

## **London Strategic Migration Partnership**

7 December 2021

14.00 – 16.00

Microsoft Teams meeting

### **Chair**

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

### **Attendees**

Sean Palmer, Home Office  
Gemma Barlow, Home Office  
Samuel Wray, Home Office  
David Andersson, DWP  
Steven Lakey, Clearsprings  
Daniel Kennedy, Hillingdon  
Sean Harriss, Harrow  
Alison Griffin, London Councils  
Clive Grimshaw, London Councils  
Eva Barnsley, London Councils  
Andrew Carter, City of London  
Ian Lewis, UASC Strategic Lead  
Martin Machray, NHS England  
Julie Billett, Public Health England  
John Hetherington, London Fire Brigade  
Marsela Hoxha, Migrant Help  
Anna Yassin, Glass Door  
Lisa Doyle, Refugee Council (MRAP)  
Yusuf Ciftci, Doctors of the World (MRAP)  
Nafisah Graham-Brown, ELATT (MRAP)  
Barbara Drozdowicz, EERC (MRAP)

### **GLA staff**

Tom Rahilly, Assistant Director, CSP  
Mark Winterburn, CSP  
Hannah Boylan, CSP  
Ayham Alsuleman, CSP  
Melissa Weihmayer, CSP  
Khadijah Amani, CSP  
Lidia Estevez Picon, CSP  
Leticia Ishibashi, CSP  
George Hanoun, CSP  
Hailey Wong, CSP  
Ella Johnson, CSP  
Richard Cameron, Intelligence  
Donal Ring, Intelligence

### **Agenda**

#### **1. Welcome and Minutes**

- 1.1. Debbie Weekes-Bernard welcomed attendees, and the minutes from the last meeting were approved.
- 1.2. Debbie highlighted the tragic deaths of 27 migrants in the English Channel on 24 November, and noted that tragedies such as these reinforce the importance of the work of this SMP and others across the UK.
- 1.3. Debbie highlighted the mandating of the National Transfer Scheme for all local authorities with children's services across the UK, which was announced by the Minister for Safe and Legal Migration on 23 November.
- 1.4. Barbara Drozdowicz gave a summary of updates regarding EEA nationals.
  - Since the last LSMP Board meeting, Barbara, the GLA and other civil society partners have met with DWP to discuss their communications with EEA nationals as part of the data-matching exercise with the Home Office.
  - DWP has as made efforts to contact all claimants whose status is unsure or unrecorded in some way, and suspensions (as opposed to terminations) are only considered if it does not receive a response. No suspensions or terminations have taken place yet. The right to appeal also extends any current claims.
  - A series of regular fortnightly catch ups with the International Strategy team has also been set up, which will pick up any issues at a regional or local level.
  - The UK Supreme Court's judgement on the Fratila case was announced last week, which limits the potential for legal challenges and means that holders of Pre-Settled Status must still pass a habitual residence test to qualify for housing support. This judgement also affects civil society groups who are supporting service users with Pre-Settled Status.

## **2. GLA Intelligence Update**

- 2.1. Donal Ring gave a presentation updating on London's migration and population. Key points included:
  - The number of EU nationals in London has fallen since last year.
  - The number of outstanding applications to the EU Settlement Scheme has fallen since June 2021, and the conclusion of most applications is either Pre-Settled or Settled Status.
  - Rough sleeping in London has increased in the last quarter, but the distribution of rough sleeping by nationality is unchanged over the last year. Nearly a half of rough sleepers are non-UK nationals with the largest groups being Central and Eastern Europeans.
  - The number of people accommodated in asylum hotels in London has been rising steadily over the last year. The borough with the highest number of people seeking asylum in hotels is Hillingdon.
  - Across the UK, the number of people in initial and emergency accommodation has risen. Over the same period, the number of people in dispersed accommodation has risen slowly.
  - The number of asylum applications awaiting a decision has risen sharply, with 87,995 people awaiting a decision at the end of September 2021 and 64% of these have been waiting for longer than six months.
  - British National (Overseas) applications are fewer than expected, with 88,800 total applicants in the UK, though the grant rate of applications is high (87% inside the UK and 85% outside).

