

London Strategic Migration Partnership (LSMP) Board

28 March 2023

15.00 – 17.00

Hybrid meeting – London Councils offices, Southwark Street SE1 0AL and Microsoft Teams

Chair

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

Attendees

Councillor Georgia Gould, Chair of London Councils

Hannah Doody, Chief Executives London Committee Joint Lead on Refugees and Asylum

Kalyani McCarthy, London National Transfer Scheme Coordinator

Tim Rymer, Home Office

Oliver Carlisle, Home Office

Christina Jones, Home Office

Richard Williams, Home Office

Chris Hennigan, Home Office

Nicola Hey, Home Office

Julie Billett, Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID)

Salud Murphy, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)

Dave Ashdown, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

Liz Maifredi, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

Steven Lakey, Clearsprings

James Walkner, Clearsprings

James Sweeting, Stay Belvedere Hotels Ltd

Juliet Halstead, Migrant Help

Nicola Davies, Migrant Help

Toby Gould, London Fire Brigade

Det Supt Andy Furphy, Metropolitan Police

Martin Machray, NHS England

Eva Barnsley, London Councils

Barbara Drozdowicz, East European Resource Centre

Rena Mann, Refugee Council

Anna Yassin, Glass Door

Phoebe Heneage, ELATT

Yvonne Bizayi, ELATT

Sian Humphreys, Barnardo's

Juliane Heider, Islington Law Centre

Mark Scott, Bhatt Murphy

Greater London Authority (GLA) staff

Tom Copley, Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development

Hannah Boylan, Migration

Mark Winterburn, Migration

Rukshan Rajamanthri, Migration

Siobhan Gosrani, Migration

Marc Simo, Migration

Tamara Smith, Migration

Esther McConnell, Migration

Susan Cueva, Migration

Philip Baker, Migration
Lidia Estevez Picon, Migration/ Rough Sleeping
Ramiye Thavabalasingam, Migration/ Rough Sleeping
Elizabeth Kirk, Migration/ Rough Sleeping
George Hanoun, Migration
Tom Copley, Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development
Remy Mohamed, Grenfell Response Policy and Programmes Manager
Andy Davis, Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC)
Veronica Tuffrey, City Intelligence
Emma De Zoete, Health

1. Welcome & Minutes

- 1.1. Debbie Weekes-Bernard welcomed attendees and introduced new attendees and guests to the meeting. The minutes from the last meeting were approved.
- 1.2. Debbie acknowledged that this meeting is taking place at a particularly tumultuous time for asylum policy and noted that there is a dedicated item for colleagues to discuss the Government's recently tabled Illegal Migration Bill.
- 1.3. Tamara Smith gave an update following recent meetings the GLA has held with stakeholders and experts across the migration and refugee sector on immigration advice and legal aid:
 - The need for consistent and robust data collection is now particularly acute given the speed of change of recent policy announcements and the growing need for immigration advice.
 - There is useful work happening across programmes documenting the cost benefits of early intervention, but long-term investment in the advice sector is needed.
 - Legal aid contracts are in a crisis of capacity, and stakeholders have highlighted disjointed action between the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice and the Legal Aid Agency.

2. Immigration needs of Grenfell families

- 2.1. Mark Scott and Juliane Heider, legal representatives of Grenfell families from Bhatt Murphy and Islington Law Centre respectively, gave an update on the families' ongoing immigration needs:
 - The Home Office's dedicated policy for survivors has provided greater certainty about immigration decisions, by allowing those granted 5 years' lawful leave after the fire to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain.
 - Mark and Juliane have been representing relatives of those who died. These relatives came to the UK in 2017 following the fire and have been following the Grenfell Tower Inquiry since it started.
 - The evidential part of the Inquiry has now finished, but the final report and recommendations are still to be published and any criminal investigations will not start until after the Inquiry has fully reported.
 - Although the decisions for relatives to enter the UK were made very swiftly, their immigration status has remained precarious ever since. The Home Office granted leave to remain for 6 months at a time for core participants in the Inquiry and those caring for relatives, but this has had negative impacts on families.

- Juliane and Mark called for the Home Office to enact a policy that provides Indefinite Leave to Remain for the relatives of those who died in the fire.

