

# Migration Impacts Fund Project

**East Cambridgeshire District Council  
and Fenland District Council**

Final Report  
by Emily Haysom, January 2012



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# Introduction

International migrants come to the UK for many different reasons. They may come as professionals, as seasonal agricultural workers, or care workers. Many young people come to the UK temporarily with the intention of gaining life experience, much like UK citizens working abroad such as students taking a gap year.

In a recent study commissioned by the East of England Development Agency (EEDA), Philippe Legrain argues that *'what is emerging is a pan-European labour market where workers circulate freely, just as products and capital do'* and that our concern should perhaps be how to attract and retain migrant workers.<sup>1</sup> In East Anglia the National Farmers Union is concerned about potential labour shortages and are aware of the need to attract and retain migrant workers.<sup>2</sup>

Studies have shown that migrant workers are usually self-financing, putting more into the economy in terms of production and taxes than they claim from public finances.<sup>3</sup>

Migrant Workers tend to have a very positive work ethic. They may be earning money to send home to families and often put up with hardship in order to save money.

Immigration is a more complex issue than is usually presented in the press. National immigration figures show *arrivals* rather than the *departure* of migrant workers. *'Of the million or so east Europeans who have come to work in Britain since 2004, over half have already left again.'*<sup>4</sup> Recent migrants are also likely move between areas, following work. Exact numbers of international migrants in the UK are not known. It also needs to be noted that there are national migrants - people migrating within the UK - for similar reasons to international migrants.

Using the figures available, it is apparent that there has been an overall increase in the number of international migrants coming to Cambridgeshire since 2001, with an estimated 13,100 non-UK nationals becoming resident in the county between 2001 and 2006.<sup>5</sup> Several projects were initiated in response to the growing numbers of migrant workers within our communities in Cambridgeshire.

A regional study carried out on behalf of the EEDA, *Migrant Workers in the East of England*, by Sonia Mackay, and Andrea Winkelmann-Gleed, 2005, highlighted actions to be taken by local authorities in order to better support the needs of migrant workers.

- *'Services provision in all areas (for example, housing, health, education and childcare) should be delivered in such a way as to meet the needs of migrant workers.'*
- *Due to a '[a] lack of availability of suitable and secure accommodation [...] a survey of migrant worker accommodation needs to be undertaken [...] the needs of migrant workers to be considered and reflected in local/subregional housing strategies'*
- *Greater flexibility is needed regarding provision for English for speakers of other language (ESOL). 'ESOL provision should be tailored to meet the needs of migrant workers.'*<sup>6</sup>

In May 2009 Cambridgeshire County Council was awarded funding from the national Migration Impacts Fund to manage the transitional impact of migration. Cambridgeshire County Council agreed to fund a project to *'combat overcrowding, exploitation and health and safety issues for migrant workers in Private Rented Accommodation.'*

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<sup>1</sup> Why the East of England needs migrant workers, Philippe Legrain EEDA p

<sup>2</sup> Rachel Carrington (Senior Policy Adviser NFU East Anglia), meeting with Emily Haysom July 2010

<sup>3</sup> 'Floodgates or Turnstiles – post EU enlargement migration flows to (and from) the UK', Pollard, Latorre, Sriskandarana, ...

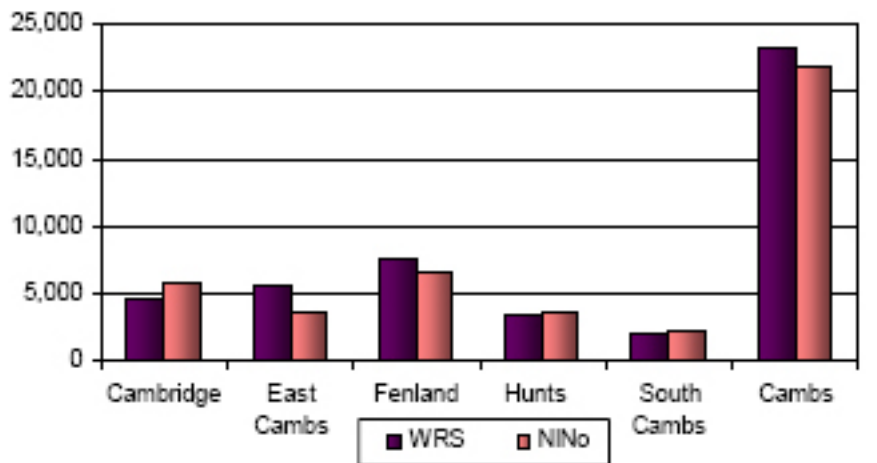
<sup>4</sup> Legrain p2

<sup>5</sup> *Monitoring International Migration in Cambridgeshire in 2009* Cambridgeshire County Council Research Group, January 2011

<sup>6</sup> *Migrant Workers in the East of England*, Executive Summary Sonia Mackay, Andrea Winkelmann-Gleed, EEDA, Autumn 2005, pp8-10

The Cambridgeshire Private Sector Housing Strategy Group was charged with taking the project forward. Interest was limited but the funding was taken up two of the five districts, East Cambridgeshire District Council (ECDC) and Fenland District Council, as studies were showing that after Cambridge they were the two districts with the highest concentrations of migrant workers from the recent migrations from eastern Europe. (See fig 1)

Figure 1



A grant of £140,000 was approved for a project spanning 2 years. Following a Government reduction in spending, the year 2 funding was reduced by 50%, revising the total funding available for the project to £107,500.

The project commenced from late March 2010 until September 2011 with the engagement of a HMO (houses in multiple occupancy) officer in Fenland District Council, and a health and safety housing officer (migrant workers) – job share – in East Cambridgeshire District Council.

Fenland had already carried out extensive research into their migrant worker populations and were reacting to conditions in their district with statutory inspections and enforcements. (The work undertaken by Fenland District Council is covered separately in part two of this report). East Cambridgeshire District Council had to carry out the initial fieldwork to identify where migrant workers were employed, where they lived and subsequently to investigate their living conditions.

<sup>7</sup> Monitoring International Migration in Cambridgeshire 2009, Cambridgeshire County Council Research Group, March 2011

# PART ONE

## East Cambridgeshire District Council

In East Cambridgeshire the focus of the project has been on building knowledge of migrant worker housing conditions.

