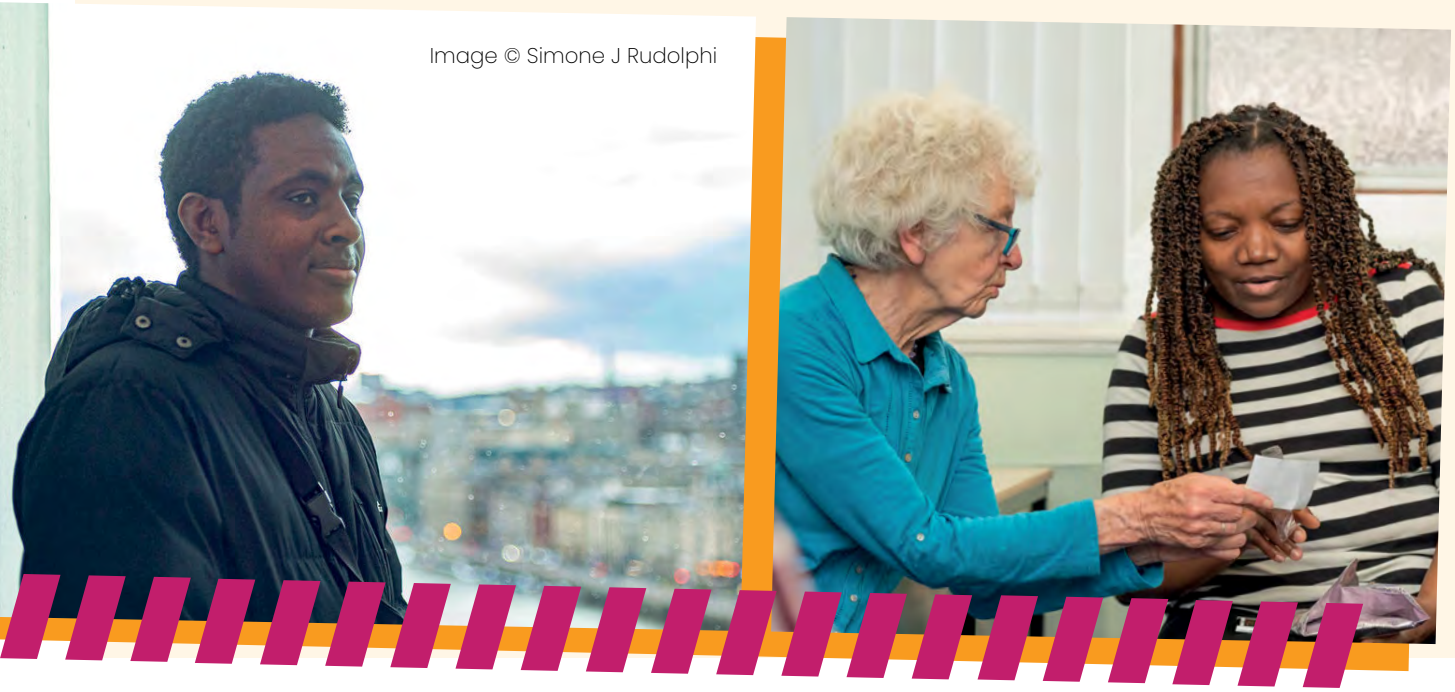


Image © Simone J Rudolphi

Good practice examples:

## Political leadership and engagement

In March 2023, Newcastle City Council met alongside Council representatives, officers, and people seeking sanctuary, to unanimously pass a motion to act against the government's 'anti-refugee' laws and to defend the right to seek safety in the UK. The motion was put forward by Councillor Lesley Storey, who used her speech to read statements from people seeking sanctuary in Newcastle.

> **Newcastle has always been a welcoming place and this motion will bolster the important work that is being carried out at a local level to raise awareness of an unprecedented backlog of cases, reinforce the de facto ban on working, and shine a light on the living conditions of those in asylum accommodation.**
>
> Partner feedback on the passing of the motion

## Everyone In and beyond

During the Government's 'Everyone In' directive in response to the Covid-19 pandemic we accommodated 48 adult households at risk of homelessness who would ordinarily have been excluded from homelessness assistance due to their immigration status.

