

CULTURE AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel was held on 24 October 2019.

PRESENT: Councillors R Arundale, C Dodds, J Goodchild, B A Hubbard, L Lewis, C McIntyre, J Rostron and J Thompson

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE Councillor D Smith.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None declared

1 APPOINTMENT OF INTERIM VICE CHAIR

In the absence of the Chair, nominations were sought for the appointment of Interim Vice Chair of the Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel for the meeting.

Councillor Lewis was nominated and seconded and, following a vote, appointed as Interim Chair of the Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel.

AGREED that Councillor Lewis be appointed as Interim Chair of the Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel for meeting.

2 MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 12 SEPTEMBER 2019

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2019 were submitted and recorded as a true record.

3 VISIT TO FOOD BANKS- UPDATE FROM CHAIR

The Chair submitted an update following the site visit to the Food bank distribution centre on Skippers Lane.

The panel members who were in attendance were extremely complimentary of the volunteers who help run the foodbanks, as without them they would not be able to function.

The Democratic services officer advised that the update would be included within the final draft report from the panel, which would be submitted to the panel in November.

AGREED that the update be noted.

4 COMMUNITY COHESION- AN INTRODUCTION

The panel at their meeting on 25 July 2019, agreed to examine community integration/cohesion as part of their work programme for 2019/20. This was an introductory meeting to the topic.

The Interim vice chair introduced Shahda Khan, Strategic Cohesion and Migration Manager to the meeting, who outlined that within her presentation she would be discussing Middlesbrough's approach to cohesion in recent years, and discussing Middlesbrough's approach to resettlement of asylum seekers and refugees (RAAS).

The presentation covered the following:

- What is cohesion?
- Our approach 2014-2017
- Our approach 2018-19
- Controlling Migration Fund- Stronger communities Middlesbrough

The Manager outlined that cohesion in its current format came to light in 2001 following the riots in Northern towns, and has different meanings. However in Middlesbrough it was currently defined as a cohesive community as one where everyone:

- lives in cohesive communities, feels safe and are protected from harm;
- gets on well with each other
- is proud of where they live
- is active in their communities and engaged in local democracy and,
- has access to high quality, joined up services which safeguard our most vulnerable.

Our approach 2004-2017

The panel learnt that there had been significant changes in the approach to cohesion and integration of RAAS in Middlesbrough.

The Cohesion Pathfinder was introduced post the riots in Northern Cities in 2001 prior to the manager being appointed in 2014. The Pathfinder focused on work with diverse communities, schools and wider partners both from public and voluntary sectors. The work was evaluated by the University of Teesside, findings of which suggested that face to face contact was essential to developing cohesive and resilient communities.

At the end of the Pathfinder, the Council set up a Middlesbrough Cohesion Partnership, led by the Mayor. The Partnership had representation of all from partners across Middlesbrough e.g. police, university, health, faith, disability, LGBT and age related groups. Initially the Partnership was very successful, however over a period of a few years, it became Council led and was seen as Council responsibility. Due to staffing restructure, there was no support for the Partnership and therefore it dissolved.

As a result of austerity, the Council had to make significant changes including the loss of community workers and direct support. The Council acknowledged that there were significant barriers in engaging with our faith groups who were picking up a lot of the subsequent work and from this. Middlesbrough Interfaith network was established which was representative of all faiths across Middlesbrough and including the Bishop of Whitby. There was buy in from the Director of Public Health due to the issues of poverty, social isolation and mental health. The Network was awarded £20,000 for community groups in bid into and great work was undertaken. However, the Network can be time intensive and the Manager has limited capacity to continue supporting and facilitating the group although work is being undertaken to examine its sustainability for the future.

At the start of the national dispersal process, the Council had a dedicated Asylum and Refugee Support team. Funding for housing RAAS came directly to the Council. However, in 2012, this was awarded to G4S nationally and subsequently subcontracted to Jomast locally. More recently the contract has been awarded to Mears Housing.

Central Government also initially provided 'enabling' funding for wider integration and support for RAAS directly to local Councils. This was changed when a number of Strategic Migration Groups were established across England and Wales regions. These were a forum where local authorities, statutory agencies and the voluntary sector came together to discuss how migration in all of its forms impacts on regions.

Newcastle City Council hosted the North East Migration Partnership which ran across the region, however due to circumstances this was dissolved. The Manager outlined that due to the increasing numbers of RAAS in Middlesbrough, in 2015 the Council petitioned the Home office to restart the partnership which is now hosted by Middlesbrough Council.

Our approach 2018-19

In addition to the Community Hubs which are facilities for local residents and partners, there are four key teams who now work in developing community cohesion across Middlesbrough:

- Ethnic Minority Achievement Team (EMAT)
- North East Strategic Partnership (NEMP)
- Controlling Migration fund (CMF)
- Stronger Communities Middlesbrough (CMF Funded)

EMAT

The Council has A EMAT team (these were nationally established) to work with students within schools, who were not part of mainstream education to try and increase their educational attainment. In Middlesbrough, the work of the team now largely centres on the welcome of new arrivals, although majority of funding is provided through the schools to carry out this work.

