

Leeds Strategic Migration Board 11th March 2021 Meeting Summary

Theme: Asylum

Key Theme: Asylum

A presentation providing a national, regional and local context on how services support asylum seekers was shared, key highlights included:

National and Regional Context

- In September 2019, Mears took over the asylum seeker accommodation contract across the North East, Yorkshire and Humber. In March 2020, Mears began using hotels to accommodate asylum seekers.
- In December 2020 the Home Office introduced Operation Oak, a plan to move everyone out of hotels into dispersed accommodation by March 2021 (extended to June 2021).
- Mears regularly submit procurement plans to the local authority asking whether the proposed properties are suitable.
- Asylum application decisions are being made, those receiving a positive decision are being moved out of asylum accommodation but those with a negative decision are not being moved on yet.

Local Challenges and Considerations

Housing and Homelessness:

- PAFRAS offer destitution case work, mental health and practical support to those who are destitute or at risk of destitution. Many asylum seekers they support have received a final negative decision on their asylum claim. However, at the start of the pandemic, refused asylum seekers were able to apply for section 4 support.
- Leeds City Council (LCC) funded Garforth House to support those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). When this provision closed in November 2020, LCC funded LEDAS (a third sector organisation) to support residents with NRPF. LCC also secured funding for WYDAN (a third sector organisation) to accommodate destitute asylum seekers. The funding for LEDAS and WYDAN is short-term.
- There are some people with NRPF conditions on their refugee status who are unable to access housing and benefits, the accommodation provided by the third sector does not receive funding to support this group, leaving a potential gap in support.
- There are concerns with regard to homelessness when the Home Office begin to move on those who have received a negative decision on their asylum application. The third sector are concerned because they do not know how many will be made homeless and their services may struggle to support large numbers.
- The Leeds Migration Partnership (LMP) is represented at the Migrant Health Board and will raise concern over the impact of poor quality housing on health.

Far Right:

- In August 2020, far right organisations were videoing asylum seekers in hotels across the country (including Leeds). Far right organisations suggest migrants are posing a risk to national health.
- Prevent run the 'Channel Programme', a multi-agency approach to identify and support individuals at risk of being drawn into terrorism. The Channel programme has received a high number of referrals in the North East, Yorkshire and Humber.

Local, Regional and National Updates

Leeds Migration Partnership (LMP)

- The Leeds Migration Partnership (LMP) is a group of third sector organisations that work with migrants across Leeds. **Action:** partners are invited to sign up to the blog updates [here](#).
- The LMP operations group fortnightly meetings are well attended and provide an opportunity for services to check in. The meetings are themed and LCC services have contributed to the vaccination programme and homelessness discussions.
- The last LMP strategy meeting was in February, a key concern for the partnership is funding for emergency accommodation.

Migration Yorkshire

Hong Kong British Nationals (Overseas) Status (briefing [accessed here](#))

- In June 2020, the government announced an offer to people in Hong Kong with British National (Overseas) Status, a route to live and work in the UK.
- As of the 31 January 2021, people with British National (Overseas) Status can apply for a visa to enter the UK for a period of 30 months, with the option to extend this for a further 30 months or 5 years. The visa contains a route to Settlement or Indefinite Leave to Remain. Visa holders will have NRPF but if they are at risk of destitution, they can apply to remove the NRPF status.
- English language is not required, all arrivals are expected to undergo TB and Covid-19 testing.

Next meeting theme: No Recourse to Public Funds (10th June 2021, 2pm-4pm)