### Establishing a knowledge base

East Cambridgeshire is a rural area dominated by agricultural industry. There are three main market towns: Ely, Soham and Littleport, a number of villages and small hamlets. Migrant workers play an important role in supporting the local economy.

### Methodology

In order to avoid being guided by assumptions about migrant workers it was resolved to undertake research and engagement with the community from the outset. An holistic, proactive approach was taken for information gathering alongside educating and informing tenants, landlords, employers and the local community, with a long term view to improving housing in the private rental sector and supporting community cohesion.

In practice, research, outreach work and statutory work were carried out at the same time. For example, outreach contact helped with information gathering, which sometimes led to an inspection of a property, which provided additional information, and in the process, tenants and landlords became informed, which led to a stronger message being sent out that standards needed to be raised.

Other issues such as the tenants' welfare, housing needs, or learning needs were identified and these were supported as far as possible with the limited resources available.

Broad and strong networks were established with partners and positive partnership working has underpinned the whole project.

### Research

As well as gaining a clearer picture of migrant workers' housing conditions and their access to housing services, contact with migrant workers has highlighted issues such as health care, employment, communication problems and access to language learning.

Visits to employers at factories, farms, restaurants, and local shops have provided access to people from both European and non-European communities, enabling the build up of key contacts and background information.

Key contacts have been identified in the Polish, Lithuanian, and Portuguese communities. These include teachers, shopkeepers and community workers.

This action provided background information on the experience of migrants and how well people settle and access appropriate support when and where necessary.

Wider reading on migration and housing issues has contributed to a broader knowledge of migrant workers at East Cambridgeshire District Council, as well as informing methods of outreach and delivering frontline services as the project has progressed. Information has been disseminated among environmental services, housing services, and other partner agencies, as well as portraying a more balanced view of migrant workers in the local press.

The Cambridgeshire JSNA Migrant Worker Network, and the Migrant Worker Housing Network were useful organisations in developing ways of working, finding out what resources exist to support the project, and building up a network of partner contacts.

## **Databases**

Following consultation with and information sharing between ECDC departments (electoral services, housing, environmental services - waste, commercial, and domestic), other agencies (police, fire service, National Union of Farmers, Sure Start children's centres) and frontline research: speaking to migrant workers, key contacts, employers and landlords, a number of relevant databases have been produced.

- migrant worker housing accommodation
- priority inspection list
- employers and landlords
- partner contacts.

There are at least 145 HMOs housing migrant workers in East Cambridgeshire. Most are of two storey construction and are therefore not licensable. Many properties in poor condition have also been identified, including tied accommodation to restaurants and caravans.

From this information a priority inspection list has been drawn of 53 properties requiring initial visits, inspections, and or follow up visits relating to previous inspections.

## **HHSRS training**

To enable statutory inspections of properties to be made it was necessary to train a health and safety housing officer in the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).

Training has also been provided on inspecting houses in multiple occupation (HMOs). This helped to embed the MIF project within current work on housing conditions and ensure its longevity through the sharing of findings with the members of the environmental services domestic team.

## **Getting to know people**

### **Partners and Stakeholders**

From the outset it was important to relate to and identify different individuals and agencies working with migrant workers. Firstly they would be an initial point of contact with migrant workers themselves. Secondly it was useful to develop working relationships with them in order to avoid duplication, and to create an integrated support network.

At East Cambridgeshire District Council the MIF project was based in environmental services which provided initial information sharing and led to joint visits and inspections with environmental health officers. A joint approach can help to provide a holistic support system or a united front when facing a difficult landlord.

Close working partnerships were formed with the housing team working together to produce information, presentations, and surgeries, offering comprehensive housing advice. A housing officer attended some inspections which led to the whole department taking a more informed approach to assessing claims for housing assistance. (Appendix 4).

Many initial outreach visits were carried out with the Open Out co-ordinator whose role is to support people reporting race hate crime. Working together increased our knowledge of migrant workers, and gave a broad supportive message to migrant workers about local services.

There is already a good partnership between environmental health officers (EHOs) and the fire service in terms of information sharing on HMOs and joint visits. This good relationship has been built on through this project with close working with the community fire safety officer improving methods of referral.

Kasia Urbaniak the outreach officer for the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) gave a presentation and helped host the migrant worker networking event at ECDC (August 2011). There has also been some joint outreach and information sharing regarding hand car washes in the district.

Sure Start children's centres have been instrumental in enabling housing surgeries, the continued dissemination of information on housing conditions and the Ely English Language (EEL) cafe.

### **Employers**

Employers were contacted in the early stages of the project and a good working relationship developed with G's of Barway, a major agricultural employer of migrant workers. Visits have been made to carry out presentations and offer housing surgeries. Turnout was low, however, the incidental effects of our being there – the one-to-one conversations with some individuals, and the leaflets we left combined to cement a connection with between G's and council services. (Appendix 4).

### **Landlords**

The relationship with landlords has been two edged. It can be a difficult relationship when inspections are under way on their properties. Nonetheless advice and guidance has been given throughout, information provided for landlords on the website has been improved as part of this project. In some cases specific support has been given supporting communication between a landlord and tenant, partly through acting as a mediator and partly through supplying information leaflets in translation to a landlord to give to his tenants. There is potential for improving this relationship with landlords, continuing provision of advice and guidance, providing a supportive role whilst putting the onus of responsibility on to the landlord to demonstrate that they provide safe housing.

## Voluntary Sector

The Migrant Worker JSNA 2009 recommended fostering *'stronger community cohesion and better engagement with voluntary and community organisations.'*<sup>8</sup>

Faith Groups are often a point of contact for people facing crises. Many local churches are aware of migrant workers in straitened circumstances, as well as members of their congregations. Contacts were made within these groups. They have been a good source of information and a means for making referrals to council services. The Roman Catholic church has provided a link with St Vincent de Paul (SVP) charity to support people with no recourse to public funds. The Lighthouse centre has been very supportive of the work of the Ely English Language (EEL) cafe and discussions are underway with them to continue to 'host' the group in the future.

The Hub community cafe (linked to the Lighthouse centre) has provided a space for the mentors and attendees of the EEL cafe to meet.

Key contacts have been made with the Ely Polish community school. Research has been carried out with them regarding language learners and scope for a pilot scheme of lessons run by volunteers from the EEL cafe has been explored but requires more work and a dedicated facilitator. There is potential to develop this.

