

Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Asylum accommodation](#), HC 1758

Tuesday, 20 November 2018

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Members present: Yvette Cooper (Chair); Rehman Chishti; Sir Christopher Chope; Stephen Doughty; Kate Green; Stuart C. McDonald; Alex Norris; John Woodcock.

Questions 1–31

Witnesses

I: Councillor Susan Aitken, Leader, Glasgow City Council, Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, Councillor Roger Lawrence, Leader, City of Wolverhampton Council, and Councillor David Simmonds CBE, Deputy Leader, Hillingdon Council, Chairman of Asylum, Refugee and Migration Task Group, Local Government Association.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Councillor Susan Aitken, Andy Burnham, Councillor Roger Lawrence, and Councillor David Simmonds CBE.

Q1 Chair: Can I welcome our second panel before us today? We are now switching topics to a set inquiry into asylum accommodation. We are very grateful to our panel for coming before us, and apologies for starting this session late.

We had been told that the next votes were not going to be until 5.00 pm. We have now just had message that they may be earlier, so I am going to apologise in advance if we suddenly have to disrupt this. Can I thank you for coming?

We are looking into the Government's contracting for asylum accommodation, and you will be aware of our report that we have previously done on this topic. I want to just ask each of you to start by introducing yourselves and also, as you do so, to tell us just very briefly a quick assessment of what your response is to the current state of the asylum contracting process.

Andy Burnham: Thank you very much, Chair. I am Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester.

The first thing I would respond to say is that Greater Manchester has a long tradition of welcoming people fleeing persecution. I think I am right in saying we are the largest dispersal area in England by some margin, so hopefully our voice counts for something in this debate.

We believe that to continue to carry on to play the role that we have played, as we want to do, we have to have fairness from the Home Office when it comes to the arrangements that are being made. If we do not have that, we would have to seriously consider our position. If we are to maintain public support, it can only be done by having a voice and a role for local authorities in supporting people. We think the current arrangements are not fair to people who are arriving needing support. They are not fair to the host communities. They are not fair to the local authorities. The only people that the current arrangements work for are the Home Office and the contract providers.

We believe that there is a need for significant change. I have had meetings with Ministers but there has been no meaningful engagement in the construction of this new contract. We are told that it is effectively a rollover for the next seven to 10 years of what we have had since 2012.

That is fundamentally unacceptable to us in Greater Manchester. We want significant changes. For instance, we want involvement in the construction of the contract before it is signed. We would like joint oversight of the contract once it is in place. We would want to agree an operational plan to underpin it with the Home Office, and we need to see a much fairer distribution across the country, which is not reflected in the



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commitment to roll over the ratios in terms of what percentage of arrivals each English region takes. We have not had any reassurance on any of those points. That is why I signalled recently in a letter to the Home Office, to the Home Secretary, that we were now seriously considering our continued participation.

Councillor Susan Aitken: I am Susan Aitken. I am the Leader of Glasgow City Council.

Glasgow has been an asylum dispersal council for almost 20 years. It was one of the first cities in the UK after London to sign up to the dispersal scheme. In actual fact, I think before the dispersal scheme was formally created, Glasgow started to accept asylum-seekers and refugees. Like other cities in the UK, it obviously had a history before that. We have more asylum-seekers in Glasgow than any other single local authority. In actual fact we have more than the next four biggest authorities combined. Certainly, in terms of individual local authorities, Glasgow is the biggest by quite some way.

We are very proud to have been a dispersal city—and I think a very successful dispersal city—for all these years. It has become part of Glasgow's culture and our sense of ourselves. It is noticeable, the impact that the inclusion of asylum-seekers and refugees in our communities has had over the past couple of decades. It has changed Glasgow for the better and we are a more diverse city, more culturally diverse, and for Glaswegians' own sense of themselves it has been a very positive thing. We very much want to continue in that vein.

In the first decade of our involvement in the dispersal scheme, Glasgow was the contract-holder. The city council was the contract-holder. It would be our preference for that to be the case again. We did make an attempt to bid, to make an expression of interest, when the new contract procurement process began. We did make an expression of interest and did so in the understanding, following all the instructions that we had been given by the Home Office, that that was what we had to do: make a formal expression of interest.

As soon as we did that, we were then sent a 32-page form. This was just before Christmas, literally on something like 22 or 23 December last year, and the 32-page form was almost impossible for us to answer, a lot of the questions, because they were questions for people who had been providing asylum accommodation over the past decade, which we had not been. We feel that we were essentially prevented from making our own public sector bid to run asylum accommodation in the city. That would very much be our preference. I think, with a lot of evidence, that our reputation as a successful dispersal city has been because it was the council that did it for that first decade, that worked really, really hard. There were mistakes and there were challenges, undoubtedly, but it worked very hard to get community support, to talk about the inclusion



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of refugees and asylum-seekers in our communities as a positive thing, as welcoming new Glaswegians.

Q2 **Chair:** Can I interrupt you there just because I am conscious of a vote being imminent? I want to give our other panellists the chance to give us the opening sense first.

Councillor Roger Lawrence: Roger Lawrence, Leader of the City of Wolverhampton Council and also Chair of the West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership, which goes beyond the West Midlands Combined Authority to the entire West Midlands region.

I just want to echo the points around fairness. Our region has something like 14% of national cases. We are about 9% to 10% of the national population, so there is clearly an inequity there. That is worsened by the fact that only seven of the 30 authorities in the region are receiving dispersal placements at the moment, which is probably around half the population of the region. That means that in some of our wards we are well in excess of the one in 200 recommendation. In fact, in Stoke-on-Trent, 10 wards are beyond one in 200.

We believe that there should be a widening of dispersal through all authorities and that this should be linked with a strategic involvement for local authorities much earlier in the process. We believe that an opportunity was missed with letting of the new contract to involve local authorities as strategic partners. There is still the opportunity to claw that back even at this late stage, we believe. We have had some indications from the Home Office that it might like to consider that, but nothing guaranteed as yet. I feel that that needs to be nailed down a little more firmly.

We are also specifically concerned about the housing conditions that people live in, and the inability of the local authorities to resolve this. All these seven authorities are among the people who have had the biggest cuts to local authority spending. Our environmental health people are diminished and our capacity to respond to needs is diminished.

We are concerned about education for any families and children who arrive because all our schools are under great pressure, as are schools in many, many authorities. Nevertheless, particularly there is the example of Sandwell. It is a special school that has been set up to try to tackle some of those issues.

We are concerned about the communication and the sharing of information. We are concerned also about no recourse to public funds, those people who are denied the right to remain, and what happens to those people, and the issues of no recourse to public funds, which can have a deleterious impact on our communities.

