

# **Monmouthshire County Council**

## **County of Sanctuary Strategy**



## Foreword

I'm proud to introduce our new Council of Sanctuary Strategy, a reflection of Monmouthshire's enduring commitment to equity and community.

Our county has a proud tradition of welcoming people fleeing war, persecution and hardship. From the Belgian refugees received in Chepstow during the First World War to the hundreds of Ukrainian families hosted by residents in recent years, Monmouthshire's communities have consistently demonstrated the values of empathy, kindness, generosity and solidarity. These are not just historical footnotes; they are the living principles embodied by our communities and that guide our work as a council.

This strategy builds on that legacy. It sets out a clear framework for how we will embed sanctuary principles across council services, ensuring that people are not only welcomed but supported to rebuild their lives and thrive within our communities. It is a strategy informed by our partnerships with local groups such as Abergavenny Town of Sanctuary and aligned with the Welsh Government's vision of Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary.

We recognise that being a Council of Sanctuary is not a badge; it is a responsibility. It means listening, learning, and acting. It means ensuring that our schools, housing, social care and community spaces are places where sanctuary seekers feel safe, valued, and included. It means turning empathy into action.

Together, we will continue to make Monmouthshire a place of welcome.



**Councillor Angela Sandles**  
**Cabinet Member for Equalities and Engagement**

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## Version Control

Title	Sanctuary Strategy
Purpose	To put in place a Santuray Strategy in line with the requirements of becoming an accredited council of sanctuary in accordance with a policy direction set by full Council
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Consultation	Cabinet; Strategic Leadership Team;

## Introduction

Monmouthshire has a proud history of welcoming and providing a home to those fleeing war and persecution. We want 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.

Our Community and Corporate Plan established a clear purpose for Monmouthshire to be a zero-carbon county, supporting well-being, health and dignity for everyone at every stage of life. This aligns with the City of Sanctuary vision for the UK to be a welcoming place of safety for all and proud to offer sanctuary to people fleeing violence and persecution.

The council recognises that providing a welcoming place needs to be more than just about how people who are asylum seekers, refugees and migrants are welcomed, but about how they settle and integrate in the county.

Monmouthshire is already a member of the City of Sanctuary movement which was established more than twenty years ago to create a culture of welcome and promote integration across all areas of society with a vision that wherever people seeking sanctuary go, they will feel safe, be welcomed, and have opportunities to participate fully in community life.

### Values

The values of Monmouthshire County Council are of openness, fairness, flexibility teamwork and kindness. These values underpin how we work as a Council every day and ensure that our citizens have the best lives that they can possibly have. Monmouthshire County Council prides itself on being a values-based organisation. Values matter to us. They set our expectations for ourselves, each other and those we work with.

Our values at MCC align closely with those of the City of Sanctuary network of inclusiveness, openness and participation. Like the City of Sanctuary, MCC works to respect people of all backgrounds, foster collaboration and actively involve sanctuary seekers in the decision-making process.

## Our Commitment

The Council has outlined its commitment to being a County of Sanctuary through its Community and Corporate Plan, Strategic Equality plans and a motion passed by Council which received cross-party support.

The Community and Corporate Plan set clear objectives, these include a number which clearly align with the City of Sanctuary objectives:

- A fair place to live where the effects of inequality and poverty have been reduced.
- A safe place to live where people have a home and community where they feel secure.
- A connected place where people feel part of a community and are valued.

A motion was passed by Council on 21st September 2023 with cross party support, where councillors committed the county to the ambition to become an accredited County of Sanctuary.

As part of this commitment, this strategy has been prepared to outline specific actions and initiatives the council plans to undertake to support sanctuary seekers and promote inclusion and integration.

In 2024, the Council published its Strategic Equality Plan (2024-2028) setting out the objectives it wants to achieve over the four-year period. The following objectives support the Council's mission to become a County of Sanctuary:

- Give every child the best start in life (Objective 1)
- Work with partners and residents to build inclusive and cohesive communities (Objective 3)

Objective one supports the County of Sanctuary ethos as the experiences we have in our childhoods have a huge impact on how we grow and develop, our physical and mental health, and our thoughts, feelings and behaviour. In Wales it is recognised that there are a range of disparities between the attainment of different ethnic groups at the foundation phase of primary education, so this objective aims to eradicate this disparity, thus leading to better outcomes for sanctuary seekers.

Objective three identifies the need to build inclusive and cohesive communities, thus improving the lives of people living throughout the county. Monmouthshire recognises that the issues that undermine cohesion can be deep-rooted, and we want to create and maintain the conditions in which local communities can flourish. This aligns with the City of Sanctuary aim to build a culture of hospitality and welcome for people seeking sanctuary from war and persecution, fostering a more inclusive and compassionate society.

