

15<sup>th</sup> September 2023

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## **NATION OF SANCTUARY: DEVELOPING A PLACE BASED APPROACH**

### **Purpose**

1. To consider a discussion paper “Nation of Sanctury: Developing a Place Based Approach”, which includes a number of proposed areas for improvement of the current asylum dispersal arrangements. A brief update on a number of current migration issues is also provided.

### **Background**

2. At a meeting between Leaders, Housing Cabinet Members and Ministers on 19<sup>th</sup> July, an early draft version of the paper attached to this report was discussed. The views expressed by Members have been incorporated into the updated version of the discussion paper attached as Annex 1.
3. The paper proposes a new, collaborative, way forward for planning asylum accommodation in Wales and seeks agreement to a future direction between the Welsh Government and Welsh local government, with a view to discussing and achieving subsequent UK Government support and agreement.
4. A number of proposed areas for improvement are set out in the paper, including those in the following areas:
  - Joint planning on asylum accommodation arrangements;
  - Place-based approach;
  - Smaller, more manageable sites;
  - Engagement with local authority planning departments;
  - Accommodation procurement approach;
  - Community and media engagement;
  - Impact on local jobs;
  - Improved data and information sharing;
  - Sector governance; and
  - Longer term plans.
5. The report, at paras 56-58 also makes a number of recommendations/proposed next steps in gaining support for the revised approach and in engaging with the UK Government on taking discussions forward, subject to support and approval from local government.

## **Update on other current migration issues**

### **Asylum Dispersal**

6. Latest figures confirm that there are 3,308 asylum seekers accommodated in Wales, the vast majority of whom are in dispersal Accommodation (3,054) and the remainder in contingency hotels (Cardiff). The Full Dispersal Regional Plan is four months away from the end date of December 2023. Wales' target figure was a 2,411 increase in bed spaces and so far, the net increase in asylum beds from April 2022 is 293, with accommodation procured in 12 additional council areas. At this stage, it is unlikely that Clearsprings Ready Homes (CRH), the accommodation provider, will be able to procure sufficient dispersed accommodation to meet regional plan targets in Wales (or elsewhere). This means that the Home Office is not currently able to reduce their reliance on contingency hotels or achieve more equitable dispersal across the UK.
7. There are currently two asylum contingency hotels in Cardiff, with a proposed expansion of provision at the Stradey Park Hotel in Llanelli. The Llanelli site has had well-publicised difficulties and there remain a number of protestors outside the hotel. WSMP recently hosted a public online information sharing session, with participation from Police, Home Office, Carmarthenshire Council and Clearsprings/Ready Homes.
8. As part of the UK Government's ambition to clear the backlog of legacy asylum claims by the end of 2023, a Streamlined Asylum Processing (SAP) has been introduced as a way of speeding up decision-making. The Home Office plan to deliver 73,033 decisions nationally, and 1432 for Wales by the end of December 2023. There is already evidence that this approach is resulting in significant challenges for long-standing dispersal areas in terms of potential presentations for accommodation and support within a short period of time.

### **Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC)**

9. On the 27<sup>th</sup> July 2023, the High Court ruled that the Home Office's policy of placing unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) in hotels was unlawful when it became "systematic and routine", and that the Home Secretary has the power to require local authorities to accept UASC via the National Transfer Scheme. The court also ruled that a decision by Kent County Council to cease taking UASC into their care was in breach of the Children Act 1989 and that a deal between the Home Office and Kent that capped the number of UASC the council would accept into their care was unlawful.
10. Since the National Transfer Scheme was mandated on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2021, a total of 311 UASC have been transferred into the care of Welsh Councils. Although all the councils across Wales are complying with the National Transfer Scheme and placing young people as quickly as possible, there is a growing concern that placements for under 16-year-olds are becoming increasingly difficult to find.
11. The Wales Strategic Migration Partnership commissioned the development of an Options Paper in response to a Home Office request for each region/nation to consider developing Welcome Centres for UASC. The paper has been finalised and shared with AWHOCS. Discussion with the Home Office on next steps are

awaited as the implications of the High Court case referenced above may change the role of such centres and the role of any council who may host one.

