

MAYOR OF LONDON

London Strategic Migration Partnership

8 June 2021

10.00 – 12.00

Microsoft Teams meeting

Chair

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

Attendees

Councillor Muhammed Butt – London Councils

Jane DeBurgh – Public Health England

Eleanor Walker-Todd – NHS England

Sean Palmer – Home Office

Karen Joynt – Home Office

Tanya Dewey – Home Office

Bill Parsons – Home Office

Daniel Hobbs – Home Office

Hannah Sinclair – Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)

Danielle Davis – MHCLG

Steven Lakey – Clearsprings

Clive Grimshaw – London Councils

Ian Lewis - Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) Strategic Lead

Lisa Doyle – Refugee Council (MRAP)

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

Nafisah Graham-Brown – ELATT (MRAP)

Yusuf Ciftci – Doctors of the World (MRAP)

Matteo Besana – Doctors of the World

Anna Yassin – Glass Door

Varsha Baburam – Migrant Help

Sophia Nasreisfahany – Migrant Help

Beau Sukpran – Reed

Greater London Authority (GLA) staff

Khadijah Amani – Communities and Social Policy (CSP)

Mark Winterburn – CSP

Ayham Alsuleman – CSP

Hannah Boylan – CSP

Bella Kosmala – CSP

George Hanoun – CSP

Ella Johnson – CSP/Health

Emma De Zoete – Health

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Agenda

1. Welcome

1.1. Debbie Weekes-Bernard welcomed attendees, and the minutes from the last meeting were agreed.

2. Hong Kong Nationals

2.1. Danielle Davis updated on the government's package of support for newly arriving Hong Kong BNO status holders.

- A £43 million package of funding for local authorities has been set up to allow Hong Kongers to integrate in Britain. £30.7 million is being designated for targeted support, such as ESOL provision and destitution support. The aim is for local authorities to claim the money back in a backdated approach.
- Danielle noted that this autumn's spending review will provide a chance to put the case the Treasury for longer term funding and asked the group to feed back on the funding as this will feed into the Treasury's decision-making for future years.
- £5 million is also being provided to establish 12 'welcome hubs' across the UK, with the funding being weighed against predicted arrivals in each region. The Hubs will work closely with local partners to share resources and signpost to support.
- London will receive just over £1.3 million in total funding for its hub and wider civil society support: £917,000 for Hub activities and £462,000 for VCSE activities in the London region. London is expected to receive 28.9% of total BNO arrivals in the UK.
- Local VCSE organisations in all regions can bid for support to fill gaps not reached by local authority provision, such as mental health and wellbeing. There is also a small pot of money targeted at reducing hate crime.
- A dedicated welcome pack has been published on gov.uk in both English and Cantonese.

2.2. Hannah Boylan updated on the London picture for welcoming Hong Kong arrivals.

- The £917,000 funding for London's welcome hub will be administered by the GLA. This funding is currently time-limited and will be phased in order to ensure the best distribution.
- The first phase will be about building understanding and capacity building, where interlocking the funding with existing services will be key.
- Initial proposals are to recruit two full-time posts to administer the funding and carry out engagement work, to commission a provider to develop a comprehensive map of services across London for Hong Kong nationals, and to set up a London Migration Hub.
- The GLA are hearing from stakeholders that many arrivals are relatively young, highly educated and confident speaking English, including families with two children and some relatives, though we do not know the full picture yet.
- Concerns are being raised about arrivals from Hong Kong without BNO status such as those seeking asylum, and protections are also needed for this group.

2.3. Clive Grimshaw and Ian Lewis raised concerns about children arriving with vulnerabilities and being accommodated as unaccompanied asylum-seekers despite

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reporting connections to extended family or friends in London, noting that this is creating pressure in particular areas and existing services need to be linked in. Danielle Davis noted that MHCLG have come across these cases, and they are speaking to civil society groups who have raised this issue. Danielle noted that Hong Kong has a family passport system, and so children are effectively arriving with no documents and leaving the family passport behind so that their families can travel at a later time.

2.4. Cllr Muhammed Butt noted that London Councils wrote a letter to the government in February asking for regular timely updates to be provided to local authorities about the numbers applying and being approved, as this would allow councils to better plan their services, particularly data on children to allow them to plan school provisions. Danielle Davis responded that MHCLG are pulling together a data dashboard which will incorporate different sources of data across government, and once this is ready it will be shared with SMP colleagues.

Action: Cllr Muhammed Butt to forward the letter sent by London Councils in February to Danielle Davis.

3. EEA Nationals & EU Settlement Scheme Deadline

3.1. Mark Winterburn provided the latest numbers in London, noting that there have been 1.83 million applications to the EU Settlement Scheme and there are 101,500 cases still outstanding.