The team was based in Newport HUB and were responsible for organising a range of activities/ groups and events, welcoming new arrivals, language support, drop in sessions and ongoing support (registering at a doctors and dentist). The panel learnt that their main focus was supporting any family with young children and processing their needs and identifying the correct support.

A panel member queried whether traveller children attend school? In response the Manager outlined that the majority do not attend, however are taught by the virtual school on site. There are two traveller sites in Middlesbrough Metz Bridge and North Ormesby, the latter being for show community. The children from the show community do generally attend school and the EMAT team support the schools and communities.

North East Migration Partnership (NEMP)

The Partnership was hosted by Middlesbrough Council and acts as a link between Councils across the NE and the Home Office. Within NEMP there are thematic sub groups, including the Regional Chief Executives sub group, VCS group, and the North East Directors of Public Health network. NEMP have also established local inter agency groups.

The Strategic Cohesion and Migration Manager Chairs the Middlesbrough Multi-Agency Migration group. This was an opportunity for those on an operational level working with RAAS to discuss and resolve local issues and concerns. If however these cannot be resolved at this group, the issue would be forwarded to a Regional level and if required to the Government. The group meets 4 times a year and has representation from the Home Office as well as the housing provider Mears and other key partners from both voluntary and public sectors. Controlling Migration Fund (CMF) Programme

The panel were advised that in 2016, the Council were approached by the Government to bid for funding from the Controlled Migration Fund (CMF). The main focus of the fund was to mitigate the impact that migrants have on settled communities.

The following 3 projects were funded in Middlesbrough and all independently evaluated by the University of Birmingham.

Data mapping- the Council commissioned Teesside University to collate all the publicly available data in regards to our communities. It was acknowledged that the 2011 Census data was not fully reflective of the local population. As a result, a report and a toolkit has been produced. Training on collecting relevant will delivered to key staff as well as external partners including the voluntary sector

There was a lack of understanding that the number of new arrivals to Middlesbrough was almost the exact same number of people that leave every year within our local population.

Education- working within schools had seen changes within student profiles. This included

recruiting teaching assistants, delivering language support as well working with partners.

Cohesion (SCM) - looking at cohesion and integration and working within 3 priority wards (Thorntree & Brambles Farm, North Ormesby and Newport) across Middlesbrough.

Additional funding was secured for two Local Authority Asylum Support Officers (LAASO) who are the key contact for and work with asylum seekers to prepare them in regards to potential impact will be from the Home Office decision as to whether they remain or leave.

Stronger Communities Middlesbrough (SCM)

One of the significant community projects from the funding was Stronger Communities Middlesbrough. The aim of SCM was to work and support residents in 3 priority wards in Middlesbrough (North Ormesby, Newport and Thorntree and Brambles farm) to integrate within communities, live and socialise together in an environment of shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities. All 3 wards shared similar challenges in terms of socio-economic factors but Thorntree and Brambles Farm had the highest votes in support of Brexit in the Country. One of the main concerns that local residents highlighted in that ward was levels of immigration in Middlesbrough.

There were three key strands of activity:

1. Improving community cohesion and integration
2. Improve tension monitoring and conflict resolution practices across Middlesbrough
3. Welcome new communities to Middlesbrough.

The SCM team consisted of 1 full time member of staff and 1 part time member and 1 staff member who worked 12 hours a week. The project was awarded £300,000 over 2 years, which was to pay for staff salaries (including £10k to internal finance department) the £60k grant program, and related activities. The manager outlined to the panel the work that has been undertaken within these strands of activity:

Community Cohesion and Integration

The team has:

- Engaged with communities and organisations
- Worked in partnerships with local services, internal and external agencies
- Hosted 7 community conversations
- Delivered 4 funding workshops
- Launched Middlesbrough City of Kindness event
- Identified residents for Advisory groups in each ward.
- Organised a number of events and workshops including; Newport HUB Islamic Diversity Centre community lunch (to break down the myths about Muslims), NUR fitness celebration event, International Women's day 2019 and supported residents with small grants to deliver culture cooking together and creative song writing/ poetry workshops. These events have been key to breaking down barriers in the community and allowing residents to understand about different faiths.

Key success stories were as follows:

- Community conversations focused on supporting unity in the community and provided a safe space for local resident to discuss their experience on living in their community. The conversations also enabled staff to undertake one to one surveys with local residents and from discussions, staff were able to incorporate key issues identified into orientation workshops.
- Middlesbrough City of Kindness event was launched in November 2018 with the strapline, Our Communities Our Middlesbrough and #kindboro. Local businesses donated refreshments and the brought together residents and key partners from the three priority wards, where we were able to showcase what local groups and residents do for their community. Participants signed pledges which included random acts of

- kindness.
- Funding workshops- these were designed to give residents the confidence and knowledge to apply for funding. £60,000 was allocated over the 3 wards and the workshops provided lots of support on application processes and subsequent delivery and the workshops brokered relationships to encourage collaboration.
- Youth Talent Show (which was funded via SCM grant) used music and culture to engage young people across Middlesbrough

From the work undertaken, the team have identified key individuals in the communities who can drive change and help teams into communities. These individuals are key to the work.