## Current Situation

Monmouthshire has welcomed sanctuary seekers to the county for many years, supporting people from all over the world to resettle in the county to rebuild their lives. This has been exemplified by local groups and volunteers such as Abergavenny Town of Sanctuary.

The Council is continuing to refine and develop its offer for sanctuary seekers and refugees. We have a dedicated resettlement team, working across Newport and Monmouthshire, who support sanctuary seekers who arrive in the county. This work has been supported by other teams across core services as well as countless community groups. The way in which council and communities have worked together is perhaps best exemplified when over one hundred families across Monmouthshire opened their homes to support Ukrainian nationals to find safety after fleeing the war in Ukraine under the UK Government's Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

People seeking sanctuary will have faced and overcome many barriers. These are exacerbated by a range of challenges globally, nationally and locally.

**Global** – The United Nations has estimated that over 120 million people worldwide had been forcibly displaced from their homes due to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations and events seriously disturbing public order. This included nearly 44 million refugees and 8 million asylum seekers. In addition to this, millions more people are displaced annually by weather-related events – such as floods, storms, wildfires and droughts linked to climate change<sup>1</sup>. A relatively small number of these people make their way to the UK, the largest recipients being Iran, Turkey, Germany and Uganda. However, the number of asylum seekers arriving in the UK has increased sharply in the past five years<sup>2</sup>.

**National** – In 2022 the UK Government widened arrangements for asylum dispersal. This meant that all local authorities were expected to accommodate a share of the asylum seekers arriving in the UK. Previously those arriving in Wales has been accommodated in Newport, Cardiff, Swansea and Wrexham. Language barriers and problems getting qualifications recognised in the UK make it hard for recent arrivals to find work. Those seeking sanctuary are likely to be on low incomes and amongst the most susceptible to the rising cost of living. In addition to these factors, negative attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers have become more widespread with social media appearing to legitimise negative attitudes.

**Local** – Monmouthshire has high property prices in comparison to earnings and relative to other parts of Wales. This translates into high rental values which place properties out of the range of many families. The people seeking sanctuary are likely to have limited financial resources and a lack of credit history making it hard for them to find a home. This has made it difficult for housing providers and families arriving in the area to secure affordable properties. Rurality and the relative lack of diversity in the county means Monmouthshire does not have the range of shop and places of worship needed to meet the needs of different groups. Many recent immigrants also have No Recourse to Public Funds which places them at increased risk of hardship.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/263423/major-refugee-hosting-countries-worldwide/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-december-2024/how-many-people-claim-asylum-in-the-uk>

## Vision and Principles

We want Monmouthshire to be 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 rebuild their lives from the day they arrive and feel part of this special place.

Monmouthshire County Council will adopt the following principles which apply to all groups, networks and streams operating under the name of City of Sanctuary:

- Offer a positive vision of a culture of welcome and hospitality to all.
- Create opportunities for relationships of friendship and solidarity between local people and those seeking sanctuary.
- Recognise and encourage partnership working and network development across localities.
- Identify opportunities for practical action and work on common-cause issues to effect change within and across communities (turning empathy into action).
- Celebrate and promote the welcome and contribution of people seeking sanctuary.
- Engage people seeking sanctuary in decision making processes at all levels and in all activities.
- Promote understanding of asylum and refugee issues, especially by enabling refugee voices to be heard directly.

## Objectives and Actions

It is vital that these principles are mainstreamed into all aspects of the council's work including education, employment, housing and social care and well-being. We need to ensure that the lived experiences of those seeking sanctuary are sought when we are engaging communities and their needs should be considered in the design of services.

The following objectives create a framework for the development of an 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.

## Council of Sanctuary Action Plan

The action plan below is included as an appendix to the strategy and will be refined in in response to the changing needs of refugees and asylum seekers. Progress will be monitored regularly and embedded as part of the council's performance management framework with reports available to the Council's scrutiny committees.

Action	Responsible Officer	Timescale
<b>Ensure Essential Needs Are Met</b>		
Support local people seeking sanctuary who settled under government schemes including UK resettlement scheme (UKRS), Afghan Resettlement scheme (ARAP, ACRS), Asylum Dispersal Scheme and Homes for Ukraine scheme in line with statutory duties.	Connected Communities Manager	ongoing
Work alongside our food partnership and community fridge projects to raise awareness of free or low-cost food options.	Strategic Partnerships Manager	March 2026
Provide support to help people sustain tenancies as part of the Council's approach to homelessness prevention.	Housing and Communities Manager	ongoing
Expand advice and support for local people seeking sanctuary to help them navigate the housing system.	Housing and Communities Manager	March 2020
Provide training for council staff on how to support people seeking sanctuary, e.g. residents with varying immigration status.	Connected Communities Manager	January 2026
<b>Foster Economic Inclusion</b>		
Educate and empower council staff and local businesses about opportunities to employ people seeking sanctuary including through work experience and apprenticeships.	Chief Officer – People, Performance and Partnerships	March 2026
Ensure a clear pathway is in place to support victims of domestic violence of other vulnerable people with no recourse to public funds.	Equalities and Welsh Language Manager	December 2025
Ensure access to English and a Second language provision (ESOL)	Strategic Manager: Community Hubs, Community Education & Libraries	ongoing