- 2.2. Donal also presented the findings from the data collection exercise carried out by the Ministry of Defence in Afghan bridging hotels in London in late 2021:
- Most people in the hotels were under 18.
  - The most common family sizes were 5 and 6.
  - The ARAP Scheme was the most common immigration status.
  - The most common nationality of respondents was Afghan (86%).
  - Pashto and Dari were the most common primary languages.
  - Female respondents had a lower level of English than male respondents, and English language skills increased with age.
  - Nearly half of respondents were unemployed.
  - One third of respondents had no existing links in the UK, and those who did mostly have links in London.
- 2.3. Ian Lewis highlighted the reasons for the rise in the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The key factor is that there are a number of people seeking asylum who have been accommodated as adults, but then approached the local authority where their hotel is situated and assessed to be children. The other factor is that the National Transfer Scheme has led to a net increase in the number of children entering London. Ian noted that making the National Transfer Scheme mandatory may make some difference but will not affect entrance through hotels via age assessments, and noted that the slow level of registration of new claims is what is inhibiting local authorities from using the Scheme, since service users have to be registered before they can be transferred. Ian noted that London partners has regularly called on the Home Office to improve this system.
- 2.4. Andrew Carter highlighted that the data presented by Donal showed no unaccompanied asylum-seeking children coming through bridging hotels. Sean Palmer confirmed this and explained that though these children are not officially unaccompanied asylum seeking children as they are not officially seeking asylum, the Home Office are treating them as unaccompanied children for funding and counting purposes.
- 2.5. Anna Yassin asked if Afghans who arrived in the UK before 2 September automatically receive indefinite leave to remain. Sean Palmer responded that those who arrived via Operation Pitting could not go through the process to get ILR, but the Home Office expects that everyone will receive ILR at the end of this process apart from exceptional cases. Sean added that the Home Office will commission its commercial partner which has helped all of its assistive digital processes to assist service users to complete forms. The Home Office will also arrange transport for service users to its offices to complete the Biometric Residence Permit process, after which they will receive their paperwork.
- 2.6. Martin Machray raised his concerns around the unequal pressures felt by local authorities across London, noting that pressures are higher in some parts of the city than on others. Martin highlighted the need to create the foundations for equity of services and service provision across London, involving the NHS and all other relevant bodies, and called for this to be addressed as part of the current governance review. Debbie Weekes-Bernard seconded this and highlighted the Fair Shares programme as an example of good practice to address this issue.
- 2.7. Sean Palmer updated the group with a positive recent development, noting that last week the Home Office completed the move out from the largest hotel in Camden. Sean noted that the majority of service users have moved to other hotel accommodation outside of London,

though some have moved into their own accommodation. Sean added that there will be some announcements going out this week regarding permanent accommodation.

### **3. Supporting people in Afghan Bridging Hotels**

3.1. Sean Harriss gave an update on the work being done by task and finish groups to support those in Afghan bridging hotels.

- Sean commended the work of local authorities, voluntary partners, the GLA, the Home Office, DLUHC, London Councils and health partners to provide services to those in bridging hotels, and highlighted the collaborative and pan-London nature of this work. Members joined Sean in thanking partners for their continued hard work.
- Sean noted partners' recognition early on in this process that due to their convening power the best and most practical way to provide support to those in bridging hotels was through local authorities, with specific support provided by the Home Office and DWP, and boroughs agreed an appropriate funding package with the Home Office to enable this.
- Sean praised the impact of health colleagues in seeing to the health needs of those in hotels, such as through supporting GP registrations.
- Sean noted that partners have moved from a more humanitarian approach focused on welfare support to one that is more focused on integration and providing longer-term support, anchoring service users in their local communities through (for example) schooling and employment.
- Sean noted that it has been difficult to move a significant number of people out of bridging hotels, but highlighted that the decommissioning of hotels has been largely based on feedback from local authorities.
- Sean cautioned that it will be difficult to relocate families who have started to put roots down, and partners should be realistic that many of these families will need to move in order to be provided with suitable accommodation, but colleagues should also work towards delivering families' preferences wherever possible.
- Sean noted that partners have always been cognizant of potential community cohesion risks but these have largely not manifested. Sean added that boroughs have worked with the police and fire services throughout this process but there is nothing of significance to report relating to this.
- Sean summarised that the process to support those in bridging hotels has been difficult, particularly at the beginning, but partners are in a much better position now and should soon be in the position to be able to stand down hotels over a period of time.

