

# Newham Borough of Sanctuary Strategy 2024-2027



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# Foreword



**As the first female directly elected Mayor of Asian heritage I am proud to lead the most diverse Borough in the country. Migration has shaped the history of Newham**

**as well as my life. How we support those seeking sanctuary in the UK reflects who we are as a country, our values and compassion to enable those seeking refuge to build a new life in the UK.**

Newham has a long history of welcoming and reaching out the hand of friendship to people who have been forced to flee their homes and countries as a result of war, violence, persecution and discrimination. In recent years, we have welcomed individuals and families seeking refuge from conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan and Ukraine. We also have the third highest number of people seeking asylum in London placed by the Home Office in hotel accommodation.

Many individuals and their families seeking asylum face years of uncertainty whilst they await a decision about their application during which time they can experience frequent moves around the UK. Without a right to work and often living in overcrowded poor conditions, many experience poor health and are at risk of destitution and exploitation. Yet, those seeking sanctuary who arrive in our borough have so much to offer and the integration of refugees benefits us all. It ties us together, enhances our cultural diversity, identifies talents and skills beneficial to our local economy and provides opportunities for connections that create a strengthened collective belonging. One of our greatest strengths in Newham is our diversity and multiculturalism and we proudly celebrate the contribution of migrant communities who have made Newham their home.

We believe in a compassionate and rights based approach to supporting people seeking sanctuary. Through our Welcome Newham programme and in partnership with local organisations, we provide support to refugees and people seeking asylum, ensuring that people's immediate needs are met, that they can find connections within our vibrant and welcoming community and that they can access support they need to gain future employment, skills and permanent accommodation.

We have a long history of challenging national and local policies that negatively impact the health and wellbeing of our residents. For example, in 2018, Council passed a Motion to commit to reviewing its policies and procedures to ensure it supports those from the Windrush generation, and their families, impacted by the government's 'hostile environment'.

We are proud to be joining a City of Sanctuary movement of cities, boroughs and towns from across the UK who are committed to building a culture of inclusivity and hospitality and who believe in the values of dignity and welcome. Our Borough of Sanctuary strategy sets out our vision to continue Newham's tradition and embed a culture of welcome to people seeking sanctuary enabling them to lead independent, healthy and happy lives.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rokhsana Fiaz' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Best wishes,  
**Rokhsana Fiaz OBE,**  
**Mayor of Newham**  
**🐦@rokhsanafiaz**

# Why do people seek sanctuary?

In the context of international migration, people seek sanctuary (protection and safety) as they:

- May have experienced war, climate-related displacement, economic insecurity, have been trafficked, or have been discriminated against or experience violence and abuse due to characteristics protected under UK Equality law. These are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
- Have insecure immigration status, which places them at risk of discrimination, exploitation including modern day slavery and destitution. This can include people who have been living, working or studying in Newham, in some cases for years. It can also include people fleeing violence resulting in insecure status.

Some sanctuary seekers are formally recognised as people seeking asylum, people who have arrived via refugee resettlement schemes, unaccompanied asylum seeking children, or have recently received their leave to remain. However, sanctuary includes people who are not able to access those routes. The causes of people seeking sanctuary is not limited to the above definition.

In addition, there is evidence that drivers forcing people to seek sanctuary will continue. A global rise in authoritarian rule in the last 16 years is resulting in the erosion of democracy and human rights.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, The UN Refugee Agency has warned the climate crisis will have devastating consequences that forcibly displace people.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup>The Global Expansion of Authoritarian Rule | Freedom House

<sup>2</sup>Climate change and disaster displacement | UNHCR

# Introduction

Newham has a proud history of welcoming people fleeing conflict and persecution in their home countries. We celebrate the diversity and multi-culturalism that strengthens us and makes the borough such a vibrant place.

Continuing Newham's tradition, this strategy is a commitment to embedding a culture and practice of welcome through all our work. This aligns with Newham's corporate plan for a Fairer Newham, where residents are helped through tough times and supported to live happy, healthy and well.

Newham strongly believes that a whole system approach is the best way to promote the welfare and inclusion of people seeking sanctuary. The approach is underpinned by our commitment to work as equal partners with the NHS, voluntary, community and faith sector organisations in Newham. Together, we can deliver targeted support, where gaps have been identified, apply system change to complex challenges and work to increase knowledge and capacity of frontline staff to enable a supportive and inclusive environment for people seeking sanctuary.

