

Roma Strategy 2011-14

**Elaine Mills and Andy Wilson
Chief Executive's Department
March 2013**

Roma Strategy 2011-14

1. Background

- 1.1 Romanian Roma have been arriving in Manchester and settling in the Hemmons Road neighbourhood of Gorton South for the last 5 years following the accession of Bulgaria and Romania (A2 Nationals) to the EU in 2007. The presence of this new and emerging community has highlighted many challenges for service providers and the existing community alike.
- 1.2 Manchester City Council has an extensive history of accommodating inward migration, from the Irish and Jewish communities throughout the last century to the arrivals of Commonwealth immigrants in the latter part of the 20th century. Much of the international migration affecting the city has been the consequence of international crises e.g. Vietnam, Somalia, Sudan and Kosovo. While these communities in the first instance have needed support it is generally the case that they assimilate and integrate over time and that they play a positive part in the life of Manchester.
- 1.3 The guiding principle in the case of the more recent Roma migration continues to be that where new communities wish to assimilate and play a positive role as citizens of Manchester, the City Council and its partners would work to support them in this ambition. Manchester values its reputation as a city that enjoys good community cohesion and where people from different backgrounds get on well together.
- 1.4 In our view the main routes to successful integration are through school and employment – as these are the places where people are able to work and interact together. Consequently our efforts have been focused on practical challenges like providing sufficient school places; ensuring children attend school; and addressing the economic challenges faced by a community have restricted rights of employment.
- 1.5 However the early challenges were centred on more immediate issues arising from tensions between communities, which resulted from cultural differences and misunderstandings. This led to the development in 2009 of a multi agency approach to resolve some of these concerns both at an operational and at a strategic level. The goal of a Gorton South neighbourhood – characterised by tolerance and where people from different backgrounds get on well together – can only be achieved if all residents believe they are being treated fairly and are subject to the same rules. In practice this means focusing on practical issues like school attendance and respecting locally determined neighbourhood standards.

2. Early challenges

- 2.1 In the early months of 2009 there was a series of heated public meetings attended by local residents at which they expressed two main concerns. These were firstly, that the Roma children did not attend school, and secondly, that Roma households appeared to enjoy a comfortable lifestyle without appearing to work. There were rumours that the Roma funded their lifestyle through crime and consequently the initial response of agencies was to prioritise getting Roma children to attend school and deal with the perception that the Roma community was supported by organised crime networks. This represented an urgent challenge for Manchester City Council's Children's Services Team and Greater Manchester Police.

- 2.2 Due to pressures on primary school places in this part of the city (largely due to wider inward migration) we initially faced the problem of many Roma children missing education (CME) as they tend to come from larger families where it is expected that all children from the same family attend the same school. This is still a challenge and work continues to resolve CME issues in some areas of the city.
- 2.3 Manchester City Council's Children's Services have been instrumental in supporting Roma families to enrol their children into school. In 2009 over 100 Roma Children of school age were not attending school. Initially, engaging school age children in education had its own difficulties since many Roma residents have faced discrimination in accessing services in other European countries and traditionally do not engage in the formal education system, however, Gorton Mount primary school and Cedar Mount High School are the nearest schools to where the majority of the Romanian Roma settled and were the first local schools to enrol significant numbers of Roma children. Now many more of the local primary schools take Roma children and in fact, Roma families are now resident in every SRF area in the city except for Wythenshawe.
- 2.4 Much work has also been done to engage teenage girls in particular, who traditionally leave school in their young teens to 'marry' and raise families of their own or to care for elderly and dependent relatives and siblings.
- 2.5 Work has also been undertaken by Children's Services to engage Roma under 5's and their parents in Early Years activities. This has proved much more difficult than engaging school age children since traditionally Roma residents with pre-school children do not engage in activities outside of the home. However a pro-active outreach approach including involvement of Roma community members and provision of activities within the local park is proving successful.
- 2.6 There have also been potential safeguarding risks, which have needed to be addressed. In November 2009, GMP received information from the Metropolitan Police and the UK Human Trafficking Centre suggesting that there was a European Crime Group emanating from Romania and active on the B Division in Manchester. The safeguarding of children was identified as a police and partnership priority. Following a police investigation (Operation Epee), it was established that there was no child trafficking or sexual exploitation taking place within this community, however, concerns remained around school age children without school places, managing the neighbourhood, benefits claims and access to employment/self employment. The need to investigate this trafficking allegation was clearly a priority but it should also be recognised that it delayed some of the other work on integration.
- 2.7 Engaging with the Roma community presented a new challenge, as they were difficult to reach through conventional routes. Children's Services funded family workers to help Roma families access local services, particularly health and education. The city also partnered with two outreach projects to work directly with the Roma community. The Big Life Company Outreach Project, based at Longsight Sure Start focused on the skills development of Roma residents and have trained seven young people from the Roma community in community interpreting and supporting public agencies in accessing the Roma community. The Big Life Company project was funded until September 2011. This training project was in partnership with the BHA (Routes team), the University of Manchester, the Children's Services INA|T/SS Team and Manchester Adult Education Service (MAES). Literacy and numeracy needs were addressed through dedicated classes from MAES and work experience placements were provided by the Big Life Company and in local schools. The group received mentoring and support from the INA/T/SS Team and schools. All now work on a self-employed basis. They have developed skills and

