

London Strategic Migration Partnership (LSMP) Board

07 December 2023

11.00 – 13.00

Microsoft Teams meeting

Chair:

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

Attendees:

Cllr Grace Williams, London Councils

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

Sarah Newman, Association of London Directors of Children's Services (ALDCS)

Tim Rymer, Home Office

Scott Dunning, Home Office

Edward Russell, Home Office

James Alawi, Home Office

Elizabeth Redrup, Home Office

Sarah Aspinall, Home Office

Andrew Bailey, Home Office

Ewan Brown, Home Office

Det Supt Andrew Furphy, Metropolitan Police Service (MPS)

Andrew Stafford, Ministry of Defence (MoD)

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

Gerald Ahern, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

Suzanne Elwick, UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA)

Steven Lakey, Clearsprings Ready Homes

Samantha Tidy, Migrant Help

Clive Grimshaw, London Councils

Juliette Frontier, London Councils

Rachel Buttrick, London Councils

Rianne Lowe, London Councils

Renae Mann, Refugee Council (MRAP)

Barbara Drozdowicz, East European Resource Centre (EERC) (MRAP)

Yvonne Bizayi, East London Advanced Technology Training (ELATT) (MRAP)

Anna Yassin, Glass Door (HMAP)

Chloe White, Action for Refugees in Lewisham (AFRIL)

Howard Chae, Doctors of the World

Reg Cobb, deafPLUS

Mark Hopkinson, City Lit

Indie Beedie, University College London

Greater London Authority (GLA) staff:

Hannah Boylan, Migration

Mark Winterburn, Migration

Siobhan Gosrani, Migration

Marc Simo, Migration

Rukshan Rajamanthri, Migration

Tamara Smith, Migration

Laila Aziz, Migration

Eleonora Paesani, Migration

Phil Baker, Migration

Eduardo Lopes, Migration

Louise Yu, Migration

Maysa Ismael, Migration
George Hanoun, Migration
Navprit Rai, Communities and Social Policy (CSP)
Caroline Drummond, CSP
Okorite Amachree, CSP
David Orton, Rough Sleeping
Ramiye Thavabalasingam, Rough Sleeping
Adam Norris, Skills and Employment
Toby Gould, London Fire Brigade
Lisa Kunwar-Deer, MOPAC

Minutes:

1. Welcome & Minutes

- 1.1. Debbie Weekes-Bernard welcomed attendees, and the minutes from the last meeting were approved.
- 1.2. Mark Winterburn provided updates on actions from the last meeting. Key updates included:
 - Home Office and Clearsprings will facilitate training for asylum contingency hotel staff as part of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS)'s Operation Seascale. Content is being refined by MPS through feedback from MOPAC and the GLA, and engagement with individual local authorities. The training is likely to be rolled out in the new year.
 - The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has committed to looking into individual cases flagged by Sudanese community partners where arrivals from Sudan have faced barriers accessing housing support, despite being eligible for an exemption from the Habitual Residence Test (HRT).
 - Important actions outstanding are:
 - A meeting between the Home Office, DLUHC, GLA and civil society and community partners to further discuss issues affecting the Sudanese community.
 - Home Office 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.

2. Feedback from MRAP

- 2.1. Laila Aziz provided a summary of the discussion at the most recent meeting of the Migrant and Refugee Advisory Panel (MRAP) on 23 November. Key points included:
 - Colleagues acknowledged the impact on migrant Londoners and the wider sector of the Supreme Court judgment on the Government's Rwanda policy, which it found to be unlawful, and the ongoing crisis in Israel and Gaza.
 - Concerns were raised in relation to housing and homelessness pressures, including around the impact of asylum support cessations on rough sleeping levels and the need to respond to acute safeguarding needs. Members reflected a considerable increase in referrals to frontline organisations for young men (particularly Eritreans), impacts on mental health, and specific concerns around people with disabilities, people with experiences of substance misuse, and women.

