

## **London Strategic Migration Partnership (LSMP) Board**

28 September 2023

11.00 – 13.00

Hybrid meeting – City Hall, Kamal Churchie Way, London, E16 1ZE and Microsoft Teams

### **Chair**

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

### **Attendees**

Cllr Grace Williams, Chair of London Councils

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

Jane McSherry, Chair of Association of London Directors of Children's Services (ALDCS)

Paul Bilbao, Home Office

Desiree Woods, Home Office

Kara Thompson, Home Office

Christina Jones, Home Office

Edward Russell, Home Office

Russell Bramley, Home Office

Deborah Cooper, Home Office

Sarah Aspinall, Home Office

Sarah Spain, Home Office

Jo Beck, Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC)

Philip Adekunle, DLUHC

Liz Maifredi, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

Julie Billett, UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA)

Anisa Goodwin, NHS England

Clive Grimshaw, London Councils

Eva Barnsley, London Councils

Nancy Hunt, London Councils

Steven Lakey, Clearsprings

Samantha Tidy, Migrant Help

Jon Featonby, Refugee Council (MRAP)

Marina Davidson, Doctors of the World (MRAP)

Michael Boyle, East London Advanced Technology Training (ELATT) (MRAP)

Madeleine Kelleher, Southwark Law Centre (HMAP)

### **Greater London Authority (GLA) staff**

Mark Winterburn, Migration

Hannah Boylan, Migration

Rukshan Rajamanthri, Migration

Siobhan Gosrani, Migration

George Hanoun, Migration

Tamara Smith, Migration

Eleonora Paesani, Migration

Laila Aziz, Migration

Phil Baker, Migration

Eduardo Lopes, Migration

Maysa Ismael, Migration

Louise Yu, Migration

Yin Lam, Migration

Muhammad Abushiri, Migration

Healah Riazi, Migration & Rough Sleeping

Ramiye Thavabalasingam, Migration & Rough Sleeping

Navprit Rai, Communities & Social Policy  
 Ellen Storrar, Housing & Land  
 Andy Davis, Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC)  
 Heather Alexander, Government Relations  
 Toby Gould, London Fire Brigade (LFB)

**Minutes:**

**1. Welcome & Minutes**

1.1. Debbie Weekes-Bernard welcomed attendees, and noted the following points:

- This is the first meeting of the LSMP Board since the Illegal Migration Act received royal assent in July.
- Debbie has [tweeted](#) to oppose statements made this week by the Home Secretary about people who claim asylum on the basis of their sexuality.
- The London Assembly held a [plenary meeting](#) earlier this month on the challenges facing refugees in London. The discussion covered areas which have been touched on in LSMP meetings and raised a number of issues which the GLA will be responding to.

1.2. The minutes from the last meeting were approved.

1.3. Mark Winterburn gave a series of updates on actions from the last meeting:

Action from June 2023 LSMP	Update at September 2023 LSMP
Julie Billett to share guidance on the prevention of outbreaks and infectious disease once this is finalised.	This guidance is still being finalised but Julie will provide an update in item 6 of this meeting.
GLA officers to prepare a report into lessons learned from London's response to the Sudan crisis.	This work is ongoing and an update will be provided in item 2 of this meeting.
Paul Bilbao to check with Home Office colleagues and confirm in writing whether, for Sudanese nationals who claim asylum while they have leave to remain, the conditions of their leave (e.g. permission to work) will continue until their asylum claim is decided.	Paul Bilbao has confirmed that this is correct: leave conditions will continue until an asylum claim is decided.
Local authorities to get in touch with Det Supt Andy Furphy about arranging safeguarding training for staff in hotels as part of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS)'s Operation Seascale.	Mark offered to follow up with Det Supt Furphy on this before the next LSMP meeting in December 2023.  <b>Action: Mark Winterburn to follow up with Det Supt Andy Furphy about local authority take-up of safeguarding training for staff in hotels as part of the MPS' Operation Seascale.</b>
Mark Winterburn to look into opportunities for involving the Enforcement Working Group in the LSMP Board going forward.	<b>Action: Mark Winterburn to follow up with Det Supt Andy Furphy about the Enforcement Working Group.</b>

