

Rotherham's approach to EU migration

Background

Rotherham has seen a rapid growth in Slovakian and Czech Roma communities following EU enlargement in 2004, growing from nil in 2003/4 to 3,700 in 2011/12. Roma are now the fastest growing minority ethnic group in Rotherham and the second-largest black and minority ethnic community in the borough. The Roma community has settled in three small central areas of Rotherham that are among the most disadvantaged areas in the borough, with one area (Ferham) being among the three per cent most deprived areas in England. In common with Roma people from many parts of Europe, Roma new migrants to Rotherham come from a background of extreme poverty, discrimination, exclusion and denial of rights. They are coming here to escape this background and to build a better life for their families. However, they bring with them needs and experiences that partner agencies must take account of when looking to integrate this new community.

Summary

Rapid demographic change has brought with it many challenges, both for local residents and for local services. For example, the population in the Eastwood Village area has increased by 20 per cent in five years due to inward migration. Given that no new houses have been built in the area, this is a large increase in population density over a short time. The age structure of the area is young, with 30 per cent of the population being under 16. Entrenched deprivation is also a concern, both for Roma families and the wider community. The Rotherham Partnership, the local strategic partnership (LSP) comprising public sector, voluntary and community sector and private sector partners, came together to develop a coordinated response to managing the impact of new Roma migration to Rotherham. Council services are developing innovative responses to community needs, working with police, health services, children's services, community organisations, housing landlords, Jobcentre Plus and Rotherham United Football Club.

Who is involved?

- South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service community partnership officer – Support with community engagement and community safety initiatives.
- Chief executive, Rotherham Citizens Advice Bureau – Provision of community legal advice.
- South Yorkshire Police EU migration officer – Support for community safety initiatives.
- Rotherham NHS Public Health – Commissioning of targeted health services and GP liaison.
- Rotherham MBC community protection manager – Dealing with private sector housing landlord and tenant issues.
- Jobcentre Plus partnerships manager – Lead for employment and worklessness issues.
- Drug and Alcohol Service manager – Provision of targeted drug and alcohol services.
- Rotherham MBC Chief Executive's Directorate – Coordination of strategic migration issues.
- Rotherham MBC Elected Members – Acting as champions and addressing community and neighbourhood issues.
- Rotherham Gate Surgery coordinator – Community health provision.
- Safer Neighbourhood Area sergeants – Neighbourhood policing.

- Rotherham MBC waste manager – Addressing local waste management provision and recycling.
- Rotherham Area partnership manager – Coordination of neighbourhood services.
- Rotherham MBC early years manager – Coordination of early years provision and dealing with Safeguarding issues and liaison with schools.
- Rotherham MBC schools cohesion officer – Managing community cohesion and community relation matters.

The challenges for us

The main challenges facing Rotherham in relation to the growing Roma community are:

- Disproportionate and rising demands on safeguarding and child protection services.
- Low levels of education/skills and language barriers.
- Poor health, disability and lack of engagement in ill-health prevention.
- Housing overcrowding and some of the stock in very poor condition.
- Problems of non compliance with recycling, excess waste and fly tipping in gardens, streets and parks are causing tension in the local community.
- Anti-social behaviour and youth nuisance.
- Schools are facing pressures of increasing demand for places; attending and attainment presents a continued challenge.
- Roma people coming to Rotherham are suspicious of authorities and fear harassment and discrimination by the non-Roma community.

Rotherham has tackled these issues by a range of activities and interventions including:

EU International Links – Links have been made with charitable organisations and authorities in the Kosice region of Slovakia. This includes sharing information on child protection issues. Rotherham has become involved in regional and EU Roma projects.

Practitioners Group – A practitioners group has been established including social care family support workers, education welfare officers, police community support officers, health workers, learning mentors, EAL coordinators, school attendance officers, schools admissions and children missing from education officer. The purpose of the group is to achieve improved coordination of service delivery through information sharing and joining up activities. Workers with relevant community language skills have been recruited by many partners.