- Colleagues noted the recent report by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner which found that every police force in England and Wales had shared information about migrant victims and survivors with immigration enforcement. There have been calls for an amendment to the Victims and Prisoners Bill to create a firewall between immigration enforcement and the police, so that migrant victims can safely report domestic abuse. This is also relevant to migrant victims and survivors of other crimes, such as modern slavery, who require safe reporting mechanisms.
 - Other items covered the cost of living crisis, how organisations can work with the London Assembly, research findings by the Learning and Work Institute on Adult Education Budget flexibilities, and a new report by the Work Rights Centre on migrant worker exploitation.
- 2.2. Debbie Weekes-Bernard noted that the issue of creating a firewall for migrant victims of domestic abuse was discussed at the [latest meeting](#) of the London Policing Board on 6 December.
- 2.3. Barbara Drozdowicz raised her concerns around detention, deportations and removals, noting that this issue is likely to increase in significance in light of the Illegal Migration Act. Colleagues are reporting a significant rise in cases, and there are acute concerns around cases affecting vulnerable people, including children and elderly people, the use of detention instead of immigration bail, and deaths in detention settings. Barbara highlighted that those in the community will be impacted by the changes in immigration enforcement works as well as those currently in detention. Barbara argued for the need to track these impacts in some way in order to inform any potential changes in the way frontline organisations deliver their services.
- 2.4. Debbie Weekes-Bernard acknowledged the prominence of this issue and committed that officers will explore ways that discussions around detentions, deportations and removals can be held within LSMP structures.

Action: GLA to explore options to hold space for discussions on detention, deportation and removals within LSMP governance.

3. Deaf Migrant Londoners

- 3.1. Debbie Weekes-Bernard highlighted the importance of ensuring that the work of the LSMP recognises intersectionality and reflects the specific experiences felt by different groups of migrant Londoners, including Deaf Londoners. Debbie provided further context by noting that the Mayor of London recently signed the Charter for British Sign Language (BSL).
- 3.2. Indie Beedie presented findings from UCL's Deaf Migrants Project, which looked into the experiences of Deaf migrants in London with a focus on access to services and integration. A number of barriers to integration were identified, including limited access to both written and signed information, barriers to learning English and BSL, being unaware of their rights, lack of access to the Deaf community, and confusion over services. The project proposed recommendations to improve services for Deaf migrant Londoners, such as effective, joined-up signposting from the Home Office and local authorities, regular, faster and more frequent access to BSL and English courses, and creating a forum for Deaf migrants to be able to feed in to the policy and service agenda. She also noted the need for accessible immigration advice for Deaf migrants.

- 3.2. Indie called for accountability for the services that the Home Office and its contractors provide; they must be accessible to Deaf migrant Londoners. She also noted that there were tools available that would help that are not being used by the Home Office and its contractors, such as video relay services that enable Deaf migrants to access signers abroad that they can understand in interviews and briefings.
- 3.3. Indie noted that there is a lot of research already about the experiences of Deaf migrant Londoners, which take a deficit model. Rather than going over this again we should be looking at implementation, asking through research what works for Deaf migrant Londoners, and creating opportunities from Deaf migrant Londoners to shape things through coproduction.
- 3.3. Reg Cobb welcomed the findings of the Deaf Migrants Project, noting that they reflect the experiences of deafPLUS's service users. In particular Reg highlighted language barriers as a key issue, caused by a lack of translated materials and access to interpreters in asylum accommodation. This can lead to severe, negative consequences for individuals, such as the removal of support and accommodation. deafPLUS has to spend a lot of time advocating for individuals, and even they find services difficult to navigate. Reg emphasised the importance of migrants having access to the Deaf community and a safe space/hub where they can be in community with each other and receive signposting and advice to ensure they understand information regarding services and processes.
- 3.4. Mark Hopkinson spoke about barriers to accessing skills for deaf migrant Londoners, noting that education providers like City Lit need funding for more BSL-proficient teachers and to be able to continue their courses and ensure there is a consistent skills offer supporting migrants to move into careers. He highlighted the lack of functional skills courses that would enable Deaf migrant Londoners to learn things that hearing migrant Londoners might informally pick up, which can be really important for social integration; there used to be a two day 'New Start' course available that did this but funding for that ended. He also noted that the AEB does not fund learners to achieve a BSL level 3 qualifications, despite this being of interest to migrant Londoners.
- 3.5. Chloe White explained that Action for Refugees in Lewisham (AFRIL) has seen an increase in the number of Deaf migrants using its services despite it not being a specialist Deaf organisation, and highlighted barriers to communication for those entering asylum accommodation, such as an overreliance on telephone services, and lack of access to legal aid as key issues affecting deaf migrant Londoners. She outlined a case study which demonstrated issues in the system, whereby someone was transported to unsuitable accommodation Essex rather than suitable accommodation in London, which required considerable advocacy from hearing advocacy workers to resolve; this simply would not have been possible for the Deaf service user to resolve themselves without means to communicate.
- 3.6. Steven Lakey proposed a separate working group to explore solutions to support Deaf asylum seekers in asylum accommodation across London. He noted that there was the potential to be creative with resources available, such as conference rooms that could be used for video relay services but currently are not, or the use of digital devices that are currently being used to break down other language barriers.
- 3.7. Samantha Tidy noted that Migrant Help is committed to broadening its offer of support to Deaf service users. She noted tools were available such as webchat – but