Mark Winterburn to circulate the summary note of the GLA's Emergency Summit on the Illegal Migration Bill.	This has been actioned.
Mark Winterburn to circulate Lauren Evans' slides containing updates on the GLA's Skills Strategy.	This has been actioned.
Mark Winterburn to circulate details of the GLA's Skills for Londoners Community Outreach Programme.	This has been actioned.

- 1.4. Phil Baker noted that the GLA convened the first meeting of its Illegal Migration Act Advisory Board on 15 September. Further discussion groups will be set up and the GLA is preparing an action plan to respond to the recommendations arising from the [emergency summit](#) it convened with local authority, civil society and statutory body colleagues in May 2023.

## 2. Sudan evacuation

- 2.1. Eduardo Lopes gave an update on the GLA's Lessons Learned Review into the evacuation of Sudanese nationals in April 2023. Key points included:
- The goal of the review is to improve London's resilience to sudden new arrivals, by understanding and clarifying the roles of different organisations and improving information sharing.
  - The GLA is consulting with different partners including community groups, emergency response organisations, local authorities in London and other SMPs across the UK, and LSMP Board members are also welcome to participate.
  - An initial consultation has been held with Sudanese community partners, where a number of issues were raised including uncertainty about how to regularise status, lack of capacity in the immigration advice sector, and lack of culturally appropriate and translated guidance.
  - The GLA will use the review to draw recommendations and to inform the best way(s) for the GLA to support partners in response to new arrivals in future.
- 2.2. Phil Baker expanded on the current challenges facing the Sudanese community in London that were raised in the GLA's initial consultation. Key points included:
- Overall, the community feels very strongly that it is being forgotten about, and that there is a clear disparity between the response to Sudanese arrivals and the responses to Ukrainian and Syrian arrivals via the UK resettlement schemes set up for those countries. There is a call for a Sudanese resettlement scheme, or something similar, to be set up.
  - One of the biggest issues is around regularising immigration status. Different cohorts within the Sudanese community are pursuing different routes depending on their situation.
  - For non-British nationals who were initially granted 6 months' leave to enter as part of the evacuation, the 6 month point has now been reached,; however, they have not received clear guidance on what they are expected to do now and/or what routes they can take to regularise their status.
    - Many Sudanese nationals in this cohort are concerned about claiming asylum given the delays in the process and concerns around being accommodated in hotels and away from family, the implications of the

Illegal Migration Act, and the lack of ability for many to work as a person seeking asylum.

- Other possible immigration routes also present barriers: there are significant fees attached to making further leave to remain applications, and fee waivers only apply in certain circumstances where someone is destitute.
- The lack of capacity in the immigration advice sector is also compounding these issues, as many Sudanese people are not able to receive the advice they need.
- Some Sudanese nationals whose 6 months leave to enter have now expired are now facing destitution, and there are reports that, despite the exemption to the Habitual Residence Test (HRT) for this cohort, this message has not been received by all local authorities, leading to some people not being able to access housing support. There are also reports of some Sudanese not being able to access Universal Credit despite being British citizens, e.g. due to issues with their passport.
- There are barriers around education: some families are unable to continue to pay fees to continue their education in the UK, and issues around documentation are preventing some from registering for school or accessing adult education and English language learning.
- Some Sudanese nationals are also unable to access mental health and trauma support due to a lack of capacity in the sector and long waiting lists.

2.3. Phil Baker noted that, following its consultation with Sudanese community partners, the GLA has submitted a number of questions to the Home Office for a response.

