

SUBJECT: COUNTY OF SANCTUARY STRATEGY

MEETING: Cabinet

DATE: 17 September 2025

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: all

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To seek approval of a County of Sanctuary Strategy which is one of the requirements of the process of becoming an accredited Council of Sanctuary in line with a commitment in the Community and Corporate Plan and a motion passed by Council.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That Cabinet approve the County of Sanctuary Strategy.
- 2.2 That officers are tasked with keeping the appended action plan under continual review so that the authority can respond to changing circumstances

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 The communities of Monmouthshire have done a huge amount to welcome people fleeing war and persecution. A Refugee Committee was established in Chepstow during World War I with the town providing an organised effort to support and welcome refugees from Belgium. More recently, Abergavenny became a town of sanctuary since 2016. During this time our county has welcomed a number of refugees from Syria and Afghanistan and more than a hundred local families have opened their homes to people fleeing the war in Ukraine.
- 3.2 The Council is already a member of the City of Sanctuary Network and is working towards becoming an Awarded Member. One of the requirements is to agree a Sanctuary Strategy. This strategy is not about whether or not the county will accommodate sanctuary seekers, that is a given. The requirement for all local authorities to become asylum dispersal areas was created by the previous UK Government back in 2022.
- 3.3 The authority has made significant strides in recent years to improve the housing position for local people. Our Rapid Rehousing approach has improved homeless prevention. We have increased the availability of temporary and settled homes for homeless households which has led to reduced use of unsuitable B&B accommodation including the elimination of it to house 16 and 17 years olds and families with children.

- 3.4 Becoming a Council of Sanctuary is about how we work with people who arrive here. The strategy creates a clear intent for Monmouthshire to be recognised as a safe and welcoming county where refugees and people seeking sanctuary have access to support and services, where community connections are fostered and where people can begin to rebuild their lives from the day they arrive and feel part of this special place in the same way that previous generations have.
- 3.5 This is underpinned by a series of principles that need to be adopted by all members of the sanctuary network. The strategy also establishes a number of objectives which set the framework for the accompanying action plan.
- Ensure Essential Needs Are Met - Supporting residents with access to food, housing, healthcare, and other basic necessities.
 - Foster Economic Inclusion - Creating opportunities for all through employment, skills development, and financial support.
 - Strengthen Social Integration - Developing the networks available for sanctuary seekers in the county
 - Champion Monmouthshire as a County of Sanctuary - Welcoming and supporting people seeking safety, and promoting diversity and compassion.
 - Shape the Future of Public Services - Collaborating with communities to influence and improve the delivery of local services.

4. EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

- 4.1 The proposal to become an accredited county of sanctuary is about improving outcomes for refugees and asylum seekers by providing a welcoming environment, challenging discrimination and negative perceptions and ensuring equality of opportunity where possible within UK Immigration law. It strives to promote good relations between groups ensuring vibrant and cohesive communities.
- 4.2 The impact assessment concludes that the proposed strategy will enhance safeguarding and corporate parenting, support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and promote community integration.

5. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

- 5.1 The requirement for all local authorities in Wales, Scotland and England to become asylum dispersal areas was established by the UK Government in 2022. All local authorities are required to accommodate a certain number of asylum seekers. This paper is not about whether or not to accommodate people or where they are accommodated. It is about improving the outcomes for refugees and asylum seekers when they are here. The options are to:
1. Do not accredited Council of Sanctuary Status
 2. Do not seek accredited County of Sanctuary Status

- 5.2 The desire to seek accreditation has previously been agreed at Cabinet and remains the preferred option.

6. EVALUATION CRITERIA

- 6.1 The success of our application to become an awarded member of the city of sanctuary network will be determined by a third party. The outcome of this application will be part of the evaluation of the success of the recommendations of this paper.

7. REASONS:

- 7.1 To ensure that the council becomes a county of sanctuary for those fleeing war and persecution in line with the previous commitments of Council and Cabinet.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 8.1 The provision of services and accommodation for refugees and asylum seekers is funded by the UK Government. We also receive grant funding from Welsh Government that helps fund the community cohesion team that works across Newport and Monmouthshire. The commitments within the strategy will be delivered within those existing resources. There is a membership fee of c. £1500 associated with the accreditation process.

9. CONSULTEES:

Cabinet
Strategic Leadership Team
People Scrutiny Committee

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None

11. AUTHOR:

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12. CONTACT DETAILS:

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