

Combined Meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Board, and Surrey Heartlands Integrated Care Partnership - Formal (public)

1. Reference Information

Paper tracking information	
Title:	Surrey Wide Immigration Strategy
HWBS/Surrey Heartlands IC Strategy priority populations:	Possible inclusion of Sanctuary Seekers during future HWBS refresh
Assessed Need including link to HWBS Priority - 1, 2 and/or 3/IC Strategy Ambition 1 and/or 2:	Migrant Health Rapid Needs Assessment Priority 3: Supporting people to reach their potential by addressing the wider determinants of health
HWBS or IC Strategy Outcome(s):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People's basic needs are met (food security, poverty, housing strategy etc) • Children, young people and adults are empowered in their communities • People are safe and feel safe (community safety including domestic abuse, safeguarding)
HWBS system capabilities/IC Strategy Ambition 3 enablers:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowered and Thriving Communities • Clear Governance • Programme Management • Equality Diversity and Inclusion • Data, Insights and Evidence
HWBS/IC Strategy Principles for Working with Communities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community capacity building: 'Building trust and relationships' • Co-designing: 'Deciding together'
Interventions for reducing health inequalities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic / System Level interventions • Service Based interventions
Author(s):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bashir Fatehi, Surrey Immigration Manager, SCC; Bashir.Fatehi@surreycc.gov.uk • Hannah Dirks, Strategic Lead for Strategy and Policy, SCC; Hannah.Dirks@surreycc.gov.uk
Sponsor(s)/Champions:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ruth Hutchison, Director of Public Health, SCC • Mark Nuti, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing, and Public Health, SCC
HWB/ICP meeting date:	11 December 2024
Related HWB/ICP papers:	N/A

10

Annexes/Appendices:	Appendix 1 - Draft Surrey Wide Immigration Strategy Appendix 2 - Analysis of Sanctuary Seeker Engagement
----------------------------	---

2. Executive summary

Led by the Surrey Wide Immigration Group (SWIG), a Surrey Wide Immigration Strategy has been drafted, setting out partners’ joint narrative, values, strategic objectives and agreed governance for the ongoing partnership work to support Sanctuary Seekers in Surrey.

Sanctuary Seekers are a group who, due to their immigration status and/or heightened vulnerability, often have greater need for the services and support of the wider system in Surrey.

The draft strategy sets out key objectives for partners to deliver against under the four sub themes: Meeting the Basic Needs of Sanctuary Seekers, Economic Inclusion, Community and Belonging, and Working Together as a System. It also proposes a strengthened governance structure enabling partners to more effectively shape and deliver services for sanctuary seekers.

This report asks the HWB/ICP to review the draft strategy (Appendix 1), as well as discuss and agree the proposed governance including the proposal for the Surrey Wide Immigration Group to report into the HWB/ICP.

3. Recommendations

The HWB and Surrey Heartlands ICP are asked to:

1. Approve the draft Surrey Wide Immigration Strategy (Appendix 1).
2. Endorse the ongoing engagement on the draft Surrey-Wide Immigration Strategy.
3. Approve the proposed governance structure within the draft strategy, including the HWB and ICP’s ongoing role in overseeing delivery against the strategic objectives.

4. Reason for Recommendations

The Surrey Wide Immigration Strategy closely aligns with the priorities in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, in particular priority 3. As such, SWIG and authors of this report feel that the HWB/ICP are an important oversight group for the delivery of this strategy.

Within this context, the report asks the board to approve the draft strategy and its strategic objectives, as developed and agreed by SWIG. The board is also asked to review the proposed governance and consider its role in the oversight of partnership delivery for Sanctuary Seekers in Surrey.

5. Detail

Surrey has a long and proud history of providing sanctuary for people fleeing crises, from Huguenots escaping persecution in the 16th century to displaced people from both World War 1 and 2. Over the last few years, Surrey has continued to welcome migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees into the county as migration patterns have shifted in response to changing global pressures such as war and instability. The essence of No One Left Behind has been exemplified time and time again by Surrey residents, who have opened their homes and hearts to welcome new arrivals into their communities.

The Surrey Wide Immigration Strategy sets out our intent and role as a system of partners for how we will continue to work to ensure all people are welcomed, feel safe and are supported to achieve the best outcomes, regardless of where and what situation they come from. The strategy brings together the various strands of extensive work partners are already delivering and sets out our objectives as a system.

Immigration is a broad term referring to all forms of voluntary and forced migration into a place, however this strategy will focus on a group that the strategy is labelling as 'Sanctuary Seekers' due to their migration status and/or heightened vulnerability which often result in greater need for the services and support of the wider system in Surrey. This term broadly includes individuals who have fled their home either due to violence or persecution, or continued insecure status at home, and are therefore seeking sanctuary in Surrey. A more detailed definition can be found in the draft strategy (Appendix 1).

Strategic Objectives:

The Surrey Wide Immigration Strategy contains a set of strategic objectives located under four headings: Meeting the Basic Needs of Sanctuary Seekers, Economic Inclusion, Community and Belonging, Working together as a System. The objectives under these categories can be found in the draft strategy (Appendix 1).

The objectives were shaped based on existing Surrey insight and data such as the Migrant Health Rapid Needs Assessment¹, as well as best practice examples from Sanctuary strategies across the UK. They were then refined and added to by partners across the county. Finally, they were discussed and approved by residents with lived experience in seeing sanctuary in Surrey through dedicated focus groups. As such, these objectives reflect the view and commitment of the partners working together through SWIG, as well as residents with lived experience of seeking sanctuary in Surrey.

Governance:

This strategy sets out the systems commitment to developing a robust and appropriate governance structure in order to oversee system-wide activity. SWIG is committed to reviewing this governance on an annual basis to ensure it remains fit-for-purpose to deliver against the strategic objectives in an ever-changing national

¹ [Migrant Health | Surrey-i \(surreyi.gov.uk\)](https://www.surreyi.gov.uk)

and local context. A more detailed breakdown of the governance and delivery mechanisms can be found in the draft strategy (Appendix 1).