2.4. Jo Beck noted that DWP conveyed the HRT exemption for housing support to all local authorities and asked if Phil Baker could provide evidence from the Sudanese community of individual examples where boroughs are currently preventing access to housing support. Hannah Doody highlighted that London the London Local Government Working Group chaired by Daniel Kennedy can support on any work with individual boroughs to resolve this issue.

**Action: Phil Baker to ask Sudanese community partners for individual examples where local authorities are preventing Sudanese people from accessing housing support (despite the HRT exemption) and share these with DLUHC.**

2.5. Madeleine Kelleher highlighted that Southwark Law Centre has been organising informal information sessions for the Sudanese community in Southwark, led by an immigration advisor. The community has raised recurring concerns about high fees and the Rwanda policy in particular, but Madeleine noted that the approach of providing basic advice and reassurance in small groups has been a successful one at the local level, and offered to support with replicating this model across London.

**Action: Madeleine Kelleher to get in touch with Phil Baker about facilitating information sessions for the Sudanese community across London.**

2.6. Paul Bilbao gave an update on behalf of the Home Office. Key points included:

- The Home Office is unable to advise people on which routes to apply for in individual circumstances, but recognises that there is more that it can do to improve access to immigration advice, and is working with the Legal Aid Agency on this.

- The Streamlined Asylum Process (SAP) has now been extended to include Sudanese asylum claims made between 28 June 2022 and 7 March 2023, so decisions on these claims will be made quickly. The Home Office remains committed to making swift decisions on any legacy asylum claims from before June 2022.
- There are still questions about the possible impact of the Illegal Migration Act on asylum claims made after 7 March 2023 but Sudanese nationals who claim asylum while they have leave to remain will see the conditions of their leave continue until their claim is decided.

**Action: The Home Office to provide a full response to all questions submitted by the GLA following its consultation with Sudanese community partners.**

**Action: GLA officers to convene a meeting between the Home Office, DLUHC, GLA and civil society and community partners to further discuss issues affecting the Sudanese community.**

- 2.7. Hannah Boylan and Debbie Weekes-Bernard emphasised the importance of ensuring consistency in the support provided for different communities.

### **3. Afghan Refugees**

#### Bridging hotels closures

- 3.1. Debbie Weekes-Bernard thanked partnership colleagues for their hard work to support the Afghan community during and after the closure of bridging hotels. However, she cautioned that Afghans not presenting to local authorities as rough sleepers should not (on its own) be taken as an indication of success, and emphasised the importance of continuing support for people who have left hotels.
- 3.2. Edward Russell gave an update from the Home Office on the number of people in bridging, interim and long-term accommodation. Edward thanked local authorities and civil society colleagues for their support in this work and the close partnership working with the Home Office..
- 3.3. Mark Winterburn updated on the current interim accommodation for Afghan families in London.
- 3.4. Jo Beck updated that DLUHC is working to match Afghan families who have been made homeless after leaving bridging hotels to properties coming online via the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF). Cllr Grace Williams asked if there will be enough LAHF properties to support families, highlighting this as a key concern of local authorities. Jo responded that there is a surplus of properties coming through compared to the number of families that need them, and the focus is on getting the matches right by taking into account location, need and whether families are able to move.
- 3.5. Jo Beck noted that DLUHC is working to minimise the number of Afghans becoming homeless and is publishing data on homelessness presentations being made in London. Jo updated that DLUHC data showed that 29 Afghans were accepted as homeless in London between 1 July and 31 August, but Siobhan Gosrani flagged that local authority resettlement colleagues on the ground are reporting higher numbers than this.

#### Afghan overseas arrivals to the UK

- 3.6. Edward Russell and Jo Beck gave a confidential update on Afghan overseas arrivals to the UK, and policies in development to respond to the needs of the population.
- 3.7. Mark Winterburn noted that DLUHC has discussed the potential applicability of a rota in response to the housing and homelessness need of this population. There was support from LSMP Board members for LSMP to support this work if requested and required.
- 3.8. Cllr Grace Williams and other LSMP Board members discussed the situation and proposals from DLUHC.

