



COSLA

STRATEGIC MIGRATION PARTNERSHIP

Scottish Strategic Co-ordination Group

April 2nd 2007

CoSLA Strategic Migration Partnership
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COSLA REFUGEE AND ASYLUM SEEKERS CONSORTIUM

AGENDA

1. Welcome and apologies (11.00-11.05)
2. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising (11.05-11.10)
3. Operations Group Minutes (11.10-11.15)
4. Accommodation Contracts (11.15-11.20)
5. Sunrise in Review (11.20-11.30)
6. IND Update (11.30-11.40)
7. Under-spend Proposal/Finance Update (11.40-11.45)
8. National Race Equality Strategy (11.45-11.50)
9. CRASC Business Plan 2007-09 (11.50-12.00)
10. CRASC Website (12.00-12.10)
11. Human Trafficking in Scotland (12.10-12.15)
12. Gateway Protection Programme (12.15-12.25)
13. IND Publication: 'Enforcing the Rules' (12.25-12.35)
14. Lead Professional Model (12.35-12.45)
15. UASC Reform Process (12.45-12.55)
16. AOCB (12.55-13.00)
17. Next meeting: **Friday 27th July 2007**

Minutes of Meeting

Present:

Cllr Irene Graham	COSLA (Glasgow CC) Chair
Val Thomson	Association of Chief Police Officers Scotland
Nick Morgan	Scottish Refugee Council
Jim Jarvie	YMCA Glasgow
John Crawford	NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde
John Donaldson	Glasgow City Council
James Pinkerton	Association of Directors of Social Work
Jean Wilson	Scottish Executive
Brian Kinney	Home Office
Jerry Harland	Home Office
Hazel Evans	Home Office
John Hampsey	International Organisation for Migration
Heidi McMahon	The Angel Group
Anthony Golsand	The Angel Group

In Attendance:

Derek Mitchell	COSLA
Lindsay McGregor	COSLA
Ron Culley	COSLA
Mhoraig Green	COSLA
Colin Mitchell	Border & Immigration Agency

Apologies:

Cllr. Andy White	COSLA (West Dunbartonshire Council)
Cllr Kate Dean	COSLA (City of Aberdeen)
Cllr Sheila Gilmore	COSLA (City of Edinburgh)
Lesley Irving	Scottish Executive
Sally Daghlian	Scottish Refugee Council
Robin Jackson	Angel Group
Elizabeth Welsh	Border & Immigration Agency
Phil Taylor	Border & Immigration Agency
Gary Sweeney	Border & Immigration Agency
Mike Canham	Home Office
Barry Dryden	Border & Immigration Agency
John Short	International Organisation for Migration
Kenny Simpson	Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers
Maria Walker	Association of Directors of Education

Item 1: Welcome and apologies

Councillor Graham welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologies were noted.

Item 2: Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

Minutes were agreed as an accurate record. In addition, the following action points were addressed:

- DM noted that at the request of the SSCG, a NAM Implementation Group has been established. The Group has met on three occasions to date;
- DM noted that previous under-spend proposals failed to meet the criteria set out in the enabling grant and as such the monies would be redeployed to cover the costs of an additional policy officer for COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership.

Item 3: Minutes of Operations Sub-group Meetings

Minutes were agreed as an accurate record.

Item 4: Accommodation Contracts

Section 95. DM noted that Glasgow City Council had signed the Section 95 Accommodation Contract in February 2007.

CM asked if there were plans to spread the intake of Section 95 clients to other Local Authorities in Scotland. IG and DM noted that there had been previous engagement with Local Authorities to discuss this matter and that this could feasibly be facilitated by COSLA at some point in the future. However, it was also suggested there would be a range of challenges in securing suitable accommodation outside of Glasgow. JD indicated that the terminology in the current Section 95 contract is ambiguous: references to 'Scotland' often refer Glasgow City Council. BK clarified that other Scottish Local Authorities had the opportunity to bid for a Section 95 contract but chose not to; as such, the only feasible option for exploring this option in the immediate future would be for Glasgow City Council to sub-contract to a neighbouring authority. There was general consensus that this was unlikely to happen.

Section 4. DM indicated that the transition to the new Section 4 contracts was progressing smoothly. The Angel Group has agreed to the novation of most of the properties used by the previous Section 4 accommodation providers. Moreover, all stakeholders are committed to take a sensitive approach in relation to any clients who are required to move premises.

JD noted that Glasgow City Council would be providing accommodation to a limited number of section 4 clients in circumstances where such provision was necessary to ensure family units were not broken apart.