Surrey-Wide Immigration Group (SWIG):

SWIG is responsible for coordinating activities and resources across Surrey, addressing immigration challenges, ensuring efficient integration of new residents, capturing the benefits of immigration, and managing pressures on partner services. The group is comprised of local, regional and national partners from across health, education, VCSE (voluntary, community and social enterprise), and local government.

SWIG holds primary responsibility for steering and reporting on the progress of the Surrey Wide Immigration Strategy and its action plan.

SWIG will report into the HWB/ICP as well as the Surrey Chief Executives group through regular reports on the delivery against the action plan.

Thematic, Task and/or Response Sub-Groups:

A number of thematic, task and response sub-groups exist to bring together partners around specific programmes of work related to sanctuary seeker support. By nature, these groups stand up when targeted partnership activity is necessary, based on the current immigration context. Each group is linked into SWIG through board representation.

Regional and National Immigration Groups:

There are a number of groups that have been set up at a regional level or that bring together regional and national partners to discuss immigration activity. Relevant partners in Surrey have representation on these groups and feed information into the wider system through the local governance.

Wider Alignment:

Individual partners in SWIG and the sub-groups will remain aligned with other relevant partnership groups or internal organisational groups, feeding in updates or specific discussion items when relevant and ensuring duplication is avoided.

6. Opportunities/Challenges

The Surrey Wide Immigration Strategy presents the opportunity for more effective and streamlined partnership working to deliver against the systems priorities for supporting sanctuary seekers. It enables partners to better focus joint attention and action, as well as removing risks of duplication or gaps in support and service provision.

Our guiding mission for Surrey is that No One is Left Behind, and in line with this one of our core values for immigration work in Surrey is universal and inclusive services and support. However, it is important to note that the individuals who fall under the term Sanctuary Seeker will have arrived in Surrey under different national schemes and pathways which result in differing levels of funding and service provision being

10

made available to them. As such, partners in the Surrey system are not always able to overcome or mitigate the inequity that is built into the current system.

Furthermore, some cohorts within the term Sanctuary Seekers, may be 'subject to immigration control' resulting in them having No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). In this context, public funds include certain benefits, housing assistance and social housing. As such, when delivering against the joint strategic objectives of this strategy, partners will need to understand and act within the legal bounds of NRPF, ensuring that appropriate support is provided to individuals.

Immigration can be an emotive topic. We hope that the engagement with residents through the customer panel will allow for a temperature check on residents' views. The strategy sets out the systems commitment to taking a participative approach and engaging communities throughout the delivery against the strategy.

7. Timescale and delivery plan

Following the approval of the draft strategy, partners will jointly develop an action plan, with SWIG holding responsibility for monitoring this. The action plan will detail activity against each of the strategic objectives as well as responsibility within the system.

The HWB/ICP will be kept informed on the development of, and delivery against, the action plan for the Surrey Wide Immigration Strategy.

8. What communications and engagement have happened/needs to happen?

Partner Engagement:

- The initial draft strategy and plan for development of this was taken through SWIG three times between July and November. SWIG is comprised of local, regional and national partners from across health, education, VCSE (voluntary, community and social enterprise), and local government.
- A discussion item was taken to each of the active partnership subgroups that feed into SWIG. These groups include the Ukraine Task Force Group, the Housing Officers Group and the Immigration & Education group.
- In addition, four focus groups were hosted to discuss the strategy and its strategic objectives in detail with partners. Three of the focus groups brought together relevant partners from the VCSE, and the final focus group brought together housing, asylum and resettlement officers from the district and borough councils together.

Sanctuary Seeker Engagement:

- A series of focus groups were hosted with residents who have lived experience seeking sanctuary in Surrey.

- The first cohort was made up of 10 adult sanctuary seekers who met three times to review the strategic objectives and discuss their experiences.
- The second cohort was a group of 3 children and young people seeking sanctuary in Surrey who were brought together for two hours to discuss the strategic objective in relation to their experience in Surrey.

Resident engagement:

- Three questions were added to the November Customer Panel survey which was sent to circa. 1,500 residents, with representation for Surrey's age and gender demographics. These questions were multiple choice and asked for residents' awareness and feelings towards services provided to sanctuary seekers by SCC and partners.

9. Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer:

Within the HWB and ICP's Terms of Reference the Immigration Strategy falls under Priority 3 of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy (HWBS) which the HWB/ICP has oversight of. The HWB has a statutory duty to prepare a joint local health and wellbeing strategy and there is a migrant needs assessment as part of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment to which this Immigration Strategy contributes.

10. Next steps

The HWB/ICP is asked to review and approve the strategy in its current draft form. The ongoing engagement set out in section 8 may see minor changes made to this draft after approval.

At present, feedback from the first Surrey County Council Customer Panel is being collated where a representative sample of residents were asked closed questions about services provided by the county council and partners for Sanctuary Seekers. The results, along with the analyse of the engagement with Sanctuary Seekers will be added to the annex of the draft strategy.

In line with the proposed governance structure, the draft strategy will also be taken to the Surrey Chief Execs group in the new year for the group to review and approve the draft strategy.

Following the approval of the draft strategy, partners from SWIG will collaborate to draft an action plan, which will be delivered and monitored through SWIG and other relevant sub-groups. The HWB/ICP and Surrey CEX will be kept informed on the development of, and delivery against, the action plan for the Surrey Wide Immigration Strategy.

Questions to guide discussion:

- Do HWB/ICP members have any questions or requests for clarification in regard to the draft strategy document, especially the strategic objectives within this?
- Do the HWB/ICP approve the draft Surrey Wide Immigration Strategy, as well as endorse the plans to develop an action plan to deliver the objectives of the strategy?
- Do HWB/ICP members approve the suggested governance structure for oversight of the delivery against this structure? How would members like to be engaged in the future?

Appendix 1 – Surrey Wide Immigration Strategy – DRAFT

Overview

The Community Vision for Surrey in 2030² sets out a system-wide view on the ambitions we all share for the county. Partners and residents agreed that we want Surrey to be a uniquely special place where everyone has a great start to life, people live healthy and fulfilling lives, are enabled to achieve their full potential and contribute to their community. As partners we agree that Surrey is a welcoming and inclusive county with a fundamental goal to support communities in accessing opportunities and tackling inequalities wherever and for whomever they exist in our county. We envision Surrey to be a place where **no one is left behind**.

