



11th November 2022

Dear Liz and Helen,

Re: North West Local Authorities Feedback regarding Regional Plans

We would like to thank you for organising the regional workshops between Serco, Home Office and North West RSMP and taking the time to discuss the proposed plans. Following the workshop, RSMP met with local authorities, and we have compiled their feedback below.

Local Authorities welcomed the Home Office's willingness to consider social and service pressures in their dispersal of people seeking asylum to the North West, as indicated by their interim agreement to proposed local authority allocations. However, it is felt that there remain some responses outstanding, which local authorities would like to work with you to resolve.

The first aspect is in relation to the regional plan's principles and methodology, as set out as part of the plan submission. Local Authorities ask for clarification that the regional plan's principles and methodology have been accepted, or what collective approach to resolve this will be taken going forward if they have not been agreed.

North West Local Authorities remain concerned about the lack of clarity on how dispersal will be governed and implemented, to ensure that it delivers improvements on the status quo and can be sustained by local services. Moreover, there is still no clear indication as to what the Home Office backstop looks like, or what the forward plan is in relation to those areas where the RSMP indicative plan and the Provider plan do not align.

The Provider's current interim plan includes local authorities' allocated numbers only, but there is no agreement as to the Provider's method of the allocation. Local Authorities are concerned what the method of allocation will be in an increasingly likely scenario that numbers are higher than the initial forecast – will the approach be to utilise the RSMP methodology of distribution (based on 4 weighted factors) or something else? Local authorities are clear that the methodology cannot be a repetition of the same systems as previously, or the move to a more equitable system will not be realised.

There is a stark disconnect between the messaging around the collaborative regional planning process, and what the Providers have been asked to deliver in terms of procurement – this is evident in the procurement requests reaching local authorities which, even accounting for attrition rates, exceed the indicative plan allocations. It has also been evident in meetings with the Home Office, where there is a clear steer that Providers are being asked to procure to 1:200 rather than in line with plans.

Local Authorities ask for a clarification on the below points:

- To what degree does the Home Office agree with the principles and methodology set out in the cover to the North West plan, and what are the next steps for this?
- Is the proposal to continue working to regional plans, or does the current situation within the system mean that a different approach will need to be taken?
- What methodology is the Provider using in relation to procurement to ensure an equitable system, and one that does not replicate existing processes.

- How does current procurement fit in with negotiation against numbers – we believe that a significant amount of our indicative 4,107 has been procured already (or is in the pipeline) and this needs to be reflected in the plan.
- How often will the data on procurement requirements be revisited?
- Whether Serco will cease procurement in local authorities where they've reached their allocation as in the interim plan, and whether any further procurement will be subject to further engagement.
- Will the priority be to allocate all the numbers in all local authorities *before* increasing the agreed numbers? Local Authorities such as Manchester, Liverpool, Preston, Wirral and St Helens, where the Provider's suggested numbers exceed those in the RSMP Plan, are concerned that the procurement will continue beyond the numbers indicated in the RSMP Plan and procurement in other areas will not keep pace.
- Confirmation whether procurement will cease once 75% of the cluster limit of 1:200 is reached (as per the regional principles).
- How local authorities can notify the Provider that they are at/above 1:200 and for procurement to cease – there is no current process for this, and there are examples where it has not automatically ceased by the Provider.
- What is the backstop position, should Local Authorities oppose the plan.
- Confirm whether an agreement is needed from Local Authorities to the current suggested plan and what format this needs to be.

Local Authorities are keen to work with the RSMP and the Home Office to develop policies that build on the extensive work previously done in the region to develop proposals for a fair, equitable dispersal system. In the Region's view, written policies and protocols covering the below need to be developed, in collaboration between the Home Office, Serco, Local Authorities and RSMP to ensure successful delivery of the Regional Plan:

- A methodology of allocation of numbers across Local Authorities agreed by all parties based on recommended weightings to be reviewed at regular intervals, based on the latest available data;
- An early and transparent consultation on procurement with Local Authorities, based on refreshed procurement protocols (including PCC checks and adjudication procedures). PCC checks should take into account wider ward pressures and community safety considerations beyond police and crime data and ensure that procurement is not focused on a small number of wards leading to some being significantly over 1:200;
- Governance and monitoring structures for regular collaborative engagement between Home Office decision-makers and Local Authorities, to review the progress of the full dispersal policy and the regional plan with procurement level data readily available at least bi-monthly. This should include information on the levels of procurement outside of the region to ensure that the new areas participate alongside existing ones.

The North West Region remains committed to delivery of a fair and equitable Asylum System and welcomes any suggestions as to the above points. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss any of the above.

With thanks,



Katie Jones
Service Lead
On behalf of the North West RSMP