

**MINUTES OF THE WEST YORKSHIRE SUB REGIONAL MIGRATION GROUP
MEETING THAT TOOK PLACE ON 9 DECEMBER 2020**

Attendees

Will Sutcliffe	Beacon Bradford
Hiron Miah	Bradford Council
Ian Day	Bradford Council
Cllr Smith	Calderdale Council
Sarah Richardson	Calderdale Council
Adam Smith	Home Office
Jonathan Kingham	Home Office
Sarah Mitchell	Kirklees Council
Cllr Coupar	Leeds City Council
Pria Bhabra	Leeds City Council
Nicki Batley	Mears
Pat McCusker	MESMAC Wakefield
Marsela Hoxha	Migrant Help
Dave Brown	Migration Yorkshire
Sarah Botterill	Migration Yorkshire
Vicky Ledwidge	Migration Yorkshire
Becky Hellewell	St. Augustine's, Calderdale
Cllr Cummings	Wakefield Council
Kerry Murphy	Wakefield Council
Kate Smith	WomenCentre, Kirklees

Visitors

Kevin Brain	Bradford Council
Kat Kinloch	Home Office – EUSS Communications Team
Mani Hayer	Reed in Partnership

Apologies

Natja Thorbjornsen	Bradford
Emma Fitzpatrick	Mears
Ally Swadling	PAFRAS, Leeds
Cllr Cummings	Wakefield

1. Welcome Introductions and Apologies

The chair welcomed attendees and introductions were made.

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting – 22 September 2020

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record

3. Matters Arising

Housing and modern slavery items are to be added to the agenda of future meetings.

Migration
Yorkshire

A breakdown of the process of support provided for service users by Mears when moving in to DA is an on-going piece of work and will be shared when available.

Mears/ Migration
Yorkshire

In regards to the 3 concrete asks from the VCS around Urban House, there has been no formal response. However, verbal updates were given by the Home Office, Mears, Kerry Murphy and Pat McCusker.

- TVs available in rooms and internet access – The Home Office is continuing regular meetings to continue improvements. TV provision is ongoing but not currently available. A small number of tablets that are data enabled are now available for service users, but more resources to improve equitable distribution and education are needed.
- Regular, structured access for VCS staff – This has begun subject to risk assessments, however there are still some sticking points which continued to be discussed. Mears local welfare officer has not provided contact details of local VCS to SU for support while VCS are not attending Urban House. Without this contact, SU's are missing out on key services.
- Covid safe ways to get resources in to Urban House – provisions are now being provided and ways to improve this are being looked at.

4. EU & EUSS

Kat Kinloch joined the meeting from the Home Office and presented an update on the EU Settlement Scheme.

The presentation will be circulated to the group following the meeting.

Following the presentation, members discussed the information and raised questions.

It was commented that the development of the child friendly leaflet was very interesting and it would be good to know more about the process of the development. Kat Kinloch added that the development had taken place in the Liverpool area where they worked with a network of gatekeeper organisations that supported the development and added input from young people. Kat will send more information on the child friendly leaflet when it is available.

Home Office

Calderdale requested case studies of successful engagement with harder to reach communities. It would be helpful to see good practice as Calderdale currently only have 50% of

predicted registrations. Kat offered to speak to Sarah Richardson separately to offer support. Migration Yorkshire to link up.

Home Office/
Calderdale /
Migration
Yorkshire

A further question was raised as to how the Home Office are contacting hard to reach communities, and how are issues being addressed to people who don't want to register or don't understand why they need to apply.

Kat replied that the Home Office are applying lessons learnt from other schemes, such as Windrush. It is recognised that the Home Office is not best placed to be contacting hard to reach migrants so are working with a grant funded network of organisations who are experts in their communities. There is also a team focused on vulnerable services users within the Home Office EUSS team, who ensure that the communications are as accessible and wide spread as possible. The marketing campaign has been changed and adapted to get key messages out to more communities as they are identified.

Members were asked to note the Migration Yorkshire EU and EUSS report, and data update.

5. Asylum

Mani Hayer, Operations Manager for Reed in Partnership joined the meeting to give an overview of Reed in Partnerships role and its work so far.

The presentation will be circulated to the group following the meeting.

Cllr Smith questioned how other local authorities are finding the service, and what monitoring and evaluation is being carried out if Reed are sign-posting to local organisations for support.

