VCS Engagement Day 2024

Overview and notes

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# Background

* The VCS Engagement Day was held on 27 November 2024 in Leeds
* This document is an overview of the sessions and should be used in conjunction with the slides and handouts which have also been circulated.
* Notes were taken in the sessions by a number of people and compiled below. Please contact Migration Yorkshire if there are any questions or more detail is required.
* A wealth of information was shared, and Migration Yorkshire have committed to driving forward a strategy and action plan based on the conversations and outcomes of the event. This will be shared with the wider VCS network in early 2025, along with details of how we can collectively move forward.

# Welcome, overview of the day, and synopsis of the last 18 months

*Delivered by Migration Yorkshire*

The day began with reflections of changes since the last VCS Day in July 2023. The last 18 months have been stop-start, with little consistency, and following the general election in July 2024, the sector is still going through transition and uncertainty.

Slides were shared giving bullet point overview of both changes and upcoming horizon scanning for the national picture, asylum, unaccompanied asylum seeking children, resettlement, Ukraine and Hong Kong schemes.

The [Migration Yorkshire round-up](https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/policy/migration-news-roundup), published each week, aims to keep stakeholders updated with current news and issues.

Time was also spent reflecting on the summer events, acknowledging how difficult last few months have been with riots, protests and a rise in anti-migration rhetoric. It shook sense of safety, and impacted the belief that Yorkshire is a safe place to settle. Community cohesion and integration would be a theme that would run throughout the rest of the event.

# Community cohesion and anti social behaviour – a research perspective

*Delivered by IPPR, Leeds Beckett University and Migration Yorkshire*

Lucy Mort, Senior Research Fellow at IPPR gave an overview of their research and work on Community Cohesion. Kirsty Cameron, Course Director for Criminology at Leeds Beckett and Jack Liuta, Community Researcher at Migration Yorkshire then gave an overview of their ongoing research into anti-social behaviour and shared early findings.

Questions and reflections followed.

To both IPPR and Leeds Beckett – what are you hoping to do next?

* Leeds Beckett would like to explore the stories in more detail. Unfortunately, they had to turn down people who would have liked to take part due to funding, and so would like to follow these up if possible. They also want to assess the impact of ASB and look at good experiences, including how can we improve what we do and prevent ASB?
* IPPR would like to carry out further research to bring threads together, digging deeper onto impact of use of hotels in particular.

How do you collect the information in a safe and dignified way?

* Kirsty – having a peer community research (Jack) offered a safe space. They were open about project and what it was for, clear didn’t have to share anything they didn’t want to, anonymised names and modified stories so people and situations were not identifiable. Participants could opt out and check transcripts of their conversations.
* Lucy – IPPR conducted listening sessions in asylum accommodation. The experience of being uprooted has meant some people are making connections in unsuitable accommodation, and then having to start again when they are relocated. A strong recommendation from IPPR is to shift power from the Home Office to local government, and avoid people being moved around different accommodation settings and locations.

Reflections from the room:

* City of Sanctuary Sheffield – it is good to focus on ‘doing’, but important to take a step back and explore what ‘active hope’ means. We need to firstly remind ourselves collectively of world we are trying to build (vision), then look at context, then finally think about the path to take. They also reflected on the impact transferring people around the country has on integration.
* Attendees from Leeds – within hotels there are issues with people getting on bus being targeted, and so asylum seekers are deciding to walk to use a bus stop away from the hotel. Some dispersed accommodations have had beer cans thrown deliberately into front gardens. However, it is important to also reflect on the good experiences, and they shared an example of the police picking up an individual whose bike had a puncture, and kindly bringing him back to the hotel.

# What are your everyday approaches to cohesion?

*Rotherham Ethnic Minority Alliance and Migration Yorkshire*

Azizzum Akhtar from REMA led tabletop discussions exploring what every day approaches to cohesion are already embedded in the sector.

A huge amount of good practice was shared, including values which underpin organisations and activities.

The details gathered will be collated and shared in detail in the new year. Time will be taken to present the information in conjunction with the notes from the final session, in a format which may be of help to the sector.

# How can we and why should we effectively get our messages across?

*City of Sanctuary and Migration Yorkshire*

This workshop focussed on exploring different methods of communicating to different audiences. A full set of resources were shared, including City of Sanctuary publications on [Courageous Conversations](https://cityofsanctuary.org/2024/08/13/start-having-courageous-conversations-about-refugee-rights-2/).

