

London Strategic Migration Partnership Board Meeting

Tuesday 1st October 2024

11:00 - 13:00

Microsoft Teams

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

Attendance:

Andrew Davis, Mayors' Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC)
Cllr Anthony Okereke, Executive Member for Communities, London Councils, and Leader, Greenwich
Barbara Drozdowicz, Eastern European Refugee Centre (MSAP)
Bill Lacy, Home Office
Bronagh McCuaig, Home Office
Clive Grimshaw, London Councils
Daniel Briscall, Home Office
Emma De Zoete, Greater London Authority
Francesca Rowson, London Councils
Det Supt Andrew Furphy, Metropolitan Police Service (MPS)
Hannah Boylan, Greater London Authority
Maxine Holdsworth, CELC and Chief Executive, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Catherine Houlcroft, No Recourse to Public Funds Network
Juliet Halstead, Migrant Help
Juliette Frontier, London Councils
Kara Thompson, Home Office
Kath Wilson, Clearsprings Ready Homes
Khadijah Amani, Greater London Authority
Kismet Meyon, Greater London Authority
Kulsam Mohammed, Greater London Authority
Lauren Evans, Greater London Authority
Lidia Estevez Picon, Greater London Authority
Liz Maifredi, Department for Work and Pensions
Marc Simo, Greater London Authority
Martin Machray, NHS England
Meltem Dincer, ELATT (MSAP)
Natasha Khadka, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
Navprit Rai, Greater London Authority
Philip Baker, Greater London Authority
Rosalind Blundell, Home Office
Sarah Sturdy, Home Office
Siobhan Gosrani, Greater London Authority
Stephanie Ratcliffe, St Mungo's
Tamara Smith, Greater London Authority
Tim Rymer, Home Office

1. Welcomes and Minutes

- 1.1 Debbie Weekes-Bernard welcomed colleagues, including Cllr Anthony Okereke, London Councils' new Executive Member for Communities.
- 1.2 Debbie highlighted the impact of the recent racist attacks and riots, and the fear and threat felt by many communities in towns and cities across the country. Additionally, she noted how this impacted the GLA's partners, who worked tirelessly in keeping our migrant communities safe. Debbie shared her personal appreciation of all those at the meeting who worked to protect people. Lastly, Debbie noted the importance of shared learnings in the collective response to the far-right attacks and protests.
- 1.3 The minutes of the last meeting were approved.
- 1.4 Mark provided updates on the following actions:

Action	Follow up/Update
Action: The Greater London Authority to produce a Lessons Learned Review on Streamlined Asylum Process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mark noted that the paper is in progress, but that focus was slightly wider due to the change in the Home Office approach to decision making. Mark noted the paper will be shared in the coming weeks or months.
Action: The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to respond in writing to questions and concerns regarding the 31 December 2024 cut-off date, including access to benefits in relation to eVisas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DWP has provided comprehensive answers to questions and concerns raised.
Action: The London Strategic Migration Partnership (LSMP) to share the LSMP Business Plan to the group to sign off.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mark stated that the London Strategic Migration Partnership Business Plan was circulated. Mark noted that he was optimistic the next business plan can be agreed upon much earlier next year.

2. Update: Lebanon

- 2.1 Philip Baker shared a confidential update on the Lebanon situation and any potential evacuation. He also noted that:
 - Intelligence suggests that the majority of the Lebanese population are in North and West London, and it is likely people will migrate to these areas.

- Any evacuation that would occur would include British Nationals, spouses and dependants. However, spouses and dependants who do not have British Nationality or Leave to Remain in the UK, may be granted six-months Leave to Remain.
 - Local resilience forums, government agencies and the Red Cross would support with the initial reception for arrivals in the UK.
 - The Government has already removed the Habitual Residence Test for those leaving Lebanon who have Leave to Remain status for six-months; consequently, reducing barriers for those needing housing support.
- 2.2 Martin Machray asked how authorities and their partners will know about the flow of people into the city on commercial flights. Philip noted this would be challenging, although where there are concerns from the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office about individual households these have been flagged to relevant local authorities. The GLA is in touch with local resilience forums.
- 2.3 Cllr Anthony Okereke noted that intelligence and information is needed to enable councils to support arrivals. He asked whether there was specific work occurring in the boroughs with large Lebanese populations.
- 2.4 Maxine Holdsworth noted that the Lebanese population in Kensington and Chelsea is roughly 1000. The council have connected the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) with local organisations; however there is no Lebanese-specific group in the borough.
- 2.5 Philip noted that MHCLG are providing funding for the ports of arrival as this is where an emergency response is being requested. The London Strategic Migration partnership has requested information on whether there may additionally funding for boroughs with higher populations of Lebanese people in London.
- 2.6 Philip noted that intelligence suggests that the British nationals and family in Lebanon. Lebanese population are relatively affluent and well educated and therefore their needs will not be that high. However, Philip noted that similar intelligence was shared about evacuees from Sudan – but in the end there were high numbers of homelessness presentations among this population. Additionally, there are factors at play (e.g. no access to banks in Lebanon) that could mean people come to the UK with fewer resources than expected.
- 2.7 Tim Rymer said he would not disagree with Phil's update. Regarding those who may be granted leave to remain in the UK, Tim noted that visa applications are still open and the requirements and processes are still in place, but it is difficult to say who would get what status and what this would mean at this given time. Debbie thanked Philip for the updates and responses and others for their contributions before leading to the next item.

