

**MINUTES OF THE WEST YPRKSHIRE SUB REGIONAL MIGRATION GROUP  
MEETING THAT TOOK PLACE ON 9 JUNE 2021**

**Attendees**

Dinah Beckett (chair)	Migration Yorkshire
Vicky Ledwidge	Migration Yorkshire
Bev Adams	West Yorkshire Police
Sophie Payling	Migration Yorkshire
Ally Swaddling	PAFRAS
Pip Tyler	Migration Yorkshire
Sarah Botterill	Migration Yorkshire
Cllr Pattison	Kirklees
Becky Helliwell	St Augustine's
Emma Fitzpatrick	Mears
Emma Taylor	Wakefield
Michael Crowe	Migration Yorkshire
Nicki Batley	Mears
Murad Ali	West Yorkshire Police
Rebecca Witt	Home Office
Adam Smith	Home Office
Gary Jeffers	Home Office
Hiron Miah	Bradford
Kirsten Fussing	Calderdale
Cllr Maureen Cummings	Wakefield
Ian Day	Bradford
Ben Foord	Migration Yorkshire
Kate Smith	WomenCentre
Marsela Hoxha	Migrant Help
Pria Bhabra	Leeds
Pat McCusker	MESMAC
Sarah Mitchell	Kirklees

**Apologies**

Michael Martin	Home Office
Sarah Richardson	Calderdale

**1. Welcome Introductions and Apologies**

The chair welcomed attendees and introductions were made.

**2. Minutes of the Last Meeting – 9 March 2021**

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record.

### 3. Matters Arising

In terms of housing and modern slavery being added to the agenda, this will be raised with the new chair who will be in place for the next meeting in the autumn. In the meantime, a modern slavery update has been added to the integration and cohesion paper.

A verbal update on arrivals from Hong Kong will be given and information has been included in the statistics update.

There has been no progress on the request for an estimate of property procurement at a local level to help the VCS plan their delivery. This action has been passed to Gary Jeffers who will follow it up.

Home Office

### 4. Asylum

#### Home Office

Members were asked to note the update provided.

Adam Smith gave an additional verbal update.

The third party proof of concept pilot ran from 16 Nov 2020 – 28 Feb 2021. It has been proposed that the scheme will not continue due to issues of recruitment and retaining staff.

All the asylum interviews and decisions have now been completed as part of the Bradford pilot. The interviews were carried out by a specialist case working team in Leeds. Some service users are still waiting to move accommodation. There were a number of positives identified from the process:

- The hotel population was reduced and there was a decrease in potential delay in asylum claims and wait times.
- There was an improved experience for service users, with interviews taking place in safe and familiar surroundings with no travel.
- Improvement in partnership working with the local authorities, Mears and external organisations such as the DWP.
- Opportunity to explore more available end points.

From an operational perspective, the pilot went well with 100% attendance rate for interviews. There are other local authorities interested in taking part in similar pilots.

Substantive interviews are now taking place at Napier Barracks. These interviews are being coordinated remotely by the Leeds team. The interviews are happening with support from Migrant

Help and local VCS organisations and aims to improve the experience of service users.

Digital interviews and decisions for UASC are now taking place in 51 local authorities. Asylum decisions continue to be made without interview where possible. There are dedicated UASC hubs in Solihull and Liverpool that are developing focus and expertise.

Some pilot interviews in IA have been taking place in Derby and Liverpool. These pilots have taken place with the support of Migrant Help and the accommodation providers. So far there has been a positive reception and a pilot review will take place in July.

Questions were put to the Home Office about what the next steps are for Bradford and the appeal support available.

It was replied that those with negative decisions have been moved to DA and will continue through the system as normal. Throughout the interview process there was enhanced sign-posting to legal support as part of the project. One of the pilot review points is the time scales for services users to seek representation post decision. Records have been made of how many services users chose to access legal support and how many didn't, which was shared with the group. This data is restricted.

One lesson learnt was that there needs to be more time between pilot set up and interviews taking place.

VCS representatives asked whether the local Bradford VCS organisations that have supported service users through the pilot can feed in to the review. The Home Office agreed that it would be helpful to have more input from all involved in the pilot.

Members questioned whether the interviews taking place at Napier Barracks were for the accommodation to close? It was replied that the pilot is to improve service user experience, but there are no known plans to close Napier Barracks.

Gary Jeffers gave a verbal update:

Figures showing current asylum population in West Yorkshire were shared with the group. This information is restricted and should not be shared further.

A review by PHE is planned for the 17 June to decide whether Urban House can resume operating at full capacity.

