



Steering Group Minutes of Meeting: 10th July 2007

Present

- **Adrian Smith**, Head of Asylum and Refugee Service, Islington Council (Chair)
- **Becky Lyons**, Commissioning Manager, Disability, Newcastle City Council
- **Bill Davies**, Team Manager, MAST Statutory, Manchester City Council
- **Emma Jenkins**, Policy Adviser, Local Government Association (LGA)
- **Joan Denton**, London Borough of Lambeth (on behalf of Cynthia Winifred)
- **Lorraine Ayensu**, Team Manager, Bristol Asylum Support and Refugee Integration Team
- **Mary Blanche**, Senior Policy Manager – Asylum and Migration, Kent CC
- **Olvia Fellas**, NRPF Team Manager, LB Islington
- **Paul Mavin**, Team Manager, Intermediate Care Services (PSI and SGH Social Work), Southend on Sea
- **Ted Brown**, Principal Care Manager, Bradford MBC
- **Mark Rapley**, Corporate Consultant, LB Lambeth

Apologies

- **Bill Brittain**, Principal Manager – Health, Disability & OTRB, Kingston
- **Colin Elliot**, Principal Manager, Asylum Seekers and Refugees, Manchester City Council (Chair)
- **Cynthia Winifred**, London Borough of Lambeth
- **Mark Brangwyn**, Head of Health & Social Care, London Councils
- **Peter Olnor**, Strategic Manager for Asylum and Persons from Abroad,
- **Vicky Williams**, Team Manager, NCCG

1 Minutes and matters arising

The spelling of Cynthia Winifred and Paulina Achaab were corrected.

E-Briefings

Links to further sources of information have been circulated to the Steering Group. In addition it was noted that the Briefings will become more tightly focused, and will include themed briefings. The first themed briefing will be on domestic violence.

Domestic Violence Guidance

The domestic violence guidance has been circulated, and is currently being reviewed by Islington's legal team. LB Islington currently receives 3 or 4 calls a week relating to domestic violence, although not all are within Islington. Mark was concerned about the definition of domestic violence and whether it is perpetrated within or outside this country.

- **MR** to return comments on the domestic violence guidelines to Olivia in the next week.
- **OF** to circulate copy of guidelines to MR.

Website development

The website has been further developed since the last meeting, but does not yet include details of regional groups. It was agreed that Steering Group members would seek to put a link from their own organisation's websites to the NRPF Network website. It was also noted that the ADASS Asylum Taskforce website now provides a link to the NRPF Network website.

- **JF** to develop webpage providing details of regional groups.
- **JF** to develop and circulate text that can be put on Steering Group members' websites.

Guidance on subsistence rates

Lambeth have a payment policy that has been in place for a couple of years and is due to be updated. LBI has recently reviewed its subsistence rates and now pays cash equivalent to NASS Section 4 rates, £35. The cost of utilities are included in accommodation costs, which LBI estimates adds approximately 10% to the overall cost of support.

Draft guidance on how to set subsistence rates has not yet been developed. It was agreed that guidance on children and families should be developed first.

- **MR and OF** to circulate details of their respective subsistence rates.
- **OF / JF** to lead on the development of guidance on children and families.

Network evaluation (Monitoring Report)

The Network evaluation has been submitted to the Home Office as part of the Network's grant agreement. The Network received a grant of £39,050 last year, and LB Islington contributed a further £30,070.

Informal feedback from the Home Office has been positive and has indicated that they would be willing to provide support to the Network again. Adrian is due to meet with representatives from the BIA shortly.

2 Objectives and workplan

The Group agreed that much has been achieved in the last year. The workplan is an attempt to outline key areas of work in the coming year. It was agreed that this is a baseline document and that actions and activities will be developed over time.

The following points emerged through discussion of the objectives and workplan:

2.1 Background

Destitution has been recognised as a consequence of current legislation and policy by the Parliamentary HR Committee. NRPF is a consequence of immigration legislation. NRPF clients are within immigration legislation, rather than mainstream welfare legislation. Since migration is on-going, the Network needs to take a long term view of its work.

