**WM Migration Network Rights Thematic Meeting**

**17th November 2022 (13:00 – 14:30)**

**Minutes**

**Chair: D﻿anai Papachristopoulou**

1. **Introductions**

DP welcomed everyone and explained the purpose of the meeting as providing a forum for those either working with migrants, or wishing to support the sector to discuss strategic issues affecting integration and settlement. It is intended to provide advocacy around key issues, collaborative solutions and agree priority areas of work for the sector.

A wide membership is encouraged so that the group, and wider network can represent the migration sector in discussions with statutory partners and the wider VCS.

New attendees introduced themselves and gave brief information around their work to the group.

1. **Previous Activity and Actions**

AH gave an update on the development of the network and it’s strategic work. A annual Sector Assessment is being produced with a draft to be released shortly. This builds on the document released last year highlighting barriers to migrant integration.

Since the last report, a number of Focus Groups have taken place with migrants across the region at various stages of settlement. The issues raised from these discussions have informed the priority areas of action that will be raised at Thematic Meetings.

1. **Current Priorities**
2. Access to Specialist Advice

DP gave an update on the Justice Together Initiative, which seeks to strengthen Immigration Advice in the region as week as providing a forum for mutual support and training. The first meeting of the Initiative will take place on the 30th November.

EG introduced her work with Shelter, including providing workshops to sector organisations around housing rights. They also provide dedicated housing advice for those currently eligible for legal aid.

**ACTION – AH to circulate details of services offered.**

ST highlighted Baobab’s work on advocacy for refugee women in key areas – health, housing and money. One of the the major challenges is around providing support for those refused asylum. Specialist policy advice is important as are issues around language barriers for clients. Recent months have seen the cost of living increasingly becoming an issue, with advice needed around utility payments.

NW talked about the specialist support available from the WMASN, including training for partners. They also offer a safe house with temporary support and advocacy for residents as well as training Knowledge Champions within Local Authorities.

KB provided an input on the availability of carer support. Much depends upon the immigration status of those seeking help and she is currently awaiting advice on eligibility that can be shared with the group.

AA introduced his work supporting migrants experiencing exploitation in the workplace, particularly those who had legal status. DP asked around problems that had been experienced with Right to Work checks which AA agreed was a serious issue. There is potential to offer a mini-training session to attendees.

AH asked the group how referrals were currently received by their organisations as Focus Group activity suggested many migrants were not aware of many avenues of support and relied on recommendations from friends or family. AA stated that much of their work came in this manner as they had helped someone before. ST agreed, and also suggested that many drop-in services did not operate at convenient times for those with childcare commitments.

AA highlighted their work programme which sought to deal with a gap in terms of individuals being unable to find ‘safe’ work.

EK stated that similar issues existed for those seeking to start businesses.

DM mentioned the Migrant Advice Portal being launched by Birmingham City Council.

**ACTION – AH to invite Julie-Ann Wright (BCC) to next meeting in order to present details of the Portal.**

1. Cost of Living

CB attended the recent Cost of Living event which had a number of breakout sessions including one on volunteering. Birmingham Settlement also attended this event and were to feedback but a representative was unable to attend.

**ACTION – AH to obtain details of event and invite presentation update at next meeting.**

1. Housing

EG updated on the Fair Housing Campaign. Two key objectives are to prioritise families in poor social housing and to educate residents on their rights. Main barrier is that the waiting list for Council housing is too long due to Right to Buy and a lack of new building.

A discussion was had between attendees around support that was available.

1. **Next Steps**

AH reiterated that priorities for the group were not set and feedback from attendees was welcome.

**ACTION – All attendees to submit three priorities from their areas of work by next meeting**

1. **Terms of Reference**

AH discussed a Terms of Reference for the meeting. A draft has been produced and will be circulated to the group for comment with a view to adopting a final document at the next meeting.

**ACTION – Members to provide comments on draft Terms of Reference for next meeting.**

1. **Date of Next Meeting**

It was thought by members that as the network was in the process of being established, meetings should initially be every six weeks. Due to the Christmas break, the date was set for **Thursday 12th January** at 1pm.

Meeting Closed