Mani replied that the team are working closely with local organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau to get referrals the support they need.

Members asked whether there are opportunities for more partnership working with local authorities and VCS to increase support for referrals.

Mani answered that there is more scope for collaborative working and would be happy to speak further with any local authorities about this.

Members asked for data on the numbers of people being supported per local authority in the region. Mani explained that data requests would have to be submitted to him in writing so that he can arrange with Migrant Help what data can be shared.

The group expressed disappointment that stats for the region had not been made available for this meeting as requested. Mani agreed to follow this up with Migrant Help and provide local data on the number of referrals.

Reed / Migrant
Help

Migrant Help

Members were asked to note the update from Migrant Help.

From the reports Marsela Hoxha highlighted:

- A staff presence has been maintained in the offices throughout this period and have continued to deliver services. Staff are now working as part of 50% home/office rota and rotate weekly.
- The Urban House office is Covid-19 compliant and Migrant Help are making face to face appointments for SUs where necessary.
- That there are still challenges with contingency accommodation, but are working closely with Mears to reach all SUs.
- Mobile phones were purchased and distributed to the different contingency accommodation sites, via Mears for any SU's without a phone. The phones are borrowed by SU's for the completion of the ASF1 and induction briefing.
- The Freephone advice line service went live on 15 Oct and all contingency sites have been sent all the relevant information to display and inform SUs. This information is available in 11 languages.
- Migrant Help handbooks will be taken to contingency accommodation sites so that they are available for clients on arrival.
- Migrant Help continue to make welfare calls for service users where there is concerns due to vulnerability or safeguarding.
- Both the FRC and EAGL phone lines remain busy, meaning that neither are meeting the KPIs on wait time.
- However, progress has been made for recruitment and rotas to help manage the challenging.
- The outreach inbox continues to be monitored and is up to date.
- The outreach team has gone from actioning a previous weekly average of new referrals of around 50 referrals a week to an average of 90 referrals a week during November.
- Commissioning for outreach organisations has been paused during the pandemic, meaning that internal outreach advisers only for Y&H.
- Feedback and SU experience surveys can be found on the MH website <https://www.migranthelpuk.org/as-feedback>

- Migrant Help do not have a specific hate crime policy. However, it is included in the safeguarding and domestic abuse guidance.
- Further to this, all Migrant Help staff received training on hate crime when negative attention began to be focused on contingency accommodation.

Following the update, members expressed concern over the level of support available in our region due to the lack of outreach organisations. Marsela replied that the commissioning application was opened 3 times, but there had been no appointments. An issue that many organisations had found, were the lengthy organisational Counter Terrorism checks that are required by the Home Office, which had led to Migrant Help not being able to appoint. However, there are dedicated outreach advisers for our region providing all the required support.

Members also questioned whether appointments with service users in initial and contingency accommodation was taking place face to face or virtually. Marsela responded that in Urban House it is possible to have face to face appointments when necessary, but there is not the capacity to do this in contingency accommodation. However, as lockdown measures ease, this will be readdressed. There is planning taking place to have the correct support and measures in place so the Migrant Help staff can begin to go back in the contingency accommodation. Marsela agreed to keep the group updated on the progress of this work.

Migrant Help

It was raised that there is inconsistency in call handler responses, and if there are ways to feedback and escalate issues. Marsela clarified the processes; if there is a complaint then the formal process needs to be followed and it will be escalated and actioned appropriately. If there is general feedback about a call then please use the option via the website for this. This type of general feedback is not fully or formally investigated. A full list of Migrant Helps escalation emails will be sent to Migration Yorkshire for onward sharing.

Migrant
Help/Migration
Yorkshire

A question was raised about the support being provided to service users receiving negative decisions. Marsela explained that general support would be offered for all negative decisions. There is not the capacity to provide support for an appeal so MH staff ensure that all SUs understand the details of the outcome and refer them to organisations that can provide support.

Home Office

Members were asked to note the update provided by Adam Smith on Asylum Operations.

