

CULTURE AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel was held on 27 February 2020.

PRESENT: Councillors C Dodds, L Lewis, C McIntyre and J Thompson

OFFICERS: S Blood, J Hartley, K Jackson and I Rashid

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE Councillor J Goodchild, Councillor B A Hubbard, Councillor J Rostron and Councillor R Arundale.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None declared

1 WELCOME AND EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair welcomed officers and members to the Panel and read out the fire evacuation procedure.

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 30 JANUARY 2020

The minutes of the 30 January 2020 were submitted and approved as a true record.

AGREED- that the minutes be approved.

3 OUR PARTNERS AND IMPROVING COMMUNITY COHESION

At the last meeting of the Panel, it was agreed to consider terms of reference 3- to examine the work that the Local Authority and its partners are undertaking to promote community cohesion and integration, looking at the initiatives by the North East Migration Partnership and Public Health.

The Chair welcomed Janine Hartley, North East Migration Partnership (NEMP) Manager to the meeting.

The Manager outlined that NEMP was formed in January 2015 as a result of the rising Asylum numbers in the Region. At the time, there was no regional organisations and the creation of NEMP was a direct response.

These Partnerships exist in every Region, however they exist Country wide in Scotland and Northern Ireland. NEMP have Lead Officers and Lead Members for each Local Authority nominated by each Local Authority in the region, in Middlesbrough's case, Councillor M Smiles is the key Lead.

NEMP work with Local Authorities, Police, Department of Work and Pensions and Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations as a critical friend of the Home Office. The Panel were advised that there are 6 staff members within NEMP, who are fully funded by the Home Office. NEMP had recently been granted 3 year indicative funding (subject to review) and were governed and monitored by the Home Office. NEMP produce light touch reports, a mid-year report and an end of year report as well as review calls regularly.

NEMP were a strategic board, who as a rule did not deal with individual operational matters. However, when this did occur, it was dealt with in a timely manner and issues were resolved.

What do NEMP do?

The Manager outlined that NEMP coordinate all Refugee and Asylum Seeker (RAS) programmes and act as a single point of contact to:

- Improve data, information and communication around RAS issues.

- Inform policy and guidance.
- Escalate issues from partners in relation to barriers, trends in operational delivery and gaps in provision e.g. within the new housing contract, they were using a furniture provider who were not installing cookers correctly. As a direct consequence of this, the contract provider changed kitchen fitter suppliers.
- Share good practice from national network of Partnerships and with regionally local authorities and other partners.
- Join up on a strategic level where appropriate e.g. training, service delivery and/or logistics for large refugee arrivals.

The Panel were presented with a structure of the partnership. The key issues that were raised were as follows:

- In terms of the Health and Wellbeing Group, the Partnership was looking for a new health lead, however this was currently on pause. It was likely that any involvement would be on a project basis.
- The local migration multi -agency meetings (MAMS), were previously chaired by the contract provider, however it was seen as a conflict of interest and were now chaired by a local authority lead. Middlesbrough's MAM was chaired by Shahda Khan.

The Panel had a brief discussion in relation to number of asylum seekers in the North East. The Manager advised that in September 2019, Middlesbrough had 595 asylum seekers, however the numbers of Asylum seekers in the North East have remained the same for the last 2 years, however nationally the number of asylum seekers have increased.

The Manager went on to discuss some of the key projects which are delivered by NEMP to encourage community cohesion.

Middlesbrough Welcome and Orientation Pilot

This project was delivered in partnership with Middlesbrough MAPP and Cleveland Police, to deliver a presentation on UK laws. The pilot used volunteer interpreters to work with new arrivals and what was expected in the UK. The Police discussed aspects of hate crime and also did telephone calls to 111 and 999 to illustrate what questions would be asked.

The pilot had been so successful that NEMP applied for funding through the controlling migration fund (CMF) and were awarded £150,000 to develop a regional induction programme. This would have specific modules on health, parenting, positive relationships and about the local area. The programme would also look at developing a digital induction. The Manager outlined that a Refugee and Asylum Seeker Orientation Task and Finish group had been created and the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Consultation Group had been created for service user input. NEMP were also working with the Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to make the sessions sustainable, and training community interpreters.

The Panel queried whether there were large numbers of asylum seekers who entered the UK in poor health? In response, the Manager outlined that they had seen large number of asylum seekers with poor dental health and many suffer from mental health issues. Core foundations in Middlesbrough was the dedicated asylum seeker doctor's surgery and there was the arrivals clinic in Stockton.

Employment Routeways

The Manager advised that the Employment Routeway was formed with the DWP and the VSC. It was now used by the DWP and Local Authority support staff to help get people ready for employment, by providing ESOL classes, teaching a standard of English to be employment ready. The course uses volunteers and form a checklist which allows Newcomers to track their progress through various categories such as language, CV progress and volunteering.

