

MAYOR OF LONDON

London Strategic Migration Partnership

8 December 2020

10.30 – 12.30

Chair

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

Attendees

Councillor Muhammed Butt – London Councils
Sean Palmer – Home Office
Alison Samedi – Home Office
Andrew Carter - ALDCS
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
Tina Rea - Clearsprings Ready Homes
Ian Lewis – Association of London Directors of Children's Services (ALDCS)
Moushami Atkar – The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC)
Anastasia Mulenga – London Councils
Varsha Baburam – Migrant Help
Grace Ashaye – London Asylum Seekers Consortium
Lisa Doyle – Refugee Council (MRAP)
Anna Yassin – Glassdoor (HMAP representative)
Jane De Burgh – Public Health England (PHE)
Mark Smith – NHS England
Anna Di Mascio – Migrant Help
David Andersson – DWP
Susanna Jenkins – Home Office
Razwan Zaman – Home Office
Lisa Howard – Home Office
James Henry – Home Office
Kate Ridley-Moy – Home Office

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
Karissa Singh – Skills Team

Apologies

Rita Dayoub – Doctors of the World (MRAP)

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Agenda

1. Welcome

- 1.1. Sarah Mulley opened the meeting, and apologised for the late arrival of Debbie Weekes-Bernard.
- 1.2. Sarah thanked Jackie Odunoye for her contributions to the partnership and for her representation of housing issues. Members noted the lasting impact Jackie has had to improve asylum accommodation and support in London.
- 1.3. Members agreed to minutes of the last meeting.

2. Access to healthcare & managing Covid-19-19 outbreak risks

- 2.1. Ella Johnson provided an update on the work of the London Asylum Health (LAH) Task and Finish Group. The group was convened after being actioned by the LSMP and aims to support commissioners local healthcare providers, Home Office contractors and statutory and non-statutory services to enable the delivery of accessible, quality healthcare to asylum applicants housed in Initial Accommodation (IA), with a focus on hotel accommodation, and to establish a pan-London standardised healthcare offer which prioritises the health and wellbeing of residents.
- 2.2. Ella also provided an update on a letter that the Mayor sent to the Home Secretary calling for the commissioning of a rapid outreach testing service to be made available on site at contingency hotels accommodating people seeking asylum, and for the establishment of clear standard operating procedures to control the spread of COVID-19, working closely with the London Coronavirus Response Cell and underpinned by staff training.
- 2.3. Ella also outlined the importance of a robust communication strategy for residents in a language they understand to outline COVID-19 information and safety measures, including information on registering with a GP.
- 2.4. NHS England have now agreed to pay for a rapid outreach testing service up until the end of the financial year, or until a more operational sustainable solution is available to support asylum seeker populations.
- 2.5. Jane De Burgh set out the situation in contingency accommodation and highlighted some of the risks without clear standard operating procedures to control the spread of COVID-19.
- 2.6. Jane asked whether the NHS funding for rapid outreach testing would extend to Initial Accommodation. Mark Smith responded that he was not averse to this but was considering the operational challenges of delivering test and trace in the contingency hotels which necessitated a tailored solution at those locations. Jane outlined some of the limitations of access to training and swabbing in IA that warrants their inclusion in the service.
- 2.7. Steve acknowledged challenges arising from having stood up contingency hotels rapidly, including having a single approach to healthcare across the entire estate. Steve outlined that coordination is currently being provided at a CCG level, covering access to primary care services, infection control and outbreak management.
- 2.8. Steve confirmed an internal audit had been conducted to ensure translated material was available at accommodation sites.

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- 2.9. Sean Palmer agreed the need for consistency across the system, and that he is committed to driving forward to achieve this. Sean outlined that the asylum population is starting to steady a little, and the Home Office focus is on reducing the use of contingency hotels but acknowledged it would take some time to get there. Sean confirmed his willingness to work in partnership to address the health issues raised today.
- 2.10. Lisa Doyle raised concerns about mental health and highlighted her concern that access to primary care is crucial for the identification of vulnerability that is a determiner of vaccine eligibility. Jane noted that the LAH would be discussing vaccination.
- 2.11. Steve outlined the differences in process at a CCG level for the registration of people seeking asylum with a GP and underlined the importance of a single approach to GP registration. Mark Smith noted the need to manage capacity within local areas and the solutions needed to meet immediate demand and longer-term work to ensure registration with a GP as the default option for new arrivals.

Action: Members to be in touch with Sean Palmer on what is needed from the Home Office to progress and embed a rapid outreach testing service and the establishment of clear standard operating procedures.