Global migration is complex and multifaceted but is a phenomenon that has been present throughout human history. Although migration can bring with it some challenges, countries, organisations and communities also recognise the significant economic, social and cultural value that migration offers.

Surrey has a long and proud history of providing sanctuary for people fleeing crises, from Huguenots escaping persecution in the 16th century to displaced people from both World War 1 and 2³. Over the last few years, Surrey has continued to welcome migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees into the county as migration patterns have shifted in response to changing global pressures such as war and instability. The essence of No One Left Behind has been exemplified time and time again by Surrey residents, who have opened their homes and hearts to welcome new arrivals into their communities. It is likely that further global instability and the growing effects of climate change will continue to impact the number of people seeking sanctuary in our county, and Surrey has a strong foundation from which to grow its support for those finding safety here.

This strategy sets out our intent and role as a system of partners for how we will continue to work to ensure all people are welcomed, feel safe and are supported to achieve the best outcomes, regardless of where and what situation they come from. Supporting our communities and our residents through this process requires a partnership approach on every level and in every part of our county. This strategy brings together the various strands of extensive work partners are already delivering and sets out our objectives as a system.

Immigration in Surrey

Immigration within Surrey remains a dynamic situation with a regular flow of people in and out of the county.

Since the notable increase in immigration after welcoming Syrian refugees in 2016, our system-wide effort has expanded in recent years with the evacuation of initially military personnel and those supporting them from Kabul, Afghanistan and then Afghan civilians and more recently, those arriving in the UK from the Ukraine. British Nationals from Hong Kong have also been welcomed into Surrey, under their national re-settlement scheme. In

² [Community vision for Surrey in 2030 - Surrey County Council](#)

³ [Refugees \(exploringsurreypast.org.uk\)](#)

addition, Surrey is providing accommodation for asylum seekers, most notably those that arrive in small boats having crossed the channel. A number of these are Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), who warrant the utmost sensitivity in their treatment.

In recent years, the system has developed a substantial amount of data and insights on the experiences of migrants, communities and service providers in Surrey.

- The Migrant Health Rapid Needs Assessment⁴, published in 2023, highlighted the challenges experienced by vulnerable cohorts of migrants. It identified issues such as difficulty accessing services, difference in presentation and awareness of mental health conditions, the impact of cultural differences and the complex nature of pre-migratory experiences and how these can all significantly impact the health and wellbeing of migrants.
- Similarly, the 2024 annual Public Health Report⁵ looked at the health needs of vulnerable migrants in Surrey. The report focused on five key areas of need, primary care, mental health, women and children’s health, education and housing.
- A 2024 needs assessment looked into the experiences of guests and hosts that were part of the Homes4Ukraine scheme. The assessment presented findings on guest and host relations, guest access to jobs and skills, guest access to support for mental health and wellbeing, and children’s experiences of settling into school in the UK.
- Sanctuary Seeker focus groups were brought together specifically to discuss the drafted contents of this strategy to help inform and set the strategic direction and priorities for the system (Appendix 2).

10

These insights paint a clear picture of the challenges and barriers facing both sanctuary seeking residents and service providers within Surrey. They have therefore shaped the contents and direction of this Surrey-wide strategy.

Definition and Scope

Immigration is a broad term referring to all forms of voluntary and forced migration into a place, however this strategy will focus on a group we are labelling as ‘**Sanctuary Seekers**’ due to their migration status and/or heightened vulnerability which often result in greater need for the services and support of the wider system in Surrey. This term broadly includes individuals who have fled their home either due to violence or persecution, or continued insecure status at home, and are therefore seeking sanctuary in Surrey.

Sanctuary Seeker may include, but is not limited to:

- Someone seeking asylum
- Someone with refugee status
- Someone who has arrived as part of a resettlement scheme
- Someone who has been sponsored (such as under the Ukrainian Visa Schemes)
- Someone who has lived, worked, or contributed for years but experiences insecurity, discrimination, and hardship because of insecure or irregular immigration status
- Someone who has relocated due to significant changes in political or legal conditions in their place of origin, impacting their freedoms and rights

⁴ [Migrant Health | Surrey-i \(surreyi.gov.uk\)](https://www.surreyi.gov.uk/migrant-health)

⁵ [The Health Needs of Vulnerable Migrants in Surrey. Annual Public Health Report. \(surreyi.gov.uk\)](https://www.surreyi.gov.uk/health-needs-vulnerable-migrants)

More detailed definitions of the cohorts included within the Sanctuary Seekers term can be found in the annex of this report.

Our guiding mission for Surrey is that No One is Left Behind, and in line with this one of our core values for immigration work in Surrey is universal and inclusive services and support. However, it is important to note that the individuals who fall under the term Sanctuary Seeker will have arrived in Surrey under different national schemes and pathways which result in differing levels of funding and service provision being made available to them. As such, partners in the Surrey system are not always able to overcome or mitigate the inequity that is built into the current system.

Furthermore, some cohorts within the term Sanctuary Seekers, may be 'subject to immigration control' resulting in them having No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)⁶. In this context, public funds include certain benefits, housing assistance and social housing. As such, when delivering against the joint strategic objectives of this strategy, partners will need to understand and act within the legal bounds of NRPF, ensuring that appropriate support is provided to individuals.

Within this context, this strategy sets our ambition to, where possible, welcome every sanctuary seeker in Surrey with the same care, support and dignity.

Principles for Action

Values

- **Welcoming** - The primary guiding principle for our response to sanctuary seekers will be make clear that they are welcomed and valued in the county. We treat sanctuary seekers with respect and dignity, and on an equal basis with all residents.
- **Inclusive** – We welcome and respect people from all backgrounds, place the highest value on diversity and are committed to equality.
- **Universal** - Sanctuary seeker groups were clear that "what is good for one marginalised group is good for all". The county will work to make sure that, wherever possible, the services it offers are open to all on a consistent basis.
- **Clear** - Organisations working with sanctuary seekers emphasise the importance of clarity - around services available, around policies on housing eligibility, on how to access services, and the time it may take. The system of partners will ensure that they are clear in their communication and interactions with sanctuary seekers about what they can expect and when.
- **Collaborative** – Each partner recognises that it is just one part of a network of organisations and groups which support sanctuary seekers. It will endeavour to deliver joined-up services, to signpost to other services and providers when needed, and to work in partnership with community groups.