A quick fire tabletop exercise took place:

Who are your audiences?

Funders, beneficiaries, people who support us, people who agree/disagree, local community, service providers, partners, VCS and others, media, politicians, government, charity commission, asylum seekers, faith leaders, police, HO.

What methods should be used to engage with the media?

* More chances of positive stories in local media.
* Big Issue has been great
* Try making stories easy to find/spoon feeding media
* Is it worth targeting local media? May have influence on the larger ones like the Yorkshire Post.
* Regional /national organisations
* Finding sympathetic journalists
* Work with other orgs with a common theme
* Local - good news stories
* National – find sympathetic journalists, feed them the stories – could leave to national advocacy orgs

What methods should be used to engage with politicians?

* Meet local politician so they can find out what you do
* Petitions, writing letters
* Use forums like LinkedIn and other SM
* Access to parliament, coalitions (voices together)
* Joint influencing /active voices
* Part of groups/decisions
* Making initiatives
* Visits to parliament
* When liaising with politicians, be positive rather negative, offer support and try and make their work easier which helps build relationships
* Common ground (e.g. transition guides)
* Participating in research

What methods should be used to engage with beneficiaries?

* Physical spaces, create safe spaces to come together
* invest time, offer advice, quality time, trust
* gain confidence and give a voice
* invest time
* relationship development, 1 to 1 conversations
* trust confidence & voice

The session concluded with some top tips for developing a communications strategy, and an overview of the resources provided.

# Aging out – how the ‘transitional safeguarding’ approach may support work with adolescents and young adults.

*Refugee Council and Migration Yorkshire*

An explanation was given about ‘transitional safeguarding’, why it is important and how you can apply the approach within your organisation. Case studies were also presented. During discussions, the following points were made:

**PAFRAS**

* Someone coming to the UK just after they turned 18 is really challenging.
* It’s a big responsibility to put on children to translate.
* We think some people make risky decisions, and adult social care don’t respond accordingly.
* It’s hard to diagnose under-development and age growth delays.
* Age assessment dispute is like having identity removed.

**BEVAN**

* The system doesn’t cater for someone who has trauma.
* Structurally we are far away from being trauma-informed.
* Agencies, including MEARS are reactive rather than proactive.
* Agencies give people a chance to say their real age (under 18) at a late point of time.
* Not all hotels are consistent in their practice.

**Horton Housing**

* People who are new here don’t know anything about the system. They seem low risk, but they are actually high risk for safeguarding teams.
* The system is flawed.
* Mixing UASC with young British people works well, for example two people found a bond together, without one person knowing the language, they developed own way of communication, this inspired one person not to (offend) anymore, and to learn English as well, (sometimes what we need is a human connection).

**St Augustine’s**

* Age assessment process is very poorly, it’s appalling.
* Lack of sharing on safeguarding from MEARS, this puts our staff, their staff and even clients at risk.
* It’s risky when young family member becomes translator, it gives them access to all family info, including bank details.

**CofS Sheffield**

* The system kills people, the second case study from the presentation is an example.
* The way people are treated is unbelievable.
* Services not giving people choice there is no agency for people. The system needs to change, everyone needs to be treated equally, start from schools.

**BRC**

* It’s really hard to support someone who has been different accommodation in four places, it’s not understandable.
* Destitution support work made us to turn into (become) social workers, which we are not qualified for.

**Everyone**

* Wrong dates on documents can create future issues. People don’t realise this issue at the time themselves.
* Working with the Home Office is the biggest eye opener.
* Can Migration Yorkshire bring LAs and VCS together, to get people to work together, to explain/overcome age dispute issues?

# How can we enable the transition to e-visas?

*Citizens Advice Rotherham and Migration Yorkshire*

An overview of the current situation with e-visas was shared:

* The process should be straightforward but can be challenging and all guidance is only in English
* There are delays but the processing resolution centre currently respond quickly
* There are a lack of resources, especially for regional support
* Technical issues have improved since the issues at the beginning
* Data privacy while using apps/emails etc is unclear when multiple agencies are involved (concerns over security)
* There are changing eligibility criteria, a complex appeals process and policy inconsistencies

Current challenges include obtaining travel permits (issues when people return to UK, some cancelling holidays) and getting ID approved (lack of appointments – but £50 checking appointments are available), and a lack of resolution of issues.

