

London Strategic Migration Partnership

28 September 2021

11.00 – 13.00

Microsoft Teams meeting

Chair

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

Attendees

Sean Palmer – Home Office

Melanie Johnson – Home Office

Deanna Matthews – Home Office

Tina Rea – Clearsprings

Greg Mutyambizi – Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

Karen Pringle – DWP

John Hetherington – London Fire Brigade

Julie Billett – Public Health England

Maha Saeed – Public Health England

Eleanor Walker-Todd – NHS England

Martin Machray – NHS England

Alison Griffin – London Councils

Eva Barnsley – London Councils

Graeme Gordon – London Councils

Sean Harriss – Harrow & CELC Lead on Refugees and Asylum

Daniel Kennedy – Hillingdon & London Lead Housing Director for Asylum and Migration

Ian Lewis – ALDCS

Andrew Carter – City of London & ALDCS

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

Nafisah Graham-Brown – ELATT (MRAP)

Lisa Doyle – Refugee Council (MRAP)

Yusuf Ciftci – Doctors of the World (MRAP)

Matteo Besana – Doctors of the World

Tesfay Waldemichael – Migrant Help

Jakub Szukaj – Migrant Help

Anna Yassin – Glass Door (HMAP)

Greater London Authority (GLA) staff

Bella Kosmala – Communities and Social Policy (CSP)

Mark Winterburn – CSP

Ayham Alsuleman – CSP

Khadijah Amani – CSP

Leticia Ishibashi – CSP

George Hanoun – CSP

Richard Cameron – Intelligence

Agenda

1. Welcome

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

2. GLA Intelligence Update

- 2.1. Richard Cameron gave an Intelligence update in London. Key points included:
 - There were 2 million applications to the EU Settlement Scheme in London before the Scheme's 30 June deadline. There have been more outcomes of Pre-Settled Status being granted in London than in the rest of the UK, but there were still 180,000 applications outstanding on 30 June.
 - Rough sleeping in London has been falling steadily since its peak level in 2020. Fifty per cent of rough sleepers are non-UK nationals.
 - 73,000 people are currently awaiting an asylum decision, and there are currently 8,800 people in asylum hotels in London, distributed across 24 boroughs.
- 2.2. Richard Cameron also presented some key characteristics of the Afghan diaspora in London, in light of the recent crisis in Afghanistan and efforts to resettle Afghan nationals in the UK.
 - The Afghan population in London has not dramatically changed over the last ten years.
 - The rate of asylum decisions for Afghan nationals being granted has increased over recent years.
 - National Insurance number registrations show that boroughs in west London are the biggest centres for the Afghan diaspora.
 - Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) reports show that there has been an increase in the number of rough sleepers who are Afghan nationals over recent years, which mirrors the trend for Asian national rough sleepers more generally.
- 2.3. Sean Harriss noted that partners should assume in their strategic planning for the current wave of Afghan displacement and resettlement that there will be a pull towards current diaspora areas in west London, due to established community links and support. Sean noted that this trend may not emerge during the initial wave of resettlement but is likely to take shape over time.
- 2.4. Lisa Doyle raised concerns over the current waiting times for asylum decisions, noting that the Home Office has confirmed these are now averaging over one year. Lisa noted that, together with the pause in evictions, longer waiting times are creating pressure on hotels and contingency accommodations, and that this pressure will exist for some time unless decisions can be sped up.
- 2.5. Martin Machray noted that it would be useful to compare data on the Afghan diaspora in London with similar data for the rest of the country, in order to help

partners establish a national spread of where communities are located across the UK.

3. Evacuation from Afghanistan and new Afghan resettlement schemes

3.1. Situational update

3.1.1. Sean Palmer gave a situational update from the Home Office.

- The evacuation of Afghan nationals in August was very speedy, with many arriving in the UK faster than the Home Office had expected. Arrivals were initially moved into quarantine hotels due to Afghanistan being a red-list country.
- Bridging accommodation was procured at great speed and based on availability. 13,000 bed spaces have been procured, with just over 11,000 of these currently in use. 3,800 people are currently in hotels in London.
- The Home Office are discussing how best to manage bridging accommodation. There is an offer of funding for wrap-around care of £28 per person per night, which most local authorities have indicated they would like to take up.
- The Home Office are working with local authorities to move families into long-term accommodation, with top-up funding recently being announced to support this. So far 281 offers of support from 18 local authorities have come through, with 23 properties under consideration or in use, and 11 families have been matched to these.
- The Home Office are working with the Ministry of Defence to send the army to hotels to carry out a large data-gathering exercise, particularly who arrivals are and their basic needs. This data will then be shared with partners in a legal and proportionate way.