⁶ [Immigration conditions | NRPF Network](#)

- **Accessible** - Sanctuary Seekers should be able to access the right service in the right place at the right time. Partners will make sure that services are accessible to sanctuary seekers, including access to translated documents and interpreters when needed.
- **Participative** - We value and recognise the contribution of all involved in making Surrey a place of sanctuary. We aspire to ensure people seeking sanctuary are fully involved in decision making processes.
- **Inspiring** - We work with enthusiasm and positivity and are determined to surpass what has already been achieved to welcome 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 act in the interests of people seeking sanctuary, service providers and our wider communities.
- **Outcomes-driven & Effectiveness** – We focus on delivery, and maximising our collective action to make best use of resources
- **Evidence-led** – We act based on the facts and adapt our approach as the facts change the nature of our delivery landscape

Our Role as a System

As a system we will...

1. **Offer a positive vision** of a culture of welcome and hospitality to all. We will promote in our county an unwavering commitment to equality, protecting and promoting the rights and welfare of all our residents.
2. **Be accountable for strategic delivery** of support systems and services across the county which help existing residents, new residents, groupings, and communities to make the most of the potential within population change.
3. **Promote relationships of friendship and community** between local people and those seeking sanctuary. We will support community development and foster good community relations, while rejecting all forms of discrimination.
4. **Recognise and encourage collaboration to achieve our collective aims.** We will work as partners and communities to improve the county for everyone who lives and works here, using our influence to create positive changes.
5. **Identify opportunities for practical action** and work on common cause issues to effect change within and across communities.

Objectives

As a system, we will seek to deliver against the following objectives:

1. Meeting the Basic Needs of Sanctuary Seekers

We prioritise:	Our objectives:
Secure and Stable Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sanctuary Seekers will be supported with access to information on housing options, rights and responsibilities. ▪ Surrey partners will work alongside housing providers to ensure that, where possible, Sanctuary Seekers have access to timely and good quality housing support. ▪ When accommodation is provided, it will meet local authority housing standards.
Health and Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sanctuary Seekers will be supported to access appropriate medical support upon arrival in Surrey. This may include emergency treatment, immunizations, and infectious disease screening. ▪ Sanctuary Seekers will be assisted in registering with local GPs and dentists. ▪ Sanctuary Seekers will be assisted in accessing appropriate adult and children’s social care services. ▪ Where available, mental health and well-being services will be accessible and tailored to meet the specific needs of Sanctuary Seekers. ▪ All health services will provide professional interpreting and translation services in line with NHS guidance. ▪ Health promotion and awareness services will be available to reduce health inequalities.
Preventing Crisis, Destitution or Homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Where necessary, Sanctuary Seekers will be supported with timely access to appropriate welfare support to prevent crises and acute poverty, thereby reducing future demand on social care and health care services.
Security and Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All partners play an active role in raising the awareness of the needs and value-add of Sanctuary Seekers in the community to make Surrey a safe and welcoming place for everyone. ▪ Sanctuary Seekers are made aware of their rights and responsibilities in the UK and are supported with access to legal advice and representation when needed. ▪ Culturally sensitive advice and support will be provided on topics such as safeguarding and domestic abuse. ▪ Sanctuary Seekers feel safe, trust authorities, and are confident in reporting crime, including hate crime. ▪ Young Sanctuary Seekers, including UASC and care leavers, will be supported to feel safe and have opportunities to develop and thrive.

2. Economic Inclusion

We Prioritise:	Our Objectives:
Access to Skills and Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sanctuary Seekers skills, qualifications and work experience are assessed and recognised by relevant agencies. Sanctuary Seekers are supported with access to education, training, volunteering, and work experience opportunities that meet their aspirations and increase employability. Schools, colleges, and other educational providers support Sanctuary Seekers and ensure they feel welcomed. Sanctuary-seeking children have timely access to education in early year settings, schools and colleges that are safe and welcoming, with additional support to ensure academic attainment and social integration.
Participation in the Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where permitted by immigration status, Sanctuary Seekers will be supported to access employment and business development support aligned with their needs and aspirations, as part of the local employment support offer.
Advocacy and awareness building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employers, businesses and education providers are educated on Sanctuary Seekers' rights and needs, promoting employment opportunities.
Addressing Barriers to Economic Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The English language needs of Sanctuary Seekers will be assessed as soon as possible after arrival using consistent and comprehensive tools, such as the British Council self-assessor. Sanctuary Seekers will have access to ESOL provision that is suitable to their individual needs and aspirations, including informal learning opportunities. Sanctuary Seekers will be supported with digital access and are helped to gain the necessary skills, equipment, and connectivity to use online services. Sanctuary seekers are supported with information and guidance on how to access local transport provision.

3. Community and Belonging

We Priorities:	Our Objectives:
Community Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural, leisure, sports and wider voluntary, community and faith sectors will engage in the integration of Sanctuary Seekers through safe, accessible, and welcoming activities. Recognising the importance of social connection for mental health and wellbeing, Sanctuary Seekers will be supported to make sustainable connections with people from all backgrounds and have access to meaningful opportunities to interact with others.
Bringing Communities Along	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents and community groups will be informed and supported with welcoming sanctuary seekers into their communities, helping to educate, upskill and raise

	<p>awareness of the value sanctuary seekers bring to their host communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take a partnership approach to promoting community cohesion and tackling hate crime.
--	---