## **Resettlement**

### **Ukraine Schemes**

12. Councils and the Welsh Government continue to work together to support Ukrainian citizens with move-on from Initial Accommodation into longer term solutions. There are 450 Ukrainian citizens remaining across 11 Initial Accommodation sites spread across Wales as of 4th September 2023.

### **Afghan Bridging Hotels**

13. All refugees at bridging hotels were given notice to quit by the Home Office in May, with all hotel use by those evacuated out of Afghanistan ending by the end of August this year. In Wales, the Home Office continue to support 14 families remaining (117 people in total) until move-on properties identified for them become available in a variety of locations.

## **Illegal Migration Act**

14. The UK Government's Illegal Migration Act received Royal Assent on 20<sup>th</sup> July. Not all provisions of the Act have yet been commenced and the future timetable for implementation is unclear. The specific implications for councils, partner organisations and those subject to the provisions of the Act are yet to be fully clarified. Following a recent information session Chaired by Cllr Andrea Lewis, WLGA Housing Spokesperson, a briefing will be developed and shared with councils and other partner organisations.

## **Recommendations**

15. Members are asked to:

- 15.1 Note the contents of the report and the update provided;**
- 15.2 Consider and approve the attached discussion paper and the suggested direction of travel for improving the asylum dispersal system in Wales; and**
- 15.3 Support the proposed next steps as set out in the attached report, providing a steer for WLGA and WSMP officers.**

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## Nation of Sanctuary

### Place-Based Approach – discussion paper

#### Issue

1. To propose a new collaborative way forward for planning asylum accommodation in Wales. To agree a future direction between Welsh Government and Welsh local government, with a view to achieving subsequent UK Government agreement.

#### Background

2. With over 175,000 UK asylum applications pending decision (as of 30 June 2023), the challenge of accommodating asylum seekers whilst applications are processed shows little sign of abating. Indeed, changes introduced by the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, and now the Illegal Migration Act, appear to be causing further delays in asylum processing, requiring longer accommodation placements. Under current accommodation arrangements, the UK Government identifies asylum seeker accommodation across a number of different categories, including initial, dispersal, contingency, and ‘other dispersed accommodation’ (ODA), all of which signify accommodation provision for asylum seekers in different parts of the asylum process, differing levels of support and funding.
3. One of the UK Government’s efforts to increase asylum accommodation capacity has been to mandate all local authorities to participate in asylum dispersal (full dispersal) rather than it being a voluntary process. A policy introduced in April 2022 to ensure a more even and fair distribution of asylum seekers across the UK. Full dispersal intends to alleviate pressures in the asylum system, increase supply of accommodation across all local authority areas and reduce the costs of hotels used as contingency measures due to a lack of dispersed accommodation. Following the announcement of full dispersal, the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership (WSMP) worked with local authorities, third sector and the Welsh Government to develop the Wales Asylum Dispersal Plan (“Dispersal Plan”) outlining how all local authorities could take a proportionate share of asylum seekers.
4. The dispersal plan was developed and approved by the WLGA in September 2022 and provides a target of an additional 2,344 bedspaces for Wales by the end of December 2023 which would bring the total numbers to c5,600 (slightly exceeding our UK population share.)
5. With the Dispersal Plan, Wales’ target figure was a 2,411 increase in bed spaces. Thus far, the net increase from April 2022 is 293, with 12 councils participating (Home Office figures). Affordability and availability of accommodation have been indicated as key barriers to participation in the remaining local authority areas.

