

**DSP Partnership Board
Meeting 19th September 2007**

Agenda Item 7: Migrant Workers

Recommendations

1. That the work of the Migrant Worker Task Group be welcomed
2. That Council Leaders identify a Lead Member from each council who would provide political leadership to support the work of the Task Group in their area
3. That the DSP Partnership Board identifies a Lead Member to advise and support the Task Group from a community leadership perspective.

Context / Background

Early in 2007 the DSP endorsed the proposal by its social inclusion partnership, Common Ground, to commission a piece of work to scope the issues relating to migrant working in Devon. A Task Group, convened by the Community Council for Devon (resourced by Devon County Council), undertook this work. A preliminary discussion took place with the DSP Delivery Board in June who asked that a report be made to the Partnership Board prior to further consideration of the action plan at its October meeting.

The commitment of partner organisations to this work has reflected the growing awareness of the need to examine carefully the issues arising from the growth in the migrant worker population in the county. This is a complex area of work and the available data remains only partial but it is clear that:

- a) there has been a growth in the migrant population (current official statistics suggest about 10,000 people)
- b) approximately half of migrants return to their country of origin within a year
- c) there is a growing number of migrants who are settling permanently in the county.

The report recognises that the migrant workforce both offers a welcome boost to the economy and to the diversity of cultures within Devon but also presents challenges to our communities. There are often misunderstandings about the nature and size of the migrant worker population and sometimes this has given rise to prejudice and intolerance, reinforcing the importance of high quality information and effective community leadership. However, the concerns and experience of the settled population needs to be heard and sensitively responded to.

Discussions with employers have revealed a serious interest in working with the Task Group as business success is often dependent on effective recruitment of migrant workers and responsible employers wish to drive out exploitation. The potential for business sponsorship of aspects of the work programme is being explored.

Overall the report seeks to achieve a position where migrant workers:

- a) Are supported to make a positive contribution to the economy and community without fear of exploitation;
- b) Have access to effective and timely advice about housing, health, money and employment rights and responsibilities and the law;
- c) Are welcomed and integrated into Devon's communities and that good community relations are achieved.

Key Work Areas

The report proposes a series of actions (see below) that are designed to build a co-ordinated response that will:

- a) Support Devon's leaders to promote good community relations and meet public sector Race Equality Duties.
- b) Ensure that our economy continues to benefit from migrant working.
- c) Focus the energies of partners on taking action to respond to the needs of migrant workers whilst being mindful of the views and attitudes of the settled population.

It concludes that a number of actions should be addressed as a priority

- a. Supporting the leadership of Devon to be proactive and to inform and respond positively to public debate on this issue
- b. Preparation and dissemination of a Welcome Pack for Migrant Workers that sets out their responsibilities and rights (this is at an advanced stage of planning and will be published in the autumn) Preparation of a Fact and Myth Buster to help to inform partners and the public (this will draw on work undertaken by the TUC and will also be available shortly)
- c. Consultation with, and involvement of, Migrant Workers to ensure an effective and proportionate response to their needs and issues
- d. Further research and information gathering to build a more accurate picture e.g. through monitoring returns from CAB, schools, GP surgeries etc about requests for help from migrant workers. This will also help us to understand service pressures and develop appropriate responses
- e. A range of issues related to "compliance" within both public and private sectors e.g. in relation to employment and housing law
- f. Facilitation and organisation of the Migrant Worker Task Group

Regional implications

Migrant Workers are, by definition, often very mobile and live and work in different locations. This means that any approach must include Plymouth, Torbay and other neighbouring authorities. Cornwall in particular has been a leader in this area of work over recent years. Early discussions have begun with Plymouth and Torbay (who are also part of the Task Group) to ensure we make best use of resources and expertise and will extend to include the RDA and GOSW.

Resources

The costs of the work programme are being refined but will initially be in the region of £80,000 to £100,000 over the next 18 months (this will depend on the success of

securing sponsorship from business for example to help with costs of the welcome pack). Devon County Council has committed £40,000 to help this work to proceed and a discussion will take place at the next Delivery Board to consider ways of building upon this commitment.

Conclusion

All evidence demonstrates that migrant workers make a net contribution to the economy and enrich cultural diversity. Devon is a welcoming county and there is good evidence of positive integration of migrant workers locally. However, the settled population sometimes becomes anxious about the growth of the migrant population and there are examples of exploitation and prejudice that do arise from time to time. The contribution of elected members within the county to providing leadership and reassurance will be a pivotal part of the strategy as it evolves and the Task Group would welcome the support of the DSP Partnership.

**See accompanying full report: Migrant Workers – Scoping the Issues
for Devon April 2007**