

London Strategic Migration Partnership Board

Wednesday 18th December 2024

10:00-12:00

Microsoft Teams

Chaired by:

Debbie Weekes-Bernard, Deputy Mayor for Communities and Social Justice

Attendance:

Aine Ruth, Greater London Authority
Andrew Davis, Mayor's Office on Policing and Crime
Andrew Grant, London Metropolitan Police
Barbara Drozdowicz, Eastern European Refugee Centre
Beth Wheaton, Greater London Authority
Claire Portlock, Home Office
Calum Davidson, Greater London Authority
Catherine Houlcroft, Islington
Diletta Mastria, Greater London Authority
Eduardo Lopes, Greater London Authority
Elenore Jones, Home Office
Eleonora Paesani, Greater London Authority
Elizabeth Kirk, Greater London Authority
Emma De Zoete, Greater London Authority
Emma Neill, Clearsprings Ready Homes
Esther McConnell, Greater London Authority
Fawad Shah, Home Office
Francesca Rowson, London Councils
Grace Ashaye, London Asylum Seekers Consortium (LASC)
Cllr Grace Williams, Deputy Chair and Executive Member for Housing and Regeneration, London Councils
Hannah Boylan, Greater London Authority
Imman Laksari-Adams, Greater London Authority
James Bottomley, Mayor's Office on Policing and Crime
Josie Garrett, Greater London Authority
Julie Billet, Department for Health and Social Care
Juliette Frontier, London Councils
Khadijah Amani, Greater London Authority
Kismet Meyon, Greater London Authority
Laila Aziz, Greater London Authority
Lidia Esteves Picon, Greater London Authority
Lisa Kunwar-Deer, Mayor's Office on Policing and Crime
Louise Yu, Greater London Authority
Liz Maifredi, Department for Work and Pensions

GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY

Marc Simo, Greater London Authority
Mark Winterburn, Greater London Authority
Matty Gladstone, Refugee and Migrant Forum of Essex and London (RAMFEL)
Maysa Ismael, Greater London Authority
Mohammed Kashif Khan, Home Office
Meltem Dincer, East London Advanced Technology Training (ELATT)
Kalyani McCarthy, Westminster (London National Transfer Scheme Coordinator)
Navprit Rai, Greater London Authority
Philip Baker, Greater London Authority
Ramiye Thavabalasingam, Greater London Authority
Richard Cameron, Greater London Authority
Robin Misir, Home Office
Rory Weal, Greater London Authority
Rukshan Rajamanthri, Greater London Authority
Sachin Fing, Home Office
Siobhan Gosrani, Greater London Authority
Susan Cueva, Greater London Authority
Tanya Dewey, Home Office
Tamara Smith, Greater London Authority
Tim Rymer, Home Office
Tom Copley, Greater London Authority
Tunde Olayinka, Greater London Authority
Veronica Tuffery, Greater London Authority
Voke Oniovo-Kukor, Greater London Authority
Woodren Brade, Refugee Council
Yin Lam, Greater London Authority

Apologies:

Cllr Anthony Okereke, Executive member for Communities, London Councils
Alison Griffin, London Councils
Sarah Newman, Association of London Directors of Childrens Services

1. Welcomes, Minutes and Actions

Debbie Weekes Bernard, Dep. Mayor, Communities and Social Justice, Chair

- 1.1 Debbie welcomed the group and proceeded to approve the previous meeting's minutes with the board. A special thanks was extended to Cllr Grace Williams for her attendance.
- 1.2 Mark Winterburn shared updates on key actions from the last meeting. Mark also noted these were circulated ahead of the meeting, alongside relevant papers.

- 1.3 Philip Baker outlined funding arrangements between the Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government (MHCLG) and local authorities hosting airports when evacuations occur.
- 1.4 Tamara Smith reported progress on actions regarding hate crime. She stated that the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) is collaborating to outline specific migration needs and broader training and support requirements regarding hate crime. The GLA Communities and Social Policy Unit are planning a half-day training session to be provided to partners in supporting to tackle hate crime and ways of reporting this.