3.2. Barabara Drozdowicz raised her concerns over a number of issues:

- Late applications are being partly caused by a backlog in European consulates due to COVID-19, and advisers may not be able to submit applications on behalf of citizens after 1 July
- Several groups are less likely to have applied to the Settlement Scheme, such as older EU nationals, children in families and children in care
- Barbara noted that children in families may not have had their applications submitted as their parents may not have fully understood the differences between their children's status and their own, and they may also not have their own passports
- Almost 60% of children in care are yet to apply despite councils submitting applications on their behalf, with issues sometimes caused by parents not agreeing for documents to be issued for their children
- Barbara noted that those with Pre-Settled Status will need support to convert this into Settled Status, and called for the Home Office to support grant-funded organisations to continue their work

3.3. Cllr Muhammed Butt raised the issue of accessing IDs and uploading them online, noting that digital access is a barrier for many Londoners, and called for the Settlement Scheme deadline to be extended until September.

3.4. Bella Kosmala raised that there is an inconsistent approach across government departments, noting that this needs to be rectified so partners and stakeholders are aware of how to support citizens from 1 July onwards. Bella also highlighted the confusion and anxiety caused by letters which have been sent out to some Londoners asking them to prove their status.

3.5. Nafisah Graham-Brown noted that European Social Fund contract holders have been asked to prove the eligibility of citizens, and the onus to provide evidence

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will be on employers and education providers. Nafisah also called for small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) employers to be consulted to help them prepare for the future Visa system.

3.6. Yusuf Ciftci raised concerns around access to healthcare for EU nationals, noting that secondary care access is determined by a residency check and some may be asked to pay for hospital services.

3.7. Karen Joynt responded to some of the issues raised by the group:

- The Home Office will continue supporting grant-funded organisations to assist people to apply, and there are reasonable grounds for late applications
- Procedures are in place with local authorities and parents to work around issues getting documents for children
- There is a dedicated SME advisory group, and the Home Office will reach out to SME employers across the UK to support them to understand the sponsor system and new graduate route
- There are no current plans to extend the Settlement Scheme deadline, but caseworkers are being moved around to meet pressure points as required
- There are no current plans to change the digital ID system as this will be used to evidence status.

4. New Plan for Immigration

4.1. Daniel Hobbs gave an overview of the New Plan for Immigration which was published by the Home Secretary on 24 March, noting that the Plan aims to increase the fairness and efficacy of our system, deter clandestine entries to the UK (such as via small boats) and smuggling networks, and swiftly remove those in the UK who have no leave to remain in the UK. Daniel noted that the Home Office ran a 6-week consultation period for stakeholders and the general public involving a questionnaire, targeted deep dives and focus and user experience groups. These consultations will be considered ahead of bringing the bill forward in Parliament.

4.2. Cllr Muhammed Butt raised his concerns that the Plan will in effect tell people that they are not welcome in the UK, despite our history of inviting and welcoming migration.

4.3. Ian Lewis raised that the proposals regarding maintaining family reunion arrangements are not entirely clear.

4.4. Nafisah Graham-Brown raised her concerns over the language of the proposals, noting that it seems to criminalise those who are genuinely fleeing persecution and who have come through asylum and refugee routes, such as many ESOL learners. Nafisah also highlighted the lack of accessibility to the Home Office's consultation, noting that the language was difficult even for herself to be able to respond to.

4.5. Lisa Doyle agreed that the discourse around the Plan is divisive and added that charities have great concerns over some of the proposals, such as making refugee protection conditional on route of entry.

4.6. Anna Yassin added her agreement to the points around language and accessibility, noting that the consultation was very difficult to feed into due to pressures on local services caused by COVID-19 and it only being open for six weeks.

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- 4.7. Daniel Hobbs responded to some of the issues raised by the group:
- This Plan is not about economic migration, but rather those who are overstaying their visas or not arriving through formal routes, as the government is concerned about the impact of people smugglers
 - The Plan represents a strengthening of the UK's global resettlement offer, with a more global outlook rather than focusing on specific targets
 - Regarding family reunion, the standard rules for refugees will remain unchanged, so they can be joined by their pre-flight family in the UK, though the UK is no longer part of the Dublin arrangements after leaving the EU and so agreements are being sought with individual countries
 - The new proposals contain a safety mechanism for those at risk of otherwise being destitute
 - The consultation did receive thousands of responses despite the short window.
 - Daniel does not anticipate a long delay before the bill is brought forward in Parliament.

