

Title:	Migrant Workers and Houses in Multiple Occupation in West Wiltshire 2008
Portfolio Holders:	Cllr Virginia Fortescue (Housing)
Reporting Officer:	Kathy Geraghty (Community Development Officer) Janet Homewood (Principal Housing Renewal Officer)
Key Decision:	No

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet on the findings of the Report – ‘*Migrant Workers and Houses in Multiple Occupation in West Wiltshire*’ Commissioned through the I&DeA’s Migration Excellence Programme and the recommendations of Scrutiny Committee of 17th September.

Background

As a result of the A8 accession countries joining the EU in 2004, West Wiltshire has experienced large numbers of migrant workers, mainly Polish, coming to live and work in the area. Like many other councils up and down the country, this has been a new phenomenon that has brought with it new challenges.

The Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA) on behalf of Communities and Local Government (CLG) set up the Migration Excellence Programme to help Councils understand and meet these challenges and to be able to share good practice resulting from the programme with other councils.

WWDC has received national recognition for its work to understand and support the needs of migrant workers and their current and future impact on council services but more work was needed to more fully understand the picture and numbers involved. Alongside this, the majority of reported complaints and concerns into the Council have been about migrant workers living in overcrowded houses and the anti-social impacts this had supposedly created i.e. noise, car parking, rubbish and potential health, fire and community cohesion risks.

Given the accessibility of private rented accommodation and the probable need for low overheads for migrant workers, as most are filling low-paid, low-skilled jobs, it was assumed that they would be living in houses in multiple occupation (HMOs).

The resulting successful bid to I&DeA was a project that would help identify the current and future plans and needs of migrant workers through a questionnaire and a survey of HMOs that would help the Council to decide if it needs to license many more HMOs. This would also improve the safety and living conditions of the tenants including migrant workers.

As the thrust of the project brief and this report is in regards to housing, Cllr Virginia Fortescue is the Portfolio Holder responsible,

This was supported by Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 13 February 2008, and Cabinet on 5 March supported the recommendation made by Scrutiny.

The consultants were also asked to consider recommendations for how this work should be taken forward by the new Wiltshire Council.

Cabinet should also be aware that as a result of a presentation to Scrutiny on 17th September, that committee recommended to this Cabinet:

- That resources are directed towards enforcing statutory regulations regarding HMOs
- Work is done to ensure that recommendations in the report concerning migrant workers and HMOs are taken forward by the new Wiltshire Council

Key issues

- Using various data and formulae it is suggested that the A8 population of West Wiltshire is currently in the region of 2,600 people.
- 29 of the 80, 36%, respondents to the questionnaire plan to stay permanently in West Wiltshire, 936 if current figure of 2,600 is assumed.
- Approximately half lived in dwellings that might constitute a house in multiple occupation.
- With regards to community cohesion, the majority of respondents had not felt threatened by neighbours, employers, landlords or other members of the community.
- Key risk factor is to the economy of the district if migrant workers were to leave
- The key message from the HMO surveys highlighted that many of the premises failed to meet satisfactory standards against a diverse range of measures.
- These included certification for gas safety, electrical safety and furniture safety.
- Just less than one half of premises met full fire precaution requirements.
- A number of premises were not satisfactorily managed.
- The most significant failings were found in the absence of fire and management information notices.
- About one third may have category 1 hazards that are serious enough to require statutory intervention.
- Overall cost to remedy defects within the (known and identified) HMO stock in West Wiltshire is estimated at £257,700. Approx £3,530 per HMO. These however only relate to the identified defects. There are also likely to be other maintenance defects not identified.

The report contains ten recommendations as well as a suggested list of tasks to take forward.

The report and its findings were presented at a national conference on 16th October.

Effects on Strategies and Codes

There are no effects on strategies or codes.

Risk Management Implications

There are no risk management implications.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

There are no legal or human rights implications.

Next Steps

Housing Renewal is required to consider the recommendations and list of tasks in the report and to identify priorities that could be undertaken by this Council before April 1st 2009. The following tasks could be undertaken:

- Contact all potentially licensable HMOs and inspect with a view to licensing if found licensable.
- Produce an information pack for Landlords on their rights and responsibilities in the private rented sector
- Pursue at least one enforcement action per year.
- Prioritise HMOs for full inspections

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet recommend that the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Transition Board consider the report and identify where and how the work around migrant workers should be taken forward.
2. That Cabinet recommend that this future work should address the key issues, recommendations and list of future tasks identified in the report.
3. Recommendations and list of potential next steps be circulated to Keith Robinson and Cllr Jane Scott.