2.2. Oliver Carlisle responded on behalf of the Home Office. Key points included:

- The vast majority of people eligible under the Home Office's survivors' policy have now received Indefinite Leave to Remain.
- The scheme to support relatives entering the UK following the fire was never intended to be a permanent route to settlement.
- The Home Office's latest position is that it has agreed to extend all immigration leave for relatives until the end of July 2023, with the expectation that this will be the last extension of leave under the relatives' policy. Those who leave the UK after this point will be able to come back as visitors for 6 months to attend or be involved in the Inquiry; the Home Office is looking at providing some concessions such as a visa waiver to support families to return in future, but on the basis that they will be coming only to visit and not stay permanently. This position has been agreed with Ministers.
- 220 people have come to the UK under the relatives' policy. Of these, there are only 6 people currently in the UK, with the rest having either left or attained indefinite leave to remain.
- The Home Office needs to ensure it is acting consistently and fairly and thus apply the same rules for all 220 people who came under the policy.

3. Asylum Accommodation & Support: Updates & Escalation

3.1. Far right activity at asylum contingency hotels

3.1.1. Debbie Weekes-Bernard highlighted the violent protests which took place outside an asylum contingency hotel in Merseyside in February, and noted her concern that they reflect a recent wider trend in far-right anti-migrant activity. She noted that although far-right activity has been less prevalent and violent in London than the events in Merseyside and elsewhere, there has still been activity including an incident in Romford that has required increased patrols from the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS).

3.1.2. Det Supt Andy Furphy gave an update on the MPS response in Romford and other trends. Key points included:

- The MPS recognised the risk of far-right activity early on and is monitoring this through its public order command and operations centre.
- A single point of contact has been identified to oversee the neighbourhood-level response to far-right activity and ensure there is a strategic link with work around organised crime and crime affecting migrants. As part of this, the MPS is making contact with hotels in London and liaising with their management.
- The MPS is carrying out Operation Seascare, which involves officers going into businesses to raise awareness of, and train staff on the signs to spot exploitation. The MPS is working with the Home Office to deliver this training in hotels.
- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children going missing is also a key issue that officers are monitoring and on which the MPS is awaiting National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) guidance.

- 3.1.3. Tim Rymer gave an update from the Home Office, noting that the Department is working with the National Police Coordination Centre to monitor far-right protests and leading regular planning and coordination meetings to bring together colleagues in the unaccompanied children space. Tim added that accommodation providers have built strong working relationships with the police, and that there is a lot of work happening at a national level to tackle issues around community cohesion. Tim also confirmed that work is being done to provide information and advice to residents in hotels as well as to staff.
- 3.1.4. Steven Lakey gave an update, noting that Clearsprings has a robust gold command process for monitoring any live events on the ground, which is shared with the MPRS and led by the Home Office. Steven added that all staff inside hotels have been briefed on the risks and noted that civil society colleagues have played a key role in supporting people inside hotels.
- 3.1.5. Barbara Drozdowicz gave an update on key trends in crime affecting migrants being seen by civil society organisations. There has been a slight shift towards more localised individual hate crime incidents, including a sharp rise against people suspected of being Russian following the war in Ukraine, but charities are also seeing slightly less hostilities in the workplace and in schools.
- 3.1.5 Barbara highlighted the importance of ensuring that there are sufficient hate crime reporting services in place, noting that while some organisations are funded by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) to map incidents and provide hate crime reporting sites, greater numbers of these are needed.
- 3.1.6. Det Supt Andy Furphy offered to commission a hate crime report looking at asylum specifically, and share this at the next LSMP meeting.

Action: Det Supt Andy Furphy and Andy Davis to explore potential for MPS and/ or MOPAC to map relevant hate crimes against people seeking asylum and share these findings at LSMP Board.

Further engagement with London health system partners and national UKHSA colleagues is underway to finalise the tool, and the final guidance will be disseminated widely to London partners within the next few weeks.

3.2. Update on London Asylum Regional Plan & new governance structures

- 3.2.1. Mark Winterburn noted that the London Asylum Regional Plan is now live. Delivery of the plan will be monitored by the London Regional Asylum Plan Oversight Group that is also now live. The meetings of this group are chaired by Hannah Doody and involve colleagues from the Home Office, Clearsprings, Migrant Help, health systems and civil society. The Oversight Group is complemented by a Working Group convened by London Councils. This Group will be able to consider intelligence presented to boroughs and present thematic issues at the Oversight Group such as equity, data-sharing and safeguarding.
- 3.2.2. Hannah Doody provided further detail about the Oversight Group:
- Two key themes for the group will be around accountability and how national policy decisions taken by the government will impact on London specifically.

