



Needs Assessment of the Korean Community in Kingston



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Executive Summary

1. Introduction

The research sought to gain further understanding of the needs of the local Korean community in Kingston. It seeks to recommend measures, or initiatives for the Council, its partners and the community to take in order to promote the wellbeing of communities.

The Equalities and Community Engagement Team (currently the Community Development Team) have been working with the Korean community for over 10 years through a range of projects, for example, mental health and wellbeing projects, hosting health and social information in the Korea Post and health days. In addition to this, the council hosted its first Korean Link Worker, a project funded by the European Integration Fund between October 2013 and June 2015. The research builds on the insight gained in these projects.

The research will inform the Council's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). Research methods consisted of a mixture of focus groups and interviews, with professionals and service providers, North Korean community members and South Korean community members.

2. North and South: Different Contexts and Needs

The Korean community is not a unified or homogenous community. North and South Korean communities interface, but have differing cultures, and their needs are shaped by their very different immigration histories, different social and economic circumstances.

One of the overall conclusions to emerge from this study is that the North Korean community is much more vulnerable than the South Korean community. Given their more recent arrival and the fact the population is mainly composed of refugee and asylum seekers this perhaps their needs are often more acute than the needs of the South Korean community.

The different circumstances shaping the lives of Kingston's North and South Korean population are the most significant to take into account when devising engagement strategies.

3. The Language Barrier

One of the major concerns and barriers identified by participants in this research is the immense language barrier experienced by Koreans in Kingston. This is also a big contributor to a plethora of other concerns, informing every aspect of our participants' lives. Many participants reported, that it took them longer to learn English than other migrants, that they relied on interpreters for longer than expected, but also had difficulty accessing interpreters.

4. A Sense of Belonging

The majority of participants answered this question positively. They felt that the UK was 'welcoming', 'open and tolerant' and Kingston was 'safe', 'had nice green spaces', 'good schools and children's activities. All participants also expressed their appreciation of 'the efforts of the council to help them settle in Kingston'.

However many also described how much hard work they needed to put in to fitting in and understanding how 'society works' in UK. They reported that they wanted to be part of UK society but because of the language barrier, and because social practices and habits were not always easy to decipher, this was hard work. In some cases this was isolating and had an impact on mental health.

5. Making Ends Meet

Poverty was a particular concern amongst the North Korean residents. All North Korean reported that they struggled to make ends meet or even had difficulty with basic subsistence. These difficulties can be seen in the context of a) language barrier, b) negotiating an unfamiliar system c) restrictions imposed by participants' immigration status. Single mothers and older residents were identified as in particular need.

6. Access to Housing

Many North Korean participants Struggled to access and pay for accommodation. Here again the impact was particularly bad on the older generation and single mothers. These daily struggles to which they seemed to be no solution affected their sense of well-being. Many already had traumatic journeys behind them, but having arrived here their uncertain living conditions prevented some from developing a sense of stability and belonging.

7. Education, Children and Young People

Participants emphasised the importance of education and activities for children more generally. They were generally happy with education and schools and felt that children's activities in the borough and schools were very good. For many the reputation of Kingston's schools had been another motivating factor in moving to Kingston. Participants also appreciated the efforts their schools made to support their children and engage with the Korean Community.

Whilst participants were generally very positive about their experience with schools and education, respondents reported that they did not always 'understand the system' and were not sure where to access information about 'how it works', particularly when they first arrived.

One of the areas of concern our research highlighted is that despite the availability of activities for young people and children, North Korean families were often not able to access these. This was either as a result of the language barrier or often as a result of the cost.

Professionals, service providers and those working in the community raised some concern over the safeguarding of children, in part as a result of 'different parenting styles', and in part linked to the context of trauma.

8. Health

Both North and South Koreans, reported difficulty accessing health care, partly as a result of the language barrier and partly because they were unfamiliar with the system. Here again North Koreans' need was starker, as they lacked the economic means to 'opt out' - i.e. to travel back to Korea or access private health care as many of South Korean participants reported doing.

9. Immigration, Poverty and Mental Health

Many North Koreans' needs and concerns were first and foremost shaped by issues around immigration and immigration status. This of course included the mental impact of the stress caused by uncertainty over immigration status and the trauma from emigrating from North Korea.

In addition to stress and uncertainty over visa applications, participants also described the stress caused by the restrictions placed on their lives as a result of their status: i.e. their inability to work, study or generally move on with their lives. The importance of not working here went beyond the fact that they did not earn a living, but also meant they were 'standing still' and 'not moving forward'.

Many North Korean residents and particularly the older generation reported feeling very isolated. They not only found themselves with any family support networks but also lacked the economic means of maintaining or creating networks. These experiences have a clear impact on mental health issues. Many North Korean residents openly talked about the fact that *'we are all depressed'*.

10. Accessing Mental Health

Professionals and service providers raised concerns about the fact that Koreans are generally underrepresented in mental services. This underrepresentation is despite the fact that certain proportions of the Korean population face quite acute issues with a clear impact on mental health.

Our research found that this underrepresentation is the result of a mixture of factors which include: the belief that mental health issues are the symptom of wider problems (and it's the problems that need to be solved), cultural attitudes around mental health, unfamiliarity with the health system, and a reliance on interpreters which makes counselling difficult.

11. Avenues of Support

Both the South and North Korean community reported some difficulty with accessing information, formal channels of support and relied more on informal networks, or on community internal organisations. Here again the need is starkest amongst the North Korean community.

12. Recommendations

Based on the findings of our research, this report makes recommendation across the following areas:

- ***Focus on the needs of the North Korean community & vulnerable groups***

- ***Overcoming language barriers***
- ***Accessing services***
- ***Young people and education***
- ***Cultural Engagement***

1. Introduction

The research for this report was carried out by Dr Heidi Seetzen (Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Kingston University) and Dr Carlie Goldsmiths (North Social Research Ltd). Focus groups were supported by Ellie Cooke (Community Development Team, Royal Borough of Kingston). Sampling and participation was supported by Nighat Taimuri (Community Development Team, Royal Borough of Kingston). The data was analysed and the report is authored by Dr Seetzen.

Dr Seetzen and Dr Goldsmith have previously conducted similar research in the Royal Borough of Kingston and bring historical expertise to this project.

Aims

The research sought to gain further understanding of the needs of the local Korean community in Kingston. It seeks to recommend measures, or initiatives for the Council, its partners and the community to take in order to promote the wellbeing of communities. The research will inform the Council's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA).

Who is the research about?

The demographics that were covered - South and North Korean populations of Kingston are two distinct groups which interface but have differing needs and cultures to be sensitive to.

The South Korean community

The South Korean community in the Kingston borough is over 5,000 strong according to the census but community leaders have informed officers their perception is it is '15,000 strong'.

The community has been well established well over 30 years. It has a thriving business community. In the past it has been mainly transient, but those working with the community suggest that this pattern is now changing. Those who are permanently settled in the UK are, in the main, affluent. It is believed there is a high student population.

The community is well organised with internal infrastructure and community services which are, in the main, taken up within the Korean community. Previous year's community work with Koreans in the borough revealed South Koreans will often pay privately for health care and anecdotal evidence has informed professionals in both social care and mental health services, South Korean families tend to return to their home country when they can if there are serious health or social care concerns. The research has been able to confirm and further explore these impressions.

The North Korean community

The North Korean population is a much more recent arrivals in Kingston. Service providers estimated that North Koreans started arriving in the borough around 2006.

The North Korean population is mainly made up of refugees and asylum seekers. In 2016, Refugee Action Kingston was supporting clients from 78 different countries. The largest numbers of Refugee Action Clients came from North Korea (there were 314 registered North Koreans). Representatives of the North Korean community estimate that the North Korean community is about 500 strong.

Previous projects and background

The Equalities and Community Engagement Team (currently the Community Development Team) have been working with the Korean community for over 10 years through a range of projects, for example, mental health and wellbeing projects, hosting health and social information in the Korea Post and health days.

In addition to this, the council hosted its first Korean Link Worker, a project funded by the European Integration Fund between October 2013 and June 2015. The aims of this project were to reduce health inequalities and improve health and wellbeing around addressing integration and feeling safe. Over 180 beneficiaries benefitted from the project and the involvement of 31 volunteers.

The fund criteria only allowed the project to focus on newly arrived migrants, which meant that refugees and asylum seekers and men were excluded. The project was targeted at newly arrived female migrants as they were considered to be the most vulnerable group within the community. Anyone outside the target group was also welcomed and signposted to other advice or support agencies.

Other dedicated posts, such as the Korean engagement and support worker with Hestia was also recruited to work with the Korean community around domestic violence. For a limited time, the Metropolitan Police in Kingston seconded an Officer as Korean Engagement Officer. Both of the above initiatives have also come to an end

Literature and previous research

Themes that informed the design of focus groups and interviews were drawn up following a review of previous relevant studies and projects:

Davidson, J. Huq, H. Rupa & Seetzen, H. (2010) *Towards engaging with and understanding three BME communities in Kingston: identity, interaction, belonging and belief*. (Project Report) Kingston upon Thames, U.K.: Kingston University. 82 p.

Goldsmith, C. (2015). *Living Lives, and Building Futures: Refugee, Asylum Seeker and Migrant Needs Assessment*, Royal Borough of Kingston: Refugee Action Kingston

Tamuri, N. (2015) *Korean Link Worker Project: Evaluation Report*, Royal Borough of Kingston

Taimuri, N. (2015) *Korean Link W Royal Borough of Kingston*, Royal Borough of Kingston

Research Methods

These consisted of a mixture of focus groups and interviews, with professionals and service providers, North Korean community members and South Korean community members. Focus groups with professionals were held at Kingston University. Drop-in community workshops and focus groups were advertised in Korean Newspapers and

held at the New Malden Methodist Church.

Engagement with Korean community for this was initially difficult and the first community workshops were not well attended. In this context further focus groups and interviews were organised through individual contacts and snowball-sampling. Additional focus groups and group interviews were held at Refugee Action Kingston, Local Korean Restaurants, the New Malden Methodist Church Café, and individually arranged locations.

In addition to this the research team Engagement was also boosted through questionnaires and short interviews at a communities' stall at the New Malden farmers' market.

Our research engaged with a total of 98 participants, through focus groups, interviews and questionnaires. The following represents a breakdown of these:

3 focus groups with professionals and services providers (total of 22 participants (representing Korean community organisations and groups, child protection, children's services, health services, maternity services, the fire service, mental health services, schools education,

4 focus groups/interviews with the North Korean community (25 participants)

5 focus groups/group interviews with the South Korean community (19 participants)

13 interviews with professionals and services providers (representing education, health, mental health, culture Korean culture events, Korean newspaper, Korean School and Korean community centre, Language schools) (14 participants)

18 short interviews/questionnaires with Koreans in New Malden (Farmers' Market)

Time-frame

Data for the project was gathered between June 2017 and September 2017.

Interpretation

Thank you to the interpreters from the Kingston Interpreting Service, KIS, as well as volunteers that stepped in to interpret on numerous occasions. Their language skills and sensitivity to the context helped make this research possible.

Quotations and participants' stories

The report contains anonymous extracts from interviews and focus groups, both for the purpose of illustration but also to let participants' stories and experiences - which are at the heart of the project - shine through.

As many interviews and focus groups were conducted with the help of translators these stories are sometimes told in the third person. In order to preserve the authenticity, the translations have not been amended.

2. North and South: Different Contexts and Needs

As noted in the introduction, the Korean community is not a unified or homogenous community. It includes two distinct groups who interface, but have differing cultures, and whose needs are shaped by their very different immigration histories, different social and economic circumstances.

In addition to the South and North Korean residents, participants in the research also identified as Chinese Koreans (North Koreans who had established themselves in China prior migrating to the UK). Although numbers are not known, service providers and professionals working in the community estimated that their presence was not very significant (“a tiny proportion”).

