**WM Migration Network Rights Thematic Meeting**

**6th October 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.

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

1. **Background to the Network and Previous Activity**

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 approved this month. 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. **Sector Priorities**

Three initial priorities were highlighted from the Focus Groups that could be developed through the Rights Thematic Area.

1. Access to Specialist Advice

DP discussed the Justice Together Initiative which could support this area. It is a collaboration between a number of legal aid providers in the region and aims to strengthen access to advice, share best practice and provide mentoring to newly qualified staff in order to prevent high turnover. There will also be opportunities for non-specialist organisations to be supported in training and hosting immigration advisers.

*ACTION – DP to provide details of Initiative at next meeting.*

CS agreed that this initative was worthwhile in supporting the wider sector, for example when individuals seek help when they have been informed by statutory agencies that they cannot access advice.

AH stated that focus groups highlighted the need not just for immigration advice but around a wide range of issues particularly debt and housing. There was also a lack of awareness amongst many around where to go in order to seek help, particularly those not in the asylum system and that many relied on support from friends to signpost to appropriate services.

ST mentioned that for many this was a confidence issue, particularly when English was not a first language.

JD gave her perspective from current workloads seen at Birmingham Settlement in that most referrals to the organisation are self-referrals. Capacity is a massive ongoing issue. CAB for example can only take on 10% of calls and it is therefore very difficult for non-English speakers.

1. Cost of Living

JD provided insight into current debt advice needs. There has been a massive increase in demand over the past twelve months. Last year 14% of clients were signposted for further advice, whilst in the past month alone it has been near to 50%. Gas and Electric bills are the main problems, particularly as household budgets are in deficit so it is hard to find solutions.

JD is part of the BCC Financial Inclusion Group and it might be beneficial for the network to get involved as there is a gap around support for those with NRPF conditions and asylum seekers.

*ACTION – JD to invite representative from Financial Inclusion Group to next meeting.*

1. Housing

AH highlighted issues raised around housing from Focus Groups, this was not just in terms of lengthy waiting times for social housing, but primarily the standards and costs of private housing that are being experienced. Linked health problems are also being experienced by residents, particularly children due to damp and mould in many flats.

Representatives from Shelter were unable to attend the meeting due to illness but AH will invite to next meeting. The Birmingham Social Housing Partnership have also expressed an interest in involvement.

*ACTION – AH to invite Shelter and BSHP to next meeting.*

1. **Future Priorities**

DP 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*

DP suggested some additional areas that might be covered – issues around the Right to Work and confusion around legislation and ongoing delays to outcomes from the EU Settled Status scheme.

ACTION – AH to invite Ake Ache (Right to WorK) to the next meeting.

JD suggested that as insolvency can affect immigration status there is a greater need to understand this area.

DM suggested an invite be extended to Ashley Community Housing and the Aston University CREME centre to the meeting. It was agreed that this would benefit the group.

*ACTION – DM to invite ACH and representatives from CRÈME to attend the meeting.*

DP also highlighted the issues of carers and the impact these responsibilities have on other areas. AH has a number of contacts with organisations through other meetings and offered to see if there was any interest in involvement with the network.

*ACTION - AH to progress contact with carers organisations to seek involvement with the Migration Network.*

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. Date was set for **Thursday 17th November** at 1pm.

Meeting Closed