The whole system approach recognises that people with 'lived experience' are often best placed to advise on what support is needed to help on their journey to resettlement and to inform how we can make services and programmes more inclusive. We are actively working to embed research into our practice to drive our understanding of needs and experiences of people seeking sanctuary, and facilitate inclusion into existing health, care and support services. Our aim is to embed a culture and practice of welcome at place in Newham. We are also committed to advocating at regional and national levels to ensure the rights of people seeking sanctuary are protected.



Publishing a Borough of Sanctuary strategy, given a history of policies that create hostile environments for people seeking sanctuary, is important because Newham aspires to be a beacon of sanctuary: a place where everyone is able to live safely, with dignity, meet their full potential, and access compassionate support. Newham is joining other local authorities across the UK and London who have committed to be places of sanctuary.

# City of Sanctuary: charter, vision, values and principles

Newham Council is committed to the principles and values of the City of Sanctuary movement, leading us to apply to become recognised and celebrated as a Borough of Sanctuary.

Therefore, Newham Council will adopt the five values that underpin the City of Sanctuary.

- **Inclusive** - We welcome and respect people from all backgrounds, place the highest value on diversity and are committed to equality.
- **Openness** - 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 at all levels 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 to welcome refugees and people seeking sanctuary. We act as a catalyst for change by being open to new and innovative ideas and through sharing knowledge gained with others 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.

Our work strongly displays these values already but we want to go above and beyond to show how Newham is proud to be a borough of inclusivity, solidarity and compassion.



# Where are we now?

Newham has a proud history of celebrating diversity and supporting people to make the borough their home. This has been achieved through the work of local government, NHS, and the VCF sector, both individually and together. The following are some examples of the work that has been delivered as partners since 2020:

**1. EU Consortium** (Mar-June 2021): Newham Council funded a consortium of 10 organisations to deliver an awareness-raising project on the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) to vulnerable residents. The first of its kind in the borough, the campaign adopted a pioneering approach to engaging over 1000 residents and over 200 local community, faith and voluntary organisations, delivering 64 in person and online events, and guiding over 300 residents through their EUSS applications in the 10 weeks before the scheme's deadline.

**2. Safe Surgeries:** The Newham Safe Surgeries Project was launched in May 2021 by the Newham Training Hub to raise awareness of the Doctors of the World (DOTW) Safe Surgeries initiative and support Newham GP practices to sign up. The main aim is to promote equitable access to primary care for all Newham residents by supporting GP registration in line with NHS England guidelines and providing training and support to Newham primary care teams. As of May 2022, all Newham practices are signed up as Safe Surgeries and work continues to embed these principles and reduce barriers to accessing healthcare for all Newham residents.

**3. Afghan resettlement schemes** (Nov 2021) to current: Newham Council are supporting 12 families totaling 63 people to settle in Newham. Eight of the families are fully settled using the government grant to support them into long term housing association or privately rented properties. They are now self-sufficient, paying their rent, with occasional support from our dedicated tenancy sustainment officer. The government grant was also utilised to provide furnishings and white goods in unfurnished properties, and supports a dedicated caseworker for these families.

**4. Social Welfare Alliance (SWA)** (Nov 2020) to current: launched in October 2020, the SWA offers a training programme and development pathway to enhance the skills of all frontline workers and create better connectivity between Newham Council and voluntary sector organisations. Since December 2020, 671 people have taken part in one or more of the following training modules delivered by Praxis and Doctors of the World: Working with Migrants, No Recourse to Public Funds, Asylum and Entitlement Support, Working with Migrant families, and Entitlements to Healthcare.

**5. 0-5 year olds referral pathways** (Oct 2022) to current: 10 partners from voluntary, NHS and council services work in partnership to generate and deliver actions that meet the acute needs of pregnant women, new mothers, and children under five years of age living in Home Office contingency hotels. To strengthen access to support services, the group developed a suite of referral pathways, with case studies, to statutory and voluntary services, including the Acorn Maternity Team (vulnerable women), Health Visitors, Children's Centres, Newham's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, Newham Nurture, The Magpie Project, and Sister Circle. The pathways were stress tested by frontline staff with residents with lived experience to evaluate how they work in practice and identify areas for improvement. Working as a partnership, and developing the pathways, has strengthened collaboration across the system and helped ensure more inclusive and equitable access to services.

