

Joint statement by Peterborough City Council and Barka Foundation of Poland following meeting in Peterborough on Tuesday 12 September 2006.

Representatives from the Barka Foundation from Poland met with officials from Peterborough City Council, Cambridgeshire Constabulary, Greater Peterborough Primary Care Partnership and voluntary and community groups on Tuesday 12 September 2006.

They discussed issues affecting the welfare of Polish citizens who have travelled to the UK to seek employment following the expansion of the European Union in May 2004. Around 2,000 Poles are thought to have registered for work in Peterborough in the past year but it is not known how many have remained in the city.

The meeting coincided with a fact-finding visit to London by the Barka Foundation representatives to investigate reports that thousands of migrant workers were becoming destitute after failing to obtain jobs and accommodation in the UK.

The visit was arranged in co-operation with a London-based charity called The Simon Community, which has been asked for emergency help by increasing numbers of migrant workers from Poland and other Central European countries.

The Barka Foundation delegates visited Peterborough with support from the Polish Embassy to learn about an award-winning New Link centre operated by Peterborough City Council, which provides an impressive range of support and advice to asylum-seekers, refugees and migrant workers. However, they learned that the UK government provided only three years' funding for the centre and this would cease later this year.

Officials from both sides agreed that people from Poland and other Central European states did not make sufficient enquiries and preparations before travelling to the UK in search of employment. It was important for them to realise that the cost of accommodation and food was much higher in the UK than in Poland and that people without good standards of English and valuable job skills often earn only minimum wages for long hours of hard work.

The Barka Foundation is working with Polish authorities to emphasise the increasing economic opportunities that are developing within Poland and is establishing a London office to warn Polish people about the challenges involved in finding work in other countries.