

Report on Roma Communities Event, Margaret MacMillan Tower

26 February 2024

Introduction

The Bradford District European Roma Strategy was adopted by the Stronger Communities Partnership in 2021 and participating partners agreed at that time to jointly adopt and implement the strategy. Wider circumstances delayed delivery but in 2023 Bradford and District Community Empowerment Network (CNet), were commissioned by Stronger Communities to lead work on a delivery plan.

The activity involved the establishment of two groups; an Implementation Group to move the strategy forward and a Network Group to allow operational level practitioners, including those from the Roma community, to meet and build collaboration.

On 26th February 2024, a multidisciplinary group of 42 participants, from 18 organisations, including statutory agencies, VCS and the Roma community, came together to discuss progress in delivering the Bradford District European Roma Strategy. Table sessions discussed current activity, gaps and barriers to progress and ideas for future action. They concentrated on five areas: Housing, Health and Well-being, Families, Children and Young people, Community and Skills and Opportunities. It was not possible to cover all the areas of the strategy given the resources, space and time available. Some cross over into missing areas (e.g. Crime) did occur but more focus there may be useful in future.

Overall, the event confirmed that many issues and problems identified in the strategy remain. However, more action is being taken in many areas. A common cross-cutting theme was that of communication and co-ordination around services needed attention. Other cross-cutting themes including communication with the Roma community, inadequacy of translation provision and need for more staff cultural awareness training.

The notes of the sessions are attached to the report, though, inevitably, the ad hoc groupings of participants approached the issues and differing ways. It is also the case that most people involved were practitioners, not service recipients, and process, rather than outcome, may have featured more highly because of that.

Summary of workshop notes

As has been noted, a lot of the issues and barriers mentioned are already those mentioned in the strategy. However, there are different emphases and signs of newer concerns.

Housing

EUSS issues were recorded in the strategy but with the expectation they would be transitory. The Housing session shows clearly they are still a major issue, having knock-on effects. Without status, accommodation is hard to access, leading to many people homeless and staying with other families, which in turn causes overcrowding and worsening housing conditions generally.

Issues with the complexity of UK housing law and the need for more help specifically to the Roma community are also mentioned. Repatriation and repatriation support are mentioned here in a positive sense but more investigation of what is being offered may be required to fully understand the issue.

Health and well-being

The original strategy did not dig particularly deeply into issues which may be somewhat hidden – e.g. disability, mental health, learning disability. Access to healthcare is a complex matter for the Roma community, as the strategy makes clear and is emphasised in the notes, but access to services beyond general health care is even harder. The impression of the workshop feedback is this is not properly understood by statutory health structures.

Families, Children and Young People

Notes are particularly thin for this workshop, despite it being-attended. It is surprising there is little discussion of education, looked after children or safeguarding, for example. There is also no mention of peri-natal and early years issues for children and families.

There is a brief mention of young people having problems with their Roma identity. Other concerns were raised about ethnic conflicts, gangs and the opening these gave for young people to be drawn into crime. Specific work with this group does take place but how much, how appropriate and geographical spread may be a mapping exercise needed. It is also an area where work with young women and girls might have been raised but isn't mentioned.

On the plus side, the idea of engaging young people in whatever processes evolve in the future is noted as idea for action.

Skills and Opportunities

There is little in this section that isn't in the strategy but it does show quite a list of support already engaging, or existing that could be engaged. It seems ripe for pushing forward with co-ordination.

Community

This was always going to be cross-cutting for the other topics and so it proved. A range of actions is noted, which is a plus. The issue of the relationship between the community and service providers is picked up here, as it is elsewhere (see health and skills for example). The need for a community-focused approach, building a relationship and mutual understanding and trust, is clear.

