

LEICESTER CITY OF SANCTUARY STRATEGY 2026 – 31

OUR VISION AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY WHERE PEOPLE SEEKING SANCTUARY ARE EMPOWERED TO PARTICIPATE MEANINGFULLY IN SOCIETY

OUR MISSION TO SUPPORT ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES IN AND AROUND LEICESTER THROUGH A CARING COMMUNITY THAT PROVIDES ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION, SKILLS DEVELOPMENT, AND HOLISTIC SUPPORT—HELPING PEOPLE NAVIGATE UNCERTAINTY AND BUILD INDEPENDENT, DIGNIFIED LIVES.

OUR VALUES

WELCOME

EMPATHY

EMPOWERMENT

COLLABORATION

EDUCATION

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

MEETING BASIC, SOCIAL AND WELLBEING NEEDS

PATHWAYS TO EDUCATION, SKILLS & EMPLOYMENT

LIVED EXPERIENCE AT THE HEART OF ALL WE DO

STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMUNITY

SUSTAINABILITY AND IMPACT

OUTCOMES

PEOPLE EXPERIENCE IMPROVED STABILITY, DIGNITY AND WELLBEING

INCREASED INDEPENDENCE AND LONG TERM INCLUSION

DECISIONS AND SERVICES ARE SHAPED BY THOSE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

INCREASED COLLECTIVE IMPACT AND EFFICIENT USE OF RESOURCES

A RESILIENT CHARITY WITH STRONG GOVERNANCE AND FINANCIAL STABILITY

SERVICE PATHWAYS

WELLBEING (MENTAL AND PHYSICAL)