I agree with most of those points, those are the key things. I would maybe add a few more there.



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Councillor David Simmonds CBE: Thank you, Chair. My name is David Simmonds. I am a Conservative Councillor in Hillingdon, where we are home port of entry to Heathrow Airport. We have every bit of the asylum system from deportations, borders and short-term dispersal accommodation in our borough, and I chair the Local Government Association's asylum and refugee group in succession to Roger, who used to chair it.

In respect of your question, I would say the view of councils is that there are two issues with the dispersal contracts: there is no money to fund the proper discharge of the duties that are envisaged under it, and there is unfortunately very little trust in the relationship with the Home Office that would enable us to be confident that what we will see with the new contracts is significantly improved over the current position.

Q3 Chair: We have just had a message that suggests that there will not be votes at around 4.00 pm. I cannot testify to the reliability of that, but fingers crossed.

Councillor Simmonds, just to ask you quickly further, I know you have had a letter from the Immigration Minister I think in the last day or so. Do you have any initial response to that letter and the points that the Immigration Minister makes?

Councillor David Simmonds CBE: The letter is rich in aspiration. I think it is fair to say our experience of dealing with the Home Office is that the 2015 migrant crisis in Europe did prompt a significant improvement in the working relationship with local government, but it feels like the Home Office has been reverting to type since. We will need to see evidence of the things that are referred to, the aspirations that are in that letter, which would involve a great deal more engagement of the kind that other panellists have referred to, in both the procurement and implementation of the contracts, and the management of those contracts subsequently, for us to be confident that the system will be working better under the new arrangements that it is at the moment.

Q4 Stuart C. McDonald: Thank you all for coming along this afternoon. Just first of all to get a sense of how serious this situation is, Mayor Burnham, you have already said that you would think very seriously about continued participation if we just carry on regardless. Could I also ask the other members of the panel whether your authorities—or member organisations in your case, Councillor Simmonds—are in the same space in terms of really thinking seriously about continued participation?

Councillor David Simmonds CBE: Perhaps just to provide a local authority perspective to begin with, there are at least 32 authorities that have signed up to be new dispersal areas that I am aware of, which as yet have had no accommodation procured within them. Clearly there is a willingness on the part of councils to engage with it, but a sense of frustration that nothing is happening.



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That will be balanced by the messages that we are hearing from other places that are already dispersal areas, which are simply saying the system is not working as it should for them, and that clearly is acting as a significant bar to participation.

Councillor Roger Lawrence: The experience of those authorities that are already dispersal authorities is likely to deter others, rather than encourage them, which is why it is important that we get first of all this engagement, and secondly some recognition that there are additional costs falling on local authorities and we need to be reimbursed and supported in providing greater community liaison, greater environmental health, education, and also our colleagues in health. Many people are not registered with GPs, so they turn up at A&E whenever they have a problem. We know the impact that that has on our health services. All of those things are absolutely crucial in terms of trying to rebuild and ensure that we get the sort of services that people need.

As David has indicated, there are good examples of this. The Syrian resettlement programme worked incredibly well, given the strength of the pressure we were under, but that was linked to proper funding and proper engagement with local authorities. I think that the same needs to be replicated in the dispersal programme, even though it is much bigger.

Councillor Susan Aitken: We do not want to be in a position in Glasgow of having to go to the extent that Mayor Burnham has. We would prefer to stay in as a dispersal area. Having said that, our commitment to that has been put under significant pressure, particularly over recent months.

We have improved engagement with the Home Office since this summer, when Serco was the contract-holder for the asylum accommodation in Glasgow unilaterally announced—and we, as an authority, found this out through the newspapers, the same as everybody else—that they were going to evict 300 asylum-seekers from asylum accommodation and essentially dump them on to the streets of Glasgow. That was utterly unacceptable to us and an intolerable situation, so we insisted that the Home Office respond to that, and to be fair to it, it has.

We established a task force, which is led by the chief executive of Glasgow County Council, and that has at least helped us to have more access to data and information, and to mine that and triage those 300 asylum-seekers also, to get a much better sense of their status. We currently have well over 4,000 asylum-seekers in the city.

The other side of that is that on some of the other issues that colleagues have raised about better engagement, about movement on the key issue of funding and proper resourcing of a genuinely effective, supportive service for these vulnerable people, there has not been any progress at all. The Home Office I think will say—and indeed has said, by all accounts—that it thinks that the partnership and the task force that we have established with Glasgow since that period of crisis earlier this summer has been an enormous success. I would add rather more caveats



to that from our point of view. We think there has been progress, but nowhere near enough. If that is the example of engagement so far, it does not hold out an enormous amount of hope.

Andy Burnham: Just briefly, I do not think there is much difference between our position and the Glasgow position. We are saying that we want to continue. We share the same pride in what we have done as a city region over a long time to welcome people in. What we are saying is that we are not prepared to do it on the basis on which the Home Office has been doing it in recent times, and that is not just me speaking. That is the clear view of our 10 councils.

I do not know if it is the same letter as Mr Simmonds has received, but I have received a letter from the Home Secretary overnight before coming to this Committee. It would seem that there is some recognition now of what we are saying. I do not know if it would help the Committee, Chair, if I read some of the letter. It says, in response to our concern about the number of people dispersed to Greater Manchester, "I am happy to commit my officials to work with you on the question of a more equitable distribution of supported asylum-seekers and what this would look like in practice. This is part of a wider intent that from the start of the new contract onwards we will achieve a progressive reduction in the proportion of dispersal in the higher-volume areas, with a commensurate increase in the ratios in areas that currently have lower or non-existent volumes."

That seems to us to be a change of position on the part of the Home Office to perhaps put the funding in to begin dispersing in those 30 or so councils that have agreed, or indeed to use powers to require, which have never been used but we believe should be used in the interests of fairness across the country.

There is a further point that is just worth me saying. It says, "This represents a willingness on our part based on the strongly made case by you and other local politicians to revisit the previous decision to roll forward the existing ratios." This is a significant movement, we would say, from the Home Office, but it is coming late in the day in this contract.

The question for all of us is: where is this up to? These are encouraging words but they are only acceptable to us if they are then written into this contract to make these commitments binding in the new contracts, so that we can have confidence that they will be delivered.

Q5 Stuart C. McDonald: Following up on that, the two key areas that have already emerged are first of all funding and second of all the idea of genuine partnerships.

First of all, on genuine partnership, what does that look like? The letter that we have seen refers to partnership boards and things like that, but what does a genuine partnership mean for local authorities?