service improvements could be made, including where people are need of access to Section 98 support which is necessary to get into systems in the first place.

- 3.8. It was noted that access to services such as the helpline provided by Migrant Help for Deaf migrants is a question of equalities and this is a legal requirement, and that any necessary improvements should be seen in that light.
- 3.7. Tim Rymer welcomed the commitments from Clearsprings and Migrant Help to explore how they can expand their support for Deaf service users, and offered to link colleagues in with the Home Office's Customer Support and Language Services teams to think through accessibility to other parts of the system.

Action: Partners to meet to take forward necessary service improvements in light of the presentations and commitments made by the Home Office and its contractors. GLA to help facilitate these connections.

4. Asylum Support Cessations, Rough Sleeping and Homelessness

- 4.1. Debbie Weekes-Bernard highlighted a recent letter sent by Tom Copley, Deputy Mayor of London for Housing, and regional Mayors to the Secretaries of States for Work and Pensions and Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, calling on these departments to work together with local government to prevent homelessness.

Action: Mark Winterburn to circulate the letter sent by Tom Copley and regional Mayors to DWP and DLUHC.

- 4.2. Rianne Lowe presented the findings of an October 2023 survey sent by London Councils to local authority housing teams, outreach/rough sleeping teams and day centres regarding rough sleeping presentations by asylum accommodation leavers. The survey found that presentations in October were up by 39% compared to September, with the vast majority of those presenting having received positive decisions. A number of key barriers were cited by responding teams such as lack of accommodation, language barriers, and insufficient notice to do prevention work.
- 4.3. Anna Yassin noted that the findings of the survey by London Councils reflect the experiences of frontline organisations across the homelessness sector. Glass Door, London's largest open access winter night shelter provider, is seeing crisis levels of demand. Anna highlighted that providers like Glass Door have had to try to shift their service provision from a traditional rough sleeping response to one that also includes integration support.
- 4.4. Cllr Grace Williams echoed Anna's points, emphasising that the current overwhelming pressures on civil society should not be regarded as business as usual and are a specific result of the issues when asylum decisions are made. Cllr Williams welcomed the introduction of a Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) grace-period and the place-based visibility tool, but highlighted that urgent engagement is needed from the Home Office regarding what support is available to meet current pressures.
- 4.5. Home Office colleagues responded to the points raised above:
 - Tim Rymer noted that the Government is aiming to reduce intake into the asylum system to reduce pressures on localities and regions.
 - Tim Rymer invited further conversations between central and local government to understand current pressures, highlighting the management of

expectations around support and entitlements is a particular challenge that the Home Office is reflecting on. Tim added that DLUHC and DWP colleagues are working with local authorities to improve the move-on process, such as by ensuring the process around notice periods is as smooth as possible and closing the gap between provision of universal credit and cessations of asylum support.

- Andrew Bailey noted that the Customer Services team within the Home Office is now responsible for issuing discontinuation decisions, and stated that careful steps are taken to ensure all decisions are made fairly and correctly, despite the pressure to reduce the backlog of cases.
- Elizabeth Redrup noted that the Home Office Transformations team is working to develop a place-based visibility tool and a discontinuation prediction tool, which will provide an indication of when someone will receive notice of an asylum support cessation, broken down by local authority.

