

Welcome

The start of 2011 is a good time to look forward and consider the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

Later this year, the UK Border Agency (UKBA) will begin tendering for 2012 asylum services. Local authorities in Yorkshire and Humber are ready to step up with new ways of working that meet the needs of the region and government. We'll also be working with local authorities to establish new 'initial accommodation' in the region, as outlined in the main article.

This year also sees the launch of Roma SOURCE, a European project looking at how we can learn from other countries about working to meet the needs of Roma migrants in a way that benefits all communities.

There are challenges too. Like many of our partners, we'll be working with fewer resources, and there are specific pieces of work where future funding remains uncertain.

Despite those challenges, we're more than ready to continue delivering high quality support to our local partners, to help them deliver effective services at a local level.

Local authorities win contract extension

Just before Christmas, UKBA confirmed that it intends to extend the current contract for those local authorities in Yorkshire and Humber that provide accommodation for asylum seekers.

A group of local authorities in this region has provided accommodation as part of a commercial arrangement with government since 2001. There are also other accommodation providers in the region from the private sector. The accommodation is paid for by central government as part of its international obligations.

The arrangement has brought considerable investment into the region, helping regenerate some of our cities and towns. It has also ensured that local authorities have some strategic control over the places where asylum seekers are accommodated, which minimises tensions within communities.

This latest agreement sees a continuation of this provision until May 2012. This provides welcome stability both for local authority providers and

for users. The decision was made following a competitive tendering exercise which looked at quality as well as cost. Local authorities in this region have always been at the forefront of asylum accommodation provision nationally, and the decision to extend the local authority contract here is a reflection of the very high standards of delivery that these local authorities work to at a realistic and competitive price.

UKBA has asked that the group of local authorities involved in delivering this service also consider providing 'initial accommodation' (the short term accommodation that asylum seekers use when they first arrive in the region and are assessed) from March 2011. We're currently working with UKBA and other agencies to look at options for delivering that service.

Policy and research

In May 2011, government restrictions on migrant workers from the EU 'Accession 8' (or 'A8') countries will expire. This means that nationals from these countries will have the same rights and entitlements as all other EU citizens in the UK and will no longer need to register on the Worker Registration Scheme.

We've been considering the implications of this change for local services and the

immediate challenges that may arise. A briefing paper about this is available on our website.

Government continues to develop policy initiatives through consultation. We're currently focusing on our response to the consultation about the student immigration system, as this will directly affect educational institutions as well as having wider impacts upon local areas.

Asylum seeker accommodation contract

The Public Sector Group - the 10 local authorities that provide asylum services under contract with the Home Office in Yorkshire and Humber - has won an extension on the asylum services contract till May 2012.

As a result, some tenants - both families and single asylum seekers - will be transferring from their previous accommodation to public sector housing in various areas across the

region over the next few months.

The Public Sector Group is consulting with a wide range of asylum services to ensure the transfer process goes as smoothly as possible.

When placing people in their new accommodation, the Public Sector Group will be aiming, where possible, to minimise disruption both to children in the last year of school, and to individuals with health support needs.

And finally...

Website news Average use of the website for the period October-December 2010 was over 1,400 visits and 6,100 page views per month.

You can find our briefing paper 'End of A8 transitional arrangements in 2011' at:
www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/A8transition

Integration and RIES

We're currently seeing changes to the existing structures for refugee integration in the region, with the Refugee Integration Group, the employment group and the Yorkshire Integration Network merging into a single 'Regional Refugee Network'. The new network will be more about groups of practitioners coming together to share knowledge, learning and experience - enabling them to improve their delivery at local level - and less about formal representation.

The Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES) has now received more than 2000 referrals. RIES is expecting to wind down in the coming months, in preparation for the end of the current contract in Sept 2011.

Migration

A small project to support health champions within Roma migrant communities will start in our region in April 2011. This is the Yorkshire strand of the new EU-funded Roma SOURCE project.

The Partnership will be contacting agencies around the region in the next few months to identify where this work should be focused. We intend to ensure that learning from the project can be shared among agencies working with Roma migrants throughout the region.

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