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| **LMP Strategy Group Action Notes****Date: Thursday 11th January 2024****Time: 10.00-12.00** **Venue: PAFRAS, Unit 24, Unity Business Centre, 26 Roundhay Road, Leeds, West Yorkshire, LS7 1AB** |
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A number of articles based on previous strategy group meeting themes have been published on the Leeds Migration Partnership (LMP) blog for future reference.

1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies – Karen Pearse (Chair)

Karen welcomed partners to the strategy group meeting and reviewed previous minutes for correction and actions.

1. Minutes, Amendments and Actions from the last meeting

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| Summary of actions from the last meeting 5th October 2023: |
| Asylum Discontinuations:Actions: * Action: Amber to share a blank version of the ‘priority in need test’ to partners.
* Action incomplete: Sam requested this information from Amber
* Action: Jon and Mary to write a draft request to the local authority to have a named person to contact and suggest a conversation with senior officers on how to progress this agenda.
* Action complete: Jon received an email from Nadeem who confirm the importance, however council pressures and current capacity do not allow for a single person to take the lead on this. Nadeem confirmed Pria Bhabra (Migration Programme Manager) and Sam Powell (Third Sector and Migration Partnerships Manager) with the Migration Team are supporting this agenda and are taking forward a number actions with statutory and third sector partners to progress refugee move on. Action: In response to DWP’s question regarding organisations to connect with, LMP suggested DWP connect with RETAS.
* Action: Jon to create a shared Google document to have a shared understanding of what is taking place in hotels for information sharing and circulate.
* Action complete: however, this will be circulated again
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| West Yorkshire Sub Regional Migration Group update: * Action: Sam to meet with Ally and Kathryn to agree an approach to interlink VCS reps with LMP
* Action complete: Sam met with Kathryn and Ally and discussed the connection between LMP and VCS Rep roles. Going forward Sam will check in with Ally and Kathryn for agenda items suggestions prior to LMP strategy planning meeting. Ally or Kathryn will attend LMP.
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1. Key Themes:

3.1 Asylum Discontinuations

* Context - Migration Team: Nadeem Siddique, Head of Community Relations and Cohesion (and Head of Service for Migration, Resettlement, Equality, Prevent and Third Sector,) LCC
* LCC financial pressure means there is now £30 million of savings to identify before the end of this financial year 2023/24 and £60 million next financial year 2024/25.
* The general fund, core budgets and grant funding are under considerable pressure and important considerations around spend are being made by senior management.
* Lots of conversations happening with the wider third sector and liaising with the Third Sector Partnership and Third Sector Leeds about the impact of the financial challenge on the third sector. There will have to be some really difficult decisions about what the council can and cannot fund in the years to come and that may well impact on third sector, however we aim to minimise the impact.
* Asylum Funding: made available by LCC to support asylum ans assist with some of the pressures on the asylum system. Lots of organisations applied for the £600k funding. The Migration Team have been working as fast possible to progress and gets grants out to organisations to support in hotels and communities.
* Asylum Discons: The Migration Team are keeping on top of the fast tracking of asylum decisions, working with partners and close working with Leeds Housing Options.
* The Home Office are saying new refugees still get 28 days’ notice. However, we are not sure this is the case and if some just receive seven days. We have sought clarity with the Home Office prior to Christmas and still await a response.
* Home Office haven’t agreed to share data on negative decisions with LCC or the third sector. We’re not asking for personal details, just the numbers at this moment in time, however they’re still refusing to share.
* In summary, we know it’s a really difficult time and the council is absolutely committed to supporting the third sector.
* Leeds Housing Options: Piers Donno-Fuller, Deputy Housing Options Manager, LCC
* Leeds has the third highest number of homelessness approaches across the country. Assess in the region of 1500 households every quarter. Currently accept duties to prevent or relieve homeless for about 1200 households, certainly seen a massive shift in terms of when people are approaching us and the trends of why people are becoming homeless. At the end of December 2021, we only had eight families in temporary accommodation, which is amazing achievement for the city when compared to other cities like Birmingham.
* Currently there are 100 families approx. in temporary accommodation, for Leeds - a massive increase. There are many different variables that are contributing factors. One of the biggest being family and friends no longer being able to accommodate. We think that the cost-of-living crisis has played a massive impact which in turn increases the pressures for LHO.
* In terms of new refugees since September, we have seen a large upward trend, in November and December it was 65 households approx per month for homelessness assessment. LHO have also noticed the *move on* time given has been reduced, therefore finding it harder to create a positive accommodation outcome. LHO have worked to maximise the number of advisors that can contribute to our dedicated LASSLO team who are dedicated to this work and sit under Amber Khan.
* During January (so far open 7 days this year) and already assessed 24 households.
* In regards to this cohort, in the last 12 months, there’s about 370 approaches, 80% of those were single males. The majority of assessments for the single people are found not in priority need, which means the council are not under a duty to provide temporary accommodation. Currently really stretched, therefore concerned how these numbers could continue to increase. Currently not seeing a direct correlation between those that are not in priority need who have left Mears accommodation going into rough sleeping.
* We’ve got a strong rough sleeping partnership arrangement across the city; with third sector and council services and our priority is to minimise and reduce rough sleeping.
* The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) is to make sure that we’re guarding anyone that finds themselves rough sleeping in temperatures below zero and the council brings online emergency bed spaces. Recent Home Office guidance means we notify the accommodation provider Mears when SWEP is activated. Home Office evictions should not happen while SWEP is in place. However, since the guidance released SWEP has not been activated. It was only activated at the very end of November and the start of December. LHO teams have been asked to make sure SWEP is communicated with plenty of notice where possible.
* SWEP is a discretionary power by the council, not a duty to accommodate. SWEP is there for someone that generally has no accommodation available to them. It’s an opportunity to be accommodated by the council because if someone was not in priority need while severe weather’s protocol is on, the council would accommodate if they were rough sleeping. However, as soon as the temperatures goes above zero, they would need to leave the accommodation. Therefore, if people are staying with friends and family, it is best to try and maintain those arrangements.
* LHO are trying to increase the private sector lending scheme which supports people into the private sector with landlords that work with the council and looking at how we may be able to widen HMOs which would be beneficial for singles. It’s not an immediate solution, but hopeful that we can really maximise the accommodation available to us as a service.

