Horizon scanning for the migration sector in Yorkshire and Humber

Summary

- National picture: PM promise to ‘stop small boats’; new immigration Bill(s) on illegal entry to the UK and removals; legal rulings on Rwanda policy; Housing Fund to be implemented.
- Elections: North Yorkshire becomes one council. Voting now requires photo ID.
- Asylum: Target to address the backlog by the end of 2023 with implications for local support following rapid decision making. Continued search for alternative accommodation options for new arrivals. New areas accommodating asylum seekers. Rollout of Nationality and Borders Act provisions.
- Children: Pilot offering enhanced funding for placements ended. Widespread pressure to end the use of hotels for children.No clear resolution to the question of accurate age assessment.

- Resettlement: Plans to introduce an annual quota. Councils may struggle to advise on capacity in advance.
- Ukraine: Increasing challenge to prevent homelessness and identify Homes for Ukraine hosts.
- Afghans: Expectations to identify housing and work opportunities for this group.
- Hong Kong: Falling arrivals and funding, short-term rise in young people applying independently.
- EU nationals: The EU settlement scheme (EUSS) process may change as people transfer from pre-settled to settled status. New arrivals continue to make late applications. Existing EU residents will bring dependant family members.
- Modern slavery: Increasingly restrictive process (reduced cooling off period, higher threshold for decision makers).
- Cohesion: Continued pressure on local areas, various celebratory events are planned.

The national picture

1. Prime Minister Sunak made several immigration announcements recently:

- Fifth of his five promises in January 2023 was: ‘we will pass new laws to stop small boats, making sure that if you come to this country illegally, you are detained and swiftly removed’ – building on the promise of ‘new legislation to make it unambiguously clear that, if you enter the UK illegally, you should not be able to remain here’ – which he

later described as the ‘Stop the Boats Bill’ and now formally introduced to Parliament as the ‘Illegal Migration Bill’. This includes restricting the opportunity to use human rights legislation to prevent forced removal. Without an alternative route to the UK, some commentators have doubted how small boats can be stopped.
- He committed to reducing net migration. He has yet to set out a position on skilled workers (the Migration Advisory Committee review of shortage occupation list is on hold while government determines priorities around skilled work) but likely to increase the minimum income requirement for skilled workers and students to keep up with inflation.

2. Other plans in the pipeline include:

    - There will be an appeal of the High Court Rwanda ruling that the scheme is lawful, but also a ruling by the European Court on Human Rights on the policy by the end of the year. There will be efforts by government to start flights amid speculation about the relationship between the UK and the European Convention on Human Rights.
    - A new cross-government ministerial taskforce on immigration enforcement will have a focus on illegal working
    - A proposed amendment to the Online Safety Bill would ban broadcasting videos showing the arrival of Channel migrants ‘in a positive light’
    - Defra’s cap on seasonal workers in horticulture will rise in 2023 (from 30,000 to 45,000 and potentially more)

(seasonal workers are not included in net migration figures)
- New Permission to Travel requirement for people planning to travel to the UK, non-visa nationals requiring an Electronic Travel Authorisation, applied first to Middle Eastern countries.
- A Consolidation Bill for immigration law is being worked on by the Law Commission, but it is not known if or when it will be introduced to Parliament

3. Planning will begin for using the £500 million Housing fund from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (for selected councils struggling with housing pressures following arrivals from Afghanistan and Ukraine) although some eligible councils could struggle to identify their own funding contribution and there are concerns about the pressure this might create on places with cheaper housing.

Elections

4. On 1 April North Yorkshire becomes one single council: North Yorkshire Council, replacing the county council and seven district councils. It'll be the geographically largest council in England.

5. Local elections are set for 4 May. 12 council areas in our region will have them. These will be the first elections to require photo identification – note there are official resources aimed at supporting certain groups to get photo ID for this including Roma

communities.

6. The next General Election is expected in 2024 (at least by January 2025).

Asylum and new refugees

7. Sunak expects the Home Office to address the backlog of initial asylum decisions by the end of 2023 for 'legacy claims' (lodged before 28 June 2022). This will involve speeding up decision making (more caseworkers, shorter guidance, fewer interviews and less paperwork as well as increased capacity at the immigration tribunal), introduction of a 'fast track' process for the nationalities with highest grant rates, 'most' Albanian claims to be deemed 'clearly unfounded' with a specialist unit for these cases.

8. There'll be a continued search for alternative accommodation options for new arrivals, with government suggesting holiday parks, former student accommodation and military sites and likely continued local resistance to hotels and alternative sites.

9. Implications for local areas if decisions are made more quickly include:

- The quality of decisions may be an issue, particularly with legal aid paucity to challenge negative decisions (the Ministry of Justice review of civil legal aid provision will

conclude in 2024 – see the terms of reference)

- Increasing numbers of positive decisions will add further pressure on councils and support organisations
- Recent changes to homelessness legislation may increase placements of people outside the local authority area - making it more difficult to know where people are and meet their needs. Further, new refugees may be in temporary accommodation for a longer time than previously.