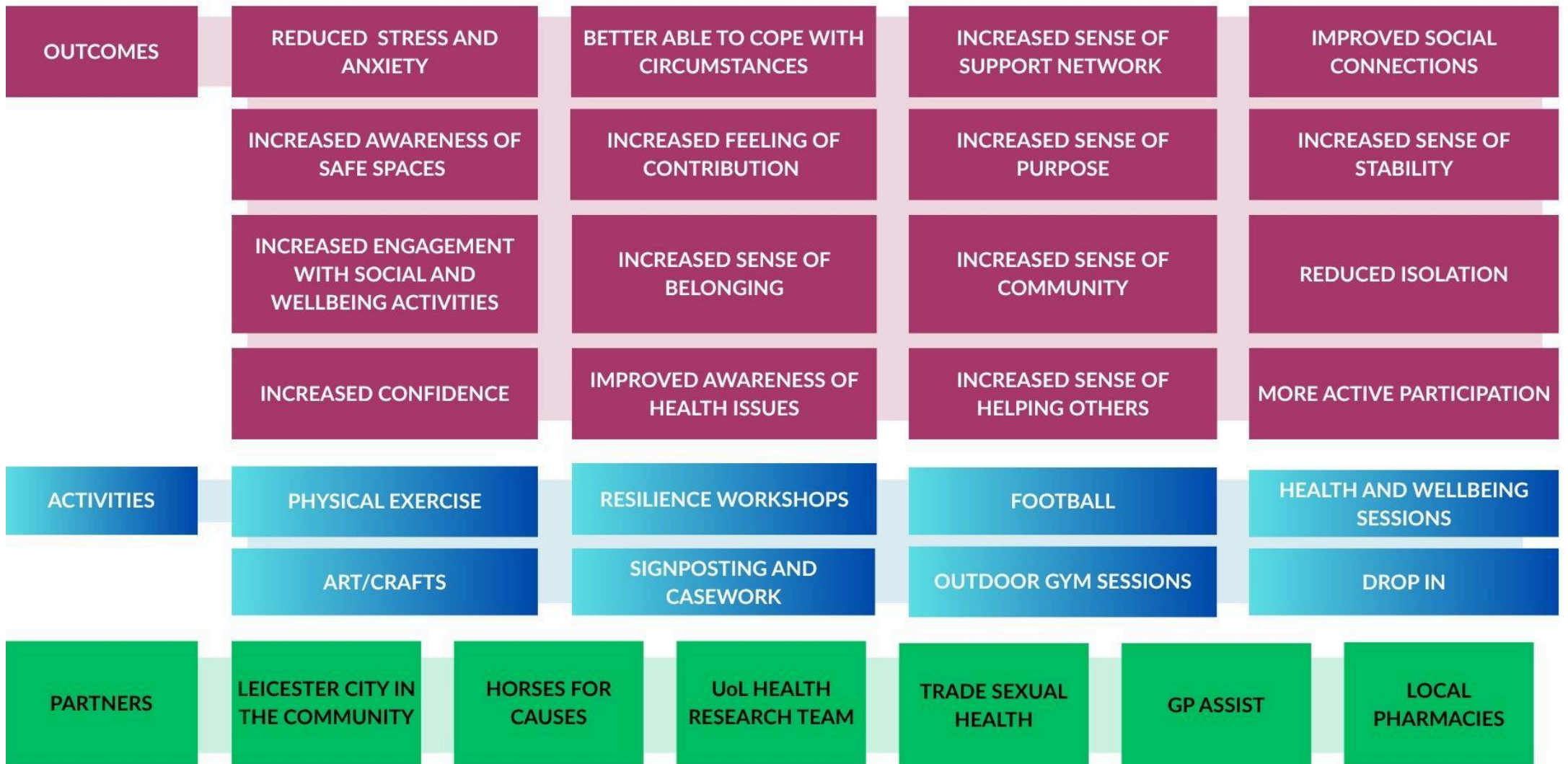
LANGUAGE & EDUCATION

COMMUNITY NAVIGATION

SKILLS & EMPLOYABILITY

TRANSITION TO SETTLEMENT AND NEST

PATHWAYS - WELLBEING (MENTAL & PHYSICAL)



PATHWAYS - LANGUAGE & EDUCATION

OUTCOMES

IMPROVED SPOKEN AND WRITTEN ENGLISH SKILLS

INCREASED CONFIDENCE IN COMMUNICATING IN EVERYDAY SITUATIONS

REDUCED ISOLATION

INCREASED SENSE OF INDEPENDENCE

BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF INFORMATION

MORE CONFIDENT IN ASKING FOR HELP

IMPROVED STABILITY AND SENSE OF INDEPENDENCE

BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF SYSTEMS AND SERVICES

INCREASED OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

INCREASED CONFIDENCE IN ENGAGING IN THE COMMUNITY

IMPROVED SENSE OF CONTRIBUTION TO COMMUNITY

BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF HELP AND SUPPORT AVAILABLE

ACTIVITIES

BEGINNERS ESOL

SONGS FROM HOME

CONVERSATION CLUB

ACCREDITED ESOL

PARTNERS

WEA

LEICESTER COLLEGE

UoL SANCTUARY SUITE

AFTER 18

PATHWAYS - COMMUNITY NAVIGATION (SYSTEMS/SERVICES/PLACES)

OUTCOMES

IMPROVED CONFIDENCE IN FINDING AND ACCESSING SERVICES

BETTER KNOWLEDGE OF RIGHTS

BETTER AWARENESS OF SPECIALIST SUPPORT

MORE CONFIDENCE IN EXPLORING COMMUNITY

EXPERIENCE A POSITIVE WELCOME IN THE PLACES THEY VISIT

IMPROVED AWARENESS OF THE ASYLUM SYSTEM

MORE CONFIDENCE IN ATTENDING COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

INCREASED SENSE OF SAFETY IN EXPLORING LEICESTER

BETTER INFORMATION AND AWARENESS OF HEALTH SERVICES

IMPROVED AWARENESS OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

BETTER ACCESS TO LOCAL AUTHORITY SERVICES (LIBRARIES/MUSEUMS/FAMILY CENTRES)

IMPROVED INFORMATION AND ACCESS TO MATERNITY SERVICES

ACTIVITIES

NAVIGATING RIGHT TO REMAIN WEBSITE

GUIDED WALKS

ORIENTATION TRIPS

HOUSING SESSIONS

HEALTH AND OTHER SERVICES SESSIONS

CITY COUNCIL FAMILY HUBS

RIVERS AND CANALS TRUST

NHS MIDWIFERY TEAM

COMMUNITY POLICING TEAM

SANCTUARY SUITE (UoL)

