

Ms K Nicholl MLA
Northern Ireland Assembly
Parliament Buildings
Stormont

12 April 2024
AQW 9447/22-27

Ms K Nicholl (South Belfast): To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the terms of reference; (ii) membership; and (iii) a breakdown of all meetings held in the last 12 months for (a) the Strategic Planning Group (SPG); (b) SPG Sub-group: Asylum Contingency Accommodation; (c) SPG Subgroup: Task & Finish; (d) Voluntary and Community Sector Forum; (e) NI Regional Delivery and Procurement Group; (f) the Council Engagement Group on Asylum Dispersal; (g) Move On Delivery Board; (h) the Move On Coordination Group.

Answer

Details of membership and meetings of those Groups which are the responsibility of the Department are provided in the tables below. Additionally, available agreed Terms of Reference have been placed in the Assembly Library and can be accessed there. It should be noted that these are kept under review and updated as required, and further Terms of Reference will be added as necessary.

The Move On Delivery Board is chaired by the Home Office and, as such, any requests for meeting information and Terms of Reference should be directed to them. The Regional Delivery Group (RDG) was chaired by the NI Strategic SMP and since its dissolution in April 2022 has been chaired by the Home Office. As such, any requests for meeting information and Terms of Reference should be directed to them.

Strategic Planning Group: Refugee and Asylum Seekers (SPG RAS)	
Membership	Meetings in last 12 months
The Executive Office	16 Feb 2023
Department for Infrastructure	23 March 2023
Department for the Economy	20 April 2023
Department for Communities	24 May 2023
Department of Health	20 July 2023
Department of Education	24 August 2023
Department of Justice	23 November 2023
Department of Finance	1 December 2023
Northern Ireland Housing Executive	20 February 2024
Education Authority	
SOLACE	
Police Service of NI	
Home Office	

Strategic Planning Group Sub-group: Asylum Contingency	
Accommodation	
Membership	Meetings in last 12 months
The Executive Office	31 March 2023
Home Office	16 May 2023
Mears Group Plc	28 June 2023
Department of Health	14 September 2023
Health and Social Care NI	11 October 2023
Department of Education	13 December 2023
Department for Communities	15 February 2024
Education Authority	

Department of Justice Police Service of NI Department for Infrastructure Northern Ireland Housing Executive Department for the Economy Safeguarding Board for NI Conway Education Centre NICCY	
---	--

Illegal Migration Act: Task and Finish Group	
Membership	Meetings in last 12 months
The Executive Office	14 June 2023
Department of Justice	3 October 2023
Department for Communities	
Department of Health	
Department of Education	
Department for the Economy	


Voluntary and Community Sector Forum	
Membership	Meetings in last 12 months
The Executive Office	27 October 2023
Barnardo's	25 January 2024
Bryson Care	
International Organisation for Migration	
North West Migrants Forum	
Extern	
Law Centre	
Migrant Help	

Red Cross	
-----------	--

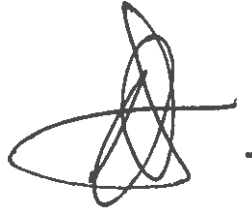
Council Engagement Group	
Membership	Meetings in last 12 months
The Executive Office	04 May 2023
Migrant Help	26 May 2023
Home Office	28 June 2023
Mears Group Plc	02 August 2023
Northern Ireland Housing Executive	07 September 2023
Police Service of NI	04 October 2023
Education Authority	06 December 2023
Department of Health	01 February 2024
Local Councils	14 March 2024

Move On Coordination Group	
Membership	Meetings in last 12 months
The Executive Office	15 November 2023
Education Authority	22 November 2023
Northern Ireland Housing Executive	29 November 2023
Department of Health	6 December 2023
Department of Education	13 December 2023
Department of Communities	20 December 2023
	3 January 2024
	10 January 2024
	24 January 2024
	7 February 2024
	21 February 2024

	6 March 2024 20 March 2024
--	-------------------------------



**Michelle O'Neill MLA
First Minister**



**Emma Little-Pengelly MLA
deputy First Minister**

Strategic Planning Group (Refugees and Asylum Seekers)

Terms of Reference

Purpose and Principles

1. The multi-agency Strategic Planning Group (Refugees and Asylum Seekers) is the principal strategic planning and governance group for Refugee and Asylum Support and Integration within the devolved sphere in Northern Ireland.
2. The Group aims to approach all aspects of the tasks undertaken in a respectful and dignified way; to take a person-centred approach allowing equality, inclusion, and fairness to guide decision-making and delivery of services to refugees.
3. The Group will adopt a joined-up approach across Government and work in partnership with local communities and voluntary organisations.
4. The role of the Group is to:
 - collectively consider and make decisions regarding the strategic issues and local implications relating to refugee and asylum seeker workstreams;
 - provide advice and support to Executive Ministers and through the chair, report or make recommendations on strategic issues/provide updates to Ministers as required;
 - support the effective implementation of the Refugee Integration Strategy and monitor implementation by Departments and other partners; and
 - co-ordinate across Executive Departments and Agencies in respect of refugee and asylum support and integration, liaising closely with wider stakeholders.