## English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

Connections have been made with Cambridgeshire ESOL Network (English for Speakers of Other Languages), getting to know what support and provision currently exists locally. Contact has been made with local ESOL providers. There is, however, minimal provision of courses locally. Conversations with migrants testify to the existence of far more learners than could be provided by existing courses, whilst at the same time there are barriers to those learners accessing the courses. Much has been done to liaise with providers, volunteer language mentors, employers and community groups to link people together to improve access to English language learning. We helped circulate questionnaires from CP Learning Trust as part of the Cambridgeshire ESOL Survey, and we helped find migrant worker interviewees for separate research by the CHS Group. The EEL cafe was established to provide a supportive intermediary between learners and formal ESOL courses.

## Migrant Workers

Contact was initiated with individuals and groups of migrant workers through schools, cafes, shops, churches and community groups. People were given the opportunity to raise concerns and talk about their own experiences.

## Supporting Statutory Duties in Local Authority

Alongside the research aspect of the MIF project in East Cambridgeshire, housing inspections and practical work to tackle severe hazards were undertaken.

Under the Housing Act of 2004 the Council has a statutory role in reviewing private sector housing, including rented properties, and making sure that it is safe.

*'If a local housing authority consider that a category 1 hazard exists on any residential premises, they must take the appropriate enforcement action in relation to the hazard.'* (Housing Act 2004, section 5.1)

Inspections were carried out under the Housing Health and Safety System (HHSRS) and HMO management guidance.

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<sup>8</sup> MIGRANT WORKERS JSNA – Executive summary November 2009



## **Outreach visits**

150 door to door visits were carried out to known or potential migrant worker accommodation. Tenants were asked if they had encountered any issues with their housing or with settling into the community. Visits provided the chance to deliver information through face to face contact and leaflets as well as giving migrant workers direct contact with the Council. These sometimes led to a full housing inspection where appropriate.

## **Visits and inspections**

It is important to distinguish between **visits** and **inspections** as they have different legal implications. Visits are informal and can give opportunities for outreach and initial information gathering but cannot form part of legal processes. Inspections form the basis of a legal process whereby notices may be served on the landlord to carry out repairs or take other actions to deal with category 1 hazards.

## **HHSRS inspections**

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System is an evidence based system of assessing hazards in a property which replaced the Housing Fitness Standard.

In the case of a complaint being received by the council (or when instigated by an officer after becoming aware of a category 1 hazard) it is a legal requirement to give 24 hours notice to the landlord and occupants in order to carry out an inspection under HHSRS (Housing Health and Safety Rating System).

Migrant workers do not tend to complain and yet are often the occupants of the poorest housing. In practice, where information has indicated that there are substandard conditions in a property and where category 1 hazards were suspected an HHSRS inspection was carried out.

The knee jerk reaction of landlords in several cases was to serve eviction notices on tenants! The need for an informal initial visit as stage 1 became imperative – opening up more scope to deal with tenants and landlords at an informal level.

At times a more ‘sweeping’ approach was taken to inspections –for example, issuing notices to inspect several properties owned by the same landlord or on the same street as part of a ‘review of housing conditions’ as a way of protecting individual tenants. However the doubling up of visits followed by inspections, and the ‘sweep’ method are time consuming.

## **HMO inspections**

An HMO inspection does not require 24 hours prior notice, which enables officers to carry out spot checks (HMO management regulations 2006). This is useful for inspecting tied accommodation where there is suspected overcrowding. Anecdotal evidence points towards less responsible managers moving people out if informed in advance of an inspection.

## **Category 1 hazards**

HHSRS and HMO inspections have highlighted category 1 hazards including overcrowding. This has led to category 1 hazards being dealt with, improved management of HMOs, and rehousing of families from hazardous accommodation or overcrowded conditions.

To date East Cambridgeshire have carried out interventions on 26 category 1 hazards. In East Cambridgeshire the process for more detailed inspection has begun on 18 properties. Six properties

have been brought up to standard, seven require follow up visits and ongoing work with portfolio landlord/ owners to raise their standards generally. Five substandard properties owned by an unco-operative landlord are now vacant and up for sale. This initial work on inspections has created a priority inspection list of 53 properties.

## Provision of information

### Leaflets

In East Cambridgeshire a simple leaflet for all tenants has been produced: 'Live Safe – in your rented home'. This has been translated into Polish, Lithuanian, and Portuguese, the main language groups among recent migrants in East Cambridgeshire. The leaflet is visual with minimal text, making it cheaper to translate into additional languages when necessary with the added benefit of being more accessible to people with low levels of literacy as well as people learning English. (see Appendix 2)

Officers also organised the translation and distribution of local authority information on subjects such as mould and condensation, and fire safety, as well as providing existing resources in English to landlords and tenants.

### Website

Information on the ECDC website giving advice on housing rights and responsibilities, as well as language learning support has been updated and links made more accessible to migrant workers and to landlords.

A link has been provided on the website to myukinfo.com – a national MIF initiated advice website aimed at speakers of other languages.

### Ely English Language Cafe

- *'English language learning has a significant and positive impact on individuals, communities and the productivity and safety of workplaces in England.*
- *For individuals it enables better communication with other people, it improves their self-esteem and mental well-being and makes realising their potential easier. It also improves their job opportunities and prevents them from being exploited in the workplace.*
- *For communities effective communication is vital - it enables their social inclusion and social cohesion. It also improves their socio-economic situation and lessens the risk of poverty (through better job opportunities). English language skill is a great asset for both employers and employees. [...]ESOL is both a language and a skill for life.'*<sup>9</sup>

The MIF project enabled an officer to establish the Ely English Language Cafe (EEL) in June 2011 with 15 English speaking 'mentors' and a varying group of participants – 25 to date made up of speakers of over 12 different languages. Attendance is informal with an ebb and flow depending on other commitments. An average of 15 people in total meet together to chat in English, usually on a one to one basis.

See Appendix 3

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<sup>9</sup> The Committee of Inquiry on ESOL (NIACE) Report as quoted in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) for migrant Workers in Cambridgeshire Version 4.0, November 2009, p50

## Findings

Foreign migrants are settling in East Cambridgeshire as can be seen by the increasing numbers of foreign food shops, cafes and numbers of children in schools who speak English as a second language. However, so too are British migrants, as evidenced by the general growth in housing developments, schools and GP registrations.