4. Working Together as a System

We Prioritise:	Our Objectives:
Information and Data Sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Services and organisations in Surrey have access to, and use of, information and data sources about Sanctuary Seekers in the county. Through the governance structure, partners share relevant data and insights in an effective and timely manner, to inform decision making. Existing services are mapped and their information is easily accessible so partners are able to signpost sanctuary seekers to available support.
Participative approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sanctuary Seeker communities will be involved in data production, research, and evaluating service impacts where possible. Feedback from Sanctuary Seekers will be sought to mitigate any negative service impacts. Ensure sanctuary seekers have adequate means of understanding and communicating with the system and their community, through ESOL provision and translation services.
Partnership Working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providers in Surrey collaborate effectively with each other through strong partnerships, robust referral mechanisms and joint commissioning. Robust and appropriate governance is developed to oversee system-wide activity, and this governance is reviewed on an annual basis to ensure it remains fit-for-purpose.
Service and provision planning and management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership within services will be committed to sanctuary seeker integration and the development of welcoming and inclusive services. Positive action for Sanctuary Seekers will be promoted, and where possible resources allocated to eliminate access disadvantages.
Training and support for staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raise awareness and understanding of cultural differences between service users, providers, commissioners, and communities. Raise awareness of the impact of trauma on Sanctuary Seekers and the need for services to be trauma informed. Ensure frontline staff working with sanctuary seekers have access to occupational mental health and wellbeing support and/or training.
Responsibilities as Employers and Commissioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner organisations to take responsibility both as employers and, where relevant, commissioners to understand, mitigate and address modern slavery through appropriate policies and activities.

10

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide staff and commissioners with anti-slavery training to ensure organisations are equipped to recognise and address exploitation where present. Take a partnership approach to providing comprehensive support for victims of modern slavery.
Sustainable Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The system works together to identify and map the funding available to support sanctuary seekers, making any necessary changes to the funding allocation process in order to maximise and ensure best use of limited resources. Explore alternative funding provision such as through philanthropic sources.
Advocacy and Lobbying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raise awareness of the experiences and needs of sanctuary seekers with national stakeholders, ensuring national leadership is equipped with the information to make systematic changes.

Governance

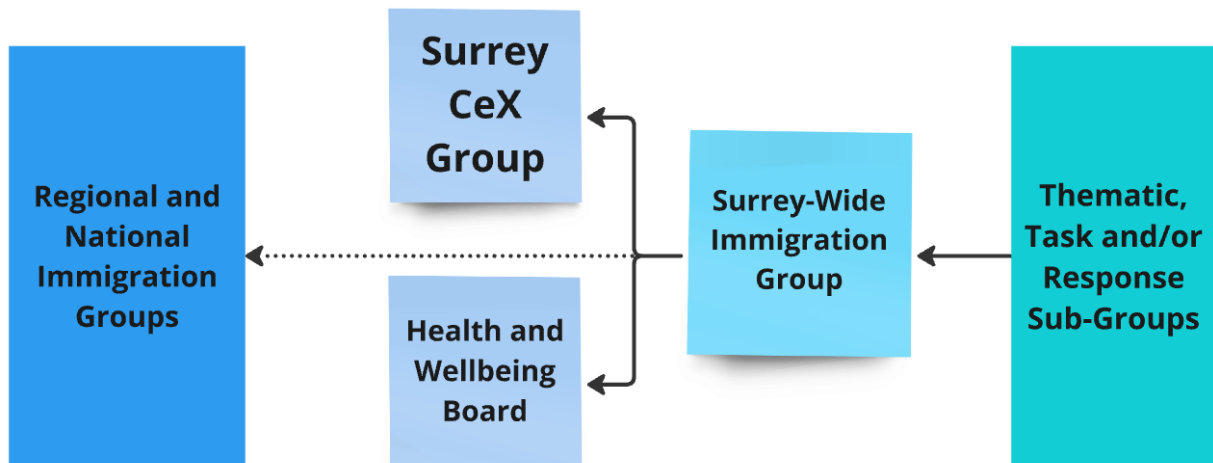
Partners Across Surrey

There is an extensive amount of partnership work already taking place across the county between health services, education providers, voluntary, community and faith groups, local government, local businesses, central government departments and residents themselves. These partners, forming the wider system, have collectively worked to accommodate, care for, and settle sanctuary seekers in Surrey, both on a temporary and permanent basis. Each of these partners has an important and integral role to play in responding and supporting sanctuary seeker communities in the most effective way.

In order to deliver the objectives within this strategy, we must make the best use of our collective resources, work in an effective way as possible, not duplicate effort, celebrate successes together, remain flexible to the changing context and find solutions to issues as a collective.

System Governance Structure

This strategy sets out the systems commitment to developing a robust and appropriate governance structure in order to oversee system-wide activity. The system is committed to reviewing this governance on an annual basis to ensure it remains fit-for-purpose to deliver against the strategic objectives in an ever-changing national and local context.



Surrey-Wide Immigration Group (SWIG):

SWIG is responsible for coordinating activities and resources across Surrey, addressing immigration challenges, ensuring efficient integration of new residents, capturing the benefits of immigration, and managing pressures on partner services. The group is comprised of local, regional and national partners from across health, education, VCSE (voluntary, community and social enterprise), and local government.

SWIG holds primary responsibility for steering and reporting on the progress of the Surrey Wide Immigration Strategy and its Action Plan.

SWIG will report into the Health and Wellbeing Board/Integrated Care Partnership, as well as the Surrey Chief Executives group through regular reports on the delivery against the action plan.

Thematic, Task and/or Response Sub-Groups:

A number of thematic, task and response groups exist to bring together partners around specific programmes of work related to sanctuary seeker support. By nature, these groups stand up when targeted partnership activity is necessary, based on the current immigration context. They operate in line with their own agreed Terms of References and decision-making structure. However, when a system-wide decision or discussion is needed this will be escalated to SWIG for consideration. Each group is linked into SWIG through board representation.

Regional and National Immigration Groups:

There are a number of groups that have been set up at a regional level or that bring together regional and national partners to discuss immigration activity. Relevant partners in Surrey have representation on these groups and feed information into the wider system through the local governance.

In order to raise awareness of the experiences and needs of sanctuary seekers in Surrey with national stakeholders, SWIG will feed into national and regional immigration groups

where necessary, whilst transferring important information from these groups into SWIG to ensure local conversations are in line with the regional and national context.