Action: Steve to look into which CCGs needs adaptation to improve the systems in place to register people seeking asylum with a GP.

3. Procurement framework for future asylum dispersal

- 3.1. Mark Winterburn shared an update on the London Asylum Procurement Framework, for the procurement of up to 800 bed spaces in London, which was produced in consultation with London Councils Executive, Chief Executives, and London Housing Directors, Clearsprings Ready Homes and the Home Office.
- 3.2. The framework sets out a number of principles and processes that the Home Office, Clearsprings and boroughs agree to abide by. The plan is now live, and the details of the framework were circulated with the agenda for this meeting. Mark outlined some of the key principles, including that:
- New dispersal accommodation would be procured within the capital in an equitable way that takes into account local pressures.
 - Procurement of properties will meet minimum standards that match the expectations of London boroughs
- 3.3. Steve said that the plan was welcome and would improve the coordination of services in London, benefitting all partners and service users. Steve highlighted the positive impact of avoiding competition between boroughs and providers seeking access to the same limited accommodation. Steve outlined how this framework was a good opportunity to address the imbalance of accommodation within London, with asylum accommodation currently disproportionately procured in just a few London boroughs.
- 3.4. Jackie agreed the framework was a good piece of collaborative working, and welcomed the pledge by Clearsprings and the Home Office to continue to use this as an opportunity to address the imbalance in London over the longer term, which would benefit boroughs and service users. Jackie acknowledged this would have an

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impact on procurement costs and welcomed the openness of the Home Office and Clearsprings to address this issue.

- 3.5. Jackie outlined how the Everyone In plan for rough sleepers coincided with this work, and that concerns have been raised about the co-location or mixed use of hotels for rough sleepers and people seeking asylum that added to local pressures.
- 3.6. Cllr Butt reiterated the point about equity and balance within London regarding housing pressures, and the importance of avoiding competition that would undermine the work our boroughs and drive up prices.
- 3.7. Sean reiterated his thanks to Mark and the LSMP for leadership of this piece of work – one of the primary ways to reduce reliance on contingency hotels is by procuring longer-term accommodation at pace, and this framework would enable that. Sean reiterated the point about collaboration rather than competition and to get a greater balance across the capital for community cohesion and wider range of services in the capital.

Action: Mark to provide a future update on the implementation of the plan at the next LSMP meeting.

4. Refugee Resettlement

- 4.1. Sean Palmer outlined that the Government had nearly met the originally 20,000 commitment under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). Flights have now restarted with final arrivals under the scheme.
- 4.2. Sean noted that Ministers are still considering the future of resettlement, including considerations about the scale and speed of that programme. The Home Office is currently working through the implications of the spending review and hope to have an update after ministers have considered option in the coming weeks.
- 4.3. Ayham shared the perspective of boroughs, community sponsorship groups and wider civil society, outlining the restarting of VPRS was welcome but shared concerns about lack of clarity on a future commitment for refugee resettlement. Ayham outlined the operational impact this has on boroughs who need to have longer-term financial security in order to continue commissioned integration support services, maintain staffing and infrastructure necessary to restart the programme.
- 4.4. Ayham also noted that boroughs were concerned about losing trust with landlords without the clarity about the future of the programme needed to secure those properties for resettled refugees.
- 4.5. Lisa Doyle reiterated these points, and the frustration felt by partners and fear of losing continuity and expertise without a quick funding commitment to continue the programme. Lisa noted that given flights under the VPRS had restarted it was possible to open a new scheme and urged the Home Office speed in securing a future programme, and underlined the consequences of not doing so for service providers.
- 4.6. Cllr Butt expressed his frustration at the uncertainty for boroughs and service providers, and the impact of lack of clarity on feelings of unwelcome amongst recent arrivals under the VPRS.

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4.7. Sean welcomed this feedback, and acknowledged the need for certainty and to get some movement going. He agreed it is far smoother to continue a service, rather than to stop and start.

Action: Sean agreed to ensure that these representations were made to Ministers to inform the decision about the future of resettlement schemes.

5. Windrush Lessons Learned Review

5.1. Kate Ridley-Moy noted that the Home Office had published a comprehensive improvement plan, outlining how the Home Office can implement the recommendations of the Windrush Lessons Learned review, including taking a more compassionate approach and learn the lessons of the past.