3.1.2. Sean Harriss gave an update on wrap-around support in hotels.

- Local authorities have broadly split the management of bridging hotels into two phases.
- The first phase is about welcoming Afghan families and dealing with their initial needs (until the end of October), particularly any health needs such as maternity, mental health and trauma support.
- The second phase is about providing a medium-term offer of support. Local authorities are working out what this support could look like, such as health and integration support, whilst considering feasibility in a bridging hotel scenario. Councils are liaising on this work with the Home Office and other key agencies such as the Metropolitan Police and the London Fire Brigade.

3.1.3. Julie Billett from Public Health England (PHE) gave an update on access to health care and responding to health needs.

- NHS colleagues are leading on the health response, including facilitating GP registrations, conducting enhanced health needs assessments and signposting where necessary to relevant services, such as for safeguarding

and trauma needs. There are five Integrated care systems (ICS's) in London who are working to put these arrangements in place.

- From a public health perspective, PHE have produced national guidance on primary care and migrant health, and are coordinating across public health teams in boroughs to ensure solid communication between partners and public health bodies.
- The health sub-group of the Afghan response Task and Finish Group is working through operational issues regarding oral health, communicable diseases, access to testing and vaccinations, and outbreak management.

3.1.4. Lisa Doyle noted that there are other populations in hotels who could also be benefitting from this coordination and support, and asked if this support is being extended to other people seeking asylum in hotels. Debbie Weekes-Bernard noted that councils are viewing this support as a holistic approach. Sean Palmer noted that the Home Office are contractually obliged to provide wrap-around care for people seeking asylum in hotels, and that there are slight differences between populations, particularly that Afghans are arriving mostly as families whereas those in hotels are more often single people who can be moved on quicker. Sean offered to look at comparing models of wrap-around support in the long term.

3.1.5. Andrew Carter raised a number of issues, including access to ASPEN cards on the ground, long waits for universal credit payments and road safety concerns, noting that Afghan children play in very different settings back home compared to London. Andrew also noted that the data-gathering exercise being carried out by the Ministry of Defence is vital due to safeguarding concerns and the need to identify and match family members.

Sean Palmer responded to each of Andrew's points.

- Regarding ASPEN cards, these are being rolled out much quicker to cohorts in the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) scheme than to those not in this scheme because the Treasury already had arrangements in place for the former. Sean also noted that the Home Office does not have any powers to pay those who are British citizens, and so they are working with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to support this group and their dependents.
- Regarding universal credit, Sean noted that DWP are going into hotels to support families with their applications, and that DWP are working with the Home Office to decide whether it is better for families to receive payments via ASPEN cards or for them to move to universal credit payments sooner.
- Regarding road safety, Sean noted that the induction pack being provided to Afghan families is a good place to start, but acknowledged that a larger education piece on safety would be welcome.

3.2. Governance

- 3.2.1. Sean Harriss gave an update on the Task and Finish Group he chaired, noting that he intends to stand it down as its main purpose (coordinating the initial response) has now passed.
- 3.2.2. Sean noted that a new Task and Finish Group is being established, chaired by Martin Pratt, to convene lead officers for the bridging hotels to deal with practical challenges on the ground relating to housing and homelessness. In the medium term, and this work must be embedded back into the wider work of London Strategic Migration Partnership.
- 3.2.3 Sean noted that London Councils 'Fair Shares' workstream is a significant piece of work which will continue outside of the Task and Finish Group.
- 3.2.4. Julie Billett noted that health issues have been represented in the bridging hotels Task and Finish Group chaired by Martin Pratt, but she is also scoping out a sub-group focused on health to sit beneath this to explore how health support will be anchored in wider governance arrangements.
- 3.2.5. Mark Winterburn presented on some of the ways in which the GLA and the LSMP infrastructure can continue to assist partners in the response:
 - Drawing on its networks with civil society and work with London Councils to support on intelligence
 - Support on liaising with the Home Office by providing points of escalation and sharing information
 - Inputting expertise where useful. For example: the GLA's English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Coordinators who are working on Adult Education Budget (AEB) eligibility and ESOL provision for Afghan families
 - Supporting on lessons learned from asylum accommodation and new ways of working, for example provision for infants in hotels
 - Supporting on health issues, for example the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and training for hotel staff which were developed by the London Asylum Healthcare task and finish group
- 3.2.6. Mark noted that the Migrant and Refugee Advisory Panel (MRAP, an expert panel which advises the work of LSMP and the GLA), the Refugee Resettlement Coordinators Meeting (which brings together borough resettlement lead officers) and the London Asylum Healthcare Task and Finish Group are all LSMP forums which can pick up some of work of temporary Task and Finish Groups, and look at the long-term integration journey of Afghan families.
- 3.2.4. Members agreed that a key question is what public health and health support, structures and governance should look like in the long term in relation to the Afghan population. Yusuf Ciftci from Doctors of the World noted that they are keen to be involved in long-term planning to ensure that there is sufficient health provision and capacity in hotels.