A strong recommendation is to improve accessibility and language barriers.

A group discussion followed:

What have you seen (challenges/barriers)?

* Lack of understanding of process (eg Mears, banks) people becoming homeless/destitute due to process; impact on UC (no interpreters)
* \*banks have a list of accepted ID e-visa not on it (same for work/housing)
* BRP lost have to apply for new one, issue applying e:visa no physical BRP
* Technical errors (official response ‘keep trying’)
* Homes for Ukraine coming back with wrong status – although this seems to improve
* Impact on travel documents – destination country not always aware, lack of physical ID, how do they check/know (official response should be communicated and all documents link together, however not sure in practice as lack evidence, see what happens over Christmas travel period)
* Need to ensure device is charged and you have data
* Education providers (eg British Council) not accepting as ID eg for IELTIS
* Employers – generate code, system doesn’t work
* Issue getting image
* Extra step for Refugees to do as 28 day clock ticks to get UKVI log in (shouldn’t be evicted until got one – email UKVI Homeless Escalations, rapid response)

What would you like changed?

* Some organisations have met the Home Office to raise concerns, but it is unclear how the issues will be dealt with and responses shared
* Migrant Hub are coming to drop ins to focus on e:visas – they provide some information but are not able to provide all the answers
* The national SMP meeting with HO was cancelled
* Issues between communication government departments eg HO, DWP etc
* Duncan (RC) said it would be good to share local intel eg what bank accepting, could MY support with this?
* Adam – see MY e:visa page for all organisations supporting - [eVisa | Migration Yorkshire](https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/evisa)

# How can we collectively ensure ESOL provision is recognised as a key part of belonging?

*MESH and Migration Yorkshire*

MESH provided an update on their websites: Learning English, which allows you to search for English classes across Y & H region and their Learning English Plus website, which provides a resource hub, staff room and training information for ESOL Tutors.

MESH then gave an update on their *‘Exploring & Belonging*‘ project, which focuses on migrants and their feelings of belonging, in places they are settled in the Yorkshire & Humber. As part of the project, they worked with them on taking photos of places and things that make them feel they belong, alongside them attending structured ESOL sessions focused on this theme. A variety of examples were given e.g. running club, mosque, seeing history & heritage.

A video was shown about Ammar’s experience of taking part in the project, in Hull.

Migration Yorkshire then gave an update on the role of MY ESOL Regional Coordinater and the following Toolkits that are available were shared [ESOL for refugees: a toolkit for commissioners and practitioners | Migration Yorkshire](https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/esol-refugees-toolkit-commissioners-and-practitioners) and [ESOL Needs Analysis and Placement for Refugee Learners: a toolkit for providers | Migration Yorkshire](https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/research-entry/esol-needs-analysis-and-placement-refugee-learners-toolkit-providers).

A series of discussion activities, either in pairs or groups, were undertaken for participants to consider the following questions.

* Belonging. What do you need to feel like you belong in a community?
* How do we embed, champion, facilitate, explain, show the value of ESOL & belonging? e.g coffee mornings at schools create ESOL spaces for parents, playing football and via football coaches, conversation classes at hotels, , encouraging employers to offer ESOL at lunchtime or after work sessions.
* Does your organisation recognise ESOL as a key part of belonging? (give examples of how it does or doesn't; what can YOU do to influence?).

Examples were then shared around the group on positive or negative examples of how ESOL can or is or is not embedded and participants finally considered what they can you take away from this workshop?

# Self-Care and Vicarious Resilience – what is it and why is it important?

*Solace and Migration Yorkshire*

An overview was given:

* People who work in the care field may have experienced trauma
* Stress can be a motivation and keep us going
* Stress can also cause burn and exhaustion
* Compassion fatigue
* Vicarious trauma – a serious condition – someone’s trauma as if you’ve experienced it yourself

Triggers include

* Friendship has an impact on stress
* Financial crisis has an impact on stress
* Working from home may have an impact on stress

Possible responses could be compassion satisfaction or vicarious resilience – something that you can gain

What are the positive effects of work on you?