6. It is important to note that the Dispersal Plan only relates to asylum seekers whose applications are currently being considered and are in receipt of section 95 or section 4 asylum support. Alongside increasing dispersal arrangements, UK Government also continues to identify initial and contingency accommodation across Wales. There is currently one initial accommodation site in Cardiff with a further site in Flintshire also being proposed by Home Office to act as a North Wales initial accommodation site (live planning application for Northop Hall).
7. Additional contingency accommodation is also being sought across Wales to house those whose applications have yet to be initially considered. Asylum seekers who have been placed in contingency hotels in Wales have either arrived directly from the Manston processing centre or another contingency hotel in London. At present, two contingency hotels are being utilised in Cardiff, with a highly controversial proposal at Stradey Park hotel (Carmarthenshire). There is an unknown number of other hotels under consideration in Wales with new potential sites being identified each week. Nevertheless, this represents limited use of contingency accommodation, compared to England where almost 400 contingency sites are being utilised.
8. The lead UK Government department, the Home Office (HO), works through an accommodation provider in Wales, Clearsprings Ready Homes (CRH), who identify, source and manage asylum accommodation and support on their behalf under the Asylum Accommodation and Support Services (AASC) contract. An Advice Issue Reporting and Eligibility Support contract was awarded at the same time to Migrant Help, which complements the support offered by CRH. The Home Office and CRH approach in identifying appropriate accommodation and engagement with local authorities, Welsh Government and other parts of the public sector is often poor: the lack of concrete information offered at an early stage, and lack of community engagement, creates significant community tensions and an inability to plan effectively.
9. Welsh Ministers and Leaders have been clear that Wales is prepared to play its part in welcoming asylum seekers and is content to support full asylum dispersal to both alleviate pressure on a small number of authorities and support our Nation of Sanctuary approach. This paper will set out the current challenges and present options to improve the current situation.

## **Wider housing pressures in Wales**

10. Since March 2020 Wales has taken a 'no-one left out' approach, which continues to be in place today. Over 36,000 people have been supported with temporary accommodation since then. This has led to an unprecedented pressure on housing and particularly homelessness services – and particularly on temporary accommodation, which continues to rise.
11. The situation is being made more challenging as a result of the cost-of-living crisis and the resulting pressures on household budgets. Additionally, affordability of the

Private Rented Sector (PRS) and the humanitarian crisis arising from Ukraine have placed additional pressure on temporary accommodation.

12. The premium placed on affordable, accessible PRS makes the challenge of sourcing appropriate temporary and longer-term accommodation for asylum seekers increasingly difficult. Clearsprings Ready Homes offer landlords and developers high rental returns and tend to focus on increasing accommodation in established asylum dispersal areas (Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham) thereby distorting already expensive local markets. This additional pressure on access to the housing market is another factor resulting in the highest numbers of people currently in temporary accommodation in Wales with over 10,000 recorded in June 2023.
13. The Home Office is also seeking to cease asylum support – including accommodation – for those deemed to be uncompliant with asylum system rules or where an asylum application has been rejected. The UK Government's commitment to eliminate the asylum legacy backlog by the end of 2023 is likely to lead to increased homelessness where newly granted refugees are given an inadequate amount of time to find alternative accommodation. We might also expect to see more homelessness amongst those with No Recourse to Public Funds. In most cases, local authorities will be unable to provide accommodation for these individuals, but some will need support via social services and homelessness presentations are likely to rise.
14. Any new planning activity for asylum accommodation must take into account these pressures, not just on access to the housing market, but on local authority housing teams and services. Staff have shouldered significantly increased workloads and responsibility through the pandemic, the Ukraine humanitarian crisis and the cost-of-living pressures impacting on housing and homelessness. Any new approach must take into account already stretched resources and the need to prioritise activities to ensure statutory and legal duties are met.

