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CBI MIGRATION SUMMIT 2008

Interacting with local services

1. Introduction

In this presentation I seek to highlight some of the main ways in which migration into rural districts [such as Breckland] from European countries impacts on local service provision.

I hope that the presentation will stimulate thought and discussion with colleagues on how local authorities, particularly in rural areas, can best address in-migration and develop a collective understanding of how 'new' communities interact with local services.

2. About Breckland…

To give you a bit of background on Breckland: -

- Breckland is a geographically large rural District in central Norfolk covering an area of over 500 square miles and with a population circa 125,000 [and significant projected growth].

- Generally, quality of life is good with official crime rates being low and generally decreasing. However there are pockets of health, disability and access related deprivation, notably in and around our main town: Thetford.

- Unemployment in the District is very low and has been consistently below both the national and county figures. However, wages are also relatively low and reflect the lower level of qualifications of people in the district and the low level of skills required by many of the available jobs.

- Estimating numbers of migrant workers is notoriously difficult. Both the main sources of data, on National Insurance number allocations and registrations under the Worker Registration Scheme (WRS), are seriously flawed.

    - But to give you some indication – the migrant worker population in Breckland is estimated at between 6,000 and 15,000 people.

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3. Interacting with local services

Breckland is currently experiencing significant population growth – in no small part, due to major in-migration from European countries. This places a rising demand on our public services whilst at the same time ensuring that our local economy remains competitive.

So, Breckland [like many other areas] is faced with a series of new opportunities and new responsibilities. How can we best achieve balance between economic demand and social responsibility; and what lessons can we learn from elsewhere?

3.1 Institute for Public Policy Research

The Institute for Public Policy Research's paper *"Your place or mine"* suggests there are three main ways in which migration affects local economies:

1. Skills effects (short-term changes in a local area's population and in the make-up of the local labour market).

In the short term employers will benefit from a migrant labour supply, but the wider impacts on the local area will remain small. In places, like Breckland, where most migrant workers enter low-skill [low pay] jobs there may be some short-term losses for low-skilled domestic workers, but these are often mitigated by the willingness of migrant workers to take 'hard to fill' jobs.

2. Diversity effects (medium-term changes in the diversity of the workforce and in consumer tastes).

Employers in 'high skill' sectors gain benefit from workforces with a range of skills and experiences. Greater diversity amongst the local population will likely lead to new markets for goods and services.

These effects are felt greatest in urban areas with large migrant populations working in high skilled jobs. The impact of such migration is felt less keenly in rural areas like Breckland where migrant workers are predominantly found in the agricultural, manufacturing and food processing industries working in low skilled/paid jobs.

3. Size effects (long-term changes to the size of the local population, and the productivity of the local economy).

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The research suggests that large-scale in-migration can boost productivity in large urban areas, which is where migrant populations are biggest and the scale of economic activity greatest.

These effects materialise where there are the greatest concentrations of population. In rural areas, like Breckland, where migrant populations are dispersed across a large area, such economic dynamism is still felt but is much less tangible.

3.2 It's not pure economics

Whilst this research gives us a strong indication of the economic impact of net in-migration it tells us little about the social impacts.

In Breckland, we readily accept that we need to maximise the economics benefits of migration driven growth, whilst also tackling the challenges presented by the predominance of low skilled / low paid jobs.

However, we prefer to sit migration related issues within the broader social context and think about the challenges it presents to the delivery of our services and fulfilment of our community leadership function. For example: -

- How do we increase a "sense of belonging" amongst new communities?
- How do we tackle myths and legends?
- How do we ensure that our services (and those of our public/private/voluntary sector partners) are fully accessible to all?
- How do we take account of the views of new communities when prioritising our work?

We can't look at a single dynamic; we've got to take account of the bigger picture. If we want to strengthen our economy and ensure its sustainability, we need to build stronger communities for all.

3.3 Lessons from elsewhere

Research and information on how migrant worker interact with public services in rural areas is scarce.

However, two powerful reports produced in South Lincolnshire (*The Dynamics of Migrant Labour in South Lincolnshire* and *Migrant Workers in South Lincolnshire*) give a strong indication on the impacts of net migration.

Much of what they found can be readily applied to Breckland and similar districts in Norfolk and further afield.

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The South Lincolnshire work suggests that: -

- The reception of migrant workers in rural communities is largely positive. The economic benefits that migrant workers bring are readily acknowledged. Where **tensions** and conflicts do exist, they tend to be in areas with where there is little experience of accommodating diversity.

- The main impact of migrant workers on **education** services is in the demand for ESOL classes and pupil intake to schools.

- The impact of migrant workers on **policing** relates to police liaison/interaction with people who are new to the country and unfamiliar with English language and English laws.

- Migrant workers have had a huge impact on **Citizens Advice Bureaux**, which are a major source of advice and information for them. The most frequent enquiries relate to employment, benefits and housing.