#### **4. Caring for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children: Current Challenges**

- 4.1. Jane McSherry gave a summary of a discussion at the last London Regional Asylum Plan Oversight Group meeting about a letter sent by ALDCS on 24 August to the Secretary of State for Education regarding the care of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in London. Key messages from the meeting included:
  - The National Transfer Scheme (NTS) is not currently fit for purpose: it is unable to deal with numbers of unaccompanied children like those we have seen this summer, and is consistently vulnerable to any increase in the number of children arriving. A properly funded, long-term solution is needed to ensure the NTS is sufficiently resilient.
  - There have been times when London has had to work outside of the NTS, but this is masking the problem. The government needs to think at a national level about how such children should be counted within the system. The NTS also does not take into account asylum contingency hotels and other broader pressures that are relevant within the London context.
  - Concerns were raised that current funding to support care leavers is insufficient, although the Department for Education (DfE) said that it is looking into this. There is also real concern about the Home Office's process for age assessments and the fact that there are still some children being miss-age assessed and so being accommodated in asylum hotels. On this issue, the Home Office committed to looking into creating a mechanism for sharing data on the number of age-disputed cases in asylum contingency hotels.
  - DfE has not yet responded to the letter from ALDCS, but Children's Services across London remain open to working with the Home Office to shape solutions.
- 4.2. Cllr Grace Williams echoed the concerns set out by Jane and highlighted in particular the need for a more joined-up system, clarity around the age assessments process, and providing sufficient fostering options for UASC.
- 4.3. Madeleine Kelleher argued for the need for greater communication and data-sharing with local authorities by Clearsprings. Madeleine also raised her concerns about the impacts that the decanting of hotels and the Home Office's hotel maximisation policy will have on age-disputed young people.
- 4.4. Hannah Boylan highlighted that colleagues attending the GLA's emergency summit on the Illegal Migration Bill in May this year raised serious concerns about the potential impacts of the (now) Act on children and young people, in particular risks around the exploitation and trafficking of young people who, if deemed inadmissible, will become subject to the Home Secretary's removal duty once they turn 18.

4.5. Paul Bilbao and Sarah Spain gave a response on behalf of the Home Office. Key points included:

- Sarah confirmed that children who transfer outside of the NTS rota count towards mandated future cycles, and thanked local authority colleagues for their support, noting that London is consistently ahead of other regions in cycles.
- The Home Office is currently working through the implications of High Court judgements in July this year.
- A small number of unaccompanied children are still being accommodated in hotels, but the Home Office is working with DfE and local authorities on plans to build a long-term sustainable solution.
- The Home Office acknowledges the difficulties around the age assessments process and is committed to working on a resolution to this. It is also drawing up an action plan in response to the safeguarding deep dives carried out with Hounslow.
- The situation around data-sharing is improving and the Home Office is committed to keep working on this, including by looking at options to share data directly with local authorities. Training sessions are also being delivered with boroughs to ensure they know how to access Clearsprings' data portal as this is the primary way it should be sharing data.

## **5. Modern Slavery**

5.1. Tamara Smith gave an update on the GLA's meeting with Home Office colleagues on 11 September to discuss the NRM and the Illegal Migration Act. Key points included:

- On the NRM, colleagues established shared awareness about first responder capacity being a key issue, and welcomed that the Home Office is working on a first responder toolkit and first responder hub to help address this.
- On the Illegal Migration Act, concerns were raised that the Act will have a serious detrimental impact on migrant victims of trafficking and modern slavery being able to access support. In particular, it was raised there is a risk of reduced trust from victims leading to fear of approaching support structures, ultimately resulting in reduced protection for victims. Consequently, the Home Office welcomed good practice examples on how to improve trust with victims.
- The Home Office also expressed interest in exploring replicating a model of positive cross-sector work established by colleagues in the migrant rough sleeping space, where the government is engaging with the GLA and London Councils to address barriers non-UK nationals rough sleeping in London face in ending their homelessness. Two core pillars of this work in a rough sleeping context involve providing government funding to trusted frontline organisations and the GLA's convening of the Homeless Migrants Advisory Panel (HMAP) as a collaborative space.