The offer of accommodation and stability combined with dedicated case worker support saw successful resolution for the majority of these households. For example, 35% of people were able to re-engage with Home Office support, 21% were supported to secure employment, 17% were supported to prove eligibility for mainstream welfare support, 10% were supported into alternative specialist provision, and 4% were supported to apply and return voluntarily to their home country.

> **Everyone-in' was a sea change for us. We've been able to develop new partnerships and ways of working... and show what is possible. It has been really positive being part of this work, seeing the difference made to people's lives and identifying creative ways of working with people with NRPF**
>
> Rough sleeping coordinator, Newcastle City Council

Despite the Covid-19 restrictions being lifted Newcastle made a commitment to extend the offer of accommodation and support for as long as there was a public health justification. This meant that support was available through the subsequent waves and full vaccine roll out and we have utilised public health funding to extend this offer.

Image © Simone J Rudolphi

## 2. Leadership: NEXT STEPS...

| What are we going to do? | Why is it important? | What will this look like? |
|---|---|---|
| **Offer a positive vision: promoting understanding and celebrating the contributions, creativity and resilience of people seeking sanctuary** | National narratives can legitimise negative attitudes to sanctuary seekers which can cause tensions in local areas and impede people's ability to build social and emotional connections with people and places, impacting on their experience of trying to rebuild their lives in Newcastle.<br><br>We have the opportunity and the responsibility to do things differently, to set the tone for celebrating and supporting new arrivals locally. | • Council leadership and politicians use their voices to challenge the narrative about people seeking sanctuary<br>• Residents hear positive, welcoming messages from the Council promoting understanding and empathy for people seeking sanctuary |
| **Implement a place-based approach to sanctuary: we will make decisions relating to sanctuary locally where we can** | National polices impact upon people's experiences of arriving and resettling in Newcastle and can be hard to mitigate locally due to legislation, control, influence, and funding – for example asylum accommodation is outsourced via the Home Office to private providers.<br><br>By taking a place-based approach we can use our local powers, knowledge, and networks to do things differently to benefit all our residents. | • We listen to and work with partners and people with lived experience to understand what opportunities there may be to do things differently, and how we might be able to do this<br>• On particular issues (for example NRPF) where there is scope to make decisions on the issue locally, we do |

| What are we going to do? | Why is it important? | What will this look like? |
|---|---|---|
| **Lobby for change: we will understand when and how we can lobby for change to the national asylum system** | The consequences of national asylum policy are felt in local neighbourhoods. This can result in division in local communities and people being held back from fulfilling their potential.<br><br>We can use our role to advocate and lobby for change to improve the lives of our residents. | • Council leadership and politicians use their voices to advocate for humane immigration and asylum policies |

## 3. Governance: We will strengthen systems and processes to ensure the overall direction, effectiveness, and accountability of the City of Sanctuary approach

We will provide governance and accountability for the delivery and monitoring of our City of Sanctuary approach.

We will use the Council's convening and governance arrangements as a platform to strengthen consensus, building on what it means to be a City of Sanctuary and creating a framework of accountability for sustainable improvements. This will include using exception and escalation reporting to evidence a proactive approach to setting and meeting standards of services for people seeking sanctuary.

We will collect evidence and provide clear information, training, and reviews in order to inform policy decision making, protocols, commissioning and to support the continuing development of citywide consensus. We will publish quarterly updates including up to date data and actions made against outcomes via the Newcastle City of Sanctuary website and to partners in person via the Sanctuary Forums.

Image © Simone J Rudolphi

Good practice examples:

## The Cross Council Migration Group

The Cross Council Migration Group (CCMG) was established in 2010 bringing together service leads to build consensus and inform decision making within the Council. Due to embedded structures and the multi-disciplinary nature of the network we have been able to respond quickly and decisively to various government resettlement requests (e.g. 150 families resettled via resettlement schemes, and over 250 people from Ukraine via the Homes for Ukraine route10) and unpredictable asylum accommodation demand.

> **When I first arrived here I was lost for words and I can't describe how happy I was. I felt happy, secure and stable because it was a big change in my life…or rather it was a feeling that I moved to a completely new and better life…..It is a new life now.**
>
> Resettled Refugee participant from the Bridges, Bonds and Belonging research

## Newcastle Sanctuary Forum

The Newcastle Sanctuary Forum is a space for people to come together to share, explore and learn about the issues related to migration and seeking sanctuary in Newcastle. Quarterly forums have run since 2021 and we have seen the numbers of attendees increasing at each event, as well as the diversity of people attending. Each forum has a theme and using presentations, case studies, testimonials, and group discussions we explore issues, seek solutions and propose changes to local services and the systems that are within our control to influence.

