

**Refugee & Migrant's Forum (RMF) and Border and Immigration Agency
Meeting Held on Thursday 31st May 2007
At Dallas Court, Salford**

Present: Elinah Mugwagwah (Chair, RMF)
Azeldin El Sharif (Vice-Chair, RMF)
Elzein Mohamed (RMF)
Abobeker Zukrya (RMF)
Hazel Healy (Associate member, RMF)
Sophie King (Development Worker, RMF)
Ian Collings (Assistant Director, BIA)
Chris Brammer (Chief Immigration Officer, BIA, Detention & Removals)
Mo Williams (Senior Executive Officer, BIA, Reporting Centre Operations)
Sarah Williams (Higher Executive Officer, BIA, Reporting Centre Manager)

Peter Mayor (BIA) attended to take minutes

Apologies were received from Kashif Ali (RMF)

1) Previous Minutes.

- **Chris Brammer to ask Ian Collings to speak at launch event on 15th May and notify RMF.**

Action completed – item closed.

- **Mo Williams to contact BSU for an update on negotiations on the shelter and to check it wouldn't be a problem for RMF to look at who might have influence over the landlord's decision**

Mo Williams reported that negotiations were ongoing. Sophie King suggested that the RMF might be able to bring pressure to bear on the landlord by dealing with the local M.P, however the BIA representatives present considered that this could be counterproductive at the moment.

Status – ongoing.

- **To produce comprehensive leaflets and posters, covering reporting centre procedures, in community languages. Mo Williams to investigate what budget there was for their production.**

Mo Williams reported that maps are now being issued to applicants, and stated that it is intended that some details of such procedures will be printed on the rear of the maps by the end of July. This will initially be in English. There are also multi-lingual posters regarding complaints which are due to be brought into use shortly. As the IPCC are responsible for putting this system in place and BIA do not wish to duplicate their work it is intended to wait until they have set up communication systems, which can then be amended to suit local conditions.

Sarah Williams further volunteered to raise this point at the regional Reporting Centre Managers meeting. She also stated that she would e-mail tagging instructions to RMF representatives, as these are now available in English and four other languages.

RMF requested that they are allowed input into the information issued in pamphlets or on the rear of the maps – this was agreed provisionally.

Status - ongoing

- **RMF to advise on the languages needed to cover the various communities.**

These were stated to be Arabic, French, Tigrinia, Amharic, Somali, Urdu, Swahili, Farsi, Punjabi, Chinese, Kurdish, Pashto and Albanian.

Status – completed.

- **Mo Williams to look into the possibility of issuing day tickets that included the tram.**

Mo explained that this is a centrally funded contract management issue. Although relationships exist with various bus companies there are none with the tram company at this time. Sophie King enquired as to the possibility of meetings with contact management and Sarah Williams agreed to raise this at the next reporting centre management meeting.

Status – ongoing.

- **RMF to contact transport network about the First no. 33 service.**

Not yet actioned. RMF to action, and will also enquire about the possibility of more buses being scheduled to serve the reporting centre.

Mo Williams will contact BSU about better signage to the reporting centre.

Status – ongoing.

- **Mo Williams to look into how people on section 4 vouchers are expected to report if they haven't received a travel ticket.**

Sarah Williams stated that this should not apply where people turn up on their assigned date. Sarah will liaise with contact management to arrange issue of travel tickets by post where justified (e.g. where someone phones in with an acceptable reason for not reporting).

Status – ongoing.

- **RMF to draft and circulate a brief terms of reference.**

These were circulated as page 6 of the agenda for the meeting, and agreed.

Status – completed.

2) Waiting Times

Sarah Williams reported that a new system is now in place to cut waiting times. People reporting are now set up to report in set time slots, agreed after consultation each person, which should reduce the time spent queuing outside the reporting centre. Sarah will continue to monitor waiting times.

It is also now the practice that travel vouchers are issued when reporting rather than clients having to queue separately for these, which is more convenient for those waiting.

3) Contact with staff.