Item 5: Sunrise Update

NM provided an update on the performance of the Sunrise project in Scotland over the last 12 months. In many respects the challenges and successes in Scotland were similar to those elsewhere in the UK. It was noted that there had been issues around the length of time the Home Office took to process the NASS 35 forms, without which new refugees could not access state benefits. In relation to integration, it appears that many new refugees have already established strong social networks but economic integration was proving to be a far greater challenge - the majority of clients are a distance from the labour market. It was recognised that the introduction of NAM could change these dynamics. There were also a range of challenges in finding suitable accommodation for new refugees.

JC asked if accommodation in England was more amenable to the needs of new refugees, to which NM noted that there was often greater capacity for larger families. LM suggested that there might be scope for Sunrise and partner agencies to undertake a capacity building exercise, to increase the potential to retain new refugees in the communities in which they lived. JD indicated that it might be interesting to scope out the extent to which suitable accommodation acted as an incentive to remain in a given community. More broadly, NM felt that there was a need for the SSCG to consider strategies that could be implemented to retain new refugees in Scotland

Action Point: COSLA staff will work with other stakeholders to draft a strategy for the retention of new refugees within Scottish communities

Item 6: Border & Immigration Agency Update

CM offered an update from the BIA around the number of asylum cases being considered within Scotland. The details are as follows:

- There are around 5,200 clients in Section 95 accommodation;
- There are around 400 clients in Section 4 accommodation
- There are around 140 clients in induction accommodation;
- There are around 180 clients receiving subsistence only support.

CM also indicated that the Westminster Parliament was due to legislate to eliminate the discrepancy between UK and Scottish law in relation to EU accession state migrants' access to homelessness support.

Finally, CM noted that the BIA corporate structure at Brand Street would be restructured to align the legacy casework with the new NAM structure. This would involve a case-owner approach to integrate support and decision-making. Work had also been undertaken to facilitate a more effective approach to the repatriation of failed asylum seekers. IG asked if there could be a report on the legacy cases at the next SSCG.

Action Point: BIA to report on the resolution of legacy cases at the next SSCG

HE reported on the future plans of BIA. Particular importance would be attached to the collation of information that could underpin strategic planning in relation to immigration and asylum. This would involve more extensive information sharing between BIA and partner organisations.

Item 7: Under-spend Proposals

DM referred members to proposals previously considered by the group:

UASC Guide. The first concerned the translation of an SRC UASC publication into the main languages spoken by unaccompanied children in Scotland (French, Arabic, Somali, Farsi and Sorani). DM noted that this proposal had not been sanctioned by the Home Office since the Enabling Grant did not allow for this type of activity to be pursued.

Research Proposal. DM referred members to a proposal to fund research into the current funding streams to which voluntary organisations and public sector projects have access. It was felt that this is particularly cogent given the imminent closure of the Atlas funding and the re-structuring of Home Office funding. Again, however, it was felt that this activity was disallowed by the terms of the Enabling Grant. However, the central thrust of this work will be taken forward by the ATLAS Partnership.

Residual Under-spend. DM suggested that the remaining monies should be used to build capacity within COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership. This will involve employing an additional policy officer.

Item 8: Scottish Executive Race Equality Strategy

JW provided an overview of the strategy, including the focus of the proposed activity. It was noted that the proposed publication date had been set back and the Strategy would now not be published until after the election.

Item 9: Strategic Plan 2007-10

RC summarised the three year strategic plan, highlighting its links the BIA Enabling Grant. In particular, the strategic plan is based on the following principles:

1. COSLA Refugee & Asylum Seekers Consortium will be re-branded as COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership;
2. In addition to the policy development activity that COSLA has carried out in relation to asylum seekers and refugees, the Partnership will additionally undertake work in relation to broader migration issues;
3. In order to fulfil this broader work-load, the Partnership will employ an additional policy officer;
4. In view of the sensitivities around the migration issue for local authorities in Scotland, COSLA officers will invite more elected members to sit on the SSCG, taking care to ensure that both urban and rural local authorities are represented.

5. In order to reflect the broader remit, COSLA officers will ask new organisations to send delegates to the SSCG. These organisations will include DWP, Scottish Enterprise, CBI Scotland, Shelter, the International Organisation for Migration, and the Scottish Trade Union Congress.

The strategic plan was given the endorsement of the SSCG. In terms of future work, a number of additional suggestions were made, including a focus on people without access to public funds and the effective integration of migrants.

Item 10: COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership Website

RC provided an overview of the new website, which has been refreshed and updated in line with the strategic plan. The previous address [www.asylumscotland.org.uk] will be kept, with an additional address [www.csip.gov.uk] also being introduced.