confidence over the past three years and are positive role models for children and young people in their community. Some have spoken at national and international conferences and they have done a great deal to challenge negative stereotypes of Roma people (for further information about this work see report at www.whatsworking.eu).

2.8 The Migration Impact Fund (MIF) was a £500,000 award, funded via Government Office North West (GONW) to deliver advice and information services to ease the pressure on existing advice services within the city to December 2011. The project was managed by Manchester City Council's advice service; Manchester Advice and consisted of three strands:

- An advice project that employed 8 full time equivalent advice workers throughout the city in community settings, managed by the Manchester Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) service. These services used the skills of qualified interpreters to offer legal advice services to newly arrived migrants whom have come to Manchester from all over the globe.
- The outreach project employed three full time outreach workers through the BHA (Routes Team) to work with Central and Eastern European migrants to signpost them to relevant services and to support newly arrived European migrant families to access services.
- The third strand was a volunteer development programme which trained volunteers from migrant countries (many of whom would have been referred to the project via either the advice project or the outreach project) through the MRSN (Manchester Refugee Support Network), in basic advice skills, understanding the system and how to make appropriate referrals.

2.9 A multi-agency Roma Strategy group continued to meet from 2009 and achieved a number of practical successes in managing neighbourhood concerns particularly around anti-social behaviour, street cleansing with the support of an extra Clean Team in the area and school admissions and attendance. Much of this work has been delivered by a multi-agency operational group (MCC services/Police/Health) that met regularly to task out and resolve issues. However, regular public meetings with the established community continued to be held as a means to manage hostility and cohesion risks. These indicated that local people felt there were still problems in the neighbourhood, and some specifically around the behaviours of the Roma community (for further information about the history, background and culture of the Roma community in Manchester, please see report, The Romani Community in Gorton South, Manchester, Professor Yaron Matras, October 2009).

2.10 Whilst there has been a high level of success in managing the neighbourhood, particularly street cleaning and waste management, these have not been exclusively Roma issues. There is still a need to achieve real behaviour change in the Hemmons Road neighbourhood – the costs of keeping the neighbourhood clean have been disproportionately high and are not sustainable. The area still experiences high levels of churn within the Roma community, which makes it harder to develop a settled and cohesive neighbourhood. Although the two outreach projects did in many ways support the work of the Strategy Group, the nature of this community means that evidence of change is slow, given the high turnover of residents and language and cultural barriers.

2.11 As a result, the challenge for the Roma Strategy is to continue to focus on achieving positive outcomes for the neighbourhood, for Roma children, and for Roma adults. What this means in practice is outlined below.

3. Have we achieved our objectives?

- 3.1 At an early public meeting, residents and councillors articulated a number of rules or standards that they felt everyone in the neighbourhood should adhere to. It was felt that this was an important basis for building community cohesion i.e.; the same rules apply equally to all residents. These include:
- 1 All children under 16 must attend school
 - 2 All rents and taxes must be paid
 - 3 Don't drop litter
 - 4 Put all your household waste in bins (including recycling)
 - 5 Don't park on the pavements or double yellow lines
 - 6 Don't disturb your neighbours, particularly at night
- 3.2 Whilst there has been general understanding and acceptance of these standards at the public meetings it is clear that not all residents are abiding by the neighbourhood standards. The vast majority of the recent calls for service from residents in the Hemmons Road neighbourhood suggest that environmental issues and anti social behaviour are still of concern to residents.
- 3.3 The volume of waste being collected in the Hemmons Road neighbourhood has remained constant throughout the period that the Clean Team was in place. Although complaints of anti social behaviour are relatively few, they involve neighbour disputes that have gone on for a considerable length of time. Two complaints were raised by residents with the local MP.
- 3.4 Many Roma residents are not engaged in any form of meaningful economic activity. Language is a barrier to developing legitimate forms of self-employment. Many Roma residents are still dependent on selling the Big Issue magazine, which Manchester does not consider to be sustainable self-employment and will no longer pay housing benefit or council tax rebate on that basis. Reports suggest that some Roma residents are also engaged in illegal forms of income generation such as begging and cash point crimes and bogus scrap metal dealing.
- 3.5 The immigration status of A2 Nationals (those from Romania and Bulgaria) means that adults are restricted to particular forms of employment, i.e. in the meat packing industry or the vegetable picking industry or they can work as self employed earners. As these proscribed industries are unavailable to Roma residents in Manchester, the majority have to rely on establishing themselves in self-employment.
- 3.6 These restrictions apply until January 2014 only, when the Home Office restrictions are relaxed, which means that Roma residents will have full rights to employment, education, social housing and welfare benefits.
- 3.7 The restrictions on A2 nationals are different however, for their dependents. Immigration law allows that the dependents of A2 Nationals can work in any occupation as long as their parent or spouse is in self-employment, registered with the Home Office under the Blue Card Scheme to enable their dependents to obtain a yellow Card to enter the competitive labour market.
- 3.8 Work is on going to support families into self-employment. Work remains in this area so as to avoid developing a culture based on benefits dependency when the restrictions are lifted in 2014. However there have been successes, especially with the young people involved in the multi-agency training project. All now work on a self-employed basis. They have