- The group will also work towards building an agreed dataset amongst partners and mapping the information that local authorities need in terms of place, social care, housing and health.
- Current priorities for the group include: obtaining greater detail around contingency hotel numbers and the process around local connection, obtaining clarity around offers of accommodation, and oversight of the Streamlined Asylum Process.

3.2.3. Cllr Georgia Gould highlighted some issues that have been raised by local authorities:

- The lack of sharing of data on people moving into boroughs and the timeliness around being told about hotels being stood up key concerns. Although there is an agreement on 24 hours as the timeframe for notifications around hotels, many colleagues feel that this does not go far enough.
- There are also wider concerns around housing supply: there has been a contraction in the size of the private rented sector and the withdrawal of properties mean that new modes of supply and mechanisms for buying properties in central London must be considered. This is vital to ensuring a truly fair distribution across London.
- There is a continued importance in working to support people in hotels to access ESOL learning and employment opportunities, and work around integration for this population more generally.

3.2.4. Steven Lakey agreed that the state of the rental market represents a major issue. He noted that Clearsprings is meeting with local authorities to look at collective ways to bring more properties onto the market. Steven also highlighted that there are some brownfield sites with modular builds that can be used to accommodate people seeking asylum, Ukrainians and the general homeless population.

3.3. Update on Asylum Health Task & Finish Group

3.3.1. Tim Rymer gave an update on the work of the National Asylum Health Steering Group (NAHSG), noting that this group was set up together with NHS England to discuss the health and safeguarding of people seeking asylum, involves colleagues from civil society, meets quarterly and also has four specific task and finish groups reporting into it. The Group is currently looking to bring in a focus on infectious diseases, and is reviewing its overall governance and direction.

3.3.2. Julie Billett gave an update on the work of the London Asylum Health Task and Finish Group, noting that in their most recent meeting the group discussed issues and lessons from the situation at the Manston asylum centre, as well as best practice for providing a consistent offer of health support for people seeking asylum. Julie also described the Group's current strands of work:

- Working with the UK Health Security Agency to develop guidance on roles and responsibilities for different system partners relating outbreaks in asylum accommodation settings;
- A commissioner-led review of needs gaps and service model options for screening, testing and vaccinations (currently provided by Find and Treat);
- Work on data, including progressing a detailed piece of mapping work looking at where data is held in different parts of the system and how this flows, as well as a review of current data-sharing agreements and best practice for troubleshooting issues;

- There is also now a community of practice which is well attended by public health partners.

Action: Julie Billett to share guidance on the prevention of outbreaks and infectious disease in asylum accommodation once this is finalised.

- 3.3.3. Martin Machray called on partners at national bodies to ensure that the work they are doing on health systems at a national and/or regional level supports the facilitation of place-based neighbourhood-level services.

3.4. Safeguarding

- 3.4.1. Tim Rymer gave an update on work around safeguarding systems:

- There is a lot of work happening at a national level, including an operational safeguarding hub that receives referrals and advocates and raises issues to statutory bodies such as the police; work on contract assurance and compliance (including discharging safeguarding responsibilities); and work around mental health and wellbeing with partners such as Barnardo's providing therapeutic care.
- There is more work to be done to strengthen governance and improve understanding of the roles held by the Home Office and Clearsprings.
- The Home Office has opened up more channels of communication with local authorities such as weekly drop-in sessions, and is hosting a workshop to walk London Councils and the GLA through its processes and the role it plays.

- 3.4.2. Cllr Georgia Gould highlighted that referrals are still not coming directly to local authorities at the scale they should be and that there is a lack of information about risk assessments (particularly about vulnerable groups). There are also significant concerns around data sharing and age assessments, with some children being placed in hotels as adults. Cllr Gould highlighted that boroughs have a statutory duty on safeguarding and, as part of this, called for there to be an expectation amongst all accommodation providers that boroughs should be able to come in to hotels and make safeguarding checks.

Action: Tim Rymer to provide a written update on the progress of the Home Office's review into age assessments before the next LSMP meeting on 29 June.

- 3.4.3. Renae Mann echoed the concerns raised by Cllr Gould about sharing data on vulnerable residents in hotels and, regarding age assessments, highlighted that many service users who have age disputes are advised they can challenge their decisions, but not being visible to local authorities makes it very difficult to do this.

4. Housing & Homelessness

4.1. Overview of current pressures

- 4.1.1. Mark Winterburn gave a brief overview of current pressures, noting that the current context is very challenging, with a reduction in the availability of accommodation in the Private Rented Sector and cumulative challenges across the needs of refugee and asylum-seeking populations.