Discussion / Q&A

* Question: where is the most reliable place SWEP notification is available to direct us toward and what time is the information shared?
	+ *Response and action:*: Piers will update LMP asap.
* Abigail Housing commented: in the past seen lots of single people who have had their *not in priority need* decision overturned, due to language barriers and mental health problems in the initial assessment, lots of refugees have trauma and have no idea if they tell LHO this could make the difference to their priority need.
* Abigail Housing commented: Housing benefit also refusing to pay for some people in supported accommodation as it is considered they do not meet the support needs requirement, even if they have been assessed as in priority need by housing. It’s very difficult situation for us at Abigail Housing, but particularly for the refugees, because it could put us out business.
	+ *Response:* Our priority need test is completely different to the supported housing exempt rate that housing benefit is assessed by, the regulations are completely different.
* LASSN asked: is it possible for everyone who has had a safeguarding referral on basis of mental or physical health problems, that this information is shared with local authority partners to allow them to be able to understand? Also, how diligent the weekend and night checks are? Are you able to comment on how often those take place?
	+ *Response and action:* Mears considers on both points we’ll probably better clarify with the safeguarding team because they’ll probably be able to explain that process best in terms of the clarity around safeguarding concerns being referred to the council in the context of rehousing.
* Leeds Refugee Forum asked: that most of these people are supported by communities. The support provided by Leeds City Council for move on was excellent. Also, the information curated for private rented and how to access was really good. Could this be replicated specifically for refugees who aren’t Ukrainians?
	+ Action: LHO/Migration Team to explore.
* Red Cross commented: the majority are single men, and they are not seen on the street. Where are these people? Where are they staying? A lot can be learned from the Ukraine project.
	+ *Response:* The support under the councils private rented scheme is available to everyone. It doesn’t matter if it’s Ukrainian household, new refugee or if it is a household that we’re seeing on a day-to-day basis. Under the private rented scheme, we can offer to pay someone’s bond to secure the property, pay the first month’s rent, and, in some cases, we are able to pay a top up.
	+ As Nadeem mentioned the council is currently under significant financial pressure. So, we do have to be very careful about how we are spending, and we have to ensure spend is on an invest to save basis.
	+ If the council pay a top up for someone to start a tenancy off successfully, we would have to be satisfied that household or that single person has the ability to continue paying the rent after a few months. Unsustainable solutions (customer cannot afford the accommodation) are not outcomes that we can say is positive. In these circumstances we wouldn’t be agreeing to pay the top up. The council seek a sustainable (invest to save principle) because ultimately, if we put someone into accommodation that they can’t afford, after six months they will be coming back to Housing Options, and they’ll be in the same situation, and it will just be a cycle of repeat homelessness. One of our priorities at the minute that we launched in our recent strategy about avoiding repeat homelessness and making sure that we’re create and sustainable outcomes for people.
* Question: Has the government announced the Local Housing Allowance?
	+ At the time of the LMP meeting the information had not been released.
	+ Shortly after the meeting the indicative Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates for financial year 2024 to 2025 was released and shared on LMP.
* Karen/PAFRAS asked how often does that happen that people get the bond paid?
	+ *Response:* A lot. If our budgets get significantly tightened, which they have in previous years, we’ve had to restrict it to priority need cases. However, I am pleased to say this financial year, because of how we’ve spent throughout the whole year, we’re not in a position where this is being restricted. So, as it stands, it can be extended to not in priority need cases.
* LASSN asks: is there a conversation we should be having with our friends in Public Health and the ICB about the money that was deliberately put aside for refugees and asylum seeker health to see if that has been spent? I wonder if some of that money could be ported through to underpin an existing bond scheme as housing is a Public Health issue. It’s just about trying to be strategic and get ideas at them.
	+ *Response*: LHO are always looking for opportunities where possible to create sustainable tenancies.
	+ Action LMP to explore if ICB money set aside for refugees and asylum seekers can support refugee move on with potentially Kerrie Murray, Catherine Ward, Karen Walker and Martin Earnshaw in February– Jon Beech to arrange, Sam Powell offered assistance if required.
* CAB asked: can we have a name that we can meet? Is there anyone else?
	+ *Response:* We’ve got a dedicated private rented team, Harry Webster and Cameron Calvert are the best contacts.

Partner Updates: DWP, RETAS and Migrant Homelessness Charter.

* Migration Homeless Charter Presentation – Dave Paterson

* RETAS – Roger Nyantou
* Seeing clients in need of support to open bank accounts.
* Leeds City Council keep sending people back to RETAS.
* Working closely with LHO LAASLO and DWP delivering drop ins at RETAS.
* DWP – Joanne Harris, Social Justice & Youth Employment Partnership Manager
* DWP are not seeing the expected increase in universal credit claims which is concerning.
	+ Action: Sam Powell to meet with Jo to compare numbers.
	+ NB: Sam Powell met with Jo on 15th January to compare the number of newly granted refugees accessing LHO with DWP data. However, DWP are unable to extract refugee data from the total, therefore this concern could not be evidenced. Sam is aware LCC and third sector are already signposting toward access of UC, and re- circulated the asylum decisions guidance flyer with LRF and Migrant Access Project to support community knowledge. Sam suggested DWP provide information sessions in asylum hotels to provide advance information. Jo to contact again should future concerns arise.
* Customers who have not received a BRP card should still make a claim universal credit claim.
* In reality a National Insurance Numbers does need to be recorded on our Universal Credit system in order for the advance to be issued. If a National Insurance Number has not been allocated (in most cases it will have been) then the process involves DWP completing a form which will send a text, with a link, to the customer’s UK phone number (usually the same day). The refugee needs to access this link, complete the form and upload the required documents.
	+ NB: Joanne Harris later retracted the above – and confirmed customers do not need a National Insurance Number to make a claim for an advance payment.
* DWP are doing outreach work for people with complex needs.