## **Asylum accommodation - current situation and challenges**

15. Latest figures (July 2023) show there are 3,308 asylum seekers accommodated in Wales - 3054 in Initial or Dispersal Accommodation and 258 in Contingency (Source: HO Data Pack).
16. The current process for securing accommodation underlines the importance of 'early and effective engagement' between CRH / Home Office representatives, WSMP, Welsh Government and the relevant local authority. Once a site is identified, Welsh Government and the local authority are informed, WSMP arrange an initial meeting with CRH and Home Office and the LA to discuss details and feasibility of a given proposal, and then progress to and then progress to a wider, multi-agency meeting arranged by WSMP, to discuss options and arrangements for the site. These meetings usually include representation from WSMP, CRH, Home Office, different local authority services, police, fire service and the local health board.

17. A regular feature of this engagement (and source of ongoing frustration) is the lack of clarity on the exact use of, or intelligence on, who is likely to be placed at the site. Lack of detail on numbers, make-up and needs of the cohort and likely length of stay compound the challenges involved in ensuring that local services are prepared to welcome and support asylum seekers. Concerns have been regularly raised by local authorities and Welsh Government about the engagement with CRH and Home Office in planning and delivering accommodation, and the interface other key support services (including education for all ages, healthcare, legal advice, general advice services and interpretation).
18. There are also numerous examples of where a void of information has led to increased community tensions and cohesion issues. A current live example is a proposed site in West Wales where the site is planned to go live shortly but CRH / Home Office have been unable to confirm until very recently, if the site has been secured, how many people would be accommodated and if they were single individuals or family groups. The lack of information provides a void for local communities and is also an opportunity for far-right groups to spread misinformation and incite anxiety and protests. It also causes anxiety within public authorities and a confrontational atmosphere between partners who need to work together.
19. The lack of available and affordable accommodation options to meet the Full Dispersal Plan target is also posing a significant challenge. CRH is reporting that they can only find larger properties or those which are too expensive in some areas. This puts the rollout of the asylum dispersal plan in jeopardy. It seems very unlikely that the Home Office will meet its target for additional asylum bedspaces in Wales by December 2023 through dispersal bedspaces alone. The Home Office is aware of the constrained availability of PRS properties in Wales. The challenge of procuring dispersal bedspaces is likely to lead to more proposals for contingency hotels and this is against a back-drop of the proposition of large-scale accommodation sites, proposed as part of the Illegal Migration Act and the HO need to significantly increase their detention estate.
20. Another concern regularly raised is the lack of health data available with guests on arrival. Local health boards find it challenging to deliver the correct initial assessment, health screening and vaccination programmes as asylum seekers arrive with very little or no health information. This proved challenging in the contingency accommodation recently occupied in North Wales where a significant number of guests were identified as unaccompanied minors with specific health and social services needs. There is also no funding provided for LHBs in Wales
21. Where an adult in a contingency hotel is subsequently identified to be under 18, the relevant local authority is then duty-bound to take the child into care and provide the support. This means an asylum accommodation site can put a significant strain on children's services where poor initial age assessment processes have been conducted by the Home Office. The recent [UNHCR review of the UK asylum system](#) has highlighted major deficiencies in these processes.