North Koreans are the most vulnerable

One of the overall conclusions to emerge from this study is that the North Korean community is much more vulnerable than the South Korean community. Given their more recent arrival and the fact the population is mainly composed of refugee and asylum seekers this perhaps their needs are often more acute than the needs of the South Korean community.

Although engagement with the North Korean community has progressed significantly since our last piece of research (carried by the university in 2010), North Koreans feel much more ‘out of place’, excluded or ‘invisible’. They are also much less likely to engage with local services or make use

of local community facilities, even if these are directed explicitly at the Korean community.

A number of professionals commented that the different needs of these communities and the different barriers they face, make devising a comprehensive engagement strategy very difficult.

Others reported that this difficulty is compounded by the fact that service provision rarely distinguishes between North and South Korean clients or patients. Whilst those working closely with the community are aware of the different contexts, needs and indeed tensions between the communities, they are not always widely acknowledged or taken into account by service providers. And sometimes there is an: “Attempt to engage with the Korean community as a whole, rather than acknowledging the differences and tailoring engagement.”

There is a community division and in some sense, I think services need to stop thinking about the Korean community and needs to be thinking about the divisions – the North, the South and the tiny, tiny population of Korean Chinese. It’s challenging to provide a comprehensive service for the full community without addressing those divisions.

This report highlights where the North Korean community faces more particular and acute needs.

Difficulties engaging the North Korean community: Immigration context

One of the biggest barriers to engaging with the North Korean community (and this is where their needs differ substantially), is the fear many have of 'being sent back'. Many are therefore wary of engaging with officials or council representatives or any situation where they are asked to give information about their background. Indeed in organising focus groups, some participants sought reassurances concerning the focus of the research and anonymity of the findings.

The route through South Korea – that might mean you will be sent back, so they are very wary of talking openly to anyone. It might open a can of worms. Many are so afraid of being sent back so they want to stay well below the radar.

We (service providers and professionals) want to engage with them. But they don't know if they are here illegally or if their application will work out. So they don't want to put their head above the parapet.

This fear was particularly a barrier when engaging with service, which were required to measure and prove outcomes. One example that was given was the European Link Worker project, funded by the European Integration, and externally imposed requirement of the project was to provide evidence of engagement, by recording passport details - a requirement that provided a significant barrier to engagement:

I was working with X [link worker from the Korean Link Worker project] – and we required evidence that we engaged

with the North Korean community – every north Korean that attended had to bring a photocopy of their passport. And that was exactly one of the ways to keep people away.

The South Korean Community: Changing patterns of residency

Whilst the South Korean community was less vulnerable and their needs less acute, the research nevertheless identified a number of areas of need (around language, social barriers to engagement and accessing local services). It is worth noting that some of these needs have taken on an increased importance as a result of changing immigration patterns.

Previous research reports identified the South Korean population as relatively transient: a mainly expat community many of whom would eventually return to Korea. There is evidence to suggest that this is now changing. Professionals and service providers working in the community argued that this profile is now changing and that the South Korean community is becoming more settled. They were "no longer seeing the turnover of ten years ago" and community had become "more static".

This change was also reflected in the profile of focus groups participants, which only included a few short-term residents and expats. Many had been here between 5 & 10 years, and the majority intended to stay.

North & South: differences and tensions

The majority of participants agreed that the relationship between the North Korean and South Korean community was not straightforward, but was complicated by the wider political context, the inevitable cultural differences that have emerged

between two countries that have been divided for more than 60 years and the very different socio-economic situation these communities find themselves.

We can't change overnight, our parents in particular – they cannot forget the horrible war.

Technically we are still at war. Technically it is still illegal to 'fraternise' or to marry between North and South Koreans.

Indeed a few participants observed the 'oddness' of suddenly inhabiting the same space and being grouped together, given the long and hostile division between the two countries.

It still takes time; it's a different country! So we never met before and here suddenly we meet each other. I think it will take time.

Cultural differences

Participants also described how as a result of this situation the two communities have effectively grown apart.

We see North Koreans as different I think. They find it difficult to integrate with the South Korean as well.

We are all Koreans – but when we have conversations it feels very different. Sixty years after we divided I think we have grown apart. It is not the same. They can get misunderstood and then it's upset.

We communicate, we can speak the same language, we are just living here but deeper down I feel we are thinking different our cultures feel very different. I'm not sure how it is, but it quite deep down.

Social and economic differences

Differences were not always cultural, but inflected by the different immigration history and economic status of North Koreans and South Koreans. Many North Koreans move to Kingston because of its pre-existing Korean community. Many find work in Korean restaurants, work as childminders or au pairs for South Korean families, and use or want to use the local Korean schools to educate their children (see also chapter 5, 'Making Ends Meet: Poverty in the North Korean community'). These socio-economic differences also informed the sense of division.

At our school and in our area (Malden Manor), the South Koreans are normally big company bosses, and they have the big houses. It's OK, most of the morning we say hello, but not more.

A more complicated identity: feeling out of place

For some, this division meant that they not always felt welcome in what might be called South Korean spaces. In particular, because many felt that given their more complicated relationship to their country of origin they could not lay claim as easily to a Korean identity.

Even the school children asking why are we different: North Korean, and South Korean. And ask where are your parents from? North or South Korean. It seems strange we are all Korean, but we are not. ... It's not really the children it's the parents. So on sports-day, some South Korean parents tell their children, "oh we are South Koreans, we are winners", and the North Koreans can't really say that [because of their more complicated relationship to their country of origin], which is why my friend here is not happy.

North Koreans can feel doubly excluded

What is interesting to note here is that some North Koreans that because they sometimes felt doubly excluded. To the extent that there was an effort to include Koreans, such attempts often seemed to favour South Korean residents, as they were better able to communicate.

(North Korean volunteer translator) "Example, North Koreans cannot really speak English, and at the school they wanted to help out at school fair, but it's difficult. Malden Manor has a Korean teacher and she asked the Korean parents if they wanted to help. The South Korean mothers can speak English and they can help and explain and make South Korean food stalls. The North Koreans wanted to help but it's more difficult and then often can't.

Tailored engagement

In conversations with professionals many stressed the possible benefits of a specific North Korean engagement strategy, particularly as a few professionals reported that because they often feel marginalised, their North Korean clients preferred classes or groups dedicated to the North Korean community:

My North Koreans clients tell me time and time again they don't want to be in language classes with South Koreans.

Significantly the beginnings for this have already been developed across a number of projects, although due to funding restrictions some are no longer able to operate:

a) On a professional level, by for example the services of the Refugee Action Kingston, the Empower and Inspire Project and the Korean Information Centre.

b) At a community level through the work of North Korean community groups like the *European Alliance for Human Rights in North Korea* (now winding down but a new one is being founded) or Kingston's Free NK.

Changing relationships

It is important to note that despite ongoing differences and the experience of marginalisation, there has been positive change. Research Kingston University conducted in 2010 (Davidson, Huq and Seetzen, 2010) revealed a much harsher divide between the two communities, and found that in some cases North Korean migrants were afraid to speak out in church meetings and community settings and publicly identify themselves as North Korean. This is now changing.

Participants felt that this was in part simply a result of having more opportunities to meet (in churches, at the school gate). In addition they also acknowledged the importance of specific outreach work being done by community organisations (such as the language school or the Korean Community Centre) and local churches:

We meet them at school and at church. But we feel we are segregated, they have their own community, but there are some people making an effort.

Efforts are being made to bridge the divide. The South Korean embassy/national unification advisory council have been running community workshops trying to bridge the divide.

Community engagement: Where to start when engaging a diverse community?

The different circumstances shaping the lives of Kingston's North and South Korean population are the most significant to take into account when devising engagement strategies. However these are not the only differences that could complicate engagement. Both communities are also internally diversified and represented through different community organisation or church groups.

It is important to note that at the time of the research, there was an acute awareness amongst professionals and those working in the community of tensions over representation within the North Korean community, tensions which had led to concerns reputation and eventually a lawsuit.

There's great tensions in the North Korean community. One group is suing 20 other North Koreans for defamation of character, and these are people who can't really pay.

There are four separate factions in the North Korean community, at one point there were two. They put aside their differences and formed one group, but now their suing each other.

Service providers reported that the plethora of organisations and their awareness of some tensions meant they were unsure where to begin the engagement process. They were not always sure who to approach, and "didn't want to make the first engagement the wrong one."

One of the questions arising in discussions with professionals and service providers was: whether there were particular community figureheads

that represent and speak for the community that information could be passed too. The answer to this question is that, unfortunately, like any community or population the Korean community in Kingston is relatively splintered, which means that engagement is likely to be more successful if it goes through several channels.

3. The Language Barrier

One of the major concerns and barriers identified by participants in this research is the immense language barrier experienced by Koreans in Kingston. This is also a big contributor to a plethora of other concerns, informing every aspect of our participants' lives (as will become apparent through this report).

English and Korean are very different languages and, as all participants pointed out, English is very difficult to learn for native Korean speakers. Indeed many participants who had been here for 10 years or more admitted that they still struggled with speaking English and many participants reported that despite seeming fluent when communicating in writing (e.g. through email), they felt more comfortable with an interpreter in face-to-face settings.

A barrier to social connections

Difficulty with speaking and understanding English prevented participants from forming social connections with others in the UK.

I want to make friends but I find it so hard to understand. It's very, very hard.

I don't always feel comfortable here, I'm sure they (other mothers at the school gate) want to know me better and I want to know them better and become good friends, but because of the language barrier it is not easy to form friendship. So just keep smiling at others, particularly when I don't understand.

Some also found that the language barrier made it more difficult in general

feel at home. In one focus group a group of long-term residents (between 4-7 years), described how even though they now feel more connect to UK than Korea, the language barrier difficult to follow UK current affairs, which creates a distance to cultures.

Giving up

All participants described how hard it was to participate in conversations and establish social networks, so hard that some reported giving up after a while:

Because I feel like I can't talk and they cannot talk to me anymore, I, I don't hide, but I pretend I'm busy all the time. Pretend I'm very, very busy.

The sheer number of Korean speakers in Kingston made 'retreating' easier as well. Although our participants had wanted to form social connections outside of the Korean community, the linguistic difficulties associated with this meant that many now spent most of their time with other Koreans.

It's hard to talk to people, so spend time with other Koreans. You have to talk to someone. ... Some days I wonder am I living in England, I've spoken Korean all day.

Professionals working in the community made similar observations.

'The number of Korean speakers here, you have to be quite focused to keep working on your English. You can do anything in Korean if you need to.

Many of our participants described being trapped in a vicious circle, aware that in order to improve their everyday

English skills they needed to speak English more regularly in their everyday lives. However, this had been difficult and once they had 'given up' it was difficult to find an opening again.

I'm not improving enough, I learn English at the church classes, but to improve you need to chat and I don't meet English people anymore, I tried at the beginning now it is just Korean. All day.

The importance of speaking English for parents and carers

The inability to effectively communicate and form new social networks in the UK was most acutely felt by mothers and parents. Many saw the development of social connections in the UK as a vital part of fulfilling their role as a parent.

Because I am living as a mum I need to make broad relationship. I might have to talk to school, I might have find information I might have to take them hospital and talk to people there. So I have to make broad relationships.

I have tried to form connections with other mothers at school, for the sake of the children.

It is very hard work, but because of my boys I try to make the effort. If can't sit at the table and speak for them then who will. So I go to the coffee mornings and sit at the table and I say 'hello', and 'how are you' and 'I am very excited'. But hard work.

Language barriers amongst North Koreans: "we are language-disabled"

Whilst the language barrier is an issue that affects Koreans across both communities, it undoubtedly constitutes a bigger barrier amongst

the North Korean population. Whilst South Korean migrants will have spent several years studying English at school prior to arriving in the UK, North Korean refugees will have little or no prior knowledge of English.