**6. Food and nutrition support:** Food is not only important for health; it is an integral part of cultural identity. For people who have been forcibly displaced, preparing and eating food can help associate with their past lives and provide a connection to their country of origin. To improve food standards and safety for people seeking sanctuary living in contingency hotels, Newham has developed a framework to identify vulnerable and at risk groups, work with providers and residents to make food better, and embed food as a life enhancing activity. Along with Newham's environmental health team and a local GP, critical concerns with a hotel caterer were identified, including a 1\* food hygiene rating, resulting in a new caterer

and food offer. In addition, to give people seeking sanctuary more autonomy over what they eat, using the government Asylum Dispersal Grant, Newham Food Alliance (NFA)<sup>3</sup> partners across the borough run community kitchens and others provide free, healthy, culturally diverse meals. NFA partners create a supportive, welcoming, and community atmosphere, treating hundreds of people seeking sanctuary with dignity and respect. Along with cooking and free meals, organisations also provide additional support and activities, such as English classes, yoga, craft activities, board games, and film showings.

Jane, a warm haven worker said: “At our Tuesday Warm Haven we have mostly seen refugees and asylum seekers from local hotels. They have been so happy to have somewhere to go and meet people. They are hugely grateful for all we offer and have started helping with the cooking each week. We have had several Iranian dishes, and today had an Afghan dish. The community that is being built is amazing and people are saying it feels like family”.

**7. Welcome Newham One-stop Shop** (Aug 2022 to current): Initially set up to support people arriving via Homes for Ukraine and Family Visa Scheme, the weekly Welcome Newham one-stop shop provides a number of different services in one place to help refugees and people seeking asylum to establish life in Newham. In-person assistance includes GP registration, school applications, benefits applications, employment support, housing advice, English courses, and more. Since August 2022, more than 2,000 people have attended the Welcome Newham one-stop shop. Using the government’s Asylum Dispersal Grant, the one-stop shop also supports people who have recently received a decision about their asylum application (see Move on Support).

**8. Welcome Newham Move on Support:** the Welcome Newham team has trained officers, and has brought in specialist support including a Benefits Officer and a Homelessness Prevention Officer, to help deliver Move on Support for people who recently received a decision about their asylum claim. The aim of the service is to prevent homelessness and destitution. The team work in the hotels and at the one-stop shop providing

support with homelessness applications, opening a UK bank account, applying for benefits, registering for the Refugee Employability Programme (REP), and helping people to attend the next available ‘How to secure your own accommodation’ workshop. Engaging quickly with people seeking sanctuary living in hotels improves the chances of a successful outcome. Welcome Newham is also collaborating with voluntary and community partners to reduce the risk of individuals rough sleeping once they move out of hotels.

**9. Migrant Health Operational Group:** Started in June 2020, the Migrant Health Operations Group is London Borough of Newham’s cross-directorate and VCS partner group that provides a collaborative and systems-led operational response to migrant health and supporting people with insecure immigration status in Newham. The group meets every two months to share experiences and best practice, and to enhance partnership working.

**10. International Student Research:** Starting in August 2023, the research project is a three-way collaboration between the School of Geography, Newham Community Project and Newham Council. The project is exploring rising food insecurity among international students in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing cost of living crisis, and student’s reliance on the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sectors for their necessities. The knowledge exchange research project aims to co-create evidence, map resources, and leverage opportunities.

**11. Domestic Abuse Services:** Newham is proud to provide domestic abuse (DA) support to all survivors of all genders and identities age 16+, including those with NRPF or insecure immigration status. The Newham domestic abuse co-production group has been established for 3 years and membership includes Newham residents, local survivors, and those seeking sanctuary. The group is informed by the principle that the voices of those with ‘lived experience’ and local connection are the best people to steer work on domestic abuse. Achievements of the group include co-creating the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2022-2025, and action plan, and contributing to the commissioning

<sup>3</sup> The Newham Food Alliance is an open collaboration between partners to help reach thousands of residents each week with food parcels, meals and other support.

of community DA services, writing evaluation questions, scoring bids and drafting key performance indicators. The new DA community services contract commenced in September 2024 and will include two new posts aimed at supporting those seeking Sanctuary. Year 3 of the DA strategy will include clear outcomes for DA survivors seeking Sanctuary.

**12. Multilingual Training Hub:** A multilingual approach has been pioneered by Kensington Primary, which looks at an asset-based approach to English as an additional language, allowing schools to unleash the power of multilingual learners - educationally, socially and culturally. Kensington has established the Multilingual Training Hub to bridge the gap between research and practice. Training is available for schools to learn about current research in multilingualism, the advantages of using first languages and practical ways to support multilingual learners and families in the classroom, school and in the wider community. Research collaborations are with UCL, London Metropolitan University and Reading University; any current research is shared via the Multilingual training hub. Kensington has been training schools in and around London, more

specifically they have worked with the boroughs of Kingston and Richmond and Jersey Island.