22. Under the Home Office National Transfer Scheme, local authorities are mandated to provide placements for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) with 5 days' notice. It is often impossible to identify suitable foster placements during this timeframe leading to the placement of many highly vulnerable young people out of county (and even out of Wales). The outcome of a recent High Court Case is likely to lead to increased pressure on councils to ensure the transfer of children takes place within the 5-day window to ensure the legal duties of the Home Office and Kent County Council are effectively discharged, placing greater pressure on limited availability of appropriate placements.
23. Although Home Office is exploring adopting a Place-Based approach to identifying asylum accommodation - where the impact on the community, economy and market capacity are all considered alongside other pressures in the system and other cohorts of migrants – this has not translated into a policy, and the desired, more equitable distribution of the asylum population, proposed in the Full Dispersal Plans, has also not materialised in significant change. It is worth noting that a place-based approach has been proposed on-and-off by the Home Office since at least 2016, though a greater effort seems to be underway this time around. The current approach to achieving more equitable distribution is focussed mainly on the asylum population, which is driven by unachievable targets and may not ultimately deliver a fair and proportionate approach across all authorities. There are also other resettlement programmes such as the Afghan Resettlement programmes and Homes for Ukraine that should be factored into a Welsh Place-Based approach.
24. Lack of input in identifying appropriate accommodation and any meaningful engagement with public services and communities is leading to increased frustration and tensions across Wales. Following discussions with local authorities, WLGA and the WSMP, the following proposals have been identified for further consideration.
25. With an increasingly challenging financial backdrop, additional resources to undertake this work will be difficult to identify. Proposed areas of improvement will focus on how local authorities and Welsh Government interact and plan more effectively, working with the Home Office and Clearsprings Ready Homes, alongside the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership and WLGA. Maximising available funding from Welsh Government to support other local cohorts through the Homelessness Prevention Grant and boosting local capacity through the Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme can also help alleviate pressures. However, it should be noted that these funding streams are already under significant pressure to deliver housing support.
26. After many years of providing no funding for local authority asylum dispersal, the Home Office is currently providing some support in certain circumstances. Where each new dispersal bedspace is made available (and occupied) between April 2023 and March 2024, the host local authority will receive £3,500. Currently (August 2023), the Home Office is also piloting a further 'incentive payment' of an additional £3,000 for each bedspace made available quickly.

27. On 1 April 2023, the Home Office made 'one-off' payments of £750 per existing occupied asylum dispersal bedspace. A similar payment was also made in April 2022.
28. Further payments are made available where large-scale asylum accommodation sites are utilised. Payments **do not apply** to contingency accommodation bedspaces (such as hotels) or unoccupied bedspaces.
29. While this funding is not ringfenced, each of these payments could be helpful to local authorities to ensure proper services are made available in their areas. Asylum seekers generally need health screening, ESOL provision, immigration legal advice, and good quality casework advice and advocacy, amongst other services. However, these funding streams are often described as 'one-off' or only for the specific financial year, making recruitment and contracting difficult.

## **Proposed areas for improvement:**

### **Immediate proposals**

#### **Joint planning on asylum accommodation arrangements**

30. Whereas Home Office currently follows an approach of 'early engagement' on proposed sites, the current process still entails local authorities responding and reacting to proposed sites in their area. The relationship needs to evolve so Welsh Government and the WLGA/WSMP are working alongside UK Government to develop parameters for appropriate asylum accommodation in Wales.
31. We want to evolve the current model to ensure the system is jointly planned with key Welsh partners. We can then better support the Home Office to fulfil the dispersal plan and other reasonable requests.
32. We would ask the Home Office to provide parity of esteem between themselves, Welsh Government and Welsh local government.

### **Place-based approach**

33. By taking a more proactive, asset-based approach, public services would be better placed to support arrivals whilst ensuring that no single area is overwhelmed. This approach would require a strategic overview of all resettlement programmes plus insight into wider pressures on housing and other services to make dispersal manageable at a local level.
34. We would build upon the Dispersal Plan by incorporating other types of asylum accommodation and other resettlement and dispersal requirements. This includes

contingency accommodation, initial accommodation, UASC Reception Centres, and the resettlement of people under safe and legal routes (e.g. Ukraine Schemes, Afghan Schemes, Hong Kong BNO visas, Refugee Family Reunion, UK Resettlement Scheme).

35. The approach would also need to consider the underlying housing and homelessness pressure which exists in each part of Wales. This is an important consideration as the unavailability of housing for local communities can be a source of community tension and undermine the integration of migrant community members.
36. By understanding the totality of the 'ask' on local areas we will be able to communicate clearly the limits of support in certain areas, opportunities to specialise in support for particular cohorts, and the need for the Home Office to focus on less developed areas.

