

Perth & Kinross Council – People Seeking Sanctuary Policy Statement 2023-27

Introduction

In recent years we have welcomed different groups of people to Perth and Kinross as they seek sanctuary from war, persecution or other troubles in their home countries. We strive to make this area as safe and welcoming as possible for people coming here under such extremely difficult circumstances and this policy sets out in detail how we will continue to do this going forward.

Perth & Kinross Council wishes the area to be seen as a recognised ‘area of sanctuary’ for all people coming here seeking refuge or asylum and will continue to work with our key partners in the public sector, third sector and the wider community to make sure this happens.

This Council has a vision that this is a place where ‘**everyone can live well free from poverty and inequalities**’ but for these particular groups this will be a challenge due to the restrictions of any immigration legislation that they are placed here. This policy and accompanying Action Plan will seek to mitigate any such challenges and commits to work creatively to prevent and mitigate destitution which may arise from a person’s immigration status.

Values

The work to support this Policy and Action Plan fits with the Council’s values of:

- Ambition
- Compassion
- Integrity

We have also aligned each individual action within the plan to the relevant Council Strategic Priority. These priorities are:

- tackle poverty
- tackle climate change and support sustainable places
- develop a resilient, stronger and greener local economy
- enable our children and young people to achieve their full potential
- protect and care for our most vulnerable people
- support and promote physical and mental wellbeing
- work in partnership with communities

Local Context and Demographics

Considering the population of Perth and Kinross and identifying equality-related opportunities, challenges and barriers is key to our proactive approach to working with our communities and meeting our commitments.

There are some areas to note in particular in terms of the population of Perth and Kinross. We have responded to the significant changes which have affected Perth and Kinross in recent years in relation to an increase in migration.

Migrant populations include a combination of seasonal migrant workers, new migrants and settled communities from different minority ethnic communities. They are working in critical sectors of employment which for us locally is agriculture, tourism, hospitality, food processing and the care sector for example, and in many cases are self-employed businesses and employers themselves or they may have been studying here. A number of these sectors of employment have been particularly affected by the coronavirus crisis.

97.97% of the population of Perth and Kinross categorised themselves as 'White'(slightly above the national average of 96.02%) in the 2011 census. At the time of publication figures from the 2021 Census are not published. However, this figure included some 2,482 people categorised as 'White Polish' (1.69% above the national average of 1.16% and the 4th highest local authority population in Scotland), 3,130 categorised as 'Other White' which would include other Eastern European countries of origin (2.13% of the total population above the national average of 1.93%).

The EU Settlement Scheme officially closed for application on 30 June 2021 (although remains open for late applications). At that point there had been 11,260 applications from this area (the 8th highest local authority area in Scotland in terms of applications and highest of the 3 Tayside Authorities) Our 3 main applicant countries of origin in this area are Poland (3,870), Romania (2,500) and Bulgaria (1,410).

Figures for our longer-established minority ethnic communities in Perth and Kinross totalled 1,852 at the 2011 census (1.26% of the total population below the national average of 2.66%)

Migration Status

People arriving in the UK through formal Resettlement Programmes are given Refugee or Humanitarian Protection status immediately and are not required to claim asylum. These formal schemes typically provide limited or unlimited leave to remain in the UK and access to housing/homelessness assistance, benefits, education and health services etc.

People arriving through informal/illegal migration routes, such as small boat crossings of the English Channel, are required to claim asylum and the outcome of their claim determines whether they are granted leave to remain in the UK. Asylum seekers are accommodated by the Home Office in temporary accommodation dispersed across the UK and are not eligible for housing/homelessness assistance or benefits.

With regards to our local **sanctuary seeking population**, we have fully participated in three most recent resettlement schemes for people from Syria, Afghanistan and Ukraine.

Syrian programme – 33 people from 7 families have settled in Perth and Kinross since 2015.

Afghan programme – 15 people from 4 families have settled in Perth and Kinross since 2021.

Ukraine programme – 451 displaced people have settled in Perth and Kinross Council since March 2022.

The table below shows a breakdown by location of where in Perth and Kinross the families have settled, as at August 2023.

% distribution across PKC	Perth city	Strathmore (Blairgowrie & surrounding areas)	Strathearn (Crieff and surrounding areas)	Kinross & South Perthshire	Carse of Gowrie	Highland Perthshire (Dunkeld, Pitlochry, Aberfeldy and surrounding areas)
Syria	100%	-	-	-	-	-
Afghanistan	100%	-	-	-	-	-
Ukraine	32%	31%	11%	5%	3%	18%

Over the past two years, we have also supported the arrival of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking young people through the National Transfer Scheme.

In February 2022, the UASC element of the team changed its name to **CASA** (**Children Alone Seeking Asylum**) thereby putting the emphasis on these young people being children first and foremost. This fits in with The Promise whereby Local Authorities will be able to “*demonstrate that they are embedding destigmatising language and practices across the way they work.*” We now have 24 young people from 11 different countries with over 14 different languages being spoken by the young people, many of whom are fluent in a number of languages.

People Seeking Asylum – 2 hotels have been used in Perth as part of a Home Office Resettlement programme since December 2021 to provide accommodation for a male population of people going through the asylum process. As at the beginning of August 2023, the hotels accommodated a total of 100 single males.

Governance and Reporting

The work undertaken within this policy and Action Plan will report annually during the lifetime of the plan to the Housing and Social Wellbeing Committee with an update also provided to the Equalities Strategic Forum who will have an oversight role.

A Community Integration Network is also in place with membership from across the third sector and community groups working directly with newer and longer-established minority ethnic communities in Perth and Kinross. All members of the network are committed to pro-actively support this work and will also provide a voice for those with lived experience within the process.

The report on work undertaken will demonstrate how we meet the Sanctuary Award criteria to Learn, Embed and Share as the accompanying Case Study examples evidence.