

Notes of Decisions Taken and Actions Required

LGA Asylum and Refugee Task Group

15 January 2009, LGA London

Present:

Chair: Cllr Roger Lawrence

Members: Cllr Ken Armstrong (East Midlands), Cllr Basil Curley (North West), Cllr Jean Jones (COSLA), Cllr Aled Roberts (Wales), Cllr Olivia Rowley (Yorkshire & Humberside), Cllr David Simmonds (London), Cllr Paul Watkins (South East)

Officers: Grace Ashaye (London Councils), David Barnes (West Midlands), Ian Beattie (East of England), Lesley Carr (South East), John Donaldson (COSLA), Mhoraig Green (COSLA), Anne Hubbard (Wales), Helen Johnston (London Councils), Helen Murray (LGA), John Price (South West), John Ransford (LGA), Nicola Rea (North West), Sarah Short (East Midlands), Victoria Williams (Yorkshire & Humberside)

Attendees: Phil Woolas – Minister for Immigration
Paul Darling, Tom Greig (Home Office)

Apologies: Cllr Roger Hutchinson (South West), Cllr Andy Matchet (West Midlands), Cllr Michael McNestry (North East), Cllr Anne Steward (East of England)

Nadeem Ahmed (North East), Derek Mitchell (COSLA)

1. Matters arising from the last minutes

- The minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the previous meeting. There were no matters arising.

2. Update on UASC funding

- Helen Murray stated that an agreement had been reached with the Home Office regarding all outstanding leaving care and special circumstances payments due to March 2008 and that an email had been sent out informing members as such on the 19th December. All local authorities should now have received their payments. Paul Darling confirmed that all payments had been agreed and processed by UKBA.

Action: individual local authorities to contact Helen Murray and Helen Johnston with details of any payments not yet received.

3. UASC Reform Programme

- Paul Darling explained that Keith Lambert had now been appointed as the overall UKBA lead on the UASC Reform Programme and that a project manager would be appointed in the very near future. Paul stated that UKBA were committed to the Reform Programme and that discussions were currently ongoing with 6 local authorities who had demonstrated an interest in becoming specialist authorities. One of the main dependencies for the success of the Reform programme was the removal of UASCs given a negative asylum decision prior to their 18th birthday in order to reduce the leaving care duty on local authorities. Resolving this was now a priority for UKBA.
- Vicky Williams stated that the main barrier to the Reform Programme for local authorities was the 'post-18 funding issue'. Local authorities need to be reassured that they will be fully funded for any leaving care costs as many former UASCs cannot be removed at 18 and are owed a duty of care by their local authority.
- Cllr Simmonds stated that a legislative change may be required to prevent situations whereby UASCs with a negative decision are returned to their country of origin but then subsequently return to the UK again and claim leaving care support.

Action: Cllr Simmonds to provide a case study to the UASC Reform Steering Group 'post-18 issues' sub-group.

- David Barnes stated that UKBA had 'accepted in principle' the request from local authorities at the Midlands UASC Reform Programme Workshop for funding to develop service models/specifications as specialist authorities.
Action: Paul Darling to confirm in writing to Cllr Matchet (cc David Barnes and Ian Beattie) whether funding would be made available to local authorities to develop service models/specifications as specialist authorities.
- The Taskgroup agreed that there had been a general lack of leadership and direction up to this point with regard to the UASC Reform Programme and that clarification on timescales, service specifications, funding, age-assessment issues and post-18 funding was urgently required in order to re-engage local authorities.

4. **RSMP Enabling Grant Agreement**

- Paul Darling explained that David Pike was leading the RSMP Enabling Grant review for UKBA in the first quarter of 2009. The review would commence within the next two weeks and be completed by the end of March.
- Cllr Jones stated that clear timetables and terms of reference for the review were needed to enable RSMPs to assist UKBA in the process and incorporate it into their upcoming meetings. UKBA Regional Directors should also be consulted in the review.
Action: UKBA to provide Helen Murray with terms of reference and timescales for the proposed review.(NB Subsequent to the meeting, information was circulated to the Group)
- Cllr Jones hoped that that UKBA should consider granting a one-year extension to the Enabling Grant if there was a delay in the review to enable forward planning.

5. **UKBA update**

- The Taskgroup noted the report.

6. **AOB**

- Ian Beattie stated that the next Taskgroup meeting in April would be a good opportunity to review the workplan and reassess the strategic priorities. The Group also discussed the proximity of the June meeting to the local elections and decided to preserve the date unless this impacted on a significant number of Members.

7. **Visit by the Immigration Minister Phil Woolas**

- A follow-up letter to the Minister outlining the main discussion points raised during his visit is attached to the minutes (see Annex A).

The next meeting will be held at the LGA on the 2nd April 2009, 11.00-13.00 in room 7.1/7.2.