**WM Migration Network Rights Thematic Meeting**

**2nd March 2023 (10:00 – 11:30)**

**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.

1. **Previous Activity and Actions**

The previous minutes were agreed as correct. There was one action from the previous meeting relating to a series of instances where individuals had attended the Housing Office in Newtown, Birmingham and being told to find private accommodation. EG reported that there had been no new cases and it appeared that the issue had now been resolved.

1. **Proposal for format of future meetings**

AH gave a presentation on a proposed new structure for the meetings. It was suggested that each meeting be based around a specific theme with an organisation providing a presentation on their work and current challenges leading to an open discussion based on this. The second part of the meeting would be for attendees to update on their work.

AA suggested that the group should focus on actions around the priorities identified in the recent Sector Assessment as a starting point, particularly capacity issues to deliver services.

CS suggested that the group could provide an opportunity to create the case for joint funding bids to address priorities and agreed that outcomes of meetings should see some form of output. AH agreed with both points, highlighting that this meeting, and the wider network, should bring organisations together to discuss solutions.

DP stated that the meeting should identify areas of collaboration to work on issues and solutions however these will need time and this proposed structure will allow experts to identify and discuss them.

AB asked around a timeline for the work as Aston University has funding over the short term that could help involvement.

CS stated that the meeting presented an opportunity to link specialist advice with mainstream support.

CB agreed that the meeting should link migration with the wider sector, and thought that attendance by a wide range of organisations supported this.

**ACTION – New format to be adopted. AH to circulate details and link to online form for members to suggest topics and presentations for future meetings.**

1. **Discussions around Current Priorities**
2. Cost of Living

SP highlighted that the Household Support Fund is now open, however only those who did not apply last year are eligible. CS asked about the criteria being used, were these fair looking from a Public Law perspective. Could the network look to produce a letter to be circulated highlighting these discrepancies.

EG mentioned that there is currently no support post April 2023 and that local welfare provision is only available every 6 months.

**ACTION – SP to forward more information on support to AH.**

1. Housing

EG stated that Birmingham City Council have recently revised their Housing Strategy with some rebranding including giving higher priority to those experiencing homelessness.

LR updated on recent work funded by the Oak Foundation including a series of small grants to groups in order to self-organise responses to housing issues with an emphasis on capacity building. Locally these were administered by BVSC with a fixed deadline that may have been missed. LR would welcome any feedback on the application process.

LR also talked about the Access to Justice Initiative that has a focus on housing support. Support is needed to understand where gaps in funding exist and whether this includes migration issues. CS agreed that there were significant benefits in bringing migration and housing sectors together to discuss this. CB was happy to facilitate this for future meetings.

DP highlighted that government pressure on clearing the backlog of asylum applications will create additional pressure on both the Move On process and accommodation needs in the region. It is unclear if BCC are aware of this and factoring into their planning.

CS suggested that a proportion of the Asylum Dispersal Fund be used for immigration advice in order to support this.

**ACTION – Contact to be made with BCC to ascertain their views and approach to this issue.**

1. Right to Work

DP highlighted a recent legal action brought by the Refugee and Migrant Forum Essex against the Home Office for not providing physical copies of Right to Work evidence. There are cases where employers are unwilling or unable to carry out online checks which potential discriminates against many migrants. It would be good for the group to look at this issue in the region.

1. **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be **Thursday 13th April** at **10am**. AH will chair due to Danai being on annual leave.

Meeting Closed