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Andy Burnham: I would say joint oversight of the contract. That is along the lines of what was being suggested. There is not sufficient oversight of the contract. That came through very strongly in an adjournment debate last month, where we have very poor accommodation and people not treated fairly.

The point I would want to make is that I believe in making these points. We are being a voice for people who are left unsupported in communities and, therefore, not in good accommodation, not able to integrate with the local community. It is about us jointly managing the contract, overseeing the level of provision, calling unscrupulous landlords to account, getting action taken where accommodation is not good enough, having funding to support people with English as a second language, levels of funding that properly support their integration and working with our voluntary sector to do that. That looks to me like a partnership, whereas at the moment it is basically that the Home Office decides and we are meant to pick up the pieces.

Q6 **Stuart C. McDonald:** One particular example of that, if anyone else wants to chip in, I am guessing is about the procurement of accommodation and the fact that while local authorities are supposed to have a say in that, ultimately there is a Home Office veto. If you guys object to a particular place being procured, that can be overridden by the Home Office, if I am correct.

Councillor Susan Aitken: Yes, I believe that is the case. We have a situation in Glasgow where we have one particularly very, very challenged neighbourhood, and we have special powers from the Scottish Government to address that. We have been over three or four years now removing unscrupulous and exploitative landlords through compulsory purchase orders. That neighbourhood cannot right now sustain the additional pressure of asylum-seekers. If we were in a position where the Home Office or a contractor were to overrule that, that would be a very serious problem.

We had an issue again, although we thought we had made progress, following the eviction threat, which has not gone away. We managed to pause it but it has not gone away. Serco then announced that it was going to use contingency accommodation, ie hotel accommodation, for primarily young males. Again, it is unacceptable. My officials, who work very closely with vulnerable asylum-seekers, have seen this as potentially absolutely disastrous. Again, this was something that was announced without discussion with us entirely, and that is a red line for us. As a local authority, we would find that unacceptable.

There does have to be an ability to set standards, to insist upon those standards being maintained, and also there has to be a recognition that there is a gap right now, and it comes back to the funding issue, of what the contractors are providing, will provide and are funded to provide, and the fact that we, as a local authority, currently step in and fill the gap between what is delivered and what is acceptable to us. We do that



willingly because we believe we have, frankly, a moral responsibility to do so, but it is a significant financial pressure on us.

Just to give one brief example on unaccompanied child refugees, in Glasgow we currently support 372, mainly through our care system. Two hundred and thirty of those were eligible for Home Office funding. The other 142 are not eligible, I think because they have presented for asylum in Glasgow and have not been dispersed to us through the scheme. We are reimbursed £1.67 million for the 230 who are eligible for funding, but we actually spent £4.26 million through care and support for those young people. We did that, but that is an enormous pressure when we already have pressure on those kinds of services to begin with.

Q7 Stuart C. McDonald: Finally, David Simmonds, Councillor Lawrence, do you want to say a little bit more about exactly what the implications are for local authority services and local authority finances of being dispersal authorities? What would you say in response to a Home Office argument that, for example, just the general funding formula for local authorities is enough to continue to do what they are doing?

Councillor Roger Lawrence: What we would like is to work jointly with the Home Office around exactly how we can demonstrate what those costs are and to get the Home Office to acknowledge that these costs are being incurred. I have indicated areas. Education. We are going to spend £36 million on school expansion at the moment. Clearly not all of that has anything to do with refugees but the small number of refugees does put extra pressure on many who are in really tight situations. We are quite anxious to work around showing people and the Treasury what the extra costs are so that we can get to a proper negotiation around what reimbursement we should have and what extra funding should be made available to us around that.

There are, as I said—health, education, environmental health—a number of other areas, but beyond that there are other public services that are going to have impact as well. Andy has talked about TEFL, English as a foreign language, and there is clearly some work to do around how we can help people who do receive getting the right to remain getting to employment, and getting them straight into employment, so we can do some preparatory work with people prior to that to provide that level of training. Again, that comes with a price tag.

Then there is the issue around homelessness and the impact of no recourse to public funds, which does cause me a real concern. The whole of that area is so complicated, and people with no recourse to public funds, as you know, can be moved from one authority to another area without the other authority even knowing about it. There is a particular case that I have in mind about that, which I will perhaps talk to you about.

Equally, there are other things that can happen. If I refer to Stoke-on-Trent again and the closure of Dallas Court, which was an asylum



reporting centre, the nearest reporting centre to Dallas Court in Stoke is Salford. I daresay Kate Green can tell you easy it is to get from Stoke-on-Trent to Salford. It is not easy at all. Some people are taking up to eight hours. They are failing to pick up the kids from school and have had all kinds of problems. Initially, there was no reimbursement to the people, so they are having to pay the costs as well. That was clearly quite unacceptable and something that we have taken up with the Home Office. Those sorts of decisions, again without any consultation, throw extra burdens on the receiving authorities.

Q8 Stuart C. McDonald: David Simmonds, you would agree that there is a lot of work to be done to try to assess exactly what—

Councillor David Simmonds CBE: Yes, I would agree with that. The first thing that is worth paying to attention to: the Home Office's argument has always been, "Extra residents equals extra council tax". A local authority typically would get around 40% of the funding of its revenue budget from council tax, so that by definition, therefore, means in each household you are going to be short of the funding for the other 60%, which covers things like education, as Roger has just highlighted.

Reputationally, the issue around no recourse to public funds is an earlier example of a significant cost, where the Home Office has decided somebody should not be here but they are still in that local authority area. On average, those people are likely to be supported by a local authority for two years, entirely without any financial support from the Home Office. On average, two-thirds of those people are then granted leave to remain. It is obvious as a local authority that you are going to see a significant number of costs shunted on to your budget as a consequence of being a dispersal area. It is also clear that most of those people will be granted the right to remain in the United Kingdom at the end of that process after you have incurred those costs.

Q9 Kate Green: David Simmonds, I think you mentioned earlier that 32 authorities were now offering to come on to the dispersal programme. In the light of what you have all said about the pressures and costs that authorities face, what has persuaded those authorities to do so?

Councillor David Simmonds CBE: There are a combination of factors. We have seen this play out in all of the different refugee schemes that operate. Roger has made a number of references to the Syrian resettlement scheme. Coventry gave the example of the fact that additional children coming in made local schools sustainable, so they saw that as a positive for their city.

We see that the way the current contracts operate is that they are bid into the Home Office on the basis of securing the cheapest possible accommodation in the cheapest parts of the country. While we see some parts of the country seeing enormous pressure on housing, there are other parts of the country where depopulation is a significant issue. There are local authorities that may well see the arrival of refugee families as



an opportunity to revitalise parts of that area that are struggling, where there is housing perhaps that is not being used, where there are schools that do not have enough children, where there are issues with recruiting workers, and the view that people will be settled and then in due course will stay and will have the right to work in those local areas. There is a positive, and I think that is why a number of local authorities are stepping up to the plate, in addition to, as Susan has outlined, the sense of moral responsibility that people may well feel.

