

PERN'S STRATEGIC PLAN

**2026 TO 2029
SUMMARY DOCUMENT**



The Story So Far

PERN's first Strategic Plan (2023 to 2026) guided the steady growth of our charity to become the thriving organisation we now are.

Our 2026 to 2029 Strategic Plan will look to the next part of our journey as a charity, setting out our vision for supporting people seeking sanctuary across Cumbria over the next three years.

Our latest strategy was developed in consultation with our members. We held an Away Day, where those with lived experience and those who have lived longer in the UK engaged together to discuss our priorities, strengths and challenges, and to map the path forward.

Our Strategic Plan was approved by our Board in September 2026 and is available on our website. This version is a summary of the full document, highlighting our three priorities.

SUMMARY STATEMENT

PERN STRATEGIC PLAN 2026-2029



The Penrith and Eden Refugee Network (PERN) Strategic Plan 2026-2029 sets out our vision for supporting people seeking sanctuary across Cumbria over the next three years. Building on the growth achieved under the 2023-2026 strategy, the plan responds to significant changes in the local and national asylum landscape while positioning PERN for long-term sustainability.

Cumbria became an asylum dispersal area in 2022, bringing increased demand for specialist support alongside continuing challenges created by the UK's asylum system, shortages in affordable housing, structural inequality, misinformation and growing anti-migrant sentiment. Against this backdrop, PERN's mission remains to welcome diversity, strengthen community, pursue justice and help rebuild lives.

OUR STRATEGY IS BUILT AROUND THREE INTERCONNECTED PRIORITIES:

- 1) Building a community of solidarity
- 2) Delivering high quality services
- 3) Securing PERN's future



PERN is currently developing a financial strategy that will sit alongside the strategic plan. Our financial systems reflect the size of charity we now are. In 2025 we secured a specialist charity accountant and in 2026 we introduced forecasting under their guidance and began the process of migrating our financial systems to QuickBooks, a recommended accounting software.

BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF SOLIDARITY

PERN aims to be a community of solidarity truly inclusive of asylum seekers and refugees and those who have lived longer in the UK.

Our values guide all that we do. They ensure that refugees and asylum seekers are at the heart of our work and shape our behaviour, decisions and actions. Alongside solidarity, PERN's values include being:

- Empowering and enabling
- Respectful, supportive, kind and compassionate
- Inclusive and actively anti racist

We:

- Prioritise the most vulnerable
- Challenge injustice and promote a sense of global unity
- Ensure good stewardship of time and money



We work in solidarity with refugees so that together we can make Cumbria a place where sanctuary seekers are welcome and included. We empower people to be independent and to thrive. Integration requires inclusive, fair and welcoming communities; we seek to influence structures and attitudes to remove barriers to belonging.

We prioritise increasing the voice and leadership of those with lived experience - both within PERN and within the community. Our talent pipeline method and ethos mean we can make this priority a reality.

Empowerment requires addressing the systems and structures that limit agency. We educate, influence and campaign for a fair and humane asylum and immigration system. PERN challenges discrimination, 'othering,' ignorance and prejudice in Cumbria.

DELIVERING HIGH QUALITY SERVICES

PERN will continue to provide community-embedded services that enable people to survive, navigate life and thrive. These services focus on upstream interventions that empower, bring independence and prevent destitution. They include learning English, securing refugee status, accessing employment, obtaining safe housing and avoiding poverty and destitution. Our strategy commits to continuing and developing quality provision of our core services:

- **PERN English** - providing regular volunteer-led English language classes and opportunities for integration.
- **Penrith Welcomes Diversity** - promoting inclusion and anti-racism across Penrith and Eden.
- **PERN Legal and Info** - IAA Level 3 regulated in immigration, specialising in asylum and protection: claims from first submission to upper tribunal and complex asylum rights cases, alongside outreach and routine queries at drop-ins in Carlisle, Barrow and Workington.
- **PERN New Refugee Support** - integration, jobs, training and employment for refugees, plus transactional work.
- **PERN First Steps Housing** - Cumbria's only specialist housing provision for refugees. We established 24 housing places in the first two years of this service, delivered as part of our four pathways out of homelessness. Through our capital project - PERN Open Doors - we have successfully fundraised to purchase our own house for new refugees alongside destitute asylum seekers.

We seek out the most vulnerable and support all to survive, navigate life and thrive. Local partners refer to us; national partners give expertise which we adapt to rural Cumbria. Together, these services provide practical support while empowering people towards long-term independence and belonging.

SECURING PERN'S FUTURE

Having established our reputation, alongside high-quality services, PERN's priority is now to ensure the charity remains sustainable. The strategy focuses on diversifying income, strengthening funder relationships, improving external communication, educating about global and local refugee matters and raising our public profile. Increasing PERN's visibility, amplifying lived-experience voices and improving public understanding of refugee issues will be essential to sustaining the charity's impact.

Throughout the strategy, we reaffirm our commitment to solidarity, inclusion, anti-racism and community cohesion. We seek not only to support individuals but also to influence the wider systems, policies and public attitudes that shape the lives of people seeking sanctuary.

Over the next three years, PERN will build on its reputation as a trusted, community-based charity, ensuring that Cumbrian communities are welcoming and refugees and asylum seekers are empowered and supported to integrate and thrive.

