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**Market Engagement Notice for the North West Region**

**Welfare and Advice Service for Internationally Recruited Care Workers**

North West (NW) local authorities are exploring a regional welfare and advice offer to international recruits working in adult social care. The three NW sub regions: Cheshire and Merseyside, Lancashire with Westmorland and Furness, and Greater Manchester (comprising of 23 local authorities) have been collaborating in relation to oversight of ethical international recruitment for Adult Social Care. Work to date has been funded by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and in part facilitated by North West Association of Directors of Adults Social Services (NW ADASS).

The International Recruitment fund for the Adult Social Care Sector 2023 - 2024 enabled regional partnerships to develop solutions, strengthen safeguards against exploitation, and support international recruits as they transition into working within the care system in England. Over recent years, we have witnessed an increase in international recruitment of care staff, but unfortunately there has also been a rise in reports of unethical employment practices reported on a national basis. Estimated data from Skills for Care suggests 9000 internationally recruited Adult Social Care staff were working in the independent sector in the North West in 23/24. [International recruitment (skillsforcare.org.uk)](https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Adult-Social-Care-Workforce-Data/Workforce-intelligence/publications/Topics/Monthly-tracking/International-recruitment.aspx)

Local and national evidence highlights that some care workers recruited from overseas do not have a positive experience working in the UK. There have been growing concerns and evidence of poor recruitment practice and [in some cases exploitation](https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jun/02/uk-care-agencies-accused-of-exploiting-foreign-workers-caught-in-debt-traps). A significant number of workers find that their opportunity to work is revoked because their employer has breached the terms of their own license to recruit staff internationally, leaving them vulnerable and uncertain about their future.

As DHSC extend the pilot funding for another 12 months, with a renewed focus on sustainability and ethical employment, the three NW sub-regions have identified an opportunity to explore working together to commission a service or services that can provide a range of accessible advice, guidance and support directly to internationally recruited care workers. Regional learning events have established the need for this service and outlined outcomes. The aim of the service will be to help people settle positively in the UK and to help when there are issues or concerns arising from their employment. The services will operate independently of the local authorities and employers.

We are investigating a collaborative approach where one or more providers provide the service or services to cover the whole region, to achieve an economy or scale and level of specialism.

The outline aim of the envisaged service/s is a **NW ‘Welfare and Advice Service’** for adult social care internationally recruited staff*,* the main aims will be to:

* Provide a regional service that will offer support and advice to all (ASC) internationally recruited staff. We envisage a single point of contact for any internationally recruited worker either online or via a web presence, but also with some group and or face to face services for those with increased needs.
* The service will establish a NW regional base but also ensure that there is some localised offer in each of the sub-regions.
* The service/s will provide a mixture of general and specialist advice and support, including crisis help when needed. It should be creative in identifying opportunities for different types of support, for example via peer networks that may related to the role, or the issues that staff are facing or networking people together from the country that they have travelled from.
* It is anticipated this will be led by a voluntary organisation but will have key links with for example CAB’s, Trades Unions, Safeguarding Services, Community and Representative Groups, Training providers, Health and Wellbeing Services and Housing providers.

At this stage we are seeking interest from those with experience working in this area of provision to demonstrate that there are potentially providers available for this service and to share their interest in this proposed development. We expect a procurement process will be required but want to hear from any organisations that are interested in finding out more.

The anticipated budget for the service is approximately £250,000. Grant funding in 2024-25 is confirmed only for one year, but this will be reviewed in due course. We recognise that the uncertainty over funding will limit some opportunities to develop this provision. One consideration to explore with interested parties is for a collaborative approach where a group of organisations co-operate to develop different aspects of the offer under a single lead provider.

Please contact us to share your interest and any materials that you believe could support further thinking on this to develop the proposal. An open market ‘Question & Answer’ session is being provisionally planned for **3pm for 4th September 2024 (please hold this time / date if expressing an interest)**. If you are interested in attending the session, then please advise via the Chest as well as putting suggestions that may be of use in developing our thoughts.

For an informal discussion please contact Andrew Burridge (NW ADASS Programme Manager) andrew.burridge-nwadass@wigan.gov.uk