**WM Migration Network Rights Thematic Meeting**

**25th September 2025 (11:00 – 12:00)**

Minutes

**Chair: Mary-Rose Puttick**

**Meeting Introduction and Participant Introductions**

* Meeting chaired by Mary-Rose Puttick in-person at the University of Wolverhampton and all were welcomed to the hybrid meeting with many attending virtually.

**Presentation – Healthwatch Wolverhampton**

* Luke Guy gave an input on the work of Healthwatch Wolverhampton and their recent report on Mental Health Service Access and Quality in Wolverhampton.
* The key finding is that mental health services in Wolverhampton face significant challenges around accessibility, empathy, and communication, with voluntary sector support showing more flexibility and patient-centred care.
* Patients frequently experienced being passed between services with no clear support pathway, worsening their mental health conditions.
* Negative attitudes and poor communication from healthcare practitioners were a common complaint, undermining patient involvement in care decisions.
* The voluntary sector was seen as more accessible and empathetic, offering tailored support that patients found easier to engage with.
* Case studies underscored these issues, with one patient describing mental health assessments as intrusive and anxiety-inducing, reflecting poor practitioner approach and lack of emotional support.
* Recommendations focused on enhancing communication, increasing empathy training, and promoting voluntary sector services within NHS pathways.
* Suggested training includes the NHS Communicator Syndicated Empathy Programme and Mind E-Learning, aiming to build staff skills in sensitive patient engagement.
* Regular independent inspections by Healthwatch and other groups are planned to ensure accountability and continuous improvement. The report’s reception by hospital management has been constructive, with ongoing dialogue and follow-ups to assess implementation of recommendations.
* Community inclusion remains a priority, with ongoing engagement including migrant and refugee voices to ensure diverse populations’ mental health needs are addressed.
* Language barriers and lack of staff awareness about interpretation services were noted as additional obstacles, especially for deaf and non-English speaking patients.
* Staff training gaps on interpreter booking and availability of interpretation agencies were found to impede effective communication.

**Current Priority Areas**

* Members continue to identify struggles with visa issues, no recourse to public funds (NRPF), and inconsistent local authority support for vulnerable migrants, particularly women and children.
* MS reported a growing issue where social care visa holders are unable to renew, risking job loss and family destitution, with limited Home Office transparency on numbers. This emerging problem requires data sharing and advocacy to inform policy and prevent negative social impacts. LM connected this to Work Rights Centre’s efforts supporting affected workers and policy advocacy.
* Several attendees highlighted difficulties supporting women on work or spousal visas facing housing and immigration challenges.
* IS noted that women often end up in costly hotel accommodation due to lack of local authority support during immigration status transitions.
* Section 17 support is inconsistent and hard to secure, with some authorities slow or unable to provide adequate assistance.
* ST described similar issues with no recourse women slipping into the asylum system with limited access to housing or work.
* Local authority variations in support and policy were discussed, with Birmingham’s NRPF policy under review but unclear current standards, and Sandwell’s team reported improving but still inconsistent.
* There is a broader problem with social workers lacking training on NRPF issues, leading to inappropriate referrals and delays in care provision.

**Any Other Business**

* **Migrant Advisory Group** – AH highlighted establishment of new group within Migration Policy and Practice to involve people with lived experience in guiding organisation priorities and research. Payment for attendance will be given, £50 honorarium payments or equivalent support to avoid jeopardising existing entitlements. This group will meet quarterly, blending online and in-person sessions with expenses covered, to ensure authentic community input into future work.
* **Save the Children/ Migration Policy and Practice Project** - A new regional research initiative will investigate poverty drivers among migrant children and families in the West Midlands, aiming to inform comprehensive policy and practice recommendations. The project launch is scheduled for 6th October 2025 in Birmingham. It will include six focus group, ideally split evenly between families and children, alongside desk research and interviews with local and national practitioners. The final report, expected by April or May 2026, will combine evidence of barriers with actionable recommendations at local, regional, and national levels.
* **Communities Thematic Group** – The group, which was paused recently, is being relaunched with an initial online meeting planned for 2nd October 2025. It will explore social integration, community safety, and welcoming strategies for migrants, responding to recent social and political developments.

**Next meeting scheduled for 6th November 2025 online.**