

## Agenda item 7

For decision – a proposal for Frome Town Council to seek ‘Council of Sanctuary’ status  
Author: Hannah Stopford, Community Partnerships and Development Manager, Lyndsey Mayhew, Lead Councillor for Communities and Chair of Community and Place Committee.

### Summary (incl. recommendations)

The Council of Sanctuary is a national initiative encouraging communities to foster a culture of hospitality and support for refugees and asylum seekers. By aligning with the principles of the City of Sanctuary, Frome Town Council would be demonstrating that it aims to ensure that everyone feels safe, valued, and included. We already undertake much of the work required to achieve the award and are well supported by Frome Welcomes Refugees Advisory Group to contribute to the wider network.

This paper recommends that we approve the pledge, commit to joining the City of Sanctuary Local Authority Network, and to work towards accredited recognition as a ‘Council of Sanctuary’.

## Background

The ‘City of Sanctuary’ initiative was set up in 2005 in Sheffield. It has grown to build a network made up of hundreds of community groups, schools, local councils, universities, theatres, galleries and more. The Local Authority network emerged in 2020 to develop the Council of Sanctuary award, recognising that “Councils are a key local institution that has the potential to lead the way in creating a tapestry of organisations, institution and places that seek to include and support people of sanctuary seeking background”.

The Council of Sanctuary (CoS) is a national initiative encouraging communities to foster a culture of hospitality and support for refugees and asylum seekers. By aligning with the principles of the City of Sanctuary, Frome Town Council would be demonstrating that it aims to ensure that everyone feels safe, valued, and included.

## Current situation in Frome

Frome has a long history of welcoming displaced people through previous resettlement initiatives. The well-established annual Multicultural Frome event celebrates the cultural diversity of the town and attracts hundreds of attendees each year.

FTC hosts the Welcome Hub, a multi partner programme supporting displaced in Frome – we heard an [update](#) of the work led by Iryna our Welcome Hub Advisor, at the Communities and Place meeting last month. We work in close partnership with the community-led Frome Welcomes Refugees Advisory Group, an independent local group that administers funds raised by FTC and Rotary at the start of the Russian war on Ukraine. It also offers advice, support and advocacy for refugees and people that host them.

Currently the Welcome Hub supports 148 displaced people in Frome including 89 adults and 59 children. Dispersal accommodation is increasing in the town, and the hub offer provides vital practical support as well as ESOL lessons, mental health programmes, volunteering opportunities, social activities and community events.

### Benefits of becoming a Council of Sanctuary

- Pursuing the award recognises and promotes the work that is already happening in Frome
- Joining the Local Authority Network would give access to new ideas and benchmarks
- Add voice to national debate
- Increasing awareness
- Potentially opens up new channels of funding

### Process

The first step is to publicly commit to joining the City of Sanctuary Local Authority Network, and to work towards recognition as a 'Council of Sanctuary'. This is one of the recommendations of this paper. Taunton Town Council has achieved Council of Sanctuary and were very positive about the experience. Achieving CoS status has enabled them to boost their fundraising to support projects. They have shared their insights with us and we have adapted their pledge to propose the following:

### Frome Town Council's pledge of support

1. We support the 'City of Sanctuary' vision that the UK will be a welcoming place of safety for all and proud to offer sanctuary to people fleeing violence and persecution.
2. We endorse the City of Sanctuary [Charter](#) and agree to act in accordance with City of Sanctuary values and apply the network principles within our actions and policies (as far as our specific context enables us to).
3. We acknowledge the contribution of refugees and people seeking sanctuary to the town of Frome. Sanctuary seekers are welcomed, included, and supported within our context. We will support and look to be represented on the local City of Sanctuary group when one exists.
4. We are willing for our organisation's name to be added to a list of supporters of City of Sanctuary, linked to our website. We are also willing to be contacted by City of Sanctuary with further ideas for how we can turn our support into practical action and to discuss ways we might work together to promote the vision further.
5. We agree to work towards a City of Sanctuary Local Authority Award with the aim of becoming a recognised Council of Sanctuary.

If this is agreed at the meeting, we can then apply for membership to the network. The cost of membership is £150 for 3 years, which the Frome Welcomes Refugees Advisory Group has offered to fund.

There is an expectation then to:

- Engage with the network (members of FWRAG would be interested in getting involved in the national organisation on behalf of FTC, attending meetings, making connections and sharing knowledge).
- Develop a strategy/framework for supporting people seeking sanctuary in the community (this could be developed as part of the Equalities Action Plan being undertaken in the Improvement Plan)
- Work to demonstrate the [criteria](#) required to achieve Council of Sanctuary status and make an award application. Much of the criteria can already be evidenced in our current work and partnerships, and there is an emphasis on elevating existing projects rather than starting new workstreams.
- Celebrate and promote achievement of the award.

Other options considered	n/a
Key considerations for the Council	As above
Consultation and feedback	With welcome hub and FWRAG partners. Further engagement with displaced community would be undertaken when pursuing award.
Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan	<b>Grow Community Wellbeing 2026/27 work plan:</b> Build community cohesion and social capital by working with Communities of Place, Identity or Interest. Support people to identify gaps and enable approaches that foster ownership and resilience, bridge divide and co-create solutions.  Host and support Welcome Hub offer on behalf of Thrive collaborative, to welcome displaced people in the town with practical and wellbeing support and enable marginalised voices to be heard.  This also fits with the Council’s stated intention to “advocate for our town and its needs, and try to ensure all voices are heard, particularly those which might otherwise be overlooked.”
Financial and Risk Implications	None – membership fee covered by FWRAG
Legal / HR Implications	None
Equalities Implications	Accreditation would have a positive impact on Equalities. A strategy for supporting refugees and asylum seekers would align with current Equalities Action Planning.
Community Safety Implications	Vulnerable members of the community would feel more welcomed and supported in the town.
Climate Change and Sustainability Implications	None
Health and Safety Implications	None

Constitutional Requirements	Requirement to achieve public positive vote to move forwards
Background Papers	Councils Award Procedure and Criteria 2026: <a href="https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WeT7xRyDnqGr27AsoBUEg6Aghw9wsVLg/edit">https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WeT7xRyDnqGr27AsoBUEg6Aghw9wsVLg/edit</a>
Report Sign-Off	Peter Wheelhouse, Town Clerk 03/06/26

**Recommendations:**

1. Approve the pledge of support.
2. Commit to joining the membership of City of Sanctuary Local Authority Network.
3. Delegate to the Community Partnerships and Development Manager in consultation with Cllr Lyndsey Mayhew to work in partnership with Frome Welcomes Refugees Advisory Group towards a City of Sanctuary Local Authority Award with the aim of becoming a recognised Council of Sanctuary.