5.2. Russell Bramley thanked GLA colleagues for setting up this conversation and expressed the Home Office's commitment to collaborating with partners on modern slavery. In principle, the Home Office supports the idea of a London-level working group but is keen to avoid duplication with other stakeholder forums. Russell agreed to discuss with colleagues and revert back to the GLA.

- 5.3. Debbie Weekes-Bernard sought the approval of LSMP members for the GLA to convene its proposed London-level working group with civil society and the Home Office, subject to final agreement about its form, and this was approved by the Board.

**Action: Russell Bramley to update GLA officers on next steps for a London-level working group involving civil society, the Home Office and MOPAC focusing on the intersection between migration and modern slavery.**

- 5.4. Andy Davis gave an update on MOPAC's recent work in the modern slavery space. Key points included:

- MOPAC provided a grant to the Human Trafficking Foundation in the last financial year. This enabled the continuation of the London Modern Slavery Leads network, which brings together statutory and voluntary sector partners from across London to share information about approaches to modern slavery, and MOPAC is looking into funding this work again.
- MOPAC is continuing to fund the London Holistic Advocacy Wrap Around Service until 2025, this is a pan-London service which provides wrap-around support for migrant women, trafficked women and women at risk of entering prostitution.
- The Rescue and Response service supports young people who are vulnerable and caught up in 'county lines' drug distribution networks, which may include migrant children.
- London's Independent Victim's Commissioner, Claire Waxman, wrote to the Home Secretary in December 2022 calling for the appointment of a new Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner (IASC), which has been vacant for over a year, and pushing back on the suggestion that the NRM is being abused by migrants gaming the system.
- The letter also highlighted the importance of safe reporting pathways for victims of modern slavery, and work has since continued to lobby for an information-sharing firewall between police forces and immigration enforcement.
- Other work in progress includes:
  - Claire Waxman continues to convene the Victims Reference Group, which helps to inform her work and lobbying.
  - MOPAC has commissioned an Inspector of Police to assess the MPS' work to tackle child sexual and criminal exploitation, this is due to report in January 2024.
  - Work will also be carried out next year on missing persons' profiles, which will involve looking at issues around unaccompanied asylum seeking children and other vulnerable groups going missing in London.

- 5.5. Andy Davis gave an update on the London Policing Board (LPB), which was set up in response to one of Baroness Casey's recommendations in her review into the MPS. The LPB held its first meeting this week and consists of 12 members who assist the Mayor in holding the MPS to account. Andy also highlighted 'A New Met for London', the MPS' two-year plan (2023-25) to deliver more trust, less crime and higher standards, focusing on three priorities for reform: Community crime-fighting, Culture change and Fixing our foundations.

## 6. Asylum Health



6.1. Julie Billett gave a presentation on the work of the London Asylum Health Task and Finish Group, which is convened by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA). Key points included:

- The group aims to improve access to services and support for people seeking asylum in order to improve health outcomes and reduce health inequalities, and to promote and encourage integrated working and system preparedness.
- The work of the group is split into four primary workstreams: user and resident participation and engagement, addressing system partners' data and data-sharing needs, developing and embedding 'What good looks like' and standardising practice, and cross-cutting enablers of collaboration, integration, learning and sharing.
- The group is publishing guidance to support health and wider partners in London to work together to deliver effective routine care, prevention and acute responses to notifiable diseases and outbreaks in asylum and migrant settings. The guidance will include clarification on the roles and responsibilities of different agencies, action cards, weblinks to further information and examples of good practice.
- The group is currently working with stakeholders to explore the best approach for disseminating the guidance and delivering supplementary training by UKHSA in autumn and winter 2023. In particular, Julie noted that the group would welcome the support of Clearsprings and the Home Office to promote the guidance and its relevant training to hotel staff.