2.2 Strengthening links with local authorities

The network has a good network of contacts within the voluntary sector, but needs to strengthen its local authority contacts.

Local authorities need to provide a quality, cost effective service within the law. The network should take a lead on supporting them to do this.

At the last London Strategic Meeting it was proposed to write to LA Chief Executives in London with information in order to highlight the cost, point out local authority duties and encourage them to capture information. The Steering Group were concerned that the letter will be passed on to the lead on asylum and not all NRPF cases will be captured.

The Steering group discussed sending a letter to all local authorities. It was felt that:

- The letter should go to a combination of Chief Executives, Directors of Finance and Directors of Social Services Social Services;
- The introduction should emphasise the financial impact of supporting people who have NRPF, in order to capture attention;
- The letter should explain that there is a case risk and very little practical guidance;
- The letter could be used to support the network to collect information on costs and numbers;

- The letter should ask chief executives to nominate a lead officer;
- The letter could propose a focused approach to collecting costs and numbers that local authorities could identify if they would like to be part of (see below).

Adrian is due to meet with Peter Hay, Co-Chair of the ADSS Asylum Taskforce, who could potentially be the signatory to the letter.

Action: AS to circulate the final version of the letter.

2.3 Collecting information on costs and numbers

It has been challenging to collect and collate information on the numbers of people and cost to local authorities. This is partly due to different ways of recording the information. Local authorities are also potentially sensitive to making information about costs publicly available. There was a concern that the variation in costs be presented to the Home Office as an argument to support the development of national guidance, rather than an opportunity to criticise higher spending authorities.

The Steering Group proposed that rather than seeking to collect information on costs and numbers from a large number of local authorities, it could work with a group of 10 in detail, who are prepared to be publicly identified.

2.4 Work with elected representatives

The Regional Strategic Co-ordination Forum is the main regional body for migration in each region and was felt to provide the best way to link with members.

Mary Blanche has had discussion with Damian Green, MP for Ashford, Kent and Shadow Immigration Minister, to the effect that making people destitute does not necessarily further the aims of returning them to their country of origin. She is increasingly being asked to brief elected representatives.

It was felt to be crucial that the LGA is informed and aligned with the Network's work.

2.5 Work with the BIA

It was agreed that different individuals within the BIA are responsible for different areas and should be engaged accordingly. It was noted that the BIA has no specific lead on destitution. Adrian is currently meeting with a number of people at the BIA and trying to identify a lead for the Network to liaise with. It was agreed that it is also very important that NRPF is discussed with regional BIA Directors.

It was noted that the BIA are particularly interested in issues such as intelligence and fraud.

2.6 Linking with health

The Network needs to strengthen its links with the health service, which tends to view support to people who have NRPF as a matter for social services.

- **ALL:** to send in their key points relating to health to JF
- **JF:** to circulate Department of Health guidance on providing health services to refugees and asylum seekers.

2.7 Key areas of work

The following key areas of work and Steering Group leads were identified:

- **Voluntary returns – Ted Brown:** Lin Homer has said that she would like to work with local authorities on voluntary returns. It was agreed that there should be a special briefing on returns.
- **Strategic Migration – Mary Blanche:**

2.8 Developing guidance

It was agreed that guidance should be developed on children and families, then subsistence rates and then EU.

- **OF / JF** to lead on the development of guidance on children and families.
- **JF** to develop briefing on 'who's who'.

3 Regional / local updates

3.1 London and South East

London

Adrian sits on the London regional strategy group, which is chaired by Steve Lidicott, from LB Croydon, who also sits on the ADASS Asylum Taskforce. So far the focus of the group has been exclusively UASC, and the BIA Regional Director has not yet attended. The next London group meeting is on 21st July.