Professionals working in the community that some of their North Korean clients "can struggle with a basic good morning". This further marginalises North Koreans living in Kingston. Many of our participants felt that because they were not able to speak the language they were vulnerable in any situation simply because 'they cannot do anything'.

They cannot get any information, get any news, explain themselves, present themselves, put any case they have to the council or indeed defend themselves against any accusations.

So all the time we are the victim, we are never heard in our circumstances.

We have a saying amongst ourselves it's not just a language barrier, it seems so huge we call it being language-disabled, because we can do nothing.

Feeling powerless

One frequently expressed frustration associated with language barriers, was the feeling of powerlessness. Participants, in particular our North Korean participants, reported feeling powerless to seek help and support, access information or to query inconsistent information they received from different organisation.

Accessing the right kind of help, many felt could involve a degree of "detective work", where they had to find their way through an unfamiliar system, weighing up different kinds of advice and information about services they might be able to access. Examples of this

include being given contradictory information, about qualifying for free medication from the hospital and the GP, about the availability of free school meals, or indeed about the availability of interpreters for different local services.

Lacking the language skills to ask questions and establish 'how things really work' added to a general sense of insecurity and stress.

Time frames are longer

Professionals and service providers also identified language as one of the biggest barriers to engagement and often relied heavily on interpreters.

Language is a big problem, because they don't speak the language, is available.

In particular many noted that it would take their Korean clients longer to be able to communicate in English, and that they remained reliant on interpreters for much longer.

We find that like many other, at the beginning they are often supported through translation. But then even after a few years, parents are still heavily reliant on a translator. Basic communication can be very difficult. Whereas our Polish families or other immigrant families have acquired English after a few years, Korean families seem to take much longer. So is it harder if you're Korean? Or do they not want to Learn English?

Significantly, the difference in the time it took to acquire a working knowledge of English was something that our Korean participants were acutely aware of. Many reported that, even though they objectively knew that "learning English is harder if you're Korean", seeing others being able to

pick up the language more easily made them feel less confident. I could also make them reluctant to ask for help and even led to some 'giving up', altogether.

Other Europeans seem to catch it up more quickly. It is much more tricky for us. The pronunciation is so different; we see Polish or other people. They seem to be able to speak it very quickly, and you wonder, is there something wrong?

Many Koreans are accessing ESOL/language classes

There are a number of different ESOL language classes (some of which are free) available in Kingston: at children's centres, selected local churches, Refugee Action Kingston and Kingston College.

One of the questions that was asked during focus groups with professionals and service providers was: "If language classes are available – what's stopping people attending?"

The immediate answer to this is that the majority of our participants are already accessing language classes, but are nevertheless still struggling with the language barrier.

I go to English academy every week, to improve English, but still it is hard!

What can make accessing ESOL classes difficult?

Nevertheless despite the fact that most of our participants were working to learn/improve their English, a proportion did report difficulties accessing classes. Here different reasons were given or emerged in the context of our conversations:

1. Many of our North Korean participants were struggling

significantly with larger issues **such as relatively stark poverty, the experience of isolation, depression and other mental health issues.** These impacted on their activities more generally. In some cases it prevented them from engaging with the outside world, including their motivation and confidence to seek out and participate in language classes.

2. Mothers with small children reported finding it hard to organise childcare for these sessions. They wanted to find **classes that allowed them to bring children.** A few classes like this had been available through the local charity LEAH (Learn English at Home), but this was no longer available. Some participants felt that it was only once children had reached school age, that they were able to access language classes. At the same time participants felt it was particularly important to be able to learn English while the children were young.

3. A few participants reported that they found it difficult to access free classes, as charities offering these had **a long waiting list.**

4. Many of our participants found accessing **information about language classes fragmented and difficult to access,** and asked if a comprehensive list was available.

'Pronunciation' and importance of learning 'spoken' English

The language barrier is not simply a result of limited participation in language classes. Here there is need to focus more closely on what linguistic difficulties Koreans are facing.

Significantly, for many of our participants their difficulties lay with

spoken English and making oneself understood in conversation.

I learn English in Korea – but wrong accent – when I say something English people just say pardon, don't understand. Again and again! I'm Ok but many of my friends just stop speaking.

I want to be friends, so I try, I went to parents in pub, but I didn't understand it was loud in pub and hard to hear. So I was a good listener, and smiling a lot. Unless someone asked me question and I just say pardon. So I left early and I thought perhaps I better not come here again.

Culture/Language

Another reason, that was given were then the way certain cultural differences inflected speech and conversation.

My problem is both culture and language. My English is translated from Korean to English – and sometimes you don't say it that way. Because they misunderstand me, then they don't know what to say to me and just smile and say 'hello', but I feel like they don't want to talk to me anymore.

Different provision for North and South Korean residents?

In our interviews one professional working closely with the North Korean community reported that many of his clients were reluctant to attend language classes with South Koreans.

It was difficult to verify to what extent this feeling was shared amongst across the community. There is evidence to suggest, however, that North Korean residents were much more likely to lack confidence and often felt marginalised, within the overall Korean population.

This lack of confidence is likely to be particularly pronounced in the context of language classes. North Koreans often have little exposure to English in the home country before arriving in the UK and start from a much lower base. Meanwhile South Koreans language learning can build on several years of formal language learning.

A higher language barrier amongst North Korean men

If the language barrier was higher amongst North Korean residents it was particularly high amongst North Korean men. In the experience of local professionals, North Korean women, and particularly mothers, even though they struggled, were often better able to communicate than their husbands.

In part this may be related to the fact that, despite facing similar burdens, as the primary carers North Korean mothers felt more encouraged to attend toddler groups and communicate with education or health professionals, *'for the sake of the children'*.

Accessing Interpreters: mixed experiences

Many of our participants (even if they had been learning English for a long time) did not feel confident in their spoken English. As a result, for the vast majority, access to interpreters was seen as very important

Respondents reported that they particularly relied on interpreters when attending medical appointments, parent teacher meetings, appointments at Jobcentre Plus, when applying for social housing or 'sorting out immigration issues'.

Most of our participants, but not all were aware that interpreters were

available. Whilst respondents were appreciative of the service we received mixed reports concerning access and availability. This will be discussed in more detail in the relevant sections below, but also included is a shorter overview

GP Surgeries: Access to interpreters was generally available. However some participants had been discouraged from booking a translator by receptionists (on the basis of cost). Others found that booking a translator through the surgery made agreeing an appointment time difficult. As a result a small number of participants reported that they preferred to hire an interpreter privately.

Hospital: We received mixed reports on the availability of translation services during hospital visits. Many participants had been able to access interpreters, a few reported access to a telephone translation service (which was not always without problems), and some had not been able to access and interpretation services.

A common concern expressed by our participants, in this context was: *"what happens in case of emergencies?"* It is the understanding of the research team, that the telephone interpretation service is precisely designed for use in emergencies. However, there seemed to be little awareness of this amongst our respondents.

School setting: We received mixed reports. At Malden Manor, communication was helped by the presence of a Korean Language assistant. At Burlington parents reported access to an interpreter, in other settings Korean parents volunteered to help translate during parent-teacher meetings.

Jobcentre Plus: Participants reported they had no access whatsoever, and had to hire interpreters or muddle through. This was seen as either a huge financial burden or incredibly stressful.

Housing: Again, participants reported they no access whatsoever, and had to hire interpreters or muddle through. This was seen as either a huge financial burden or incredibly stressful.

Interpretation and Confidentiality –

The need for interpretation (whilst important) was in-itself often a barrier to engagement, because it introduced a third party into a private and sensitive conversation. Moreover, interpreters were often from the local community, and participants were worried that neighbours would know about private affairs.

4. Sense of Belonging: An Unfamiliar Society

We began our focus groups by posing the question: - “How at home do you feel in Kingston?” To put participants at ease, but also to avoid imposing researcher-led themes, and ensuring that the research was, as far as possible, participant led.

The majority of participants answered this question positively. They felt that the UK was ‘welcoming’, ‘open and tolerant’ and Kingston was ‘safe’, ‘had nice green spaces’, ‘good schools and children’s activities. All participants also expressed their appreciation of ‘the efforts of the council to help them settle in Kingston’.

I like in UK the society is about thinking about human rights and the people’. For example you are meeting us to talk about the services. I’m not sure if in Korea people would really care’

I think I want to die in the UK; I never want to go back

I talk about negative experience, but also I fall in love with UK and Kingston. It is also so beautiful. I like that people always say hello, or very kind, like when you put lost babies sock or shoe on wall to find.

At the same time many participants reported that they could not help feeling torn between Korea and the UK (A minority of long-term residents said that they felt 100% connected here).

My head is in the UK but my heart is in Korea.

I’m not quite at home in the UK. Not yet. But I’ve become so westernised. So also not at home in Korea. So am I at home in both or am I not properly at home in UK or Korea.

The extent to which residents felt connected often depended on the length and intended length of their stay. The majority of participants considered themselves as residing in the UK indefinitely, for a few others their stay was temporary).

Others reported that for everyday things they were increasingly connected to UK (such as the children’s education), but for ‘big things like politics’, they still feel more connected to Korea.

My everyday life is in the UK, but I still read Korean newspaper.

Social Geography: Kingston

Not all of our participants immediately moved to Kingston, a significant proportion had moved from other towns and cities, or from North London or Central London. Participants reported moving to New Malden, or the surrounding area for a number of reasons. This included the presence of Korean shops, Korean tutors and other Koreans that provided a social support network, as well as the boroughs reputation for having good schools the availability of green space and a good range of children activities. A few participants reported that they’d moved to Kingston only after having children.

I move to New Malden with babies, as can find Korean childminder, can buy Korean food when busy and no time cook. Not so much in central London.

To the extent that participants felt at home in UK, they felt very much connected to Kingston (rather than London or the rest of the country) Kingston was seen as 'friendly', 'nice' and 'safe'. The presence of other Koreans also meant they felt less visible and more at home. Many of our participants reported not really leaving Kingston borough very often. Particularly South Korean mothers told us that their husbands might travel to the centre for work, but for them there seemed to be no need to travel.

Everything can be sorted out here: education, Korean education, shops friends, community. There's no need to leave the area very much).

My life is very much grounded in Kingston, because children go to school here or were born in hospital; also shopping - I can do all my shopping in Kingston.

The cultural significance of New Malden High Street

Regardless of residence, New Malden high street was an important location, partly because of the availability of Korean food and shops. It also constituted a first point of contact and a meeting point for mothers and parents. For many it also felt familiar and reassuring given the difficulty they sometimes felt negotiating life more generally.

The main reason I came to this area is the Korean supermarket. And even Koreans who live outside of the area drive down here because of the Korean supermarket. Food is very important.

I use the shops; I can take away when I'm busy.

*I: Where do you first go to meet others?
P: Supermarket! (laughter)*

Negotiating cultural and social differences: everyday interaction

The majority of participants reported that they struggled to negotiate what sometimes seemed like an unfamiliar culture and society. Small everyday practices were difficult to get used to.

Like saying hello we bow and here either say hello or either kiss, which is uncomfortable.

Participants also observed that communication was more difficult, because was Korean more direct and English more indirect.

Korean speech is more direct, in English everything is very polite, like: 'would you mind?' or 'would you like to do something?' And in Korean it would just be 'GO!' Like that. When we translate, it sounds rude.

I have to teach my boys now when we go into shop to say hello, and please, and smile, because otherwise it looks like they are impolite people. In Korea we are always direct. And always look serious, and without eye contact".

Participants also described their unfamiliarity with local customs and the many unwritten rules, which could be hard to negotiate.

For example, In Korean when we see cute little baby we can say: "Hello, oh cute little baby!" and stroke its hair. But here that seems to be not allowed. So feel I always have to be very, very cautious.