Action	Responsible Officer	Timescale
<b>Strengthen Social Integration</b>		
Empower and support local institutions and services, including libraries and schools, to become registered places of sanctuary.	Strategic Partnerships Manager	March 2026
Commit to working with and alongside refugees and sanctuary seekers to ensure services reflect the reality of their lived experiences.	Strategic Partnerships Manager	ongoing
Facilitate the creation and empowerment of community groups and spaces where refugees and sanctuary seekers can come together to enjoy common interests and create new friendships and connections amongst themselves and with local communities.	Strategic Partnerships Manager	June 2026
<b>Champion Monmouthshire as a County of Sanctuary</b>		
Work with local groups to promote positive narratives to build understanding, empathy and support in local communities	Strategic Partnerships Manager comms	ongoing
Provide platforms where refugees and asylum seekers can tell their stories	Strategic Partnerships Manager Comms	June 2026
Sharing resources, ideas and achievements via Councils of Sanctuary network and City of Sanctuary UK website	Connected Communities Manager comms	March 2026
<b>Shape the Future of Public Services</b>		
Ensure that the sanctuary principles are considered when strategies, policies or services are updated or revised.	Chief Officer – People, Performance and Partnerships	December 2026
Develop resources, including the council’s website, to ensure they are accessible for people seeking sanctuary	Chief Officer – People, Performance and Partnerships	March 2026

## Glossary

**Asylum seeker** - In the UK, a person who is seeking asylum or sanctuary is known as an asylum seeker because they have:

- fled their home
- arrived in another country, whichever way they can
- made themselves known to the authorities
- submitted an asylum application
- a legal right to stay in the country while waiting for a decision

**Refugee** - Refugees are people who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country. The 1951 Refugee Convention is a key legal document and defines a refugee as: “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.”

In the UK a refugee:

- has arrived in the UK on a recognised UK Government resettlement programme
- has proven that they'd be at risk if returned to their home country
- has had their claim for asylum accepted by the government
- has permission to stay in the UK either long term or indefinitely

**Migrant** - A migrant is a person who moves from one country to another, this could be for several reasons, for example to work, study or to reunite with family.

**No recourse to public funds** This is a condition for a person that is subject to immigration control, and it means that they are not entitled to most public benefits due to their immigration status, for example a student, someone on a spousal visa or a visa overstayer. Section 115 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 states that a person will have ‘no recourse to public funds’ if they are ‘subject to immigration control’.

**Separated or Unaccompanied children** - Separated children and young people seeking sanctuary is an alternative to use of the acronym /abbreviation UASCs (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children) or UAM (Unaccompanied Minors). Unaccompanied can imply a deliberate decision to send lone children into danger and does not reflect the fact that many lose their families in the chaos of fleeing war and other dangers. In the UK, they are usually looked after by the local authority.

**Indefinite Leave to Remain** - This is an immigration condition that gives a person the right to live indefinitely and is also called 'settlement'. It gives a person the right to live, work and study and apply for benefits. It can also be used to apply for British citizenship.

**Forced migrant** - A term commonly used for a person subject to a migratory movement in which an element of coercion exists, including threats to life and livelihood, whether arising from natural or man-made causes (e.g. movements of refugees and internally displaced persons as well as people displaced by natural or environmental disasters, chemical or nuclear disasters, famine or development projects or those who have been trafficked or enslaved).

**A Person Seeking Sanctuary or Sanctuary Seeker** - An umbrella term for someone seeking safety irrespective of immigration status.

**Subject to immigration control** - A person will be ‘subject to immigration control’ if they:

- Have been granted leave to enter or remain in the UK with the condition of ‘no recourse to public funds. This may include women who have joined their husband or partner on a spousal visa or may have limited leave granted under family or private life rules.
- Have leave to enter or remain in the UK but may have a restriction or prohibition on claiming public funds for a period of time. For example, persons from the European Economic Area (EEA) nationals may be prevented from accessing public funds when they do not meet the eligibility criteria.
- Do not have leave to enter or remain, such as those who overstay their visa or who enter illegally.
- Individuals on a time limited visa, such as a student or work visa.

**UKRS** – United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme (replaced the above in 2021) Works with UNHCR to identify those most in need of protection.

**VPRS** – Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (Syrians 2014-2020)

**VCRS** – Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Scheme (Middle East and North Africa as well as Syria started in 2016)