2. Migrant Sector Advisory Panel (MSAP) Update: Immigration Advice Capacity

- 2.1 Tamara Smith shared updates from the Migrant Sector Advisory Panel (MSAP) meeting. She noted that concerns were raised regarding the lack of immigration advice capacity, ahead of bringing in Barbara Drozdowicz.
- 2.2 Barbara Drozdowicz highlighted that legal aid rates have remained unchanged for 30 years. Additionally, while legal aid supports detention-related legal action, it does not cover large areas of immigration advice. She noted that immigration work is predominantly funded through external sources, with individuals paying for services themselves or through charity contributions. Lastly, she noted that European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS) funding will end soon. Below is a summary of some of the key concerns shared:
 - The lack of immigration advice has impacted the welfare and wellbeing of London's population, contributing to homelessness. Additionally, vulnerable individuals, while submitting applications, are at risk of destitution due to the cost and quality of unregulated advice.
 - Approximately 50% of asylum claimants cannot access legal advice. While some asylum cases are covered by legal aid, the capacity to support these cases is insufficient. The backlog is exacerbated by complex appeals, leaving individuals in asylum limbo without access to public funds or the ability to work.
 - Another central challenge relates to domestic abuse, as immigration status is used as a controlling factor to women or anyone in a situation of exploitation.
 - Safeguarding issues cannot always be resolved without accessing immigration advice.
 - Payment rates are due to increase, with further legal aid contracts also being released. However, there are cost and funding barriers to managing and maintaining this work. Barbara stated that suitable grant-funded support or non-contractual models can support the sector to deliver more immigration advice work.

- 2.3 Tamara noted that the LSMP Board has considered these issues in the past, including through presentations of research conducted by the Electronic Immigration Network in 2021 and extensive writings by Dr Jo Wilding.
- 2.4 Grace Ashaye discussed the potential for further funding and suggested conducting an analysis to evaluate whether organisations can absorb additional funding. It was noted that this process could take up to two years to implement. Tim informed the group that a consultation will be held in January, regarding legal aid fees and the pressures of asylum backlogs.
- 2.5 Tim Rymer, Home Office, stated that individuals can apply for separate funding through a contract with the Law Society to conduct asylum and legal aid work. He noted that collaboration with organisations such as the Immigration Law Practitioners Association (ILPA) is essential for data utilisation and to identify areas where advisors are needed.
- 2.6 Debbie thanked everyone for their contributions, noting the importance of all that was discussed and suggested revisiting this item at a future meeting.

Action: London Strategic Migration Partnership Board to host item on Immigration Advice Capacity at a future meeting.

3. Update: eVisas

- 3.1 Philip Baker provided an update on expired Biometric Residence Permits (BRPs) and eVisas. Philip noted that the GLA hosted an online event on eVisa updates on 10.12.2025, which 170 people attended. Philip stated that a note summarising this event will be compiled and circulated by the new year. The event covered the processes and policies surrounding eVisas, and technical challenges.
- 3.2 Philip updated that, following the 4th of December Home Office announcement, airlines are permitted to accept BRPs that expire on 31st December until the end of March 2025. However, some carriers may remain risk-averse, despite a check service for verifying immigration status.
- 3.3 Philip noted that banks continue to refuse eVisas and identification documents. Reports being received by the GLA are being shared with the Home Office, who are working to resolve these issues.
- 3.4 Eleanor Jones, Home Office confirmed that individuals can now register errors through their UKVI accounts, and that banks are being directly engaged with at a branch level. There is also a new government travel advice page on 'How to travel with eVisas'.