As a result of such cultural differences, mothers in particular gave voice to feelings of insecurity when it came to interacting with other mothers at school or toddler group. They were not always sure if they were welcome or were unable to read cultural signals correctly.

What I find difficult here is the politeness, people say hello and smile but I don't know is it just polite or are we friends.

Fitting in is a lot of effort: "I want to be here, but I feel like I'm not here"

Longer-term residents described how much hard work they needed to put in to feeling at home. They reported that they wanted to be part of UK society but because of the language barrier, and because social practices and habits were not always easy to decipher, this was hard work.

In one interview a South Korean mother described how she purposefully started attending an English church (rather than the Korean one she had previously attended) so that she could forge closer connections to the UK. But this was 'hard work' and 'not relaxing'.

Others described their efforts as 'almost like a glass ceiling'.

I talk to other mothers and they are nice. And I want to be friends, here but - not just because of language barrier, but also misunderstandings it somehow isn't possible.

I try to meet and speak to people and fit in, and become friends with people here but because it is hard work I cannot always because it is so hard work".

In Korea it takes no energy to be part of community, but here a lot energy. ...I want to be here, but I feel like I'm not here.

Impact on Mental Health

Participants also described the impact not always feeling at home could have on their sense of well-being and mental health. Here women and mothers were strongly affected, particularly where they were the main carer of children or where they had left their life behind to move with their husbands.

I always rely on my husband. I was getting really depressed; I was thinking I'm useless I don't know anything. What is sort code? In Korea I was a career woman and here I know nothing! I bought a car now, I will be independent wife!!

Unfamiliar With Services and Regulations

Many participants highlighted the fact that 'the social system' was unfamiliar to them; this compounded the sense of disorientation (or even bewilderment) some experienced.

Obviously this is not my house, so definitely it is not that much comfortable. ... If it were my home that obviously I could do whatever I wanted, but here it is not my home. Therefore there are lots of the regulations and controls that I don't know about.

I felt really depressed, I couldn't speak English. I was pregnant with baby, I didn't know who could help.

As a result some participants had been or were missing out on services. In one focus group a local single mother reported not being aware of the fact that her daughter qualified for a free school meal, and was struggling to

provide her with a school meals for two years, until 'a teacher told her and helped her'.

For a few of our participants, and significantly amongst North Koreans, their unfamiliarity with the system went beyond not being able to access services, but manifested itself in a general insecurity about whether they might be unwittingly breaking the law by, for example, claiming benefits but not registering family members and/or partners correctly.

A comprehensive information pack

A number of participants asked about the availability of a comprehensive information pack, containing information about the services offered by the council, how these might be accessed and any rules or regulations they should be aware of. Translated into Korean, this would be very useful for Korean residents and it would not only help to make services more transparent, but also help to make immigrants feel more settled and 'at home'.

Some participants had attended special talks and events (e.g. about the free NHS health check) and had found these useful. A comprehensive list of such events and where they would be held would also be useful.

Recent immigration history

A number of participants made the valid observation that Koreans have had less time to integrate or find their place than other migrant communities. Unlike many commonwealth communities, Korean immigrants are a relatively recent addition to the residential population. Whereas other groups have had a long history of cultural negotiation and integration (spanning several generations and often working through tensions), the

Korean community still have this ahead of them.

We have less in common than European communities

In addition to this, some participants felt, unlike European communities (whose countries of origin have long-standing social and political connections to the UK), there was less of a common culture. Many participants said they 'had fallen in love' with UK culture, but found it difficult to decipher.

At the same time many were very aware that, European migrants adapted much more easily and quickly to UK culture and society. For some, this comparison sometimes felt like a 'failing'.

Feeling Welcome: everyday instances of discrimination or racism

Despite the fact that participants generally described Kingston as a friendly and safe place, we had some reports about instances of racism and discrimination.

A few participants described being confronted with racist taunts or comments on the street. Due to the language barrier they often found it difficult to defend themselves. A few participants, whilst not experiencing direct racism described 'bad events' or 'instances' that make them feel unwelcome.

Almost weekly there is a bad event, where I feel unwelcome in a shop on the high street, unfriendly people. It not always seem bad because in England most people are very kind and very polite. But sometimes not.

People are not direct or rude, but you have incidents. For example, I was

passing a Korean restaurant and an old lady who was walking there too, said to me 'the smell is really disgusting isn't it?' and just looked really annoyed. I just went 'oh really', I couldn't say anything about it.

In Waitrose, I asked to change money for a coin for the trolley. And she didn't know me, but the lady behind the counter said, you were here last time 'you have to remember!' 'You put in your wallet!' And I just thought how do you know me? And why do you speak to me like that and not other customers?

I was shopping in the evening, and one of the members of staff said to me, why are you shopping at this time? It is late. I couldn't believe it?

Such instances undermine the relatively strong connection participants feel to Kingston.

Belonging and engagement

I came here (professional focus group) and am surprised. All these people work for us, for the Korean community?

From a service provider perspective, the Korean community is often seen as a very closed and private community that is difficult to engage with. Our conversations with local Korean residents show that the difficulties around engaging are not necessarily connected to lack of motivation or wanting to. Rather it is in part connected to efforts needed to overcome language barrier and struggles with a negotiate culture and society. It is also significant to note that there is a time frame beyond which engagement can become more difficult, as many of our participants reported giving up after too many failed attempts of connecting.

5. Making Ends Meet: Poverty in the North Korean community

Poverty was a particular concern amongst North Korean residents. All North Korean reported that they struggled to make ends meet or even had difficulty with basic subsistence. These difficulties can be seen in the context of a) language barrier, b) negotiating an unfamiliar system c) restrictions imposed by participants' immigration status.

Trapped in low-paid employment and exploitation

Partly as a result of the language barrier, partly as a result of their immigration status many North Koreans were trapped in low income work, often in restaurants, factories, and construction or domestic help (to the extent that participants could work.)

Our members are often working in kitchens or au pair work, minimum wage or below. People that are here illegally have no access to benefits. Even if you have all the documents you still have a significant problem with exploitation. They get perhaps £6.00 an hour, – how do you live of that.

A lot of the North Korean community work in factories shops, storerooms, restaurants, construction. There is ample opportunity for exploitation, as they have no English, no avenue out of those jobs.

Difficulty accessing social benefits

Those who were able to claim benefits also struggled to cover their expenses. They also reported difficulty with negotiating an unfamiliar system in a foreign language, which was often

experienced as very hostile. Participants' accounts particularly highlighted their experience of dealing with the jobcentre. Many reported not only having difficulty accessing an interpreter for interviews and visits to Jobcentre Plus, but a number also recounted instances where they were directly blamed for not speaking English well enough and accused of avoiding work. For many participants this was a very upsetting experience, particularly considering the fact that they very much wanted to move forward with their lives and work or learn new skills.

When dealing with Job Centre Plus, participants also felt that there was not enough understanding of the difficulties associated with learning English for Korean native speakers or with the circumstances that may have led to a longer-term residents not learning much English. One specific case discussed in focus groups concerned a former housewife who had been very much trapped at home (not learning much English) until her divorce, at which point she became more acutely reliant on state support.

Difficulty accessing social benefits: Mothers and single mothers

Mothers and single mothers participating in focus groups also found that when claiming benefits no allowances were made for the fact that they had several young children and were unable to access childcare for hours that many jobs demanded (see also section on single mothers).

One single mother with three young children described how she would like to work very much, but the fact that she would need to fit this around her children was reportedly met with little sympathy at the job centre. Another mother reported that she was told she had to find full-time work when her daughter was only six months old.

The pressure participants experienced added to the general stress, experience of depression and mental health issues the majority of Korean participants reported.

Not working/ not claiming benefits and covering living costs

In addition to this a number of participants in focus groups reported that their immigration status allowed them neither to work or claim benefits. Some talked about the difficulty of making do otherwise, (e.g. by relying on partners, taking work that was badly paid); others were simply despairing at what seemed like a solution-less situation.

This lady's case, she has been living here two years. She has a partner with citizenship; he is only given £156 per week for him. But they are a couple, so they are two people, and they are living off the £156, which is not enough. Her immigration status is, she is applying for visa, but visa is still very limited. So what she is saying is that if it was somehow possible to at least being able to cover the living cost that would be helpful. Because at the moment there is just such extreme poverty.

What this lady is saying because they are not allowed to work in here it is just such extreme difficulty. And very poor circumstances. [...] You do not let us work so we cannot earn our living expenses, but nothing you can provide

us with either. Don't how we can survive.

Vulnerable Groups Older migrants, refugees and asylum seekers

Older members of the North Korean population were identified as particularly vulnerable. They reported experiencing poverty, housing issues and generally feeling isolated. A number of participants reported experiencing acute poverty, to the extent that they were unable to afford to feed themselves. Also, culturally many said there were used to being supported by family/the community. However having arrived in the UK, this support network:

This lady came here with her son and daughter in law, altogether here. The thing is though now the son divorced the daughter in law, and she couldn't find any place to stay anymore. She doesn't have any family or financial support. So obviously she has really suffered from the lack of food, she doesn't have any money, any place to stay. And then she says: "How long I can survive in here. So I just desperately need some help because there is just nothing. I don't know what to do.

This lady's case she has a family. So she should be well, but in this country she isn't she is completely isolated and there is no one who can support her financially. She cannot commute anywhere because she hasn't got money for the bus. So she is only in her room.

The suffering and isolation of senior citizens was something that was particularly strongly felt by participants; most of whom felt that particular respect and support was due to the older generation 'as you get older you should be celebrated, you

should be with your family and friends, you should be with people’.

Vulnerable Groups: North Korean Single Mothers

North Korean single mothers were another socially and economically vulnerable group, who particularly struggled to make ends meet. Many wanted to work rather than rely on benefits, but struggled to fit work in around their children. They were often trapped in low paying part-time jobs in restaurants.

Volunteer Interpreter: She is working mum, single mum with two boys 7 and 11. She has got rent payment every month £1350. ...And you think you get child tax credits and benefits, it is enough? But she can only work part-time because nighttimes she can't work.

Participant: Then all my money, one month from working job and from council, £1850 money. And then one month rental £1350. So everything on rent. And then gas, water council tax - so out. And two child, school uniform, food. One month - I have perhaps £18. And I'm working.

Not begging for money

Overall there was a strong feeling that people wanted to work and contribute to society. The fact that they were unable to was a source of stress.

To really work, contribute and to settle in here properly, rather than begging for money.

I don't want to beg any money of anyone, of the council. I want to earn my own money for living

We will make a big contribution to your society if you let us.

Difficulty in identifying particular needs

Professionals working closely with the community were aware of the struggles faced by many in the North Korean community, but found it difficult to identify those who needed particular help or offer support where necessary,

The North Koreans are really living on the breadline. But they don't always know. They're afraid of speaking out. In the infant school it's now more difficult to so, as they get free school meals, but in the junior school start to see the cracks.

There seems to be a shame in asking for help. We find the Koreans rarely ask for help, grow baby, food vouchers etc., they're all under represented.

6. Access to Housing in the North Korean Community

Many North Korean participants Struggled to access and pay for accommodation. Here again the impact was particularly bad on the older generation and single mothers.

Waiting for council housing

Many of our participants were on waiting lists for council houses. They were not sure how much longer they would have to wait, whether there was fixed or whether they would ever be able to access council housing. Many also found negotiating the bureaucracy around this because of the language barrier.

I hired a translator [paying for translator] to help apply for the council housing in Kingston. I already applied 7 years ago, but still I am in a queue. It is not clear how long had to wait. So how long I have to stay in these circumstances, I am getting old. I don't know how long I am going stay [survive]. No one can tell me when I will get a house, I have heard people talking here that disabled people get priority, but I know that there are waiting 10 years, and still there is no housing. And we don't know if we will live that long.

Struggled paying rent

Many were living in private rented or in crowded sublet rooms, and this was eating into their living expenses.

