West Midlands Regional Local Authority UASC Group

Notes from the meeting of 1 July 2009

Present: Richard Ross – Chair (Solihull MBC); Sue Blick (Walsall); Ruth Gray (Birmingham); Tehseen Kauser (Sandwell); Sam MacDonald (Walsall), Zelda van Niekerk (Coventry); Sharon Tilt (Dudley), Louise Chilton (WMLGA – notes)

Apologies: Debbie Lewis (Staffordshire), Dave Newall (WMSMP)

Nicola Clarke (Children’s Society) would be chairing the Multi-Agency UASC Regional Implementation Group following the morning’s meeting – Sue Blick to report on the Local Authority meeting to the Multi-Agency group.

1. Notes from the meeting of 22 April 2009 and matters arising

It had been agreed following a Freedom of Information request that notes would be uploaded onto the Migration Partnership website after agreement at Local Authority UASC group meetings.

Sue Blick (Walsall) asked for changes to item 9 (AOB) regarding the care leavers and UASC networking group pilot that had been operating in the Black Country. Sue had prepared a document outlining the pilot, which was in the process of being discussed and agreed by DWP Regional Office before it could be circulated. Evaluation of Information from the pilot itself had not yet taken place, but would need to be before the pilot could be rolled out across the Region (hopefully be as soon as possible).

Action: LC to change before the notes are loaded onto the website by Dave Newall

The notes were agreed subject to this change.

Matters Arising:

Third Country Cases: The meeting with the third country unit would take place in 3 weeks time. Group members to email RR with any individual matters/general issues they would like raised.

Accommodation Providers: DN/RR had not yet had chance to meet to discuss the development of a regional commissioning approach. A meeting would be set up as soon as possible to discuss major issues about accommodation providers, viability etc. One provider would like to be Ofsted registered which would have an impact on cost. Group members to invite accommodation/ commissioning colleagues in local authorities to the meeting as soon as it has been arranged.

Future UASC Group Meetings: Group members were asked to note that future local authority meetings would start at 10.00 am and finish at 11.00 am with Multi-Agency meetings taking place between 11.30 am and 1.00 pm, followed by lunch.

1a Stats – All requested to send in staffs to DN by email (d.newall@wmlga.gov.uk)

1b Commissioning/accommodation group – nothing was reported (Note this has now been set for 14th Sept)

1c Child Trafficking – the Home Office had recently issued a new formal procedure for assessing and recording cases of child trafficking.
Action – Child Trafficking to be a substantive item on next agenda

2. UASC reform update
There was not much activity to report. A number of local authorities had been asked to provide further information on UASC support UKBAs UASC reform programme team.

3. Post 18 support and potential transition to Section 4 UKBA provision
RR explained that Section 4 provision is a residence provision where UKBA provide for people signed up to voluntary return who cannot be returned. People being supported under Section 4 tended to be underlying cases or under 21 years old.

There was discussion regarding Section 4 case experience at individual authorities. It had been noted that in some cases it was taking 4 weeks to find accommodation. It was also commented that it was difficult to get young people to accept applications as they were unwilling to embrace the terms and conditions involved.

Action: TK to find out Sandwell figures on deportation at the next local authority panel.

There was also discussion regarding Post 18 support. Generally people were being well supported and many were receiving housing benefit. There had been problems in Birmingham with getting housing providers to work with the housing department.

It was agreed to explore at the planned accommodation providers’ meeting whether local authorities were accepting applications on the basis of people being care leavers.

UASC reform – local authorities and the Home Office to discuss whether there is a solution to the leaving care problem without going through too difficult a process.

4. Updates on case law – recent age assessment case
Recent age assessment training had provided a detailed update on the Croydon and Kent casework relating to age assessment and medical assessments. There is a new abbreviated version at:(link)

It was confirmed that there were many local authority Freedom of Information requests in process around age assessment.

5. Age Assessment training and further sessions
Feedback on age assessment training was good. Further follow-up training was now needed on challenges, of which there are two basic types - solicitors and advocacy services. One age assessment case had gone to the local government ombudsman; it had been accepted that the local authority had to redo the age assessment because some of the process around it had not been concluded properly, but the work on age had been correct.

There are tricky areas around age assessment eg at a recent court judgment the issue was whether the young person was offered the opportunity to have an advocate present. There is the need to ensure that the offer is made, logged and put into the report.

It was agreed that it would be useful to have follow up age assessment training as a next stage and to invite an LA solicitor or barrister to attend. There may be the opportunity to engage the solicitor working on the Croydon case via Birmingham City Council.

Action: RG to email Carey and copy in RR to follow up.
**Action:** TK to investigate the possibility of hiring room for 20/24 people in Crystal house/Shaftesbury house in Sandwell sometime during middle 2 weeks in October, avoiding half term week.

Judith Dennis of the Refugee Council carries out training in London at a cost of £299 per delegate but would be prepared to travel to the regions to put on the course for £1000 plus train fare (and the cost of the venue) for a maximum of 20 people. It was suggested that local authorities combined resources to take advantage of this. This training takes people through the UASC process up to transition and beyond and touches on age assessment.

**Action:** RR to contact Judith Dennis, RG to organise venue for end of September/beginning of October.

**6. NAM stakeholders group update**

Nigel Williams to circulate notes on his return from annual leave. There was much discussion regarding age assessment.

**7. Current issues and AOB**

Further issues discussed included:

- The best dictionaries for Pashto speakers. RR to ask Sue to email details regarding their suppliers to SB
- There was an issue about the group email list which needed to be updated as follows – Julie Kelly to be removed, TK to be added, ZvN’s email address to be checked
- Prayer mats – RR to send details to RG
- Unannounced Ofsted visits – an Ofsted team of 12/13 had made a visit to Sandwell. They had spoken briefly about UASC but had looked at every sector. There had been brief positive feedback. The team had also visited Coventry.
- Case resolution update – RR went to NAM meeting. Not much progress had been made and RR had not done anything to liaise with them. Although it was in the interests of all local authorities to liaise with them, this was a decision for individual local authorities.

Next meetings:
Wednesday 9 September 2009 (10am)
Wednesday 25 November 2009 (10am)