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Evaluation of Rotherham's *Controlling Migration Fund* Programme (Phase 1)

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December 2019

Summary

The CMF programme

This report presents the evaluation of the community cohesion programme in Rotherham, funded by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government with £1.3 million from the Controlling Migration Fund (CMF). This programme has supported Rotherham Together Partnership's broader community cohesion strategy, which addresses a major policy priority for the borough. Although the ethnic minority population is well below the national average it is rising rapidly, with recent growth largely through migration from Eastern Europe. Rapid migration has placed demands on statutory and voluntary sector service provision, and there are ongoing tensions between the migrants and established White British and Pakistani/Kashmiri communities.

The programme was led by Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC), and delivered by three departments within RMBC and six principal partners from the voluntary and community sector (VCS). Its broad goals were:

- positive effects on host communities/reduced pressure on services
- improved relationships within communities (i.e. community cohesion)
- improved relationships between communities and the local authority
- improved wellbeing (environmental, economic, social/family) for deprived communities

with a subsidiary objective of improving governance and inter-organisational relationships in relation to cohesion.

The programme comprised 25 projects, involving nine distinct approaches to community cohesion: Working with key individuals; Providing advice; Training/education; Getting individuals together across communities; Financial support for community groups; Environmental projects; Increasing housing and environmental enforcement activity; Targeted state support to families and young people; Working with governance organisations (state and voluntary and community sector).

The evaluation

This evaluation was carried out by staff from the Department of Urban Studies & Planning at the University of Sheffield, and was funded from Rotherham's CMF. Its principal aim is to support learning about "*what works?*" as well as demonstrating the impact of the Fund, and it therefore adopts a 'Theory of Change' approach, organised around the causal links between activities, effects on individuals and organisations, and broader social impacts. Given the short and complex nature of the programme, and the largely unfavourable external environment (in which Brexit, austerity and local activities of the Far Right play a part) there was little chance of evaluable impacts on community cohesion at borough level. Visible change, especially in such an environment, will take more time and resources to achieve. The process-based approach to evaluation is thus particularly important for planning future projects. The report combines quantitative measures of immediate outputs and impacts (drawn principally from the delivery organisations' quarterly reports) with qualitative analysis

of the mechanisms by which these plausibly contribute to the programme's broader goals (derived from interviews with project staff).

Key achievements

- There is clear evidence of a large number of valuable impacts, even in the short timeframe of the programme, on individuals, organisations and communities in Rotherham
- Almost all the programme outputs were delivered, or will have been by the time the projects closed; many targets were exceeded
- The services delivered were clearly meeting very real needs, in the context of demand probably far exceeding what could be provided using the CMF resources
- The funds were used very creatively, supporting an impressively varied range of activities and a great deal of innovation, diversification and new capacity both in the local authority and in the voluntary and community organisations
- The programme also enabled a great deal of learning, within organisations and at programme level, demonstrating what can be achieved and how to deliver effective and innovative approaches to cohesion in the future
- The few exceptions to successful delivery were principally where problems of recruitment or procurement delayed the start of activities, or where an innovative activity proved inappropriate or unworkable. RMBC's appropriate response was to allow flexibility and support organisations to find alternative approaches.

Programme goal 1: Positive effects on host communities/reducing pressure on services

Several of the projects delivered **services directly to host communities**: e.g. housing advice, opportunities for young people to participate in social action projects, opportunities for participation in sport, enviro-crime enforcement. Others provided services to recently arrived migrants which **reduced pressure on statutory services**: e.g. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), community navigators, housing advice; others supported recently arrived people in ways which will reduce sources of inter-community tension e.g. housing advice, enviro-crime enforcement, ESOL). Early interventions in supporting families and vulnerable individuals (e.g. through advice, family and young person support) were shown to have **cost savings, through reducing more complex and expensive later involvement** by statutory services.

Programme goal 2: Community cohesion

Many of the projects gave people experiences which should encourage community cohesion, particularly when a) inter-community contact was over an extended period and b) it involved activities such as sport, or carefully facilitated 'difficult conversations' about identity and migration. To sustain and broaden the impact of this work within communities will require ongoing support for people who have been involved.

Programme goal 3: Relationships between community and the local authority

Activities such as housing and enviro-crime enforcement work, providing housing advice in community centres, and Early Help and youth outreach work all gave members of the public experiences of direct, immediate help or evidence of local authority responsiveness. It seems very likely (though with little direct evidence) that many people's positive interactions through the programme will have made them more favourably disposed towards RMBC.

Programme goal 4: Improved wellbeing

There were some striking impacts on individuals – at the extreme transformative and even life-saving, in the case of advice and crisis fund provision. Although not visible at community scale, the effects of early help with family problems (including child abuse), access to services, language classes and opportunities to volunteer (amongst others) all have enormous positive implications for the individuals and families concerned, and for those with whom they come into contact (either within communities or service providers.) The programme also led to perceptible environmental and housing quality improvements in some locations.