**Action: Mark Winterburn to circulate Julie's presentation slides.**

6.2. Jon Featonby welcomed the publication of this guidance, highlighting its importance given that outbreaks of communicable diseases are becoming more frequent, and offered to discuss involving civil society groups in its dissemination plan.

6.3. Julie Billett gave an update on Covid 19 and flu vaccinations and winter preparedness. Key points included:

- Health partners are aiming to vaccinate as many eligible people as possible by the end of October, and there is a strong ambition this year to continue to address the lower uptake of vaccinations seen amongst some communities and eligible groups.
- To this end, integrated care systems (ICS's) are creating individual engagement and outreach plans, and will be delivering engagement, outreach and pop-up clinics to support vaccinations of underserved communities until 31 January 2024 for Covid 19 and 31 March 2024 for flu vaccinations.

## **7. Asylum Support Cessations & Planning for Winter Homelessness Pressures**

7.1. Paul Bilbao gave an update on the recent change in practice in asylum cessations so that the minimum 'notice to quit' period once someone has had a decision on their asylum claim is seven days. Key points included:

- The notice period that someone granted refugee status should be given to leave their asylum accommodation remains 28 days as set out in legislation, and this period starts from the moment they receive their asylum decision.
- Recognising the urgent pressures that this can cause, the Home Office's intention is to notify local authorities of cessations of support as early as

possible in this 28-day period. The Department is working with Clearsprings to improve this process and provide real-time notification to boroughs via Clearsprings' data portal as soon as an asylum decision is received.

- The Home Office is also taking other measures to improve communication with local authorities, through sharing heat maps, rolling out a place-based visibility tool and recruiting a local authority liaison officer for each of the 12 SMP regions in the UK, with the aim of implementing the latter two initiatives as soon as possible.
  - There is also a taskforce within the Home Office looking at addressing the barriers to providing newly recognised refugees with their biometric residence permits (BRPs) at the same time as their asylum decision.
- 7.2. Madeleine Kelleher highlighted that this change in practice is already leading to high levels of rough sleeping across London and noted the longstanding calls repeated in a recent letter from the co-chairs of the Life Off The Streets (LOTS) programme to the Immigration Minister for all necessary documentation, including biometric residence permits, to be provided to newly recognised refugees at the same time as they receive a decision. Madeleine also highlighted the pressures being put on civil society organisations and disputed the rationale that this change in practice will save the Home Office money through the closure of hotels.
- 7.3. Ellen Storrar echoed Madeleine's concerns about the impact on rough sleeping, noting that CHAIN data is showing a significant increase across London in the number of rough sleepers whose last recorded accommodation was an asylum hotel, with this trend expected to continue into the winter. Ellen highlighted further calls that have been made by the LOTS Executive Board to the Home Office for the move-on period to be extended to 56 days, greater data-sharing, and a collaborative approach on procurement to ensure that local authorities are able to procure accommodation for rough sleepers, which is particularly important in winter when boroughs seek to activate the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP).
- 7.4. Hannah Doody updated that there are conversations around potential wraparound support with Home Office and DLUHC colleagues, which has been discussed at the London Asylum Oversight Group, to ensure that newly recognised refugees avoid homelessness, centring around three areas: providing refugees with grants rather than loans, fast-tracking Universal Credit applications, and fast-tracking moves into the private rented sector.
- 7.5. Liz Maifredi (DWP) noted that there is dedicated resource in JCPs to support with vulnerable population, and that the Department is open to ideas of what more they could do to support.
- 7.6. Cllr Grace Williams underlined the importance of having a clear notifications process for local authorities around asylum decisions, and highlighted that there is also an ask from boroughs for greater flexibility around how they use housing funding.

**Action: London Asylum Oversight Group to continue to focus on the issue of asylum support cessations in its meetings.**