Migrant workers tend to rely on friends and relatives to help them when they get into difficulties, for example, with money, housing and schooling. They frequently share their homes with others on an informal basis and subletting is quite common. People often have family coming to stay from other countries (adding to numbers of temporary visitors in dwellings).

While some migrants speak scathingly of people in their own communities who they see as ‘working the system’ to their benefit, conversations on the whole have shown that people do not understand their rights as tenants or their eligibility to support. There is a stigma in some migrant communities attached to claiming benefits. Sure Start children’s centres have raised concerns where children are involved and families are facing hardship.

Some people considered that they were not treated fairly by GPs or in hospital and were unaware of potential support from Patient Advice and Liaison Services (PALS). Language again is a barrier to accessing support.

Migrant workers generally keep a low profile and are reluctant to complain. At work they may be vulnerable to losing their job and as tenants they face potential eviction if they complain, potentially losing their livelihood, their right to remain in the UK, or being made homeless.

## English Language learning

*‘My only problem is language – how do I find good English lessons?’<sup>10</sup>*

*‘We find migrant workers to be very good tenants, the only problem is the language barrier’.<sup>11</sup>*

Migrants with a good command of English are often heavily relied on by those without such language skills. Routinely friends and relatives are used as interpreters on people’s behalf when accessing services. This is a cost-saving to the Council, as well as to other agencies such as the CAB, as we rarely need to use interpretation services. This could be seen as in keeping with ‘the big society’. However there is an unfair burden on some individuals, for example, children interpreting for adults. This is particularly onerous in doctor’s surgeries where confidentiality is compromised, and the weight of this responsibility on children is potentially unethical. (This issue is also referred to in the NHS Commissioning Framework for Language Support 2011, EELGA) There is also undue pressure on key members of migrant worker communities to go far beyond their role due to their command of English and their native language.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Comment made by east European agricultural worker, repeated frequently by many others of European and non-European origin, including a care workers, restaurant worker, and a parent of young children.

<sup>11</sup> Comment made by local letting agent.

<sup>12</sup> A Polish teacher had a teenage student who spoke little English. Whilst there is good language provision in schools for children under 5 or with siblings under 5, this girl without younger siblings could not access this provision. She came from an abusive family, with alcohol problems and the only person she could talk to was the Polish teacher. As a result the teacher took on a greater level of pastoral care than she felt able to, which caused her stress. She felt isolated and it seemed she had little support to cope in this situation. This story is much repeated. Teachers and key workers from the migrant communities carry an undue burden of support for their communities, helping to fill out forms, attend appointments, relay information on schooling, health care, employment and housing, often acting as an advocate and interpreter. They are effectively volunteer frontline workers for their communities. There should be sufficient mechanisms in place to support these individuals themselves.

Ethnic cafes and shops, and specific language community groups have become ‘hubs’ in our district where people meet one another and share local information. The benefit of this is a strong supportive language and cultural community which helps break down isolation. There is potential that the need for English learning is lessened when people ‘stick with their own kind’. Some people exist for years without ever learning English. This can have a detrimental effect on community cohesion and longterm social integration of individuals. On the other hand, Portuguese cafes are becoming increasingly frequented by local English people, and to a lesser degree, Eastern European food shops. With more settled migrant communities the local restaurants and takeaways provide an interface between migrant and local communities which may encourage English-speaking and cross-cultural friendships or neighbourliness.

There are some groups of entrenched non-English speakers in the area, for example, older Portuguese men (reason unknown), Indian, and Bangladeshi women from traditional families— due to their role in the home within extended family networks, isolated from English speakers. There are also many workers in tied accommodation whose command of English is poor due to various restrictions such as the rural location of their work, shifts, relative poverty, or temporary migrant status.

The EEL Cafe has been developed as an informal language learning environment run by volunteers that could be easily replicated elsewhere.

Some major employers organised English language courses, however this was mainly accessible to administrative staff and only to a basic level.<sup>13</sup> There is good ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) provision through Ely College. Cost can be prohibitive, as can work shift patterns, lack of access to transport. Through the EEL cafe we have facilitated the provision of additional ESOL tutors to G’s of Barway supporting around 20 students, with the flexibility to allow variable attendance to support shift workers.

There is a gap in ESOL provision for many older children who have to study in mainstream classes without additional language support, some of whom are at risk of becoming NEETS (‘not in employment, education or training’). In schools, children under the age of five, or with siblings under five, currently receive free additional support with learning English.

### **Improvement of information resources**

The availability of related information has been increased through leaflets and improving website information.

There has been an increased awareness of rights and responsibilities among tenants and landlords. Over 1000 ‘Live Safe’ leaflets (and a similar number of myukinfo.com cards) have been distributed. It is hard to gauge whether this has led to an increase in access to support as there is no central means of gathering that information that includes migrant worker status, though there has been feedback from employers that the leaflets have been useful – three local Polish shops (whose owner has requested more leaflets for his customers), and G’s Marketing (whose staff manager has said that his staff are now better informed as a result of our involvement).

### **Increased training resources**

Information and training was delivered to other services, authorities and agencies dealing with migrant workers in the form of reports, power point presentations, and talks. Having a dedicated migrant worker officer has improved interagency communication regarding migrant workers. (See Appendix 4)

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<sup>13</sup> Peripatetic ESOL providers still require signed up students to attend regular classes making them inaccessible to agricultural workers with variable shift patterns.

As an integral part of the project to enable inspection of properties an officer was provided with training in the use of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System HHSRS and HMO inspections

A good practice guide has been drawn up for social engagement with migrant workers and reviewing private sector housing for migrant workers to be made widely available to interested parties.

## **Lessons Learned**

Engagement with migrant workers was most successful through face to face contact and word of mouth communication through key members of different migrant worker communities in order to convey information and to build up trust. This also promoted two way communication.

Housing surgeries and market stall outreach work– conventional local authority methods for communication – failed to reach many migrant workers. Whilst flexibility was employed to fit in with variable shift patterns and out of town locations, the conventional outreach still relied on the target migrant audience to make the approach – coming forward to see what is going on. Reticence may have been due to a lack of confidence in speaking English, or to a belief that local community information is not meant for them (a sense of not being rooted in the local community), or a wariness of officialdom. Migrant workers have through necessity a sense of being self-reliant.