Action: GLA to find out what financial and onward support the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office will offer towards Local Authorities with higher needs, if a full evacuation is to take place.

3. Update: No Recourse to Public Funds

3.1 Catherine Houlcroft introduced the work of the NRPF Network.

- The network provides advice and guidance to councils to support them in enacting their statutory duty to support destitute families, adults and care leavers who have no recourse to public funds.

- This includes people in the asylum system but also others with and without valid visas, and those with leave to remain or who have rights under the EU resettle scheme with no access to benefits.
- The NRPF Network's national data would suggest that half of the costs and need in the UK are born by London local authorities, therefore there is need for a strategic response from London.

3.2 Tamara Smith provided an overview of the work the GLA has been doing with London Councils and the NRPF Network to ensure appropriate convening on NRPF issues in London. This includes:

- Exploring ways to better platform NRPF Network's data and work.
- Mapping existing local authority spaces to explore improved convening on this issue across London.
- Exploring ways to support improved data collection across services to ensure London's NRPF needs are more accurately captured.

3.3 Debbie noted that a deeper conversation will take place in December on this item.

4. Asylum Decision Making

- 4.1 Debbie noted that a range of conversations are taking place across various forums, including the London Asylum Oversight group, regarding this issue and managing associated risks.
- 4.2 Tim Rymer noted the Home Office is focussed on restarting decision making, appeals system reforms, and returns, while looking at lessons learned from previous government initiatives. This is part of a wider strategy from the Home Office that includes full dispersal.
- 4.3 Daniel Briscall stated that the priority has been interviewing people while learning lessons from the backlog clearance last year. He noted that the Home Office does not want to create another backlog. Dan noted that no decision had yet been made about whether to prioritise adult or children's claims.
- 4.4 Dan noted that the Home Office have been working alongside MHCLG, NGOs and the charity sector as well as the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC), ILPA, the Law Society and Solicitors Regulation Authority to better understand where there are gaps and barriers for legal representation in supporting people through the process.
- 4.5 Sarah Sturdy to provide further updates on the Home Office 'Move On' work.
 - The Home Office Liaison Officer (HOLO) model has been replaced by the Asylum and Migrant Liaison Officer model (AMLO).
 - Updates are due to come this week regarding the Place Based Visibility Tool 3, which will help put the level of need of decision making into perspective
- 4.6 Maxine Holdsworth noted the importance of learning lessons from the streamlined asylum process. She also welcomed the Place Based Visibility Tool 3 and the AMLO model, noting that the lesson from Hillingdon and Brent HOLO pilots was the need for close working together for the success for the model.
- 4.7 Maxine noted the importance of a 56 day-on period. Maxine also noted the how the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol has been a concern, especially those regarding a negative decision or result to NRPF as the winter months are soon approaching.
- 4.8 Cllr Anthony Okereke noted that it is positive that the asylum backlog is being reduced as people require certainty of their status. The 56 day move-on period is essential as it impacts those who may present themselves as homeless. A real structure is required to our approach.

4.9 Tim Rymer stated that the Home Office is working on their approach Severe Weather Emergency Protocol and how this interacts with cessations of support. Tim stated the importance of understanding how we get people the right support around voluntary returns and suggested bringing a colleague from this team to speak further on this. Debbie welcomed this suggestion.

4.10 Sarah Sturdy stated that in terms of the understanding numbers of claims, once the PBVT 3 is released, the team are welcoming any follow-up conversations with Strategic Migration Partnerships to iron out any concerns in the data. AMLOs will take a flexible approach depending on local requirements and will work in partnership.

