

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS

ALL-MEMBER MEETING

Date: 29 January 2020

Subject: **South East Strategic Partnership for Migration**

Report of: Roy Millard, Head of Partnership



1 Background

- 1.1 The South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM) is hosted by South East England Councils but grant funded by the Home Office alongside 11 other Strategic Migration Partnerships (SMPs) that cover all the English regions and nations of the UK. SMPs provide both a coordination function on key migration programmes and enable strategic dialogue between local authorities and central government. The SESPM Executive Board is a multi-agency agency body which includes local authority members and officers. It is chaired by Cllr Roger Gough, Leader of Kent County Council, who represents the South East at the LGA Migration Task Group which has ministerial attendance.
- 1.2 The South East Strategic Partnership for Migration reaches across the region by facilitating four sub-regional Strategic Migration Groups which meet quarterly. These cover Kent, Surrey & Sussex, Hampshire & Isle of Wight, and Thames Valley. Each group operates under agreed terms of reference and is chaired by a local authority lead. These groups meet quarterly and provide a two-way conduit for information. One key function is to identify and address the key impacts of migration at the local level.

2 Refugee Resettlement

- 2.1 The Government's current resettlement programmes, the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme and the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme, will be extended in Spring 2020 and then combined into a single programme to be known as the Global Resettlement Scheme.
- 2.2 Whilst most people on this scheme will continue to be resettled from Middle East North Africa, there will be some from other areas of the world where the United Nations High Commission for Refugees have identified a resettlement need.

- 2.3 The current scheme has been very successful. The 20,000th person is expected to arrive in the UK in Spring by which point we anticipate the South East to have contributed 2,000 across 59 local authorities. Funding for the Global Resettlement Scheme will continue at the same level as the current scheme for 2020-21 (subsequent years funding will be confirmed following the Comprehensive Spending Review)
- 2.4 SESPM has met with all 74 councils in the region and at the time of writing we are set to offer approximately 300 places to the Global Resettlement Scheme for 2020-21 (the Government aspires to resettle up to 5,000 people a year nationally).

3 Asylum: Adults and Families

- 3.1 The latest published statistics show the number of asylum seekers has risen 22% on the previous year and the accommodation network provided by Home Office contracted providers is at capacity; hotels are currently in use throughout the UK as contingency for around 1,500 people. The South East has one such hotel in use providing 40 bed spaces.
- 3.2 As of the end of December 2019 approximately 1.4% (847) of supported asylum seekers live in the South East with the majority in the traditional dispersal areas of Hastings, Portsmouth and Southampton. This is the lowest level of any of the regions and nations of the UK; the North West hosts the most with 23% (10,768). There is a national initiative through the LGA Chief Executives' group to work towards greater equity over ten years.
- 3.3 SESPM has met with all our councils and 36 in addition to the existing dispersal areas have agreed to participate in asylum dispersal at some level. 15 of them are now 'live', hosting an average of 11 asylum seekers.
- 3.4 The single key barrier to participation is the shortage of affordable appropriate accommodation across the region. Other factors here include the use of rural/semi-rural locations, access to voluntary sector support, available English language support and obtaining legal services. These are considerations that SESPM is working with stakeholders at a strategic and operational level to address. As with all of the programmes, officers within SESPM and other agencies work assiduously to ensure that placements are appropriate.

4 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

- 4.1 In line with the adult and family asylum seeking population the UASC population has increased and nationally there are currently in the region of 5,000 UASCs and 5,600 former UASC care leavers. Unlike adult and families, responsibility for supporting UASCs and care leavers rests with local authorities. The South East is second only to London in supporting both categories with the majority in Kent and Portsmouth.
- 4.3 The National Transfer Scheme (NTS) is the mechanism introduced in 2016 to disperse UASCs within each region. This enables authorities such as Kent and Portsmouth to reduce their numbers of UASCs to a manageable level (0.07% ratio

of UASC to resident children). It relies on the voluntary participation of other local authorities. Placements however have not kept up with arrivals and numbers to continue to grow in receiving authorities where there are ports of entry. Last month Kent and Portsmouth wrote jointly to all the other upper tier councils in our region to seek greater participation in the programme. SESPM is the body responsible for coordinating placements in our region and is following up on this joint request to facilitate transfers to volunteering authorities.

5 EU settlement

- 5.1 Out of the 3.5m EU citizens by country of birth resident in the UK, there are approximately 463,000 residing in the South East, which is the highest number in any region English outside of London. Whilst there have been around two million applications to the EU Settled Status scheme it remains important that the messaging and process for registration reaches all EU citizens in our communities in order that their status in the UK is regularised. There are a number of bodies resourced to assist those who need it to make applications. The deadline for applying will be 30 June 2021, or 31 December 2020 if a deal with the EU is not agreed.

Roy Millard

Head of Partnership