PARTNERS

THE RACE EQUALITY CENTRE

INCLUSION HEALTHCARE

LCC LIBRARY

LEICESTER MUSEUM

COMMUNITY & FAITH GROUPS

PATHWAYS – SKILLS AND EMPLOYABILITY

OUTCOMES

IMPROVED UNDERSTANDING
OF EMPLOYMENT PROCESSES

BETTER PREPARED TO
PURSUE WORK OR LEARNING

IMPROVED AWARENESS OF
CAREER PATHS

BETTER AWARENESS OF JOB
OPPORTUNITIES AND SKILLS
REQUIREMENTS

GAIN CONFIDENCE IN SKILLS AND
ABILITIES

BETTER AWARENESS OF THE RANGE OF
LEARNING OPTIONS

INCREASED SENSE OF EMPLOYMENT
READINESS

ACTIVITIES

SEWING GROUP

EMPLOYMENT SKILLS

COLLEGE TASTER COURSES

SANCTUARY AMBASSADORS

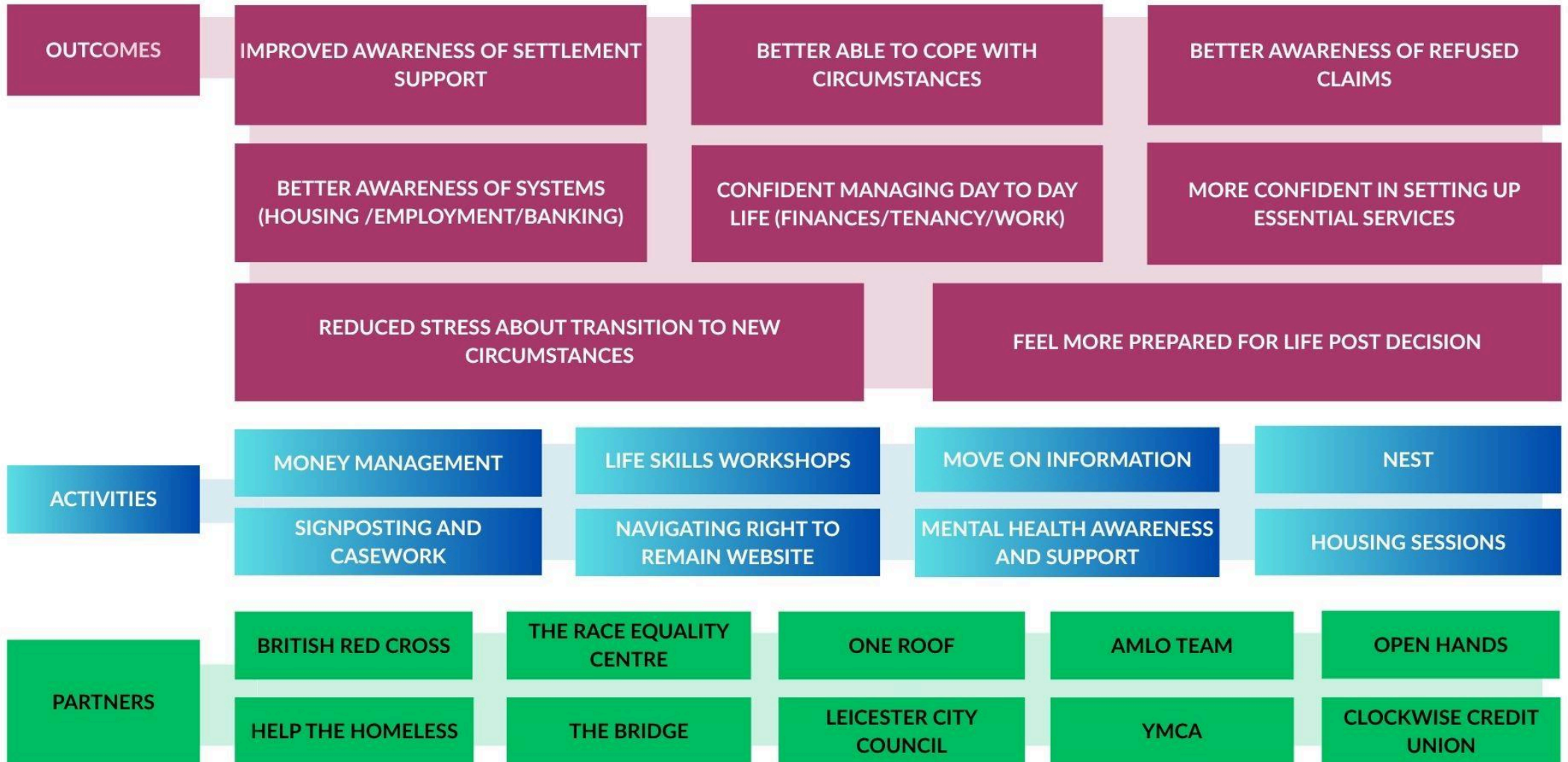
PARTNERS

LEICESTER COLLEGE

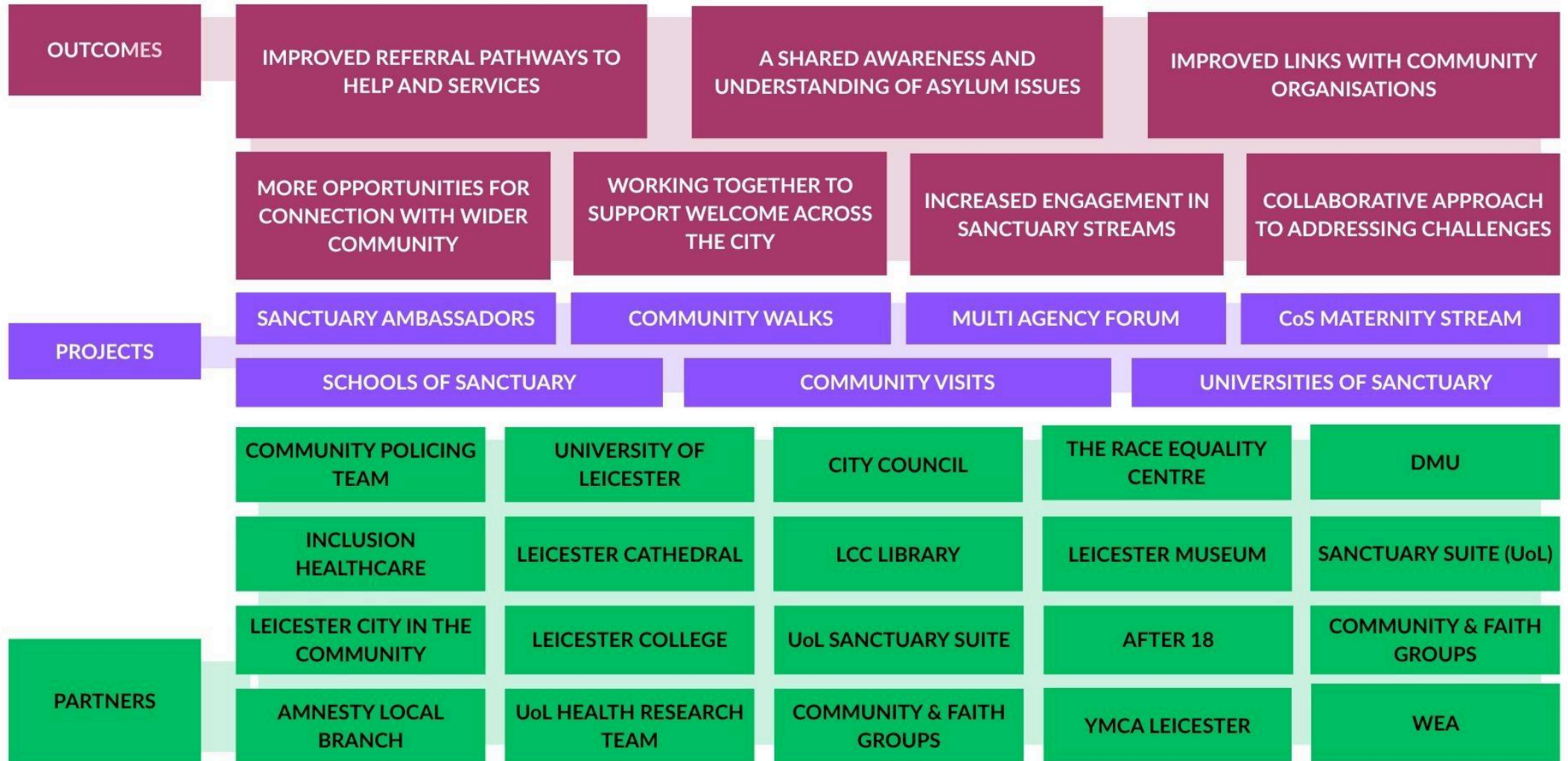
TWIN EMPLOYMENT

WEA

PATHWAYS - TRANSITION TO SETTLEMENT



STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS



SUSTAINABILITY AND IMPACT

OUTCOMES

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| OPERATIONAL DELIVERY | RESPONSIVE AND WELL-COORDINATED SERVICES, ACCESSIBLE AND TRAUMA INFORMED – DELIVERED CONSISTENTLY IN LINE WITH OUR MISSION AND VALUES. |
| SANCTUARY AMBASSADORS | A GROWING COMMUNITY OF ADVOCATES WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE WHO HELP RAISE AWARENESS, INFLUENCE DECISION MAKING AND BUILD A CULTURE OF SOLIDARITY LOCALLY AND BEYOND |
| VOLUNTEER TRAINING AND SUPPORT | CONFIDENT, VALUED AND WELL-SUPPORTED VOLUNTEERS WHO FEEL CONNECTED TO OUR MISSION AND CONTRIBUTE MEANINGFULLY TO OUR SERVICES. |
| IMPACT EVALUATION | A CULTURE OF REFLECTION AND LEARNING, WHERE WE LISTEN TO FEEDBACK, UNDERSTAND OUR IMPACT AND USE EVIDENCE TO STRENGTHEN AND EVOLVE OUR WORK. |
| COMMUNICATIONS | CLEAR, COMPASSIONATE AND CONSISTENT COMMUNICATIONS THAT BUILD TRUST, DEEPEN PARTNERSHIPS AND INCREASE UNDERSTANDING OF ASYLUM ISSUES. |
| FUNDRAISING | AN ORGANISATION THAT ANTICIPATES CHALLENGES, MANAGES RISK RESPONSIBLY AND REMAINS STEADY AND PREPARED IN TIMES OF CHANGE. |