Summary of key positives identified

- Sharing information / contact details happening
- Ethnic minority Roma research underway
- Work happening in pockets - Great Horton, Thornbury, West Bowling, Girdlington
- Specific DVA for Roma communities in local GP practices
- Most services by voluntary /council/ health groups good
- Profile of Roma communities has been raised
- Safe space/community centres available
- Events / festivals happening but need more promotion.
- Roma on council agenda
- VCS responsive / supportive but lack of specialist provision.
- Roma communities are working together, lots do work

Summary of key gaps identified

- Overcrowding and lack of suitable / appropriate housing remains a major issue

- Cultural awareness is lacking. Lack of training and wider awareness as different Roma communities within the wider community. No support and language barriers, nowhere to signpost to and some agencies don't know where the Roma families are
- Need for mapping of services available so that proper/helpful signposting happens
- Lack of Roma language access
- Fear of police, social services, LD and associated mental health. Need to build trust.
- Better networking is needed

Potential actions

Many future actions are given in the individual workshop notes, some more specific and detailed than others. These could be taken forward centrally and subject to prioritisation or might be better advanced through groups focused on those particular subject areas.

Quick wins identifiable from the notes include

- A focussed look at children and families. There are so many aspects of impact here that need to be understood, including health, education, looked after children and safeguarding. In practical terms, the needs of younger and older children/young people might be a useful dividing line here. Bringing together community members and professionals to better understand the issues would be an obvious move, as would involving Roma young people themselves.
- In terms of gap filling, some areas were hardly covered by the strategy and were raised in the conference. What information do we have about needs of disabled community members, or of people with mental health needs? Given the on-going issues with identification of community members in the district and potential cultural reticence about these issues, this group could be largely hidden and suffering unmet need.
- Although highlighted in the strategy, staff training in Roma community awareness is patchy at best. The strategy recommended joint action by partners to share design of common training in conjunction with community members. Such training would build a common approach to services to the Roma community and have the potential to be delivered more cheaply. It would offer a useful addition to CPD programmes.
- Continuing networking of practitioners and community members would be beneficial, both at local and district levels. This could work in parallel to service mapping, giving practitioners and community members alike a better understanding of currently available services at little additional cost.

In the medium and longer term, the following may be highlighted

- There remains a need in the medium term to tackle the issue of monitoring of Roma identity. This is difficult because many monitoring schemes have a national basis which doesn't include Roma but local work needs to continue nevertheless.
- EUSS continues to cast a shadow long after it should have passed. Failure to sort out the related issues risks the development of a hidden population excluded from services and causing knock-on issues like lack of housing access worsening overcrowding and poor living conditions generally. Potential destitution may lead some to street homelessness and criminality to support themselves. Continued support in this area into the medium term is vital if long term consequences are to be avoided.
- Roma housing issues are, in part, a subset of a wider problem of lack of good quality affordable housing in the district, especially family properties. However, questions around how appropriate

support can be obtained to search for better homes and to understand the complexities of tenancy remain a specific longer-term issue.

- Continuing work is needed from healthcare agencies to understand the needs of Roma communities and to provide accessible services to meet those needs. A better understanding of Roma uptake of existing services is required to see whether current service design and distribution works for the Roma community and whether specific action in certain area is required. Key areas include staff awareness training and access to suitable translation services.
- Roma civil society is starting from a low level, for historical reasons. It is therefore vital that support continues to be provided to help the community understand its own needs and participate in the solutions to them. Roma community organisations have a key role to play in this.

Future activity

With the completion of the Roma Strategy project, it remains uncertain how future activity may be co-ordinated. Networking between active parties will, it is hoped, continue in the future and lead to joint work continuing. Work currently underway in areas highlighted in this report, such as housing, translation services, ESOL and community learning is expected to continue.

AJC 08/07/24

Discussion Theme: Housing

<p>What is happening to support our Roma communities? <i>Initiatives, successes, projects, planned activities</i></p>	<p>Barriers and Gaps in Provision <i>include access to services, communication etc</i></p>	<p>Ideas for moving forward <i>Refer to summary action plan, include ideas for collaboration</i></p>	<p>Who should be involved? <i>Include contact details if known</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VCS Orgs • VCS reliance on benefits to support • Support repatriation • Crime / Exploitation 	<p>EUSS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EUSS is base issue – full settled status • EUSS criteria 30% destitute • EUSS – late application prove evidence – no bills/employment record • Embassy to get evidence verification • Lack of funding to help some? EUSS <p>Tenancy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding tenancy • Keeping tenancy • Exploitation • Tenancy management /understanding • Unsuitable Breaking barriers / understanding rights <p>Accommodation issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenancy Training • Support Officers for Roma people moving into housing • Repatriation 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on health = mental health & physical • Housing Association / social housing – no housing options • Private landlords not taking Roma • Illegal subletting – destitute will smuggle in • Illegal activities easier here? <p>Children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children Social pay for access potential removal of children • Children get taken • Community Resilience 		
<p>Feedback - 2 good things, 2 gaps/issues to address</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcrowding • Suitable / appropriate housing 			

