



COUNCIL OF  
**SANCTUARY AWARD**  
WELCOMING PEOPLE SEEKING SANCTUARY



MANCHESTER  
CITY COUNCIL

# A Manchester Welcome: the city's strategy for people seeking sanctuary

Making Manchester a welcoming and  
supportive city for people seeking sanctuary.

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## Foreword



**Councillor Joanna Midgley**  
**Deputy Leader of Manchester City Council**  
January 2025

Manchester is a thriving city that prides itself on being diverse and welcoming.

People have emigrated here from all corners of the globe to find safety and security, and to make Manchester their home. We live in a vibrant and brilliant city because of the contributions our communities make to our history, culture and economy.

In the summer of 2023, we unanimously agreed at Full Council to become a Council of Sanctuary. The accreditation process has encouraged us to reflect on achievements to date, as well as challenges and opportunities to come. The development of the strategy, including the recommendations and action plan, has assisted the Council to focus on this often unheard cohort of people. It puts their needs, and how the city can meet them, at the heart of our work.

We know that big financial, social, political and operational demands exist. These make the environment challenging, but Manchester has always risen to a challenge; the city's welcoming, caring and supportive culture and passion will therefore ensure it continues to welcome and support people seeking sanctuary.

I am proud that Manchester is a Council of Sanctuary and that together, alongside our libraries and art galleries of Sanctuary, schools of Sanctuary, our partner statutory organisations, and our voluntary, community and faith sector, we can work together to make Manchester a welcoming and supportive city for those seeking sanctuary here.

# A Manchester Welcome: the city's strategy for people seeking sanctuary

Manchester City Council's journey towards becoming accredited as a Council of Sanctuary was formally marked when the Council passed a motion in July 2023. The Council's commitment to welcome and support people seeking sanctuary predates this, dedicated services and behaviours being firmly engrained in the Council's offer.

Manchester City Council was awarded Council of Sanctuary status in October 2024, joining a movement of local councils working to create a culture of welcome, inclusion and empowerment for people seeking sanctuary.

This strategy is a commitment to continuing what we already do: celebrating sanctuary and having conversations about sanctuary; it is also a commitment to improvement and doing things differently. The three-year strategy supports the Council's commitment to social cohesion and inclusion, recognising the need to further address the needs of people seeking sanctuary in Manchester.

The vision statement is clear – **we want to make Manchester a welcoming and supportive city for people seeking sanctuary.**

The supporting action plan is in place to monitor the delivery of activity towards ensuring Manchester is a welcoming and supportive city for people seeking sanctuary.

A Manchester Council of Sanctuary Steering Group was established in January 2024 to shape and support the Council of Sanctuary accreditation process. The multidisciplinary group consists of representatives from the Council and other statutory bodies, Experts by Experience, and voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) organisations.

Looking ahead, the Steering Group and related governance forums will play an essential role advocating with and for people seeking sanctuary; this will ensure sanctuary is discussed, included on agendas and reflected in positive outcomes across Manchester. The governance forums will ensure recommendations and actions from this strategy, as well as wider recommendations and actions via relevant thematic strategies, are progressed and firmly engrained throughout the Council and the city.

A glossary of terms used in this strategy can be found on [pages 14 and 15](#). We have indicated these with an asterisk (\*).

## Context

Manchester has a long and proud heritage of being a truly multicultural society. This is reflected in the city's current population, over 43% of which identify as being from an ethnic minority, there being more than ninety ethnic groups living in the city.<sup>1</sup>

Owing to the diverse nature of its population, Manchester has always focused on promoting community cohesion and equity in the city. This is seen in several citywide strategies based upon bringing communities together.

The strategy for people seeking sanctuary and the action plan is in addition to:

- **Our Manchester Strategy 2025–2035**  
The new overarching ten-year plan for Manchester will be launched in April 2025. It aims to continue to improve the city, ensuring that all Mancunians are part of Manchester's successes and can shape its future. The plan will include specific priorities on equality and participation
- **Building Stronger Communities Together Strategy 2023–2026**  
Bringing social cohesion and a sense of belonging for all
- **Making Manchester Fairer Strategy 2023–2027**  
Addressing health inequalities in the city by focusing on the social determinants of health
- **Anti-poverty Strategy 2023–2027**  
Drawing upon evidence from residents, organisations and national research to produce evidence-based recommendations to tackle poverty, its causes and consequences
- **Manchester Inclusion Strategy 2022–25**  
Setting out priorities and guiding principles for the inclusion of all children and young people, whatever their age, identity, circumstance or ability, so they can have a sense of belonging, feel respected and valued for who they are.

The work of social cohesion is about developing neighbourhoods, workplaces, institutions and social spaces, where difference is welcomed and celebrated, and where empathy and curiosity about people 'not like me' are encouraged and embedded.<sup>2</sup> Community cohesion and equity are at the forefront of a programme of work to build community and organisational resilience across the city with our communities, businesses and residents.