For instance, the housing benefits. There is a kind of very limited amount that is given. And considering our circumstances, we're not able to make money outside, and we are very fragile

and old. I cannot work outside, but the housing benefit is a very limited amount. So for instance if the monthly payment is £1000 and then housing benefit given is only £800, then the £200 I have to cut my living cost to pay the rent.

She is single so she was allocated a one bedroom flat, but in Kingston there are no one-bedroom flats available, so they allocated 2 bedroom flat, but the renter fees are higher than the one-bedroom flat, and then they do not have any money and the only possible solution is to rent another room to another person to make the rental fee, but unfortunately it is not allowed by the council. So there is not any solution. It is simply just vicious circle.

Impact on sense of well-being

Participants described how these daily struggles to which there seemed to be no solution affected their sense of well-being. Many expressed a sense of hopelessness when describing their situation.

Many already had traumatic journeys behind them, but having arrived here their uncertain living conditions prevented some from and developing a sense of stability and belonging.

And on top of that I have to be moving around all different places according to my circumstances. It's not that I have a proper home, all the time I am moving around different places and houses, so it's extremely difficult. So I have no

home and I am old so moving around different houses is extremely difficult.

The experience of finding themselves trapped in situations to which there was no solutions had a very evident impact on participants' mental health. Many of the Interviews and focus groups we conducted were very emotional, as participants gave voice to their sometimes desperate need for support.

Impact on older North Koreans

Many of our participants (not just members of the older generation) were concerned about the impact of housing concerns had on older residents. Many felt that the older generation needed to be looked after more carefully as *'they might not be with us for much longer'*.

If the council could consider special circumstances like old aged group and the high language barrier and everything that would be really appreciated.

7. Education, Children and Young People

Participants emphasised the importance of education and activities for children more generally.

They were generally happy with education and schools and felt that children's activities in the borough and schools were very good. For many the reputation of Kingston's schools had been another motivating factor in moving to Kingston.

Participants also appreciated the efforts their schools made to support their children and engage with the Korean Community. They also expressed particular appreciation over the attempts made by different schools to translate information in order to reach out to Korean parents and children. North and South Korean parents at Malden Manor School reported they particularly appreciated the fact that they had a Korean Teaching Assistant that helped translate. North Korean Parents from Burlington school appreciated that they received letters to parents translated into Korean.

Koreans love the Malden Manor School.

The schools are very good in Kingston. We moved here because of the schools.

We have Korean teacher. It is very nice.

School's very helpful. We had information session for new parents, it was very good.

When we moved my son was little so spoke more Korean, but at school he got language lessons catch up on English. I was very happy.

Very liberal at school, and very welcoming to pupils from different backgrounds, and very easy to adapt myself in school in Kingston. People are more open-minded. I don't know if it would as easy for foreign people in Korea to adapt themselves.

Conversely, service providers and professionals in the education sector have long focused on engaging with the Korean communities at their school.

A significant percentage of our intake are Korean children, I think about 8% at Burlington, so it is an important area.

Unfamiliar education system

Whilst participants were generally very positive about their experience with schools and education they did highlight a few areas they struggled with. In particular respondents reported that they did not always 'understand the system' and were not sure where to access information about 'how it works', particularly when they first arrived.

My school is changing to an academy but I don't understand what that means, I don't understand the English school system and I don't know how to find out. But I need to know so I know how it changes for my son.

As a mum I feel I need to know everything about the system,

curriculum and so on. Otherwise I can't care about my children. But it is difficult and I don't know where to begin

Many participants had looked at government or council websites as a first port of call, but had found these confusing, partly because the information was not all collated in one place and partly because they had difficulty understanding the language (even when their English was very good).

Childcare is changing and I was reading government website to find out. And it said non-EEA members don't qualify and I don't know what is EEA. And I have a residents' permit, so I don't know – can I use it? It is very complicated

I really want to find activities for children when I came, I didn't have family so I needed to do something. But I couldn't find information. Only some on council website there is something but not all toddler groups.

Respondents felt they were working things out through a process of trial and error, and that they had to 'make many mistakes' before they could 'figure out how to use the system'.

They also heavily relied on informal networks for information about education and children's activities. Churches were often a first port of call, and once a network had been established parents (particularly mothers) relied heavily on other parents to gain information about education in the UK. However, establishing networks took time to develop and until then participants reported they had often felt isolated and alone.

I know everything from mothers in toddler group. Anything I need to know: toddler group.

Children's centre and library there are very good; you can get information, but takes a while to find out about.

When I first come I don't know a lot of activities but don't know when people first arrive they stay at home.

'Education in the UK, is more relaxed'

Significantly, and perhaps surprisingly, most of our respondents reported that they preferred the education system in the UK, as it was 'less stressful for the children'.

Education is very good here, it allows kids to relax, and I think are maybe happier here. In Korea I think they have more stress.

I find it much more relaxing being a mother in UK; in Korea there is a big emphasis on education outside school. Here there is some private tutoring for grammar and 11+ and so on but it is much more relaxing, and less stressful. I am happier and my kids are happier.

There is a concern amongst professionals that Korean parents put more pressure on their children to work hard and perform well in school. This was also confirmed by our Korean participants. It is interesting to note that parallel to this, parents also appreciate and see the benefits of a play-based approach. This suggests that differences in cultural approaches to education are not insurmountable.

The importance of education amongst refugees and asylum seekers

The importance Koreans place on education is often seen as a mainly cultural characteristic. This assessment is largely correct but is not the only explanation. It is also important to consider the social and economic context. North Korean refugees and asylum seekers participating in the research described the importance of focusing on the next generation, given that their own lives were 'standing still' or had been 'interrupted'. They felt that if educated properly, at least their children would be able to have a better and upwardly mobile life.

Here their economic situation was thrown into relief. Many reported that they would like to be able to spend money on tutors for their children, but were simply unable to.

Preserving Korean Language and Culture

For many participants one of the priorities of educating their children is preserving the Korean language, culture and identity. Many participants were aware of cases Korean children who had grown up in the UK and had absorbed the UK's culture and language, but no longer spoke much Korean and as a result were increasingly estranged from their parents.

Parents don't always understand their children, because children speaking English. Then arguments in English and parents feel they have no power.

What I worry about is, my children are going to be English, and I don't really know English culture. So we don't understand each other. How will there

be communication between parents and children.

For this reason most Korean parents send their children to the Korean Saturday school in Chessington – in order to continue to study Korean and learn about the Korean culture.

Moreover, whilst there was a focus on preserving identity, participants were also keen to stress that it was through educating their children that their community would contribute to society.

North Korean Mothers have difficulty accessing the Korean School

Many of our North Korean parents reported that for many accessing the Korean school (in Chessington) was a struggle, mainly due to the cost of transport. Given how important ensuring that their children learnt Korean was (to preserve the parent-child relationship), this was quite a big concern for some.

It is worth noting that at the time of interviewing there was a plan to organise fundraising during the Korean festival for a free bus service to the Korean School. Alternatively participants wondered if it would be possible if a space could be provided for the North Korean community to organise their own language classes in New Malden (walking distance for most participants).

Activities for Children and Young People

Activities for young people and children are a big priority amongst Korean families. And many of our respondents were happy with provision available in Kingston.

In Kingston there are great toddler groups, parks and churches have lots of activities and classes.

In New Malden there are a lot of toddlers. So everyday there are toddler groups and I made some friends there.

North Korean families have difficulty access children activities

One of the areas of concern our research highlighted is that despite the availability of activities for young people and children, North Korean families were often not able to access these. This was either as a result of the language barrier or often as a result of the cost.

Many North Korean mothers expressed concern that apart from school their children 'don't really do anything' often as a result of parents' inability to pay for extra-curricular activities or language/cultural barriers.

North Korean mothers also identified the summer holidays as a particularly difficult time-period, partly because it was more difficult to find childcare, but also because they were aware of the fact that they were not able to offer their children the same experiences as their school-friends and peers.

Summer-holiday, we still work but it's more difficult. Also many people are away at seaside, on many, many holidays people go on trips to here or holiday-clubs here. And we North Korean mums haven't got any money for leisure. Leisure [in the local area], even that it is not free.

After covering living expenses there generally not much left over for extending children's experience and education, on which participants placed a great deal of importance. Participants reported they appreciated

the attempts by local churches to reach out invite North Korean children to holiday clubs which were free (in particular they mentioned the Gospel Church). However, this was 'only a few hours a week, and the summer holidays were 2 months long'.

North Korean mothers also reported that they would very much like to 'help each other' in this respect by organising activities and children's groups more generally amongst themselves - they could take it in turn to organise activities such arts and crafts or language sessions - but they lacked the space. Their flats were generally too small to host such sessions and renting a space was too expensive. A number of participants had asked at various venues whether space could be made available cheaply, but had been unsuccessful.

This desire for a space in which to organise community activities was also echoed more widely (e.g. in the context of organising a North Korean language school for children).

Accessing Childcare

On one level participants were very positive about the childcare on offer in the borough, In particular they felt longer school hours enabled mothers to go back to work earlier.

I am very happy with kids' education in UK. First of all it starts early, in nursery and reception. In Korea public education is not until 6. It's also longer. In Korea early on it's only until 12 pm, only three hours. Here 3 or 4 hours. It encourages mum to work.

In terms of accessing local nurseries, these were quite well used by longer-term residents in the UK. Newer arrivals were less likely to access nurseries, mainly because not sure

how the system worked and the language barrier seemed to make it more difficult to find out about nursery provision.

Nurseries were also sometimes seen as expensive by some participants.

Difficulties accessing childcare amongst North Korean families

Like with many other services accessing childcare was more difficult for North Korean families. North Korean mothers reported their experience and sense of well-being was very negatively affected by the fact that they felt unable to access both child-care for younger children (due to the cost factor) as well mother-toddler activity groups (a mixture of cost and language/cultural barriers).

Childcare for many was simply not affordable, and attending toddler groups was again often expensive and many participants described feeling 'out of place', simply because the language barrier was so significant. As a result participating single mothers reported feeling 'isolated and depressed'.

Whilst participants reported that they wanted to attend toddler groups, where they could, in order to help them and their children and learn English, it was not a cure for their isolation. What they also needed was the opportunity to develop a supportive network of (North Korean) mothers they could talk to and seek support from.

Here again the participants were keen to find a way to help each other, by organising informal meetings and activities, but again were hampered by the difficulty of finding spaces.

Using Public Spaces and Parks

The majority of our participants positively noted Kingston's green spaces and parks. Many mothers reported making regular use of these.

We like to go to the parks and by the river; we meet up and take children out.

In summer season spend time in park.

When asked what could be improved, respondents mentioned the lack of water and sand play areas, which enabled more sociable play and presented more opportunities to meet other parents.

South Korean respondents all felt confident in using public spaces, and many were happy to travel further afield to other parks - especially since a lift has been installed in New Malden station. North Korean reported feeling less confident in public spaces, and whilst they made use of them. Many had experienced misunderstandings with others as a result of the language barrier.

Safeguarding of children and young people

Professionals, service providers and those working in the community raised some concern over the safeguarding of children, in part as a result of 'different parenting styles', and in part linked to the context of trauma.

What is seen as acceptable [in terms of chastisement] in the community is not always seen as acceptable here. I think they are two different worlds. Without base of knowledge.

Some of the North Korean families come here with their children, but have left family behind [...] this can be very disruptive of family life – they have their

own trauma issues and that can explode.

We had an incident where a mum thought she working in the law by asking the children what she should use a newspaper or something – she thought it was legal, and got into trouble.

Professionals also found that engagement was difficult as family life was seen as much more private,

We often encounter an attitude of 'get of our life'. I think it must seem like we come in kicking doors down, when we should be redressing what is acceptable behaviour in UK context.

