



Richmond Borough of Sanctuary Strategy



*LONDON BOROUGH OF
RICHMOND UPON THAMES*



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INTRODUCTION

In December 2022, Richmond Council passed a motion to become a Borough of Sanctuary, an accreditation awarded by City of Sanctuary to boroughs that go above and beyond to welcome and support sanctuary-seeking residents. This strategy sets out the three-year action plan and partnership working with the Voluntary and Community Sector, in collaboration with people with lived-experience.

Richmond has a proud history of welcoming refugees into its community, from the arrival of Belgians during World War I, to more recent populations of displaced Afghans, Syrians, Hong Kongers, and Ukrainians. The Council deeply appreciates the invaluable contributions made by sanctuary-seekers to the borough, and this strategy outlines the comprehensive plan to continue providing support for all those who arrive here.

In more recent years, Richmond has provided a warm welcome to Afghan and Syrian families through the government's resettlement schemes, with the borough supporting one of the highest number of Syrian refugees in London. In addition, many families from Hong Kong have arrived in Richmond, with the largest numbers settling in North Sheen and Twickenham Town. By April 2022, 239 Hong Kong students were enrolled in state schools across the borough, highlighting the welcoming communities and excellent schools that make up Richmond.

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, over 600 Richmond households have welcomed Ukrainians into their homes and provided accommodation. This generosity from residents has resulted in almost 1000 Ukrainians arriving in the borough since March 2022. This is the eighth highest population in London, and sixteenth highest nationally, reflecting the incredible hospitality of Richmond's residents. Alongside individual households, the outpouring of support from community groups, faith groups and local organisations has been paramount in welcoming Ukrainians and supporting their integration into employment, education and beyond.



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VALUES AND COMMITMENTS

Our vision is for Richmond to be a place where all sanctuary-seekers feel welcome, safe and have access to opportunities and the support to thrive. This vision is underpinned by the following principles, created in collaboration with the Richmond Sanctuary Partnership:

Accessible

- We aim to remove barriers for sanctuary-seekers to access support, working towards a more joined-up approach where people feel supported and welcomed.

Collaborative

- This strategy was drafted in collaboration with the voluntary sector and statutory partners. We will continue to grow this partnership and recognise our collective strengths to best support sanctuary-seekers across Richmond.

Non-judgemental

- We recognise the values of trust and honesty, and we aim for all sanctuary-seekers to access services and support feeling free of judgement or prejudice.

In addition to this and as a member of the City of Sanctuary network, we are committed to the values of:

Inclusiveness: *We welcome and respect people from all backgrounds, place the highest value on diversity and are committed to equality.*

Openness: *We are committed to a culture of working collaboratively within the network and in partnership with others.*

Participation: *Those who support our vision work together with people seeking sanctuary. We value and recognise the contribution of all involved. We aspire to ensure people seeking sanctuary are fully involved in decision-making processes and supported to become leaders within the City of Sanctuary organisation and network as well as the wider movement.*

Inspiration: *We work with enthusiasm and positivity and are determined to surpass what has already been achieved to welcome refugees and 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 always act in the interests of people seeking sanctuary.*

ROLE OF THE RICHMOND SANCTUARY PARTNERSHIP



The Richmond Sanctuary Partnership meets quarterly and is attended by local voluntary sector organisations, statutory services and Richmond Council officers. It is an opportunity for collaborative work as well as the sharing of knowledge and ideas across the borough.

The Partnership's first meeting was held in April 2023 following Richmond Council's declaration to become a Borough of Sanctuary, and it continues to be fundamental in ensuring that the voice of the community, including sanctuary-seekers and those who work closely with them, is heard.

Progress on this strategy will be reported annually to Richmond Council's Finance, Policy and Resources Committee as well as regular updates to the Richmond Sanctuary Partnership. The Richmond Sanctuary Partnership will help to hold the Council to account on successful and timely delivery.