> **It's really encouraging to see so many in one room to think through these issues and testament to the remarkable job [the Council] is doing in pulling it all together through the City of Sanctuary.**
>
> Partner feedback on convening of Sanctuary Forums in the city

## 3. Governance: NEXT STEPS...

| What are we going to do? | Why is it important? | What will this look like? |
|---|---|---|
| **Strengthen local governance arrangements** | The Council plays a key role in coordinating and convening Newcastle's City of Sanctuary work.<br>The Council is well placed to bring partners together and identify new partners who can contribute to this work. | • Governance frameworks (e.g. Cross Council Migration Group, City-Wide, Sanctuary Forum) are robust and allow us to continually respond and adapt to changing pressures<br>• New partners are, and continue to be, included and involved in the work |
| **Collate, interpret, and present evidence to inform decision making** | The Council is uniquely placed to collect evidence and data.<br>By producing quarterly reviews and policy updates, which include the best available data, we can support partners and collectively review the challenges we face, the difference we have made, and agree future priorities. | • We know what data is available to us and we take a proactive approach to collating and presenting information in useful and appropriate ways<br>• We know where there are gaps in the available data and are seeking to address these |

| What are we going to do? | Why is it important? | What will this look like? |
|---|---|---|
| **Use local powers to set and enforce standards** | The Council has local powers on areas such as: housing, education, public health services, safeguarding, environmental health standards for accommodation and food, support for accessing welfare benefits, language skills, training, and employment.<br><br>Where we can set local standards that are monitored and reported on, we can ensure a place-based approach which reflects our values as a city. | • We have locally set standards in areas that we have powers (such as: housing, education, public health services, safeguarding, environmental health standards for accommodation and food, support for accessing welfare benefits, language skills, training, and employment)<br>• Locally set standards are monitored and regularly reported on, providing transparency and accountability |

## 4. Partnerships and coordination: We will continue to build and maintain partnerships to ensure that services are well coordinated and accessible

We will continue to build and strengthen collaboration and partnerships, increasing knowledge, resources and skills sharing. We will improve the coordination and consistency of information and advice available, ensuring that people can access the correct advice at the right time.

We will build upon the current work and momentum around Awards of Sanctuary in the city and will support organisations and institutions – schools, universities, libraries, arts and cultural venues, sports clubs, libraries and many more – to gain sanctuary awards and promote good practice in encouraging welcoming, inclusive and accessible spaces across Newcastle.

We will build structured partnership arrangements at the case, delivery and strategic levels which facilitate collective decision making, compromise and learning.

Good practice examples:

## Schools of Sanctuary

Through a small multi-disciplinary team within the Council, we manage the Schools of Sanctuary programme in the city. Support and coordination are provided via a Senior Education Psychologist, a specialist Education Consultant in Refugees, Asylum and English as an Additional Language (EAL) and the City of Sanctuary Lead.

**We are thrilled with the award but even more so with the knowledge and understanding we have gained throughout the application process. Our Senior Leadership Team have used this period of reflection to further improve the offer we give to our most vulnerable pupils and have felt encouraged and supported.**

Awarded School of Sanctuary

We have been able to increase the number of awarded schools from 2 to 13 since the team began working collectively and in 2023 there are over 50 schools (out of 90 in Newcastle) who are involved in the Schools of Sanctuary network with regular training, network events and mailings.

**Thanks to Newcastle City of Sanctuary for bringing every charity, statutory body and the public together. Without any single one of us, it would be challenging to achieve the objective for our community. We are building a stronger community which is what we need for any good work for good causes. I hope this momentum can be continued to deliver bigger impact**

Partner feedback on the Just the Ticket campaign

## Collaborative campaigning and fundraising with the Just the Ticket campaign

In April 2022 a collaborative fundraising campaign – Just the Ticket – brought voluntary sector partners in Newcastle together and raised over £10,000 to support people living in hotels with travel. This campaign was the first time that a group of charities came together to raise money for a collective pot under the City of Sanctuary banner. There are plans for more collaborative fundraising in the future.