- As local [rural] populations tend to be older or ageing and incoming migrant workers who are mostly aged 25-34 are filling gaps in the **labour market**.

- Few employers want to invest in providing **training** and those that do are often unable to do so in the migrant workers' native languages.

- Migrant workers often struggle to access basic **local services**, e.g. setting up a bank account.

- Before arriving in the UK migrant workers have high **expectations** of living and working standards in the UK. These expectations are rarely met and dissatisfaction is often caused by bad employment conditions, discrimination, poor accommodation and lack of access to and provision of services.

- Local communities, voluntary organisations, local authorities, employers and other key groups play an increasing role in **introductory and integration programmes** for migrant workers, providing language and skills training, social orientation and easier access to services.

- There are a number of initiatives aimed at improving the lives of migrant workers, e.g. providing ESOL training and advocacy services. However there is a need to **coordinate** efforts and not duplicate services.

- **Rural** migrants are in the greatest need of support because they are often poorer, more vulnerable to abuse and exploitative living conditions.

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4. In Breckland…

We're hosting the first Specialist Cohesion Team Pilot. Announced in June, by Hazel Blears, Specialist Cohesion Teams are one strand in the Government's response to reports from the Commission on Integration and Cohesion.

Piloting additional support to local authorities facing cohesion challenges particularly those areas facing rapid change is a new approach to addressing the demands of in-migration.

The aim of the pilot is primarily to share good practice, both in terms of identifying what is already working well within Breckland, and also in identifying what good practice from elsewhere might be applicable within the area.

The specialist cohesion teams are seeking to apply their expertise in coaching partnerships on building strong and cohesive communities in which everyone regardless of race or faith has a real stake in their community and where services are tailored to meet local needs. Activity is focussed on ensuring integration, community cohesion and conflict resolution.

I'd like to take this opportunity, share some good practice that's already in place in Breckland: -

- The Council has an excellent track record of helping integrate all our communities; funding was secured for projects such as 'Widen Your Horizons' training project and Pre-ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) courses. Breckland staff also learnt basic Portuguese, helping employees working directly with the public, to communicate with clients and help with forms. Other training included operating fork lift trucks, sports coaching and health and safety. A Care Sector event was organised bringing employees together with potential employers.

- The Council employed a [Portuguese speaking] Community Liaison Officer who was one of the first in the country, and a further 4 staff members were supported through the Keystone Development Trust to work across our communities. The Council also helps individuals and community groups, supporting and mentoring their development and building their capacity to help others. Early identification of the needs of individuals and groups enables the Council to tailor it's response to ensure those needs are met rather than trying to provide a 'one size fits all' policy.

- Breckland's 'support and mentoring' approach has nurtured a number of the agencies that now work successfully in the district. Eighteen groups including SIMPLE, Project Amigos, the Mid Norfolk Association and the International Friendship Group provide a range of welcoming and self-help services to migrant communities; most of these groups are now working independently of Council support.

- The Council has Regional Champion Status for Homelessness, in recognition of its work with disadvantaged groups. Vulnerable individuals are identified at an early stage and action is taken to prevent homelessness. Resources have also been dedicated to locating inadequate private sector housing such as HMOs (houses of multiple occupation) and using enforcement action to ensure that conditions are brought up to a decent standard for occupants.

- Other cohesion projects include a Pride in Breckland Campaign, designed to address a number of long and short term issues that impact on the community. The aim is to stimulate a variety of community and partnership based initiatives that benefit all sections of the community. Currently under discussion are schemes such as community clean-ups, activities to reduce carbon emissions and environmental education and healthy lifestyles projects.

This best practice was shared recently when the Breckland Council staged a 'Settling In' conference. Here, many of the community organisations supported by the Council were able to showcase their work to delegates alongside keynote speakers from the Audit Commission and other agencies.

This best practice also shows how in Breckland we look at migration and community cohesion in the broadest sense: targeting all communities and not just migrant workers; addressing economic and social factors together and not in isolation.

Conclusion

I hope you've found this presentation stimulating and informative. To finish, I'd like to make three key points: -

1. Policies and practices on migration, cohesion and integration need to be targeted at the whole of society, not just at migrants and minorities.

2. There is a need for strong local leadership. Diversity [achieved through net in-migration] needs to be welcomed and celebrated not just for its economic impacts but also for wider social benefits. Effort should be spent on building links between communities and increasing 'sense of belonging' amongst new communities.

3. A partnership approach is essential to achieving strong coordination between public/private/voluntary sector bodies in delivering key services and in taking the lead on migration issues. Responsibility for migration issues should be part of a shared agenda.

We are increasingly knowledgeable about how migrant communities interact with local services, and reports like those from South Lincolnshire, help meet this end. However, further information is necessary to ensure our provision and 'offer' is meeting the needs of migrant workers and all sections of our community. In Breckland, the work undertaking as part of the Specialist Cohesion Pilot, will go some way to achieving this.