* Develop strict boundaries
* Offer appointments
* Positive feedback
* External validation
* Keep hope
* Improvements on the environment and home
* Making a difference is joyful
* Don’t like saviour complex – we are not reliant on people’s gratitude
* Learning from different people
* Meditation/satisfaction when you’ve helped someone who’s been in a similar situation
* See hope through others
* Sense of community – building relationships
* Someone going through a difficult time helps you or others
* Empowerment through giving
* Mindful of being trauma informed

What has helped you?

* Setting boundaries
* Knowing your limits
* Knowing your team
* Family & relationships
* Organisational boundaries – this really can help
* Set your own boundaries
* Psychotherapy sessions as an essential part of your org
* Peer support sessions
* Team meetings
* Wellbeing day off
* Training
* Mandatory caseload management with support from management
* Saviour complex – keeping yourself grounded to prevent top-down approach. Shifting power dynamics with clients, reverse boxing session
* Participation gives power
* Shifting power rather than doing things for people
* Lived experience ‘power’ in organisations – change dynamics - respectful
* Joy from your job
* Being real about what you can achieve
* Use the Refugee Action selfcare guide

# How do you to pitch your ideas to funders in times of uncertainty?

*Leeds City Council and Migration Yorkshire*

Migration Yorkshire began the session by leading a discussion and gave an overview of good sources of data and information for funding bids, and a resource was shared with some suggestions. Sources include:

* ONS data
* Migration Yorkshire dashboards and toolkits
* LA data, normally found on their websites
* Academic research.
* For internation and national data – UNHCR, Red Cross, Refugee Council, IPPR or Migration Observatory websites.
* Migration Yorkshire publish a Migration round-up every Monday which covers recent news and policy.
* Other sources include LA strategies, annual reports by other stakeholders (including Mears) and Hansard transcripts from the House of Commons and House of Lords.

Leeds City Council then shared the view of a funder, highlighting what they would look for in a solid funding application. It includes making a compelling argument that you know your beneficiaries and their needs, the local context, and can provide good value for money.

During the discussion and group exercise, the following was shared:

* Essentially funders are looking for organisations they can trust with their money
* Annual reports of funders are a good resource to find out what and who they are interested in supporting – it shows their track record
* Partnerships are crucial
* Evidence gap analysis – what’s the role of VCS? What is the impact of not doing the work, sustainability.
* (During your bid) write down the costs of closing down a project at the end of your, within your project plan.
* Stats are important (big national picture)
* There is no plan until next gov. vision is known.
* Always read annual reports of organisations you work with and of the funders.
* Be transparent with partner orgs who are applying for the same funding, to collaborate, (tell each other) and share examples of funding applications.
* Funders want the sector to work together.

# How can we support those who are affected by NRPF and destitution?

*British Red Cross and Migration Yorkshire*

What are Public Funds?

Attendees shared their ideas, including that it is the money from the government, including benefits, and access to social housing.

Adam Atack from Migration Yorkshire explained that the change was introduced with the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. He also provided an historical background. It originally targeted asylum seekers. It was originally to ensure that asylum seekers were not getting benefits.

Susan Morley from British Red Cross explained you can become NRPF because of your circumstances or it can be attached to your leave to remain. Some one who came for family reunion for example may not be entitle to NRPF.

What issues and challenges have you come across in your organisation when it comes to NRPF?

A case study was shared. A service user came under spouse visa/ and had leave to remain but she became illegal as they broke the marriage for domestic abuse. She then made a claim for asylum but did not receive any support because she was NRPF. She has health issues, but the Council could not provide housing for her. The lady is now in a different local authority area and Migrant Help said she need to contact that council, but she is still waiting. She is in Wheelchair.

Susan explained that it is important to understand the role of Social Service for someone who want to claim public funds, and that it can be very difficult to lobby statutory services.

In the legislation, there are two groups that need special attention.

The first group is for those with children: The provision on child in need in the Children Act says that Local authority and social services have a duty to care for them. They need to assess the best interest of the child. When there is abuse, LA and Social services can take them to the care. But in this case, if the mother knows, she can disappear. For a NRPF who has a child, local services need to be contacted, and they cannot argue because there is a child in need.