ECDC environmental services responds to complaints and has a reactive approach to investigating housing conditions. This project has shown that some of the worst properties slip through the net because tenants don't complain as they are vulnerable to eviction. Landlords are required by law to provide two months notice to tenants in the case of eviction. With an Assured Shorthold Tenancy and a deposit being held in a rent deposit scheme, tenants should be fairly well protected, however, informal tenancy agreements are commonplace, deposits are not registered, and illegal evictions are often carried out. Some tenants were illegally evicted as a result of inspections carried out during this project! The threat is very real, and while much was done to resolve these cases satisfactorily, the vulnerability of tenants should be considered when taking any action. The protection of tenants needs to be a priority. Methods need to be developed that separate the process from the requirement for an initial complaint.

There is a need for a proactive rather than a reactive approach to housing conditions but this approach is more resource intensive.

It is also worth noting that if a property remains empty after tenants have been evicted, the local authority has little power to enforce any repairs. There is an overall loss to the private rental housing stock which increases the burden on the local authority to secure adequate housing.

## **Migrant worker housing in East Cambridgeshire**

The largest populations of recent migrants in East Cambridgeshire come from Poland, Lithuania, and Portugal; with smaller populations from other European countries and non-European countries. However, our data does not show non-European populations from countries outside of the Commonwealth – there are significant gaps such as migrants from the Philippines, of which there is a noticeable community emerging in some areas.

There are areas of poor housing which are largely inhabited by migrant workers, usually located near to major employers such as G's of Barway, Turners of Soham, and possibly construction companies in Littleport. It seems that Soham has a larger proportion of migrant workers, and a lot of problems such as overcrowding and substandard housing. Littleport and Ely have similar problems but these are more isolated and sparsely distributed. There are hidden problems in villages such as older poor quality housing or caravans in gardens being let to migrant workers.

Tied accommodation in restaurants has been highlighted as a serious issue requiring further investigation and there is a need for better management across the district of this aspect of housing. Unlike most forms of accommodation, where accommodation is tied to employment the tenant has no protection against eviction. Legally the landlord need only give 'reasonable' notice which could be as little as 24 hours. Again these workers/tenants are highly unlikely to complain if conditions are bad.<sup>14</sup>

Good practice has been developed for joint inspections with Food inspectors, HSE, and the fire service. A food safety officer cannot inspect accommodation, and the fire service can only inspect communal areas, and environmental health officers can inspect the accommodation. Tied accommodation is complex and joint inspections mean all areas of the property and aspects of the tenancy are investigated.

There are confirmed reports of people sleeping in hand car wash waiting rooms, and anecdotal evidence of the workers receiving wages well below the minimum wage. Unlicensed caravans and mobile homes have been found in gardens and forecourts and in some cases were found to be unsafe. For example not having smoke alarms, the risk of rapid fire spread from homes sited too close together, the carbon monoxide risk from gas cookers. More worryingly there is evidence of families sleeping rough in storage containers. These inhabitants are unlikely to be registered on the electoral register or traceable, and in rural areas this sort of accommodation can be well hidden from public view.

Resources are needed to investigate this further to combat exploitation, promote better management of small businesses to keep people safe in their work and their accommodation.

### **Migrant worker liaison officer**

Having a dedicated migrant worker post in the Council has helped to bridge the gap between migrant workers and accessing support and advice, both about housing conditions and language learning.

Direct referrals have been made to partners such as CPL Trust for foreign nationals requiring advice and guidance about applying for work and qualification conversions. Having a migrant officer has enabled signposting to existing ESOL provision and co-ordination with different groups and providers to increase that provision.

The project has enabled council officers to seek advice about cases concerning migrant workers and developing their own methods for working with them.

A Migrant Worker networking event was organised by East Cambridgeshire District Council, on 17<sup>th</sup> August 2011 in partnership with HSE. The event was well attended by partners from five other local authorities, the fire service, YMCA, NHS and other interested parties. Evaluation forms highlighted that partners found the information provided, the discussion and the networking opportunity to be very beneficial.

We have actively contributed to strategies to support and deal with issues relating to migrant workers, leading to better interagency communication in the district regarding migrant workers.

Direct referrals are now being made to the fire service for home fire safety checks on behalf of migrant workers. Tenants at risk are asked for consent to have their details passed on to the community fire safety officer for a visit. Previously tenants had to contact the fire service themselves. Speakers of English as a second language are unlikely to be aware of the service, or make self-referrals. Poorer housing - with the greatest fire risks- is often occupied by foreign nationals. (Appendix 5, )

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<sup>14</sup> A one bedroom flat was found above a restaurant, housing nine people with access to only one bathroom and WC and where sanitary conditions were defective. Above another restaurant eight people were sharing one shower and multiple electrical sockets were in use. There are several reports from food hygiene inspectors of similar types of accommodation attached to restaurants.

Landlords have been a difficult group to reach regarding housing conditions and often feel threatened by council involvement. However, good relationships have been formed with responsible landlords, co-operative landlords and HMO managers<sup>15</sup> – that is, people who have responded well to intervention and are now complying with requirements to provide suitable safe accommodation or the correct management of houses in multiple occupation under the Housing Act 2004.

## Recommendations

The good practice guide developed as part of this project should be circulated among partners and made available to other interested groups.

The proactive methods of carrying out inspections undertaken within this project should be developed to include an ongoing review of private rented housing stock, maintaining and updating the priority inspection list of substandard and HMO migrant worker housing.

Further research into private sector landlords should be carried out. The list of private sector landlords should be maintained and updated to include all properties owned by portfolio landlords and notes on conditions, and migrant worker occupancies. Information should be shared between environmental services and housing. This will highlight repeat offenders and poor management, thus enabling resources to be prioritised. It will also identify co-operative landlords who could be a resource to improve affordable housing in the future.

A method should be developed whereby a greater level of responsibility is placed on landlords and HMO managers to *demonstrate* that their rented properties are safe, encouraging self-regulation. This could be done with a landlord logbook that is inspected annually by environmental health officers combined with spot checks on properties.

Prosecuting rogue landlords is a costly process and will increasingly be avoided by lean local authorities. More proactive work needs to be done to ensure that conditions can still be successfully enforced without the need for prosecutions.

