

Scotland's Strategic Migration Partnership

Meeting Summary: Developing a Place Based Approach to Asylum Dispersal

Thursday 29 November 2018

Scotland's Strategic Migration Partnership Board met with key stakeholders in November 2018 for a roundtable discussion on 'A Place Based Approach to Asylum Dispersal'. The Home Office is seeking to develop what they describe as a place based approach to their policy of dispersing asylum seekers around the UK as part of their strategy of opening up new areas of the UK to accept dispersed asylum seekers. The roundtable discussion was informed by inputs from Andy Kelly of the Home Office, Sabir Zazai of Scottish Refugee Council and Gayle Findlay of COSLA.

The Home Office stated their priorities of meeting the international duty to provide humanitarian protection and to avoiding destitution, principles which have a lot of support in Scotland. There was also broad agreement of the benefits to communities of receiving asylum seekers and the need to widen dispersal to Scotland beyond Glasgow.

The discussion revealed different interpretations of what a place based approach would look like in practice. There is a long tradition of delivering place based approaches in Scotland and therefore potential to learn from and build on those approaches. A common understanding of what all stakeholders are trying to achieve needs to be reached before this can be fully realised.

Through discussion it emerged that a place based approach in Scotland would be:

- Rooted in the needs of the community – both local people and asylum seekers themselves need to be involved in the shaping of services.
- Informed by community consultation and other ways of capturing the 'lived experience' of asylum seekers and the other people living in the areas they are dispersed to.
- More than a housing-based approach – the needs of the community must be considered in the round.
- Based on genuine partnerships between all stakeholders and centred around a shared understanding of what all stakeholders want to achieve.
- Adequately resourced – the resources need to follow partnership decisions in order to support delivery.

A place-based approach creates the opportunity for:

- Trialing innovative ideas on a smaller scale and then growing.
- Agreeing principles in accommodation standards that all stakeholders can respect.
- Developing joint understanding of 'issues' i.e. definitions of terms like safeguarding and vulnerability.
- Sharing of information to enable people to work effectively.

- Recognising where things are not working and having the flexibility to try something new / different.

The meeting explored what needed to happen to support the development of a place based approach to asylum dispersal in Scotland and came up with the following:

- Good cooperation between the spheres of government in Scotland – local, Scottish and UK with understanding of each other’s policy priorities and how these can be balanced.
- A strong partnership made up of the spheres of government and other key stakeholders which should be informed by the ‘lived experience’ of asylum seekers and the people in the communities they are dispersed to.
- Good communication about the asylum contracts and the development of a joint understanding of key terms like safeguarding and vulnerability.
- Application of existing good practice around place based approaches, person centred approaches and community engagement in the Scottish context.
- Sharing of good practice, learning and development about the experience of asylum dispersal in Glasgow and other parts of the UK.
- Consideration of potential flexibilities there are in the asylum system which could support the more effective development of place-based approaches in Scotland.
- Space for innovation and piloting of different approaches.
- Adequate resources – the resources need to follow partnership decisions in order to support delivery.