Wider Alignment:

Individual partners in SWIG and the sub-groups will remain aligned with other relevant partnership groups or internal organisational groups, feeding in updates or specific discussion items when relevant and ensuring duplication is avoided.

Accountability and Delivery Mechanisms

The primary delivery mechanism for this strategy is through an action plan that sets out activity against each of the agreed upon objectives within the strategy. The action plan is an iterative document and is able to flex in line with the changing context and realistic delivery timescales.

Accountability for the action plan sits with SWIG. SWIG will have a standing item on the delivery against this action plan and the group will produce regular progress reports to share with the wider governance and senior stakeholders. Ownership of individual objectives sit with the appropriate sub-group or, in some cases, with individual partners to lead.

Importantly, and in-line with the strategic objective to take a participative approach, Sanctuary Seekers will be engaged on the delivery against objectives where appropriate, ensuring that their lived experience is factored into decision making and prioritisation.

10

Appendix 2 – Sanctuary Seeker Lived Experience Engagement - Report

Surrey County Council - Surrey Wide Immigration Strategy Development

Participation Phase 3: Sanctuary Seekers Lived Experience Engagement

Facilitated by Jenny Cave-Jones (Research Officer, RIU) & Bashir Fatehi (Surrey County Council (SCC) Immigration Manager, C&P, PH)

Full Report

by Jenny Cave-Jones

28.11.2024

Introduction

This research took place as part of the wider system and public participation process in designing the Surrey Wide Immigration Strategy. The engagement process took the following phases:

1. Internal SCC engagement phase
2. External partner engagement phase
3. Sanctuary Seeker Lived Experience Participation
4. Resident Research through Customer Panel Survey

This report sets out the approach and findings of Phase 3: Sanctuary Seeker Lived Experience Participation. It is structured with the following sections: aims, sample, data collection, data analysis, findings, discussion, conclusion and key recommendations. The 'findings' section contains many of the human experiences shared against the objectives, whilst the 'discussion' and 'key recommendations' sections both contain information about the feedback on delivery. Whilst this sits technically outside the scope of the strategic objectives review, there were rich discussion, views and ideas which are outlined to support the ultimate endeavour of meaningful implementation.

Aims

To find out:

- whether participants identified and agreed with use of the term 'Sanctuary Seekers'
- whether participants agreed with the draft strategic objectives included in the Surrey Wide Immigration Strategy
- about experiences participants have had seeking sanctuary in Surrey, in relation to the strategic objectives
- about insights participants have that may further inform the final shaping of the strategy's values and objectives.

Sample

Ten adults participated in total, with two groups of five each attending three sessions, in addition to four one to one catch up sessions due to participant non-attendance at one or more of the three planned meeting slots. Male and female participants attended, with countries of origin being Hong Kong, Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan. Immigration status was variously identified as settled, asylum seeker or refugee and immigration visa programmes such as HK BNO and Homes for Ukraine.

- Interpreters required for adult groups: Arabic, Ukrainian, Dari
- Translation modes: Microsoft Teams basic transcript translation.
- Written documents of session summaries and pre-session reading shared with participants in English and language of origin as required.

The Young People Focus Group consisted of three male participants aged between eighteen and twenty-seven years; countries of origin being Iran, Nicaragua and Sudan, with either settled or refugee status.

10

Data collection methods

Quantitative

A Surrey Says Survey (online) was distributed via organisational contacts, and demographic information and availability of people interested in participating was collected.

Invites were then sent to participants who met the identified priorities in order to ensure that, where possible, there was representation across county-of-origin, gender, immigration status and age.

Qualitative

This section includes ethical considerations around how this data was collected.

Focus Groups (online):

In order to accommodate the participants availability, the group of adults was split into two subgroups, one meeting in the morning and the other in the evening. Each subgroup took part in three session over the 17th, 24th of October and 7th November. Although the sessions were scheduled for hour, most lasted one and a half hours and it became apparent this was the minimum time allocation needed given the nature of the content and richness of experience sharing. Several one-to-one sessions were also facilitated with participants who were unable to attend one of the group sessions for various reasons, in order to ensure thorough capture from all participants. These lasted up to one hour. Each participant was gifted a £25 voucher per session, up to a total of £75 for all three sessions.

A decision was taken to interview the participant who is an SCC employee separately to avoid other participants potentially being less open if the group space contains SCC employees in addition to core facilitators

One participant disclosed their current status as a Borough Councillor in Surrey at the end of the first session. Given the group had positively bonded at that point, the decision was made to retain the group as it was, in the best interests of the participants.

Before each meeting, an agenda and pre-reading was sent to participants, and after each meeting a summary of discussion for any comments and amendments. Versions were sent in English, Dari, Arabic and Ukrainian. Participants were informed they will receive a summary report at the end of the sessions once collated.

The young person focus group took place as one, two-hour session with three young people aged between eighteen and twenty-seven years old.

In all groups, a trauma-informed approach was taken, and the key principles of safety, trust, choice, collaboration, empowerment and cultural consideration/ intersectionality were named to the groups as the relational framework, alongside agreement around the key aspects of confidentiality and consent. Contextual aspects, such as any sharing not negatively affecting their status or situation, were clearly named. It was explained that the facilitation would be led by the Research Officer with support from the Immigration Manager and any session translators, and that for any issues requiring specialist advice, the Immigration Manager would be available for a one-to-one support session at a later point for participants seeking help with personal circumstances.

For the young person group, the facilitation differed to include a representative from Big Leaf who was familiar to the young people, alongside the Surrey County Council Research Officer. The young people involved have direct support in place from Big Leaf but were also offered the opportunity to contact the County Council's Immigration Manager at any future point for advice or assistance.

Data analysis methods

A Thematic Analysis (light touch) was conducted to include main themes, insights, experiences and ideas put forward.

Findings

The term 'Sanctuary Seeker' was unanimously welcomed by all participants, though with the clear caveat that a definition should accompany any usage of it. The purpose of this is to:

Define what 'sanctuary' means in this context – different cultures ascribe various meanings to the word

Clarify that it is being used as an overarching term to describe anyone who might be going through the legal processes related to immigration and is an intended term of humanity rather than a legal definition or separate category.