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1. 2021 Census

2. Building Stronger Communities Together Strategy 2023–26

## People seeking sanctuary

Since becoming the world's first industrialised city, Manchester has attracted people from all over the world to become one of the most culturally diverse cities in the UK. For hundreds of years Manchester has been a city of sanctuary for those fleeing under forced circumstances, for humanitarian reasons, and to help people build a better life. We recognise the valuable contribution all these communities have made to our economic, social and cultural life over many years.

'People seeking sanctuary' is the preferred term used throughout this strategy, as it focuses on people, as opposed to their immigration status. We have actively avoided providing a definition, so that people can self-determine if they recognise themselves as seeking sanctuary. The City of Sanctuary guide to the use of language defines sanctuary as 'providing safety and protection'.<sup>3</sup>

This document uses people seeking sanctuary as a collective term, based on recognising the likelihood of shared experiences and/or trauma. We will always specify if referring to a specific cohort of people based on their immigration status and will do so using language that emphasises their humanity. An understanding of intersectionality\*<sup>4</sup> among people seeking sanctuary must also be applied, as different forms of marginalisation, prejudice and oppression can combine in certain contexts.

To explore the relationship between immigration status and people seeking sanctuary in Manchester, this strategy takes a closer look at people:

- Claiming asylum
- Granted refugee status
- Who have experienced displacement.

The number of people seeking sanctuary at any point in time fluctuates, as it is dependent upon world events. It includes those affected by human activity – including war, civil unrest and political events – as well as natural events and disasters.

The following paragraphs explore the number of people seeking sanctuary in Manchester using the latest published statistics at the time this document was published. Visit the Home Office website for the most recent immigration system statistics.<sup>5</sup>

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3. City of Sanctuary UK, [City of Sanctuary UK guide to use of language](#)

4. See glossary on [pages 14 and 15](#)

5. Home Office, [Immigration system statistics data tables](#)

## People claiming asylum

On 22 August 2024, 1,627 people living in Manchester were claiming asylum, consisting of both family and single applications.<sup>6</sup> In addition to this figure, Manchester is home to separated children and young people seeking sanctuary who are cared for by the Council's Children's Services under the Children's Act 1989.

## People granted refugee status

It is not possible to accurately estimate the number of people living in Manchester who have been granted refugee status. People with refugee status are entitled to move and live wherever they wish in the country. They are not recorded as being protected or as a homogenous group. Nevertheless, it is accepted that Manchester will have a significant number of people with refugee status who have chosen to live in the city and who will be seeking sanctuary in Manchester.

## People who have experienced displacement

Manchester is home to many people who have arrived in the UK via visa routes or irregular migration routes who have not claimed or cannot claim asylum. People who have experienced displacement include people who have arrived in the UK via Government resettlement schemes:

- Since 31 October 2024, 437 Afghan individuals across ACRS and ARAP Pathways\* have come to settle in Manchester<sup>7</sup>
- On 22 October 2024, there were 844 people from Ukraine who have come to live with sponsors in Manchester via the Homes for Ukraine scheme<sup>8</sup>
- An estimated 9,662 people from Hong Kong live in Manchester – a projection made using Home Office immigration statistics between 31 January 2021 and 31 December 2022.<sup>9</sup> It is not possible to be more accurate, as Home Office figures only show the number of people arriving in the country and not their place of destination.

People who have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) may choose to live in Manchester. This cohort of people are not recorded as a single group, as there will be many different reasons why they have no recourse to public funds. It is accepted that people in this cohort will be seeking sanctuary, but the number of people living in Manchester will be unknown.

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6. North West Regional Strategic Migration Partnership, [Data and insights](#)

7. North West Regional Strategic Migration Partnership, [Data and insights](#)

8. North West Regional Strategic Migration Partnership, [Data and insights](#)

9. Yue (2023), Study Report on Hong Kong Migrants Recently Arrived in the UK

## Engagement

Throughout 2024, Manchester City Council engaged with communities to improve its understanding of the lives of people seeking sanctuary in Manchester. Targeted engagement took place in several formats, with different audiences:

- Structured conversations with people with lived experience of seeking sanctuary
- Workshops, an online survey and individual conversations with stakeholders (including local authority representatives; statutory and non-statutory services, including health and wellbeing services, Department for Work and Pensions, school and education providers; and voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) organisations)
- Policy panels with Elected Members.

The engagement framework was structured around the vision statement – **making Manchester a welcoming and supportive city for people seeking sanctuary**.

People's experience of seeking sanctuary can be deeply emotional to share and revisit. Therefore, engagement was designed and delivered with a conscious effort not to retraumatise.

