**Migration: Policy and Practice Steering Group**

**Minutes – 22nd October 2020**

**Online Meeting**

**Attendees:**

Dipali Chandra – DC (Network Facilitator/Chair)

Andrew Hoole – AH (Project Senior Coordinator)

Alicja Kaczmarek - AK (Centrala)

Dave Stamp – DS (ASIRT)

Emma Birks – EB (Asylum Matters)

Jeremy Thompson – JT (Restore)

Michael Bates – MB (Central England Law Centre)

Niall Mann – NM (IMIX)

Rachel Chiu – RC (Spring Housing)

Heather Thomas – HT (Refugee Migrant Centre)

Martin Holcombe – MH (Birmingham Settlement)

**Apologies Received:**

None

1. **Introductions and apologies**

DC welcomed all members to the meeting.

1. **Welcome from Dipali Chandra, Network Facilitator**

DC gave a short overview of her role. She has been asked to take over from Sharon Palmer as Chair of the Project. Following a review conducted by the Project funders, the role will now be known as Network Facilitator.

She is keen to understand how the role will fit into the wider voluntary sector network and will be speaking to all members individually over the next few weeks.

1. **Project Update**

AH provided a short summary of the Project Update circulated to members prior to the meeting (attached)

MB asked about the impact of participation in the wider COVID response work coordinated by BVSC. AH believed this to have been beneficial in allowing issues to be highlighted by the wider voluntary sector which has enabled greater impact in seeking solutions with decision makers.

There was an update on involvement in supporting ongoing homelessness provision in Birmingham, including for migrants with No Recourse to Public Funds. EB highlighted a recent FoI request from the NACCOM network to councils regarding how many individuals are currently being housed.

RC highlighted the need for the Project to provide an influencing role within the region, ensuring that various strategies are tied together.

DS brought up the issue of Serco not following correct processes and the impact on two specific groups requiring support – refused asylum seekers and EEA nationals. The potential for a strategy paper was discussed, ensuring that council leads were aware of this issue.

1. **Revised Delivery Plan**

AH gave a short summary of the revised Delivery Plan for the next 12 months that had been sent to attendees in advance (attached). He highlighted that several strands of work were not able to be progressed due to current social distancing measures.

DC explained how the Project links into existing strategic and operational networks and asked the meeting where this could add value?

MH stated that the dissemination of relevant information is critical to generalist groups who may provide support to migrants as part of wider service provision. He emphasised the importance of the broad thematic areas of the Project to ensure that generalist groups and involved. This will help to ensure migrants are supported as part of the community.

RC queried the proposed outputs for the Project and how these would be measured.

AK raised concerns over the Delivery Plan being too vague and whether changes to the initial plan had been agreed. There was also no mention of the needs of Eastern European groups.

MB asked if the strategy was too wide in scope, with the danger that effectiveness would be diluted. There is a danger that the use of thematic areas hampering development and should instead focus on the work of those within the group.

EB asked whether the current priority areas were correct and was there scope to change these?

HT was supportive of a ‘State of the Sector’ report giving a baseline for current sector activity along with recommendations and action points for further work.

AK asked whether the group could be broadened to involve more representatives with lived experience of migration issues.

DC asked the group that if there are broad strategic areas for the Project, what activity could be achieved in the next 12 months.

1. **Project Officer Role**

AH gave a brief update on the new part-time Project Officer role that has been approved by funders. The role will assist with capacity building, outreach to VCS groups and regular dissemination of information.

A role profile has been agreed and the vacancy will be advertised shortly.

1. **Partners Update**
   1. ASIRT

Funding has been secured for a further 18 months to support EUSS work, including outreach to non-specialist agencies to raise awareness of processes. A number of Settled Status applications are being processed as well as repeated applications for LTR, with a significant cost implication. Several clients have not received biometric residency cards, which is impacting on employment applications.

* 1. Spring Housing

Continued issues around housing for those with NRPF, currently 60 individuals are being housed under the Everyone In process. Currently the biggest gap in sector is around advocacy and the ongoing disconnect between strategic and operational work. There are still long-term issues around young people in accommodation and the level of support available once they turn 18.

* 1. IMIX

Providing training to grass roots groups and media work around potential right wing activity at asylum accommodation. Currently requesting positive media stories for release towards Christmas and developing piece around worker exploitation.

* 1. Birmingham Settlement

Continuing development of new sites at Kingstanding Road and Edgbaston Reservoir. Recently involved in awarding Early Help grants which highlighted need to support migrant-led groups to access funding streams.

* 1. Restore

Main challenges have been to adapt face-to-face work into remote working. Ongoing support to clients in IA for extended periods. Review of government COVID guidance for impact on befriending work. A recent course for prospective befrienders with 55 attendees.

* 1. CELC

Funding received for a further 18 months from AMIF Project. This will allow increased capacity, but not enough to meet demand. Part of funding will be used on a piece of work to understand level of need for specialist legal advice in the city.

* 1. RMC

During lockdown, activity dropped to 20% of normal business – focusing on key delivery of food and medicine to those in most need. Since May however, when all offices opened again to offer a hybrid of face to face and online service, client numbers are now exceeding pre-COVID levels. RMC is currently working with 8 universities on a number of research projects and have received requests for access to their clients to support this.

* 1. Asylum Matters

Ongoing campaigns include Lift the Ban, removal of NRPF conditions, changes to Asylum support rates and Asylum accommodation standards

* 1. Centrala

Currently delivering COVID information campaigns. There has been an increased prevalence of mental health issues experienced due to the lockdown. The exploitation of workers during lockdown has also been seen. EUSS applications continue to be supported. There is an ongoing lack of trust in the authorities by large sections of the community, which makes engagement difficult.

1. **Any other business**

None

1. **Date of next meeting**

It was agreed that the next meeting will be held on the 21st January between 10:00 – 12:00, online instructions to be sent shortly.

Meeting closed