## **Smaller, more manageable sites**

37. To help achieve targets and economies of scale, Home Office is seeking large scale accommodation sites and barges to house people. These larger venues present significant challenges for local services and often attract negative attention from far-right groups as was seen at the Penally camp in Pembrokeshire. They also undermine a core principle of the Nation of Sanctuary plan, which is to support integration within communities from day one of arrival in Wales. Aligned to the approach of working more closely with Home Office to plan accommodation capacity across Wales, potentially identifying and encouraging the take-up of more modest-sized venues would result in less impact on local communities and services leading to better integration for individuals.

## **Engagement with local authority planning departments**

38. Fundamental to the use of asylum accommodation are planning departments who consider venues which require a 'change of use' to enable Home Office to house larger numbers of asylum seekers or planning permission for new sites. We propose engagement with Chief Planning Officers to ensure that they have a very clear understanding of the standards required for such accommodation and the access to services needs of occupants, alongside a broader awareness of how such proposals align or undermine the Nation of Sanctuary vision.
39. This would include consideration of whether proposals comply with the Wales Housing Quality Standards around room sharing and whether the scale of accommodation would harm integration. This would be an opportunity to clearly state the objections to use of military bases and ships, whilst setting a clear framework for when planning committees could look favourably upon applications from the Home Office.

40. By providing clear guidelines to local Planning Departments, we can also provide more clarity to the Home Office and Clearsprings Ready Homes about how proposals are likely to be received. This can help them to modify their procurement approach and increase the chances of appropriate sites being identified.

## **Accommodation procurement approach**

41. A major frustration with the current system is the confusion and information vacuum which develops after the Home Office has announced that it intends to use a particular facility for asylum accommodation. Initial notifications provide no detail about the type of cohort to be accommodated, despite this having major implications on the facility and services required.

42. We will develop a process with Home Office and Clearsprings to give maximum clarity on use alongside any notification of an intention to use a particular site. We will ask for confirmation that no unrelated individuals will be forced to share rooms, clarify the demographic characteristics of the intended occupants (i.e. singles / families / UASC etc), the type of asylum accommodation (i.e. initial / contingency / Accommodation Centre / UASC Reception Centre), maximum number of occupants, and any funding which will be made available to the local authority, Police or Health services.

43. The Wales Strategic Migration Partnership has previously developed a Dispersal Framework for Wales, with broad engagement with local authorities and the Welsh Government. We intend to build upon this previous work in developing our approach.

## **Community and media engagement**

44. Whilst protecting asylum seekers by not announcing the location of asylum accommodation, we must recognise that the location of some venues will get into the public domain. Through the Ukraine Response we worked closely with local authorities to gauge how the local community would respond to the establishment of initial accommodation in their area and built a flexible community and media engagement model to suit the different circumstances. One tactic that worked well was an off the record, technical media briefing to disclose the location of our Welcome Centres or hotels which gave the media sufficient information to be able to report but underlined the importance of keeping these sites confidential to protect the safety and dignity of guests. We have successfully managed over 50 facilities in relation to the Ukraine super sponsor route in this manner so we know this can work and would encourage the Home Office and Clearsprings to adopt this approach in Wales.

45. If, however the location of a site has created significant community tensions and there is a clear need to de-escalate the situation, we would also encourage Home Office and Clearsprings to lead on more intensive community engagement, including events – digital and localised communications activities. We have seen

from recent events that a lack of engagement and void of information is quickly filled by misinformation and right-wing rhetoric. Additionally, local people working alongside asylum seekers will organically counter misinformation which may otherwise spread.

## **Impact on local jobs**

46. Job losses caused by use of a facility for asylum accommodation creates significant local tension and must be avoided wherever possible. There must be a clear undertaking from Home Office and Clearsprings that local employees must be prioritised for any suitable roles at the venue or, working with local employability services, supported into alternative employment. Employment practices such as TUPE must also be followed wherever appropriate.

## **Improved data and information sharing**

47. For several years, we have sought additional data on the asylum system in Wales from the Home Office and some progress is now being made. We will make a renewed effort to receive full information about the demographics of those living in accommodation in Wales to support the planning and delivery of services.