Programme goal 5: Governance relationships

The programme led to increased cooperation over delivery, sharing of knowledge and information between VCS organisations and with RMBC, reinforcing some existing relationships and creating some new ones.

Factors supporting success

While each project was different, three key factors are identifiable which underpinned the success of the programme as a whole:

✓ **wider cohesion objectives:** across the programme projects were explicitly focusing on contributing to broader, shared community cohesion goals, alongside achieving their own specific outputs. This shaped their delivery, helped build links and develop synergies between projects, and gave a very diverse and potentially piecemeal programme a central focus.

✓ **staff:** staff across the local authority and VCS were impressively dedicated and committed to the objectives and the programme, and the work as a whole was characterised by professionalism and cooperation

✓ **structure and management:** the partnership of experienced VCS and statutory organisations, meeting regularly as a team of equals, enabled effective delivery and mutual confidence building on a firm foundation of existing skills, experience and relationships. This was coupled with flexibility in management, from both MHCLG and RMBC, allowing projects to adapt to emerging circumstances and needs and pick up ideas coming from the community.

Constraining factors and risks

While almost all the project outputs were delivered, there were some factors which reduced the overall effectiveness of the programme, most of which were outside the control of the partners but need to be taken into consideration for future work.

x several projects started slowly, with consequences for delivery given the very short timescale of the programme funding. This resulted from a mix of administrative factors, the need to train staff and community members, the inherent slowness of community development work, and structural labour market constraints

x resources were inevitably inadequate to meet the demand for services; there was a specific problem with some of the community development work that resources were not available to support new initiatives coming from the community.

Looking forward: recommendations

The following are the main recommendations for those planning and delivering future work at the local level; they also have implications for policy and support from MHCLG and other central government departments.

The portfolio of activities: Overall there is value in supporting a broad portfolio of activities and a diversity of providers, which builds in resilience and promotes unplanned synergies between projects. However, given the inevitable resourcing constraints, I suggest prioritising:

- Focused work with individuals/small groups drawn from across communities
- Training of community development workers
- Providing sustained support for participants in both these.
- Advice/support work for individuals and families.

Lower priority should be given to one-off events, which have unknown and perhaps marginal impact.

Strategic approach: The existing community cohesion strategy should be revised and deepened, so that it sets out in a systematic way its goals and the approaches to be adopted to achieve them, over a relatively long timescale (several years) and with integration between activities.

The strategy should include activities targeted towards economic development and link to the local authority's neighbourhood working approach.

An evaluation framework based on an explicit theory of change, with proper resourcing and allocation of responsibilities, should be built into the strategy from the outset. Resources could usefully be put into base line surveys in project intervention and control neighbourhoods.

Reach: The portfolio of projects should extend further support to the White British working class communities (e.g. advice services for people in the private rented housing sector; opportunities to participate in sport and cultural activities.)

All projects should have an explicit cohesion aspect, so that provision to more recent communities also benefits host communities (e.g. ESOL providers should cover integration in their teaching.)

More attention could be given to reaching individuals within communities who are most in need, or whose communities could benefit most from their participation, but are often less likely to access the activities/services on offer.

Sustainability: A strategic approach should consider where Rotherham Building Stronger Communities can influence, support or supplement funds accessed by other organisations.

Future support should not necessarily be tied to innovation:

- projects should be supported to continue as they are, where they clearly deliver cohesion objectives
- some should be supported to innovate, for instance where community development workers have been trained
- some activities/approaches can be mainstreamed and may not require further resourcing, particularly where it involves a new approach to existing activities rather than additional staff
- resources should be put into supporting individuals who have been involved in community cohesion activities to reinforce behaviour change and their potential as change agents.

Timescale: Strategic planning should be carried out over a medium timescale (e.g. 5 years) so that development and learning (by projects, organisations, and individuals) can be planned for, and outcomes evaluated, without being tied to single funding regimes.

Whilst problems for individual recent migrants may be of short duration (as reflected in the short timescale of the CMF), community level need is likely to be longer term, especially in 'reception areas' for waves of migrants. Also, integration and cohesion issues are deeply engrained and require long term solutions. Longer term funding is needed.

Transparency and trust: Actively sustaining and nurturing a programme culture of trust and mutual respect is crucial for longer term partnership working.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful for all the time and effort that people from Rotherham put into this evaluation. My thanks go particularly to Mahara Haque, Waheed Akhtar and Miles Crompton from the ACE Directorate at RMBC, who were my principal contacts with the local authority. Many thanks also to the people running the funded projects and their staff, who gave me immense amounts of time, and put up with intense (sometimes probably intrusive) questioning with good grace and humour.

I learned an enormous amount during the course of the evaluation, and everything helped me understand the complex, difficult and largely successful work that was carried out under the CMF. I am very conscious that only a fraction of what I was told has found its way *explicitly* into this document. While I regret this, the document had to be kept within reasonable bounds if it was to be of any use, and I hope in the process of synthesising and summarising I have not done too great a disservice to the work that was done.

I am also grateful to Professor David Robinson, also of the Department of Urban Studies & Planning at the University of Sheffield, for all his advice and support.

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