

1. Purpose

- 1.1.** A meeting has been arranged with the Immigration Minister Caroline Nokes MP in order to discuss some of the key challenges around asylum support and accommodation.
- 1.2.** The current dispersal contract is currently up for renewal with new providers being announced in December 2018 and contracts operational by September 2019. New contracts will be in place for a period of 10 years. There is a need for clear and transparent pathways in place outlining local government involvement in the new contracts and in any transition period.
- 1.3.** Key areas of discussion for the meeting are:
 - i. Strategic relationships between national and local government**
 - ii. Equitable dispersal of asylum seekers in the United Kingdom**
 - iii. Resolving key issues**

2. Strategic relationships

- 2.1.** Resettlement provides a good example of where National Government and Local Government have worked together as strategic partners successfully, with open and honest partnerships shared information and sense of collaborative outcomes. Local Government has been involved throughout.
- 2.2.** Relationships on migration matters vary considerably depending on the 'type' of migrant (and therefore system), and Government department. The asylum system and relevant department within the Home Office are the least positive strategic relationships with less successful outcomes both for local communities and asylum seekers. Local Government may feel been increasingly excluded and treated less as a strategic partner.
- 2.3.** Future asylum contracts provide an example of this. The procurement for £650m contracts covering 3 regions (Yorkshire & Humber, North East and Northern Ireland) were unsuccessful, relating to the housing of a quarter of the UK's asylum seekers creating a 'state of urgency'. Despite months of awareness and conducting 'extensive market engagement', the Home Office did not inform Local Government during this period. Nor did the Home Office inform Local Government or anyone except providers during the compressed new tender process despite this technically being in the public domain. There are a number of concerns, and surprisingly Local Government in the three regions affected have still not been approached for joint working on risk management or strategic planning.
- 2.4.** A further example is that devolved administrations are concerned that the decision-making process re the awarding of both the AASC and AIRE contracts does not seem to involve any input – either formal or informal – from local government or devolved administrations, i.e. the spheres of government that have the best understanding of how the new contracts should interact with local and devolved services. Therefore clarification of the process and the checks and balances that are in place to ensure that the contracts are reflective of the local context are required.

3. Equitable dispersal

Current inequitable dispersal

- 3.1.** It is in the interest of UKVI and local government to have an effective asylum system. However there are increasing concerns around inequitable dispersal across the UK, with some regions having over ten times the concentrations of asylum seekers than others. For example: One region (North West) takes one quarter of all supported asylum seekers; 10% of all the UK's asylum seekers are housed in just 40 wards in one region (Yorkshire & Humber) out of a possible of 10,000 in the UK; and in another region (NE) there is a concentration in one ward of 1 in 20 asylum seekers to general population. Similarly 14% of asylum seekers are accommodated in a small number of authorities in the West Midlands. The Home Office's current stated position is that it will not change the proportions distributed to each region during the next asylum contract (i.e. until 2029 earliest).
- 3.2.** Many asylum dispersal areas consider the inequity to now be unsustainable for much longer, with a substantial cumulative impact of asylum seekers and refugees over the last 20 years. Issues are exacerbated by other factors including other migration into these areas, reduced local budgets and increased pressure around education, housing and social care.

- 3.3.** The table below shows latest comparable figures for people supported by UK region/ nation:

National summary by region/nation				
<i>Source: ASYS data for start Dec 2017 and recently revised ONS population data</i>				
Region/nation	Supported asylum seekers (start Dec 2017)	Supported asylum seekers % of national total	Supported asylum seekers Population (2016 MYE)	Supported asylum seekers per 10,000 population
East Midlands	2,797	7	4,725,400	6
East of England	609	1	6,129,000	1
London	3,760	9	8,769,700	4
North East	3,691	9	2,636,600	14
North West	10,008	24	7,224,000	14
Northern Ireland	759	2	1,862,100	4
Scotland	4,046	10	5,404,700	7
South East	455	1	9,030,300	1
South West	1,003	2	5,517,000	2
Wales	3,113	8	3,113,200	10
West Midlands	5,597	14	5,810,800	10
Yorkshire and The Humber	5,339	13	5,425,400	10
Other and Unknown	98			
*Total	41,275	100	65,648,100	6

Widening dispersal and addressing inequitable dispersal

- 3.4.** The Home Office is encouraging 'widening dispersal' to new local authority areas, with support from SMPs. The main barriers to making this successful have been lack of funding to support new areas, political difficulty in volunteering to be a dispersal area, cohesion and lack of infrastructure and housing availability.
- 3.5.** There has been some progress with new areas giving political approval to become a new dispersal area. However progress in actual procurement of bedspaces in these areas has been slow. Barriers due to a number of reasons including housing providers unable to procure due to the lack of affordable housing. Clearly contract value and house prices are the main driver for inequitable asylum dispersal.