| STRATEGIC RISK | A DIVERSE AND SUSTAINABLE INCOME BASE THAT PROVIDES STABILITY, REDUCES UNCERTAINTY AND ENABLES US TO PLAN CONFIDENTLY FOR THE FUTURE |

Leicester City of Sanctuary

Strategic Plan - 2026–2031

Introduction:

Leicester City of Sanctuary (LCoS) has been operating in one form or another in our city and county since 2007 and is part of the wider City of Sanctuary movement UK. It has had charity status for most of that time and became a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO) in 2017, at a point when we began to employ staff working alongside volunteers.

Our first ever strategic plan as a CIO covered 2019-2022 and our second was for 2022-2025. This replaces it with a slightly longer time-frame to take us beyond the period of current Lottery funding (to October 2029).

Both the overall Vision and localised Mission of the plans for these two periods are, with slight verbal updates, broadly consistent with what is proposed for this next period and the Values are identical. This indicates that the work done in those areas back in 2019 was well-founded and has stood the test of time.

Our previous strategic plans can be found on our website:

<https://leicester.cityofsanctuary.org/draft-strategic-plan>

Leicester City of Sanctuary - Who we are and why we exist

For many years, Leicester City of Sanctuary has been the first point of contact for asylum seekers being housed in Leicester by the Home Office. While waiting for the outcome of their cases, they are not permitted to work and risk destitution when their cases are refused. In this challenging environment, we offer a welcoming space for asylum seekers and refugees, where they can socialise, take part in meaningful activities and have a sense of normality. By creating these spaces and communities, where they can feel like they belong and can contribute, we help to reduce isolation and improve their mental wellbeing.