Discussion Theme: Health & Wellbeing

What is happening to support our Roma communities? <i>Initiatives, successes, projects, planned activities</i>	Barriers and Gaps in Provision <i>include access to services, communication etc</i>	Ideas for moving forward <i>Refer to summary action plan, include ideas for collaboration</i>	Who should be involved? <i>Include contact details if known</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing attitudes to wellbeing & health • Herbal remedies have had a great impact on the community (Holland & Barrett's) • Also hikes and outdoor activities have made a big impact • Sports such as football and dance have helped too <p>Great Horton Hub</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women's smear screening • GPs speaking to the group • Men's Group happening • Lived Experience & drug treatment programme • Specific DVA's for Roma communities in GP practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More pockets of work need to unite • When not able to access healthcare provisions, alternative provision available not know about • Roma community labelling (MH Taboo) • Language used is stigma or complicated • Lack of trust to be comfortable saying 'I am Roma' on official forms. • Access to mental health services is difficult, even acknowledging issues is difficult, • Fear of accessing green spaces – lack of ownership/belonging • Fear factor/ stigma attached • Stereotypes make the community reluctant to take part 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local authorities are working in an 'old school way', more innovative methods are needed.... invest more interpreting to companies and have a look at their tender • Outreach – door knocking. Community leaders' opinions are different to the individual community • What community centres are people from the community accessing? • Need to understand that health & wellbeing is more than just medical services • Activity – physical activity • Promoting/ awareness • Gateway/Pathway in substance misuse – linked into Roma community representative • Language provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which people in organisations can cascade down to the community? • More representation from the Roma community • Researchers / teams build on the work done • Healthwatch

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual health more knowledge is needed – contraception, safer relationship • Language Barriers – lack of Roma interpreters • Telephone appointments with interpreters, timings and understanding • Not aware of work happening in BHCT and lack of presence at events focused on the Roma community • Lack of Mapping/transparency of services available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging members of the community to see what they need • Representation in organisations • Community Champions – not about qualifications • Website – mapping/directory of services (newsletter) • Connector Support (connect to Support?) • Treacle.Me Social Prescribers • Cultural Awareness of new communities 	
<p>Feedback - 2 good things, 2 gaps/issues to address</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing information / contact details • Ethnic minority Roma research - NHS RIC Gap? • Work happening in pockets - Great Horton, Thornbury, West Bowling, Girdlington • Specific DVA for Roma communities in local GP practices • Need mapping of services available so that proper/helpful signposting happens • Cultural awareness is lacking - missing training – wider awareness as different Roma communities within the wider community 			

Discussion Theme: Children / Young People / Families

What is happening to support our Roma communities? <i>Initiatives, successes, projects, planned activities</i>	Barriers and Gaps in Provision <i>include access to services, communication etc</i>	Ideas for moving forward <i>Refer to summary action plan, include ideas for collaboration</i>	Who should be involved? <i>Include contact details if known</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EDO - Oral Health / Zumba • 4BC - Mindfulness Yoga, Stay & Play for children & parents, wellbeing gardening club • Britannia - weekly session on access services/ fill forms/support on Thursday 9 – 12 • Perinatal Support - District cover, free sessions for mum with children up to 2 years old 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information gap to link groups with services • Add EU / Roma groups into community groups • Express to wider community services • Improving links between schools and other organisations • Word of mouth promotions rather than only a leaflet • Identity for young people, clash of cultures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange emails – collaboration /Set up regular meetings online / in person • Connector Support (Connect To Support) • Flexibility – services be available to come to each ward/area • Young people’s voices – engage to take part • Partnership events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create contact details group for EU / Roma
<p>Feedback - 2 good things, 2 gaps/issues to address</p> <p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most services by volunteering /council/ health groups • Profile raised <p>Gaps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better networking • Roma awareness training 			