- 4.1.2. Cllr Georgia Gould highlighted that councils would like to see Afghans move into long-term accommodation as soon as possible, and called on partners who are supporting Afghans and have any budget underspend to use this towards housing costs if possible. Cllr Gould also welcomed the national investment in buying back homes and partnership work with the GLA through the Refugee Housing Programme, but noted that there is a cap on each home and so bespoke deals for boroughs that are looking to procure housing at pace would be welcome.

4.2. Refugee Housing Programme

- 4.2.1. Tom Copley gave an overview of the Refugee Housing Programme:

- The Mayor of London has secured £126m in capital grant funding from the government's £500m Local Authority Housing Fund to be administered as the Refugee Housing Programme in London. This will be used to deliver up to 630 homes in the capital for those eligible by 31 March 2024.
- The GLA has held extensive discussions with local authorities about formulating how funding for the programme should be administered and distributed.
- The programme is predominantly aimed at boroughs; it will also be open to housing associations.
- Eligible cohorts are those who are homeless, at risk of homelessness or who live in unsuitable temporary (including bridging) accommodation, and who are also on any of these schemes: Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP), the Ukraine Family Scheme, Homes for Ukraine, and the Ukraine Extension Scheme.
- The grants intend to provide local authorities with the flexibility to pursue a range of different delivery models to respond to local contexts, such as refurbishing and/or converting local authority-owned buildings, acquiring non-local authority owned buildings, acquiring new build properties 'off-the-shelf' and developing new properties.
- This programme expects grant recipients' bids to support moving Afghan households out of bridging accommodation. In London, it is expected that over 100 homes will be acquired for this purpose, and these will be for larger homes (4+ bedrooms), given the average family size of those in bridging accommodation.
- Rents can be set at Local Housing Allowance levels as long as these are no more than 80% of market rate.
- The minimum tenancy requirement will be for 3 years. Once the properties are no longer being used by the eligible cohorts, accommodation should be converted to general-needs affordable housing.

- 4.2.2. Cllr Georgia Gould acknowledged her appreciation for the collaborative working taking place on this programme, and welcomed that it will increase housing stock and provide flexibility to inner London boroughs accommodating high numbers of Afghan refugees.

- 4.2.3. Oliver Carlisle asked how the 3-year minimum tenancy requirement will work for Ukrainian refugees, considering that they only have 3 years leave to remain. Tom Copley responded that Ukrainians will not have to stay in their homes for 3 years, and they will be able to terminate their tenancy agreements if they need to move back to Ukraine.

5. Streamlined Asylum Process

- 5.1. Debbie Weekes-Bernard noted that while she welcomes the attempt to speed up asylum decision making, she has written a letter to the Government outlining her concerns with the Streamlined Asylum Process.
- 5.2. Tim Rymer acknowledged that the increased speed of decision making will mean greater pressures on local authorities. The Home Office is aware of the overall practical challenges and the Home Office encourages feedback from colleagues.
- 5.3. Renae Mann raised several key concerns, highlighting that questionnaires are not being translated and must be responded to in English. There are also significant concerns about the potential impacts of people seeking asylum completing the questionnaires without legal representation, particularly given that only advice providers who are OISC qualified at level 2 or above are allowed to provide support.
- 5.4. Anna Yassin highlighted that the announcement of the Streamlined Asylum Process took the migrant and refugee sector by surprise. She described the lack of consultation and engagement with stakeholders in the development of the process as a missed opportunity to work in partnership to resolve the asylum backlog. Anna noted that the Home Office's work on the EU Settlement Scheme had been highly collaborative.
- 5.5. Hannah Boylan highlighted that asylum decisions are being made in the next few weeks, and that this underlines the importance of partners continuing to monitor data and the risks of destitution.