4.6. Renae Mann expressed that there is a mismatch between the Government's stated policy objectives of cutting the asylum backlog and ending rough sleeping, highlighting that, whilst all partners agree on the need to process decisions quickly, it is extremely difficult for newly recognised refugees to find housing within 28 days of a positive decision. Renae echoed calls for the move-on period to be extended to 56 days, in line with the Homelessness Act, so that refugees are able to find housing, access support from DWP, and/ or enter into employment.

4.7. Cllr Grace Williams highlighted that local authorities do not have capacity to provide the necessary wraparound support to meet current demand, noting that central government has not provided new funding for councils to support those in contingency accommodation since April 2023. Cllr Williams also raised her concerns around the potential impacts if the severe weather this winter outlasts the 3-day grace period confirmed by the Home Office.

4.8. Jo Beck highlighted that DLUHC colleagues continue to escalate concerns raised by partners to the Home Office, and are prioritising finding solutions to issues around SWEP, notifications and data-sharing.

Action: GLA to consider how issues around asylum support cessations, rough sleeping and homelessness can continue to be picked up through the LSMP structures.

5. Update: Resettlement of Afghan refugees from Pakistan

5.1. Andrew Stafford provided an update on the resettlement of Afghan refugees from Pakistan. Key points included:

- Pakistan's government is currently looking to deport undocumented migrants; these include Afghans who are eligible to be relocated to the UK, meaning additional resettlement support is required from local authorities.
- The MoD is setting up transitional serviced accommodation properties to house Afghans arriving as part of the overseas cohort until permanent homes for them are ready, and families will be housed in settled accommodation for 3-year lease periods.
- The MoD is using an existing contractor to source housing in the private rented sector and is working alongside the Home Office and local authorities to support matching families to properties, with a particular focus on finding 5-bedroom properties.

- 5.2. Edward Russell provided an update on the situation in London. He noted that the Home Office is keeping in regular contact with local authorities which have interim hotels to ensure robust move-on plans are in place for their guests, particularly taking into account any medical needs.
- 5.3. Mark Winterburn noted that partners would welcome further detail from central government colleagues on their plans for unscheduled Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) Pathway 3 arrivals from Pakistan and for the scaling up accommodation provision so that it can meet scale of likely demand. Edward Russell committed to looking into these.

Action: Home Office to provide further detail on its plans for unscheduled ACRS arrivals from Pakistan and the Department's strategy to ensure the scale of accommodation provision for evacuees is able to meet the scale of need.

6. Update: Safe and Legal Routes Cap Consultation

- 6.1. Cllr Grace Williams described the collective position of local government in London on the Home Office's Safe and Legal Routes cap consultation with local authorities, which will close on 15 December. Key points included:
- Local authorities in London have a proud history of supporting refugees and are committed to continuing this in partnership with central government.
 - There is strong agreement that there needs to be a coordinated response in London, and so boroughs are convening work in the new year to develop a long-term holistic approach to resettlement, in partnership with civil society and health colleagues.
 - However, Cllr Williams stressed the difficulties that local authorities are facing in meeting the ask to plan ahead and forecast their capacity for 2025, particularly given the immense pressures they are currently facing on housing and homelessness and inconsistencies in funding.
 - London local government is therefore asking the Home Office to extend the consultation deadline and support local authorities to provide their forecasts through improved coordination and engagement.
- 6.2. James Alawi provided a response on behalf of the Home Office. Key points included:
- The Home Office recognises the challenges local authorities are currently facing in terms of housing pressures and also in terms of forecasting their capacities for 2025.
 - James confirmed that the consultation is being extended until 9 January 2024, and the Home Office will be writing to SMPs conveying this. This is likely the furthest that the consultation can be extended to whilst still providing sufficient time to prepare the statutory instrument that will be laid in Parliament next year.
 - James acknowledged Cllr Williams' point around communication and highlighted that engagement will be key during the response consolidation period in January as the Home Office works through operational challenges with local authorities.
- 6.3. James noted that an overall summary of the consultation will be published, as opposed to individual local authority commitments.