The Employment Routeways also have also entered an agreement with providers and they submit an 'offer of support', which will be digitalised and uploaded on to the updated website to make it more accessible e.g. where to gain help with CV's, with clothing for interviews or placements for volunteering.

Website development

The final project which was discussed with the panel was the development of the new website, which was to bring a resource to the region. The website would map all services for refugees and asylum seekers and service users would be able to use the search function to find drop ins, ESOL classes and social activities in their local area and beyond.

The Employment Routeway will be hosted on the new website and would be accessible for agencies and refugees.

The induction sessions through the welcome sessions would be modulated on the website with video's and interactive exercises to reach beyond the face to face classes and reinforce learning.

The Manager lastly discussed the following two aspects which the NEMP govern:

- Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), and
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS)

The panel were advised that this was also known at the Syrian resettlement scheme, which was introduced by the Home Office to assist and resettle 20,000 vulnerable persons from the Middle East and North Africa by March 2020. The North East have assisted 8% under the VPRS, resettling 2,000 refugees. Scotland have the biggest percentage of VPRS within the UK at 16%, and the East Midlands with the smallest percentage of VPRS within the UK at 4%.

The VPRS is a voluntary scheme and therefore local authorities are given the choice whether they wish to participate. The programme is fully funded and allows local authorities to develop systems and support.

The Manager advised that there has been agreement from most North East Authorities, the breakdown of number of refugees per Authority were as follows:

Newcastle- 500
Gateshead- 400
Redcar and Cleveland- 250-300
Hartlepool- 180- 200

The Panel noted that Middlesbrough and Stockton were currently not part of the scheme, however the Manager advised that NEMP were having conversations and it was likely that a paper would be submitted to Full Executive in the near future. The Panel noted that although the programme was funded, there would be challenges especially as those being resettled were likely to be the most vulnerable and therefore could add additional pressures for to Local Authorities for the first few years.

It was noted that Local Authorities can determine how many families they take per year, however these families tend to be extended families and soon grow once they settle.

Despite this, the Panel fully supported VPRS and would wait for hear developments of this being introduced in Middlesbrough.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

The last project which was governed by the NEMP was Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). UASC arrive into Local Authority Care spontaneously or through government schemes such as the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS), Dubs or National Transfer Scheme.

Local Authorities are provided with funding for every looked after UASC at a rate of £798 per week up to age 17 and £200 per week for care leavers age 18 and over. The Department for Education publishes annual statistics on the number of UASC looked after by local authorities in England the latest data was produced as at 31st March 2019. The latest statistics outlined

that the total number of UASC in England increased by 11% to 5,070, representing around 6% of all children looked after.

Key facts to note were as follows:

- Most UASC are male (90%) and are aged 16 and over (85%).
- The top regions in England to host UASC were: London (34%), South East (19%), East of England (11%) and West Midlands (10%);
- The North East has the lowest number of UASC in England with a total of 40 and represents less than 1% of the total.
- In this region only Redcar and Cleveland (10 UASC), Newcastle (9 UASC) and Hartlepool (7 UASC) have more than 5 UASC and participate in the scheme.

It was noted that Middlesbrough does not participate in UASC, however the Panel stated that due to the pressures already existing in Children's services it would be unlikely that this could be supported.

The Chair thanked the Manager for her excellent presentation and praised the team for the excellent work undertaken within NEMP.

Secondly, the Chair welcome Idrees Rashid, Health Improvement Specialist and BME Network Co-ordinator, who had been invited to provide an overview of the work undertaken within Public health to promote community cohesion.

The Officer outlined that Public Health South Tees was the first in the North East to have a combined Authority, in this case between Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland, with the main aim to improve Health and wellbeing. The organisation had an asset based approach, working directly with communities, learning about their health needs and tailoring public health services directly around their needs.

The officer discussed three themes throughout the presentation:

- Asset approach
- Community cohesion
- Way forward

Asset Approach

Public Health South Tees worked directly with communities, not only to clarify the health needs of the community but to deliver training through Making Every Contact Count (MECC).

As identified in previous meetings, there are always wider issues that affect the core issue, for example, education, employment and community safety issues all have an impact on health inequalities.

Public Health South Tees use Making Every Contact Count (MECC) with the communities. This for example, means that every conversation, whether that a short or long conversation has an impact on an individual, whether this results in directing them to smoking cessation, drug and alcohol services or general signposting. MECC were currently developing a website which would also help direct individuals and communities to those specific services.

The work undertaken by the team also fits into the 5 ways of wellbeing. This the information on an individual and connecting them with local communities, volunteering, learning a new skill. 5 ways of wellbeing links to the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy framework. Each element that affects public health fits into the Strategy, with the core message of collaboration and empowering our communities.