## 4. Partnerships and coordination: NEXT STEPS...

| What are we going to do? | Why is it important? | What will this look like? |
|---|---|---|
| **Improve the coordination and consistency of information and advice available in the city** | Information is not always tailored or joined up and can be difficult to access for people seeking sanctuary, volunteers, and staff, meaning people miss out on vital support.<br><br>Clarity on the services available will help to identify gaps in provision. Awareness of the services in the city will ensure appropriate signposting. | • People are able to access to the right information and support at the right time<br>• Signposting to, and updating of existing resources such as Information Now has improved, with more people aware of the resource and accessing it |
| **Facilitate collaboration and encourage partnerships to maximise collective impact** | The Council plays a key role in coordinating and convening the work in the city.<br><br>Good partnership arrangements build trust, encourage collaborative working and support compromise. | • Robust collaborative working arrangements are in place<br>• There is an increase in the number of and diversity of organisations and institutions involved in Awards of Sanctuary<br>• There is momentum and capacity within awarded organisations to support best practice and encourage others to get involved – for example within schools and Multi-Academy Trusts |

| What are we going to do? | Why is it important? | What will this look like? |
|---|---|---|
| **Develop structured partnership arrangements and feedback loops** | By developing structured partnership arrangements and feedback loops we can build trust, increase knowledge, resource and skills sharing to better support people seeking sanctuary.<br><br>By avoiding duplication of effort, we can maximise the resource available. | • Effective partnership arrangements and feedback loops are in place and are used by partners and individuals<br>• Formal escalation processes are in place using the learning from Partnerships for People and Place work[11] |

# Implementation and delivery

## Ensuring we meet our strategic priorities and are equipped to meet the challenges of an uncertain future

**We are proud of the work that has been built, developed, and strengthened over the past ten years, including the services that the Council provides to support people seeking sanctuary in the city.**

We will continue to strengthen the City of Sanctuary approach, by consolidating and bolstering our directly delivered services, those we commission and those delivered by partners. We will increase the reach of the City of Sanctuary approach within our directorates and ensure a whole organisation response.

### WE WILL: Mainstream the City of Sanctuary approach across all council services

When services and directorates within the Council are fully engaged with the City of Sanctuary approach we can ensure a whole organisation response, maximising the resources available and ensuring that the needs of people seeking sanctuary are considered in the services we deliver or commission.

A supported workforce that better understands the issues and needs of people seeking sanctuary will feel more confident in supporting people in a compassionate, humane way, knowing when to provide support and when to refer to specialist services.

### We will know we are doing this well when:

- Frameworks are in place to support collaborative working across the Council
- Awards of Sanctuary are implemented across more services and directorates to increase reach (for example Libraries of Sanctuary and idea of Education Psychology Department of Sanctuary as discreet pieces of work under the banner of the Council of Sanctuary)
- There is momentum and capacity within the Council to support best practice and encourage others to get involved
- There is awareness of City of Sanctuary across the Council and non-specialist staff are able to respond compassionately, signpost, and make appropriate referrals
- Infrastructure support such as information, training and workforce development is provided

Images © Simone J Rudolphi

We will continue to consolidate this work and will provide robust governance structures and strong political leadership going forward. These will support the monitoring, reviewing, and refreshing of the City of Sanctuary strategic priorities. By ensuring that the strategic priorities reflect current circumstances we can ensure that we are best equipped to meet the challenges of an uncertain future. Through the Sanctuary Forum we will ensure that people with lived experience are supported to play a central role in the monitoring of the strategy.

## WE WILL: Monitor and report upon our strategic priorities

Quarterly performance reporting to the Portfolio Holder and Health Scrutiny against the four agreed strategic priorities will ensure that we are delivering on our values and commitment to the City of Sanctuary work.

By continually monitoring, reviewing, and refreshing our strategic priorities we can ensure that we are agile in response to unpredictable demand locally as well as changing national and global events.