Sophie King enquired about staff training in refugee/asylum awareness, both for reporting centre and security staff.

Sarah Williams stated that there is at present no formal training for counter staff, but she is currently attempting to improve internal training. Security staff are employed by G4S, and training issues are to be raised at the next group meeting, when hopefully a G4S representative will be present

RMF are look into options for training of BIA staff. The BIA representatives present expressed an interest in this and RMF committed to explore this issue further.

RMF raised concerns about the tone of official letters, especially ISE 143s.

Ian Collings explained that these were centrally issued, and cannot be altered locally. Chris Brammer will pass on RMF concerns to Policy.

4) Interpreters.

RMF stated that interpretations had been reported to them as not always satisfactory, and people were worried about signing anything which they don't fully understand.

Chris Brammer explained the accreditation of interpreters, and that unsatisfactory interpreters are regularly removed from the list.

Sarah Williams discovered when feeding back issues from the RMF report to reporting centre staff that people were not using the 'Big Word' telephone interpretation system. She has now ensured everyone is aware of the importance of accessing this system whenever anyone needs language assistance.

Hazel Healy asked if staff were trained specifically to work with interpreters. There is no such training in place, and RMF will look into the availability of such training for the next meeting.

5) Reporting Frequency.

Ian Collings explained that the reporting frequency was set by the case owner, and was not locally variable.

6) Sickness Policy & Procedure.

Sophie King asked about the requirements for a GPs letter / sick note

Sarah Williams said that this was now only necessary in cases of long term illness, and that in such cases sick notes and possibly specialist's reports would continue to be required. One-off situations where people ring in sick will be judged on their own merits – the situation must involve unforeseen circumstances but in cases where the applicant has a generally good record of reporting staff will be sympathetic. The sickness of a child will generally be accepted as a justifiable reason for failure to report.

Elinah Mugwagwa raised the issue of the reporting centre telephones not being answered when people rang in sick.

Sarah Williams agreed that this was a problem, due to staffing levels, but said that she was currently attempting to get more staff phones.

Azeldin El-Sharif talked of his own experience when reporting, when he was suffering from mental health problems, including amnesia. He said that he had had no idea that his reporting could be suspended, and asked if this could be communicated to applicants. It was agreed that this could be considered as part of the future pamphlets on reporting procedures.

7) Security.

RMF enquired as to the necessity of searching applicants before entry to the reporting centre. Chris Brammer stated that this is a Health & Safety issue, as the BIA owes a duty of care both to clients and staff

Azeldin El-Sharif raised the issue of the removal of peoples mobile phones, stating that the perception of this from the client's point of view was that it was a method of isolation and control.

Mo Williams stated that this requirement was purely about safety. Chris Brammer pointed out that It had been the case that razor blades had been found secreted behind the battery in a mobile phone and Sarah Williams added that camera phones could be used to identify and threaten staff.

It was pointed out that phones were available if detained, and Mo Williams stated that anyone detained with no money would be offered the chance make a free phone call. Anyone in the reporting centre is also free to leave the waiting area to use their own phone from outside.

8) Facilities.

RMF asked if refreshments could be made available to clients. Mo Williams stated that unfortunately there was no budget available for tea or coffee, however water was generally available.

9) Feedback from previous meeting of forum

Elinah Mugwagwa stated that Ian Collings report had been disappointing as there was no mention of consultation.

Ian Collings said that the new Regional Director, Gillian Mortlake, wishes to become involved in the liaison between BIA and RMF, and that the issue of consultation will be more appropriately raised at that regional level. Ian then explained the system of Regional Directors & Assistant Directors.

Chris Brammer said that he is currently engaged in producing an organogram to explain the structure more clearly, and that, when complete, copies would be made available to RMF.

There was generally a good response to the previous meeting, and those present felt that a better insight was being gained by both groups.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday 12th July 2007, 11:00 to 14:00 hours, to be held at RFM. This meeting will primarily centre round enforcement issues. A representative of G4S is to be invited to attend this meeting.