- 3.2.5. Anna Yassin highlighted that gender needs to be considered in all high-level discussions, noting that there are specific issues which impact women differently compared to men and calling for partners to ensure that Afghan women are well-informed about their rights and how they can access support.

Action: Julie Billet to consider what health/ public health governance should look like in relation to the Afghan evacuated and resettled populations.

3.3. 'Fair Shares'

- 3.3.1. Alison Griffin updated on London Council's 'Fair Shares' workstream. The aim of the is to work with the Home Office to ensure that there is an equitable spread of Afghan families across the UK. This is particularly important considering that in London there are already areas of high concentration of need due to the asylum contingency hotels. The current 'Fair Shares' paper uses a multi-factor model to suggest ways to ensure that there is a fair allocation of families across boroughs within London. Alison noted that there is a meeting with all local authority leads in London on Friday 1 October to discuss this approach.
- 3.3.2. Daniel Kennedy from Hillingdon highlighted that the biggest challenge facing all boroughs in relation to resettling Afghans is the procurement of larger properties, noting that this is a matter of supply. Hillingdon are looking to work with the private rented sector to prevent homelessness, as they are seeing a high number of evictions from private rented accommodation taking place. Daniel welcomed that the one-year provision of funding for local authorities under the ARAP scheme has been extended.
- 3.3.3. Sean Palmer welcomed the 'Fair Shares' workstream, noting that it encourages a collaborative approach and supports central government departments to plan better.

4. EEA Nationals: Implications of EU Settlement Scheme deadline passing

- 4.1. Barbara Drozdowicz gave a situational update.
- Barbara noted recent changes that will affect European Londoners, such as the Home Office granting temporary protection for late applicants to the EU Settlement Scheme, and a statement of changes to the Immigration Rules meaning that family members will be able to apply for settled status.
 - Barbara noted that as part of the latest data-matching exercise between the Home Office and the DWP, letters have been sent out which are causing some concern due to their wording. The letters suggest people's benefits will cease if they do not apply to the EU Settlement Scheme, despite sometimes being received by citizens who have applied to the Settlement Scheme or even acquired settled status. Barbara asked for the DWP to clarify the 28-day deadline referred to in the letters and what they mean for European Londoners.

- 4.2. Greg Mutyambizi from the DWP responded to Barbara's points.
- Greg noted that the DWP issued comms in May 2021 to EU nationals who had yet to apply to the Settlement Scheme, reminding them to apply to the Scheme before the 30 June deadline or update their details.
 - Pre-suspension letters have since been sent out to EU nationals who were still without status after the 30 June deadline. Greg noted that these letters are designed to get claimants to contact DWP to clarify missing information and/or confirm next steps.
 - Greg noted that the DWP are also inviting people to visit their local job centre in order to receive support with completing their Settlement Scheme applications or verifying their ID documentation.

Action: Mark Winterburn to arrange a separate call with Barbara Drozdowicz and Greg Mutyambizi to discuss issues facing European nationals in further detail.

5. AOB

- 5.1. Nafisah Graham-Brown noted that she has been working with Khadijah Amani on issues surrounding eligibility for the AEB, and highlighted their concerns about a rule change which withdraws the 3-year residency waiver for the spouses/dependents of EU and UK Nationals to access learning. This is mainly impacting vulnerable women. Khadijah noted that the spouses of British nationals are amongst the population being accommodated in hotels, and asked if Sean Palmer could raise this issue in his discussions with the DLUHC.

Action: Sean Palmer to answer the points raised by Nafisah Graham-Brown and Khadijah Amani via email.