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Local Immigration Teams

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In June 2008, the UK Border Agency published an enforcement strategy called “Enforcing the Deal”. This document remains available at:

http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/managingourborders/enforcementbusinessplan08_09/enforcementbusinessplan08_09.pdf?view=Binary

Jacqui Smith MP, then Home Secretary, announced in the Foreword to that document that the UK Border Agency:

“...will begin roll-out of new Local Immigration Teams to serve every community in the UK, bringing our people closer to the communities we serve and accelerating the development of a network of Immigration Crime Partnerships. We will back our new strategy by doubling resources we spend on enforcement (2009/10 versus 2006/07).”

This information sheet provides information about Local Immigration Teams.

UK Border Agency regions

The UK Border Agency operates throughout the UK. It is divided into six regions: (1) London and South East, (2) Midlands and East, (3) North East, Yorkshire and the Humber, (4) North West, (5) Scotland and Northern Ireland, and (6) Wales and South West.

The operations of the UK Border Agency in each of these regions is the responsibility of a Regional Director. Information about the six regions is intended to be, but not yet fully, made available at:

<http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/managingborders/your-region/>

The names of the Regional Directors are set out at:

<http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/aboutus/organisation/structure/>

The UK Border Agency is dividing these six regions into even smaller areas. By the end of 2011, the UK Border Agency intends to have established Local Immigration Teams for about 60 areas which will cover the UK. Currently, it has established Teams in about half of these areas.

Purpose of Local Immigration Teams

The UK Border Agency has stated that the focus of the work of these Teams will be on “prevention and disruption of illegal activity and the arrest and removal of offenders”. It has described five key tasks of these Teams as: (1) to enforce immigration laws, (2) to collect local information, (3) to find

and arrest those who break immigration laws, (4) to enforce laws on illegal working (see the “Illegal Working” information sheet), and (5) to liaise with community leaders, police, local government and others to address community concerns on migration. However, the precise objectives and workings of any particular Team may differ from one Team to the next. The UK Border Agency has said that it will be the responsibility of the Regional Director, in whose region a Team operates, to determine how the Team is to work. This may include setting objectives that go beyond those described as key objectives.

Structure of Local Immigration Teams

Each Local Immigration Team is to be managed by a Local Immigration Team Manager. The make-up (i.e. number of staff, and type of roles) of any particular Team may differ from one Team to the next. The UK Border Agency has said that it will be the responsibility of the Regional Director, in whose region a Team operates, to determine the structure of the Team.

The UK Border Agency has stated that there is a national framework for these Teams. However, it has also stated that the way in which the work of these Teams will be evaluated is to be set at a regional level.

Concerns about Local Immigration Teams

The division of the UK Border Agency into six regions has itself raised concerns as to how the Agency will ensure a consistency of practice and policy throughout the UK. By further subdivision into some 60 Teams the potential for inconsistency may increase.

A further concern relates to the degree to which it may be intended to use these Teams as the public face of the UK Border Agency. The key objectives of these Teams, as described by the UK Border Agency, generally relate to issues of enforcement. Concerns have been expressed, e.g. at the National Asylum Stakeholder Forum, that enforcement may dominate the work of these Teams. This could have negative effects including giving the false impression that the work and responsibility of the UK Border Agency is merely to prosecute breaches of immigration law and to remove people from the UK.

This would this give a false impression of the range of work of the UK Border Agency, and present a one-sided image of immigration law and practice. It may also change the nature and balance of the work of the UK Border Agency so that its other responsibilities (including processing people’s applications and issuing status papers) are given insufficient attention or are wrongly influenced by its enforcement work. If the UK Border Agency’s work with others, including community leaders, police, local government and other public bodies, is also led by enforcement goals, this may also wrongly influence the work of those other bodies and may have negative effects on community and race relations. The Migrants Rights Network has reported specific examples of effects on healthcare professionals and landlords, see the item on “New Immigration Crime Partnerships” at: http://www.migrantsrights.org.uk/downloads/newsletters/MRN_Newsletter_Jul08.pdf

The UK Border Agency website provides little information about Local Immigration Teams. Some information is provided at:

<http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/newsarticles/2008/localimmigrationteamstobe>

While there is little information presented nationally or centrally, information about these Teams has been presented in various local newspapers, and through presentations by the UK Border Agency to some regional or local stakeholders. For example, in April 2009, the Humberside Local Immigration Team presented information through the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Migration Partnership. This included an invitation to members of that partnership to consider whether they would wish to have a member of the Team working inside their organisation.