5.2. Alison outlined the strands of work related to the compliant environment, including work, housing, health, public funds, financial services and access to driving licences. Alison acknowledged the breadth of work and that the Home Office is taking a phased approach so that action can be taken thorough the programme. Underpinning this work is three principles:

- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation. Alison acknowledged that the Home Office has not done enough to monitor and evaluation the compliant environment on an ongoing basis.
- Regular engagement with stakeholders and individuals who have been impacted by the compliant environment.
- Being open to change. While the Home Secretary has made clear that she does not intend to disband the compliant environment, we do need a system that meets the objectives of the Home Office, providing space to make recommendations for policy change.

5.3. Harriet noted that the first phase of work was a discovery phase, looking at data available and engagement with stakeholders including Strategic Migration Partnerships (SMPs) and civil society representatives.

5.4. Rupinder Parhar shared the importance of working with non-migrant organisations on issues related to housing and work, including homelessness organisations, trade unions and other groups with experience on the frontline. Rupinder noted that SMPs were well-placed to support local engagement with partners on this work in a way that honours the expertise of the organisations who have been working for many years on these issues.

5.5. Cllr Butt expressed concern at the lack of concrete timescales and noted that there are still people waiting under restrictions that limit their lives and opportunities in the UK right now.

5.6. Alison noted that the number of people applying for the compensation scheme is lower than the Home Office anticipated, and they were reviewing their processes to try and better understand how to reach out to people who are potentially eligible.

5.7. Rupinder outlined the inherent connection between compliant environment policies, deportation flights, and the legal system that underpins access to residency and citizenship rights, including legal aid and immigration fees. Hannah raised experiences of people attempting to access the compensation scheme being unable

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to access affordable legal advice and having to pay a significant proportion of their compensation claim towards lawyers. Alison outlined the support available to the Windrush Generation to access the scheme, and the funding shortly being launched to provide additional help.

Action: Future LSMP meeting to consider the deportation flights and the broader concerns being raised that are impacted the Windrush Generation and descendants.

6. Children in Care

- 6.1. Ian Lewis provided an update on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, noting the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) consultation response was still being considered by the Home Office and Department for Education. The scheme has been operating largely to support children arriving in Kent and Portsmouth: both authorities have stated they are not able to accept any further children and the Home Office have been assisting authorities to take children directly from those areas.
- 6.2. Ian outlined that the pan-London rota is still operational, although numbers are lower than usual. Local authorities are seeing an increase in direct presentations from children, after subdued numbers seen earlier in the pandemic.
- 6.3. Ian shared concerns of borough of the numbers of children being assessed by the Home Office as children and dispersed as adults. These young people will have been assessed as visibly over the age of 25, however in some circumstances local authorities have quite quickly assessed them as being under the age of 18, and for some there has been a longer process to assess the claim.
- 6.4. Andrew Carter added his concerns about vulnerability of unaccompanied children, with a focus on their mental health. He noted there was some work under way with Coram to look at mental resilience in young people and what can best support vulnerable children. Andrew in particular outlined his concerns at high rates of suicide amongst unaccompanied children.
- 6.5. Lisa Doyle noted concerns about children being placed in adult asylum accommodation, an isolating experience without access to social workers and school. Lisa also noted that this meant children being considered under the adult asylum process which can have very harmful effects.
- 6.6. Nafisah asked about education for children, and how organisations who provide alternative education provision can support to provide join-up with opportunities for local authorities. Ian Lewis responded that there are special needs to take into account, and highlighted the work with Coram that Andrew outlined which will pick up some of these issues.
- 6.7. Rupinder asked about how age assessments will be incorporated into the Home Office's review and introduction of a new asylum system. Sean noted that the Home Office had embedded social workers in Kent intake centre to ensure that experts were making initial age assessments, and the Home Office were trying to bring as many partners as possible to address these issues in the interest of children. Sean acknowledged the difficulty with age assessments, which is why reforms of the asylum system will put in place a better system, and welcomed the input and feedback from members to inform this work.

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- 6.8. Rupinder shared an update on the Mayor's work for young people with insecure immigration status. Rupinder outlined the GLA's development of a programme in collaboration with local authorities to build a robust system that can be implemented across London that recognises and addresses their immigration and citizenship needs. The project includes three strands and would close working with 3 local authorities to work collaboratively with a children's specialist immigration provider in addition to pan-London training for frontline workers and a comprehensive evaluation.
- 6.9. Rupinder highlighted the immigration context that makes this work urgent, with the introduction of the new immigration system from January and the deadline for the EU Settlement Scheme. Rupinder noted that we would be convening a reference group with experts to guide the work and to embed the learning across London local government.