

Greater Manchester Planning and Housing Commission

Date: 30 November

Subject: Asylum Dispersal

Report of: Paul Dennett, Mayor of Salford, GM Health and Homelessness Portfolio
Holder

Purpose of Report

To update on asylum dispersal policy development, share progress for the agreement of a North West Regional Asylum Dispersal 'Interim Plan' and present plans for a strategic approach to monitoring and responding to Home Office procurement going forward.

Recommendations:

The Commission is requested to:

1. Note the Greater Manchester position for continued negotiations on the proposed interim Regional Dispersal Plan for asylum dispersal across the North West up to the end of 2023.
2. Note the additional governance demands being sought from the Home Office to ensure transparency for the implementation of any asylum dispersal activity in Greater Manchester.
3. Note the risks associated with increased levels of asylum dispersal and opening of contingency accommodation in Greater Manchester, and consider the recommended measures to mitigate these.

CONTACT OFFICERS:

Andrew Lightfoot, Deputy Chief Executive, GMCA

Andrew.Lightfoot@greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk

Jennie Corbett, Asylum and Migration Strategy Principal, GMCA

[<Jennie.Corbett@greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk>](mailto:Jennie.Corbett@greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk)

Risk Management

Risks associated with asylum dispersal are laid out in the report alongside recommended mitigations.

Legal Considerations

N/A

Financial Consequences – Revenue

N/A

Financial Consequences – Capital

N/A

Number of attachments to the report: 2

Appendix 1: Greater Manchester analysis of Interim Plan for asylum dispersal (excel)

Appendix 2: Letter from North West Regional Strategic Migration Partnership to Home Office, 11 November 2022

To note

For the purposes of this paper, and aligned with national asylum dispersal planning, 'regional' refers to the North West, and 'sub-regional' to Greater Manchester.

Comments/recommendations from Overview & Scrutiny Committee

N/A.

Tracking/ Process

Does this report relate to a major strategic decision, as set out in the GMCA Constitution

No

Exemption from call in

Are there any aspects in this report which means it should be considered to be exempt from call in by the relevant Scrutiny Committee on the grounds of urgency? No.

GM Transport Committee

N/A

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

N/A

1. Background and context

- 1.1. On 13th April 2022 Kevin Foster MP, Minister for Safe and Legal Routes, announced that asylum dispersal was assumed to be able to take place in all parts of England, Scotland and Wales.
- 1.2. To achieve this, the Home Office subsequently developed regional allocations of asylum dispersal to align with the UK population share. This was modelled to increase equity across regions, between 2023-2027, however with increasing dispersal in all areas due to overall demand.
- 1.3. A Regional Dispersal Plan ('the Plan') is required from the North West to determine the dispersal of our modelled allocation of 4,107 additional asylum-seekers up to the end of 2023 across and within its sub-regions: Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, Lancashire, Cheshire and Warrington, Cumbria.

2. North West Regional Dispersal plan

- 2.1. On 14th September, the Wider Leadership Team (WLT) agreed to the principles that should underpin the Plan and direct procurement by the Provider (Serco), as proposed by North West Regional Strategic Migration Partnership (RSMP).
- 2.2. The GM position agreed is summarised in the table below:

Recommendation 1	<p>Welcome the RSMP's proposal that sub-regional asylum dispersal procurement to be based on a model that considers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Population proportion;• Statutory homelessness pressures;• Existing dispersal levels;• Existing contingency/hotel accommodation levels. <p>Request the model additionally includes weighting based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Re-settlement schemes (including Afghan schemes and Homes for Ukraine)• UASC receiving LA support• Indices of Multiple Deprivation
Recommendation 2	<p>Accept the RSMP's proposal for a place-based approach to a fair and equitable asylum dispersal system within each council area, which will not exceed 1:200 within ward. Procurement to be stopped if 1:200 is 75% achieved across whole LA 'cluster.' Acknowledge that this would result in higher levels of procurement in lower ratio GM areas.</p>

