

MAYOR OF LONDON

London Strategic Migration Partnership

28 September 2020

10.30 – 12.30

Chair

Debbie Weekes-Bernard, Deputy Mayor for Social Integration, Social Mobility & Community Engagement

Attendees

Councillor Muhammed Butt – London Councils

Lucy Cartwright – Home Office

Barbara Drozdowicz – East European Resource Centre (MRAP)

Nafisah Graham-Brown – East London Advanced Tech Training (MRAP)

Jackie Odunoye – London Borough of Redbridge/ London Housing Directors

Steven Lakey – Clearsprings Ready Homes

Ian Lewis – Association of London Directors of Children's Services (ALDCS)

Paul Wylie – The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC)

Anastasia Mulenga – London Councils

Samira Islam – London Councils

Anna Di Mascio – Migrant Help

Grace Ashaye – London Asylum Seekers Consortium

Judith Dennis – Refugee Council (MRAP) – standing in for Lisa Doyle

Jane De Burgh – Public Health England (PHE)

Deborah Chittenden – Home Office

Maria Rodrigues – NHS England

Susan Harrison - London COVID-19 Homeless Health Response Cell

Jean Young – NHS Southwark CCG

Durga Sivasathiseelan – Doctors of the World

Yusuf Ciftci – Doctors of the World

Anna Di Mascio – Migrant Help

David Andersson - DWP

Greater London Authority (GLA) staff

Hannah Boylan – Communities and Social Policy (CSP)

Mark Winterburn – CSP

Bella Kosmala – CSP

Rupinder Parhar – CSP

Ayham Alsuleman – CSP

Ramiye Thavabalasingam – CSP

Lidia Estevez Picon – CSP & Housing

David Eastwood – Housing

Emma De Zoete – Health Team

Vivienne Avery – City Intelligence Unit

Alice Major – City Intelligence Unit

Richard Cameron – City Intelligence Unit

Ella Johnson – CSP & Health Team

Alison Pearce – Health Team

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Karissa Singh – Skills Team

Apologies

Kate Carr – Home Office (Director of Resettlement, Asylum Support & Integration)

Lisa Doyle – Refugee Council (Migrants & Refugees Advisory Panel/MRAP)

Andrew Carter - ALDCS

Rita Dayoub – Doctors of the World (MRAP)

Agenda

1. Welcome

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

2. Contingency hotel use for supported asylum seekers

- 2.1. Alice Major presented data showing the spread of contingency hotels for asylum seekers across the capital.

- **Access to healthcare & managing Covid-19-19 19 outbreak risks**

- 2.2. Jane de Burgh (PHE) set out a number of needed areas of focus for work around the health of people seeking asylum in hotels. She stated that she believed there was a need for a new overarching group to look these issues and standardise procedures across London, helping to guide and provide advice on these issues.

The issues she outlined in need of attention were:

- Quarantine
- Staff training
- Infection control
- Testing for symptomatic service users
- Self-isolation for COVID-19 positive cases and their families
- Surveillance and outbreak detection
- Health assessments and medical support
- 'Cohorting' of vulnerable service users
- Testing

- 2.3. It was noted by a range of partners, including NHS England, that there were currently challenges in accessing testing for those in hotels. It was suggested that that there could be advantages to a bespoke approach to testing for the population given the context. Deborah Chittenden said that she would welcome any proposals for how the Home Office could help practically with the testing of service users.

- 2.4. Cllr Butt raised concerns about the additional pressures that hotels used for people seeking asylum place on local services (including local testing sites), the concentration of hotels in certain areas, and the potential for local tensions to arise as a result. Some of these concerns were echoed by Judith Dennis, who noted the support social services is required to provide those in hotels, including children accommodated in hotels as adults, who are then found to be children in a Merton compliant assessment.