Participants were in unanimous agreement with all objectives of the draft strategy, whilst sharing their own experiences around each one, and consistently referring to the underpinning delivery mechanisms that will need to be in place, with key themes being: action, accountability, and outcome measures.

There follows a summary under each objective heading of the insights provided by the participants in these groups. There were varied experiences, some being culture specific, whilst several themes were recurrent regardless of country of origin, immigration status, or resettlement route. It became quickly apparent during the session discussions that many experiences, both positive and negative, sit across more than one objective, each impacting the effectiveness of the other.

Secure and Stable Housing

Experiences varied from receiving the right information and timely support with suitable housing provided, to not having the correct or complete information around rights and processes, unsuitable accommodation (hotel, temporary etc), borrowing money to self-fund private renting and associated stresses.

Private landlords charging one year rent in advance (circa 20K), an experience shared by Ukrainian and Hong Kong participants, can significantly add to stress and limit options whilst creating more debt. This arrangement was described as being proposed by landlords in lieu of references they deem acceptable. Participants from Hong Kong also shared experiences of estate management companies increasing fees and explaining that this was due to the increased security cost incurred to protect migrant tenants.

One participant described how they worked two jobs, 72 hours a week in order to get references to rent somewhere, because their family had not received the correct information about housing options. The participant described it as being like 'stuck in a circle' and landlords would still not accept references which resulted in borrowing money for one year upfront, in addition to exhaustion from parenting three children at the same time.

Another participant became upset when sharing their experience of where they and their family are currently living:

'You know when you go to a new place it is difficult to settle about and some places with the war we've lived in have been unsuitable and very tough. I didn't want that for my kids. I want them to grow up in a better place.'

'There is no parking close by.... and if (my) kids sleep,(I) need to wait in the car till they wake up to be able to walk back to the flat...the windows are very low and with their age they can easily climb into the window....the windows are exposed, although

I covered it, but as a Muslim, you know that I wear the hijab. So at home I take off my hijab. Well, when I want to open the windows for ventilation, I need to put on my hijab because it would be too exposed.'

Young people described experiencing the housing system as very complicated without much help to understand the different categories and bandings of priority, for example. One young person said that seeing their Personal Advisor every eight weeks was not enough for the support and information that was needed.

Transport

Transport was described in all groups as posing several challenges; frequency of services, costs (being given discounted fares only for limited periods), navigating bus systems (especially where there are multiple companies operating with different fares) and availability of services more rurally. Delays re-issuing free travel passes caused stress and travel limitations for one family.

It was raised by the young people that in London and Surrey where Transport for London (TFL) operated, it was much easier than other areas. They had also experienced being given no or minimal advice by Personal Advisors and accommodation Support Workers respectively, which added to stress and confusion about how to travel in the most efficient way.

Health and Wellbeing

Most participants had been able to register with a GP fairly easily, and there were mixed experiences with some praising care, especially of children and in one case, outstanding signposting. It was also apparent, though, that not all were aware of the scope of issues GP's can provide support with, for example mental health.

Participants also explained a lack of information and awareness around the role of Special Education Needs and Disabilities Co-ordinator (SENDCo's) in school, and English As a second Language (EAL) support staff. Registration with an NHS dentist had only been successfully experienced by one participant, with others struggling and quoted large sums privately for needed dental work. Participants described a lack of understanding around wide reaching impacts of contextual Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (C-PTSD) especially in adolescence, parenting, inter and intra cultural bullying.

The young people shared that it is very important to be able to talk to someone they have a trusted relationship with about anything which might be bothering them in terms of mental/ emotional wellbeing. And that being heard, understood and validated is very helpful. One young person was passionate about suggesting therapy should be much more readily available, and that there needs to be far greater understanding generally about what Young Sanctuary Seekers may have experienced prior to arrival and once in the host country.

Surrey was described as a beautiful place with lovely nature, peaceful and quiet, though also isolating where transport was an issue, and especially where people were housed rurally, delayed issue of bus passes had caused already sparse public transport options to be more of a stressor for integrating into the local community and visiting other places of interest.

Being able to learn and speak better English was relevant here too so as to more fully understand communications about, and access, wellbeing opportunities and activities.

Preventing Crisis and Destitution

It was agreed that clear definition around the meaning of 'Crisis and Destitution' in this context is needed, and clearer explanation of this objective and what meeting it means.

Information about rights and support were described as not only needing to be disseminated on arrival but on an ongoing basis and in different ways due to overwhelm of traumatic experiences and adjustment in the initial stages of resettlement.

Security and Safety

Participants had mixed experiences of feeling safe, often depending on housing and location. One participant described feeling generally safe in Woking because of the multicultural aspect, but unsafe at night and in their job at a local supermarket because adolescents would come in regularly and shoplift. The participant said they had not experienced anything in regard to their culture or immigration status specifically but that they would be advising their children not to go out at night when they are older due to this general cultural issue of youths in groups late at night locally, which can feel threatening, and said they would be interested to know if this was the case across Surrey and nationally too.

Young people spoke about feeling safe in Surrey, one described seeing police around generally who are always friendly but had friends in other areas of the UK who did not feel safe and had been told there was less preventative police presence in areas such as Liverpool and Manchester. They spoke particularly about the riots and one young person described feeling scared and wondering if they would need to move country, thinking 'where to next' because 'I can't change the colour of my skin.'

An adult participant described feeling safe at all times in their neighbourhood and very welcomed by many different parts of the community with meaningful GP signposting which led to inclusion and relationship building.

Access to Skills and Education

The adult participants discussed the experience of accessing skills and education for children and young people in their family or community. There were several examples given of the need for educators/ schools be more aware of, the specific challenges that sanctuary seeker children face at different points in their development and how to provide support in these circumstances.

Examples were given of how it can be harder for Sanctuary Seekers to get diagnoses and support for children with additional needs due to lack of information and language barriers, such as a pediatrician mis-understanding a parent explaining there was no autism in their family that they were aware of. This resulted in a discharge with the note that the parent did not believe the child was autistic. It then took several months for a diagnosis to be given, which is what the parent was hoping for initially. This had an impact on schooling, and support offered which caused great stress to both parent and child.