Engagement findings have informed recommendations ([page 11](#)) and the action plan ([pages 12 and 13](#)).<sup>10</sup> The findings also touched on detail spanning across the following areas:

- Benefit eligibility
- Community and culture
- Education
- Employment and skills
- Financial advice and support
- Health and wellbeing
- Homelessness
- Housing
- Language
- Legal and immigration status advice
- Leisure and sport
- No Recourse to Public Funds
- Transportation and getting around the city
- Volunteering and unpaid work.

Many of the above areas have dedicated thematic strategies that are supported by their own action plans. Manchester Council of Sanctuary governance forums will ensure wider recommendations and actions responding to the above areas are progressed and firmly engrained via relevant thematic strategies.

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<sup>10</sup>. A high-level version of the action plan is presented on [pages 12 and 13](#)

## Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

This strategy is supported by a multi-agency Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), which provides a summary of the currently available evidence and data regarding the health and care needs of people seeking sanctuary in Manchester. The JSNA describes some of the health issues that have been shown to affect people seeking sanctuary and what we know about the size and distribution of these communities in Manchester. It also describes what Manchester City Council, the NHS and voluntary-sector organisations working in the city are doing to support people seeking sanctuary and alludes to some of the opportunities for further action.

As part of the work to produce the JSNA, the Council reached out to a small number of key organisations and groups that are known to work to support people seeking sanctuary. The stated priorities of the organisations that engaged with this work have been summarised below:

### Table of priorities and summary of support

Priority	Support
<b>Mental health and wellbeing</b>	<p>Increased mental health support for unaccompanied children (under 18)</p> <p>Mental health and wellbeing support for young people living in adult hotels (age-disputed children or young people aged 18–25)</p> <p>Provision of free gym/exercise classes for people claiming asylum and people recently granted refugee status.</p>
<b>Housing and homeless services</b>	<p>Access to safe and secure housing regardless of immigration status</p> <p>Addressing homelessness experienced by people recently granted refugee status and those refused asylum</p> <p>Destitution and its impact on health and wellbeing.</p>
<b>Access to support services</b>	<p>Free support for immigration and health needs</p> <p>Access to essential healthcare services, including physical and mental health care</p> <p>Removing barriers to registration, access, and treatment in healthcare.</p>

Priority	Support
<b>Education and integration</b>	<p>Grass-roots education: English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), maths, etc, to start the journey for people claiming asylum</p> <p>Holistic wellbeing and integration support, including social, emotional, and economic wellbeing.</p>
<b>Systematic and policy changes</b>	<p>Addressing the hostile environment and immigration control that affects life chances</p> <p>Ensuring access to public funds and basic income regardless of immigration status</p> <p>Joined-up working between health and care services, local government and national providers.</p>

These priorities complement the findings from the other targeted engagement work with different audiences that the Council undertook throughout 2024 in order to improve its understanding of the lives of people seeking sanctuary in Manchester.

## Recommendations

Manchester City Council has co-produced a list of recommended practices for all organisations working with people seeking sanctuary. The recommendations are informed by engagement findings and were further developed at a workshop with stakeholders.

The recommendations are designed to improve outcomes for people seeking sanctuary, as well as inclusivity and social-value outcomes for the organisations themselves. Recommendations are free or low cost, focusing on replicating good practice and culture change in Manchester.

### Access to services

- a. Use qualified interpreters when required
- b. Ensure translated information is available and accessible
- c. Create and share information in accessible formats
- d. Promote relevant information in places where people will see it
- e. Ensure the availability of in-person and/or video support, as well as written or digital information

### Feeling welcome

- f. Ensure communications are compassionate and emphasise the humanity of people seeking sanctuary; use humanising language wherever possible and avoid misuse of terminology
- g. Promote the positive impacts people seeking sanctuary have on the city and celebrate their contributions
- h. Provide the opportunity to connect people seeking sanctuary via peer support, so they can give reassurance and direction to each other

### Ways of working

- i. Be accountable – provide accurate and consistent information about processes affecting people seeking sanctuary
- j. Promote training opportunities and knowledge-sharing across the sector
- k. Provide interventions to make it easier for people seeking sanctuary to navigate the city
- l. Work together, network, pool resources, and have constructive conversations to improve services
- m. Adhere to responsibilities under the Human Rights Act 1998 and Equality Act 2010
- n. Embed honesty, transparency and an inclusive approach in practices, so that people's expectations are managed from first contact.

Organisations are encouraged to self-assess their performance and strive to implement and practise all relevant recommendations, also encouraging others to do so.

## Actions

Manchester City Council and partners have co-produced a three-year action plan. The actions were developed in conjunction with stakeholders and ratified at engagement workshops. The action plan is a dynamic document, regularly changing to reflect the needs of people seeking sanctuary in Manchester. Actions will be added, removed, updated and monitored as required, and quarterly monitoring updates will be presented to Manchester Council of Sanctuary governance forums.