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- 2.5. Steve Lakey and Deborah Chittenden agreed that hotels were not a sustainable option that that it was desirable to reduce use as soon as possible.
- 2.6. Steve Lakey explained that Clearsprings has been working with local CCGs on health provision for those in hotels. He also noted that a forum with civil society groups will be set up with civil society groups from October.
- 2.7. In response to a query from Judith, Steve explained that cash is not being provided to those in hotels because wash gear, personal items etc are provided in kind to this population.
- 2.8. Yusuf Ciftci explained that Doctors of the World was delivering a healthcare outreach service in one of the hotels in London, as well as being involved in healthcare provision for those in hotels before COVID-19. Doctors of the World have seen a poor understanding of how NHS works and of symptom identification on the ground in hotels, and language barriers affecting GP registration and healthcare access. He recommended that all residents should be signposted to mainstream health provision, given the length of stay in IA/ hotels, and that those with existing medical conditions should be directly supported to access GPs.
- 2.9. Maria Rodrigues provided a brief overview of CCG work to provide GP access. The default position should be to ensure that residents are registered with GP practices, and to offer screening/ assessment.
- 2.10. Deborah Chittenden stated that there was a need for continuous improvement in this space, and the Home Office is willing to work with partners to do so.
- 2.11. Various partners responded positively to Jane's call for a new overarching group to look at these issues. Jackie Odunoye noted that similar collaboration had been useful for in delivering for rough sleepers in emergency accommodation in London.
- 2.12. Debbie Weekes-Bernard resolved that a new group would be convened, to report into LSMP on these issues. On the basis of discussion, she noted that:
 - There is a clear need to learn from good practice – including the delivery of health services for rough sleepers in hotels.
 - Civil society participation in this work will be important for its success.
 - The GLA are not taking on responsibility for this area of policy, but will instead be taking a role to support partners to meet their responsibilities – and help to provide accountability for service delivery.

Action: New LSMP sub-group focussing on COVID-19 and healthcare access in relation to hotels for asylum seekers to be set up. New group to report back into next LSMP meeting.

Action: Doctors of the World report on access to healthcare in asylum hotels to be circulated to partners after the meeting.

- **Future planning & exit strategy**

- 2.13. Mark Winterburn outlined the process for the plan being developed by SMP officers in partnership with London Housing Directors, Clearsprings and other partners to

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guide the process of procurement of 800 bed spaces to reduce hotel use. He noted that:

- This work was initiated in response to a request that came out to each region of the UK via their SMP for such a plan, in light of the significant challenges arising for supported asylum seekers as a result of increasing contingency hotel use.
- It is critical that asylum accommodation procurement is coordinated with what the boroughs are trying to do around housing strategies, homelessness, and around people who are former rough sleepers.
- The proposal was discussed with Cllr Butt, and at Chief Executives of London Committee (CELC). CELC delegated authority to London Housing Directors to work with LSMP on the detail of the plan.

2.14. Jackie Odunoye explained the critical importance of avoiding competition between local authorities and Clearsprings/ Home Office for the same properties. This is one of the key principles of the plan. Another key principle is for new procurement to take place beyond those boroughs that asylum accommodation is already most concentrated in.

3. Intelligence Update

3.1. Alice provided an overview of migration trends in recent months. This included long-term international migration, NINO registrations, supported asylum seekers, unaccompanied children, and migrant rough sleeping.

3.2. Alice provided an overview of the findings of the rapid evidence review commissioned by the Mayor on inequalities in relation to Covid-19 and its effects on London. The review confirmed findings of the PHE review of disparities among ethnic minority groups and migrants but also the disproportionate impact of the coronavirus pandemic for groups with other protected characteristics that have not been highlighted previously. The review can be found here:

<https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/rapid-evidence-review-inequalities-in-relation-to-covid-19-and-their-effects-on-london>.

3.3. Jackie noted that there are growing numbers of rough sleepers in London. Housing Directors are keeping a close eye on that and trying to understand underlying causes.

Action: Slides from Intelligence Update to be circulated after the meeting.

4. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

- **ALDCS/ London Councils review of needs**

4.1. Samira Islam provided an outline of the review:

- Research was carried prior to the pandemic, to explore the profile of London's unaccompanied children and to better understand their needs. There will be a second phase of this research that will be carried out later.
- The review identified seven key challenges@
 - 1) Health and wellbeing
 - 2) Asylum / immigration status
 - 3) Placement needs
 - 4) Access to education and barriers to progression

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- 5) Age assessments and age disputes
- 6) Trafficking and safety
- 7) Community and social integration

- In the next steps of this research, ALDCS will work with a research partner to engage with a much wider range of stakeholders to identify recommendations for practice improvement and to identify potential savings from partnership working.