- Even as people move out of accommodation, there will be a need to continue to use it for other asylum seekers arriving in the UK or presently in the contingency estate, at least in the short term. This churn will mean a continued need for support such as health screening, children into schools, and orientation.

10. New areas will begin accommodating asylum seekers due to rollout of ‘full dispersal’ (announced last year).

11. Implementation of aspects of the Nationality and Borders Act, such as differentiation between groups of refugees, introducing temporary protection for those who arrived ‘illegally’ and more limited rights and eligibility for support.

Children

12. In relation to unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC), the pilot to offer enhanced funding for placements ended in February, so there may be an announcement about future initiatives. There's no doubt there is public pressure to end the use of hotels, particularly for children with the debate about children going missing.

13. On age disputes:

- A definitive resolution to the question of accurate age assessment is unlikely. The interim Age Estimation Science Advisory Committee (AESAC) published its evaluation of scientific methodologies for assessing age and said biological assessments should consider whether the age claimed by the young person is 'possible'.
- The introduction of the National Age Assessment Board is underway but not yet operating nationally.
- There will be continued unpredictability locally about how many children in adult accommodation in hotels will dispute their age and require local authority involvement.

14. We understand that for some children in families, incorrect dates of birth on their paperwork are having impacts on appropriate school placements and health treatment, for example.

15. It was thought that the Home Office may amend legislation so that it can act as the legal 'corporate parent' for unaccompanied children in hotels but, as it stands, the Illegal Migration Bill will not do this.

Resettlement

16. UNHCR says global resettlement needs have risen for 2023 to over two million people needing resettlement (Africa has the highest needs, increase is greatest in Asia and the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) regions. Syrians are the population with greatest resettlement needs for the seventh year consecutively, followed by people from Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan then Myanmar).

17. The Prime Minister plans to introduce an annual quota for people resettled through 'safe and legal routes' in consultation with local authorities, but which will be flexible to respond to emergencies.

18. While remaining committed to resettling refugees, councils may struggle to specify numbers they can support amidst other (often unpredictable) demands they face to support vulnerable people (including the push from government to find alternative accommodation for asylum seekers, unaccompanied children, evacuated Afghans who have been living temporarily in hotels and Ukrainians who have arrived in the UK).

Ukraine

19. With less funding for councils and hosts to support new arrivals, the Homes for Ukraine scheme could feel like it's winding down - but huge pressure remains on councils around homelessness and finding independent accommodation for Ukrainians. It's likely to become difficult to identify new hosts as the higher rate of funding is for those here over a year.

20. There may be a shift to assessing the longer-term integration needs of Ukrainians who have been here for longer than originally anticipated and have begun to put down roots.

Afghans

21. Given the deadline to end hotel use this year and the Housing Fund specifically intended to improve the housing situation for Afghans, there will be expectations to identify housing and work opportunities for this group. Long stays in hotels may affect their adjustment and integration in new communities.

Hong Kongers with British National Overseas (BNO) visas

22. The number of arrivals is likely to fall each year. The exception is an expected short-term rise in the number of young people applying independently for a BNO visa (following recent policy change) and switching from student visas as the BNO visa confers more rights.

23. Government funding for welcome initiatives has been extended until March 2024, including local authority work on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and on destitution, for Welcome hubs, and for the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector.

24. There could be a rise in support requests that local authorities receive from people with BNO visas who have no recourse to public funds.

EU nationals

25. By the end of 2023 those who were first granted pre-settled status under the EU settlement scheme (EUSS) will reach the end of their original five year status. Government will have to change the EUSS process, and guidance for employers, as it decided not to appeal the court ruling that found it unlawful for someone with pre-settled status to be illegally present if they do not apply for settled status in due course.

26. EU nationals will continue to bring dependant family members to the UK due to family reunion rights and may seek local authority support with accommodation.

27. People continue to arrive assuming they can apply to the EUSS. Those arrivals have been allowed to work whilst they have submitted a late application; the Home Office will have to make decisions on these late application cases that are building. Funding for organisations that provide support with applications is due to end in March.

Modern slavery

28. Modern slavery victims now have a reduced recovery and reflection period from 45 to 30 days in the National Referral Mechanism. Decision makers must have ‘objective evidence’ rather than only suspicion in order to grant a positive decision.

Integration and cohesion

29. No doubt the cost of living, energy prices and inflation will continue to add pressure at community level. This could manifest in local tensions and far right activity.

30. The Commission on the Integration of Refugees (an independent commission aiming to improve the integration of refugees) will conclude in December and issue a report.

31. Windrush 75th anniversary celebrated on 22 June. It could be more challenging to identify people affected by the Windrush scandal amid the differing announcements about government commitments to reform.

32. At Migration Yorkshire, AMIF funded projects (RIS and RIYH) and Connecting Opportunities will end in 2023.

33. In Yorkshire and Humber, we have the Leeds 2023 Year of Culture, Refugee week in June including the Sheffield Migration Matters Festival, and the Yorkshire Integration Festival in September. Looking further ahead, there will be celebrations in 2024 as Calderdale celebrates its 50th birthday, and in 2025 for Bradford as UK City of Culture.

About this briefing

This briefing was prepared by Pip Tyler (with colleagues) in March 2023.

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