In our community focus groups it was difficult to confirm these concerns. Participants confirmed the Korean culture could be very private and if someone suspected abuse amongst friends or in the neighbourhood, it would mainly be seen as a private concern and was unlikely to be reported.

However, amongst our participants at least it seemed that approaches to parenthood were not markedly different. In fact, it was rather the case that parents appreciated the more relaxed attitude to education in the UK. If anything participants worried that their children were less well brought up or less disciplined than British children. Participants commented that they children would not 'sit in cafes and other public spaces as nicely as English children, 'cried more when left at nursery' or were wilder when walking or scooting down the street'. Also as they were unsure about what standards children were expected to conform in the UK, they sometimes felt insecure about the right way to bring up children

I heard English parents think we have no control over our children [...] We don't know what behaviour others expect us to control, and have to learn what the expectations are.

This constitutes quite a significant change to previous research we conducted. In our study conducted with Korean community in Kingston in 2010 (Davidson, Huq and Seetzen 2010), participants quite openly complained about government meddling in the way they choose to bring up children.

This development may in part be simply due to time and globally changing attitudes, but also the result of local initiatives to educate and inform. One example being translated information leaflets handed out in schools.

What really worked was we translated a Childline document about the chastisement of children and not hitting and that seems to have got out. We have less incidents at school, we used to have so many families – they used to come in thick and fast

Young people's mental health

Another concern raised by professionals and service providers in the community was the impact of migration on young people's mental health. Many children and young people had to negotiate a multiplicity of pressures dealing with a new language, a new culture, being torn between cultures, as well as in some cases quite material hardship.

You do see some of these young kids struggling. They've come in here year 7 or something and they don't speak the language and they don't know the culture. They've just had a massive culture shock.

Children's' mental health was not generally a concern raised by parents in our focus group. Although there was some concern that they were sometimes unable to guide them

through the education system (and society more widely), as they were themselves not always familiar with it.

8. Health

Both North and South Koreans, reported difficulty accessing health care, partly as a result of the language barrier and partly because they were unfamiliar with the system. Here again North Koreans' need was starker, as they lacked the economic means to 'opt out' - i.e. to travel back to Korea or access private health care as many of South Korean participants reported doing.

Worryingly a small number of participants in the larger North Korean focus group reported that they could not access any health services at all. They did not know how to access 'the social system'. This was partly due to language barriers and partly a result of 'not knowing where to begin'.

Language Barriers: Needing an interpreter

The majority reported they could access health services, but they did experience difficulties due to language barriers. All North Korean participants and the majority of South Korean participants felt they needed an interpreter for hospital and doctor appointments. Even those that spoke English well felt that for medical appointments they needed an interpreter, because the language was more specialist and required more than the everyday English participants had acquired.

It's particularly difficult, because you use words at the doctors that you don't normally use. It's very detailed, so even when we speak good English, it's difficult explain or understand.

Accessing an interpreter

Most participants reported that they were aware that they had access to interpreters; only a minority had been unaware of this. Nevertheless many felt that the service was not offered as comprehensively or as readily as it had been in the past:

In the beginning when they offered this interpreting service they were really nice and it was really helpful. But their attitude has changed they can be very rude to the patient, they say oh you should be able to speak English now, but they don't understand: I speak English, but I can't always understand the doctor.

They can be very rude to you. When I called to make an appointment and asked for an interpreter I was told, do you know how much that costs us. It is very expensive, can you do without? And I can in normal situations, but not at doctors".

Worryingly perhaps, a few participants reported that, whilst attending without an interpreter, they had signed documents about their health care despite not quite understanding the document. They also reported many of their friends did the same, as they did not want to delay treatment.

The possible consequences of not being able to properly communicate with a health professional was highlighted in the following case recounted by a South Korean Mother.

My son was ill so I took him to the doctor and they prescribed him medication. The medication didn't

work, so I took him back to GP surgery and I waited for two hours to see the doctor. And the Korean doctor was too busy so I saw an English speaking doctor, the doctor gave me two prescriptions one for what I now know Penicillin.

In Korea if you get prescription for Penicillin you ask if you are allergic, and if the person says I don't know then they do a test. If the doctor had asked is he allergic to Penicillin, I would have said I don't know. He did ask if he has any allergies generally – but I didn't realise it would be about Penicillin. He had an allergic reaction, I took him back to the GP and even with this bad reaction we had to wait a long time. After this experience I don't want to go back, I go to private doctor

Making other arrangements

The fact that translators were not always available which delayed appointments or made them more complicated to arrange.

As a result many participants reported that if possible they made appointments with one Korean-speaking doctor in New Malden. Other participants reported that they found it logistically easier to ask relatives or friends to attend appointments. Although one of the downsides they identified that their friends or relatives were also not always familiar with medical terms, and couldn't always effectively translate.

A third group also reported that they were able to hire a local Korean interpreter (recommended by word of mouth) for £10/h, although this was expensive this was still sometimes easier than relying on the provision of an interpreter in GP practices.

Telephone translation

A number of participants highlighted the fact that sometimes only telephone/voice translators were available (language line), which made 'explaining symptoms' even more difficult.

There is some evidence to suggest that it is not only the absence of a face-to-face conversation that makes effective interpretation difficult in this situation. The difficulty of using telephone interpreters was also discussed in a separate interview with a Korean translator, who suggested that the work done by an interpreter is often more than simple translation. It involves understanding the situation and context, and communicating the rules and procedures that govern it to the client (who is often unfamiliar with them). Telephone interpreters are not always based in the UK, and are therefore unfamiliar with local health care procedures and are not always able to do this

Emergencies

Participants also raised concerns about accessing interpreters in emergencies. It seems that here there is not much awareness of the availability of telephone translation services.

If something happens to your children and you need help quickly how can you book an interpreter?"

My child gets sick in the night, how can I use this service go to A&E and then need a translator.

Waiting Time: Cultural differences

A shared concern between North Korean and South Korean participants were long waiting times for appointments. Participants reported

that they found booking emergency appointments with their GP difficult unless they were able to call the surgery early in the morning; otherwise they experienced long waiting times for appointments.

The expectation to access health more immediately seems to be a cultural one.

I find making appointments difficult with GP, in particular when children are sick and I need emergency appointment. It is always busy. We need to call from half past eight for half an hour or one hour. I need to drop the other children of at 9.00at school, but I cannot because I am on the phone.

If I don't feel well I want to see the Doctor now. But there is always such a long queue. And appointment is 5 days or 10 days later. And if I make an appointment by the time I see the Doctor it's going to be already gone, so...?

Were simply not used to long queues and making appointments

In Korea there are many hospitals you can go to you just choose one and you don't have to wait. Of course you have to pay for that, although it is not as much as private health care here.

Here is free which is really good, but in Korea there is a lot doctors and it is not expensive, see the doctor you just pay some pounds or so and you can see specialist, for example for eyes, straightaway. So it's easy unlike here.

Koreans say services here are slow, what that means is complicated. I have pain and I want to see someone straight away, but I have to see GP, who makes appointment, I have to wait for hospital appointment, so it's so

many layers. This is what some people mean with slow.

I think here is a different definition of emergency. For me is emergency – but here emergency is not emergency.

Cultural difference: preventative approach vs. point of need

The confusions and frustrations about using the UK health system are in many ways linked to fact that whilst many Koreans are used to engaging with the healthcare system mainly at the point of need (at which point they expect to access health care quickly), the UK operates a more integrated and preventative model, built on longer term engagement. This was also confirmed by professionals working closely with the community.

In Korea you have almost all private, and individual clinics. It is not a joined up integrated health system with a referral system that must seem complex.

In Korea the health care is completely different. In Korea you just go to one of the clinics when you need to. Here you go to GP and then you wait for appointment with specialist. They tell me we are not used to this system and it put them off. That system can be a big problem, and people can get really frustrated. 'What is this system'?

Much of the British system is of course preventative; we got to get in early to prevent issues from arising beforehand, so we hope to have engagement beforehand.

With our Korean patients we have concern over continued engagement, we seem only when needed – when they are having a baby, afterwards or before we don't see many clients. And

during the postnatal visits I always feel that they can't wait to get us out of the door. There's always a lot of family there to help and we're not needed.

One exception to this seems be attitudes general health checks. According to a local GP, NHS health checks are very popular with his Korean patients, so this might constitute a way into longer engagement.

Opting out

For some participants long waiting times and the complication attached to making appointments and referrals led to giving up on medical advice and finding their own solution.

North Koreans, who had very limited resources, reported either buying medication from the pharmacy "according to what I believe I might have" or consulting friends and "asking friends if they had similar symptoms and getting medicine from the friends".

South Koreans reported accessing private health care or travelling back to Korea to access health care or for operations, but were worried about urgent care, as it would be difficult to travel back for emergencies.

I visit the private Korean dentist in Korea. I had an infection and they said I might lose my jaw I needed immediate surgery. And waiting time here too long so travelled back to Korea.

One long-term resident who wanted to apply for British citizenship, even felt she was prevented from doing so because losing her Korean citizenship would mean she could no longer access health care in Korea.

Maternity

Health professionals in working maternity care raised concerns about the language barriers faced by pregnant women in the borough. They reported seeing many women who had not managed to arrange interpreters and they were unsure about levels of understanding.

Patients who have not managed to arrange an interpreter are not understanding what is being said, and because we only have a short window for the appointment cannot check if they do understand.

They also worried that because of language barriers many Korean women feel they cannot ask for advice for more immediate concern, by for example calling the surgery.

It's one thing to arrange an interpreter for an appointment, but I think many don't feel they ring up and ask for advice when they are worried about their baby.

Concerns were also raised about the uptake of postnatal services, where Korean mothers were generally underrepresented.

We visit them but many Korean women do not attend clinics postnatally. We can't always do home visits.

I'm not sure if they don't know about the services or if they feel they cannot access them because they are Korean. I don't know. Many are not attending children centres.

Given the findings from focus group this under representation is due to a number of reasons including a different attitude to health-care (when need arises), language barriers and being unaware of services offered more generally.

We have a real issues with dental health at the school, trying to get Korean families to the dentist is hard.

Dental Health

Professionals working at schools also raised concerns about dental health in the community.

9. Immigration, Poverty & Mental Health in the North Korean Community

Many North Koreans' needs and concerns were first and foremost shaped by issues around immigration and immigration status. This of course included the mental impact of the stress caused by uncertainty over immigration status and the trauma from emigrating from North Korea.

Participants talked very openly about the impact their situation had on their mental health and the wellbeing of the North Korean community. Many emphasised the stress experienced as a result of dealing with uncertain visa applications or even rejection. Even those not in that situation felt strongly that other residents with uncertain visa applications or those who had been rejected were very vulnerable, as they 'were always stressed' because they 'didn't know what might happen the next day or even the next hour'. As a result of their status they were also often 'very cautious' and unlikely to seek help.

There's some people who haven't got their visa yet and then there are some who have been rejected. Then they suffer from huge stress and due to this kind of stress, their personality and temper is distorted. And sometimes they are not properly able to control their temper. And everything you talk about becomes related to their status. So they need medicine or help to calm down and to be able sleep properly, but they can't ask for help.

'Not moving forward' and losing time.

In addition to stress and uncertainty over visa applications, participants also described the stress caused by the restrictions placed on their lives as a result of their status: i.e. their inability to work, study or generally move on with their lives. The importance of not working here went beyond the fact that they did not earn a living, but also meant they were 'standing still' and 'not moving forward'.

(Volunteer interpreter) She is applying for visa, so she doesn't have NI number, and she has two little children and she is very young (in her twenties). So she wanted to work, she wanted to do things, to study, but she cannot. She wanted to do something, student or working mum. But she does have NI number, does not have visa, nothing ... so she feels her life stood still while she was trying to escape - a lot of time through China and elsewhere - she has come she wants to change her life, to move forward, but she is just standing still. ... She lost a lot of time from her life coming here and now she is still losing time.