- 4.2. Cllr Butt welcomed the research and noted the importance of the mental health findings. Cllr Butt also noted the importance of a restart to the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) to ensure boroughs are able to care for children in manageable numbers.
- 4.3. Judith noted the need for services like education and health to be inclusive of unaccompanied children.
- 4.4. Nafisah Graham-Brown highlighted Bell Foundation research, which looks at young children with ESOL needs and their progression in terms of education. She offered to make an introduction.

Action: LSMP members to contact Samira if they are interested in contributing the second stage of the research.

Action: Written summary of the findings to be circulated to members.

- **National Transfer Scheme consultation**

- 4.5. Cllr Butt noted the need to understand and overcome barriers to local authorities participating, and the need to focus on supporting children. This will build confidence in the scheme. He also noted that there is still an open question of whether the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) could become mandatory.
- 4.6. Ian noted that, whatever happens, we will retain a significant population of unaccompanied children in London who will still require support.
- 4.7. The consultation closes in September, and London Councils will provide a response. There is a young people's consultation event on the 29th Sept.
- 4.8. Deborah Chittenden expressed hope that there will be a clear solution presented through the consultation response.

Action: When a Home Office response to the consultation is reached, this should be shared with LSMP members.

5. Refugee Resettlement

- 5.1. Cllr Butt emphasised the need for resettlement to restart and noted that boroughs are ready to restart their programmes. He also stated that the rhetoric around refugees from the government had been unhelpful. Anastasia added that a lack of communication from the Home Office on start dates is of real concern.
- 5.2. Ayham provided outlined concerns about the ongoing suspension of resettlement for community sponsorship groups. There is a lot of frustration among groups. Without clarity, there are rumours circulating about start dates, and whether the scheme will

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continue. While some groups are pressing ahead, others are stopping work on applications. There are very real challenges about holding on to properties indefinitely.

6. EEA Nationals

- **EU Settlement Scheme**

6.1. Richard Cameron presented the latest data on the EU settlement scheme. New in June were figures showing applications from people who applied under derivative rights. Out of 7000 people who applied under the derivative rights, a small proportion have had a decision. Over half (61%) of Zambrano applications concluded so far have been refused.

6.2. Barbara expressed concerns about the high number of refusals for those with derivative rights.

6.3. Barbara expressed concerns about in Home Office policy: although ministers have said that anyone from the EU living in the UK before 31 December will have the right to work, rent etc in the UK, it is unclear how they will not fall foul of compliant/ hostile environment policies. There could also be issues with people trying to travel in and out of the country who are in this position. Those with eligibility for the scheme who are, for example, unmarried partners of someone who is working, may lose their right to apply after 31 December. There is a lack of clarity from the Home Office of the right of these people to reside after 31 December.

Action: EU Settlement Scheme Slides to be circulated to members.

- **Access to National Insurance Numbers**

6.4. Barbara explained that an application for an EU citizen for a National Insurance Number (NINo) in the UK requires a face-to-face interview to confirm ID. As Job Centres have suspended all face-to-face meetings because of COVID-19, applicants cannot complete their application by attending the meeting. This means that:

- Those who arrived recently and cannot find jobs; even though employers can employ using temporary number, most will not.
- Those who arrived recently and cannot set up sole trading / self-employment.
- Those who started work in April and have used a temporary number (valid for three months), have their number lapse and are dismissed for non-compliance

6.5. David explained that it is not possible, due to the requirement to examine customers' ID documents, to offer a virtual service currently. However, to support the reinstatement of the NINo service, DWP are developing a digital solution that should enable them to reintroduce the process incrementally during the autumn. He also noted that staff had been redeployed to concentrate on universal credit claims, but from the end of November, they might have more capacity to focus on this cohort again.

Action: David and Barbara to discuss challenges facing this cohort further.