

Regulator finds no evidence that refugee charity engaged in inappropriate activity

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The Charity Commission has closed its compliance case into City of Sanctuary UK, finding no evidence of wrongdoing.

City of Sanctuary UK works to advance education relating to asylum seekers and refugees, and to promote equality and diversity.

The Commission opened a case following a complaint made in August 2025 alleging inappropriate political activity, particularly relating to the charity's Schools of Sanctuary programme.

In particular, concerns were raised over the charity's activities in schools, including the claim that school children were being encouraged to send Valentine's Day cards to adult asylum seekers. This allegation had been circulating online and was also reported in the media.

Findings

Following a detailed review and a meeting with the charity's trustees, the regulator did not find evidence to support these allegations.

The regulator examined specific concerns about the charity's educational resources, its use of language and its activities – particularly in relation to the allegation around the Valentine's Day card activity. Heart-shaped general messages of welcome to refugees were displayed in schools, with some sent to a separate charity supporting refugees for display in its premises. The trustees explained that at no point did children write cards to individual adult asylum seekers or refugees.

The Commission found no evidence of inappropriate political activity by the charity, or activity that falls outside of its purposes. The charity's criticism of aspects of government policy was permissible under charity law in the context of the charity's registered purpose of supporting refugees and asylum seekers and did not amount to a breach of charities' obligation to remain independent of party-political bias. The trustees explained that politicians from different parties support its work and local authorities of various political compositions help deliver its programmes.

More generally, the Commission found the charity's approach to educational activities permissible under charity law, noting educational material does not need to be completely value-free, and in this case could reflect the charity's viewpoint that people seeking sanctuary should be welcomed and supported.

The Commission is concerned that City of Sanctuary UK faced a misinformation campaign, including threats to charity trustees and staff, in relation to the Valentine's Day card allegations.

Helen Earner, Director of Regulatory Services at the Charity Commission, said:

The Commission speaks out when charities fall short of their legal responsibilities, but we also have a role in affirming the right of charities to further their purposes within the law, even where some may strongly disagree with their views.

Charities have operated in contested areas of social policy for centuries, and as such, need to accept that not everyone will agree with their position or be supportive of their cause, and that they may be subject to criticism.

In this case however, concerns about the charity's work were fuelled by online misinformation, something charities are increasingly subject to and a concern for us as regulator. While we can't fact check every concern about every charity, sometimes the high profile of allegations means it is right for us to set the record straight where allegations cannot be substantiated.

After examining the available evidence, we found the claims to be misleading, and that the Schools of Sanctuary programme is within the charity's purposes and complies with our guidance on campaigning and political activity. We are satisfied the trustees understand their regulatory obligations.

ENDS

Notes to editors

1. The Charity Commission is the independent, non-ministerial government department that registers and regulates charities in England and Wales. Its ambition is to be an expert regulator that is fair, balanced, and independent so that charity can thrive. This ambition will help to create and sustain an environment where charities further build public trust and ultimately fulfil their essential role in enhancing lives and strengthening society.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/regulator-finds-no-evidence-that-refugee-charity-engaged-in-inappropriate-activity>