The experience of standing still is also exacerbated by the language barrier. Participants felt that many jobs or educational programmes were not open to them, because they had to master the language first, which would take a significant amount of time. Here North Korean participants felt rather than 'standing still' with their life while they acquired the appropriate language skills, it would be useful if they could work with the council to find

ways to further other professional skills. One participant gave the example of training as a hairdresser in a Korean shop, in order to develop new skills and not to lose any more time.

Losing Hope

Our respondents also reported that they appreciated the support they received in many other aspects from different organisation, but in this respect felt there was no solution available. Indeed many North Koreans said that it seems they simply had 'no future'. They felt trapped in a vicious circle, which made many feel very depressed.

Given the seeming impossibility of escaping what was often seen as hopeless situation, many participants expressed a sense of despair:

Interviewer: How does it make people feel?

Translator: There is no hope, and people are very upset.

In this context, North Koreans were also expressed frustration with the system and with being asked to provide feedback about their needs and concerns - given that there was no real solution to one of their main concerns.

(Translator in focus group) The situation is the people are not entitled to work here, and then the living cost doesn't come from any other places. So she cannot apply for any benefits to

cover her living costs in the council, but the same time she is not able to work either. So a couple of months ago that wrote a letter to immigration and recently they received a written reply, and they said no unfortunately, no you are not able to work. That was it!

(Translator in focus group). Every 6 months she needs to visit the office (immigration office) for a signature, and every time she asks them would you please let us work. If we work then we can earn our living costs and then we can survive here. And the person says, oh you have to write down, so she write down, but again she gets the reply: "no you can't work". So what's the point in asking, or in putting in written requests? There is simply no answer. So if the council asks us what we need: it's simply please let us work, but it's not possible.

Effects on Mental Health - Isolation

Many North Korean residents and particularly the older generation reported feeling very isolated. They not only found themselves with any family support networks but also lacked the economic means of maintaining or creating networks.

These experiences have a clear impact on mental health issues. Many North Korean residents openly talked about the fact that '*we are all depressed*'. And one lady attending the focus group described how she was unable to pay for the bus fare to visit friends or her son, found herself completely isolated and now rarely left her room, not even to attend senior citizen activities because "*she doesn't have any money and her mood is not that great.*"

10. Accessing Mental Health Services

Professionals and service providers raised concerns about the fact that Koreans are generally underrepresented in mental services.

The Korean community is large in the borough, but the Korean community is underrepresented in mental health services. It's not clear if they are not attending GPs, or attending at the GP but are not being referred, or are being referred by GPs, but not attending referrals. There is an expectation of more Korean clients.

We refer people, but I feel that referrals (for mental health and educational needs) are not followed up. Also young people do not attend drop-ins in school. But younger people more likely to engage with mental health, as there is a stigma with the older generation

This underrepresentation is despite the fact that certain proportions of the Korean population face quite acute issues with a clear impact on mental health: a mixture of language barriers, and unfamiliarity with social norms have led to experiences of isolation. Moreover, many of the North Korean community have fled a hostile regime, sometimes persecution and torture, and have left families behind and still face uncertainty about their lives ahead.

It should also be noted that there is an increased concern regarding mental health provision for the Korean community following two suicides and a homicide in...

Unfamiliarity with the system

One reason again for not accessing mental health services is unfamiliarity with the healthcare system. Our respondents reported, not knowing how or where to access mental health services, or that mental health was even a part of general health care provision. Mental health is only a relatively recent inclusion in the healthcare system in Korea. So seeking mental health support through mainstream healthcare system was not always obvious.

I was depressed after baby, but I couldn't find mental advice – only saw leaflets for domestic violence. Also didn't know that ether were specialist in health system. Only looking at leaflets on noticeboard in children's centre. And only leaflets for domestic violence.

I didn't know where or how to make appointment. I also didn't know I was depressed, and I knew no one that could tell me.

Mental health professionals also felt that there was perhaps not enough awareness of different methods of therapy. One participant working in the community described that many of her clients drop out, simply because they are unfamiliar with cognitive behaviour therapy. Here she felt information sessions about CBT (run through local Korean charities) would be helpful.

Mental health is seen as a symptom, not a problem

Another reason for the reluctance to seek mental health support was that

many felt that the problem was not their mental health as such, but an external problem. Amongst the North Korean community in particular there was an acute awareness that mental health problems were caused by a particular set of real-life problems, and rather than mental health support felt they really needed solutions to those problems.

Many reasoned that rather than seeking help through counselling, the external problem (poverty, immigration status, not being allowed to work) needed to be solved in order to restore their health and well-being.

Of course she says the mental health cannot be separated out from the current circumstances, so if the current circumstances or issues is resolved, then the mental health will be improved so it's all related.

Also what causes depression, it's child-care and isolation, if someone can help, then mental health improved – if help with everyday life.

Mental health professionals also felt that with many of their clients, treatment needed to be holistic. Because for so many mental health issues had been caused by 'big problems' they sometimes needed more than therapy. Here it was seen as important that mental health services worked with the council to tackle issues holistically.

Cultural attitudes to mental health

One of the more contradictory findings of the of the research was that whilst participants would talk quite openly about mental health issues during focus groups, most participants reported that mental health was often seen as something private, not much

discussed and loaded with stigma that prevented people seeking help.

We never think about the mental health care, because of the language”

In Korean culture we don't really talk about mental health, because the culture is more private.

I was scared to speak to GP; I was hoping to control myself rather than speaking to GP.

This cultural attitude was also confirmed by those working closely on the community.

Mental health provision in Korea is not as developed, and suicide rate higher and even higher for North Korean defectors. If it's locally not addressed, it's unlikely to be address here when they are migrants.

Stigma is generally a problem for mental health. But I find it's more pronounced amongst the Korean community. There's definitely issues around shame and privacy and not wanting to ask for help, difficulty working with families, because of the stigma.

Some mental health professionals also reported that the stigma around mental health was shifting slowly. However whilst younger people were more likely to seek help than in the past, members of the older generation were still very reluctant.

Reliance on interpreters

Another reason many Koreans felt reluctant to seek mental health advice was the fact that many would have needed an interpreter to effectively engage. This raised issues about

confidentiality and complicated the process of counselling.

Many interpreters are from the local community, and their close connection to people they know made some participants reluctant to share their mental health concerns in their presence. Moreover it seems not everyone was aware of the strict guidelines over confidentiality, and this uncertainty also made many wary about sharing private concerns.

But also, who is your interpreter. Sometimes someone you know, from the community will they then keep the information from the consultation private.

Our translator, is very trusted in the South Korean community – not sure how happy North Korean parents are to see her though

Our translator knows everything about everyone – she's trusted. But if you don't, that's a worry.

Another issue of course is that it is difficult to talk about mental health issues in another language or through the medium of a translator. As those working in the mental health sector confirmed whilst they generally manage it is more difficult to build trust when the conversation is mediated via a third party.

North Korean Single Mothers: mental health

Mental health and the experience of depression was an issue that was commonly reported in all focus groups and by the majority of participants, but was particularly acute amongst single mothers, as a result of the combined effect of isolation and the acute social and economic pressure.

Many of us just don't get out much, because we are all depressed, we need somewhere to go and see friends.

Participants described struggling not only with the everyday pressures of motherhood, but the responsibility of looking after children whilst they were often unable making ends, or to find their way through an unfamiliar culture and social system, that in some instances was even experienced as a hostile social system.

Importance of Korean community workers

Mental health professionals participating in the study felt having a Korean professional was invaluable when supporting Korean clients. At the time of research, local mental health services had access to a Korean trainee mental health counsellor. This had helped develop the work with the Korean community. However, her time at the organisation was soon to end, and it was anticipated that this would leave a big gap in provision.

11. Avenues of Support and Channels of Engagement

Both the South and North Korean community reported some difficulty with accessing formal channels of support and relied more on informal networks, or on community internal organisations. Here again the need is starkest amongst the North Korean community.

Accessing information

All participants reported difficulties accessing information about what services and support the council offered.

Many reported a need for a comprehensive source of information on what services were offered and how these can be accessed. They had looked at the Kingston website, but it seemed to be spread out and fragmented and did not always explain how to access information. Also as it was not translated into Korean, which again provided a barrier to many (and particularly to North Korean residents).

Many participants were also not sure what services were offered by the council and what services would be provided privately.

However, although many had found the council website difficult to navigate they had positive experience with information and support they had received from their local school, and suggested using the school more in order to distribute information.

During the professionals and service providers focus group the idea of comprehensive website was proposed

- managed by a panel of Korean community representatives who would update the website with information from the council and different agencies trying to engage. This matched the call for a comprehensive website or pamphlet from the Korean community. However there was some concern that the website needs to be seen as impartial and directed at all the different sections of the Korean population.

Seeking support: the North Korean Community

Marked again by more acute needs, North Koreans struggled the most with accessing information. Many reported that whilst they needed help, they were not sure how to get it. Often the initial answer to 'where do you go for support the answer?' was simply 'nowhere'. On further probing, it emerged that whilst many did try to get support, they were put off by their unfamiliarity with the system, language barriers or not being quite sure 'where to begin'.

Interviewer: Have you tried to access any help or support from Kingston Council?

Transl.: She never tried because she doesn't have any idea how to start, because she doesn't know.

Interviewer: And why is that?

Transl.: Absolutely 100% this is because of the language barrier, it's just so high. She absolutely cannot know how to access Kingston Council and ask any help.

Because it involved hiring translators, getting support was also expensive.

And respondents had to weigh up the cost and benefit of seeking help.

Due to the language barrier every time I go to Kingston Council to talk about council housing I have to hire an interpreter. So every single time I paid for translation, and appealed my cases, but so far there is no successful progress with my case. Every time I pay for translator but there is no successful result.

Translator: So basically what the problem is they don't know about the systems, the social system, they don't know how it works, and they couldn't get it (support). And they don't what will happen if they will get help at some point.

For some the hopelessness of their situation made any help impossible and rendered seeking advice futile:

There is just no solution at all, so there is no help. We are just simply suffered from all problems.

An important resource for many in the North Korean community was **Refugee Action Kingston**, which was often described as helpful. Although there also seem to be a gap in provision, as one North Korean participant in one focus group reported that they were not able to access services from RAK (Refugee Action Kingston), and the concerns they had needed to be handled by immigration.

Many participants were also generally aware of the **Korean Information Centre**, which provides advice and classes designed to help Korean immigrants navigate UK services. The services it offers appear to be very closely tailored to the needs identified in our research. However, none of our participants reported using the centre

and at the time the research was being conducted the centre was (temporarily) closed. As a result it is difficult to assess the impact of its services. Service providers and professionals working with the Korean community reported that it worked very closely with and provided services for 'a particular section' of the North Korean community.

Informal Networks

All participants stressed that rather than accessing formal channels, it was informal networks (more generally or through local networks of mothers and parents more particularly) that were most important to them.

There are so many Koreans it's easy to get information.

I mainly make friends through other mothers at school.

The mothers I met at my toddler group, that's where I got all my information from in New Malden.

I rely on my mum friends' experiences. It was the most clear information.

Local Churches

The majority of participants identified local churches, many of whom had a significant Korean congregation, as an important contact point and source of information. As well as providing a source of information churches and informal networks also provided social, emotional and culturally specific support that made Korean residents and in particular more recent arrivals feel more at home:

For instance when I had my baby, the Korean culture is that you have to take a specific soup every day. But I have no immediate family or friends here. So

the people from the church they took turns to make it.

If you need to find rented accommodation church friends help you out. They show you, but they also closely connected and are able to negotiate you with a better terms.

There was awareness that local churches do not serve all the community, and some participants expressed suspicions that some might mainly be focused on serving their own interests. Nevertheless, given their ability to reach out to a significant proportion of Koreans in Kingston, they are an important starting point.

