



Dear colleagues,

Co-chaired by the LGA and the Home Office, the Home Office and Local Government Chief Executive Group, the Group met again on 27 February. The Group has agreed to focus on the four key areas outlined below, underpinned by a set of principles around joint working, which focus on improving outcomes for asylum seekers and the communities. It was agreed that the current direction of travel was positive, reflecting progress on engagement at regional levels, with the Group stressing particular areas for greater focus going forward:

1 Equity and influence

A change plan with timeline for redistribution embedded in a place based approach would be developed. In delivery against this priority, the Group stressed the importance of:

- a joint commitment to a place-based approach which delivers a fair and equitable asylum dispersal system in the UK
- a recognition that redistribution will not be achieved on day one of the new contract but through a commitment to develop a steady pathway with set milestones
- identifying and addressing some of the barriers and challenges to widening dispersal
- working towards redistribution within and across regions where that is appropriate and extending dispersal to new areas
- developing an allocation process that takes into account local intelligence relating to deprivation, cohesion and pressures from other programmes
- an agreement to operate within optimal cluster limits, with agreement with councils if flexibility was needed.
- a commitment to strengthening the role of local and regional partnerships to support this

To support the change plan development, the Group agreed that further work would be undertaken to:

- understand the current picture both in dispersal and in related pressures, and in areas who have agreed to participate in dispersal but who have not had asylum seekers placed within them.
- capture good practice in partnership working local and regionally
- recognise that the short term focus was to ensure an effective and safe transition, but that there may be opportunities to source new and better quality accommodation which might reduce high concentrations in some areas during the transition period
- ensure real tripartite conversations were taking place, particularly around clustering

2. Engagement and oversight

The Group had made a commitment to a joint partnership for national oversight of asylum dispersal and to strengthen the role of local and regional partnerships. A memorandum of understanding between local government and the Home Office to support these would stress collaboration, transparency, and the four priorities of the group. It was agreed this would also:

- stress a **place-based approach** which includes a recognition of the full range of live local pressures including other asylum, migration and resettlement programmes and pressures, alongside homelessness and other wider issues such as cohesion and deprivation
- takes a **whole system view** that takes account of the operation of the asylum process, including processing times for asylum applications, and issues around homelessness and NRPF. Further work is needed to ensure all and other part of the Home Office reflect and demonstrate agreements in this Group around ways of working, and the role that other government departments can play.
- recognises that **access to resources** is still a challenge; and varies between regions and countries, particularly the lack of access to CMF in Scotland and Wales
- supports governance arrangements that need to continue to support and promote **genuine dialogue with providers**, based on parity of esteem across central, local government and the providers both during transition and into the new contracts, and the structures. This should ensure concerns can be addressed as they arise and prevent problems from escalating
- uses the transition to new contracts to identify and **spread existing good practice** in schemes such as selective licensing to avoid reliance on sub-standard landlords, recognising particular concerns around initial accommodation
- enables **collective efforts on widening dispersal**, including how best to bring new areas on stream and the need engagement in those areas that indicated a wish to participate but in which providers haven't yet made contact
- provides **greater detail around contingency** and arrangements for changing distribution and concentration/density
- **outlines key joint aims** around ensuring a better experience for asylum seekers and their connection to wider services; better relationship with local government with issues addressed via tripartite partnerships; and sustainability and flexibility to manage pressures to the system. Ambitions to ensure better reporting and addressing of issues and evaluation against these need to involve capturing the Groups and councils' experience

3. Funding

The Group had agreed to **review the costs, pressures and impacts of asylum dispersal** across the UK, with the results used inform any spending review and a new oversight group between the Home Office and the Treasury. It agreed areas in scope for the whole system review, including exploring looking at costs in other programmes; resourcing and an indicative timeline for the project. It was agreed that the review needed to:

- reflect and address varying resources across the UK
- cover whole system including unsupported population, rough sleeping, NRPF, cohesion and integration
- the review needed to be outcome focused and place based, and define a vision of 'what good looks like' and the funding is needed to achieve that

4. Data and information:

To progress greater access to this, the group was agreed that:

- The Home Office would compare information that is currently shared to ensure consistency across regions, based on the principle that access to data and information to be open where possible within the current legal framework
- data sharing pilots would test what information could and couldn't be provided, based on requests from local government
- This would result in a **data sharing agreement** by July 2019.

The new contracts

It was noted that underpinning this work would be the positive developments around regional structures and key improvements from the previous contracts. The latter was identified as:

- changing providers and regions offering opportunities for new relationships and a new start
- clearer and enhanced contractual requirements on service quality and partnership working
- contracts being awarded on a more equitable and long term balance of price, quality and risk.
- incentivising investment over the full 10 years and offering greater opportunity in new areas
- realigning and rebalancing of service delivery will provide service users with an independent first single point of contact for all support needs (AIRE)

Current developments

The Home Office has also committed resources to support the Group to ensure progress against priorities.

In addition, the Home Office is working with an organisation called Social Finance to test the feasibility of an outcomes fund for refugee integration. Interventions would be funded upfront through investor capital (in this case primarily philanthropically motivated funders) linked to end integration outcomes upon which outcomes payers would pay for the results achieved. Home Office are at the initial design stage Social Finance and would now like to test this with high dispersal local areas in England, Scotland and Wales with a view to potentially launching a pilot fund next year. Home Office has held teleconferences for Strategic Migration Partnerships and interested local authorities to find out more. Further update on progress will be covered at the next meeting of the group.

Future meetings

The next meetings will be held on 20 June and 8 October. Discussions at a political level will continue via the LGA Asylum, Migration and Refugee Task Group, which will meet with the Minister for Immigration each quarter during the transition period.

Please do contact Sally.Burlington@local.gov.uk, Head of Policy at the LGA, if you have any queries or comments.

Yours sincerely,

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Co-chairs, Home Office and Local Government Chief Executive Group