- 2.1. Based on Home Office projections of 976 *additional* asylum seekers to be dispersed to GM up to December 2023, RSMP developed an illustrative model for allocations across Local Authorities weighted by: Indices of Multiple Deprivation, statutory homelessness presentations, population proportion and existing dispersal and contingency populations. The model shows an overall increase in dispersal to GM, but a drop in overall share of the North West allocations.
- 2.2. Appendix 1 compares the RSMP-proposed model with proposals put forward by Serco for the dispersal of additional asylum populations up to December 2023 across GM Local authorities. The Serco model can be understood as a 'worst case scenario', as it reflects Serco's estimates of how many additional properties they can source in each area based on their own market analysis.
- 2.3. Following negotiations, Home Office and Serco agreed to consider an 'Interim Plan' for the North West which in GM, limits Serco's procurement to the RSMP-proposed model numbers. The Home Office have agreed that recent dispersal will be counted towards these allocations.

3. Further Policy Development Required

- 3.1. The Home Office have not provided any policy commitments beyond provisional agreement to the Interim Plan limits up to December 2023. We have not had any indication that the Home Office intends to develop the policies or protocols needed to ensure that more equitable dispersal within the Region is transparent or sustained once the North West's allocation is surpassed and demand continues to increase nationally.

Governance and implementation of the Interim Plan

- 3.2. GM Local Authorities' feedback on the urgent clarifications, commitments and policy development required in this respect were included in a letter from RSMP to Home Office responsible officers on 11 November (Appendix 2).
- 3.3. In order to ensure that the Plan delivers improvements on the status quo and can be sustained by local services, we proposed a number of additional priorities for policy and protocol development by Home Office and Serco. These include requests that:
- Home Office and Serco commit to cease procurement once 75% of their cluster limit of 1:200 is reached at the ward and/or borough level.
 - Home Office and Serco work with us to develop written policies and protocols that:

- commit to allocate across North West Local Authorities based on recommended weightings on an ongoing basis and review these weightings in partnership with LAs based on the latest data at regular intervals.
- refresh and clarify pre-procurement consultation protocols, to incorporate health, housing and education service pressures in addition to community safety and police concerns.
- commit to improved structures for regular collaborative engagement between Home Office decision-makers and Local Authorities, to review the progress of the place-based dispersal policy and the regional plan;
- increase local Serco staff proportionate to increasing populations, especially in areas with historically lower numbers;
- clarify protocols under which national, regional and subregional dispersal allocations will be reviewed over time, based on the latest data on new arrivals.

Taking a whole system view on the impact of dispersal

- 3.4. Given the lack of assurance from the Home Office with respect to medium and long-term commitments to equitable dispersal across the North West, as well as the significant challenges visible in the asylum system nationally, it is crucial that GM takes a strategic and proactive approach to monitoring and challenging the impact of Home Office procurement on individuals, communities and services.
- 3.5. The increased numbers of people expected to arrive to dispersal and contingency (overflow) accommodation in GM will undoubtedly increase pressures on overstretched services, putting them and their local community at risk. Existing shortfalls in provision are especially visible in healthcare and schooling, with essential screening delayed in some areas and many children unable to find school places. According to Serco, there are currently 217 children living across GM's contingency hotels alone.
- 3.6. Asylum dispersal comes at a time of well documented pressures on homelessness services and housing stock due to the lack of genuinely affordable housing. During just one quarter in January-March 2022, 174 people were owed a prevention or relief homelessness duty by GM LAs because of eviction from Home Office accommodation, and 134 named Home Office accommodation as their current accommodation. These figures are likely to be an underestimate of actual need.
- 3.7. There are currently six contingency (pre-dispersal) asylum hotels across GM, accommodating approximately 1,219 people, with additional procurement expected. Long delays and inefficiencies in Home Office asylum decision-making mean that people are forced to stay long periods in dispersal accommodation, unable to work. To address this backlog and reduce the use of hotels in the long-term, it is crucial that the Home Office invest in high-quality and efficient decision-making.