6. Illegal Migration Bill

- 6.1. Debbie Weekes-Bernard highlighted that there is lots of concern about the speed at which the Illegal Migration Bill is being progressed through Parliament, and invited Renae Mann to set out some of the key concerns about its implications. Renae highlighted:
 - Refugee Council estimates that in the first three years of the legislation coming into effect, over 200,000 people will have their asylum claims deemed inadmissible;
 - The impact on children and trafficking survivors of their claims being deemed inadmissible;
 - Questions about return arrangements that will be in place;
 - The needed increased scale of the detention estate;
 - Heightened risks of destitution;
 - The impact that the Bill will have on future generations, including children who are not yet born but will be affected if their parents are caught up in the ramifications.
- 6.2. Hannah Boylan highlighted that there are also significant questions about the feasibility of the Bill, noting that there is little evidence it will deter people seeking asylum from making journeys to the UK and that it may face similar legal challenges to the government's Rwanda asylum policy, which was announced in 2022 but is still currently in the courts.
- 6.3. Cllr Georgia Gould highlighted that the Bill does not expand safe and legal routes available to people to claim asylum.
- 6.4. Tamara Smith also highlighted the cost of the Bill, noting that Refugee Council's impact assessment projects that a total of between £8.7bn and £9.6bn will have been spent on

detaining and accommodating people impacted by the Bill in the first three years of its operation.

7. Modern Slavery & Trafficking

7.1. Trafficking & exploitation of children in hotels

7.1.1. Kalyani McCarthy gave an overview of the current situation for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children:

- There are generally two separate cohorts of unaccompanied children who are going missing: Albanian boys, and those of other nationalities who go missing for a short period of time and then present to local authorities.
- There are significant concerns about Albanian boys in particular with regards to exploitation and trafficking, especially given the length of time they tend to go missing for.
- There are very serious concerns about the locations of hotels and that these are known to and targeted by criminal networks, who take advantage of children going outside of hotels. The Home Office also does not have the power to detain children.
- However, the overall trend in the number of missing unaccompanied children missing does seem to have significantly reduced since the latter end of 2022.

7.1.2. Nicola Hey gave an update from the Home Office. Key points included:

- The Home Office is still of the view that unaccompanied children should be in the care of local authorities and so is working towards this.
- The process for children going into hotels is the same as that for if they were able to go straight into local authority care:
 - Children are screened upon arrival to understand if they have any indicators of being trafficked, with staff being trained on this and on how to make referrals to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) if needed. Children who present indications of being victims of modern slavery are assigned additional safety plans.
 - Nurses are present onsite to assess children on immediate and individual needs, and social workers obtain information on their journey to the UK, any person they are indebted to, and any existing contacts in the UK.
 - The Home Office works very closely with local authorities to make referrals and link in on additional needs.
- Nicola acknowledged that children who leave hotels cannot be detained and that the locations of some hotels are known to criminal networks, but noted that the Home Office monitors movements in and out of hotels to identify any trends where children are outside for a long time and reports any missing children immediately.

7.1.3. Sian Humphreys gave an overview of the work of Barnardo's' National Counter Trafficking Service. When children are referred into the service, staff support them by providing immigration advice, guidance packs and safety plans, visiting hotels weekly (and twice weekly if there is a spike in the number of those missing), advocating for long-term placements, and following through with children into their placements.

- 7.1.4. Hannah Boylan noted that the Illegal Migration Bill gives the Home Office direct powers to accommodate unaccompanied asylum-seeking children outside of local authority care.

7.2. NRM/First Responders

- 7.2.1. Esther McConnell gave an overview of the current situation regarding the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and First Responders. Key points included:
- There has been an increase in the number of referrals to the NRM year-on-year since the system was established in 2009, and there was a total of 16,938 referrals in 2022.
 - Non-statutory First Responder organisations currently do not have the capacity to meet the increase in both the number and complexity of referrals, and civil society colleagues are saying they have now reached crisis point. This issue is compounded by the fact that many statutory First Responder organisations lack expertise and awareness of their duties. Making referrals has also become more complicated due to the reasonable grounds threshold recently being raised.
 - In response to these issues, the migrant domestic worker charity Kalayaan, which is a non-statutory First Responder, has set out a number of recommendations for the government's urgent consideration in a recent report.
- 7.2.2. Richard Williams responded on behalf of the Home Office, noting that while it is unable to give certainty about next steps, it is considering the recommendations in Kalayaan's report. Richard added that the Home Office is acutely aware of the current pressures on the NRM and that operational improvements must be made to reduce the current average waiting time of 543 days for a decision and improve the quality of referrals, so that people can access the support they need to rebuild their lives.
- 7.2.3. Debbie Weekes-Bernard proposed arranging a separate follow-up meeting to discuss NRM issues in more detail.

Action: Follow-up meeting involving Richard Williams to be arranged to discuss the current situation regarding the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and First Responder Organisational capacity.

Action: MOPAC colleagues to report on their work around modern slavery at future LSMP Board meetings.