The target for Operation Oak to empty hotels by the end of June has not been met. The new target is the end of December 2021. Currently there are three hotels in NEYH that are closing and one pending closure. However, intake nationally is increasing so there are likely to be ongoing capacity issues. There is the possibility new hotels will need to be stood up.

There is still a lot of focus on Mears to procure more DA, but this is still proving a struggle.

Negative cessations were paused at the beginning of May due to the pending high court hearing. The Home Office are currently planning to see how the restrictions change on 21 June before planning the restart of negative cessations.

A question was raised as to whether the Bradford hotels might re-open. Gary replies that this would depend on hotel availability, but the Home Office will be looking at the top 20 cities for provision nationally to begin with. Mick Martin will be leading discussions on any new hotels.

Concern was raised by VCS representative around negative cessations, and whether there will be enough information and time provided for support organisations to plan ahead. Additionally, are there plans to ensure all with negative decisions are vaccinated prior to leaving supported accommodation? Gary agreed to raise these concerns with Mick Martin.

Home Office

The Aspen card change over did not go to plan and there were a lot of problems with service users not receiving or being able to activate their cards. The Home Office understand that this left service users in a difficult and possibly vulnerable position. Mears Welfare Managers were given permission to self-authorise ECPs, but there were some logistical issues with getting the money needed.

VCS reps stated that they are grateful for the ECP from Mears but the payments are not happening quickly enough. This means that VCS organisations are having to fill the gap.

Emma Fitzpatrick replied that Mears have issued what they were mandated to do. Please put all requests for ECPs through Mears. There is some concern over duplicate payments happening.

All

It was agreed that Mears would lead on sending an email to Migration Yorkshire to cascade explaining the ECP process to clear up confusion.

Mears/Migration  
Yorkshire

It was questioned whether there have been any issues with sending BRP cars as there has been delays for some service

users. Rebecca Witt replied that there have been some IT issues, but these have been resolved and any outstanding cards are being chased up and sent.

### Mears

Members were asked to note the update provided.

In addition to the report, it was added that Mears are aware of the food issues experienced in Urban House. There is ongoing work to improve and is planned for engagement as part of refugee week.

There is a full calendar of refugee week activities at all IA and IA contingency sites. The calendar will be shared with the group.

Vaccination information is continuing to be provide to all IA and DA, with GP registration being given to DA too.

It was asked where service as usual has resumed for positive decision. It was replied that, yes, positive decisions are back to the usual move on process.

### Migrant Help

Members were asked to note the update provided.

In addition to the update, Marsela added that all local operations are going well. All services are being provided on arrival despite the increase in intake. Migrant Help continues to work closely with Mears to keep up to date on contact details for service users and providing mobile phones for use in contingency IA.

A new, more efficient service user briefing is being introduced. The briefing will be more user friendly and will be translated in to 10 languages. Briefings over the phone will continue for service users in IA and hotels, but the new hardcopy briefing will be provided on arrival.

It was requested that a copy of the briefing can be shared to the group

Kristian Hirscher who has been Regional Manager, has now left Migrant Help. Interviews have taken place to appoint to the role.

Despite the preparations for the new Aspen card rollout, not all service users received their new cards. This led to a significant increase in calls to the FRC phone line. This has had an impact on waiting times and the ability to deal with other issues being reported. Hours have been extended on local support numbers

Mears

Migrant Help

and all requests for support are sent on to Mears within half an hour of being processed. All inboxes are still being covered and all enquiries dealt with. Please continue to use the established escalation routes.

Members asked whether there had been contingency plans in place for the Aspen rollout, and why the changeover went wrong. Gary Jeffers replied that the Home Office admits that it was not successful and that there will be a full review.

### Migration Yorkshire

Members were asked to note the update provided.

In addition to the update, Pip Tyler added that the availability of asylum stats during the last year has reduced due to Covid-19. However, there have been new stats published for the first time, including

- Stats for Hong Kong BN(O) visas
- EU nationals
- Health and care visas
- New resettlement scheme
- EUSS repeat applications data

Since service users began to be placed in hotels, we added the data to the cluster table. However, we don't always get this data. We have begun to receive S98 showing Urban House, Y&H hotels, and DA being used as IA data but this is not broken down to LA level. This has an impact on calculating distribution of asylum seekers accommodated around the region, and we can only show distribution of S95/S4 rather than including hotels/S98.

Please note the dates in the cluster table notes are incorrect and an updated version will be sent.

Following the update, members asked why the full numbers and data breakdown was not being shared. It was agreed that Migration Yorkshire will discuss this with Gary Jeffers.

