

April 1, 2020: GMP NGO Forum

20 people took part in a Zoom facilitated NGO Forum chaired by Tom Madden of Stop the Traffik.

Those present spoke of how the corona virus outbreak was impacting on their work:

- Social distancing meant that many are now conducting business from home with skeleton services continuing via telephone interviews, helpline services, food parcels and food vouchers. Meetings are via Zoom or WhatsApp.
- Accommodation had changed from shared to units. Acquisition of accommodation e.g commissioning hotels was less of a problem than suitability. Many destitute asylum seekers can no longer stay with friends or sofa surf and it is a struggle to house them.
- For many, with English not being their first language, access to information is difficult and they need information in their first language about social distancing and what to do. The case worker at Bolton Destitution Centre is facing problems in accessing translation services, so it is difficult to provide services
- Some clients are understanding and staying at home. Some are still socialising and have e.g. friends from safe houses who are homeless staying with them, and are coming and going frequently.
- However Coronavirus information IS available in different languages. For NHS guidance in association with the Red Cross in 36 languages see <https://www.doctorsoftheworld.org.uk/coronavirus-information/>
- MASH continued to give out needles and condoms and with greater safeguarding the service had progressed from “one in one out” to “through the door”.
- So far it seemed there was no shortage of supplies of heroin and crack cocaine on the streets.
- There were no reported changes in trafficking activity despite a possible expectation of impact from reduced demand for exploited labour and sexual services.
- Home Office rules on interviews and accommodation had been suspended. Failed asylum seekers have continued right to accommodation and those granted leave to remain could stay in Serco accommodation. For a full account of changes for refugees and asylum seekers see <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/latest/news/changes-to-home-office-asylum-resettlement-policy-and-practice-in-response-to-covid-19/>
- Many are waiting on government payments – Universal Credit or Furlough payments – and are struggling to meet rent payments.

There were three PowerPoint presentations:

Anthony Brown, Caritas Salford, spoke of the development of partnership plans for Catholic dioceses and congregations of religious in England and Wales arising from the October 2019 In Plain Sight Conference. A follow on meeting took place in London on February 20 where a draft declaration of commitment on partnership working was tabled for wider consultation.

Fabiola Bayavuge spoke of the UK BME (Black, Migrant, Ethnic) Anti-Slavery Network (BASNET) established by AFRUCA and “the first network in the UK and in Europe dedicated to promoting equality, inclusion and diversity in the anti-trafficking and anti-slavery space.” Fabiola’s presentation was a summary of what can be found on the [BASNET website](#).

Declan O’Reilly spoke of the Justice and Care, Victim Navigator, 2 year pilot with GMP Challenger based in Nexus House and started in December. Justice and Care rescues exploited women and restores lives by dismantling criminal networks and bringing perpetrators to justice, securing

communities at risk from traffickers and sparking systemic change. Beyond its work in Asia, Justice and Care have been awarded a partnership with the National Crime Agency's Child Exploitation and On-line Protection Command ([CEOP](#)) helping them to track and bring UK travelling child sex offenders to justice if they abuse children in South Asia. The pilot will test the feasibility and value of seconding a Justice and Care Victim Navigator into Greater Manchester Police to broker and manage contact and give victims the wider support they need. Information on the role can be found in [material for applicants](#). The pilot will cater for 20 victims a year.