**WM Migration Network Rights Thematic Meeting**

**12th January 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.

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

1. **Previous Activity and Actions**

The previous minutes were agreed as correct. Actions from the previous meeting related to additional invites to organisations that could present on current work.

AH briefly highlighted that Migration Policy and Practice have just released their annual Sector Assessment report that will have been circulated to the membership and is now available on their website.

1. **Presentations**

JW gave an input on the Migrant Advice Portal being developed by Birmingham City Council. The Project has recently received additional funding for a further year and is shortly to hold an event for Practitioners in Birmingham.

JY then gave a presentation on the new City Service that has been developed by the Refugee and Migrant Centre in Wolverhampton.

DP stated that time can be set aside at meetings going forward for organisations to give presentations on new or existing initiatives that could benefit the wider network.

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

Following the presentation around the Advice Portal there was a discussion around how it could be used to benefit signposting of services. JW stated that organisations did not need to sign-up specifically to the service and that their information would be added automatically.

AH stated that the data held within the Portal could be vital in understanding demand in provision, referral pathways and any gaps that could be identified. EK asked around legacy funding for the Portal. JW stated that discussions had been held with other local authorities and if its value could be demonstrated then others would sign up.

1. Cost of Living

SP gave an input on the current work and challenges at Birmingham Settlement in providing debt and money advice, not just in their own sessions but through outreach with partners organisations across the city. She highlighted a series of online resources that are useful in showing what benefits are available to individuals based on their circumstances.

SP stated that the most common issues currently seen around the cost of living related to uncertainty over rising prices, particularly energy, leaving it difficult to budget. Clothing and school uniform costs are also issues. There have been several cases where individuals have travelled overseas for a number of weeks without informing relevant government departments, resulting in losing access to benefits and support upon their return.

SP will collate information on help available and links to relevant websites and circulate to AH.

**ACTION – AH to circulate information once received.**

1. Housing

EG highlighted a new issue that has been identified whereby individuals presenting at Council Offices in Newtown are being presented with a list of private landlords and advised to find accommodation independently without processing an application for homelessness on their behalf. In many of the cases, there was an language barrier making communication difficult.

DP suggested that if this was something seen in other areas then this group could look to collate information and work with partners to advocate for change to ensure correct procedures are followed. It was requested that members report back at the next meeting with details of similar cases across all services.

**ACTION – Members to send details of similar cases to AH to be discussed at next meeting.**

EG also highlighted a change in housing allocation criteria which will be circulated to members

1. **Next Steps**

AH reiterated that priorities for the group were not set and feedback from attendees was welcome. The meeting can be structured in a way that benefits attendees, including networking and presentations if required. Both DP and AH are keen for the meeting to produce defined outcomes in terms of influence to both policy and practice so would welcome the thoughts of attendees on what they would like to be included.

**ACTION – Any feedback on development of meeting structure to be sent to AH in advance of next meeting.**

1. **Any Other Business**

WA introduced herself and her role at the Afghan and Central Asian Association who have recently opened a new centre in Birmingham. They provide a range of services and are keen to engage with the wider network in the region.

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 school half-term, the next meeting will be **Thursday 2nd March** at **10am**.

Meeting Closed