### We will know we are doing this well when:

- **Monitoring frameworks are in place for the four strategic priorities**
- **The four strategic priorities are routinely reported on**
- **Structures are in place to enable us to routinely review and refresh the four strategic priorities to ensure they reflect current circumstances**
- **People with lived experience and partners play a role in monitoring and continually developing the strategic priorities**

Image © Simone J Rudolphi

# Conclusion

**Through this strategy we have set out our vision and ambition for Newcastle to be a place of safety; a welcoming city where people seeking sanctuary have access to support and services, where community links are fostered and where people can rebuild their lives from the day they arrive.**

We are proud of the work that has happened over the past ten years of working as a City of Sanctuary and are keen to embark on the next stage of our journey, recognising that there is always more to be done. We want to see the City of Sanctuary approach embedded further and more comprehensively both within the Council and across the city.

We are also proud of the Newcastle communities that provide an inspiring welcome to people who are seeking sanctuary in the city. The frequent thanks and praise given by people who are rebuilding their lives in Newcastle are testament to the Geordie welcome that gives people a sense of belonging and community.

Despite this, we know that Newcastle may not always feel like a place of sanctuary and that many of the challenges experienced by people seeking sanctuary are rooted in 'hostile' national government policy. While we are limited in how much we can control global events or national policy, this strategy sets out our commitment to strive for a local response that will improve the lives of people in Newcastle.

Image
© Simone J Rudolphi

> **People in Newcastle are extraordinary. They gave us so much warmth and kindness, that our hearts will be full of it. And it will help us to go back to Ukraine and rebuilt our country.**
>
> Ukrainian Refugee

As a council, we're committed to delivering on the four strategic priorities that ensure that our City of Sanctuary ambitions can be realised. We believe that these priorities, rooted in our place-based approach, can make meaningful and measurable difference for people. This will ensure that our City of Sanctuary approach remains relevant, impactful, and fit for purpose in ever changing times. We believe that by seeking feedback, monitoring and reporting and by being held accountable, we can develop an iterative approach to taking this work forward.

Newcastle is proud to have played a role in the City of Sanctuary movement across the country as a whole. The commitments set out in this strategy enables us to go further than we have to date – playing an active role in challenging national policy and at the same time creating the best possible local support for people seeking sanctuary. We are looking forward to seeing how this ambitious approach from the Council can further drive forward our work as a City of Sanctuary and invite you to be part of it too.

**For Newcastle's ambitions as a City of Sanctuary to be fully realised we need to see the Sanctuary ethos embedded across communities, services and systems.**

We encourage people seeking sanctuary, partners, individuals, organisations and institutions, many of whom are already actively involved in the City of Sanctuary approach, to join forces and ensure that this strategy leads to positive change.

# References


1 Feedback from Newcastle's award appraisal in 2014

2 **Collaborative Newcastle** brings partners together to improve the health, wealth, and wellbeing of everyone in our city. We know that people seeking sanctuary often face additional barriers when it comes to health, wealth and wellbeing and we are committed to working together as a partnership to eradicate these and to empower people to live their best lives.

3 Dispersal accommodation, is accommodation for people seeking asylum managed by accommodation providers on behalf of the Home Office

4 Contingency initial accommodation, often referred to as hotel sites, have been in use to house people seeking asylum in Newcastle since 2020

5 Refugee resettlement involves the selection and transfer of refugees from a State in which they have sought protection to a third State that has agreed to admit them – as refugees – with permanent residence status.

6 Homes for Ukraine scheme allows Ukrainians and their immediate family members with no family ties to the UK to be sponsored by hosts living in the UK who can offer suitable accommodation

7 In April 2017, Cabinet approved an Asylum Accommodation Standards Policy, which made specific reference to enforced room sharing. The legal challenge, and subsequent tribunal ruling in May 2018, regarding our attempts to prevent this highlights another impossible situation facing local authorities.

8 **Flug and Hussein**, 2019. Vickers et al., 2016. Boudewijn and Harding, 2020.

9 **Bridges, Bonds and Belonging**. Boudewijn and Harding, 2020.

10 Date – at April 2023.

11 **Partnerships for People and Place** is a Government funded pilot focusing on place-based initiatives. In Newcastle partnerships between the foodbank and safeguarding have been strengthened leading to an increase in referrals to safeguarding and an increase in preventative approaches.


If you have any ideas or questions about Newcastle City of Sanctuary or if there is anything you'd like to discuss further please contact us via email: **info@newcastle.cityofsanctuary.org**

Newcastle City Council

Newcastle City of Sanctuary