

Scottish Strategic Co-ordination Group

Minute of Meeting held on June 12th 2006

Present:

Cllr Irene Graham	COSLA (Glasgow CC)
Barry Dryden	NASS Scotland
Elizabeth Welsh	IND Community Liaison Officer
Sarah Ballantyne	Angel Group
Heidi McMahan	Angel Group
Fiona Wilson	Angel Group
Nick Morgan	Scottish Refugee Council
Lesley Irving	Scottish Executive
John Crawford	NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde
Val Thompson	Association of Chief Police Officers, Scotland
James Pinkerton	Association of Directors of Social Work
John Donaldson	Glasgow City Council

In Attendance:

Lindsay Macgregor	COSLA
Jerry Harland	NASS
Helen Baillot	Scottish Refugee Council (Item 14)

Apologies:

Cllr. Andy White	COSLA (West Dunbartonshire Council) Chair.
Cllr Kate Dean	COSLA (City of Aberdeen)
Cllr Sheila Gilmore	COSLA (City of Edinburgh)
Derek Mitchell	Consortium Manager
Mike Canham	NASS

1. Welcome and apologies

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

2. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

Under the Report from IND, Liz noted that the words "to be piloted" should be deleted. ***With that correction, the minute of the previous meeting was approved.***

3. NASS Accommodation Contract Negotiations/Transitions

Glasgow City Council reported that they are still awaiting a response from the Minister to their request for funding for support services. The situation is now urgent as a report would have to go to pre-agenda this week to go to Policy and Resources Committee before summer recess. Lesley explained that the issue is complex as it concerns three Ministers – Communities, Education and Young People, and Finance and Public Sector Reform. The new Immigration Minister has written to Peter Peacock, re-iterating that the situation is pressing and suggesting that officers meet to

resolve it. ***It was agreed by members of the SSCG, however, that there is nothing more to be gained from officers meeting as all information has been made available to local and national politicians for a decision to be made.***

Jerry emphasised that NASS cannot go out of contract so contingency arrangements are now being made to transfer tenants from GCC to Glasgow Housing Association (this would not involved moving people from properties).

John stressed that the Health Board would want to be informed of the contract outcome as soon as it is known.

Angel have completed 14 family moves to date and have a further 37 scheduled per week over the next 3 weeks to complete all transitions. All moves are being confirmed in advance to NASS and Glasgow City Council (GCC), with the Police copied in. All homes are within GCC boundaries (1 outside has not been used for the NASS contract) and the list of properties secured has been agreed with the Consortium Manager and checked with support service providers. Further to discussions at the previous SSCG, Angel confirmed that families have not been trying to move large items of furniture such as sofas.

As there was no one available at the meeting from the **YMCA** to report on accommodation provision/transitions, Val provided an update from the Police perspective. The pressure group, Unity, has been attempting to prevent transfers, targeting YMCA (no threats have been made against Angel so far), apparently on the grounds that some YMCA transfer properties are perceived as unsuitable. However, the YMCA has transferred 3 families who have found their move to be very positive. The YMCA, against Police advice, have halted further moves, potentially fuelling future action by Unity who will perceive their actions to date as highly successful.

Otherwise, the YMCA have agreed a list of people to transfer to Angel and will be able to meet the conditions of their new contract.

4. Reference Group Minute
Agreed.

5. Business Plan 2006/07 & 3-year Strategy
Approved

6. Terms of Reference
Agreed with amendments: bullet point 3 amended to "To ensure" from "To enable" and bullet point 5 amended to "Key issues to be addressed include:"

7. UASC Update

James noted that there are key issues for the Association of Directors of Social Work (ADSW) raised by proposals for increased numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children coming to Scotland. A Home Office presentation indicates that there will be substantial implications for Social Work departments as young people in the UASC category will require safe transfer arrangements and will enter the looked after and accommodated system. In England, funds are available from the Department of Education but similar resources are not available in Scotland.

The UASC consultation paper will be published in early July for a 12 week consultation period.