Islington has recently updated its subsistence rates. It has also developed team procedures (an amended version of those for the asylum team, which were ISO 9000 accredited). The team were also starting a project with UASCs who are ARE. The Southwark team leader recently visited the Islington team to gather information.

Lambeth are spending approximately £3.5m on NRPF, which represents the majority of the Council's overspend. Lambeth currently supports approximately 160 cases, and receives 5 new referrals a week. From September it plans to launch an NRPF team with 6 qualified social work staff, working with all NRPF cases apart from UASC. The team will do holistic assessments covering HR and community care, after which it will primarily review cases. Lambeth will shortly go to court to challenge the judgement that eligibility criteria cannot be applied to people who are subject to immigration control.

Croydon are currently building a case against the Home Office regarding forced destitution.

South East

A Councillor from Kent County Council chairs the South East's Strategic Partnership on Migration, which the new BIA Regional Director has attended once. NRPF was briefly mentioned, but local authorities in the South East do not have specialist teams, making it harder to collate information, including figures.

Mary feels that the right people are not currently attending the Consortium meetings.

3.2 North East, Yorkshire and Humberside

North East

There remains no real interest in a regional group. Anne McKillop from the North East Region of the BIA is keen to link in with Becky. Becky hopes to put together a regional meeting in September.

Newcastle currently supports approximately 100 people who are NRPF. There is a single staff member for NRPF who undertakes all assessments, with support from MH and an accommodation person.

Yorkshire and Humberside

There is agreement in principle with Vicky Williams from the national NCCG to re-start a regional group, and an initial meeting is being planned. There is a danger that it will get sidetracked by the Regional Strategic Partnership and the splitting of adult and children's social services.

Bradford has a dedicated NRPF service and is seeing a year on year increase in numbers and costs.

3.3 North West

Manchester is currently supporting 45 people who are NRPF and 7 UASCs. The LA is considering its staff needs and whether someone specific is needed to do HR assessments, as this is felt to be a specialist area.

3.4 Midlands and East of England

The West Midlands group is led by Dave Newall and is focusing on children's issues. Carrie Baff has been invited to sit on this group. This is an officer group, but needs to influence members.

In Southend the number of cases the LA is supporting has fallen from 35 to 21, although 2 to 3 new cases present each week, primarily people from Zimbabwe who are HIV positive. This highlights the need to strengthen links with health.

3.5 Wales and South West

Lorraine sits on the Regional Strategy Board for the South West. A lot of strategic work is in progress. The key areas are Swindon, Gloucester, Plymouth, Exeter and Bristol, but many people end up in Bristol.

Bristol currently supports approximately 100 people who are NRPF. The caseload is increasing and there are approximately 25 children. There is an NRPF team consisting of 2 SW's and a ½ time finance and ½ time accommodation officer. The team do age assessments. There is a strong advocacy climate in Bristol, so the assessment process is extremely vigorous. There is a separate budget for NRPF, which is held within adult social care, and not split between adults and children. There is strong voluntary sector involvement around destitution and the LA is looking at how to reflect the issue within its asylum and refugee action plan.

4 Red Cross Conference

Julie circulated a summary of feedback received. This showed that the Conference was extremely well attended, with approximately 120 delegates. 85% of delegates were very or quite satisfied with the conference and nearly 60% strongly agreeing that the conference was a good use of their time. The most popular workshop was on local authority obligations to people who have no recourse to public funds,

and the workshop also scored well in terms of how people rated its usefulness and appropriateness.

It was noted that the BIA had made efforts to provide a speaker but had been unable to do so. However, a number of representatives from the BIA attended the conference and made helpful contributions during the day.

5 Future funding

The BIA has indicated that it may be willing to support the Network over the coming year and Adrian is in discussions about this.

6 Independent Asylum Commission Public Hearings

The Independent Asylum Commission is holding a series of public hearings. The Network will be invited to give evidence at one of these.

7 Any other business

It was noted that the Social Cohesion Commission were interested in NRPF when undertaking their recent enquiry.

Julie circulated the revised network leaflet.