**13. Newham's Tackling Racism, Inequality and Disproportionality (TRID) programme** underlines Newham Council's commitment to the Borough of Sanctuary principles. TRID is made up of four projects, each with its own pledges: 1) Newham as an employer 2) Newham as a beacon of social change 3) Newham as the best place for children and young people 4) Newham as a deliverer and commissioner of public services. Some of the key highlights and impact of the TRID programme include being awarded a Bronze Trailblazer status by Race Equality Matters, and anti-racism workshops delivered to over 2300 council staff.

**14. Windrush Day:** Newham Council has been successful in securing £15,000 in 2022 and £31,000 in 2023 from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) for Windrush-related activity, including a Windrush Community Grants Programme and a summer series of activities aligned to a 'Front Room' installation. The council has been awarded a grant of £32,000 from the Windrush Day Grant Scheme 2024.



# Borough of Sanctuary in practice

Our vision is that Newham will be a beacon of sanctuary. To achieve this vision, a partnership of Newham Council, voluntary organisations, primary and

secondary care services, civic groups, and people with lived experience, will develop and deliver ambitious and innovative work over the next three years.

Ambition	Proposed tasks/actions to deliver on the ambition	Leads and key partners
Commit action to improve outcomes for people seeking sanctuary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achieve Borough of Sanctuary status.</li> <li>• Ensure LBN has a named lead so that all LBN strategies and plans embed the values of welcome and inclusion through all our work.</li> <li>• Build relationships within the wider Sanctuary Network to share good practice and work towards common goals.</li> <li>• Actively participate in the NEL ICB Refugee and Asylum Seeker Working Group to support system change where needed (e.g. commissioning of health checks for RAS).</li> <li>• Identify opportunities to embed the lived experience in programmes and policies.</li> <li>• Actively engage with existing VCF sector steering group meetings to ensure opportunities to listen and learn from people with lived experience to better inform future work and direction.</li> <li>• Provide all schools with best practice guidelines for mid-phase admissions and how to support families seeking sanctuary.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LBN Public Health</li> <li>• VCF sector</li> <li>• NHS</li> <li>• Migrant Health Operational Group</li> <li>• Multilingual Training Hub</li> </ul>
Support people seeking sanctuary and those working with them to realise their health and human rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop an immigration advice partnership to help undocumented children and families regularise their status.</li> <li>• Develop workforce by ensuring all frontline staff have access to training via the Social Welfare Alliance in working with migrants and NHS entitlements.</li> <li>• Support access to the Employment Rights Hub so that people can receive confidential advice about working hours and conditions, being treated fairly and equally and rights for families and parents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employments Rights Hub</li> <li>• The Renewal Programme</li> <li>• Newham Advice Partnership</li> <li>• Praxis</li> <li>• RAMFEL</li> <li>• LBN Public Health</li> <li>• Our Newham Work</li> <li>• Our Newham Money</li> </ul>
Improve access to healthcare for people seeking sanctuary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embed Safe Surgeries in Newham General Practices to support equitable access to primary care.</li> <li>• Build lived experience into programme and service planning.</li> <li>• Deliver health needs assessment for people seeking asylum staying in contingency hotels and use findings to inform future practice and policies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LBN Public Health</li> <li>• DOTW Safe Surgeries team</li> <li>• NEL ICB</li> <li>• PCN Health inequalities leads</li> <li>• Newham Training Hub</li> <li>• Social Welfare Alliance</li> <li>• VCF sector</li> </ul>