- Q10 **Kate Green:** Is the approach that is taken between the Home Office and authorities to have that discussion sufficiently well designed to ensure that those factors can be the subject of negotiation or do you feel that it is still only going to reach a relatively small number of authorities?

Councillor David Simmonds CBE: I think the fact that, of the new authorities that have come forward, not one has had any accommodation procured within it by the Home Office's contractors tells you something about how that is operating.

- Q11 **Kate Green:** What, if any, are the dangers? This might be particularly for Andy Burnham. You have suggested that the Home Office might want to use its power to insist on authorities taking asylum-seekers in future. What are the dangers, and how do we address them, of dispersal programmes that leave people in communities that are completely ill-suited to support them, not just in the ways that you have described—lack of resources for education, for healthcare, for support and so on—but also in the sense that they could be isolated from community relationships that are really important to them?

Andy Burnham: Absolutely. I think this is unfair on people left in that position in, as I said, poor accommodation without that wider support to make connections with the community. It is just not fair to anybody. It does not work for anybody, as I say, except the Government.

The point about the other authorities that have come on board: the question is, why are they not then being activated in terms of dispersal? It is possibly because it is a cost-driven process, and it may be more expensive to take out the housing in some of those areas. This is what has to change. If this is looked at purely through driving down the cost, in the end you will have people saying, "This cannot lead to a process that is fair to anybody" and it will, therefore, collapse. The public support will not be there. The point is it has to be a balance. Yes, we understand the need for the Home Office to keep an eye on the cost, but it also has to look at the wider social consequences and the manageability of the levels of dispersal.

We welcome the Home Secretary's letter. It was a welcome letter to receive and hopefully it marks the change in tone, but the letter has to be translated now into a real discussion with us in advance of the signing of this contract. Otherwise, I repeat, we are not prepared to continue on the current basis.



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It is about health. It is about education. The Home Office needs to make sure its own processes are sharper so that it does not leave people in the position where they are unsupported. My own work on homelessness has shown me that there are maybe not big numbers, but there are people among the rough-sleeping population of Greater Manchester who have been left in this position, and that truly is now the community trying to find, with no funding, an answer for them. It just cannot be right. As Councillor Lawrence said, these are the authorities that have faced the biggest cuts. They face the biggest pressures. It just is not morally right to leave people who are trying to do the right in a position where they are unsupported in trying to do the right thing. The Government nationally needs a more moral approach to this whole issue.

Councillor David Simmonds CBE: Just on a policy point that may be of interest, the interplay with the local housing allowance is the critical factor I suspect here. The Government has long had a view that it wants to maintain that at a fairly suppressed level in order to limit the cost to the taxpayer of financing those properties. In Hillingdon, for example, there is no accommodation available at all below the local housing allowance limit. The nervousness that the Home Office and its contractors would have is that in areas where they might be wishing to procure accommodation that are in that same situation, they would then find themselves competing with the local authorities to secure accommodation to house the most vulnerable. Clearly, it would not be very welcome because that would then in turn further drive up the cost to the taxpayer of securing that accommodation where it is in short supply.

Q12 **Kate Green:** What is your suggestion for remedying that?

Councillor David Simmonds CBE: I think personally we need to have a good look at the local housing allowance and the way that that operates. There are options that include significantly more funding within the system. It is not the case that contractors are trying to place people in Kensington and Chelsea, and Kensington and Chelsea is saying, "We don't want them". It is simply the case that there is no way within the financial envelope of the contracts you could possibly consider placing people other than in the lowest possible housing cost areas in the UK.

Q13 **Kate Green:** My final question, if I may, is to ask about the ratios. I think the Home Office is indicating now that it is prepared to have another look at the existing ratios. What would you like to see, not just in terms of what the number should be, but what should be the approach to setting ratios?

Councillor David Simmonds CBE: Mayor Burnham may have more to say about this, but one of the things that is very striking in the LGA research is not so much that the total number within a dispersal area breaches the ratio, but in very specific places there are grossly disproportionate numbers. I think one to 19 was the figure that was quoted from Middlesbrough, for example, which is just an overwhelmingly large number for a local authority to have to deal with. While the wider



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regional figure might well meet that, it would be helpful to consider either having a maximum for a perhaps ward-level number of people being dispersed, or to have a more functional means whereby local authorities can say, "This is just too many people that are being placed in a specific street or specific area of a town, and that is creating a specific set of issues".

Q14 **Kate Green:** That, presumably, requires you to be more involved in the procurement and governance.

Andy Burnham: Just very quickly, if I may, the north-west as a whole accommodates 25% of all asylum-seekers and has done over a considerable period of time. Within that, Greater Manchester accommodates 70% of that quarter of all. In the end, that means 20% of the entire population is accommodated within Greater Manchester. What does it mean to look again at the ratios? I would say it is a fairness across all English regions and the devolved nations. You are hearing here a willingness to continue to play our part, but done in the right way that is then fair to all parts of the country.

We had an announcement from the Government last week when it comes to housing that 80% of infrastructure funding for housing is going to go to the areas where the affordability issues are greatest. A huge amount of public money is being thrown at London and the south-east, and then this approach to this issue. The unfairness of those two things is huge. We are not getting help to develop our housing market. We have the Home Office then coming in and it feels like taking Greater Manchester for granted in terms of what it thinks we will carry on doing. It just is not fair. All regions need to play their part, everyone accepting that it is a national responsibility. Even if that means that the cost goes up because the cost of housing in other parts of the country is greater, that should be done because it is a national effort to, as a country, continue our tradition of welcoming people and giving them safe haven.

Councillor Susan Aitken: Glasgow already has considerably more asylum-seekers than our ratio would suggest. According to the strict ratio, we should be able to sustain around 3,000. We currently have well over 4,000, in fact heading towards 5,000. It is not the numbers that are the problem. It is the resource to sustain an acceptable level of service and an effective outcome for communities, and that is where the pressure comes.

Just to briefly touch on the point about other local authorities, folk have already picked up on the Syrian resettlement scheme. It is not a direct analogy but there are a lot of lessons to be learned from that model. I would just point out that Glasgow is the only asylum dispersal authority in Scotland. Other authorities have looked at it with some interest as this new contract came in, Edinburgh in particular and a couple of others, about their experience of first of all seeing what Glasgow has to deal with, but their experience of attempting to make a public sector expression of interest put them off, I think it is fair to say.