Discussion Theme: Skills Opportunity

What is happening to support our Roma communities? <i>Initiatives, successes, projects, planned activities</i>	Barriers and Gaps in Provision <i>include access to services, communication etc</i>	Ideas for moving forward <i>Refer to summary action plan, include ideas for collaboration</i>	Who should be involved? Include contact details if known
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support groups • Funding assistance • Skills for young people • St Edmunds • Drom • Employment education – Bevan? • Training / volunteering • Opportunities • Support School • Attendance • Skills House • Connecting Roma • People’s wellbeing – Mind • Maternity circles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language • Seldom Heard • Vulnerability • Lack of understanding • Feeling ashamed • Teachers not having suitable training • Fear of groups • Not on everyone’s agenda • Enterprise knowledge • Disproportionate • Gender Imbalance • Legality / Trust • Education – not having transferable qualification • Celebration / music / culture / food • Awareness raising • Impact measurement • Opportunities for looked after children (LAC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with employers to break down barriers • Targeted approach • Workers based in community centres • Safe spaces • Mind to link into perinatal work Maternity circles / CP’s • Skills based function – from WOW partnership • Language - practical • Community cohesion – shared experience • Hanson vocational occupation • Youth club – living skills • Employ people from the communities – strengthen the workforce (opportunity for employment) • Mentorship • Work with area office to get links into areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills House • Community Centres • Impact Hub • GP’s • Community partnerships

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for people with additional needs • Year 11 child difficult to place – Year 10 dropout rate 		
<p>Feedback - 2 good things, 2 gaps/issues to address</p> <p>Safe space community centres</p> <p>Language trust</p>			

Discussion Theme: Communities

What is happening to support our Roma communities? <i>Initiatives, successes, projects, planned activities</i>	Barriers and Gaps in Provision <i>include access to services, communication etc</i>	Ideas for moving forward <i>Refer to summary action plan, include ideas for collaboration</i>	Who should be involved? <i>Include contact details if known</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P.C Officers work to ID Roma • Mind - mental health services not being accessed • Engaging with services • NHS – places where people can go for help. Practical help with bills etc. – need translation • Roma supporting each other – Council are supportive • Cultural events – empowers the local Roma community through sharing culture and heritage • VCS support – quicker in responding than statutory bodies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Old outdated stereotypes • Trying to record correct information and struggling to ID, data National models don't fit Bradford • Families feeling prejudiced by Police and Councils • Not a united group within Roma communities • Struggles intergenerational younger generation struggling to ID • Building trust takes time – translators are vital for trust and understanding • Don't break 'promises' • Listening – don't tell them what to do • Interpreters – right ones • Area to area activities, plans need to be tailored 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agencies could / should be sharing data • Promoting what is available • Share information in a way the community can understand and access • They have a lot to celebrate, Roma culture, Arts • Positive interactions • Need paid community champions • Different services / communities / integration • Including them, calendar • Positive • Culture, food festival, 25 Great Horton, music – celebration • Boils down to understanding and listening to each other • Can now report a Hate Crime as Roma 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All statutory bodies have the Roma community on their agenda but more needs to be done • Roma to Roma community partnership stronger than ever 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People with LD passed around / no support associated / mental health, nowhere to signpost to • Falling through net – Slovakian languages – barrier • Physical disabilities • Education for services and communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with groups available, strong active communities and organisations, someone they can trust • Raising positive profile • Look at GRT label – conflates life experiences – going down BAME route 	
<p>Feedback - 2 good things, 2 gaps/issues to address</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events / festivals – needs more promotion. Roma on council – agenda - VCS responsive / and supportive but lack of specialist provision. Roma communities are working together, lots do work • Fear of police social services, LD and associated mental health, no support / language barriers, nowhere to signpost to and some agencies don't know where the Roma families are 			