Parent and Toddler/Early years Groups – Roma parent and toddler groups provide education and support to parents in early years play and learning activities, to improve child development levels at entry level to school.

Safeguarding – Redirection of resources and recruitment of specialist workers with community language skills to work with children and families.

Schools – Schools have employed bi-lingual teaching assistants and family support workers to integrate Roma children into school and liaise with parents and carers to support their attendance and achievement.

Rotherham Citizens Advice Bureau advice services – A dedicated worker working with the Roma community was employed until 31 March 2012. Advice is now provided through core service delivery.

ESOL Classes/Living in my Community – Pre-entry level ESOL classes and tailored 'Living in my Community' courses have been developed specifically for adult members of the Roma community to assist their integration and employability within the community.

Housing – Extensive investment (capital and revenue). Development of a new mini-master plan for the area to support regeneration and utilising community assets. Enforcement action on poor standards, illegal eviction and overcrowding through joint agency assessment visits, monitoring and enforcement action. Close working with landlords.

Anti-social behaviour – A multi-agency high IMPACT team working at grass roots level in communities. Youth engagement work, including evening 'Stay Safe' operations to address issues as they are encountered.

Waste management/Recycling – Action to improve neighbourhoods and the environment include: distribution of larger bins; increased street cleaning; fly-tipping enforcement; and community clean-ups.

Health – A range of interventions such as support for GPs, family support work, health assessments and drugs awareness and support. Rotherham has been identified as one of the lead authorities for the EU Roma Source project health champions Pilot to assist in the development and creation of a pool of community volunteer health champions.

Voluntary and Community Sector initiatives – A range of sport, dance, healthy eating, inclusion, confidence building, skills development and volunteering activities are delivered by VCS partners.

Community engagement – A Rotherham Roma Forum has been set up to enable Roma community development and engagement supported via the voluntary and community sector.

Outcomes

Evaluating the impact of interventions is an ongoing priority, made difficult by rapid population churn. Monitoring takes place within in all services, with information shared at partner forums, for example in relation to safeguarding, anti-social behaviour, housing, waste management and ASB enforcement, school attendance, missing from education etc.

Rotherham's Into Work programme

To support new migrants to improve their job chances, more than 100 people from countries such as Russia, Sudan, Slovakia and Yemen completed the Department for Work and Pensions funded 'Into Work' course. The course is an excellent example of Roma people integrating with other new arrival groups.

The course is led by a local charity, Rotherham Ethnic Minority Alliance (REMA). They designed the specially tailored course to help new migrants learn valuable job searching skills such as interview techniques and CV writing.



What we learnt

Strong strategic level partnership working and leadership has been crucial to Rotherham's achievements. Political leadership is provided by the leader of Rotherham Council. Strategic management is provided by the Rotherham's director of commissioning, policy and performance.

Engaging with Roma families at neighbourhood and service delivery level is equally important and Rotherham has supported emerging Roma community groups, to understand their needs and assist their integration.

Problems that cause difficulties with existing residents, such as housing overcrowding, compliance with waste management and recycling, noise nuisance and anti-social behaviour, are dealt with through a dual approach of support and education, combined with targeted enforcement. Schools, social care and health services have employed Czech and Slovakian workers to support Roma families and ensure children get a good start in life. Youth workers have engaged young people in positive activities outside of school such as sports and music.

While there were no specific failures there are areas for improvement including 1) undertaking a mapping exercise of existing service provision much earlier into the project to identify areas of duplication and gaps; 2) the investment in community development was not as successful as expected and there were missed opportunities to redirect the work into establishing and developing the Roma Forum.

The further development of the Roma Forum is seen as an important next step in reaching a long term solution to the presenting problems that are impacting on both the Roma and settled communities where they reside.

We are also particularly keen to recruit, develop, and train volunteers from the Roma community to act as 'Community champions' to help us resolve problems and issues at an early stage, as external intervention is not sustainable in the long term.

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