4. Ongoing operational issues

- 4.1. In order to facilitate greater involvement in dispersal, councils will want to see priority placed on addressing key current issues and pressures, such as:
- 4.2. **28 day move on period and links to the Homeless Reduction Act:** homelessness for refugees and failed asylum seekers coming out of dispersed accommodation is a problem across the UK. The Homelessness Reduction Act will give some public institutions a 'Duty to Refer' (although notably not the COMPASS housing providers) people they identify as threatened with homelessness in the next 56 days to a local authority. The difference in the 28 days for asylum seekers and 56 days under the HRA will give local authorities little option but to home people temporarily adding to the thousands of people already housed this way.
- 4.3. **Affordable housing:** the problem is particularly acute due to the lack of affordable housing; some areas have almost no private sector accommodation available in their area at LHA rates. Local authorities with high LHA rates are unlikely to be able to find housing in their areas for statutory homeless refugees. As a consequence, they may have little option except to discharge their homelessness obligations to many of them in PRS accommodation out of area, which undermines their integration and in addition further increases pressures in more deprived wards in the Midlands and northern parts of the Country.
- 4.4. **Bail:** SMP's have raised concerns with the current and previous Ministers that there are high numbers of criminal bail cases in certain parts of the country being dispersed into highly vulnerable and deprived areas with existing issues causing clusters in single streets and neighbouring streets that could pose community and policing risk. UKVI/Criminal Case Work teams have been engaging with those affected, progress has been exceptionally slow and there is still no national data on which local authorities are most affected. Although UKVI is seeking to widen dispersal this has also taken some time to establish and there are concerns over the management of this and local government engagement in the process. In addition further work is also required on the transition to Schedule 10, risk levels and information exchange on those who will cease to receive support under Section 4 bail arrangements to manage risks and any potential impacts.

5. Recommendations

5.1. **Building a more strategic relationships with local government**

- i. **Strategic partnerships** Local Government to be involved as strategic partners in new asylum contract negotiations and transition. This role should recognise the joint strategic responsibilities within new contracts, and ensure that they are commissioned in a way that meets the needs of local services.
- ii. **Suggested next step** - Communication from the LGA to the local leaders that the meeting has taken place, with Ministerial commitment to more strategic relationships and better data.

5.2. **More equitable distribution**

- i. It is essential to ensure the future of the asylum dispersal system, using any necessary fiscal/ policy levers.

- ii. **Suggested next step** - Ministerial communication on how asylum dispersal policy will be made equitable across the UK. In addition an officer working group to consider and agree systems around equitable dispersal.

5.3. Better engagement

- i. Local Government have shown that early engagement can work well as demonstrated through the resettlement and UASC schemes. The same can be achieved under asylum and the following recommendations would aid in this work.
- ii. **Suggested next step** - Upscaling of the current 'place based' partners looking at the impacts of asylum and resettlement programmes in the round and flexible solutions that reflect local community capacity. In addition to work with local government on the learning from the CMF funded pilots to inform the next Spending Round and the implementation of the Green Paper on Integrating Communities.

5.4. Improving the system:

- i. **Managing risk:** In the regions where procurement was unsuccessful, Local Government should be immediately involved fully in risk management and strategic planning.
- ii. **Need for better recognition of the particular pressures** faced by asylum dispersal areas and, in particular, recognition that local statutory services need to be funded to support the key role that they play.
- iii. **Supporting integration:** it is vital that asylum seekers are supported and guided appropriately through the asylum process, taking cognisance of local authority and devolved government variations in entitlements and rights.
- iv. **Need for better sharing of information and data** to underpin the role that councils and statutory services play in supporting asylum seekers and other new arrivals in their communities.

6. **Background to Asylum Dispersal**

6.1. Asylum dispersal was introduced in 1999 in response to increasing pressures that were being placed upon local authorities in London and the South East of England. The Asylum and Immigration Act 1999, and its provisions, were implemented with the intention and purpose of ensuring that asylum seekers were dispersed across the UK, and that no one local authority, area, or region became over-proliferated with those seeking support through the asylum system. The Act makes direct provision for the Secretary of State to provide support for those claiming asylum and to instruct the cooperation and support of local authorities in doing so.

6.2. In 2012 Home Office introduced a new model of asylum dispersal. This is called COMPASS (Commercial and Operational Managers Procuring Asylum Support Services). This is operated by 3 private providers – G4S, Serco and Clearsprings. All are required to provide dispersed accommodation, full board initial accommodation (prior to dispersal into dispersed accommodation), and a transport service (between initial accommodation and dispersed accommodation). Prior to this the services were provided by several different providers utilising a mixed delivery model of both private and public sector.