Core Functions

5. To effectively discharge its role, SPG will deliver the following core functions:

- To set the strategic direction and provide strategic leadership by agreeing policy and strategy on cross cutting issues.
- To exercise a corporate governance function, including identification and management, as far as possible, of key strategic risks through development, review and revision of a strategic risk register.
- To oversee the work of the Tactical Delivery Group (TDG) to ensure effective response to implementation of strategic decisions.
- To maintain a membership that has both the knowledge and authority to fully address issues referred to SPG.
- To commission work / information to support the development of policy and establish strategic direction, tasking the TDG. The TDG will report to SPG on progress with the actions allocated and within the timescales set by SPG.
- To agree the allocation of funding provided by UKG to NI Departments and other stakeholders for service provision to support integration of Refugees and Asylum Seekers. TEO will be responsible for arranging the transfer of budget allocations.
- Commission quarterly updates on the use of departmental funding allocations, to allow monitoring and evaluation to improve services provision aiding integration of refugees and asylum seekers. The updates will be requested by TEO on behalf of SPG.

Arrangements

6. SPG will be chaired by the Permanent Secretary of The Executive Office. The Secretariat will be the Refugee, Asylum Support and Integration Policy Branch, TEO and the Head of Branch will act as secretary to SPG.
7. Membership will be at senior level from each of the organisations set out below.
8. SPG will meet quarterly or at such other times as determined by the Chair. The meetings of TDG will be arranged in a rhythm to support the work of SPG to allow for reporting to SPG and operational implementation of strategic priorities.
9. Member Conflict of interest declarations will be standing agenda at SPG meetings.
10. The SPG Agendas will reflect the emerging policy and strategic issues and will be tailored as such. However, an overview of expected key business to be discussed at SPG meetings over the next 12 months is included at **Annex A**. This is not exhaustive and subject to change.

List of Member Organisations

Member Organisations
The Executive Office - Chair & Secretariat
Home Office
Department of Health
HSCNI
Department of Education
Education Authority
Department of Justice

Police Service NI
Northern Ireland Housing Executive
Department for the Economy
Department for Communities
Department for Infrastructure
SOLACE
Emergency Preparedness NI

Governance

11. The Group's purpose and impact will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure it remains fit for purpose and continues to meet objectives.

12. The Terms of Reference for the SPG may change, subject to agreement by the Group, however, the above roles, responsibilities and core functions will form the basis of the SPG.

Key Performance Indicators

13. The SPG is a strategic forum and operational implementation of decisions or work to develop responses to issues will be delivered by the TDG. However, the following high-level indicators will be used to monitor performance of the SPG:

- Percentage of member organisations attending each meeting.
- Percentage of minutes issued within four weeks of relevant meeting and agreed at subsequent meeting.
- Percentage of actions successfully completed on time.
- Risk register reviewed quarterly.

- Agree draft Refugee Integration Strategy and thematic implementation plans.
- Successful allocation of funding to support delivery of HFU schemes, asylum dispersal etc to enable agencies to deliver the necessary support to refugees and asylum seekers.
- Percentage of members agreeing that SPG enables effective engagement, co-ordination, and collective decision-making for the benefit of refugees and asylum seekers in Northern Ireland.

These KPIs will be monitored by TEO on an ongoing basis and reported to the SPG annually.