48. We will make clear that providing appropriate support requires the sharing of health information available to the receiving local health board at the point of transfer to enable continuity of care, vaccination schedules, GP registration, screening and other key health-related information. Where care and support needs are known, information sharing with local authority social care services will also be required.

49. We will publish an asylum health screening pathway to ensure all Welsh Health Boards understand the approaches needed to support asylum seekers who may be placed in their area and to minimise any public health risks which could otherwise develop.

## **Sector Governance**

50. To support this approach, Welsh Government is working with WLGA and WSMP to revise the meeting architecture and governance arrangements underpinning the delivery of all asylum dispersal, refugee and other safe and legal sanctuary schemes in Wales. We are aiming to streamline the existing meeting structure, ensure Welsh Government and WLGA have a key strategic role in all discussions, and ask the Home Office to interface with our structures in the way that promotes more effective delivery.

51. The proposed new governance arrangements will include: an oversight group at political level - the Nation of Sanctuary All Wales Strategic Oversight Board - and a senior officers group – the Nation of Sanctuary Partnership Board, supported by

a number of operational subgroups. These arrangements will be complemented by the third sector's Welsh Refugee Coalition and revised arrangements at operational level. Representatives of the third sector will be included in all groups going forward, alongside public bodies, to embed a more integrated approach to identifying and resolving issues. More detail of the revised governance arrangements will be provided shortly, to include membership and terms of reference.

## **Longer term plans**

### **Consider Welsh delivery of asylum accommodation**

52. The Home Secretary has stated that they are keen to hear proposals for sites which could be utilised by the Home Office as asylum accommodation, enabling local authorities to invert the current model of the Home Office informing local authorities that they will be using local facilities. This gives an opportunity for local government to propose sites which would better fit with access to services and local pressures, potentially utilising sites which were surplus to requirements or vacant. We could explore ways to make this a meaningful part of how Wales contributes towards offering asylum placements however given existing pressures, this will also be challenging.
53. Another opportunity for Wales to play a substantial and better planned part is through the consideration of UASC Reception Centres within Wales. Commissioned by WSMP, the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru ("the Four Cs") has recently completed an exploration of ways in which Wales could host one or more UASC Reception Centres as a venue for newly arrived UASCs to be adequately cared for before being placed into local authority care. Further work is required to understand the funding model involved, the interface between the Reception Centres and the National Transfer Scheme, and age assessment processes and the impact of the recent High Court case, but we can agree to explore this further. Opening such sites in Wales would help the Home Office to ease their current reliance upon inappropriate accommodation such as hotels for UASCs. It will not, however, address the wider system issues around lack of appropriate placements.
54. The current AASC contract for Wales commenced in September 2019, following procurement activity which began in early 2018. The contracts were awarded for a 10-year period but with a break clause after 7 years depending on performance. This means that the contracts could be retendered from 2025 (to be awarded in 2026) or otherwise 2028 (to be awarded in 2027).
55. One option could be to undertake scoping work with WLGA to consider whether a Welsh Public Body-led delivery of the AASC contract is possible or beneficial at the next tendering opportunity and whether this would alleviate many of the issues we are currently experiencing under the current asylum system arrangements. Such an arrangement would come with many risks, as well as opportunities, as the nature of responsibilities would change and resources would need to be

reviewed and potentially increased to bring about the changes which we would want to see.

## **ACTIONS:**

56. Officials from Welsh Government, WLGA and WSMP have worked closely together in producing an updated version of this paper following the meeting of Ministers and Leaders on 19 July 2023.
57. Welsh Ministers, Leaders and Chief Executives are asked to reflect on the proposed areas for improvement to provide a steer for WG officials and WLGA and WSMP officers.
58. If supported, officials recommend that a letter is drafted to the Home Secretary and UK Minister for Immigration to set out the collaborative views of Welsh Government and Welsh local government, based upon the issues and actions raised in this paper.
59. Officials understand Health Boards may be interested in participating in such a letter.