**Making West Yorkshire Devolution work for migrant communities**

**Initial discussion**

**6.8.20**

This group was convened by Asylum Matters in partnership with Same Skies. Asylum Matters is a campaigning and advocacy project that seeks to improve the lives of people seeking asylum through social and political change. Same Skies are a group of volunteers across West Yorkshire who have been campaigning on regional democracy since 2015. In the run up to the mayoral election, Same Skies are working with partners to develop AMP (Alternative Manifesto Process) and ideas from this group will be included in this process.

The first meeting of this group included individuals and organisations from and working in Leeds, Bradford, Dewsbury, Huddersfield, Wakefield and Harrogate.

This and all future meetings of the group are open to any person living in West Yorkshire with an interest in refugee/migrant rights. For more info please contact mary@asylummatters.org.

Brief overview of devolution

* Devolution is the process of central government handing over power and resources to regions.
* West Yorkshire has secured a devolution deal. With devolution, we have an opportunity to influence decision making at a sub regional level about spending powers, policy priorities and even shape the messaging that comes out of the region into the arena of national debate.
* In May 2021 we will elect a West Yorkshire Mayor who will chair meetings of LA leaders and have the ability to make decisions that steer the course of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA).
* We can place pressure on Mayoral candidates to commit to actions that will progress migrant rights (both locally and nationally through advocacy) and if we are able to secure commitments, we can work to hold the Mayor to account on these promises throughout their term.
* Devolution means opportunities for West Yorkshire to:
  + Realise full economic potential and raise living standards;
  + Raise additional funds through CT and BR (with referendum);
  + Gain primary powers over planning and transport;
  + Take responsibility for policing and crime in 2024;
  + Focus on the climate emergency.
  + Have a ‘functional power of competence’ – which means the Combined Authority can be creative and start initiatives; can set the tone, influence using “soft power”.

Comparisons to other devolved areas

* Scotland –Scotland have been able to use devolved powers to expand their electoral franchise so that refugees and people with other forms of leave to remain now have voting rights in Scotland in both Scottish Parliamentary elections and local elections. This was brought into force in March by the Scottish Elections (Franchise and Representation) Act 2020. It also enables those with indefinite leave to remain to stand as a candidate in an election – recognising their position as full stakeholders in Scottish society. Expansion of the franchise would not (at present) be possible in devolved English areas, even in local government elections, but we could seek to address this.
* Manchester- A more comparable model than Scotland, where the soft power of the well-known Mayor, Andy Burnham, has been leveraged to influence wider debate at a national level through his lobbying and public advocacy around asylum and migration. The Mayor has also catalysed local partnerships and convened instrumental discussions, for example, moving towards the development of a Greater Manchester Integration Strategy.

Questions for the working group to explore:

1. Areas the mayor/WYCA will have immediate powers or resources;
2. Areas the mayor/WYCA might have ‘softer powers’ that can be used to leverage support for refugee rights;
3. Which of these areas are within our reach to influence, and how;
4. How we can ensure the voices of migrant communities are included and amplified in both our working group and also throughout the democratic process so they’ve the opportunity to influence.

Areas where the mayor/WYCA may immediately have powers/resources:

* ESOL (Adult Skills budget)
* Stop and scan/PREVENT (organising police commissioning structures prior to assuming role in 2024)
* Free bus travel for certain groups e.g. people seeking asylum (as part of an Integrated Transport Strategy)
* Education and skills programme for young refugees (Adult Skills budget)

Areas where the mayor could use their ‘functional power of competence’ and/or where the mayor could be persuaded to lobby central government for future powers/resources:

* Leading on West Yorkshire becoming the first ‘Region of Sanctuary’, inc developing an action plan
* Coordinating, sharing best practice and setting minimum standards for a common offer of support for asylum seekers and refugees, inc young people and those subject to s.17 support.
* Identify and address shortfalls in EU funded projects e.g. Connecting Opportunities.
* Voting rights in West Yorkshire elections for those with leave to remain.
* Join the Lift the Ban coalition alongside many local councils and lobby on the right to work for asylum seekers
* Accommodation for asylum seekers
* ‘Welfare support’ e.g. cash not vouchers

Migrant communities voice and influence

* It was agreed to be of utmost importance that the voices of migrant communities are involved in the devolution process, both represented in this group and taking part in the election process (without a vote, this is some WY residents’ only chance of engagement in our democracy)
* The group agreed to design a resource with information about devolution and the opportunities which we can translate and share (Mary and Christine to progress this)
* We will seek out proposals and suggestions by conducting interviews through existing refugee/migrant VCS organisations and their networks
* Persist with outreach to ensure members of marginalised groups are welcomed to join this working group

Next steps and next meeting:

Next meeting will be 10am on Thursday 29th October, venue or zoom TBC.