Updated January 2024

Strategic Planning Group (Refugees and Asylum Seekers) - Terms of Reference Annex A

Indication of Key Business 2024/25

- UKG Immigration Policy
 - Illegal Migration Act
 - Maximisation
 - Move On Process
 - Cap on safe and legal routes and any future scheme proposals emerging from UKG

- Draft Refugee Integration Strategy and implementation plans

- Afghan Resettlement Schemes

- Ukrainian Visa Schemes

- Funding Allocations and reporting on spend

- Risks and Mitigations

- Data

Terms of Reference

SPG Sub-Group: Asylum Contingency Accommodation

Purpose

1. The purpose of the SPG Sub-Group: Asylum Contingency Accommodation is to review support to asylum seekers living in Home Office, Contingency Accommodation, to identify effective support arrangements and to monitor the delivery of same. The SPG Sub-Group: Asylum Contingency Accommodation reports to the Strategic Planning Group: Refugees and Asylum Seekers (SPG RAS).
2. The Group aims to approach all aspects of the tasks undertaken in a respectful and dignified way; to take a person-centred approach allowing equality, inclusion, and fairness to guide decision-making and delivery of services to refugees.
3. The focus of the Sub-Group will be on the needs of children, their families, and pregnant / postpartum mothers living in Contingency Accommodation, but will expand to include other cohorts where possible.
4. The group will use the CLC / STEP report, which raised concerns surrounding children in contingency accommodation, to focus our aims and objectives.
5. The meetings will be held monthly in advance of the main SPG meetings, or as otherwise determined by the Chair.

Scope

6. Responsibility for the provision and management of accommodation and the provision of wider services spans both the UKG and devolved spheres of responsibility.

7. Home Office has legal responsibility for the establishment and management of Contingency Accommodation including the contracts with Mears Group Plc, who run the hotels, and Migrant Help, who provide day-to-day support to asylum seekers. NI Departments have legal responsibility for statutory services provision to asylum seekers in accordance with their departmental responsibilities.
8. The Executive Office leads on liaison and co-ordination with the Home Office and other partners and has established the Group to support collaborative working to address the issues presenting for those living in Contingency Accommodation.

Membership

9. The member organisations are listed at Annex A.
10. Departmental responsibilities are outlined at Annex B
11. The Chair is the Deputy Secretary, Good Relations and Inclusion Directorate, TEO.
12. The Secretary is the Head of the Refugee, Asylum Support and Integration Policy Branch, TEO and Branch will provide the Secretariat.

Deliverables

13. To effectively discharge its role the Group will:
 - Identify asylum data needs to support planning and the delivery of service provision by NI Departments and organisations including of their respective statutory responsibilities.

- Work closely with Home Office to support timely provision and application of data in accordance with GDPR requirements.
- Work with TEO Statisticians to develop a Data Dashboard to inform support of Asylum Seekers in NI.
- To develop a rolling action plan which identifies actions, owners and timescales to support effective service provision for asylum seekers, where each Sub-Group Member will be responsible for the delivery of its own actions - using the STEP/ CLC Report as an initial source of information. The secretariat will monitor and report on progress to the Group.
- Share the learning from the of 'Family Help' pilot and other initiatives to improve services to asylum seekers in Contingency Accommodation and make recommendations to SPG.
- Report monthly, or at such other times as the Chair will determine, to SPG on progress and to deliver on taskings from SPG in accordance with SPG timescales.

Governance

14. The Sub-Group will report via the Chair / Secretary / Chair's nominee to the Strategic Planning Group (Refugees and Asylum Seekers) and will escalate issues to SPG (RAS) as necessary.

15. Appropriate data sharing arrangements will be put in place to facilitate the work of the Sub-Group.

Mechanisms for feed in

16. The group will be informed by the lived experience of Asylum seekers via:

- Sector and Statutory Reports / Communications from the Sector
- Visits to Contingency Accommodation

May 2023

SPG Sub-Group: Asylum Contingency Accommodation – Terms of Reference
ANNEX A

List Of Members Organisations

Member Organisations
The Executive Office - Chair & Secretariat
Home Office
Mears Group Plc
Department of Health
HSCNI
Department of Education
Education Authority
Department of Justice
Department for Communities
Police Service NI
Department for Infrastructure
Northern Ireland Housing Executive
Department for the Economy
Safeguarding Board for NI
Conway Education Centre
NICCY

SPG Sub-Group: Asylum Contingency Accommodation - Terms of Reference
ANNEX B

Departmental Responsibilities

TEO

- Lead development and delivery of the Refugee Integration Strategy
- Chair the SPG and establish sub-groups/Task & Finish groups where required to provide a coordinated cross government response to issues
- Lead local response to resettlement schemes through the SPG including engagement with Home Office and other relevant Whitehall departments

DE (including through the EA)

- Ensure provision of school places for refugees and asylum seekers and additional educational needs/support such as ESOL for school age children
- Provision of support for families with school age children where appropriate.
- Responsibility for child protection/safeguarding in educational settings.
- Lead delivery of the Children and Young People's Strategy
- The Department of Education will contribute to the action of the group and ensure that in so doing it seeks to remove identified barriers to education for children arriving here with families seeking asylum and housed in contingency accommodation.