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| Summary of actions: * Action: LHO to confirm where can LMP find out if SWEP is activated.
* Do Mears share (as a safeguarding referral) information on mental or physical health problems with LCC in the context of rehousing? Also, how diligent the weekend and night checks are? Are Mears able to comment on how often these take place?
	+ Action*:* Mears considers on both points further clarification required from the safeguarding team.
* LHO to explore how Homes for Ukraine move on resources can this be replicated for refugees.
* Jon Beech to arrange a LMP conversation with ICB to explore if ICB money set aside for refugees and asylum seekers can support refugee move on (potentially with Kerrie Murray, Catherine Ward, Karen Walker and Martin Earnshaw in February). Sam Powell offered assistance if required.
* DWP reported lack of Universal Credit claims by new refugees. Sam to meet with DWP to compare the number of homelessness assessments completed by LHO with new refugees and DWP numbers.
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* 1. Asylum Hotels and Hotel Optimisation
* Mears Housing are contracted by the Home Office to provide accommodation and support to individuals and families who are seeking asylum in the UK. The Home Office is responsible for the accommodation that asylum seekers are living in and for their financial support and for deciding the outcome of an asylum claim. Mears will be directed by Home Office when it comes to routing of any arrivals and dispersals. It is Mears’ responsibility as the accommodation provider to facilitate this.
* RE asylum support, Mears are not responsible for and cannot advise upon any asylum related matters – for asylum related queries and concerns SUs are directed to contact Migrant Help. Migrant Help pathways also need to be followed for any complaints/queries by SUs and third parties. Migrant Help are the Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility (AIRE) provider appointed by The Home Office and are a charity separate from The Home Office offering independent advice.
* Hotels: Each hotel has a designated Mears Welfare Officer (WSO) team. The team are responsible for providing each SU arriving to the hotel and into our accommodation with a full induction covering a host of different topics and support needs. This includes registration of SUs with their designated GP provider - for Leeds, this would be Bevan. A dataset of hotel SUs is routinely shared by our WSO teams to register SUs with GP on their behalf with their consent, our team will then further assist the SU as needed with arranging appointments/ongoing healthcare as needed. It is important to note that Mears offer a signpost only support service. Mears WSO teams are not healthcare professionals, if an SU presents with a health need, Mears will signpost to the appropriate support.
* On an ongoing basis, Mears will be on site to assist SUs with support to access support services as needed and offer welfare signposting support to assist integration in areas such as volunteering, skills development and mental health. It is within the scope of the Mears Partnership Manager role to liaise with local partners RE such engagement opportunities and wraparound support to support frontline operational teams. Mears are happy to engage with local stakeholders to put any opportunities for activities/support in place, with the understanding that processes to authorise engagement within Mears accommodation will be followed.
* Mears WSO’s on site will also naturally manage any incidents on site and will liaise with external agencies for support as needed. For safeguarding issues, we have a regional safeguarding lead and Head of Safeguarding that provide overarching guidance to our frontline teams. We also have a Welfare Operations Manager in each area overseeing the WSO teams’ direct management.
* Please note, in Dispersal Accommodation each property is managed by a dedicated Mears Housing Manager and Welfare Officer; however, the properties are not manned, the team provide an induction to the property and a 7-day welfare visit follow up, and further support / visits as needed subject to SU support needs. DA is self-catered, and SUs are signposted to register with their local GP, this is not completed on the SUs behalf as it is in IA and Mears are not authorised to share data with providers RE Dispersal Accommodation.

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| Actions: * Mears to clarify with safeguarding for what can be shared in relation to: how diligent the weekend and night checks are to prevent further street homelessness.
* Sam, Jade and Natasha to explore how asylum hotel activity can be shared with LMP.
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Updates on Priorities