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For the Syrian resettlement scheme, 31 out of 32 Scottish local authorities took part in that, and very successfully. Shetland, Argyll and Bute, island communities, welcomed refugees into their communities. There are challenges involved in that undoubtedly, but those were authorities that did not have an existing asylum and refugee infrastructure, but they were funded and resourced to be able to support those families coming into their communities, and by and large have done so very successfully. There is a lesson there definitely. Within all of the nations there should be as much equity as possible, as communities are able to sustain, but it has to be resourced. It has to be properly resourced. If it is not resourced to the extent where we can genuinely deliver good outcomes for people in communities, then it will just undermine the entire project.

Q15 John Woodcock: That is useful, Councillor. Could you or others explain a bit more about the lessons to be learned? What are the chief differences in the scheme? What would you like to see transferred over into the main asylum assistance scheme?

Councillor Susan Aitken: Recognising that there is a cost to local authorities, that local authorities put their own resource into this. Colleagues have all mentioned different areas of service. For some authorities it will impact more on education. Perhaps education will be the biggest area. For others it will be housing. For us in Glasgow it is our homelessness service. Mayor Burnham mentioned homelessness in Manchester. We know that around 10% of our homelessness register is made up of primarily asylum-seekers with no recourse to public funds, who have been made destitute. We already have, as cities tend to, a significant homelessness challenge. Undoubtedly that exacerbates it, and we use our resource to respond to that.

Equally, when people receive a positive outcome and they go through the process and are given leave to remain or given refugee status, they immediately come on to our homelessness register. It is our job then. They are out of Serco accommodation. They are out of asylum accommodation, and quickly. They come on to our homelessness register and we find them accommodation. We are very good at accommodating them, but the more that are, and indeed the less engagement there is, the more difficult that is. It is just recognising that we step into the breach.

If the interest is genuine, if what the Home Office wants and what the Government want is genuinely to get the best outcomes for people who have come here, who are given leave to remain, then they need to recognise they cannot do that without local authorities. It is local authority services, education, care, housing. It is those services that will help to build the community cohesion that will help people to then become productive members of our society. That has to be properly resourced.



The other big difference—and there is not a direct read-across—is of course that Syrian families who came here had refugee status to begin with so they were able to work to support themselves towards economic independence, to be productive contributors to the communities that they have become part of. If there is one thing—and this has been a position of my party for a very long time now—allow asylum-seekers to work. It is completely counterproductive to community cohesion, to our resources collectively, both nationally and at local level, that those asylum-seekers who are able to make a contribution to have at least a modicum of financial independence while they go through the process are barred from doing so.

Q16 **John Woodcock:** Given the scale, Mr Mayor, that you—

Andy Burnham: I will get used to it.

John Woodcock: Yes. It is like being back in the 2015 leadership campaign. Given the scale that Manchester holds and the other main cities, you are making this threat to withdraw in the knowledge that, if you did, it would collapse the system.

Andy Burnham: We are already facing unprecedented pressure on our public services, so we cannot just sit here and say, “It is all fine”, because it is not. It is not fair to anybody, as I have said.

I have an interesting perspective on it because I was the Home Office Minister with responsibility for dispersal going back to 2005, not 2015, even 10 years before that. I am not saying we had it perfect because we did not, and your colleagues will remember the controversy around the whole policy in that area. I do remember having ministerial responsibility for a refugee integration budget that was given to support high-dispersal areas.

The cutting of funding for English as a second language particularly is raised regularly with me by groups supporting asylum-seekers, and indeed asylum-seekers and refugees themselves. Working is one thing, but if you have not even been given that ability to learn the language—this is a policy that is just wrong. It is set up to fail on every level.

From my point of view, there is something here about the arrogance of central government in terms of how it treats local government. I think the Home Office particularly has not done well in this space over many years: this idea that you can just dump things on people. That is so much of what is wrong with our political culture in this country.

The local authorities here are doing a really difficult job in trying to make this work for the country, in fact. They are stepping forward and they are trying to make this work. Let’s remember, out of 326 English authorities, only 207 do not do this. There are a small group of authorities, about 120, who are stepping forward to do this for everybody, and they are just not treated in a way that is right. It does say something about the culture of Westminster, of Government, and particularly of the Home Office in



the way that they think. I see it with new eyes now, obviously in the position that I am in at the moment.

I remember as a Minister, when we were launching the UN gateway scheme, ringing around local authorities to try to persuade them to see if they would take part. We have had to do that ourselves as Greater Manchester in the north-west. We have had to try to make those connections to persuade other local authorities to join in. It is like we are doing the Home Office's job for it and it is really not right and not acceptable.

Q17 John Woodcock: Can I ask you if you have had a chance to read today the report of the independent chief inspector on asylum accommodation? You could be forgiven for answering no because it was released by the Home Office at 2.15 pm, at the precise moment that this session started, which I think does tell you something about its attitude to this.

I am just going to briefly put to you some of the findings in that report. The inspector describes a system that is wholly inadequate, which does not look after vulnerable people, which has no systematic record of pregnant and post-partum women within it, and relies too much on spot checks with no adequate reinspection of accommodation. Is that something that bears true for your own areas?

Councillor Roger Lawrence: As you say, this report came out about 15 minutes or so before we came into the room. The first analysis I got on that report was, "This is a report that will please nobody", neither the Home Office or local authorities. It is difficult to say exactly but I am sure that we would be happy to give you a fuller feedback when we have had a chance to digest the report in detail.

Councillor David Simmonds CBE: It is probably worth saying just in response to Mr Woodcock's question about what would be better. How would this compare with, say, the Syrian scheme and the significance of what you have just said?

The Syrian scheme was based on a completely different approach, where the Home Office essentially said to local authorities, "What capacity can you offer?" That secured a very, very wide range of participation. There was also clear understanding that the funding level would be not great but getting towards sufficient, and the strength of that scheme is it avoids the kinds of problems that you have just described. I would not claim that all accommodation that is procured through a local authority is marvellous, but it will meet the minimum standards that as a society we expect: that there will be hot water, there will be functional heating, there will be an appropriate level of security, it will be safe for families with children. The kinds of concerns that we have had fed back about the accommodation that was procured through the asylum dispersal contracts is that in too many cases the standard is unacceptably poor.



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Councillor Roger Lawrence: I want to just give you one example of that. Under the new contract, we understand that some of the potential contractors were looking to override local regulations that prevented unrelated people sharing a room. In other words, they could put two unrelated people in a room. That is not acceptable to us as a way forward. We have no idea where those people may come from. They may come countries or groups that are antagonistic back home. It is this lack of information that we have, and the fact that we have not even seen the contracts yet and any dispersal plans.