Conflict and Tension Monitoring

The manager stated that the key aim was to improve the way in which the Council identify, record and respond to community tensions and issues. The Council wanted to develop a robust multi-agency response to tensions which places residents at the heart and tackled hate crime and supported vulnerable communities.

The work undertaken has been as follows:

- Undertook a review of internal CTM processes
- Developed a new Middlesbrough Council online reporting mechanism
- Developed e-learning packages for all staff
- Commissioned external facilitator who delivered two workshops for front line practitioners and for youth workers across the town.

Welcoming New Migrants to Middlesbrough

The team has consulted with numerous residents, groups such as regional refugee forum, Methodist Asylum project, Cleveland Police and volunteers. The team have developed orientation workshops and identified and supported (17 speaking 25 different languages) volunteer translators who have provided assistance with the delivery of the presentation. The team has:

- Worked in priority wards- central, Newport and Gresham
- Developed a partnership with Cleveland Police and volunteer translators
- Invited councillors, community safety officers, PCSO's, street wardens and other key partners to each session
- From the work undertaken we have been recognised as good practice by regional partners.

Orientation

From these sessions the team has been able to provide advice on practical information such as registering with a GP/dentist, how and when to (and not) access emergency services and how to be a good neighbour. The Police have also delivered sessions on UK laws including knife crime, prostitution and equality, inclusion and hate crime.

Each session included a number of key people including ward Cllrs, Street Wardens, PCSO, Community Safety Officers and MP's Case Worker. This was seen as essential to enable residents to develop links locally and to gain deeper understanding of services.

16 orientation sessions have been delivered, engaged with over 400 residents who spoke more than 25 languages and recruited 17 volunteer translators. 10 volunteers have completed levels 1 and 2 translators' accreditation courses and the team has implemented a Volunteer policy to support newer communities to volunteer.

Volunteers

As with all community activities, volunteers are a key resource and are essential to delivering projects.

The team has promoted volunteering to diverse groups and encouraged them to gain translation/ accreditation qualifications. There has also been increased volunteering from RAAS communities, which has resulted in 22 RAAS volunteers into various teams across the Council.

Following consultation, guidelines have been created for Middlesbrough's Policy for Refugee RAAS and these have been adopted by key partners across South Tees to recruit volunteers from diverse communities.

To celebrate, SCM volunteers, 3 were nominated for Middlesbrough Civic Champions awards (1 was the winner) and SCM also supported residents to collaborate/contribute to other key initiatives including social regeneration.

The Manager also shared key achievements in that the SCM team won including Middlesbrough Council's Team of the year in 2019 for Integrity and the Community Safety award at the Tees Valley BME Achievement Awards 2019.

Next steps

SCM has now moved into Phase two CMF, which will focus on priority school communities. The 5 primary schools were Abingdon, Sacred Heart, North Ormesby, Ayresome and Breckon Hill and the secondary schools were Unity City Academy and Outwood Acklam.

The team will:

- Develop orientation packs for international new arrivals within schools (information on the schools/uniforms)
- Deliver training for key community connectors on where to report problems
- Establish and support Advisory Groups

The panel were made aware that Phase 2 of the project will be delivered by the SCM team who will be only funded until September 2020. There is no additional funding for projects and activities, therefore SCM will need to train communities to be sustainable and ensure cohesion work can be maintained with limited Council support.

In 2018, the Government published the Integrated Communities Strategy Green paper and as a result the Manager provided a response to the paper from Middlesbrough. The response was circulated to the panel members for information. The panel were advised that this response would form the basis of Middlesbrough Community Cohesion Strategy which would be produced and endorsed in 2020.

The Chair thanked the officer for her informative presentation. The panel recognised that cohesion was a key strategic priority and were keen to ensure the work continued to be delivered. The panel noted that the budget would be set in due course and therefore were keen to ensure the Mayor was aware of the excellent work undertaken within our communities.

AGREED-

1. That the information presented at the meeting be considered in the context of the scrutiny panel's investigation.
2. That the panel write to the Mayor in relation to the excellent work undertaken within the community cohesion team.

5 **NEXT STEPS**

The Chair advised that there would be no evidence provided in relation to the topic on Community Cohesion in November, however in preparation for future meetings, the Chair would meet with the Democratic Services officer and devise terms of reference for the review.

It was agreed that an officer would be invited to the November meeting to provide an update on reducing homelessness in Middlesbrough.

AGREED that the terms of reference in relation to the review on community cohesion be submitted to the November meeting.

6 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD - UPDATE**

The Chair provided a verbal update to the panel on matters discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny Board on 3 October 2019.

AGREED- that the update be noted.

7 **ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.**

The Chair wished to thank Councillor Garvey for his contribution to the panel and welcomed Councillor Hubbard to the panel.