3.2. Sean Palmer gave an update from the Home Office.

- Sean praised the support and welcome provided by local communities.
- Sean noted that the matching process has been frustratingly slow, meaning some families will remain in hotels longer than partners would want, particularly larger families as these are more difficult to house. Sean encouraged local authorities to make more property offers where possible.
- Sean praised the Fair Shares programme managed by London Councils, and noted that British nationals and those being resettled via the ARAP and ACRS schemes will all receive the same funding for support.
- Sean welcomed the quick wins some families have experienced, such as BBC Pashto offering jobs to journalists and employees of NGOs being able to continue working.

- Sean noted that more people are arriving in the UK from third countries, and emphasised that partners must keep the resettlement process going in order to turn over and replenish populations and support more people.

3.3. Sean Palmer and David Andersson gave an update on the Home Office and DWP's jobs-first approach to integration.

- 7 per cent of those in bridging hotels have received a job offer in the UK already.
- This approach considers that job offers are the biggest indicator of integration for Afghan families and that jobs are the best way to support them, and has been based on the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) model.
- Some British nationals and members of the ARAP cohort already have close ties to the UK, and so this approach takes into account firstly whether individual families already have a job offer, and then (if so) the Home Office will look to facilitate a match with a property that allows transport to the job.
- The Home Office is looking to facilitate a quicker move on for those who require little intervention due to being highly skilled or having a high level of English. Local authorities are providing traditional resettlement support for those who are looking at entry-level jobs.
- The DWP is making sure that its work coaches are fully understanding of what support needs to be provided, and is working with employers who are coming forward with offers of support and vacancies.

3.4. Lisa Doyle raised a point around mental health, noting that colleagues have noticed real differences in the types of trauma and mental health issues that the Afghan population is facing compared to those who have come through other resettlement programmes, due to the unique and sudden circumstances of their evacuation to the UK. This means that the Afghan population requires different and tailored support. Martin Machray echoed Lisa's point and noted that NHS colleagues have worked with partners since the start of this process to ensure that trauma-informed services have been made available.

#### 4. Home Office and Local Government Chief Executive Group (HOLGCEX) – Update

4.1. Sean Harriss gave an update.

- Sean highlighted that every sub-region in the UK has a Chief Executive lead such as himself who works with local authorities to provide a regional perspective on this agenda to the Home Office and DLUHC.
- Partners have been meeting for quite a long time under the auspices of the Local Government Association (LGA) and equivalent bodies across the UK to coordinate a national strategic dialogue with the Home Office, which provides a constructive foundation to solve issues and look into making the system more effective.
- Sean noted that though it is not always easy to find common ground both between and within political groups in local government, partners are getting to the point where there is more and more consensus on joint working and joint solutions, and potentially more radical thinking.
- Partners are keen to exemplify the work London Councils is doing on the Fair Shares programme. They are currently discussing how best to do this as well as the role of local authorities and other partners in identifying accommodation and engaging all parts of the system. Sean Palmer has also been having similar conversations within the Home Office.
- Sean welcomed that London is demonstrating real leadership on this agenda.

- 4.2. Sean Palmer noted that he is able to provide sound advice to politicians based on the Home Office's dialogue with local authorities. Sean highlighted that the mandation of the National Transfer Scheme for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children signals that policy-makers are aware of the need to be bold and act on this moment.