Migration  
Yorkshire

Migration  
Yorkshire/ Home  
office

## **5. Regional integration strategy workshops**

A verbal update was given:

As you may already be aware, Migration Yorkshire have secured funding to coordinate the development of a new regional Refugee Integration Strategy and Refugee Integration Forum during 2021-22.

The aims of the Integration Strategy and Forum include:

- To build on the existing strong partnership working, collaboration and good practice across our region.

- To forge new links between the public sector, voluntary organisations, employers and other stakeholders
- To establish refugee integration as a priority for the region's key stakeholders
- To enable the region to develop sustainable refugee integration services
- To help improve outcomes for refugees and asylum seekers and, in particular, tackle social isolation, develop more social connections, and enable refugees to fulfil their potential here in Yorkshire and Humber
- To develop refugee participation and leadership

#### Consultation Workshops:

During June and July, a series of strategy consultation workshops are being held across the region on a wide range of themes including housing, community safety, the VCS, refugee women and targeted invitations are being sent out to key stakeholders.

The workshops will include 4 sub-regional workshops, to which all sub-regional group members have now been invited by email and a zoom invite by Outlook Calendar. The dates are as follows:

- Wed 30<sup>th</sup> June 3-5pm – South Yorkshire
- Thurs 1<sup>st</sup> July 3-5pm - West Yorkshire
- Fri 2<sup>nd</sup> July 9.30-11.30am – Humber
- Mon 5<sup>th</sup> July 3-5pm – North Yorkshire & York

If you haven't already, please could you confirm attendance for your sub-regional workshop by accepting the invite or contact us to nominate a colleague to deputise.

We look forward to welcoming you all to your sub-regional workshop, as this will be your opportunity to contribute to the consultation process regarding integration priorities and challenges in your part of the region.

Any queries, please contact:

[Liz.Maddocks@migrationyorkshire.org.uk](mailto:Liz.Maddocks@migrationyorkshire.org.uk)

## 6. RIYH research

Pip Tyler gave an update on the research being undertaken by Migration Yorkshire and partners through AMIF funding. The research is at the initial stages and will be carried out over the next 2 years. There is time for the research to be shaped, so if local authorities have thoughts on how the outcomes might inform their work or specific issues they want exploring as part of the research, please let Pip know.

See the update in the papers for full details.

## **7. Integration and cohesion**

Vicky Ledwidge gave an update highlighting information provided in the update.

Please note that in addition to the report, there have been no new reports of far right activity in the region.

Some Connecting Opportunities delivery are currently not accepting new referrals. Referrals are on hold to these areas until further notice.

- Horton Housing (aged 22 and over in Bradford)
- Halifax Opportunities Trust (aged 22 and over in Calderdale and Kirklees)
- PATH Yorkshire (non-refugees aged 22 and over in Leeds)
- Touchstone (refugees aged 22 and over in Leeds)
- Children's Society (aged 21 and under across all project areas)

## **8. EU and EUSS**

Vicky Ledwidge gave an update highlighting information provided in the update.

It was clarified that under point 11, social workers can now apply for EUSS status on behalf of young people without parental consent.

## **9. Resettlement and UASC**

Dinah Beckett gave an update highlighting information provided in the update.

There is still significant issues with the number young people being dispersed to adult temporary accommodation. The issue begins with the arrival at port and being identified as an adult without an age assessment and being issued an IS97. This is leading to issues with the increased pressure for local authorities to be carrying out age assessments. The young people having to be moved from hotels is also impacting on available spaces to participate in the NTS.

Kent County Council are having to withdraw support having reached their 0.07% limit for accepting more UASC in to local authority care.

It was raised by VCS reps that age disputes in hotels is having a real impact on the organisations who are able to support. There needs to be a more joined up approach to support. The Refugee Council age dispute team are unable to take on new



referrals. VCS organisations have raised issues to Mears Welfare officers and this has been raised to the Home Office.

It was noted by Migrant Help that if a safeguarding issue is identified it is always raised with the local authority social services, logged and shared with the Home Office and Mears.

**10. Sub-Regional Meetings – Format Review and SRMG terms of reference feedback**

Thank you for the feedback that has been submitted. Migration Yorkshire will be having an internal review of the SRMG meetings soon and will feedback on any changes. Please contact Vicky Ledwidge by the end of the month if you have any comments.

All

**11. Other updates**

Members were asked to note the latest policy update included in the papers.

**12. Any other business**

Thanks were given to the VCS reps for their work this last year. Nominations for new reps will be held over the summer.

**Next meeting TBC**

Sarah Botterill, Migration Yorkshire  
01 July 2021