From the update, Adam highlighted:

- That after the brief pause in screening interviews due to the pandemic, service was resumed (in line with Government restrictions on travel) with additional, temporary locations to register asylum claims. There are currently no plans to end these arrangements.
- The Home Office has been working on plans to increase the number of asylum caseworkers and has significantly increased the overall numbers of caseworkers in the last 18 months.
- Additionally, they are seeking to temporarily put in place, resource from within the Home Office and other government departments to assist with interviewing outstanding claims, along with other alternatives as a short-term measure.
- The letters from Dave Draper regarding proof of concept for third party suppliers to conduct screening interviews, and remote interview technology blueprints for interviewing UASC.

Following the update, a questions was raised about PIQ forms in regards to the deadlines and capacity to access legal reps. Adam responded that all PIQs go to one central team before being sent to local intake teams, and the 4 week timescale for return on the PIQs in order to keep applications moving as quickly as possible. The central team processing the PIQs are aware of the challenges being faced by SUs and are looking for trends in the submissions. There has been positive feedback from other groups on contacting the central team for extensions. Adam will share contact details for the team.

Home Office

It was also raised that there needs to be more done to let SUs know that extensions are available. Adam Smith will speak to the intake unit about communications. Migration Yorkshire are also happy to cascade information as needed.

Home Office

Concerns were raised over the proposal of third party suppliers conducting screening interviews, specifically around the training and expertise of those being contracted. Adam reassured the group that all staff conducting screening interviews would be fully trained to the standard required and be mentored to ensure the quality of the service. This is a short term solution that will help clear the backlog of applications.

Jonathan Kingham gave a verbal update in regards to asylum support and accommodation. It was highlighted that:

- There is still increased sustained pressure on the IA estate.
- Lockdown has resulted in further delays to move-outs along with a continuing increase in new S95 and S4 intake.

- The highest intake has been in London and the South East.
- Overall there has been a drop in S95 cases in Yorkshire and Humber.
- The Home Office is aware that there needs to be an end to the use contingency accommodation, and the key to this is increasing dispersal accommodation.
- There will be more pressure on Mears to increase their procurement in the region and LAs should expect more requests.
- Mears can request adjudication where LAs reject properties, and the Home Office will look at the evidence.
- There has been a decision that service users under S95 and S4 in full board IA will receive an allowance (back dated where appropriated) to cover essential items such as clothing and travel. Further information on this can be found in the Migration Yorkshire asylum update.
- If LAs wish to be involved in joint housing inspections, please contact Jonathan Kingham for contacts.
- Jonathan also requested that if there are issues that are not being resolved, please can these be reported to Migration Yorkshire to be added to the log that will be shared with the Home Office.

Following the update, members raised concerns over the restating of negative discontinuations. Specifically, the VCS were concerned that there will not be capacity to cope with the support that is required.

The need for more dispersal areas was also raised by members. Jonathan confirmed that the Home Office is in conversation with LAs but there are no plans to enforce new area to take on dispersal.

Mears

Members were asked to note the written update provided by Mears. From the report, Nicki Batley highlighted:

- There is some data missing from the report and this will be shared with the group when it is available.
- A new satisfaction survey was introduced at the beginning of October for all SU's in Dispersed Accommodation. The IA survey will be released early 2021.
- The results for October were collated and the results of these were pleasing with an overall satisfaction of 78%. Mears are currently reviewing and analysing the results to identify any areas of improvement.
- Following the implementation of the Covid-19 Outbreak Management Plan, Urban House reopened and started to take in the new SUs as of 15 September

Mears

- The control measures put in place in Urban House to ensure Covid-19 compliant safety.
- Work is ongoing to improve services in UH including VCS engagement and an activities itinerary.

Additionally, Nicki added that Mears are working on a contingency accommodation exit plan, increasing DA procurement and support for move on.

It was raised by Wakefield that it's important to get regular input from Mears at UH and there is a good working relationship with Mears staff at a local level. However, it is hard to get responses from the higher levels at Mears. It would be helpful if the Home Office could help facilitate this communication and clarify the roles and responsibilities. Jonathan Kingham agreed to support this and will meet with Kerry Murphy from Wakefield.

Home Office

Migration Yorkshire

Members were asked to note the update from Migration Yorkshire.

6. Resettlement and UASC

Members were asked to note the update from Migration Yorkshire.

7. Integration and cohesion

Members were asked to note the update from Migration Yorkshire.

8. Statistics, policy and research update

Members were asked to note the update from Migration Yorkshire.

Sarah Botterill, Migration
January 2021