DfE

- Provision of ESOL through Further Education colleges
- Support to access higher and further education.
- Careers advice
- Development of ESOL policy and coordination of ESOL policy group for engagement
- Regulation of hotels through Tourism NI

DOH (including through Trusts and other agencies such as PHA)

- Ensure registration/access to GPs and dentists

- Provision of health screening and process for ensuring referrals for health and social care needs in all Trust areas
- Ensure access to health support for pregnant mothers
- Support for UASCs/UAMs

Lead role in preventing, detecting and providing protection to adults at risk of harm. HSCT Northern Ireland Adult Safeguarding Partnership (NIASP) and Local Adult Safeguarding Partnerships (LASPs) provide strategic leadership and direction to organisations involved in the spectrum of adult safeguarding activities – including engaging with Home Office safeguarding structures.

DfC (including through the NIHE)

- Provision of accommodation for refugees who present as homeless/destitute in line with overall homelessness policy. (This excludes asylum seekers who have NRPF)
- Engaging with the Home Office in respect of move-on process and informing the procurement planning of Home Office and MEARS
- Establishment and monitoring of working protocol between MEARS and NIHE to ensure sustainable working practices.
- Funding of voluntary and community sector organisations

DOJ

- Lead policy responsibility for addressing related issues on hate crime and human trafficking and exploitation.
- Processing applications for enhanced AccessNI checks to assist safeguarding.

PSNI

- PSNI – Engage with Home Office Structures to inform procurement processes both at a local area level and on individual addresses.
- Engagement with new arrivals.

Department for Infrastructure

- DfI have a general responsibility under the Transport Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 to secure the provision of public passenger transport services with due

regard to accessibility, economy, efficiency, safety of operation and sustainability.

- DfI have power under Article 5 of the Transport (Northern Ireland) Order 1977 to enter into an agreement with passenger transport undertakings whereby the undertakings charge concessionary fares to passengers. The Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme (the Scheme) is provided for under Article 5 of the Order. The policy aim of the Scheme is 'to promote social inclusion by improving public transport accessibility through free and concessionary fares for members of the community who are most vulnerable, or liable to social exclusion', while delivering value for money for passengers and taxpayers.

Voluntary and Community Sector Forum (VCSF)**Terms of Reference****Version Control**

Version (date):	Circulated to:	Comments:
V1.0 (October 2023)	Forum members	Previously agreed by Tactical Delivery Group – circulated for discussion/approval at inaugural VCSF meeting
V1.1 (2 nd November 2023)	Forum members	Revised draft following discussion – for approval
V1.2 (March 2024)	Forum members	Revised following discussion at 24 th January 2024 meeting, to reflect Red Cross points made in correspondence.

Background

A Refugee and Asylum Support and Integration Division was established within The Executive Office in Autumn 2022, with appropriate governance structures since developed to inform and oversee the work of the Division. In brief, these comprise a Strategic Planning Group (Refugee and Asylum Seekers), a Tactical Delivery Group and this Voluntary and Community Sector Forum.

Purpose

The VCSF has been established to help inform a whole society approach to refugee and asylum seeker¹ integration in Northern Ireland. It will facilitate inclusion of key

¹ In the Forum's context, refugees and asylum seekers can be taken to include all age groups i.e. children, young people and adults, and arrivals to Northern Ireland under various routes.

non-statutory stakeholders in supporting and driving forward work on refugee and asylum seeker integration to create inter-cultural communities.

The VCSF will:

- provide one channel of communication between refugee communities and those who have a statutory responsibility for refugee integration, receiving updates on the work of SPG and TDG, and reporting to them;
- promote the aims of a Refugee Integration Strategy (RIS), advising on the development and implementation of associated thematic delivery plans;
- identify opportunities for collaboration and partnership working;
- exchange information, identify best practice and highlight relevant research to assist the development of an evidence base underpinning delivery of the RIS;
- consider the role of established communities;
- advise on delivery of current services provision, and their effectiveness, providing a further evidence base to inform and enhance provision;
- share knowledge, expertise and experience to assist effective integration; and
- act as a challenge function to ensure the successful implementation of the RIS.

Membership

The responsibility for agreeing and appointing VCSF Members falls to The Executive Office. TEO has sought to invite and appoint, as a priority, representatives who work with refugee and asylum seekers and seek to aid their integration into local communities. Notwithstanding current membership, Members can suggest new Members where they feel a group or organisation could usefully contribute. Such suggestions should be made to the VCSF Chairperson in the first instance.