That strategic engagement has to be picked up by the Home Office. We are up for that. We want to see what is going on. We want to talk about what its contingency and dispersal plans are. We want to talk about what levels of minimum standards we ought to be setting. We ought to be looking at making sure that policy is aligned with local authority policy so that there are not mismatches like there are with, for example, the 28 days that people have to get out of accommodation when they are given leave to remain, and the 56 days under the new Homelessness Reduction Act.

Q18 **Chair:** Given that this report was published, giving you hardly you any time to read it before and certainly us hardly any time to read it in order to ask you about it, would it surprise you to know that the inspector gave it to the Home Office on 9 July?

Councillor Susan Aitken: A little bit, yes.

Q19 **Alex Norris:** Just a couple of bits to pick up on what has been said already. Councillor David Simmonds, we know that a year ago the Home Office started this procurement process. We know that the history and the baggage will have made that a sensitive one for it. In the year to date, what level of engagement has there been with you?

Councillor David Simmonds CBE: A wholly inadequate level of engagement. The Home Office has made some, in my view, fairly minimal efforts to reach out. I think most of us on the panel probably will have had experience of significant public procurement processes and will be absolutely aware that from the outset you can build in a number of different elements to ensure that stakeholders' views are properly taken into account. You can have stakeholder panels as part of the assessment process. You can have stakeholder panels as part of the interview process for people who are bidding. You can have stakeholder assessments, including anonymised assessment of the bids. None of that has happened, and in fact what appears to have happened is essentially a rerun of the previous contracting process. That leaves us with a very low level of confidence.

I mentioned aspirations in the letter. There is mention that there will be, by inference, additional resource. I suspect the Home Office will have struggled to find, given previous problems it had with the contract, bidders willing to bid at the same or lower rate, so I suspect it will have



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been compelled to put additional money in simply to find any bidders at all. We do not have any real oversight of what is in those contracts.

What we are looking at now—and we have had discussions with Caroline Nokes, the Minister, about this—is that there needs, as a minimum, to be local authority involvement both at a regional and a national level in the oversight of the operation of those contracts. Then at least there is an opportunity, both in a strategic sense and then in a very specific local and technical sense, to get the issues that we were just talking about ironed out before they become so reputationally damaging to those contracts that local authorities simply start withdrawing in droves.

- Q20 **Alex Norris:** The characterisation there of basically just doing the same process again—we heard from Susan Aitken an alternative model where a local authority was keen on taking it on itself. Have you, through your LGA board, picked up other models or a sense that other councils would have done similar, given the chance?

Councillor David Simmonds CBE: Yes. The experience that we had working with the Home Office in respect of the Syrian system built a sense of confidence that at official level, both in local government and in the Home Office, there was a different way of approaching this whole issue that was more functional and more effective. Therefore, there was a degree of optimism before the start of this procurement process that we would see those better behaviours replicated in the way the Home Office approached it. Sadly, that has not been the case. It feels like it has reverted to type, essentially saying, “How can we do this as cheaply as possible and then shunt any consequent costs on to local government?”

That clearly is hugely undermining confidence. It is having a knock-on impact on things like the operation of the National Transfer Scheme for asylum-seeking children. Therefore, it is in my view absolutely critical that the aspirations that we see about greater involvement with these contracts turn into specific commitments that ensure appropriate local authority oversight at a local level and at a more regional and more strategic national level. Otherwise, this is going to become an incredibly problematic system very quickly, in my view.

- Q21 **Alex Norris:** Disappointment can often be deepened or worsened, whatever the right word is, if it is preceded by optimism and goodwill. Is there a danger, therefore, that because this will look a very pale imitation of the scheme for Syrians, that it might be more off-putting for authorities to put their hands up and say they want to contribute?

Councillor David Simmonds CBE: I will give you an example. The Home Office has been undertaking a review of the funding it provides for the National Transfer Scheme for refugee children, as a result of which I think we now have confirmation that there will not be any additional resource, which means the one major barrier to more local authorities participating will remain in place. By inference I would assume, because they have to put extra money into making the asylum dispersal contracts



work, they probably have less room to manoeuvre when it comes to the budget for supporting children. That then means you have local authorities that are willing in principle to be active in both of those areas, who have a proven track record, particularly in respect of the Syrian scheme, of making it work very effectively and without any of the community tensions that we are concerned about, who are saying in both cases there are now significant barriers to further participation being put in place.

Alex Norris: Thank you.

Andy Burnham: May I come in very quickly? It is such an important point that is being made. What is the difference between the two? There was a lot of political engagement, was there not, with the Syrian scheme? This Committee and the Chair had a very big role in making that be done in the right way because of the public concerns around it, and it felt to me like politicians were very engaged. I say this without making any party-political point: what we have here and what we have seen today feels like the Home Office at its worst, at its historical worst. It is very top-down, “We will decide and just drop it on whoever”. It feels as though—maybe because of the political context in which everyone is operating now—politicians have not been engaged.

I have met the Immigration Minister and it was a really good discussion, but then nothing changed. As I say, I have had a letter from the Home Secretary overnight. When the politicians engage, it feels to me as though they get what we are saying. What we have not had yet is the translation of that recognition into the way this thing is moving. I do not know if other colleagues on the panel think that is a fair summary of what seems to have happened.

This juggernaut is getting closer and closer now to being fully off and running. The big worry for me is that they are talking about a 10-year contract or a seven-year review. My goodness. If you look ahead to all of the uncertainties that the next seven years hold, if we are locked into this for seven years, it is why we are sending that signal that we are not prepared to sign up on the basis that this is just rolling over what is currently done. That is how it seems to me, having been in the Home Office once upon a time, having observed it and seen how it operates. I think there has been a lack of ministerial engagement. When they do engage you get good noises but we are weeks away from this thing being signed, aren't we? It is very hard to see, from where we sit today, how they are going to turn some of these political statements into something that is reflected in the contract.

Q22 **Alex Norris:** Leading on from that and finally from me, Chair, you mentioned at the beginning, Andy Burnham, that there had been no meaningful engagement but obviously the letter was a good sign in there somewhere. If, say, this Committee was meeting the Immigration Minister tomorrow, what would you want to see on the record as commitments from a Minister to know that beyond the rhetoric and



perhaps some growing goodwill, there might be enough action in time to give you the confidence to want to remain in the system?

Andy Burnham: I appreciated the meeting with her and I appreciate the letter from the Home Secretary. They seem to get it. Turn what they have said to us into something tangible now in terms of the way this thing is going to work from here on in.