The impact of the recommendations and action plan is anticipated to affect a wider audience than just people seeking sanctuary; this is expected to be the case where activity promotes social cohesion and/or targets marginalised or underrepresented communities. Other actions and recommendations are specifically targeted at people seeking sanctuary, reflecting strengths and opportunities highlighted via the engagement process.

Manchester Council of Sanctuary governance forums are responsible for promoting positive outcomes for people seeking sanctuary. Such activity will be captured via the strategy for people seeking sanctuary action plan, as well as via relevant thematic/target audience strategies, eg. housing, children and young people.

Looking ahead, the action plan will continue to draw from engagement with Manchester communities, including people with lived experience of seeking sanctuary.

A high-level description of action plan headings is captured below:

### **Making Manchester a welcoming and supportive city for people seeking sanctuary**

#### **Access to services**

Well-designed, integrated and inclusive services that focus on people and their strengths – all-age, all-purpose. Actions include ensuring people seeking sanctuary have access to good-quality information, as well as knowing where and how to access services.

#### **Feeling welcome**

Belonging in Manchester is about being included, respected and welcomed. Actions support 'being welcoming of others', which is a key Building Stronger Communities Together Strategy behaviour.

## Involving and empowering people with lived experience of seeking sanctuary, with a specific focus on children and young people

### Children and young people

Actions support Rights of the Child and Manchester's commitment to become a UNICEF Child-Friendly City.<sup>11</sup>

### Lived experience

Actions reflect the Council's commitment to involving Manchester residents in service design and delivery, including a redesign of the Manchester Local Authority of Sanctuary governance structure.

## Improving ways of working across Manchester

### Data

Actions reflect the Council's commitment to putting community voice at the heart of service design and delivery, as well as understanding our changing population and proactively identifying those who might benefit from preventative support.

### Lobbying and influencing policy

Actions support interaction between the Council, partners (including the VCFSE organisations and the Combined Authority), and the Government, and directly respond to engagement findings. Actions under this subheading relate to service delivery, with a focus on improving collaboration and drawing on strengths.

### Trauma-informed practice and training

Actions include ensuring all staff across the Council treat people with dignity and respect, taking into account the trauma they have experienced.

### Joined-up working, sharing best practice, strategic approach

Manchester has an array of services dedicated to working with people seeking sanctuary. Actions are focused on sharing and replicating best practice, which involves all Council services, statutory organisations and VCFSE organisations.

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11. [Our Child-Friendly Manchester](#)

## Glossary

'People seeking sanctuary' is the preferred term used throughout this strategy, as it focuses on people, as opposed to their immigration status. We have actively avoided providing a definition, so that people can self-determine if they recognise themselves as seeking sanctuary.

### Table of terms used in this strategy

Term	Definition
<b>Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS)</b>	The Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) focuses on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Those who have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan and stood up for values such as democracy, women's rights, freedom of speech, and rule of law</li> <li>• Vulnerable people, including women and girls at risk, and members of minority groups at risk (including ethnic and religious minorities and LGBTQ+).</li> </ul>
<b>Afghan Relocations Assistance Policy (ARAP)</b>	The Afghan Relocations Assistance Policy (ARAP) focuses on those Afghan citizens who worked for or with the UK Government in Afghanistan in exposed or meaningful roles.
<b>Claiming asylum</b>	The UK Home Office specifies that a person/persons must apply for asylum if they want to stay in the UK. To be eligible for asylum, a person/persons must have left their country and be unable to go back because they fear persecution.
<b>Displacement</b>	The International Organization for Migration defines displacement as 'the movement of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters'. <sup>12</sup>

12. International Organization for Migration, [Glossary on Migration](#)

Term	Definition
<b>Homes for Ukraine</b>	Homes for Ukraine is a scheme for Ukrainian nationals, or their immediate family members, who have applied to come to the UK on a specific visa due to the conflict in their own country. Many of the Ukrainian nationals have lived, or are still living, with sponsors who welcomed them into their home.
<b>Hong Kong</b>	<p>The UK Home Office defines British national (overseas) as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Someone who was a British overseas territories citizen by connection with Hong Kong who was able to register as a British national (overseas) before 1 July 1997</li> <li>• British overseas territories citizens from Hong Kong who did not register as British nationals (overseas) and had no other nationality or citizenship on 30 June 1997 and became British overseas citizens on 1 July 1997.</li> </ul>
<b>Intersectionality</b>	The interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.
<b>People granted refugee status</b>	The UK Home Office specifies that to stay in the UK as a refugee you must be unable to live safely in any part of your own country because you fear persecution there.
<b>Sanctuary</b>	The City of Sanctuary UK guide to use of language defines sanctuary as safety and protection.



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