5. Asylum Accommodation and Support

5.1. Debbie Weekes-Bernard noted that the London Asylum Healthcare (LAH) task and finish group has now wrapped up as a group that regularly meets. Ella Johnson mentioned that the group will keep in touch virtually to circulate key information and is prepared to reconvene if the need arises, noting that the group has enabled useful sharing of good practice.

5.2. Jane DeBurgh listed some of the achievements by the group with regards to COVID-19 management:

- A Standard Operating Procedure was developed with partners including the Home Office, Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) and local providers
- Regular multi-agency forums took place on a local level
- All hotels were provided with action cards to know what to do
- Infection control measures were introduced
- Find and Treat were commissioned in January to deliver testing
- Southwark Council developed a pathway for self-isolating families
- Webinars, training and resources for hotel staff are being developed.

5.3. Ella Johnson gave an update on the primary care outlook in London:

- Find and Treat have reported a GP registration rate of 93% in the hotels they are active in, though it is hard to tell how this is being monitored on the ground. The Home Office has also issued an instruction to accommodation providers to support service users to register with a GP
- The vaccine outreach model is proving successful, with Find and Treat reporting an uptake of 85%
- Refugee Council are delivering trauma-informed care training for practices supporting hotels, beginning in north west London and then expanding elsewhere
- Ella highlighted the Migrant Health Steering Group, a national sub-group which will look specifically at the issue of access to healthcare
- Some gaps do remain, such as some service users being directed to local A&E departments instead of primary care
- A pre-emptive pre-dispersal template has been developed by North West London CCG and is soon being shared, to prevent primary care teams losing contact when dispersals take place at short notice.

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- 5.4. Emma De Zoete gave an update on Find and Treat:
- The service is funded by NHS England
 - So far there has been a very strong working partnership and good feedback received from local authorities, with Find and Treat being vital in managing the January and February COVID wave
 - Asylum and homeless outreach is being meshed together to meet the needs of these particularly vulnerable populations
 - Find and Treat will continue to work closely with the London Coronavirus Response Cell (LCRC) and provide rapid outreach testing until March 2022, funded by all directors of public health in London.
- 5.5. Eleanor Walker-Todd gave an update on the regional picture for London:
- NHS England have set up a regional task force for delivering the vaccine to health inclusion groups and supporting integrated care systems
 - The taskforce is looking at regional progress made in vaccinating groups such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities and sex workers, how to integrate other existing services, and how to vaccinate those dispersed at short notice
 - The taskforce has so far met only on a few occasions but recently hosted a webinar workshop for 150 local authority, CCG and third sector representatives to share best practices.
- 5.6. Sean Palmer and Debbie Weekes-Bernard thanked health colleagues for all their hard work responding to the ongoing pandemic and expressed their optimism about these recent developments.
- 5.7. Mark Winterburn gave an update on the GLA's recent work:
- The GLA has commissioned research analysing the current asylum procurement framework, after recognising the need to look further into the social integration needs for this population and access to services
 - Local authorities are developing new ways of working and looking into a more corporate approach to enable asylum seekers to access children's, housing and civil society services
 - The GLA has developed a £100,000 funded programme called 'Asylum Welcome' to support the work of boroughs. The programme will be delivered by external partners and take a design lab approach, looking at areas such as digital inclusion, data sharing, loneliness and isolation, local health pathways and access to ESOL. Mark encouraged the group to share any feedback.

6. Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Relocation Scheme

- 6.1. Sean Palmer gave an update on the Afghan LES Relocation Scheme:
- The scheme was set up in 2020 to relocate Afghans who have worked with British troops over the last ten years
 - The initial plan was for relocation to be phased out gradually over months and years, but the US government's decision to withdraw from Afghanistan means that the process is now speeding up, with the new goal being to relocate Afghans before September. Therefore, the Home Office is asking local authorities to bring forward their plans on placements
 - Under this scheme, Afghans will be given immigration status and access to the jobs market and benefits, and the Home Office are working with DWP to provide universal credit

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- There is currently 4 months of funding for housing and integration support for families, and they will need support as soon as they arrive
- Currently, the plan is for the first set of families to arrive in June, followed by a fairly quick flow of arrivals over the summer
- The cohorts will vary, with some family members being very experienced and qualified in English (particularly those who worked as interpreters) and some having links in the diaspora, and so levels of support will also vary.

6.2. Cllr Muhammed Butt highlighted that it may be difficult for local authorities to arrange accommodation for large family units due to existing pressures to accommodate other groups.

7. AOB

7.1. Ian Lewis highlighted that local authorities in London are considering their response to the requests from government regarding the situation in Kent for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Sean Palmer responded that announcements on the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) consultation are due later this week, and any support London councils can provide is greatly appreciated. Clive Grimshaw highlighted calls for the NTS to be mandated.