

## **City of Sanctuary**

### **Summary**

1. This report asks the Cabinet to support York seeking recognised status as a City of Sanctuary.

### **Background**

2. City of Sanctuary is a movement to build a culture of hospitality for people seeking sanctuary in the UK. Many towns and cities are seeking recognition as places of safety and welcome. Sheffield, Bradford, Coventry, Bristol and Swansea already have that status; others like Hull and Oxford are working to attain recognition.
3. The movement is intended to be from the ground upwards; therefore support from individuals, local community groups, schools, universities, sports organisations, voluntary and statutory bodies is essential. The organising committee aims to gather pledges of support from all sectors of the city and will then ask the Council to seek recognition from the national organisers of City of Sanctuary, so that York may officially receive that status.

### **Consultation**

4. A meeting took place in September 2010 at which a large number of people from many organisations in York came together. They were addressed by the Revd. Inderjit Bhogal who set up the first initiative in Sheffield. The meeting ended with those present declaring their support for the principles of the City of Sanctuary movement. A small working group was set up from those in attendance.

## **Why a City of Sanctuary in York?**

5. We want York to become a City of Sanctuary where local people and community groups work to make York a place of welcome, safety, and security for anyone in need of welcome all who need to claim sanctuary.
6. York has a long history of providing help. In the late 1930s the York Refugee Committee found work, housing, and school places for dozens of Jewish families fleeing persecution in Europe. In the 1970s and 1980s, a small number of Asian families expelled from Kenya and Uganda found refuge in York. Many now play a significant part in the local business and commercial world. In the 1990s, York provided accommodation for refugees from the atrocities unfolding in Bosnia and the surrounding Balkan States.
7. Currently, Refugee Action York (RAY) mainly provides support to refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants from the Turkish speaking community, including Kurdish people. The problems they face are those encountered by refugees across the UK and Europe, namely:
  - Extreme poverty and hardship
  - Severe social exclusion from local communities
  - High risk of mental health issues such as anxiety and depression
8. We want to celebrate the contribution of the many people from across the world that bring their skills, cultures, and experiences to enrich our city. Some have come here to escape danger or threats to their lives. They offer their work to assist the building of our local economy.
9. Many who make the journey here feel isolated and fearful on their arrival in York. We want to spread the culture of hospitality and support throughout the whole of the city, so that welcome and support can more easily be found.

## **Analysis**

10. The Council is asked to provide a resolution of support including a specific commitment to becoming a welcoming City for refugees and people seeking sanctuary, as well as co-operation with the local City of Sanctuary movement in developing the initiative. Early thinking through a City of Sanctuary workshop has identified a number of practical needs that will shape initiatives that the Council is likely to be able to contribute to, for example:
  - ⇒ Providing access to information and signposting

- ⇒ Providing meeting space with resources such as PCs and telephones
- ⇒ Displaying signs to welcome people seeking sanctuary
- ⇒ Creating a central drop-in as a focal point for friendship, food, support and practical advice
- ⇒ Facilitating access to leisure and cultural activity
- ⇒ Creating fact sheets for officers, members and the public
- ⇒ Encouraging positive media coverage
- ⇒ Creating a pool of people with a range of languages to act as voluntary interpreters.
- ⇒ Instituting a 'Diversity Day'
- ⇒ Ensuring access to good quality legal support
- ⇒ Facilitating community conflict resolution services for areas experiencing tension over new arrivals (already happening)
- ⇒ Civic receptions for new arrivals in the City (already happening)
- ⇒ Designing workshops for schools on sanctuary issues
- ⇒ Facilitating speaker events for local people to hear from those seeking sanctuary directly about their experiences.
- ⇒ Providing ways for people to feel involved in the community

11. It is proposed that the Council's response is co-ordinated through the Neighbourhood Management Unit.

### **Corporate Priorities**

12. This initiative will contribute to the Council Plan ambition to Build Strong Communities and in particular the key outcome of safer, more inclusive communities.

### **Implications**

13. **Financial:** The initiative will be taken forward by partners across the city working directing existing resources as appropriate to further the City of Sanctuary aims. There are therefore no additional financial implications for the Council in signing up to the initiative.

14. **Equalities:** Signing up to this initiative will provide practical opportunities to promote fairness and inclusion especially amongst key groups identified within the One City Strategy. There will be links to the work of the Fairness Commission.

## Risk Management

15. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy there are no risks associated with the recommendations of this report.

## Recommendations

16. The City Council is asked to pledge its support for the City of Sanctuary initiative and in so doing to:
- recognize the contribution of refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, and all seeking sanctuary to the city of York
  - resolve to welcome and include them in our activities
  - support York seeking recognised status as a City of Sanctuary
  - agree to support the kind of practical initiatives set out in paragraph 10

Reason: So that York may become a City of Sanctuary

## Contact Details

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	<b>Report Approved</b>	✓	<b>Date</b> 22.9.11.
<b>Specialist Implications Officer(s)</b>			
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All		✓
<b>For further information please contact the author of the report</b>			

**Background Papers:** File held by the author