

## **REFUGEE & MIGRANT FORUM MANCHESTER**

### **MONITORING CHANGES AT DALLAS COURT**

**31 Jan 08**

(We have not included names of participants other than Basic Rights Group members for public minutes)

#### **Introduction**

- Since February 2007 the Basic Rights group (BRG) has been having regular meetings with staff at Dallas Court.
- The BRG needs people to keep them updated with their experiences at Dallas Court.
- One way in which people can do this is through Reporting Diaries.
- Dallas Court has said they have already started implementing changes. We need to know if this is actually happening.

#### **Discussion**

- Forum members gave some feedback on their own experiences with Dallas Court.
- Improvements mentioned were a shortened waiting time of around 15 minutes.
- This may be due to the rota system which allocates 2 hours in which each asylum seeker may report to Dallas Court. Some felt that this system was better as it lessened the waiting time.
- The use of an electronic display was also mentioned. This display gives information about where to complain if asylum seekers have problems etc. It was thought that such systems increase asylum seekers' confidence in the system.

We then split into two groups in which to discuss forum members' experiences at Dallas Court further. These groups were facilitated by BRG members Azeldin and AboBeker.

#### **Azeldin's group**

- One person has noticed a good deal of improvement at Dallas Court. Started reporting to Dallas Court in 2005 and today in 2008 he finds that he is treated much better by the guards.
- Has a friend who was tagged and was very concerned and humiliated by it. He felt like such treatment should be for an animal. He was tagged randomly as he always reported on time prior to being tagged.
- The group complained about the lack of flexibility in Dallas Court. They don't take into account circumstances. If an asylum seeker is late to report they don't accept them and are unwilling to hear the reasons why they are late.
- One person has had problems with his card. He had great difficulty in getting his money and found the system at Dallas Court complicated

and not user-friendly. For asylum seekers with little or no English this system would be even more difficult.

- Asylum seekers are not always told that they are entitled to claim their travel expenses. One person said that he had always been told about this but that others might not be. It was agreed within the group that experiences in Dallas Court often varied and depended on the staff working there that day.
- Taking away asylum seekers' mobile phones leaves them unable to communicate with their families when detained.
- Members were concerned that even any papers or their reporting diaries might be taken away.
- Azeldin said that the BRG had discussed the confiscation of mobile phones with the manager at Dallas Court. His reason was that in another reporting centre someone had once tried to smuggle in a razor blade inside this phone but people at Dallas Court gave different answers.
- People should keep a list of important numbers with them at all times so they are still able to contact people when their phones are taken away.
- One person said he keeps an A4 sheet of paper with him of all important details and gives copies to others so they can trace his friends, wife etc. if he is detained. It is important to be prepared.
- Last year he interviewed a family who were detained - they were not allowed to go to the toilet, were woken up early, couldn't change, were taken to Dallas Court, not given food, the canteen was closed and they remained hungry for 37 hours. NB they had children as well.
- People don't always know that they are entitled to a phone call.
- There is a pay phone but people often have no money.
- Asylum seekers need to be given more chances to make phone calls. Someone referred to a case where a friend tried to contact him and he was driving so couldn't answer the phone. His friend lost his only chance to make a call.
- Small time slot is a serious inconvenience, if reporting once a month asylum seekers can easily forget. They are sent a harsh letter if they miss their slot.
- Other members said that recently the language of these letters has been more pleasant. They are given another date a whole month ahead. So if someone misses their slot they must wait for a whole month without money.
- One participant forgot the date on which she was supposed to report, tried calling Dallas Court but couldn't get through. She went there in person but the guards wouldn't let her in. They told her to keep trying with the phone but it was too late and she got the letter giving her a date to report the following month. She felt there was no recognition of the effort she had made to get in touch with Dallas Court after she had accidentally missed her slot.
- Dallas Court have agreed with BRG to post a ticket to people on Section 4 vouchers if they have missed a date and let the immigration

agency know why. This is not happening. Without money it is hard to make the next appointment.

- It was felt that people should be able to change the reporting date.

### **AboBeker's group**

- People offered to help by giving out copies of reporting diaries when new ones are ready
- One person said his friend is reporting twice a day every day.
- AboBeker to speak to Mohamed to find out about the above.
- Everyone agreed waiting outside without a shelter is a major problem
- Dallas Court are in a long term contract with their landlord and the landlord refuses to let them build a shelter.
- A person on section 4 is not getting tickets - will tell him to ask next time he reports
- One participant asked to change his reporting date in November because had a full day at university but they said no.
- Kurdish speakers – they are still asking other community members to be interpreters instead of using telephone interpretation. On one day there was a Korean person there and they didn't use telephone interpretation so other reportees just tried to help.
- A forum member from DRC said last time she reported at Dallas Court she was asked to interpret for people.
- No ventilation, very cramped.
- Still can't get through on telephone system (December)
- A lot of Iranian and Kurdish asylum seekers seem to have tags.
- Fear of being in same home as someone who has a tag.
- Section 4 issue - can't get through to explain that you are ill so they won't send a travel ticket because haven't been able to explain.
- People not having sickness taken as reason to report - Dallas Court's response to this is that if once this is OK, if lots of times they don't believe them.
- People with children - too afraid to not report even when children are sick
- People turning up late for time slot - no flexibility. If late by 15 minutes they are sent home.

### **General group feedback**

- Have they allocated slots evenly? 10:30- 12:30 much better than it was. No problems on Thursdays.
- One person felt they should scrap time slots – but some people find the time slots better.
- If idea was to cut waiting times, it is still very busy at some times of day
- One person said 8:30 – 10:30 is always empty. Dallas Court changed time he went to 13:30 and it was very busy. Are the time slots evenly divided? The problem with having time slots automatically evenly divided is that then people may not be able to choose the time they report

- Some people had not been asked what time they wanted to report anyway. One person wants to change to a morning slot and will tell them next time she reports and then let BRG know what happens
- Some people were asked to make a choice out of three time slots
- Recognition that Dallas Court can help with some issues. One person said they don't see Dallas Court as a threat, asylum seekers should act as responsible people as well - Dallas Court needs to make sure that asylum seekers are aware of the reasons behind their actions and asylum seekers need to be accountable for their actions as well.

**Next Meeting:**

- Basic Rights Group will feed these points back to Dallas Court.
- The next communities meeting to consult, discuss and feedback on any developments will be 17<sup>th</sup> April 2008.
- New Reporting Diaries will be available to take away.
- Everyone was encouraged to bring as many people who are reporting at Dallas Court as they could.