I just come back to this point. For me, it goes to the heart of this country and the way that it works, the consent between national and local Government to work in a certain way. The reality is many of the places that are most affected voted leave in the referendum because they felt that Westminster does not listen to them, that it takes them for granted. They feel as though the system does not see what is going on and respond properly to what is going on.

For me, what I would say to the Government as a whole is that there has to be change in the way this country works with areas, particularly those more deprived parts of the country that often were former industrial areas that have seen decline in recent years. There has to be a real engagement with what life is like in those communities and a commitment to fairness because those places are also the most welcoming parts of the country, warm people who have welcomed many asylum seekers into those communities and done it very successfully. Contrary to what people might think, they are the warmest of people anywhere. Please do not take them for granted because that is to repeat the mistake that has led to us being a very divided country right now.

Q23 **Alex Norris:** The rest of the panel?

Councillor David Simmonds CBE: Specific things. We need to see representation from local government at the National Project Board and in the regional programme boards as well. We have a tentative agreement around some official level of engagement but I think when it comes to the oversight throughout the life of the contract, again there needs to be a national and a regional level, an appropriate level of local authority oversight built into the system. There will then be, I think, a number of asks that we can certainly write to you about, particularly around the sharing of data so that local authorities know what is coming their way and are able better to plan for that.

There is one other final fact that is worth mentioning. Mandating has been referred to. Others on the panel have mentioned the Home Office potentially going down that route. Again, it would be helpful to ask the question and explore that a little bit further because of the implications of mandating are, yes, the Home Office does have powers to direct that people will be placed in a particular local authority. The issue they have at the moment is that either that means they will mandate authorities who do not wish to continue to participate because of the overwhelming burden they are facing and simply tell them, "Well, tough. You are going to have to do it and you are going to have to take more", or they will



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need to break their own financial limits by sending people to local authorities that they are not currently using because they fall outside of that financial envelope. Mandating is a lose/lose option from the perspective of the Home Office but I think it has become a bit of a myth that there is a solution to this that lies in that direction, and in my view there simply is not.

Councillor Roger Lawrence: From my point of view I just want to see this letter to David, which is full of aspirations, turned into firm commitments.

Councillor Susan Aitken: I would go further than oversight. I think that local authorities have to design the contract, essentially, or certainly co-produce the contract. The sense is that it's just a repeat of what has happened. The problems, the mistakes of the past 10 years have been this hard border between asylum accommodation here, and local authorities and local authority services over there. That is the problem. It should not just be an accommodation contract, it should be an asylum services contract. The accommodation just on its own is not going to get the outcomes for anybody, not for individual asylum seekers, not for families, not for communities or for wider areas. It has to be co-produced.

I do not know if the ship of local authorities returning to running this themselves has sailed—I suspect it has—but I still think that is the best way to do it. Let us run our own asylum seeker accommodation, which is part of a wider service provision. I think that ship has sailed. The Home Office and the Government seem to be ideologically committed to this continuing to be delivered by private providers. At the very least then, there has to be not just continued oversight but—before we get to the point of oversight of the implementation—actual co-design and the direct involvement of local authorities in the design of their local contracts. Not a standard contract, their local contracts, because we are the people who know what is actually happening in our communities and what the sustainability of different parts of our own authorities are for supporting different numbers of people.

Andy Burnham: Just very briefly to echo that, that is a clear thing the Minister could say tomorrow. Commit to sharing this contract with us before it is signed. Let us see it and have a discussion about it before it is set in stone. That is a really simple thing she could give to us tomorrow.

Councillor Susan Aitken: Just very quickly, we had a very constructive meeting with the Minister in July and I think we have made a bit of progress from there, not as much as we would like, but it came about because of a crisis. It came about because we in Glasgow went tonto at them. We were like, "You are kidding. You are going to put 300 people on our streets?" The public of Glasgow reacted in revulsion to that. We should not have to be in a situation where we only get progress because



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something horrendous is about to happen. It has been our experience recently that it has only come about because of something like that.

- Q24 **Chair:** Can I follow on, just on that particular point? The letter we have had from the Minister or the copy to Councillor Simmonds, which I assume looks very similar to the one I think you have had as well, Mayor Burnham, refers to, “the issues around the control of people to places”. “We are happy to work with you nationally and regionally and develop typologies of case that allow us to factor in pressures on particular services in deciding which types of people should be allocated to which area.” Now, that could mean quite a wide range of different things. It could mean they are just going to have a discussion with you at the beginning and come up with a few broad typologies that will be built into the contract, over which you will have no say again at any point. It sounds to me like what you are saying is that you want much greater continual involvement about where accommodation should be within your communities, not simply an in-principle vague discussion about the contract at the beginning but continued involvement. Is that fair?

Councillor Susan Aitken: Yes, absolutely.

- Q25 **Chair:** We recommended in our report that what we should be moving towards is the complete devolution of commissioning to maybe consortiums of local authorities, regional strategic partnerships or similar. The commissioning itself should be devolved, accepting the challenges of the timescale at the moment and so on. Is that something that you would like to see and that you would support?

Andy Burnham: From my point of view, we obviously have a devolution agreement with the Government where we are increasingly running a whole range of public services and we are doing so in a way that maximises collaboration between those services, where we have one discussion in the same room and we have teams at a local level that are co-located. To have this, which is its own little silo that does not connect at all to that discussion we were having around young people who need support, care leavers and homelessness we have touched on—we are having a different discussion about all of those issues and coming up with better bottom-up solutions, working with voluntary sector partners. To have this in its own little silo, completely outside of that whole place-based approach to public service delivery, just does not make sense.

To answer your question, Chair, yes, I believe Greater Manchester should have a contract with the Home Office where we would—in many ways as Councillor Aitken is saying—agree with them at what level we need to be funded and how many people that would support. We believe we would then do a much better job of supporting those people in those communities, linking into the wider place-based approach we have to public service reform.

Councillor David Simmonds CBE: But the funding question is absolutely critical. Our experience of the national transfer scheme and



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Syrian scheme in counterpoint with each other demonstrates that local authorities do this extremely well if it is properly resourced. If you simply dump the problem, as the Home Office currently has, at our door then I suspect you will see a replication of some of the same problems.

- Q26 **Chair:** Just on that funding issue, given that presumably if asylum seekers were able to work that might mean that many would be able to support themselves as well and might also ease some of the funding pressures. Is that something that you would support in your communities? Councillor Aitken, you have already answered that.

Councillor Susan Aitken: Absolutely, yes.

Councillor David Simmonds CBE: There is a huge logic to it. Why should the taxpayer cover people's living costs when people can earn their own livings using skills that they have that they bring to this country?