For adults, it is more difficult. Following the adult care Act of 2014, if they have social needs that they cannot meet, LA and social services must provide for them. The caveat is if they are in breach of immigration rules. In this case, the law will not apply to them. This is the case for those whose appeal is exhausted, but they don’t leave the country. In this case, a human rights assessment can be initiated. The refusal to provide them with the support can be seen as a breach of human rights. Another caveat is when there is a decision to deport, but the person is not fit to fly. This may be because of medical considerations; it may be a breach to human rights health to send them back.  The Human rights assessment is conducted by social workers. It’s about understanding the clients’ circumstances and their situations.

How to make a formal referral:

* Check the resources available
* The NRPF Network
* Project 17(Advice for people with NRPF)

Tenacity is very important and if they say no, it may mean they need more evidence.

The participants engaged in a conversation about this and shared some practical cases to show how it is difficult to help people in this situation to get support from social services.

A question was asked about Hong Kongers and it was mentioned the [Hong Kong Hub](https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/hong-kong-hub) on Migration Yorkshire website is useful along with other resources. The Citizen Advice as well can offer advice and support to people in that situation.

Participants shared some concrete cases.

A participant mentioned how it is becoming very difficult even for children. She shared the case of a Turkish family with children who found themselves obliged to sleep in a park.

A participant asked a question about pregnant women. Susan responded that this is also a safeguarding issue, and social services need to take action. But it also appears that some people are scared when you talk about social services and would not be happy to contact them.

A participant also mentioned the lack of trust as one of the reasons why some people may not feel comfortable to reach out to social services. There is also a lack of knowledge that even adults can challenge NRPF decisions.

Adam also advised that when you ring the services you will not speak straight away to social services, so you need to make it clear that you want to speak to social services. And Susan added that for those working with people with NRPF they need to have a plan in mind and prepare for battle. Every child matters and you shouldn’t take no for an answer.

Someone asked the question of whether it will be easy with the e-visa to prove that the person is not entitled to PF. Adam explained that this information will normally be available on the e-visa. Susan also mentioned that if it gets very tricky, the other thing to do is to contact a community solicitor.

Susan concluded by saying that to challenge NRPF you need to be creative and assertive.

At the end of the session, the participants expressed their satisfaction and said they found the discussion very informative and enriching. A participant suggested that it is important to think about more strategies and joint efforts in the region to help those in VCS sector to address those issues more efficiently. Participants also shared the need for more resources for NRPF.

# How do we navigate the grey area between labour exploitation and modern slavery?

*Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority and Migration Yorkshire*

The group began by sharing areas where labour exploitation and modern slavery may occur (not an extensive list):

* Care sector
* Small shop employees
* Car washes
* Factories
* Restaurants/kitchen workers
* Abattoirs
* People seeking asylum being used by criminals/organised crime to do illegal activities
* Young refugees being exploited by drug dealers
* People who arrive in the UK with a legitimate visa but then otherwise exploited

The following definitions were shared:

* Labour exploitation is now a specific term under the Modern Slavery Act where acts, means and purpose must be identified
* Criminal labour abuse covers what might otherwise have been described as ‘labour exploitation’ more generally
* Labour market noncompliance may include things which may not necessarily be criminal

Discussion – do these definitions fit?

* Tighter definition of labour exploitation may not be helpful as it is a term which has been widely used in context, reports etc before now more broadly.
* Will require discipline to be more specific, which may slow up work/affect responsiveness and remit of our services in the future
* In order to be Labour Exploitation all three tests must meet threshold – acts, means and purpose. If not all three then it doesn’t qualify under that specific terminology. Does not mean that people aren’t being exploited though and criminal labour abuse is likely to be present
* Any feed paid to facilitators in the UK can be sued as fraud, but there is no jurisdiction for payments made outside the UK borders
* Skilled worker visa process often open to interpretation

# Pulling together and moving forward - from vision to action

*Migration Yorkshire*

The final session of the day drew together all the conversations, issues and ideas generated throughout the sessions.

Time was spent discussing what the sector can’t control, what can be influenced and what can be controlled. Personal action plans were created, and feedback was shared on the current Migration Yorkshire Integration Strategy.

All of this was captured by Migration Yorkshire and will be collated, along with the information from the morning session, ‘What are your everyday approaches to cohesion’, to form a comprehensive resource and plan for future work. This will be shared with the sector in early 2025 for further input and discussion.

# About this briefing

This briefing was prepared by Vicky Mulhern in December 2024

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