Whilst proactive work requires greater staff resources there would be long term benefits such as the reduction of costly emergency accommodation provision for tenants when properties become uninhabitable. It would also maintain availability of good rental housing in the area. The National Migration Group recommends that *'Central and local government [...]work together to reconsider the extent to which regulation and enforcement of the poorer end of the PRS [private rental sector] can be achieved with minimum resources or bureaucracy.'*<sup>16</sup>

The development of the EEL cafe and related language mentoring should be supported in partnership with host organisations such as the Lighthouse Centre, Ely, and the Ely Polish Community School.

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<sup>15</sup>Housing Act 2004, section 263. The manager of a house in multiple occupation (HMO) is the receiver of the 'rack-rent' no less than 2/3 of the rent.

<sup>16</sup>Central and Eastern European homelessness Report Rob Warm (National Migration Group, March 2011)

## Summary

### Achievements

1. The MIF project in East Cambridgeshire has led to the development of a good practice model that can be passed on to other local authorities. There has been some improvement in housing conditions for migrant workers and in community cohesion.
2. The lasting legacy is an improved knowledge within East Cambridgeshire District Council of where migrant workers are living and their housing conditions.
3. A priority inspection list of 53 properties will contribute to the ongoing review of private rented housing –a key part of the Council’s statutory duties.
4. Information produced, in the form of leaflets and web pages will still be relevant for some time and provide a simple model that can be repeated.
5. The Ely English Language cafe has been a simple and cost effective in developing language learning and community cohesion. Failing any further development of the project it will carry on as a localised club run by volunteers.

The information gathered on problem properties has highlighted a need for more staff resources to carry out inspections and serve notices where necessary. One of the most valuable aspects of the project was having a dedicated migrant worker officer at the Council, and this will missed at the end of the project.

Partners may also feel the loss of a key contact with the migrant worker communities.

The fire service has specified that they wish to *‘improve engagement with stakeholders who provide a voice for most disadvantaged communities’ to learn more about vulnerable groups and ‘work with partners and businesses to get information to migrant workers about fire safety in HMOs and domestic accommodation’*.<sup>17</sup>

Research has shown a much greater need for English language learning than is currently catered for. The grass-roots model of the EEL cafe can easily be expanded to reach other areas. Groundwork has been done to spread this to Soham and to target specific groups such as young people at risk of becoming NEETS, however this work will need a facilitator.

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<sup>17</sup> Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS) Equality and Inclusion Strategy 2011-2014



# PART TWO

## Fenland District Council

### **Combating overcrowding, exploitation and health and safety issues for migrant workers in private rented accommodation**

**by Harry Baxter, Fenland District Council, September 2011**

Funding allocated under this project was shared between East Cambs and Fenland; East Cambs to fund research, and Fenland to fund an HMO officer post.

We have co-ordinated and shared information with East Cambs but the respective projects are at different stages reflecting the particular issues and circumstances prevailing in each district and are therefore separately reported

Fenland already had detailed knowledge of HMOs and migrant population in the area prior to the commencement of the project (350 'knowns' on our data base and an overall estimated 600 plus in the District - source yr 2008 stock survey). However, previously we had only sufficient capacity to carry out inspections and interventions on a reactive basis, therefore in the main focussing only on the higher profile and reported problem properties.

The MIF funding enabled employment of a dedicated HMO officer for the duration of the project to operate pro-actively, undertaking a programme of visits to migrant households to identify hazards and help secure improvement in conditions by advice, guidance and intervention with landlords and agents. Also, raising tenant awareness of respective rights and responsibilities and engagement with neighbours to assist improved relations, involving other services to assist a resolution where needed.

We have carried out enforcement actions where informal action has not resolved or in cases where emergency action has been necessary including closure of premises presenting imminent high risk.

The HMO officer activity has also routinely involved in joined up working with partner organisations, police and fire service etc and other Council services to assist improved community cohesion, including several notable multi-agency initiatives, 'op surf' etc.

In conjunction with East Cambs we developed a number of tenant advice leaflets, also simple translation scripts in most common languages for operational purposes. We have also updated information on our website re HMO standards and guidance for landlords and agents and this has been further refined

A summary of the activity outputs and outcomes against the project criteria over the 18 months funded period is given as follows:

Housing conditions – HHSRS category 1 hazards and other interventions

## **Around 200 HMO investigations were carried out resulting in:**

55 category 1 hazard interventions to address more serious hazards (eg gas, electrical and fire safety failings, intensive overcrowding, amenity deficiencies, damp and mould, etc),

Outcome: reduced risk to the health and safety of residents

Also, 111 other interventions for lower risk issues (includes where substantial advice given to tenants and neighbours),

Outcome: improved living conditions for residents and reduced impact on neighbours

Evidence for reduced neighbour impacts - noise, waste and ASB complaints

An analysis of complaints in year 2010/11 shows:

- a 7% reduction in domestic noise complaints,
- a 24% reduction in ASB reports
- a 41% reduction in domestic waste complaints

(all compared with the baseline figures for the previous year 2009/10)

Evidence for increased awareness of respective rights and responsibilities

53% of households interviewed in a 'follow up' door knock survey in April 2011 reported increased awareness of their rights and responsibilities as a result of the HMO officer intervention. Evidence for this was based on a 20% sample of HMOs previously visited.

## **Lessons learned:**

Partnership working, intelligence and information sharing and developing relations with agents and landlords involving in this tenure, albeit often challenging, is key to pursuit of the core objectives (safer and decent homes and reduced neighbour impacts)

# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1 - HHSRS Inspection Case Studies

### MIF project, East Cambridgeshire District Council

#### Case study 1

#### Structural collapse/Overcrowding

Whilst doing outreach work visiting flats housing migrant workers I was invited in by occupants to see the condition of their flat. A group of Portuguese friends- a single man 'A' and a couple - were sharing a one bed flat. Among other deficiencies to the property, I noted large cracks in a wall that concerned me. The wall wasn't load bearing, and the tenants didn't wish to make a formal complaint so I left them with my details to contact me if the situation worsened. They were going to discuss repairs with the landlord.

Several months later I knocked on the door to check how they were getting on. A different man answered the door, with a young child. In broken English he managed to convey that he was the new tenant. I decided to give written notice to the landlord and tenants (in Portuguese) that I required access to inspect the property.