Councillor Susan Aitken: It does not cancel out the need for our services because people still have vulnerabilities. These are families that may well require additional support, but we have families in our communities already who work and can support themselves up to a point but still need additional support or have to claim in-work benefits, for example. It would certainly reset the way that we think about asylum seekers and the way that communities are able to think about asylum seekers and the impact that they have on resources.

- Q27 **Chair:** In terms of the quality issues and the compliance issues, again going through today's report, which you will not have had a chance to see—some of the figures that John Woodcock already referred to—they show 24% compliant, 43% not fit for purpose. Those are the samples.

Andy Burnham: That is scandalous.

- Q28 **Chair:** It is quite shocking. What I am interested in is: would you like to have a stronger involvement in that contract compliance or inspections, or not?

Andy Burnham: Absolutely.

- Q29 **Chair:** When we raised this again with the Home Office in our previous report they said local authorities do not want any further involvement in the compliance and standards assessment issues.

Andy Burnham: Who did they ask?

Councillor David Simmonds CBE: I suspect that that may be, "No further unfunded responsibilities in those respects". We already undertake this work anyway for our local housing stock so it is not a big ask. The people who already do that work could extend their remit into this particular territory. The concern clearly is that has a cost attached to it and we need to make sure it is done to the appropriate standard.



Andy Burnham: We would say joint oversight and then independent evaluation of contract compliance going forward, not done by the Home Office or us but somebody else outside.

Yes, is it not frankly scandalous that people who have been through unimaginable—whatever their journey, it undoubtedly involves personal trauma and separation of one kind or another. How can it be right to allow public money to be used in a way that is basically profiteering, really, because it is not providing what it says in the contract? It is not right to leave people in those conditions but it is also a waste of taxpayer's money, isn't it, because it is not giving them the standards that we should expect? What does it say about our country that we allow that, that we leave people in that position given everything that they have been through?

It is a shocking state of affairs but it, for me, makes the point again that you cannot manage these things top-down from a million miles away in Whitehall. You will get better provision if you allow that local oversight of what has been done and you allow local authorities to make the connection between landlords who may be providing accommodation for that purpose but also for other purposes as well. Leverage can be used then to get a raising of standards.

Q30 **Chair:** Just a final question. Tomorrow is the anniversary of the debate in Parliament on the Kindertransport. It is the 80th anniversary of the parliamentary debate so we have said to the Immigration Minister we will also raise with her the provision for unaccompanied child refugees and child refugees more widely. We took evidence at an earlier stage about particularly the Dubs scheme and also some of the wider support, at a time when there was a lot of support from local authorities coming forward to offer places.

Thank you, Councillor Lawrence. We are aware that you have a deadline to leave.

Local authorities were saying that they wanted to come forward and to offer places, particularly for the Dubs child refugees, but that a lot of those places were not, in the end, filled, and the Home Office did not seem to be responding and making sure that that support from the communities and local authorities was actually being delivered on in practice. Has that been your experience? If so, what more do you think needs to be done in terms of helping child refugees?

Councillor David Simmonds CBE: It is probably helpful to say in respect of Dubs and child refugees generally, it is hard to make a distinction that says, "You will take a Dubs child but you will not take another type of child refugee". That has certainly been a significant issue. Local authorities are very clear that there is some latent capacity to take additional child refugees and very clear with the Home Office what the cost implications of that would be. On average it is £50,000 a year to support a child in care, £133,000 on average if a child needs a residential



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care placement because of the trauma that they have suffered, and the Home Office funding tops out around £28,000. We know that the arrival rate of young refugees doubled following the 2015 refugee crisis. It has remained at a high level but it is showing signs of beginning to stabilise.

I do quite a lot of work with our counterparts in other European countries. The EU was in chaos in 2015 and the situation has stabilised quite significantly since then. Countries like Greece and Italy that are on the front line of this, although it remains an issue for them, are far more organised, they are far more engaged with NGOs and they are far more engaged with the international system in managing that situation. The number of child refugees that were presenting in 2015 across Europe, in a situation where there was essentially no care being provided, has significantly reduced. In general terms we have to see that as a positive but clearly the challenge remains in the UK that the national transfer scheme is beginning to gum up because of the lack of funding. The amount of time it is taking for transfers to take place is simply too long. Our local authorities are now beginning to say, "We just cannot sustain this any longer with the current level of funding so we are not going to do it".

Councillor Susan Aitken: It is certainly not our experience in Glasgow that places have not been taken up. I think every place we have available is taken up at least once over. As I said earlier, we have certainly close to 400 child refugees from various sources at any given time. Some of those are unaccompanied asylum seekers. We also have children and young people who have been trafficked, for example, and are looked after in an accommodated system. There are significant numbers and they receive the same level of care and support as any other child in Scotland. The law is that a looked-after and accommodated young person is entitled to support until they are 26 and any refugee or asylum-seeking child would receive exactly that same service from us if that was what they wanted.

Andy Burnham: Our experience is similar to the story with the wider issue. The tariffs paid by the Home Office do not fully meet the cost and particularly there can be significantly extra costs when it comes to the safeguarding of children. From the North West Directors of Children's Services point of view, we have an in principle commitment and we do not differentiate between the Dubs scheme and other routes for unaccompanied children. We have an in principle commitment but at this stage we are unable to join because we do not believe the tariffs fully recover the costs. There is a review ongoing, I am told, of the tariffs, but that has not yet concluded.

Councillor David Simmonds CBE: I think that review probably has concluded just about. This is the one I was referring to earlier on, where it feels like the additional resource that is needed to go into the dispersal programme has probably meant there will be nothing additional announced around children. I just have a particularly relevant figure for the Committee. The vast majority of young refugees have been aged 16



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or 17, but in England we have seen a rise from 4,660 unaccompanied child care leavers—people who have moved into adulthood being looked after—to now 7,130. For that older age group the funding rate is particularly problematic and of course for most local authorities that are committing to take child refugees the implications of taking in a 17 year-old is that the inadequate funding rate that you receive straight away will very rapidly return to an even more inadequate funding rate once they get to their 18th birthday.

- Q31 **Chair:** Thank you. I would like to thank all of our panellists for giving the evidence today. Overall then it sounds like it would be fair to say there is still continued strong willingness from local authorities and from communities across the country for us to do our bit to help those fleeing persecution, fleeing conflict, those who are asylum seekers and those who are refugees, but there needs to be proper funding and there also needs to be an effective Home Office system that works to support communities to make sure that that generosity and that commitment can be nurtured. Thank you very much. We will look forward to putting these questions to the Immigration Minister tomorrow.