In addition to the Richmond Sanctuary Partnership, an Oversight Board will be set up as a formal structure to hold teams to account. The goals that teams have committed to will be performance managed and the Heads of Service who serve on the Board will be single points of contact for issues arising in their division.

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CAPTURING THE VOICE OF PEOPLE WITH LIVED-EXPERIENCE

It is a priority that this strategy reflects the lived-experience of our sanctuary-seeking residents. To understand what areas and processes the council should focus on, we have engaged with VCS partners and most importantly, our sanctuary-seeking residents whom they support.

Through a series of engagement sessions hosted by VCS organisations, informal discussion groups hosted in libraries, translated surveys and webinars with translators, we endeavour to capture the voice of residents with lived-experience and ensure we prioritise their feedback.

It is important that this engagement is embedded in our work and not an ad hoc or one-off interaction. To ensure the perspective of people with lived-experience is present in decision-making, the governance of the Richmond Sanctuary Partnership will be reviewed, and a Board will be created with representatives who have or are still experiencing insecure migration status.

We will ensure that there are no barriers to participation. For participants who would find it beneficial, training will be provided, devices to encourage digital inclusion, travel and childcare reimbursements will be available, if appropriate. Communication will be inclusive ensuring translators are available where necessary, documents use plain English which can be easily translated, the use of icons in place of text where possible and early sight of papers to ensure participants have adequate time to prepare for meetings will all be implemented.



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VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR



Richmond Council acknowledges and honours the support provided to sanctuary-seekers by Voluntary and Community Sector partners for decades, and we recognise the opportunity to learn from their experiences. We value the agility and reach of the VCS, particularly in emergency response and ability to connect with residents who are understandably hesitant to engage with statutory services.

Through the Richmond Sanctuary Partnership and Richmond CVS, the Council's relationship with VCS organisations continues to grow. We recognise that the partnership between the Council and VCS is one where each partner brings different resources to the collaboration. For example, the Council's strengths may lie in funding, infrastructure and full-time officers, whereas the VCS can highlight the issues that sanctuary-seeking residents are facing every day as well as what groups of people or policy areas require more focus. Another way for VCS groups to share their experience to the benefit of the Council is through providing training.

Within this strategy, the Council is committing to creating a Borough of Sanctuary Fund. This will provide the opportunity for VCS groups who support sanctuary-seeking residents to apply for funding for projects that will create additional value to current services. The Borough of Sanctuary Fund highlights another strength inherent to the VCS, which is the ability to provide value for money. By providing financial opportunities, we know that this money will be spent locally to enhance well-being outcomes for some of our most vulnerable residents. We know that sanctuary-seekers who receive support from VCS organisations often go on to volunteer or even work for these groups, which in turn creates an income source for a whole family.

It is about so much more than numbers in a bank account, it is about investing in the community. It is about providing appropriate funding for meaningful projects that will help break down the barriers faced by sanctuary-seekers.

ACTIONS TAKEN TO DATE

Whilst this strategy emphasises the action plan for supporting sanctuary-seekers over the next three years, there has already been a significant amount of work done to welcome sanctuary-seekers in Richmond.

Action taken to date includes, but is not limited to:

- Recruitment of two refugee and resettlement roles, as well as additional housing officers to support the growing demand for housing support for recently arrived refugees. These roles will be supplemented through the creation of the Refugee Team and the additional roles created, noted in the action plan.
- Regular meeting of a cross-council operations group to monitor and respond to the ever-changing needs of the government's resettlement programmes, in particular the Homes for Ukraine scheme.
- Ongoing collaboration and liaison with the voluntary and community sector, including sharing of knowledge and expertise. We have strengthened connections with community groups through the creation of the Richmond Sanctuary Partnership and continue to develop our understanding of the specific and always-changing needs of sanctuary-seekers in Richmond.
- Funding St Mary's Supplementary School in Richmond to provide academic, cultural and enrichment opportunities to newly arrived Ukrainians in the borough. The school enables Ukrainian children to learn and rebuild confidence in an environment and language that feels familiar to them and supports their transition into a new cultural environment.
- Increased provision and selection of foreign language books available at Richmond libraries following feedback from residents, including sanctuary-seekers.
- Achieving for Children's development of an anti-racist pledge for schools, with focus on staff, culture and commitment to stand against racism. This links to the importance of the use of language, including in relation to different groups that fall under the sanctuary-seeker umbrella.
- WorkMatch's support to sanctuary-seekers including job fairs, CV writing, interview skills training and guidance on gaining employment.
- Distribution of ZSL London Zoo tickets, purchased through ZSL's community access scheme, to provide free entry to refugees, asylum-seekers and low-income households.
- Holding a Ukrainian Independence Day event, recognising the incredible work of VCS groups across the borough in welcoming newly arrived Ukrainians. This event also saw the unveiling of the plaque on the Civic Centre, sent from Ukraine to the Prosperity Café as a thanks to the people of Twickenham for their support.

ACTION PLAN : HUMAN RESOURCES		
Year 1 (FY 24/25)	Year 2 (FY 25/26)	Year 3 (FY 26/27)
Automatic interview for anyone meeting essential criteria from a sanctuary-seeking background (similar to disability confident).		
Provide a training module on trauma-informed approach to supporting sanctuary-seeking residents available to all staff.		
Incorporate the Sanctuary Strategy into the Council's corporate induction by adding info to the new-starter pages on the Loop and including in induction checklist.		
Work with the staff equality groups including the Race Equality Network, LGBT network, and Women's network to raise awareness of sanctuary-seeker needs and the work that the Council does. Sanctuary work to be presented at three equality group meetings.		
Review the wording on the Council's recruitment webpages and look at best practice for how it can frame its openness to sanctuary-seekers seeking employment with the local authority.		

ACTION PLAN : LIBRARIES, LEISURE AND CULTURE		
Year 1 (FY 24/25)	Year 2 (FY 25/26)	Year 3 (FY 26/27)
Pilot of free off-peak access to asylum-seekers for leisure facilities.	Scope possibility of introducing free off-peak access to sanctuary seekers for the use of council owned leisure facilities.	
Secure Library of Sanctuary status for three libraries each year.		
Continue to raise the voices of sanctuary-seeking residents and celebrate their history and stories in arts and culture programmes, and target communications about events directly to sanctuary-seekers.		

ACTION PLAN : ACHIEVING FOR CHILDREN		
Year 1 (FY 24/25)	Year 2 (FY 25/26)	Year 3 (FY 26/27)
Produce a mapping and gap analysis of resident journeys for sanctuary-seekers accessing key services including school admissions, early help services, ESOL and mental health from sanctuary-seekers point of view.	Based on Year 1 gap analysis, produce an action plan to address areas lacking provision.	
Support three schools a year, for three years, to become Schools of Sanctuary.		

ACTION PLAN : COMMUNITY AND PARTNERSHIPS		
Year 1 (FY 24/25)	Year 2 (FY 25/26)	Year 3 (FY 26/27)
Collaborate with the Voluntary and Community Sector to facilitate volunteering opportunities for sanctuary-seeking residents by ensuring accessibility and communicating opportunities.		
Continue to fund local organisations such as Citizens Advice Richmond, providing sanctuary-seekers access to advice, and support on navigating systems.		

ACTION PLAN : ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT		
Year 1 (FY 24/25)	Year 2 (FY 25/26)	Year 3 (FY 26/27)
	Provision for sanctuary-seekers to be included in Employment and Skills strategy when it is reviewed in 2024.	
Develop a stakeholder map and report on the numbers of sanctuary-seeking residents using services.		
Following successful pilots, launch Language 2 Work model to support intensive English language learning tailored to hospitality, construction, and healthcare sectors.		
Offer business start-up support to all Ukrainian guests and all resettled refugees.		

