

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

19 December 2007

Migrant Workers in Our Communities

1. I reported to the last Council that the Committee had examined the impact of migrant workers in North Yorkshire communities. The Executive has now agreed that in-migration is a key issue for the authority and that a clear sighted strategy and effective leadership is required so that we can play an important part in shaping successful places and communities of the future.
2. With the backing of the Executive we will continue this work, but will focus on some key areas:
 - through the NYSP to bring together different organisations from the statutory, voluntary and business sectors.
 - more information at a detailed level about how we respond to the increased numbers of migrant workers.
 - a more refined county-wide demographic profile to offset much of the anecdotal evidence will help us plan services effectively.
3. There is clearly an argument for the County Council taking the lead to reduce costs by jointly producing foreign language translation sheets and language cards as part of a North Yorkshire welcome pack. Welcome packs are just one possible way, other alternative approaches possibly running alongside this, particularly in the field of IT, should be considered.
4. As we reported last time more needs to be done for the provision of informal flexible and if possible free language courses.
5. One recommendation the Executive strongly supported was our proposal that there be relaxation of formal procedures which currently block the use of intermediaries and representatives from the migrant worker community.

Credit Union

6. I have reported to the Council repeatedly on the Committee's commitment to pursue the development of a credit union.

7. Kathleen Egan, the ABCUL associate appointed to explore the potential of York Credit Union covering the North Yorkshire area, has now reported to the Committee and the Executive. I am pleased that the Executive supported the proposal, subject to an appropriate funding package being determined.
8. There are a number of things to be ironed out, but I am optimistic that we will begin to see moves towards extending the credit union advantage to the whole of the County Council administrative area. The Committee has stressed that it would welcome continuing involvement.

Emergency Planning in the Community

9. The Committee has maintained an interest in Emergency Planning since it concluded a small research project on the involvement of Members, and the communities they represent, in emergency planning and response. This resulted, amongst other things, in stronger linkages between the Emergency Planning Unit and Area Committees. Since then, the Emergency Planning Officer has updated the Committee routinely on developments and activity within the Civil Contingency Forum.
10. The Committee recently agreed it would be useful for elected Members to be present during post incident agency discussion meetings so that their views and local knowledge could be fed into the process.
11. For me, this issue has brings into question how we balance the desire of local Members in the community to engage and influence against the demands of current operational practice. Many of the emergency responders involved would not normally expect elected Members to be present.
12. The Committee recognises that Member expectations and how emergency responders might react to earlier elected Member involvement, is a sensitive one which requires further thought. The Committee has therefore agreed to sponsor a workshop to develop best practice, but will invite all Members of the authority to attend.

Gambling: A Community Problem

13. The Committee intends to discuss gambling in the community. It is a major coup that Geoffrey Godbold, OBE has kindly agreed to talk to Members. He is a nationally respected authority and expert, being Chief Officer of GamCare (National Association for Gambling, Care, Educational Resources and Training). GamCare, a registered charity, has become the leading authority on the provision of information, advice and practical help in addressing the social impact of gambling. It has perhaps the highest profile of all UK treatment agencies and is actively involved in the provision of a range of services for problem gamblers as well as raising public awareness of gambling and problem gambling in the UK.

14. It is a topic of relevance to the Committee in that gambling disrupts personal, family, financial, employment relations. Linked to financial problems, debt, bankruptcy, divorce, lost productivity of work, crime, depression and suicide it is something that has a corrosive effect on the sustainability of our communities. Disadvantaged social groups who experience poverty, unemployment, dependence on welfare and lower levels of education and household income are most likely to suffer the adverse consequences of increased gambling. In addition problem gamblers are more likely than non-problem players to have heavy or problematic levels of consumption of drugs, alcohol and cigarettes.
15. Although individuals from these groups may not spend more on gambling in absolute terms they do spend a higher proportion of their incomes than wealthier players.

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County Hall
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Background Documents: Nil