Adult participants were keen to access various learning and courses, some advanced vocational, some to learn other skills/ trades, in addition to improving English language skills but had mixed experiences around being able to find information about opportunities.

The young people all described situations of being unable to progress in ways they are trying to learn and earn money, and said whilst the objectives seemed very good, what actually happens currently is very different. One young person described being assigned to an ESOL college course by their social worker, when their language skills were already at a standard for subject study, and identification and advocacy from Big Leaf Foundation (BLF) meant they were able to undertake A-Levels instead and is now at university training as an Allied Health Professional. Another described wanting to be a barber and being told because they are over 19 years of age they would need to pay for a Level 1 course in London before being accepted for Level 2 locally. They cannot afford to pay in excess of £1,000 for this course.

Participation in the Economy

Some participants described how they are struggling to make sense of how people with advanced qualifications can access suitable work. Issues around qualification recognition and networking opportunities were also raised. Some described Job Centres as being very limited in terms of what they could offer beyond basic skills job opportunities.

'I personally encountered an issue with the recognition of my Master's degree from the National Technical University of Ukraine in the field of science. The UK government needs to launch a specific program for the recognition of Ukrainian diplomas, just as it does for Switzerland and other countries. Wherever I turned, I did not receive support in finding a job in the IT sector, even though programming was a

core subject of my degree. Is there a list of companies that are willing to hire me according to my technical background?'

Addressing Barriers to Economic Inclusion

A recurring theme here that also came up in discussions around Health and Wellbeing and Skills and Education was the quality and availability of advance English Language Classes. It was recognised that sometimes these classes are unavailable and inaccessible despite there being a high need and desire from Sanctuary Seekers to further English skills in order to attain employment that reflects their other qualifications, skills and experience.

Advocacy and Awareness Building

Some participants described positive experience of making local connections, feeling supported and advocated for in adjusting and settling into life in the UK. Participants highlighted workers who they felt had passionately advocated for them. Others described more difficult experiences of receiving inadequate support and understanding from others about what they have been through and challenges they continue to face when trying to get information, advice and support about meeting the needs of themselves and their dependants.

Community and Belonging:

Better quality and more English classes needed were raised specifically in relation to several objectives, this being one of them, highlighting the far-reaching impact of communication skills across each area.

Wider community education around cultural understanding needed, so that local people can understand communication differences are cultural not rudeness or unwillingness to integrate. For example, Ukrainian culture in verbal interactions tends to be very direct and blunt, without saying sorry and thank you often, and no small talk, which has been something participants have had to learn to do but would also like it if other cultures in the UK understood this and that the communication difference does not represent values that are any less kind or caring.

Participants discussed that there needs to be more understanding from all service providers around both the value and complexities of peer support, with some participants describing experiences of bullying and invalidation from other sanctuary seekers within their own culture. One participant described a situation where they experienced this whilst in hospital, from a social worker who had also experienced sanctuary seeking in Surrey.

Positive experiences were shared about Libraries – that the welcoming staff with a wealth of useful information, and free children’s activities creates a sense of inclusion, belonging and feeling valued for the whole family.

‘The community that I’m living in is fantastic and a lot of good people, good families around so if we want to see anyone, a neighbour, mostly we see them in the park or the community centre.’

Positive experiences highlighted outcomes when the system works well, and as one participant stated:

‘people smiling...cookies in the library...the little things are the big things’ in reference to community-based services and connections

Participative Approach

Participants agreed the importance of continued involvement of sanctuary seekers in any work concerning this demographic and would welcome further work with SCC and partners in shaping the delivery of the strategy, with interest expressed around coming together at intervals as the delivery against this strategy progresses.

Service and Provision Planning and Management

Participants raised throughout that although they were in full agreement with the objectives, they were keen to see the delivery mechanisms and the importance of action, accountability and outcome measures.

Training and Support for Staff

It was suggested that all relevant staff should receive training to increase understanding around what sanctuary seeking residents and colleagues might be experiencing. The idea of a Sanctuary Seeker identity card was also put forward, which would be a card that people could give to staff for the purposes of not needing to repeat their situation each time, and the staff member instantly knowing that the person is at much higher risk/ likelihood of having had traumatic experiences.

Reflection

Shared by groups verbally prior to close of final session:

Participants felt engaged in the process, and felt it had benefited them to attend in being heard

Participants felt safe to share their own experiences in the space

Participants were very positive about SCC doing this engagement but felt more time would have been useful

'I am confident and grateful that all who work at Surrey Council are committed to improving the lives of asylum seekers.'

'I just wanted to thank you... for the conversation and especially for acknowledging and validating our struggles and my personal pain.'

Conclusion

The term 'Sanctuary Seeker' was welcomed as an overarching descriptor, with a topline definition being put in place for clarity of meaning. Other terms, such as 'crisis and destitution' also require topline definition, and further shaping of the associated objectives to be more specific in how crisis and destitution will be prevented.

All participants agreed with the draft objectives in the Surrey Wide Immigration Strategy.

Receiving and being able to find correct and full information was an experiential theme of participants throughout discussion of all the objectives, and it is important to note that many participants were not aware of Surrey County Council's own website information page, including the SCC employee participant.

Acknowledgement of, and reference to, the various types and layers of traumatic experiences represented was an important part of helping participants feel understood and reassured in sharing their thoughts and experiences in the focus group space.

Further to the strategic objectives being confirmed, key themes highlighted were the required underpinning delivery actions, accountability and outcome measures; what these will look like, and how these will be communicated to the public,

A combination of legal loopholes, miscommunications, lack of communication, cultural misunderstanding and challenges such as being in unsuitable housing, C-PTSD, caring for children with additional needs, and many more all lead to ongoing difficulties and stressors layered on top of already very traumatic experiences.

A key recommendation is that all system workers are trained in understanding the experiences of Sanctuary Seekers through a trauma-informed lens, and that there continues to be Sanctuary Seeker involvement in the shaping of delivery planning moving forward.

This page is intentionally left blank