ACTION PLAN : COMMUNITY SAFETY		
Year 1 (FY 24/25)	Year 2 (FY 25/26)	Year 3 (FY 26/27)
Communicate community safety support pathways (e.g. VAWG, Modern Slavery, Hate Crime) with VCS groups through leaflets, the Richmond Sanctuary Partnership and additions to the Refugee Services webpages.		
		Enhance Modern Slavery and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) support pathways by increasing information from a sanctuary-seeker's perspective, ensuring the survivor's voice is central.
Ensure sanctuary-seekers' needs are considered in plans relating to hate crime, including continuing to raise awareness and encourage reporting of hate crime.		

ACTION PLAN : COMMUNICATIONS		
Year 1 (FY 24/25)	Year 2 (FY 25/26)	Year 3 (FY 26/27)
Facilitate and promote three events throughout the year, highlighting the Council's efforts to support sanctuary-seekers.		
Incorporate sanctuary-seekers into the Communication Forward Plan, highlighting the contribution of sanctuary-seekers in the borough, including a strong campaign during Refugee Week.		
Appoint Sanctuary Champion to support Lead Member to lobby government on key issues.	Support local organisations' lobbying efforts and campaigns on refugee related issues e.g. through social media, promoting events, collaborating with groups.	
Re-issue an appeal for landlords to offer properties for use for sanctuary-seekers in quarterly newsletters.		

ACTION PLAN : HOUSING		
Year 1 (FY 24/25)	Year 2 (FY 25/26)	Year 3 (FY 26/27)
Carry out review of processes and resident journey from viewpoint of sanctuary-seekers for key housing services such as accessing homelessness support and implement any improvements identified.		
	Include reference to sanctuary-seekers in housing and homelessness strategies when reviewed in 2025.	
Assess how we currently manage data held on sanctuary-seekers accessing Housing services and make improvements to better inform analysis and decision making.		
	Continue work with private landlords to identify 20 private rented properties for sanctuary-seeking residents.	

ACTION PLAN : POLICY AND REVIEW		
Year 1 (FY 24/25)	Year 2 (FY 25/26)	Year 3 (FY 26/27)
Continue to ensure that sanctuary-seekers are considered part of the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion work, including through the inclusion in EINAs within the recently adopted socio-economic category.		

ACTION PLAN : ADULTS/REFUGEE SERVICES		
Year 1 (FY 24/25)	Year 2 (FY 25/26)	Year 3 (FY 26/27)
Review governance of the Richmond Sanctuary Partnership to ensure we embed participation for people with lived-experience.		
Review resident journeys for sanctuary-seekers accessing key services such as adult social care assistance (including Access team) from sanctuary-seekers' point of view and make any improvements identified and produce a review document at the end of Year 1.		
Establish a multi-disciplinary Refugee Services team which supports sanctuary-seeking residents.		
Achieve Borough of Sanctuary accreditation.		
Establish a Borough of Sanctuary Fund for VCS organisations to apply for funding to support sanctuary-seeking residents.		
Review and revise the Council's internal and external webpages for sanctuary-seekers, ensuring that relevant information about services and support is accessible and clearly set out.		

ACTION PLAN : PUBLIC HEALTH

Year 1 (FY 24/25)	Year 2 (FY 25/26)	Year 3 (FY 26/27)
Work with UKHSA /South London Health Protection Team to provide Infection, prevention and Control advice and support in preventing and managing cases and outbreaks of communicable diseases.		
Work with the SWL Integrated Care Board (SWL ICB) to continue to encourage GP surgeries to sign up to the Safe Surgeries initiative, which means they will be welcoming to people, irrespective of immigration status and not ask for documentation when someone presents with a health need. This initiative is being championed by the South London Listens Mental Health Taskforce of which the Council is a member.		
Work with NHS partners to ensure there is an effective system response with NHS partners to address health needs of refugees arriving in the borough following their initial health assessment. This includes ensuring access to primary care, infectious disease assessment and treatment, and catch up vaccinations.		