Members are encouraged to consult and interact with refugee and asylum seeker communities, and associated organisations, to enable their full representation to the VCSF.

Organisation
Barnardo's
Bryson Care
Extern
International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Law Centre
Migrant Help
North West Migrants Forum
Red Cross
The Executive Office

Invites/Agendas/Papers

Invitations to meetings will be sent to Members within 5 working days of a meeting date being agreed; Members should not forward such invites, instead notifying the VCSF Secretariat who will manage any issues.

An agenda and any associated papers will be issued to VCSF Members at least 3 working days prior to each scheduled meeting. Standing items on the agenda will be:

- Welcome and apologies;
- Conflicts of Interest;
- Minutes of the last meeting;
- Review of outstanding action points;
- SPG/TDG update;
- Refugee Integration Strategy update;
- Date and location of next meeting; and
- Any Other Business

Supplementary items will be sought in advance of each meeting. In addition, on an annual basis, the VCSF will review these Terms of Reference and review the ongoing need for the VCSF (if not reviewed during the previous 12 months).

Frequency of meetings

Meetings will be scheduled for every 3 months i.e. quarterly, on a date agreed, as far as possible, at the preceding meeting. This frequency, however, will be reviewed regularly outside of the need of a formal review of these Terms of Reference.

Support/Secretariat

TEO officials will support the VCSF and provide its Secretariat, as required.

Chair

The Chair of the Forum is the Operational Lead within the Refugee and Asylum Support and Integration Division.

Council Engagement Group - Asylum Accommodation

Terms of Reference

1. BACKGROUND

The provision of accommodation for asylum seekers is the responsibility of the Home Office and managed through a contract with Mears locally. Asylum Seekers have historically been accommodated within the Belfast City Council boundary for a variety of reasons including to support reporting to the local Home Office and access to immigration legal support.

Dispersed accommodation along with a number of hotels being used for contingency accommodation is now being procured outside of the Belfast City Council area.

2. MEMBERSHIP

It is proposed that the Councils Engagement Group on Asylum will be chaired by Thomas Barwick (Home Office) and include representatives from the following organisations:

- TEO
- Migrant Help
- Home Office (HO)
- Mears (to include representation from procurement and Welfare Support)
- NIHE
- PSNI
- EA
- HSCB/DoH
- Councils with AASC accommodation

It is envisaged that membership will be reviewed and revised to include other organisations if required as work progresses.

3. ROLE

It was initially intended that the group focus on asylum seekers but it is accepted that given the remit of Councils it is likely that it will also consider issues relating to the integration needs of all refugees and asylum seekers irrespective of the route of arrival.

The aims and objectives of the Council Engagement Group are as follows:

- To identify concern or issues which would impact the success of asylum seeker accommodation being procured in proposed areas.
- To identify specific actions which could reduce/mitigate the issues or concerns and support accommodation in the areas identified.
- To develop and agree welcome and orientation packs for each Council area
- To identify gaps in equity of access to provision of services across Council areas for all asylum seekers and refugees.
- To share good practice and experience across Council areas.
- To link across to each Council's own network of VCS groups and escalate any issues identified in relation to refugees and asylum seekers.
- To escalate issues as appropriate to relevant Departments or agencies.
- To develop and agree a communications/engagement model to support the dissemination of accurate and timely information in relation to asylum seekers and refugees.
- To support and inform a longer-term data sharing and mapping of service provision on a local and regional basis.

4. MEETINGS

It is envisaged that the group will meet every 2 weeks. This will be contingent on merger with other groups of similar focus.

5. Reporting

The minutes of meetings will be circulated to all team members in advance of meetings.

MEARS will provide Council level procurement/planned procurement information to the relevant Council representatives, departments, and agencies before the meeting to ensure consideration in advance of meetings.

6. RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk management will be a consideration at all meetings.

7. SECRETARIAT ARRANGEMENTS

Minutes will be taken and circulated by TEO in the absence of the NISMP and virtual meetings will be hosted by TEO. At present it is considered most practical for meetings to remain virtual.

8. REVIEW AND ASSESSMENT

The team will periodically review its own terms of reference to ensure it is achieving the required objectives. Approval for proposed changes will be given by the Chairperson.

9. CONFIDENTIALITY

Given the sensitivity of the business being discussed by the Group it is essential that all members agree to treat all business with strictest confidence.