Item 11: Human Trafficking Update

RC updated members on the work undertaken on the subject of human trafficking. It was reported that the UK Government has agreed to sign up to the principles outlined in the Council of Europe's Declaration on the Fight Against Trafficking in Human Beings.

The Scottish Executive has promised to deliver an informal working group to scope out how the UK Action Plan on Human Trafficking is taken forward within a Scottish Context. COSLA will play a full and active role in this process.

Item 12: Gateway Protection Programme

DM provided an update on developments regarding the introduction of the Gateway Protection Programme to North Lanarkshire. He noted that North Lanarkshire Council should be commended for its work in facilitating the integration process: so far the programme has been an unmitigated success. It was also reported that the BBC will be televising an hour-long documentary on the refugees' transition from their camp in Zambia to their new homes in North Lanarkshire.

Item 13: Enforcing the Rules

DM provided an overview of the BIA publication 'Enforcing the Rules', the implementation of which could have a significant impact on a wide range of public services. In broad terms, the strategy aims to ensure and enforce compliance in relation to immigration laws, 'removing the most harmful people first and denying the privileges of the UK to those here illegally.' This will be achieved through:

- An effective approach to managing the identity of foreign nationals to help manage migration and cut illegal working
- Cross-government enforcement action to shut-down fraudulent access to benefits and services and tackle illegal working
- Fast and efficient removal, utilising both public and private sectors

The SSCG had significant concerns about the policy and its ramifications. Most notably, VT noted that the implementation of the policy would require considerable commitment from the police, which ACPOS are unable to sanction. VT also noted that there was little consultation about the document. The result is that ACPOS cannot at this stage commit to working in partnership with BIA to implement the strategy.

It was further noted by JC that the strategy was potentially inimical to the defining principles of the NHS, particularly around patient confidentiality. There were also concerns from a public health point of view around the treatment of infectious diseases. Finally, JC reiterated the point that the consultation process was ill considered.

JD spoke about the implicit threat within the strategy of withdrawing support from family units. He noted that if this were to be pursued, it would undermine the integrity of the Section 95 accommodation contract that Glasgow City Council had signed with the Home Office and may lead to the breaking of that contract.

IG indicated that there was some real concern around this issue and that it highlighted the urgent need to consider UK Government strategies within a distinctive Scottish context.

Action point: COSLA staff will explore the possibility of commissioning work that considers the applicability of UK drafted policy within a Scottish context

Item 14: Lead Professional Model

JD provided an overview of the plans of the Scottish Executive to implement a new strategy to ensure that information was shared by the statutory services and BIA. It is hoped that this information sharing protocol could be used to inform BIA decision making and develop a more human response to the removal of failed asylum seekers. The information provided by statutory services could have an impact on when, how and if removal will take place. JD noted that client consent would be required before information could be shared.

The Scottish Executive has agreed to fund three posts within Glasgow City Council to ensure that the information sharing protocol is effective. These posts will be filled by June 2007. The key stakeholders will monitor the impact of the Lead Professional Model and retain the right to withdraw from the agreement if it is felt that it has had no impact on the manner in which removals are undertaken.

Item 15: UASC Reform Process

JD offered an overview of the reform of the way in which unaccompanied asylum seeking children are cared for in the UK. In general terms, it is proposed that unaccompanied children are dispersed around the UK in order to relieve pressure on social services in the South East. The UK Government is keen to establish regional centres of excellence, which would accommodate around 100 children at a time. Within a Scottish context, a number of themes need to be considered:

- The way in which the claims of unaccompanied children are administered by case owners working within the framework of the New Asylum Model. In particular, there is concern that there is insufficient capacity within the legal profession to ensure that every child is effectively represented. This could have serious repercussions for the corporate parent that has responsibility for the child.
- There is uncertainty about the compatibility of the Scottish Executive's policy 'Getting it right for every child' and the UASC proposals.
- There is concern about the rights of children leaving care and confusion about the services to which they are entitled.
- There is incongruence between the Executive's Fresh Talent Initiative, which encourages talented individuals to Scotland, and the 95% refusal rate for young asylum seekers.
- There is some concern about how children will be transferred between corporate parents.

JD noted that many of these issues will be addressed a COSLA seminar on the UASC reform process, which will be held on the 17th April.

Item 15: AOCB and Date of Next Meeting

In view of the forthcoming elections and the need to expand and refresh the membership of the SSCG, it is suggested that the next meeting of the SSCG be postponed until late summer. As such, the next SSCG will meet on:

Friday 27th July 2007