I carried out an inspection. The occupants were there with a translator. 'A' was still living there but a family of four were now living in the lounge. I spent some time talking with the occupants and I was concerned about the welfare of the children. I advised the family to see a housing officer as soon as possible. The wall looked very hazardous by now and the flat was severely overcrowded.

Immediately after my visit the landlord had gone to the flat, shouted at the translator, assuming she was living there, told them all to get out – he gave them the weekend to go. I arranged an emergency meeting with the housing team and left them to support the family.

The HHSRS report highlighted 2 category 1 hazards: structural collapse and overcrowding and problems with damp and mould.

Throughout all of this I spoke several times with the landlord on the phone and in person. He said 'A' was the only one on the tenancy agreement, his only problem with him was that he couldn't speak English. The occupants at some point had changed the locks, and kept the curtains closed. They claimed he didn't carry out repairs, he claimed that he had tried to arrange with 'A' to get in to do repairs. He clearly was unaware of any details about the new occupants –as far as he was concerned they were just squatters and he felt he could serve immediate notice. I told him that he had illegally evicted them but that he had to deal directly with housing regarding that. Through talking to me he gained a better picture of the occupants and he was able to work out a strategy for talking with 'A', valuing him as a good tenant, and recognising his responsibilities as a landlord. I encouraged him to take more control of his lettings and take time to communicate with his tenants.

In terms of enforcement, the illegal eviction was not followed up. It turned out that the work to repair the wall was extremely urgent and the family could not have safely remained in the flat.

The following week the landlord phoned me to update me on the repairs. He also thanked me for my intervention as the wall had come down so quickly when it was demolished that the builder sustained an

injury. 'If it had come down while those kids were playing there's no knowing what would have happened, so I have to thank you, though it pains me to say so!' He also mentioned that he had sat down with 'A' and had a good chat about the flat, the repairs, not to sublet the property and so on. He found that 'A' could communicate quite well in spite of speaking very little English and he found that he got on well with him. It was the best chat yet that he had had with his tenant who had lived in the property for several years.

Final visit to property was in March 2011 and it is now up to standard.

Main benefit to occupants – health and safety – preventing potential serious injury or death.

The flat was inspected and scored under **Housing Health and Safety Rating System** by Emily Haysom;  
**HHSRS inspection January 2011-09-22**

The following category 1 hazards were found:

**Crowding and Space** – Band A score 19994 [this scores psychological impact and development of children etc.]

Average likelihood of harm outcomes in property of that size age etc. 1 in 4710  
Assessed as 1 in 6

#### **Structural Collapse**

Band C score 1389  
Average likelihood of harm outcomes= 1 in 24098  
Assessed= 1 in 10

#### **Damp and Mould** [Category 2 Hazard]

Band E score 271  
Average likelihood 1 in 446  
Assessed as 1 in 18

### **Costs and Benefits of intervention**

Viewing the 'assessed likelihoods' of harm outcomes against the 'average likelihoods' it is clear that non-intervention was likely to result in an accident or ill health with potential costs to the taxpayer in terms of NHS treatment costs, the tenants eg. loss of ability to work, the landlord, eg. legal action, reputation.

The family have were housed in emergency accommodation. The wife has been taking an ESOL course and is looking for work. The children are in school and are happy, speaking English and socialising well. The prospects have improved for the family: language learning, job prospects, support for family, and children's development and education. (The children were not in school when the property was inspected).

Living conditions have improved for the original tenant with better landlord tenant relations. There is better management of rented accommodation by the landlord (which would benefit at least 5 further tenants in other properties), more understanding by the tenant of rights and responsibilities. This has sent a strong message to other landlords that higher standards and better management are expected.

There was a cost to the public in that the family needed to be rehoused, however, because the repairs were carried out and the landlord manages his lettings better the flats were less likely to be used as a 'stop gap' for other people seeking social housing. The 'stop gap' scenario is the potential 'loss' of not enforcing repairs.

## Case Study 2

### First floor flat, multiple hazards

Occupants: Eastern European couple with 2 young children. The landlord had refused to do any repairs. I was asked to inspect the property. There were other serious hazards relating to the access – a narrow pavement with very close proximity to a busy road which made the flat unsuitable for a family with young children. The landlord is a portfolio landlord but information on other properties is as yet unknown. There were extremely steep unguarded stairs to the flat which meant that it was highly likely that someone would sustain serious, possibly fatal injuries from falling on to the hard concrete surface below. A child had already fallen down the stairs in the last 12 months! There were multiple electrical hazards and no working smoke alarms.

**HHSRS Inspection 13/4/11** by Emily Haysom

**Electrical** Band C+ score 1803

Ave likelihood outcomes in property of that size age etc 1 in 16869  
assessed: 1 in 32

**Fire** Band C score 1145

Ave likelihood 1 in 1681  
assessed: 1 in 100

**Falls Between levels** Band B score 2968

Ave likelihood 1 in 2742  
assessed: 1 in 18

**Falls on stairs** Band A score 7447

ave likelihood 1 in 214  
assessed: 1 in 10

**Excess Cold** Band B Score 3274

ave likelihood 1 in 330  
assessed: 1 in 100

The landlord was issued with a list of repairs, which he says he is undertaking. The tenants were referred for a home fire safety check – they received a visit from the fire service with free smoke detectors and advice. The landlord says that stairs have been guarded with suitable guarding and other repairs are under way.

The family applied for social housing and have since moved out.

This property is now on a Priority Inspection list but currently staff are overstretched and follow up may not happen.

If nothing is followed up – the hazards are possibly still there - it will become a 'stop gap' for getting social housing, putting a burden on housing services, or put additional costs on the NHS from ill health or accidents.

The tenants were on housing benefit which went to the landlord – he was ultimately a beneficiary of public money without carrying out his duties as a landlord. He has admitted that in another property the tenants got free insulation and central heating because they were on benefits – another benefit to him from the public purse.

There is also a need to gather information and inspect all his properties because they are likely to be in a similar condition and to work with him to take the responsibility for demonstrating that his properties are safe.

## Appendix 2 – ‘Live Safe’ leaflet

### When looking to rent:

Get an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST) agreement. Ask your landlord for one. If you rent from someone who is not the landlord you have NO RIGHTS as a tenant.