Many of our service users have been through traumatic experiences, face complex challenges, and must adapt to a new culture and language. By supporting them to orient themselves in their new city and prepare for their life in the UK, we help strengthen their confidence and resilience so they can better engage with other services and integrate within the local community, leading to independence and rebuilding their lives as they settle here.

Ultimately, our aim is to support people seeking asylum to improve their life chances so they are able to move on with their lives independently once they gain refugee status.

Our vision for the next five years

Our vision is to support and empower people seeking sanctuary to live with dignity, purpose and independence. Our community and the work we do meets immediate basic needs whilst opening pathways to wellbeing, education, skills, and employment that support long-term independence and resettlement. Our community is one where contribution is encouraged

and valued. Lived experience sits at the heart of our work, shaping decisions through meaningful participation and co-creation. Our vision is to deliver this impact sustainably and collaboratively, taking an evidence based and reflective approach that leads to continuous improvement.

Strategy Development

Our strategy was developed through consultation with stakeholders. We undertook focussed workshops initiated at our AGM to begin building a collective vision and overarching Theory of Change. Following that, more consultation took place with our Sanctuary Ambassadors to understand needs and priorities and consultation with our community to understand their needs and challenges further. We also undertook sessions with volunteers to help create a Theory of Change for each of our pathways of work, and to understand what support they need as key stakeholders in supporting the charity to deliver its aims.