- 3.5 Catherine Houlcroft clarified that the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) Connect is used by council social care teams to check digital status. However, there may be limited access for housing officers and cannot be relied on for this.
- 3.6 Barbara Drozdowicz noted the challenges with share codes experienced by those supported by civil society organisations. Philip stated that the GLA is investigating ways to improve information flow to frontline staff.
- 3.7 Woodren Brade, Refugee Council noted the importance of cascading information to frontline staff and statutory partners. Woodren noted that there have been cases where the DWP has not accepted eVisas for Universal Credit claims. Liz Maifredi welcomed case studies to be shared to resolve these concerns.
- 3.8 Debbie thanked everyone for their contributions and noted the importance and impact in sharing case studies has in this work and implementing change.

Action: Philip Baker to share summary note on Greater London Authority's eVisas forum.

Action: Woodren Brade (Refugee Council) to send Liz Maifredi (Department of Work and Pensions) cases where eVisas are not being accepted for Universal Credit.

Action: Tim Rymer (Home Office) to take forward feedback and any case studies on issues with eVisas and asylum move-on and raise them with relevant Home Office teams.

Action: The Greater London Authority to support cascading information to frontline staff and bodies regarding eVisa updates.

4. Update: London Growth Plan

4.1 Beth Wheaton shared updates on the London Growth Plan. Below is a summary of what was shared:

- The London Growth Plan aims to ensure inclusive economic growth, targeting 150,000 good jobs by 2028.
- An Inclusive Talent Strategy will focus on Adult Skills Funding, including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and aligning healthcare and employment services.
- London will continue to be a global talent hub, leveraging migration policies and working with Skills England.
- Plans include investing in career guidance for migrants, refugees, and evacuees.

4.2 Councillor Grace Williams emphasised the need for a holistic approach to affordable housing and employment; this was discussed at the London Partnership Board recently.

4.3 Beth confirmed that career development will be part of the inclusive talent strategy, with outreach programmes supporting Londoners.

5. **Update: Place Based Approach**

5.1 Robin Misir introduced the new Home Office External Relations team and provided an overview of key workstreams under the Place-Based Approach (PBA) programme. The PBA programme is closely aligned with dispersal teams, focusing on reshaping governance and collaboration with the LSMP. Robin noted that a trial phase will begin in January 2025 for PBA governance at the level of the London Asylum Oversight Group.

5.2 Tim Rymer, Home Office, highlighted the importance of better partnership working, especially in developing simpler funding models and expanding on the work done in the dispersal space.

5.3 Councillor Grace Williams discussed the importance of involving people with lived experiences in the process and understanding this from their point of view to ensure the effectiveness of PBA.

5.4 Additionally, Mark Winterburn noted that the PBA is a response to a consultation. Mark noted that LSMP and the External relations team will work together with the Chair and Co-Chair of the London Asylum Oversight Group to refresh the Terms of Reference for the group. Mark noted the revised Terms of Reference will be shared with LSMP Board for comment.

Action: The revised Terms of Reference for the London Asylum Oversight Group to be circulated with the London Strategic Migration Partnership Board for comment.

6. **No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) Network Data Report and Recommendations**

6.1 Catherine Houlcroft shared an overview of the NRPF Network Data Report. A high-level overview is below:

- London local authorities continue to spend substantial sums to support NRPF households.
- Caseloads have decreased, with referrals mostly related to families with permission to work but still facing financial hardship.

- The average time on support remains high.
- Emerging issues include the NRPF condition affecting students and health and care workers who are struggling to make ends meet with housing and living costs, and sponsorship arrangements breaking down. It was noted that some Hong Kong BNO visa holders are experiencing these challenges. Some people also remain locked out of benefits due to having Pre-Settled Status.
- In respect of the discontinuation of asylum support, adult care needs are an issue.
- Recommendations include improving data collection to ensure continuous support and addressing funding gaps.

6.2 Catherine noted that recommendations were presented to the Home Office NRPF policy team.

6.3 Catherine noted that there is ongoing collaboration with London Councils and the GLA to develop a London policy position statement and explore how to best present data.

6.4 Catherine stated that there is great attendance at NRPF Network meetings. NRPF Network also hosts an array of free resources and practice guidance on their website, addressing gaps in statutory guidance.