Action: Tim Rymer to request someone from the Voluntary Returns team at the Home Office attend a future LSMP Board about this service for those with a negative asylum decision.

Action: The Home Office to share Place Based Visibility Tool 3 with Strategic Migration Partnerships, for them to share with Local Authorities

5. Transition to Evisas: Key Risks and Issues

- 5.1 Philip Baker presented the key risks and issues identified regarding the transition to eVisas.
- Many of those with Biometric Residency Permits are using this as a form of identity, to overcome barriers to health care, housing or employment or voting in elections. There are risks, e.g., if landlords do not know about eVisas, or if the Home Office information on individuals is not correct. There are complexities with the number of stakeholders who would use a BRP to check someone's identity, including, NHS, local authorities, DWP and others.
 - There are challenges for those who are more vulnerable and may also have language barriers. There may also be people coming from e.g. resettlement processes that have limited literacy and will need to navigate these changes.
 - Adult education providers may not know of this transition, which can add further barriers.
 - There are system issues where people's names or information are incorrect against Home Office records, and this could delay the transition.
 - The Home Office are working through issues such as incorrect statuses being displayed on screens, or holding another's data. This is a particular issue where people may have stayed out of the country for longer or people may not be able to get onboard flights back to the UK, despite having leave to remain. There are contact and resolution centres, which are regulated by the Home Office to support in resolving these issues. Nevertheless, our partners have concerns about how quickly and efficiently the concerns will be answered and how quickly these issues can be resolved.
 - Another concern is that the date of someone's expiry on their BRP may not match or exceeded the date on their claim. It is important to contact DWP if people are in the benefits system and to confirm their BRP expiry date matches that of their leave date.
- 5.2 Barbara Drozdowicz stated there are concerns about people not having adequate equipment to scan documents in, and that some people distrust in digital only systems.
- 5.3 Stephanie Ratcliffe noted that St Mungos are receiving a range of cases where people have lost their BRP due to rough sleeping and that BRP's are not being replaced. eVisas require a BRP to register. She also noted that there needs to be a timeframe on when people who do not have documentation can create an e-visa.

Rosalind Blundell noted that the Home Office have announced that it will shortly launch a paid advertising campaign to raise awareness of the move to Evisas. The Department will be

able to give more detail on that in due course, as the team is finalising a Local Authority Fact Sheet. She said that she would ensure that the fact sheet addressed the issues raised today.

- 5.4 Rosalind shared that funding was released last month for £4 million grant funding to help vulnerable and digitally excluded customers. Grantees will be shortly announced.
- 5.5 Barbara noted that deep dives with organisations would be helpful. Rosalind noted that additional support for local authorities to have toolkits available, as seen in the EUSS cohort, will also be considered.
- 5.6 Hannah Boylan also noted that the GLA had recently shared further guidance on eVisas, which can be found [here](#).

Action: The Home Office to work with Philip Baker to share Fact sheet on eVisas with Local Authorities.

Action: Home Office to work with Stephanie Ratcliff from St Mungo's to share common scenarios and concerns with the switch to digital eVisas being seen in the homelessness community, such as access to documentation. The Home Office to consider a joint communication activity regarding those who do not have documentation.

Action: GLA and Home Office to liaise on how we can make adult education providers aware of the digital transition and processes.

6. Update: London Strategic Migration Partnership and Hong Kong Welcome Hub Programme

- 6.1 Mark welcomed any final questions to be raised before approval of the LSMP 2024-25 Business Plan.
- 6.2 The LSMP 2024-25 Business Plan was approved by LSMP Board.
- 6.3 A member of the GLA migration team provided updates on the GLA's Hong Kong Welcome Hub. For the last three years, the GLA, funded by MHCLG, has been delivering this 12-week Welcome Hub programme. Community needs have been better understood and developed. 11 London boroughs that have been funded to welcome those on a BNO visa. Thrive LDN were also funded to create trauma informed training. The programme has grant funded various voluntary charity sector partners to support a holistic welcoming into the city. Additionally, further funding was provided on advice and support to front line staff working with vulnerable migrants.
- 6.4 They outlined lessons learned from the programme:
 - Establishing trusted relationship is key to welcoming newly arrived migrants – this takes time.
 - Providing support that targets at different sectors creates long term legacy of the programme
 - Empowering civil society and investing in advice sector are important
- 6.5 The next steps for this year would be seeing cross sector collaboration with schools and local institutions, whilst building on the three-year programme. Thrive LDN will look at barriers in accessing mainstream health services in London.
- 6.6 Debbie noted the importance of welcoming and positively integrating people in the city and how this programme set a tone and blueprint for cities across the nation.