Vision, Mission and Values

National City of Sanctuary Vision

The UK will be a place of welcome for all - and committed to justice and solidarity for people seeking sanctuary.

Our Vision

An inclusive community where people seeking sanctuary are empowered to participate meaningfully in society.

Our Mission

To support asylum seekers and refugees in and around Leicester through a caring community that provides accessible education, skills development, and holistic support—helping people navigate uncertainty and build independent, dignified lives.

Our Values

Welcome

We create a safe, inclusive community where everyone feels valued and able to participate and contribute. We respect, promote, and celebrate all cultures and ways of life.

Empathy

We listen with care and seek to understand the experiences and the aspirations of those we support. We stand alongside people through challenges, respecting boundaries and confidentiality as the foundation of trust.

Empowerment

We recognise and build on the strengths and contribution of individuals, volunteers, and staff. We actively involve asylum seekers and refugees in decision-making and support them to shape, represent, and deliver our work.

Education

We encourage lifelong learning and create pathways to education for asylum seekers and refugees. We challenge misinformation and prejudice by sharing lived experience and fostering understanding within the wider community.

Collaboration

We work with compassion, openness, and respect. Through communication, connection, and shared responsibility, we collaborate effectively to achieve our mission together with our partners that share the same aim. We facilitate connections between our community and the wider community of Leicester.

Our Strategic Priorities

Priority 1: Meeting basic, social and wellbeing needs

Outcome: People experience improved stability, dignity and wellbeing

Why this matters

Our aim is to support meeting the immediate short term basic needs that facilitate long term wellbeing. On arrival, a safe, social space and a point of connection and the start of building a support network, receiving information and guidance and a gateway to other help and support to begin building a foundation for settling into a new community.

Our 5-year ambition

Within five years, asylum seekers we support experience consistent access to essential resources, strong social connections and improved wellbeing, enabling them to live with dignity and stability while navigating the asylum system and preparing to live in the UK.

Priority 2: Pathways to education, skills & employment

Outcome: Increased independence and long term inclusion

Why this matters

Our aim is to support asylum seekers to be as prepared as they can be for resettlement, living and working in the UK and empower them to gain independence and rebuild their lives with autonomy and dignity.

Our 5-year ambition

Within five years, we are a trusted gateway to education, skills development, and employment for asylum seekers and refugees, with clear pathways that lead to increased independence, confidence, and long-term inclusion.

Priority 3: Lived experience at the heart of all we do

Outcome: Decisions and services are shaped by those with lived experience

Why this matters

Our aim is to empower the voices of lived experience, valuing their contribution in shaping the way that we operate. We want to deepen our understanding of the challenges faced, and empower our community to be partners in the design, implementation, delivery and decision making for our work.

Our 5-year ambition

Within five years, lived experience is embedded across governance, leadership, and service design and delivery, with people with lived experience recognised as leaders, decision-makers, and co-creators shaping the organisation's direction.

Priority 4: Strengthening Partnerships and Community

Outcome: Increased collective impact, efficient use of resources and greater awareness of asylum issues across Leicester

Why this matters

With needs and demand for services increasing across all sectors that support refugees and people seeking asylum, we recognise that resources are limited. We will continue strongly with fostering a culture of collaboration, internally with our community and volunteers and externally with our partners. We will educate and raise awareness of asylum issues within our wider community and work with others to support connections into the wider community for our service users.

Our 5-year ambition

Within five years, we are a beacon of good practice within a connected sanctuary movement, working collaboratively at local, regional, and national levels to influence change, share learning, strengthen collective impact and raise awareness of asylum issues.

Priority 5: Sustainability and impact

Outcome: A resilient charity with strong governance and financial stability

Why this matters

Our aim is to build a strong evidence base and demonstrate impact in order to secure resources to sustain the vital work that we are doing locally. Growth is essential to continue to meet ever increasing need whilst maintaining financial stability. It is also core to gaining support for the work that we do.

Our 5-year ambition

Within five years, the organisation is financially resilient, strategically focused, and operationally strong, with the systems, skills, and resources needed to sustain growth and deliver high-quality, evidence-led impact.

Service Pathways

In alignment with our strategic priorities, we have developed service pathways that outline areas of our work. These service pathways are defined as:

- Wellbeing - mental and physical
- Language & Education
- Skills & Employability
- Navigating Community (systems/services/places)
- Transition to resettlement and NEST

Please refer to the diagrams at the start of this document for an overview of each service area and partners.

