

Lin Homer
Chief Executive
1st Floor Seacole Building
Room 40
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Olvia Fellas
Head of Equalities
Islington Council
23-26 St. Albans Place
Islington
N1 0NX

Tel +44 020 7035 1678
Fax +44 0870 3369050
Email Lin.homer@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk
Web www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk

29th April 2009

Dear Olvia,

I appreciated the opportunity to discuss the findings and recommendations of the No Recourse to Public Funds Network Report when we met on 20 February, and recognise the continuing concern felt by local authority colleagues about the burden of supporting destitute migrants with community care needs who are excluded from state benefits by their immigration status. As I made clear when I responded formally to the report in my letter of 17 November, I believe the priority must be to tackle the problem at source by addressing the presence or status in this country of the individuals concerned, rather than perpetuating and risking exacerbating the problem by making specific additional financial provision for local support services for this category. We need a sustainable solution which does not simply encourage growth in the number of local authority clients.

I am keen for the Agency to work in partnership with local authorities across the UK to address this issue wherever possible. The starting point must be to arrive at a comprehensive and accurate list of local authority-supported clients who should be assisted to leave the country or whose circumstances are such that their immigration case should be resolved in some other way, making best use of the information already collected by social care professionals working in local government. This would enable us to prioritise cases for action on a sensible basis, focusing first for example on those representing the greatest burden to local authorities.

I understand that you have secured funding from the Government Connect fund administered by the Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government to

develop a database which will support this kind of analysis and also have the ancillary benefit of preventing clients from "shopping" for support services between multiple local authorities. The UK Border Agency will provide the Network with technical support to assist with the development of the database, and will participate actively in discussion about how the database should be managed, and how it should link to the Agency's immigration systems. I have asked Agency officials for regular reports on the development of this work moving ahead.

When we met in February, you mentioned that some local authorities had experienced frustration with some of the bureaucracy associated with the current voluntary assisted returns programme operated on our behalf by the International Organisation for Migration. In some cases, local authorities had instead funded their own facilitated return arrangements for clients, with some success. I have established that the Home Office does have the power in law to provide financial assistance to other organisations, including local authorities, involved in operating assisted voluntary return arrangements. In order to consider whether we should discuss further the introduction of new bilateral arrangements between the UK Border Agency and local authorities in this field of activity, I am keen to establish whether the current assisted voluntary returns programme can be tailored more effectively to meet the needs of local authority clients. I understand there have already been bilateral discussions between the Network and IOM officials on this issue, and I would like to see this expanded into a proper trilateral dialogue including senior representatives from the Agency. Agency officials responsible for AVR will be in touch shortly to take this forward.

In the meantime, the Agency is continuing with its programme of work to implement the new network of local Immigration Teams (LITs). The first 9 LITs were established in January 2009 and new LITs will continue to be rolled out across the country until they cover the whole of the UK. These local teams will build on existing partnerships with local authorities, enabling these authorities to talk directly to UKBA about the individuals they are supporting and to tailor solutions to individual circumstances. I think LITs will be key to identifying those individuals who are the greatest burden on Local Authorities and resolving their cases. I understand that colleagues from Immigration Group have been in touch with you to discuss how one of our new LITs can work with one of your member authorities to further investigate how such a relationship might work.

We remain committed to working with you and other local authority colleagues to resolve this very complex issue. To that end I was pleased that the Agency was able to meet the

Network's recent request for £60K financial assistance to meet its operating costs and look forward to working in partnership with you in the coming year.

The issues the Network has been looking at have some crossover to the separate work we have been doing with local authorities on the support system for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) - particularly in respect to former UASC care leavers who become unlawfully present in the UK when their asylum and immigration applications are finally determined as refused. We recently established a joint working group to consider the handling of these cases, including some possible legislative changes aimed at simplifying the support options for these young people when they turn 18 and the funding arrangements that flow from them. Some commentary on this work will be included in the documentation we will shortly be issuing, via our Strategic Migration Partnerships, to enable local authorities to work up proposals on implementing the new specialist model of UASC support that we wish to introduce. We expect the initial stage of that work to be completed around July, by which time we should have a clear idea of the pace at which the model can be put in place.

I hope this letter is of assistance. I continue to take a great interest in this area and have asked those responsible to provide me with regular updates on the progress of this work. I hope we can continue to work together towards a solution that will be beneficial to all concerned.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lin Homer'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'L'.

Lin Homer