LOCAL DEMOGRAPHICS DATA

A total of 195,278 people live in Richmond upon Thames according to the 2021 Census, which is an increase of 4.4% since the last census in 2011. Richmond is still one of the smallest boroughs in London and has gone from 5th smallest to 4th smallest since the previous census. The Borough has an older population overall with the largest relative increase in the 65+ age group. Data from the 2021 Census shows that 28.8% of people in Richmond were born outside the UK.

In comparison to other London boroughs, Richmond is not as ethnically diverse, with a higher proportion of white residents (80.5%) compared to Outer London (54%) and London (54%). For context, the average across England is 81%.

Indeed, Richmond has a significantly lower proportion of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority residents (19.5%) compared to Outer London (45.9%) and London (46.2%).

Reflecting a trend across most London boroughs, ethnic diversity in Richmond is higher amongst the youngest population and steadily decreases as the Borough's population grows older. In 2021, only 7% of the 65+ population were from minority ethnic groups, compared to 26% 0-17 years, and 22% aged 18-39 years.

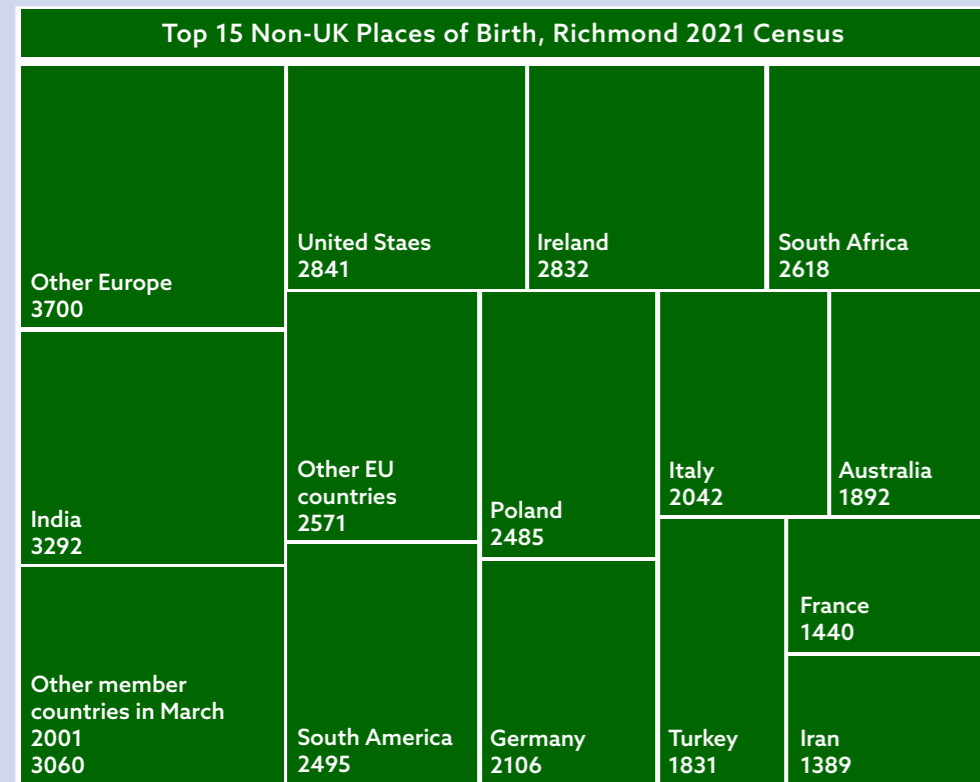


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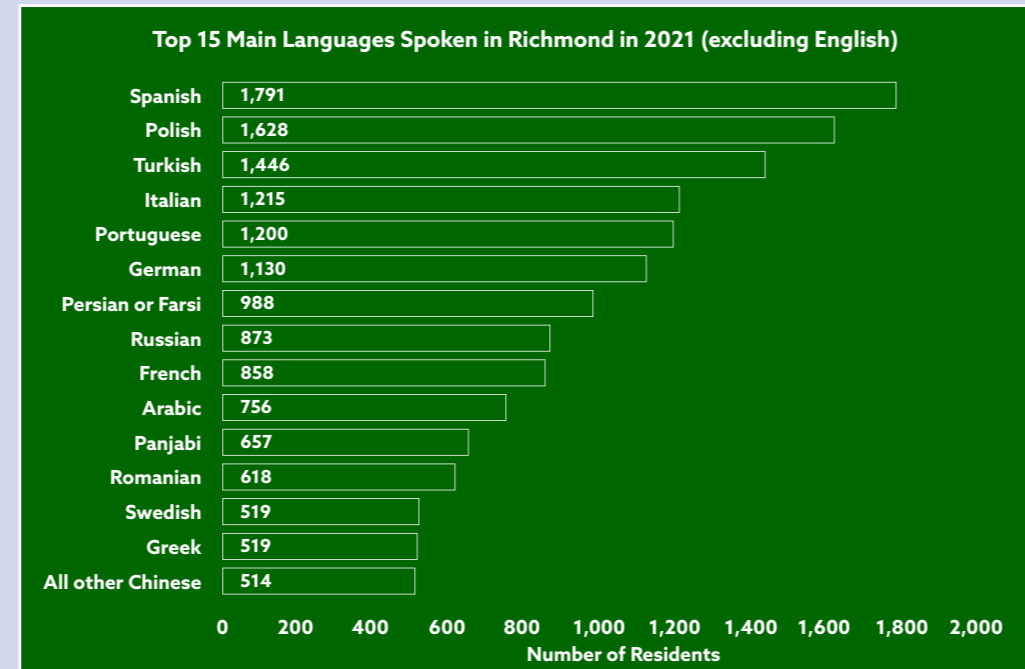
LOCAL DEMOGRAPHICS DATA

Migration

The 2021 Census found that one in three residents were born outside the UK, with 46% of non-UK born residents from European countries. Compared to Outer London and London, Richmond had a lower proportion of residents born outside the UK. Top non-UK places of birth were residents from other European countries, India, residents from other EU member countries and the US.



Language



GLOSSARY

Definitions are based on those provided by the Refugee Council.

Refugee