How needs are changing or expected to change over the next 5 years

Demand for our services continues to increase and is expected to remain high. This growth is not temporary; it is driven by the structure and operation of the asylum system and the wider social and housing context in which people are required to rebuild their lives.

People seeking asylum and those granted leave frequently experience prolonged uncertainty, instability, and isolation. Lengthy and unpredictable decision-making times, combined with ongoing changes to national asylum policy, shape people's experiences and delay their ability to plan, settle, and move towards independence. These conditions make sustained, specialist support essential.

Relocation by the Home Office, often with as little as one week's notice, regularly disrupts the support networks individuals have begun to build. This practice is unlikely to change and continues to have a significant impact on people's wellbeing, particularly their mental health. Repeated disruption undermines stability and increases reliance on trusted local services.

The current 28-day (now 42 days) move-on period following a grant of leave remains a critical pressure point. In the context of the ongoing housing crisis in Leicester, this short timeframe places many people at high risk of homelessness. Without timely, coordinated support, the transition from asylum support to independence remains extremely difficult for the majority of people we work with.

Language continues to be a key barrier to communication, confidence, and independence. Demand for ESOL provision and informal learning opportunities remains consistently high and is expected to grow as new arrivals continue to be dispersed to the area.

Many people we support have fled violence, persecution, and trauma. These experiences, combined with the ongoing stress of the asylum system and the ongoing fear and worry for loved ones left behind have long-term impacts on mental health and wellbeing. Early engagement, clear information, and sustained support are critical to helping people understand the journey ahead and to reducing crisis at the point of status change.

Our service plays an essential role in responding to these systemic challenges. By supporting people to build confidence, resilience, social connections, and practical skills, we help mitigate the impacts of a system that continues to produce instability and unmet need. As long as these structural conditions remain, the need for our work will continue to grow.

Our Operating Environment

We work within a national asylum policy framework over which we have little or no influence. Policy reform and systemic pressures require us to operate flexibly and responsively to the needs that people present with.

At a local level, we have greater scope to influence practice. By chairing the Multi-Agency Forum and leading this key partnership, we play an active role in strengthening coordinated support for people seeking sanctuary in Leicester.

Our work is funded through grants and donations, and like many charities, our capacity is closely linked to available resources. To respond sustainably to growing demand, we will develop a fundraising strategy aligned to our strategic priorities.

We also operate in a wider social climate where negative narratives about people seeking sanctuary persist. We have a clear role in challenging misinformation, sharing lived experience, and working collaboratively with partners to advocate for dignity and inclusion.

Over the years, we have fostered a culture of collaboration, working closely with partners, minimising duplication of services and making the best use of resources. We continue to define referral routes and ensure that people are signposted to receive the help and support that they need. We also continue to enhance connections between our community and the wider communities in Leicester, creating a sense of solidarity within and across the community.

Our culture is rooted in welcome, kindness and respect.

We are committed to treating everyone with dignity and compassion, creating a safe, trauma informed and confidential space where people feel able to trust and be trusted, supported and feel like they belong. People with lived experience shape what matters most to us — they know best what they need, and we actively encourage contribution, shared learning and community leadership.

Governance

The Trustee Board plays a vital role in ensuring the organisation remains resilient, financially stable, and focused on its mission. They champion the organisation's values and commitment to people seeking sanctuary. Providing strong leadership, strategic oversight and scrutiny to ensure that resources are used responsibly and effectively. Alongside financial sustainability and thoughtful risk management, they lend their expertise to support delivering the mission.

The Trustee role is an opportunity for skills development, but also one where skills and expertise can be shared in a professional and supported environment. The make up of the board is reflective of the expertise needed to ensure sustainable growth for the charity. Trustees recognise the importance of skills development, support and succession planning to ensure the work continues.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Leicester City of Sanctuary is committed to implementing and promoting equal opportunities in its activities, services and practice. Leicester City of Sanctuary will not tolerate discrimination on the basis of:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race
- Religion or Belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

As a provider of a service to the community, LCoS accepts its responsibility to promote equality of opportunity, celebrate diversity and challenge discrimination wherever it occurs.

We aim to provide a service free from unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation and to help service users and volunteers realise their individual potential.

We undertake a commitment to review our EDI policy in light of this strategic plan, and embed it into the way we deliver our services.