6.5 Grace Williams echoed concerns about the finance and service strain on London. She also flagged the human impact on those affected, including children. She urged the government to process claims more quickly. She thanked colleagues and requested the Home Office to work together to address these issues.

6.6 Tim Rymer acknowledged Cllr Grace Williams' points and thanked her. He noted that the Home Office would consider these issues, particularly around Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and the needs of people with complex issues, including care leavers. The Home Office will continue to support connected services and regularly review processes to ensure that concerns are addressed, feeding these conversations to ministers. Catherine expressed gratitude and highlighted the challenge of no single government department supporting this cohort.

6.7 Additionally, Mark Winterburn suggested discussing with Catherine Houlcroft whether other governance groups in London could address these issues, especially where they intersect with asylum policy.

6.8 Woodren Brade emphasised the importance of involving the voluntary sector and lived experience, guided by data, to identify critical points in mitigating homelessness. She noted there is a challenge of 'postcode lottery' in the support that NRPF households receive from councils. Additionally, Matty Gladstone, addressed a data gap, suggesting that the CHAIN system could link decisions and support services more effectively. She expressed willingness to continue

conversations on welfare advice and the Homeless Migrant Advisory Panel (HMAP).

6.9 Lastly, DCI Andrew Grant raised the need to address child exploitation and modern slavery.

7. Asylum Decision Making – Asylum Roadmap

Mark Winterburn, London Strategic Migration

7.1 Mark Winterburn shared key messages on the Asylum Roadmap paper. Below is a summary of some of the recommendations from the paper.

- Recognise asylum accommodation as supported/ hostel accommodation given the use of shared facilities in asylum accommodation and that people's average length of stay is usually greater than three months. This would mean refugees could access the Private Rented Sector (PRS) accommodation at the higher self-contained Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate rather than being capped at the shared room rate.
- There is a need to confirm the continuation of funding to the Rough Sleeping Initiative. This funding is currently supporting the work of over 25 immigration advisors in London, but is due to expire in March 2024.
- Better data sharing would support early interventions for local authorities.
- Maximise the benefit of Home Office Liaison Officer (HOLO), now Asylum and Move-On Liaison Office (AMLO) models, and learn lessons for the future. Multiagency approaches will be vital in supporting the asylum process.

7.2 Francesca Rowson highlighted the results of a recent survey regarding rough sleeping in London following individuals' departure from Home Office accommodation.

Action: Home Office to provide an update on the future funding of the Rough Sleeping Initiative.

8. Mayor's Rough Sleeping Plan: Homelessness

Tom Copley, Deputy Mayor, Housing and Land, Greater London Authority

8.1 Tom Copley explained that the GLA is developing a plan to end rough sleeping by 2030, noting that homelessness cannot be addressed without thinking of migrant homelessness.

- Tom noted that investment from government is needed to support a London vision for tackling rough sleeping.
- He stated that there has been years of underfunding and a backdrop of NRPF.

- The GLA is working with London Councils and local authorities to address migrant homelessness.
- 8.2 Cllr Grace Williams raised concerns about the cost of temporary accommodation and the need for suitable wraparound support for individuals. She also flagged the importance of immigration advice and partnership working.
- 8.3 Woodren Brade explained that Refugee Council agreed with the importance of focusing on prevention. She also noted the importance of improving the PRS to avoid rough sleeping. She stated that it was important for policies to be informed by lived experience and data collection.
- 8.4 Matty Gladstone flagged the data gap around what happens when people receive refugee status. She asked whether it might be possible to use CHAIN to link with what happens to people when they do get status - how long it takes people to get housed, what happens after etc. She also flagged the gap in provision for welfare benefits and advice.
- 8.5 DCI Andrew Grant raised the importance of utilising public land for housebuilding.
- 8.6 Tom Copley thanked partners for their contributions which would assist with the development of the strategy. He noted that while utilising public land for housebuilding was outside the scope of the Rough Sleeping Strategy, this was something the GLA Group was very much focussed on.