

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

10 October 2007

Migrant Workers

1. Since the European Union welcomed eight new countries in 2004, around 4,700 foreign workers, mainly Polish, have registered for employment in North Yorkshire. The Committee has taken a hard look at how the county welcomes these “new arrivals”
2. There are economic advantages– such as the filling of gaps in the labour market but research suggests that many endure overcrowded conditions, are vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous landlords and employers and may not be aware of their rights and the services available to them. For example, many don't know about registering with a GP, resulting in problems when they need treatment.
3. Being able to speak English is crucial but, because of transport difficulties and often long working hours, many are not able to attend English classes.
4. Research continues to show that immigration into the county is impacting positively upon our regional economy, filling labour gaps, particularly in hospitality, manufacturing and agricultural markets. As a caring Council, it is our duty to ensure that members of this group are given a fair deal, so that they can continue to do so and play a full and active role in their local community.
5. The Council does much to help new arrivals but we should continue to look at ways we might do more.
6. We will be asking the Executive to consider -
 - Making English language lessons, which should be free wherever possible, easier to attend,
 - Improving the Welcome Packs produced in various languages which explain their rights and the public services available to them
 - Support the establishment of ‘Focal points’ for workers or volunteers to act as facilitators and translators for non English speaking workers from A8 countries
 - Lobbying government agencies and other organisations (police, LAs, health services, inland revenue and other civil service bodies) to accept these volunteers as legitimate interpreters and intermediaries
 - Press ahead with producing Driver training and road safety literature in accessible formats as part of the 95 Alive road safety campaign

7. This issue has attracted a good deal of press interest. It is one we will return to in the next two cycles of meetings.

NYSP Community Strategy

8. We have decided to play a role, albeit a limited one, in the formation of the NYSP Community Strategy. The purpose is to set down what the agencies and partners serving a community agree should be the priorities they will seek to deliver over the period of the plan, taking into account what the community tells them it needs.
9. Group Spokespersons will consider this more fully at their mid cycle briefing in October with a report back and detailed presentation, if necessary, to your November Committee meeting. The next involvement of Members from this Committee would be to receive the final draft Sustainable Community Strategy in the New Year, prior to it being submitted to the NYSP for final approval.

Credit Union

10. Kathleen Egan, the ABCUL Associate appointed to explore the potential for York Credit Union covering the North Yorkshire area will report her initial views to Group Spokespersons and Portfolio Holders the day before the council meeting. She has spoken to most of the agencies whose support will be needed for this project to be a success. Kathleen is aware of the need to make it clear in the business case what the outputs of the credit union will be in terms of projected numbers and the precise benefits of the agencies supporting the development of the credit union.
11. In June 2007, HM Treasury released a consultation paper as part of its review of credit union legislation. In the light of its long standing interest the Committee was well placed to lead. Its response, signed by the Portfolio Holder, focussed upon making it easier for public sector agencies to foster the development on the credit union advantage and services in rural areas. For example, allowing community groups to join a credit union (currently only individuals are eligible for membership) and links to the Government's proposals about enhanced services from the rural post offices.

PAUL RICHARDSON

Chairman

Safe and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

County Hall
NORTHALLERTON

1 October 2007
Background Documents - Nil