developed skills and confidence over the past 3 years and are positive role models for children and young people in their community. Some have spoken at national and international conferences and they have done a great deal to challenge negative stereotypes of Romani people. Children's Services have also worked with 17 year olds to keep them engaged with education and give them opportunities to support younger children. (For further information about this work see report at [www. Whatsworking.eu](http://www.Whatsworking.eu)).

- 3.9 Since the start of the strategy there have been efforts by Children's Services to admit Roma children into school. There have been many successes here and the attendance rates of Roma children are now outstripping the attendance rates of non-Roma children. However, due to the shortage of school places in the Gorton South area and the preference of Roma families to keep siblings in the same school, a high number of Roma children are still missing education (CME).
- 3.10 There are approximately 96 Roma households known to the Council Tax service across the city. This figure cannot be more definitive as it relies on third party intelligence. All the properties occupied by Roma families are Band A type properties and there is a high level of transience within the community making it difficult to establish and maintain any kind of payment plans.
- 3.11 Based on 90 properties at Band A the cost to the city for 2010/11 is £80k on the assumption that little or no payments are made. In addition every account will reach summons stage incurring total costs of £7k
- 3.12 These figures are based on families living in properties for a full year and this in reality does not happen. However when one family moves out a new family moves in so the overall Council Tax liability is fairly fixed. The costs figure may well not be an accurate estimate as it is possible that there could be three separate families in one property over the year, incurring three sets of costs. For simplicity, these figures assume one family per household.
- 3.13 Manchester Benefits Service employed the services of a debt recovery service to collect Council Tax from Roma residents in the Gorton South area but they had little success in collecting any money – in many households there was very little in terms of goods of significant value to recover. However, as more Roma become economically active it should be easier for households to pay council tax, and also for the City Council to recover debt in the event of non-payment.

4. Future priorities

4.1 In order to continue to support integration at a practical level the following issues should be prioritised.

- All Roma children attend school – in particular pre-school and girls to complete high school education and both boys and girls progress post 16.
- Teams continue to be encouraged to work together, build on what has been learnt and new projects be monitored to ensure that resources are maximised and there is no duplication.
- Ensure Roma households have the skills and information to be economically independent - via self-employment or paid work.
- Ensure all Roma families understand the obligation to pay Council Tax – by promoting awareness (e.g. welfare reform messages) and taking effective action in the case of non-payment.
- Roma families are able to observe neighbourhood standards – particularly with regard to waste management
- Address any safeguarding in the Roma community particularly in relation to girls getting 'married' and moving in with their in-laws
- Address reports of disproportionate numbers of Roma young people engaged with the Youth Offending Team. It has been suggested that some of the criminal activity being undertaken is as a result of coercion by adults/parents. There is a need for a better understanding in order to deliver initiatives to address this.
- Initiatives should be joined up.

4.2 The financial constraints facing the City Council and its public sector partners make these objectives more challenging, however, the cost of not delivering these positive outcomes are potentially far higher. The EU Collaborative Project offers a valuable opportunity to support this work.

