

London Strategic Migration Partnership, December 2018

Chair

Debbie Weekes-Bernard, LSMP Chair; Deputy Mayor for Social Integration, Social Mobility and Community Engagement

Attendees

Councillor Muhammed Butt, London Councils
Mark Winterburn, London Councils
Paul Morrison, Home Office
Steve Kelly, MHCLG
Rita Chadha, GLA Migrant and Refugee Advisory Panel
Lisa Doyle, GLA Migrant and Refugee Advisory Panel
Barbara Drozdowicz, GLA Migrant and Refugee Advisory Panel
Mulat Haregot, GLA Migrant and Refugee Advisory Panel
Jackie Odunoye, London Borough of Redbridge
Grace Ashaye, London Asylum Seekers Consortium
Catherine Houlcroft, NRP Network

GLA Staff

Hannah Boylan, Communities and Social Policy
Kathleen Kelly, Communities and Social Policy
Ramiye Thavabalasingam, Communities and Social Policy
Heather Petch, Communities and Social Policy
Nathan Davies, Regeneration and Economic Development
Ronit Green, Regeneration and Economic Development

Apologies

Nicky Crouch, Westminster Council
Melissa Caslake, London Directors of Children's Services

1. Welcome and Chair's Update

- 1.1** Debbie Weekes-Bernard welcomed attendees and invited members to introduce themselves.
- 1.3** Minutes from the previous meeting were **agreed**.
- 1.3** Hannah Boylan provided an update on the LSMP workplan and the work progressed since the last meeting. The workplan covered progress updates across each objective, including the launch of the beta-version of the EU Londoners Hub in November and the second phase of the #LondonIsOpen campaign.

2. Asylum Accommodation and Support Transformation (Paul Morrison, Cllr Muhammed Butt, Mark Winterburn)

- 2.1** Paul Morrison provided an update on the delayed announcement of the new Asylum Accommodation and Support contracts. The Home Office expect the letting of the contracts to be ready in the New Year, with the new contracts in place at the beginning of September 2019. The details of operation will largely remain the same; the main change will be the cost, as the current providers are operating contracts at a loss.

- 2.2 Paul Morrison suggested LSMP and national groups could be a forum for discussions on how the new contractors should work in practice and how the Home Office can work better with local government and third sector organisations in this process.
- 2.3 The Home Office are aware of concerns about areas of the country which have more dispersed asylum accommodation than other areas and the need for more equitable distribution, however people are unlikely to be accommodated in more expensive areas of London due to cost.
- 2.4 Cllr Butt and Mark Winterburn welcomed Paul Morrison's recognition of the issues around asylum dispersal but highlighted the need for action to mediate some of the impacts arising from this, such as pressure on housing.
- 2.5 Mark Winterburn updated that in London there will be a Regional Transition Delivery Group to help oversee the transition from the current contracts/provider for Asylum Accommodation and Support. The group will have representatives from Home Office, local authorities and key statutory partners such as the police and NHS. Mark Winterburn highlighted the importance of connecting LSMP with this group and the need for continued strategic oversight after the transition period.
- 2.6 Members expressed concerns about the lack of NGO membership in the Regional Transition Delivery Group. The Partnership agreed to NGO representation, noting the crucial perspective NGO partners bring.
- 2.7 Members raised concerns around the need for clarity on who the new providers for Asylum Accommodation and Support are as soon as possible, particularly if the revised contract moves accommodation, as this may affect large numbers of people.
- 2.8 Other issues discussed included:
 - The move on period after receiving refugee status, and potential early intervention pilots
 - The planned evaluation of the Controlling Migration Fund and considering how the Fund links with other immigration and integration work

Actions

- Representation from the third sector to be invited to the Regional Transition Delivery Group (**Hannah Boylan**)
- Housing directors and other service providers to be invited to the Regional Transition Delivery Group meetings where relevant (**Hannah Boylan/Jackie Odunoye**)

3. Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (Cllr Muhammed Butt, Mark Winterburn)

- 3.1 Cllr Butt and Mark Winterburn provided an update on Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and the work taken forward since the last meeting. Cllr Butt raised concerns about the National Transfer Scheme, as some local authorities are taking in a disproportionate number of children compared to others and there are many delays due to the nature of the transfer system.
- 3.2 Mark Winterburn highlighted that the National Transfer Scheme is a helpful step forward, but it is not meeting the challenge at hand as over 20 local authorities in London are reporting they are over the threshold of 0.07 per cent of the child population in their borough.
- 3.3 Cllr Butt highlighted that funding is still not in place for a London co-ordinator. Grace Ashaye emphasised the need for this co-ordinator, as the pan-London rota is now at a standstill, with the 9 local authorities under the threshold needing to go back on the rota. Lisa Doyle suggested the co-ordinator works with Refugee Council, who also work with all the boroughs.
- 3.3 Cllr Butt raised concerns that the last funding review was in 2017 and the review has been delayed again.
- 3.4 Grace Ashaye updated that she held a meeting with the regions, who fed back that some local authorities are not participating in the National Transfer Scheme because they are taking part in the Dubs scheme and the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS).