* Volunteer Advice Project
* More than a year ago now at this meeting, Manual Bravo Project presented an overview of legal advice and legal aid, from that meeting a working group was formed to look at how we might do something to alleviate some of the pressures.
* 18 months of sharing ideas and planning a pilot project that went live in October 2023. A volunteer-led OISC Level 1 pilot, overseen by a paid OISC level 3 session supervisor, offering advice for 3 main areas: Biometric Residence Permit cards, travel documents, and nationality and citizenship.
* A partnership with Chapeltown Citizens Advice Bureau and Manuel Bravo Project who have identified volunteers that have now been recruited, trained and are delivered advice.
* The project received Leeds City Council asylum funding, to pay for an outreach coordinator. Now further developing the project.
* Update on LCC Asylum Grant Funding
* The Migration Team released £600k of funding to support people seeking asylum and new refugees with during the 28 day move on. Funding was available from £5k - £50k. 30 applications received, totalling nearly £1m. 22 applications approved most grants for 30k - 35K and under.
* Funding now fully allocated. Funded activity includes legal advice, new refugees and move on support, destitution accommodation, ESOL and skills, health, mental health, well-being, advocacy and activities. Travel expenses were included in number of applications. Activities taking place in community and hotels.
* Once all grant agreements have been signed a summary of funded organisations and activity will be provided on LMP blog

National, Regional and Local Updates

* Migration Yorkshire Regional Updates – Migration Yorkshire
* Cessations: Home office letter to SMPs in December confirmed that in September they reverted back to pre-August approach to cessations of issuing 28 days notice from date BRP is issued. Asylum grant letter now to be treated as notice of 28 days but Home Office won’t set a discontinuation date until BRP is issued. Home Office appear no longer to be issuing any 28 day discontinuation letter informing service users of the exact discontinuation date, only a 7 day notice to quit letter from accommodation providers. Policy likely to change again in coming months. Migration Yorkshire feeding back questions to Home Office to gain further clarity over process.
* Migration Yorkshire have been raising cases via Refugee Integration Service showing where Local Authorities is not getting it’s full 26 day notification of pending discons.
	+ NB: on 17th January 2024 Migration Yorkshire have received another update from the Home Office. They now say the 28 day discon letter from Home Office should say specifically the date of discontinuation and in theory by the time it arrives should give the person about 26 days notice roughly.
* Upcoming changes to policy on pregnancy and discontinuations – women in the period of 6 weeks before/after estimated due date won’t have support discontinued where they have a positive decision and will need to contact Migrant Help should they wish to receive discontinuation.
* SWEP – until March 2024, Home Office to pause any service user discontinuation for up to 72 hours where notified by Local Authorities that they have SWEP in place and the SU has not yet found accommodation.
* Refugee Integration Service – Service ended at end of Dec 2023 as Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund funded project came to end. Leeds City Council to continue providing housing support and advice to newly granted refugees independently.
* Asylum Support rates have gone up to £49.10 per week but weekly allowance for those in hotels on full board has decreased. See details of all the changes to support rates.
* West Yorkshire Sub Regional Migration Group update – Ally Swaddling / Kathryn Ashworth.
* Regular VCS updates from Migration Yorkshire available on LMP Blog.
* Leeds Strategic Migration Board – Sam/Roger.
* A summary of the meeting is available on LMP blog here.
* Leeds City of Sanctuary Update – Jennifer Jennings, Migration Team, LCC
* An update will be shared on LMP blog: [here](https://migrationpartnership.org.uk/leeds-city-council-city-of-sanctuary-local-authority-network-award-update-feb-2024/)

Any Other Business

* Next thematic meeting

LMP organisers will review the feedback from LMP, submitted to LCC to inform the priorities for the Asylum Funding, to set themes for future LMP meetings.

* The next LMP Strategic Group Meeting will be held on Tuesday 30th April 2024 (10am- 12pm) at RETAS, 233-237 Roundhay Rd, Harehills, Leeds LS8 4HS

Future meeting dates for 2024/2025:

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| **Meeting** | **Date** | **Venue** |
| **LMP Strategic Group** | * Tuesday 30th April 2024 (10am- 12pm)
* Thursday 18th July 2024 (10am-12pm)
* Tuesday 15th October 2024 (10am-12pm)
* Tuesday 21st January 2025 (10am-12pm)
 | * RETAS
* TBC
* TBC
* TBC
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| **LMP Operational Group** | * Monday 4th March 2024 (10am-12am)
* Monday 17th June 2024 (10am-12pm)
* Monday 9th September 2024 (10am-12pm)
* Monday 16th December 2024 (10am-12am)
 | One Community Centre, Cromwell Street, Lincoln Green, Leeds LS9 7SG |