4.3 A brief summary of the strategy outcomes is provided in the attached table.

Roma Strategy 2013 / 2014 - outcomes	Specific actions	Indicators	Baseline	Improvement	Responsible officers	Timescales
Improve cohesion between communities in the Hemmons Road Neighbourhood of Gorton South	Resident engagement activity	<p>Street reps group meetings – number of meetings held and numbers attending.</p> <p>Number of Roma residents participating in mentoring programme</p> <p>Roma consultation forum established (number engaged and number of meetings)</p> <p>Roma young people involved in MCC Youth Forum</p>	<p>Street reps group established December 2010</p> <p>Mentoring programme developed by outreach project in 2010</p> <p>Need to establish forum as part of EU project</p> <p>No participation</p>	<p>Street reps group continuing to meet on a quarterly basis</p> <p>7 Roma young people training as community representatives</p> <p>Outreach workers on the EU project to develop Roma consultation forum</p> <p>Support from Children’s Services, and 6 CYP attended</p>		<p>Completed.</p> <p>Completed</p> <p>April 2013</p> <p>On-going</p>

		Roma residents to participate in Friends of Crowcroft Park group	Currently Roma use park but do not participate in management	forum to date Street reps are discussing how to improve participation.		April 2013
	Council Tax payments	Percentage of Roma households paying council tax	Project completed by Council Tax Unit 2011 – limited success	Use project to promote awareness of Council Tax liability sanctions		April 2013
	Neighbourhood management - all residents abide by neighbourhood rules	Number of children under 17 attending school. Amount of waste collected/ amount of waste recycled Tonnage of recycled waste received. Number of parking enforcements in Hemmons Road neighbourhood. Number of live ASB cases in Hemmons Road neighbourhood	Schools and Children's Services have led work to engage parents. Clean Team piloted for 12 months in Gorton South GMP action days delivered to address the issue	Roma children now in over 40 schools in Manchester No increase in amount of waste collected but need to improve recycling rate. Outcomes reported to the community at Street Reps Meetings.		On-going Completed Completed

	Engage young people	<p>Activities taking place in Crowcroft Park with children from different backgrounds, including weekly Stay and play sessions for families with pre-school children</p> <p>Involvement in local Youth Groups and activities</p>	<p>CCS and GMP delivered series of community events</p> <p>Young Roma boys attending regularly.</p> <p>Increase in Roma families accessing sessions</p>	Roma young people engaging in sporting activities in the park		<p>Completed</p> <p>On-going</p> <p>On-going</p>
	Engagement in education	<p>Number of Roma children attending school on a regular basis (minimum of 94% national standard))</p> <p>Numbers of Roma Teenage girl's attending/dropping out of school.</p> <p>Numbers of pregnant/married Roma girls</p> <p>Pilot EU funded work on parental engagement and work with post 16 CYP 2012/2013</p> <p>Numbers of Roma</p>	<p>Outreach work in the Roma community conducted regularly since 2009 to address CME by INA/T/SS</p> <p>Project to engage with Teenage girls funded by Equalities Fund</p> <p>10 families and 37 pupils benefitted</p> <p>5 known to</p>	<p>School attendance by Roma children has continually increased year on year</p> <p>Work with schools/colleges to mainstream approaches</p> <p>Increase numbers</p> <p>Partnership with University to run</p>		<p>2013-14</p> <p>2013-14</p> <p>2013-14</p>

		CYP progressing to post 16 education	Children's Services	future events		2013-14
		Raise aspirations of Roma community through Achievement event	3 annual events held to date			2013-14
Integration of Roma Residents through school and work	Adults in Work/self employment	Number of Roma residents supported in self-employment prior to 2014.	2 Roma self employment events delivered	Roma residents moving into work identified and used as good examples within the community and local media		2013-14
		Work experience placements for Roma Year 10 pupils	4 placements facilitated	Support schools to provide appropriate placements		2013-14
	Young people having access to the yellow card scheme to enable them to work	Number of residents registered as self employed with the Home Office for the Blue Card/Yellow card scheme	Engagement project identified in partnership with schools, INAT and Regeneration	Registrations have taken place amongst Roma residents		Completed
	Access to ESOL classes for Roma residents	Appropriate ESOL provision identified and number of Roma residents engaged	ESOL provision identified at local college to support residents into self employment	4 Roma residents attended basic ESOL course – but still need to address new arrivals inc.		2013-14

				basic skills training		
Safeguarding issues	Girls and young women	At least 94% attendance by both girls and boys at secondary school	Awareness of the issue raised at strategic level	INAT identify families with teenage girls and support them into attending school		April 2013
		Establish forum to address teenage pregnancy in the Roma community	Issue raised with Children's Services	The issue needs be addressed on establishment of the Roma consultation forum and Equalities Fund project (see above). Build on partnership work between schools, hospital school, Teenage Pregnancy Lead, BHA and Children's Services to consult with Roma community, support young Roma girls, reduce numbers of pregnant girls and early marriages and provide		April 2013

				appropriate education packages		
		Develop effective approach to safeguarding issues in Roma community	Children's services raised concerns about teenage 'married' Roma girls living with 'in-laws'	The issue needs to be addressed on establishment of the Roma consultation forum. As above.		April 2013
		Examine patterns of disproportionate youth offending by Youth Offending Team	Children's services aware of and addressing issue at a local level	The issue needs to be addressed on establishment of the Roma consultation forum		April 2013