The definition of a refugee according to the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees is:

“A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”

In the UK, a person becomes a refugee when government agrees that an individual who has applied for asylum meets the definition in the Refugee Convention they will ‘recognise’ that person as a refugee and issue them with refugee status documentation. Usually, refugees in the UK are given five years’ leave to remain as a refugee. They must then apply for further leave, although their status as a refugee is not limited to five years.

Person seeking asylum

A person who has left their country of origin and formally applied for asylum in another country but whose application has not yet been concluded.

Refused asylum applicant

A person whose asylum application has been unsuccessful and who has no other claim for protection awaiting a decision. Some people who have their case refused voluntarily return home, others are forcibly returned. For some, it is not safe or practical to return until conditions in their country change.

Migrant

Someone who has moved to another country for other reasons, such as to find work.

UASC

UASC stands for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and refers to children who are outside their country of origin seeking asylum, are separated from parents and relatives, and are not in the care of someone who is responsible for them in a guardianship role.

Sanctuary-Seeker

An umbrella term used to describe people in the above categories.

As noted in the values section above, this strategy is intended as far as possible to create a universal offer to all sanctuary-seekers within the limits created by individual’s status within the UK. Where a universal offer is not possible, the Council’s priority will be to act compassionately and support the most vulnerable.

Richmond Borough of Sanctuary Strategy