<p>Take action to prevent homelessness and destitution</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver research on the needs and experiences of international students in Newham to inform policy and practice.</li> <li>• Pilot and evaluate Welcome Newham Move On service for people who have received a decision about their asylum claim.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LBN Housing</li> <li>• Newham Community Project</li> <li>• Queen Mary University of London</li> <li>• LBN Public Health</li> </ul>
<p>Engage with partners to improve food standards and embed food as a life enhancing activity for people seeking asylum staying in contingency hotels</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and respond to immediate and emergency needs of residents.</li> <li>• Make meals better which gives ownership to residents around the food they eat.</li> <li>• Embed food as a life-enhancing activity and a vital aspect of community connection and social integration.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LBN Food Strategy Team</li> <li>• LBN Public Health</li> <li>• LBN Food Standards &amp; Hygiene</li> <li>• Residents</li> <li>• VCS</li> <li>• Hotel contractors</li> <li>• Clear Springs</li> </ul>
<p>Support social integration in Newham where we create a sense of collective belonging and living lives connected with each other</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support capacity and resource of VCS via the Welcome Newham Small Grants Scheme.</li> <li>• Identify volunteering opportunities so people seeking sanctuary can access engaging, productive, and fulfilling activities to help them connect with other residents, feel they are more valued members of the community and develop skills and networks for future employment.</li> <li>• Identify and respond to challenges people seeking asylum face in accessing English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LBN Public Health</li> <li>• Newham Volunteer Programme</li> </ul>
<p>Evaluate the impact of changes made and use this to continue to inform future service</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilise the Welcome Newham case management system to improve quality and use data to understand people's needs as well as identify who is not coming for support to drive equity of access.</li> <li>• Continually evaluate the Welcome Newham data dashboard, which presents key indicators such as the number of people supported with housing, English classes and employment, in order to track success and focus efforts to drive improved outcomes.</li> <li>• Continue to invite people with lived experience to the move on support housing workshops to bring personal stories, successes, and learnings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LBN Public Health</li> </ul>

# Delivery, governance and accountability

Newham Council is committed to embedding a culture and practice of welcome across all of our work and services, encouraging everyone to champion people seeking sanctuary.

Newham Council has structures, teams, and working groups in place to help achieve the ambitions set out in this strategy.

Area of Focus	Group supporting delivery, governance and accountability
<p><b>Direct support to refugees and people seeking asylum</b></p>	<p><b>Welcome Newham Team</b>            A dedicated team directly engaging and supporting refugees and people seeking asylum via a weekly One Stop Shop with a range of needs, including, but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GP registration</li> <li>• School registration</li> <li>• ESOL registration</li> <li>• Universal credit and benefits</li> <li>• Housing</li> </ul> <p>The team also operate a helpline, 10am to 5.30pm, Monday to Friday.</p>
<p><b>Borough of Sanctuary Strategy</b></p>	<p><b>Newham Sanctuary Forum</b>            The Forum will oversee the delivery of the Newham Borough of Sanctuary Strategy and agree a joint action plan based on the commitments set out in the strategy. The Forum will include residents with lived experience as well as representatives from local charities, NHS services, and council departments. Everyone who is a member of the forum will work together and equally to make Newham a supportive and inclusive place for people seeking sanctuary to call home.</p>
<p><b>Partnership working and information sharing</b></p>	<p><b>Migrant Health Operational Group</b>            Started in June 2020, the Migrant Health Operations Group is a cross-directorate and VCF sector partner group. Chaired by CYP Directorate, the group provides a collaborative, intelligence-led, and systems-wide operational response to migrant health and supporting people with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) in Newham. Colleagues are looking for synergies with this and the new Newham Sanctuary Forum.</p>
<p><b>Health, wellbeing and safeguarding</b></p>	<p><b>Asylum Seekers and Refugee Newham Health Partnership Group</b>            Aims to improve access to services and support for people seeking asylum staying in contingency hotels in order to improve health outcomes and reduce health inequalities. Monthly meetings help ensure coordinated and integrated action across local NHS and the Newham Council to improve health and wellbeing pathways to statutory and NHS services, for example safeguarding pathways</p>
<p><b>Pregnant women, new mothers and children under 5</b></p>	<p><b>Under 5 Task and Finish Group</b>            Meeting regularly since October 2022, the group, consisting of 10 teams from the council, voluntary sector and NHS, generates and delivers actions to meet the acute needs of pregnant women, new mothers and children under five years old living in Home Office contingency hotels.</p>

# Appendix: definitions

Key Term	Description
A person, or people seeking asylum	A person seeking asylum, is someone who has left their country of origin and formally applied for asylum but whose application has not yet been concluded, where asylum is protection or safety given by a government to people forced to leave their own countries for fear of persecution.
A refugee	<p>A refugee is someone who:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>Has a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and</li><li>Is outside the country of their nationality</li><li>Is unable, or owing to their well-founded fear, unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country.</li></ol> <p>In the UK, a person becomes a refugee when government agrees that their application for asylum meets this definition (taken from the Refugee Convention) and recognises them as a refugee. The other route for refugee status in the UK is to be accepted onto one of the dedicated resettlement schemes prior to arrival.</p>
A migrant	A migrant is someone who has moved from one country to another, not for reasons of asylum or refuge. Often the move is for work, education or to be with family. People may also move to alleviate significant hardships that arise from natural disasters, famine or extreme poverty.

# Notes

# Notes