## 5. London Migration Governance Review

- 5.1. Alison Griffin gave an update on the new London Councils Political Leaders' Sub-Group.
- This is a cross-party working group which is chaired by Councillor Muhammed Butt. The group meets every few weeks, receives briefings from Sean Harriss and other officers and reports back into the Leaders' Committee as appropriate.
  - The sub-group gives oversight on bridging hotels and wraparound support but is also looking at a more integration-based approach. Other issues the group are considering include: contingency hotels across London, the dispersals process, unaccompanied asylum seeking children and the arrival of Hong Kong nationals via the BN(O) visa route.
  - London Councils also have an agreement with boroughs on instituting a Fair Shares approach for the ARAP and ACRS schemes.
- 5.2. Julie Billett gave an update on health governance in London. Julie noted that partners are drawing together a strategic group to focus on the health needs of all asylum-seeking people across London. The goal is to come together at a pan-London level to give oversight across health issues, develop coherent strategies to solve these issues, and escalate them where relevant to national bodies. The group will also feed into LSMP. Julie noted that there are still a few details to work through before the group is finalised but she is hoping to have a formal arrangement in place by the time of the next LSMP meeting. Martin Machray added that there is a strong will from partners to set up this group and ensure that it plays a key role in London's migration governance structure going forward.
- 5.3. Mark Winterburn gave a presentation covering the London Migration Governance Review that the GLA is currently undertaking, which includes a review of the membership, purpose and objectives of the LSMP board as well as wider governance arrangements. Mark noted that this review was borne out of the recognition that current arrangements should be strengthened particularly in light of recent challenges, but praised members for what they have achieved in the past few years. Mark welcomed feedback from the group on the new proposals set out in his presentation.
- 5.4. Nafisah Graham-Brown highlighted that the GLA tends to focus on ESOL provision which is funded by the Adult Education Budget (AEB), but this does not reflect all ESOL provision and needs across London. Nafisah suggested coordinating a non-exhaustive list of suitable ESOL for refugees and people seeking asylum which also reflects the wider integration aspect of learning as opposed to just English language. Mark Winterburn suggested amending the LSMP workplan to provide a clearer reflection of all types of provision.
- 5.5. Anna Yassin highlighted that there is a real disconnect between the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) sector and the migrant sector on gender issues, and asked how partners can intersect the work that they do in these sectors. Mark Winterburn recognised Anna's point and offered to discuss it with MOPAC, who play a key role in tackling these issues.
- 5.6. Barbara Drozdowicz highlighted that any new workplans must include vulnerable migrants, such as older migrants and those who are victims of human trafficking. Mark Winterburn

recognised this point and suggested making more explicit reference to protected characteristics in the LSMP workplan.

- 5.7. Ian Lewis raised that the work of migration partners going forward must take into account children in care and those who are living with their families in various hotels and temporary accommodation across London, as well as unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Mark Winterburn agreed to explore this further, for example by comparing the arrangements for children in Afghan bridging hotels to those in asylum contingency hotels.

## **6. AOB**

- 6.1. Barbara Drozdowicz highlighted the concerns of frontline VCS organisations over provisions for homeless migrants, while noting that DLUHC has provided a refresher fund for this population.
- 6.2. Leticia Ishibashi highlighted an issue raised by caseworkers who are supporting applicants to the EU Settlement Scheme. There is a difference between what is in immigration regulations and what is in the Withdrawal Agreement with regards to extended family members, which is causing visas and therefore EU status to be denied to those who arrived here between 1 January and 30 June 2021. These applicants are put at risk of detention and removal, since they may either be unaware of the issue or unable to afford legal support, thus caseworkers are looking for clarity on the rules. Sean Palmer offered to be contacted via email in order to connect Leticia with the most suitable person at the Home Office, and Anna Yassin suggested raising this issue with the EU delegation.

**Action: Sean Palmer to connect Leticia Ishibashi to the most suitable person at the Home Office to clarify the issue regarding extended family members raised by caseworkers.**