7. Riots

7.1 Hannah Boylan shared updates from the a Multi Agency Forum on the riots which was hosted by the GLA. Hannah noted that the key learnings were for a more coordinated communication system at times of crisis. Below is a summary of the meeting.

- People were reassured about the response from the Home Office, MPS and other statutory partners. It was evident that the safety and care for people seeking asylum were prioritised, especially in areas with higher threat levels.
- A common shared learning for all partners regarded communication. Hannah stated the importance of information and feedback being fed to Civil Society and Local Authority partners, as well as people directly affected.
- The Home Office and Clearsprings agreed at the MAF to review procedures and communications to create a more coordinated response in the future to emergency situations. This would complement resilience structures which are stood up and the use London Strategic Migration Partnership (LSMP) structures and contacts to ensure partners are informed.
- The GLA also agreed at the meeting to look to see how the voluntary and community sectors can be supported more in keeping their staff safe, and London Councils agreed to look at some of the cross-border coordination issues.
- Lastly, Hannah noted the depth of impact must be understood and the LSMP team are keen to work with local partners on this.

7.2 Tim Rymer noted that the Home Office had worked hard to keep people safe, but more could be done. Some of the toxic nations around asylum accommodation need to be broken; people seeking asylum should not be afraid in living their daily lives. Moreover, mitigating risks and monitoring what information is in the public domain is essential. Debbie welcomed the comments around noted that narratives are important.

7.3 Cllr Anthony Okereke stated that it was positive how London leaders came together in response to the riots; moreover, how the city came together. However, the riots led to wider communities feeling attacked, beyond those people who felt the direct effects of violence. Lessons need to be learned to look at how communities were impacted, and what security measures are needed to ensure their safety. Debbie noted the turn out in Walthamstow and how this showed community empowerment and togetherness in tackling hate crime and racism; and echoed the importance in the points Anthony made.

7.4 Barbara Drozdowicz noted that the Eastern European Refugee Centre have longstanding experience of work on hate crime, especially when thinking of protected characteristics and safety. Barbara stated that many of the structures that were in place around the Brexit referendum, when migrants experienced high level of hate crime, such as a single point of contact with the police, have been deprioritised. Police services now advice on increasing security measures which tend to be beyond charities' budgets. She noted that some positive work is being done in Ealing regarding a protocol to use during far-right attacks.

7.5 Debbie noted the intersectional nature of this issue; she recently hosted a roundtable with faith leaders from the Muslim community.

7.6 Andrew Davis noted that the Mayor praised the MPS for its response to the riots. He noted that MPS structures had changed in recent years, but there are still ways of engaging on hate crime. This includes Independent Advisory Groups. Andrew said he is happy to meet with Barbara or others to explore some of this.

7.7 Andrew Furphy thanked Barbara for her contribution and her comments on the work being done in Ealing. He noted that previous work had been done to map hate crime against asylum accommodation. MPS will do that again.

7.8 Natasha Khadka, provided an overview of MHCLG's approach:

- MHCLG has released a Community Recovery Fund, which is bespoke to areas which were worst affected. The GLA has received £600,000 of this funding.
- Ministers are interested developing in a multi-year strategy on communities and cohesion, looking at housing, deprivation, asylum and addressing root causes to extremism. The Department is beginning to engage with partners on this week.

Action: GLA and MOPAC to consider how Barbara Drozdowicz and the wider civil society sector can engage with MOPAC and MPS structures on hate crime against migrants.

Action: MPS to refresh its mapping of hate crime against asylum accommodation.

8. Update: Modern Slavery and National Referral Mechanism Capacity

8.1 Tamara Smith updated that the Home Office's Head of Modern Slavery Victims Support agreed to meet with GLA Group officials to discuss problems with the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) First Responder system.

8.2 GLA, MOPAC and the Victim's Commissioner position remains that the lack of capacity of first responders to make referrals into the NRM represents an emergency for London.

8.3 The GLA Migration team hope to have a set of substantive next steps at the next LSMP Board meeting, allowing oversight of these concerns at a senior level.

Action: Tamara Smith to give further updates on Modern Slavery and National Referral Mechanism at the next meeting.