8. IND Update

Barry reported that Philip Taylor has now taken up post as the Regional Manager and will be taking forward the New Asylum Model. Liz is the first point of contact for IND. Liz reported that all consultation on Family Removals Policy is now complete. Initial findings are that:

- No one likes being removed and there is a general dislike of the need for such a policy;

- There is an issue about the airline baggage limits and about provision of suitcases rather than the current “regulation” bags made available to returners;
- There is a need to engage with children without usurping the role of parents, perhaps through schools and, more specifically, Pastoral Care teachers.

Liz also reported that IND has examined cases of foreign prisoners released from Scottish prisons over the last 7 years and a number have been referred to a dedicated Criminal Casework team for decisions and, where determined, removal. ***Val and Jerry agreed to check on risk assessment and management protocols regarding dispersal of serious offenders and to inform John.***

Liz also requested that the Judicial Review process be examined by the Scottish Executive as IND feel the length and nature of the process, the inappropriateness of some cases which go to a hearing, and the unrealistic expectations being raised are causing problems. ***Lesley agreed to report back on progress on the review of Judicial Review procedures.***

Finally, Liz alerted the group to an address made at the General Assembly of Scotland by a minister who made very serious allegations about the Immigration Service’s removals practice, all of which have been strongly rebutted in a letter to the minister from Philip Taylor, copied to the incoming and outgoing Moderators. ***We agreed that Liz should be contacted in the first instance to verify details about removals and that we will prioritise discussion of a shared media strategy to explain to the public, to partner organisations, to the media and to asylum seekers about the range of asylum-related policies, processes and procedures as they are implemented in Scotland and to agree key shared values and messages.*** We also noted the difference between approaches in Scotland and England – in the former, asylum seekers are integrated; in the latter, only refugees are integrated. In Scotland, the media is generally much more supportive of and sympathetic towards asylum seekers facing deportation or eviction than the English media.

9. SRIF/Gateway

Lesley reported that SRIF is producing Action Plan points which will need to be prioritised. Points will also be raised with the Home Office on policies over which the Scottish Executive has no authority. The final meeting of the main group will take place on 26/6 and the sub-groups are also coming to conclusion. SRIF’s future is still under consideration as it is not a standing group. ***Lesley agreed to check on progress concerning the letter to Malcolm Chisholm on the future of SRIF.***

10. Community Development/Destitution

It was noted that on 10th July there will be a roundtable discussion in London for charities working with destitute asylum seekers to ensure consistent data collection etc. We agreed we need to clearly scope destitution – its nature, extent, causes and impact. On the issue of community development, local authorities are reporting considerable issues and impact arising from significant unplanned arrivals by A8 migrants.

It was agreed to proceed with plans for workshops on both issues, funded by the underspend if agreed by NASS.

11. Review of Enabling Grant

Comments were noted and agreed.

12. Enabling Grant Underspend Proposals

As proposals come in over the available underspend budget, we agreed:

- ***To remove the community development or destitution proposals;***
- ***To prioritise the media strategy within this year’s mainstream CRASC budget;***
- ***To find an alternative funding route for the UASC proposal.***

Lindsay will circulate a revised list of proposals.

13. NCG/NCCG/RSC

Proposed changes noted and agreed.

14. One Stop Service

Helen Baillot, Scottish Refugee Council, provided a presentation on the work of the One Stop Shop service, established in April 2000 following introduction of the Asylum and Nationality Act 1999. The service is funded by NASS to provide independent advocacy, advice and information to asylum seekers, new arrivals, refugees and refused asylum seekers. Core functions include establishing basic information, needs assessment and prioritisation; referral; and case work. Outreach is also provided in Edinburgh and via a freephone helpline. Services are also provided in conjunction with YMCA, NASS and accommodation providers as part of the Scottish Induction Service, including provision of advice and information on rights and responsibilities, dispersal, pregnancy and childbirth, and home safety.

15. Date of Next Meeting

Monday, 19 September at 11am, COSLA Offices, Rosebery House, Edinburgh