Letting Agents may have additional charges. Ask for a complete list of charges throughout the tenancy, before renting a property through them.

For any advice on housing or if you are experiencing problems with your accommodation speak to someone at the council. Translation services are available.

**East Cambridgeshire District Council**  
The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely, Cambs  
CB7 4EE

**01353 665555**  
[www.eastcambs.gov.uk](http://www.eastcambs.gov.uk)

### Useful Numbers

**Emergency** (ambulance, police, fire)  
999

**Fire Service** (non emergency)  
[www.cambsfire.gov.uk](http://www.cambsfire.gov.uk)  
01480 444666

**Police** (non emergency)  
0345 4564564

**Open Out** (reporting race hate crime):  
[www.openoutcambs.org](http://www.openoutcambs.org)  
01223 823552

**NHS direct** (medical advice)  
[www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)  
0845 4647

**Citizens Advice Bureau**  
[www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk)

# Live Safe



in your rented home



East Cambridgeshire District Council

October 2010

### Do you have a working smoke alarm in your home?

#### Your landlord should fit one.

It will give you early warning of a fire and can save your life. You may get a free smoke alarm fitted by the fire service. Contact your local fire station.



### Can you get out quickly?

#### Do you have secure doors and windows and can you open them easily in the event of a fire?

#### Are furnishings fire retardant?



### Your landlord must ensure boilers are serviced every year by a Gas Safe registered installer.

Ask to see the Gas Safety Certificate.

Carbon monoxide has no smell and **KILLS**.

### Are the electrics and wiring old?

### Do you have overloaded sockets?

These can lead to electrocution or start fires.



### Does your roof leak?

### Is mould making you ill?



### Is your home in good condition?

#### Your landlord should carry out repairs.

You should let the landlord know if repairs need to be done. You should look after your home too.

If you feel that conditions in your home are unsafe or making you ill, contact **Environmental Services** at the council.

### Are you sharing with others to save

### money? Or living in too small a home?

You may get some support with paying your rent. Speak to **Housing Options** at the Council.



### Do you know your neighbours?

They may help you in an emergency.

### Be considerate.

Keep the noise down at night. Be aware of others if you smoke or have barbecues. Park your car without blocking access routes. Be friendly. In the same way, your neighbours should be considerate towards you. People can complain to the council about noise and other neighbour disagreements.

## Appendix 3 - Ely English Language Cafe

The EEL cafe meets every Tuesday at 10:30 am at the Hub, a local community cafe.

17 people have requested low cost basic language lessons (in the evening) and volunteers with teaching qualifications have volunteered their time. There may be some progression to more formalised teaching groups.

Already mentors and attendees are making their own arrangements for additional tutoring sessions in small home groups. Through our involvement one mentor has established regular low-cost freelance ESOL classes for around 20 migrant workers at G's, a large local employer. Joint work is also underway with Ely College to source funding for low cost day time provision with a creche to meet the needs of parents with young children.

Three attendees from the EEL cafe have enrolled themselves on formal ESOL classes as a result of their participation. Some participants already attend ESOL classes and say how they find the cafe beneficial in helping them to practise in an informal setting.

The supportive intermediary role the cafe serves seems to improve people's confidence to the point that they are able to participate more fully in the local community.

Many mentors are retired people or between jobs. They are highly motivated and enjoy the sessions as much as the attendees. They can share their skills and knowledge as well as meet interesting people from other countries. Some have particularly good mentoring skills, enabling migrants to access the library, careers advice, and so on. Many good cross-cultural friendships have been formed.

There is scope for mentoring training, and for the Lighthouse centre to take on more of a role in the future development of the EEL cafe.

### Case Studies

'B' is a Portuguese woman who worked in a factory with other Portuguese people and had little opportunity to practise her English. She started attending the English Language Cafe in June. One of the mentors, discovered that 'B' wanted to improve her job prospects and move into retail, but needed better English. The mentor arranged for an interview for 'B' with a local charity shop to help her gain experience and give her even more opportunities to practise English. She got a position working at the shop, and has enrolled herself into a formal ESOL class locally, as well as continuing to attend the Tuesday morning sessions of the cafe. Her confidence has improved the mentor has commented that 'B' is 'doing things for herself' and feeling positive about her future.

An 80 year old mentor in the group is active in the local community. She enjoys the sessions and is able to share her wealth of teaching experience and friendliness with those who attend. She organised a tour of Ely library for the group, which was well attended by mentors and attendees of the EEL cafe.

Feedback from an east European attendee: It's amazing that we met you. I all time was thinking, where to find someone, who would like to speak to me in English, knowing that I do not speak. For me it is a miracle, this club. This is a necessary for everyone who learns the language, and especially for those people which speech local people on the street do not understand.'

Feedback from an English mentor: 'I have learnt that all ages and nationalities working together can learn from each other...The sessions are looked forward to by everyone. They are seen as both social and learning times'

## Appendix 4 - Feedback from partners

'Without Emily inviting me along to meet people to see how an assessment is carried out we would not be aware of the changes that needed to be made to our banding system. Emily has enabled me to do outreach work with migrant workers which I would have been unable to do alone otherwise.' Homelessness caseworker ECDC]

[feedback re Emily Haysom: 'I have been able to do Safety Visits in properties that I may not have had access to without her information...many more people have alarms in their properties now. With Emily accompanying me I was able to access properties where people may not have wanted me there due to my uniform. Prevention work is always hard to measure but I hope that the education given on these visit in conjunction with the alarms being fitted will prevent any deaths or serious injuries from fire. [Without this service] these people probably would not have been seen by us.' Community Fire Safety Officer CFRS]

[Staff manager, G's of Barway : 'Emily Haysom has made our staff more aware that help is out there if needed. Staff seem to be more pro-active in the community' he also valued 'interest shown to migrant workers, as the topic in the press is almost always negative',]

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## Glossary

EEDA - East of England Development Agency

EEL Cafe – Ely English Language Cafe

EHO – Environmental health officer

ESOL – English for Speakers of Other Languages

CHS Group- Cambridge Housing Society Group

CPLT – CP Learning Trust charity

HHSRS – Housing Health and Safety Rating System

HMO - house in multiple occupation

HSE – Health and Safety Executive

JSNA - Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

NEETS - not in employment, education or training

SVP – St Vincent de Paul charity