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**Review of Destitution Steering Group**

**Purpose**

This proposal summarises recent discussions around the Destitution Steering Group (DSG) and its role within the voluntary sector. It will then suggest a new structure for the meeting to ensure the meeting remains relevant, beneficial to the membership and provides a voice for the sector when dealing with partners.

**Background**

The DSG is a long-established meeting within the voluntary sector that has grown over a ten year period and now has a wide membership from organisations across the West Midlands. Meetings take place roughly once a month hosted by the Red Cross, who also provide administrative support.

Recent changes across the sector, including new senior managers within Birmingham City Council and the creation of two funded regional posts to provide coordination (Migration Policy and Practice) and communications (IMIX) support, have presented an opportunity to review the role of the group. This to ensure that it is responsive and representative of sector needs as well as able to link closely with any new structures in order to advocate and effect change.

**Status of Review**

Members were asked to contribute their thoughts around the future role and purpose of the meetings as well as views on the current structure. Although a limited number of responses were received, those at responded indicated a strong desire that the meeting retain organisational updates from groups attending as well as including a training element.

**Strengths of Meeting**

* The DSG is the only regional sector meeting organised and led purely by voluntary groups. This enables attendees to undertake free and frank discussions and agree a shared response.
* Membership is wide-ranging with a variety of groups providing support to migrants suffering destitution which allows many perspectives to be shared.
* Attendees are Subject Matter Experts, enabling identified problems to be discussed and resolved.
* Updates provided to the meeting give an insight into current activity within the sector, which allows emerging and structural issues to be identified.

**Limitations of Meeting**

* The meeting last for two hours but has a lengthy agenda and is attended by a large number of representatives. This presents a challenge in ensuring that all voices are heard and discussion remains relevant to the topics discussed. As a result, parts of the agenda can be rushed in order to accommodate all points.
* The membership is very diverse, both generalist and specialist organisations focusing on asylum seekers or migrants. This means that areas of discussion will not be relevant to all attendees and presents a challenge to be inclusive of all areas of support provided by the sector are represented.
* Training and Information Sharing, the two items suggested by members in the review process, will take up a significant portion of the allotted meeting time, leaving less scope for other issues.
* By the nature of the sector, membership of the group is largely comprised of representatives from organisations working within Birmingham. It is important that the meeting involves those from other parts of the region to ensure that the widest possible range of views are sought, even from those unable to attend on a regular basis.

**Proposal for New Structure**

**Proposed Mission Statement for the DSG**

*To provide a forum in which voluntary sector organisations providing crisis support to migrants can discuss current activity, share best practice and highlight issues of concern around capacity and service delivery in order to influence local, regional and national policy.*

**Membership**

Membership should remain limited to voluntary sector groups. Representatives from outside the sector can be invited to attend in relation to relevant agenda items but do not have a standing invitation.

Attendance is not limited to groups operating within Birmingham, those in surrounding areas should still be encouraged to attend the meetings as this will enable a more comprehensive assessment of activity in the region to be developed, providing a larger evidence base with which to support recommendations and conclusions.

**Frequency**

Meetings should be held on a six weekly cycle in order to provide meaningful inputs and more time for any assigned actions to be resolved. The current monthly meeting structure often does not allow time for updates on some activity due to the lengthy timescales required for issues to be resolved (such as in the case of legal appeals and case reviews). The reliance on other agencies or legal process to resolve many actions means that timescales cannot be shortened.

**Standing Agenda Items**

SECTOR ACTIVITY: Discussion around activity should be grouped around six main areas. These are already covered in the existing DSG structure and encompass the work carried out by all attending groups:

* SUPPORT (e.g. Move On, Financial)
* HEALTH
* EDUCATION
* LEGAL (Encompassing all areas of Immigration Law)
* HOUSING (e.g. Initial Accommodation, Housing Availability, Process Issues)
* FUNDING
* CAMPAIGNS
* TRAINING NEEDS

Reporting should be by exception (i.e. only if a specific issue is raised for discussion, otherwise section classed as ‘no update’) and this will help structure the meeting and ensure that all areas are covered within the time limit.

Specific agenda items for discussion can be raised in advance through the dedicated Google Group forum - [LINK HERE](https://groups.google.com/d/forum/wmdsg) (a discussion thread can be added in advance of meeting to facilitate this).

STRATEGIC UPDATES – Andy Hoole to provide brief update from other strategic meetings attended. As these are usually held quarterly, this agenda item should take place in every other meeting. Sector partners such as Migrant Help, WMSMP to be invited as ‘associate’ members and provide updates as to their work on a regular basis (exact timescale to be agreed, but likely quarterly)

SECTOR ACTIVITY ASSESSMENT– All organisations involved in the group will be encouraged to complete a short online form in advance of the meeting. This will allow an assessment of capacity and activity in the sector over the past period to be carried out and included in a document provided to all DSG members. It will also assist in discussions with partners and statutory bodies, providing an evidence base from which to highlight trends and risks and recommendations for action.

The Migration Policy and Practice Initiative will use this data to produce the assessment and any recommendations based on their analysis. This will be included in each document and disseminated to relevant partners.

[A link to the proposed form can be found here](https://forms.gle/CVt2T7hjsf1RR7AM9)

**Organisational Updates**

These are vital elements and promote the inclusive nature of the meeting however due to the large attendance can take significant time. Members will be encouraged to use the Google Groups Forum in order to provide a detailed update on their activities, with shorter inputs provided in relevant sections of the meeting where required.

**Training**

Although members suggested that the DSG meeting should contain a training element, it is thought that the amount of time required would not be feasible within the time allotted. Instead it is suggested that training needs form a standing agenda item and where identified given as actions to a member of arrange. Training inputs can then be held either before or after the main meeting.