3.5 Members also discussed:

- The need for the London co-ordinator to attend LSMP once in post
- Data discussed at a previous meeting which showed how some boroughs take in more of one group compared to others
- The need to emphasise that there is no difference in the statutory duty for children coming in through the Dubs amendment, VCRS or the National Transfer Scheme
- The idea of a national rota, using the successful pan-London rota as the blueprint, though noting this would require funding

Actions

- Data on borough intake of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children to be discussed at the next meeting (**Hannah Boylan**)

4. Vulnerable EU Londoners (Catherine Houlcroft)

4.1 Catherine Houlcroft provided an update on the work undertaken since the last meeting to address the needs of vulnerable EU Londoners. The Government has now released the details of a no deal scenario, with some differences to the Settled Status scheme.

4.2 Catherine Houlcroft sent questions and concerns about this to the Home Office but is awaiting a response. Concerns included:

- Access to benefits for those with Pre-Settled and Settled Status
- The need to build up five years residency for those who have been sent back to their country of origin due to unavailable services or through the Rough Sleeping Initiative (i.e. reconnecting with people in their country of origin)
- The approach to qualifying for Settled Status if you have been issued with a removal decision by the Home Office

4.3 Catherine Houlcroft asked the Home Office for a stronger steer on how to communicate this information to residents and emphasised the need for feedback from the second phase of the pilot, particularly how it went with children in care.

4.4 Barbara Drozdowicz updated that the application process is still being tested and there are still some issues with the system. As Settled Status is not provided in a formal letter it may be difficult to use for proving welfare eligibility status in DWP processes. This will particularly affect vulnerable adults and children, especially those in care.

4.5 Barbara Drozdowicz highlighted that it is unclear what would happen in a no deal scenario in terms of welfare eligibility – whether these residents would be given NRPF by default, which would have a significant impact on local authorities, or if they will automatically receive recourse to funds.

4.6 Members raised the idea of abolishing the fee for the Settled Status application, particularly for vulnerable groups. This is particularly an issue for those applicants who local authorities have a statutory duty to support e.g. adults in care. Some third sector organisations are paying for vulnerable people.

4.7 Paul Morrison took receipt of the points regarding the need to work through contingencies around these vulnerable groups and will report these back to his Government colleagues.

4.8 Members also discussed:

- People are going to local authorities for information on Settled Status, adding pressure on local authorities to communicate the Government's scheme to residents
- The Government's grant scheme for assistance with the most vulnerable EU citizens in the UK and the GLA's European outreach grant scheme for vulnerable EU Londoners

4.9 Debbie Weekes-Bernard suggested inviting those who might be able to answer or solve these issues along to LSMP.

Actions

- GLA to work with London Councils to bring boroughs together again (**Hannah Boylan**)
- GLA to set up a meeting with civil society organisations to raise awareness of Settled Status and to address their concerns (**Hannah Boylan**)
- Paul Morrison to feed back to Government colleagues the concerns raised at this meeting (**Paul Morrison**)
- Follow-up with DWP and other relevant Government departments (**Hannah Boylan**)

5. Immigration White Paper update (Hannah Boylan)

5.1 Hannah Boylan set the context to the anticipated Immigration White Paper [now published] and asked members what was important for them, focusing on social integration and vulnerable groups. Members raised the following points:

- The White Paper is likely to be contingent on what happens with the Brexit vote in Parliament
- There are concerns around the £30,000 threshold for skilled migrants after Brexit. The Mayor wrote to the Home Secretary raising his concerns about this threshold
- There are increasing concerns among businesses about what will happen to the workforce and employer checks on immigration status
- There are concerns about international students, employer-tied visas, routes for self-employment and the rights of people once they've lived in the UK for a long time
- There needs to be clarity over ending the hostile environment e.g. landlords and employers continue to do immigration checks
- The Controlling Migration Fund should be renamed as its title acts as a barrier to the integration aspects of the fund
- There needs to be greater clarity on data sharing
- London should have a voice in work around temporary worker visas
- There could be a potential increase in trafficking due to Settled Status
- Trafficking victims may face difficulties if they suddenly become undocumented on top of their victim status

5.2 Members raised concerns about problematic discourse around good versus bad migrants, particularly in light of Windrush and the hostile environment.

5.3 Paul Morrison emphasised the need to manage expectations about the White Paper, as it is primarily in response to the MAC report and will not necessarily be the answer to all the concerns raised at this meeting.

Actions

- Immigration White Paper to be discussed following its publication (**Hannah Boylan**)

6. AOB

6.1 The next meeting will be 14 March.

6.2 Rita Chadha asked that the GLA's work on Citizenship ceremonies be discussed at the next meeting following the Mayoral Citizenship Ceremony in February.