

Dr Carolyn Wilkins
Chief Executive
Oldham MBC
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Civic Centre
West Street
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29 January 2016

Dear Carolyn

Many thanks for your letter outlining your Council's recent motion on the situation with regards to asylum seekers within your communities. Councils have an important role in protecting families, children and vulnerable adults who are seeking asylum and supporting refugees to resettle in the UK. We are very much aware however that Councils have to consider how they can use their resources effectively, particularly on the currently unfunded provision of support for destitute asylum seekers.

As you may be aware, the Local Government Association has a cross-party Task Group on Asylum, Refugees and Migration. This is the only national, member-led group that discusses these issues as they impact on local government across the country. The Task Group has representatives from across the UK, including your own region.

Local authorities' support for those at risk of destitution is a key issue that is frequently discussed at the Task Group. In turn, we have been having ongoing discussions with central government on the significant cost implications of supporting this vulnerable group of people in our communities.

I am sure the outcome of any discussion within your authority and region could be fed back to the LGA Task Group to further inform its ongoing discussion of this issue. I cc-in the regional representative for your region on the Task Group at an officer level for this purpose, who is also the lead for the region's Strategic Migration Partnership.

The member and officer representation on the LGA Task Group is derived from the Strategic Migration Partnership in each region. These partnerships also offer a unique and crucial mechanism for both Councillors and officers to discuss the issues you raise, to agree possible joint approaches and to inform the national debate on support for asylum seekers and refugees.

The concerns you raise in your letter do very much mirror concerns raised elsewhere and we have fed in these views both with Ministers and officials. As part of ongoing discussions on Immigration Bill, which have led to amendments that have mitigated some of the potential cost pressures on Councils, we have welcomed the commitment to a new burdens assessment of impact on local authorities of the changes to the asylum support system as set out in the Bill.

We also have been calling on the Home Office to progress applications effectively and expediently, and for engagement in the voluntary returns process to be secured to minimise the cost burden being placed on the local communities. We have also secured funding over five years for Syrian refugee resettlement.

Whilst Jim McMahon was at the LGA he was very clear about the volume of cases your region has to support, and we are therefore very aware of the very specific pressures your region and authority are facing. Support for asylum seekers and refugees is likely to remain complex and we very much welcome the views from your authority on how this best be approached locally, regionally and nationally.

The LGA colleague leading this work is Sally Burlington sally.burlington@local.gov.uk and she would be happy to discuss the LGA's leadership on these issues with your colleagues. I'm looking forward to meeting North West Chief Executive colleagues on 18th March and perhaps we can also discuss this important issue then?

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Lloyd". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Mark Lloyd
Chief Executive
Local Government Association

Cc Katy Wood, North West Regional Strategic Migration Partnership