

Where people matter

# Migrant Workers and Houses in Multiple Occupation in West Wiltshire 2008

## Executive Summary

### Main message:

The Council have responded to the challenges posed by the significant numbers of A8 nationals (primarily Polish people) who have arrived in West Wiltshire from 2004 onwards. The situation is a constantly changing one and it is important that those involved continue to challenge themselves and their organisations to also evolve and develop to ensure the benefits are experienced by all.

### Introduction:

Funding, was provided by the Migration Excellence Programme which is managed by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and funded by the Department of Communities and Local Government to support a study that examined the related themes of houses in multiple occupation and the situation and living conditions of tenants in West Wiltshire, in particular migrant workers.

The study which comprised a questionnaire, meetings with key stakeholders and a survey of houses in multiple occupation has highlighted a number of issues that will have an impact on the health and quality of life of migrant workers in West Wiltshire.

### Messages from the Questionnaire Survey:

The largest group of respondent to the survey had lived in the UK for more than three years, the highest proportion in Trowbridge. Despite many respondents stating that they lived in a house as a single household it was clear that sharing a house either with friends or as a more formal houseshare was popular. Approximately half of respondents lived in dwellings that might constitute a house in multiple occupation (HMO). Three quarters of respondents rent privately, through a private landlord or managing agent with one half paying rent in cash. A significant number of workers were employed in the foodprocessing sector; the main reason they moved to West Wiltshire.

Feeling safe and healthy in the community is important. Eastern European people in West Wiltshire were confident in contacting the Police. The majority of people had not felt threatened by neighbours, employers, landlords or other members of the community. This is encouraging. However, 16.0% of respondents did not have hot water that worked, which is a concern.

The key message is that a significant number of migrant workers intend to live and work in West Wiltshire.



### **Messages from Key Stakeholder comments and issues identified:**

Whilst the different agendas and motivations of different agencies should be acknowledged and respected the message was that local authorities in their community leadership role should head up and steer local responses. It is essential to demonstrate practical applicability wherever possible (especially to the business and private sector) in order to show that statutory and voluntary sector responses are not just discussion groups.

Before 2004 some businesses in WW were facing an unsettled future and the availability of migrant workers had in fact helped these businesses maintain their competitiveness. This, in effect, was helping to safeguard local jobs.

Stakeholder groups found that economic rewards combined with the lack of government interference and the social and life experience of living in West Wiltshire were a positive balance to the relatively low pay and long hours. The majority of migrant workers have little call upon the statutory services and generally 'get on with their lives'.

### **Messages from survey of houses in multiple occupation:**

A risk assessment was utilised to identify those premises most likely to require the earliest intervention. The majority of HMOs which were two or three storeys in height and mainly terraced or detached build type were constructed before 1919 with the highest incidence in Trowbridge. About a third of inspected HMO's did not meet statutory minimum standards. All premises that were classified as 'not satisfactory' were in the private rented sector with the local authority and housing association sectors being 'satisfactory'. A number of HMOs required to be licensed.

The key message from the 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. The survey assessed fire detection and alarm provision, fire protection measures and means of escape and the provision and maintenance of fire fighting equipment. A number of premises were not satisfactorily managed and the most significant failings were found in the absence of fire information notices and management information notices.

There was a notable lack of knowledge amongst tenants of the identity and responsibilities of their landlords or agents. The overall cost to remedy defects within the HMO stock in West Wiltshire is estimated to stand at £257,700 which equates to a unit cost of approximately £3,530 per HMO.

The key finding dispels the myth that migrant workers live in HMOs, the study suggests otherwise. For this reason there is a need for increased resources and capacity to deal with poor quality private rented sector dwellings, and to support tenants and landlords.

### **Recommendations:**

The following recommendations are made:

- R1** That a high level political lead be identified at the LSP level to ensure that the issues identified relating to the migrant workforce are taken forward in a strategic manner.
- R2** That an economic development focus be adopted as the key driver for taking forward the operational work in the unitary Wiltshire Council.
- R3** That the continuity of the 'single point of contact' be ensured and that consideration is given to extending the role throughout the unitary Wiltshire Council.
- R4** That a high level political lead be identified at the LSP level to ensure that the issues identified relating to houses in multiple occupation and strategic housing in general are taken forward in a strategic manner.
- R5** That attention is given to extending the capacity and capability for enforcing conditions in the private rented sector across Wiltshire.
- R6** That a more professional approach from the private rented sector be adopted as a strategic housing objective in order to effectively contribute to the housing market of Wiltshire.
- R7** That targets for the proactive identification, inspection and enforcement of private rented sector accommodation are set, monitored and delivered.
- R8** That efforts are made to step up the dialogue with the business community throughout the county with the primary aim of determining the extent of their reliance on the migrant workforce and to consider the impact of a reduction in labour flows through migration.
- R9** That attention be given to the development of a set of cohesion indicators to ensure that any potential tensions are identified in a timely fashion.
- R10** To continue to improve partnership working and relationship building with the community and voluntary sectors, as well as other partners with an emphasis on the understanding and respecting of different but equally valuable agendas.