Churches that were mentioned as points of support were St James in New Malden, The Raynes Park Korean Church, the United Reform Church and The New Malden Korean Church, as well as unspecified local Korean churches.

Replacement support network: missing family

Taken together informal support networks and church congregations form a vital replacement for the family support many Koreans have lost when they moved here. In particular, mothers participating in the study reported that the absence of their wider family made life difficult. For many this meant they were missing vital support networks. Mothers of young children described how everyday tasks like picking children up, or taking them to the hospital or going shopping was more difficult, and it made mothering lonelier.

When I had my baby, I really needed my family. Only my husband could help, but he was at work. So it was hard

Because my family is Korea it can sometime get lonely. I am at home with the children and I need someone to talk to friends or someone where we have similar ideas on things and we have the same language.

I have to bring up children without family.

I'm now helping young mums here, as I have been through it.

Korean Newspapers

Many participants, and in particular more recent arrivals noted the importance of Korean Newspapers for information about local community events.

Community Centres

A section of participants, although by no means all, mentioned the Korean Community Centre in Raynes Park as a point of support. Older participants (both North and South Korean) reported attending activities.

However a large proportion of younger participants, and in particular mothers of young children, either did not use the centre or were even unaware that the centre existed.

North Korean community organisations

There are a number of community organisations in Kingston. One such organisation which was cited repeatedly by North Korean participants was 'Free NK'. It was often described as a significant source of support and one, which had been vital to their well-being and indeed survival.

Given the tensions in the community (and the fact that according to professionals working in the community the North Korean community is in itself divided), it seems

unlikely that this organisation is represents the entire community. However it seems to bring together and support a range of different people in the community.

North Korean community: A space for ourselves

Despite there being a number of organisations and community spaces that were open to all Koreans, North Koreans expressed the need for spaces that would cater more specifically to the North Korean Community.

I don't necessarily divide into North and South Korean, but the South Koreans have settled here a while ago, successfully. They don't need any other extra spaces for themselves, but the North Koreans circumstances are different. We've just come over here and we don't have any money, we would just like a space for ourselves.

Given the importance of the informal support network of fellow North Koreans, a number of participants asked if it would be possible to access community spaces to meet in. A regular space would provide both a stable identity and base from which to organise a wider programme of activities. As well as community meetings, several participants expressed the wish to organise education session for children, after-school clubs, advice/information sessions, and to organise cultural events (like dancing), at a venue that was a walkable distance.

What works

One of the questions we asked professionals working in the community was - what strategies have worked best when engaging or

supporting the Korean community. The two most effective strategies have been a) the distribution of translated leaflets (through schools and hospitals) and b) having a consistent Korean contact. The latter of course is difficult given the limited life of engagement projects.

Cultural engagement

Our research identified culture as an opportunity for engagement. Certainly amongst Korean migrants there is a strong interest in staying connected to Korean culture and teaching their children about Korean culture, but also in sharing and celebrating Korean culture with their adoptive communities.

One of the difficulties identified by some of our participants was that engagement was sometimes perceived to be the 'wrong way round' or at least very one-directional. There was also a certain fatigue with being asked 'what the Korean community needs'. Many were also interested in what their community could contribute, and hoped that engagement could take the form of a two-way conversation, not just about identifying need.

Always I look at report - "o, the Korean community does to engage, there are barriers, they have to be educated about UK culture. But it's the wrong way round. Culture is also about exchange.

This is where events like the Korean Festival were seen as important events. Held in Kingston town centre it provided an opportunity to share cultural traditions and food, and positioned Korean culture as a part of Kingston's local culture.

This is why it's important that it's held in the town centre. Koreans here are seeing their culture not as separate, but, as part of Kingston culture. So they're not just out of place - but their culture becomes part of this place.

The Korean community has certainly contributed to the distinctiveness of Kingston and New Malden. And despite the hostility experienced by some of our participants in some quarters, this contribution is acknowledged by many local residents. Although not specifically designed to do so, the

community stall the research team had at the New Malden farmers' market initiated discussions with residents who were very positive about the long-term contribution Korean families have made to the area. With one lady even describing how it had encouraged her son to visit Korea and study Korean.

Against this background there is a clear opportunity in changing the tone of engagement from purely education to one of exchange. This is likely to help overcome the experience of cultural barriers.

12. Recommendations

Based on the findings of our research, this report makes recommendation across the following areas:

- ***Focus on the needs of the North Korean community & vulnerable groups***
- ***Overcoming language barriers***
- ***Accessing services***
- ***Young people and education***
- ***Cultural Engagement***

1. Focus on the needs of the North Korean Community & Vulnerable groups

Short Term

Develop information for professionals regarding the different subgroups and very different needs that define the Korean community in Kingston.

Whilst those working closely in the community are aware of the complexities, not all professionals and service providers are aware of specific needs of this group. A number reported they rarely distinguish between North or South Korean clients.

Medium Term

Identify and provide community space for the North Korean community

Community spaces exist for and are organised by the South Korean community. There is an effort to reach out and open up to North Korean residents. But North Korean participants, whilst appreciating these efforts, did not always feel comfortable or at home there. Many North Koreans expressed a desire for a community space of their own, in which to meet, organise children's activities and host information sessions. In providing this space there may be a need to take internal community conflicts into account.

Support outreach work by the South Korean community and identify opportunities for integration

The desire for a space dedicated to the North Korean community to self-organise should be taken seriously. At the same time, it is important not to perpetuate existing divisions and to support the ongoing integration of the two communities.

There is ongoing outreach work from South Korean organisations to invite and welcome the North Korean community (e.g. by the Korean language school, the Korean community centre and local church groups). These efforts could be supported and further developed.

In addition to this ensure that outreach work to the Korean community enables North Korean participation (e.g. North Korean participants reported that because they faced higher language and cultural barriers they were less able to participate in events like school fairs - even where an explicit attempt

to include the Korean community had been made).

Provide Targeted Mental Health Support for the North Korean community

The majority of North Korean participants reported high levels of depression amongst the community (linked to financial hardship, immigration status, isolation and an inability to move on with life). Yet most rejected mental health support as something that be helpful, focusing instead on the practical solution to the issues they faced as the only way out. Whilst in the long-term the underlying causes need addressing in the medium term targeted mental health support would help alleviate this.

Long Term

Identify strategies for services to respond to the severe hardship faced by large sections of the North Korean Community, and in particular by older residents and single mothers.

The majority of North Koreans we spoke to, struggled significantly as a result of financial hardship, with no solution or support in sight. This impacted on their physical and mental health.

Identify strategies for services to respond to the housing difficulties many North Koreans face - and in particular amongst older residents and single mothers .

Many North Koreans reported difficulty accessing housing. For many most of their income went on paying rent and, as a result, they struggled to feed themselves and their family. Others lived in crowded and sublet rooms.

Identify strategies for services to respond to the uncertainty many North Koreans face over their Immigration status.

Uncertain immigration status poses a considerable source of stress for many of our participants, with many feeling helpless and unsure where to turn to. This has a significant impact on mental health. For many their lives are dominated by the experience of uncertainty and helplessness. Some of our participants reported being well supported by Refugee Action Kingston or by informal community groups. Nevertheless some also felt that organisations like RAK, simply did not have ‘enough power’ or ‘enough resources’ to help them.

2. Overcoming Language Barriers

Short Term

Develop information for professionals and service providers concerning the specific and more severe language barriers faced by the Korean community.

The fact that it takes Korean migrants longer than other groups to become fluent English speakers dented their confidence (and further impacted on their ability to communicate). More awareness amongst service providers of the specific barriers would help overcome this. It would also prevent Korean clients having to explain their continued need of a translator to service providers (as many felt they had to).

Review information about the availability of translators and language line (both to service providers and to Korean clients).

Uncertainty over the availability of interpretation services proved a significant barrier for many of our participants when accessing services.

A number of issues were identified:

- Korean patients were sometimes discouraged to book interpreters for GP appointments due to cost. Here more information regarding the language barriers patients face (and the associated risks).
- Participants were concerned about language barriers during emergency visits to A&E (more wide-spread information about language line).
- Professionals working in maternity care were concerned that their Korean clients discouraged from calling into health centres for ad-hoc queries about their baby's well-being. (Identify channels were such queries could be responded to).
- When accessing translation services clients had concerns about confidentiality. (More information and reassurance about the confidentiality of the translation service).
- Some participants were unsure when and for what services they interpreters were available. (More comprehensive information about the availability and accessibility of interpreting services).

Medium Term

Bespoke language classes that focus on speaking, pronunciation and cultural habits.

Many Koreans struggled specifically with speaking English: both with regard to pronunciation and with the cultural inflections and expressions.

Moreover they felt trapped in a vicious cycle: Many felt discouraged from speaking English or seeking out situations where they would be able to speak English (e.g. to other parents), because they had not been able to make themselves easily understood. As a result they were not 'getting much practice'. Language classes focusing on these issues will be the most helpful in breaking this cycle.

This finding is also supported by a separate piece of research conducted in partnership with Korean Information Centre (xxx).

Language classes also need to be sensitive to the different need and lower confidence of North Korean residents.

Long-Term

Consider the need to offer interpretation services where it is currently not available.

Many participants (and in particular North Koreans) noted that interpretation services were not available for appointments with housing or the job centre plus.

Where translation services were not available, clients were put off seeking help due to the cost of hiring an interpreter. They also found it difficult to coordinate booking interpreters & appointment times. Overall the experience of 'muddling through' these appointments without an interpreter as often extremely stressful, and some reported being explicitly challenged on their lack of English speaking skills.

3. Accessing Services

Short Term

Provide targeted information and education about 'how the health system works'.

Many participants reported they had to some extent 'opted out' of the health system, because they found it either too slow or too complicated.

Here targeted education concerning the different layers of healthcare and how these integrate would be helpful.

The concern here is, again, bigger for the North Korean community some of whom reported behaviour with health risks attached (e.g. borrowing medicines from friends). The South Korean community is less vulnerable, as a proportion can access private health care or travel back to Korea to access health care. Although to the extent that this allows individuals to fall through the gaps, it is also a concern.

Interviews with local health care professionals suggest that general 'health checks' are very popular with Korean clients – this might provide a useful starting point for engagement

Provide targeted information around mental health services.

Our research suggests that taboos around mental health whilst still in existence, are softening. Whilst participants reported that mental health is still a private or sensitive topic, they were happy to discuss mental health issues in focus groups.

This suggests that ongoing outreach and education around this is working. However, whilst participants were happy to admit where they suffered from mental health issues (in particular depression), they were often a) either reluctant to seek help because they were not sure it would help or b)

unaware of where and how to seek help. Often participants did not know that they could be referred by their GP.

Medium Term

Develop collated information about the services available in Kingston and how these can be accessed, translated into Korean – available offline and online.

The Majority of our participants asked whether a website or document of this type existed as they found it difficult to navigate available services. Significantly some of this work has already been done. As part of the Korean Link worker project, the council designed a *Welcome to Kingston Leaflet* in Korean. Whilst this does not quite contain the detailed information about how to access services some participants were asking for, this could be developed.

Collate and provide information about cultural barriers preventing Koreans from accessing services.

Professionals we interviewed were often concerned that Koreans were underrepresented in their services. Often they were unsure of the reasons for this. For example health care workers were concerned that not many Korean mothers were attending postnatal check-ups or baby-weighting clinics, but sometimes unsure of the reasons (in this case cultural practices around childbirth prevent Korean mothers from leaving the house after the birth). More information regarding cultural or language barriers, would enable professionals to respond better to such concerns.

Long Term

Consider the need for a dedicated Korean engagement worker

The majority of professional and service providers felt that the most effective way of engagement had been through consistent, often Korean speaking, contacts who had insight into and could develop trust amongst in the community.

4. Young People and Education

Short Term

Collate and publish information about education in the UK in Korea.

Most participants expressed a need for more information about how the education system works and also about activities for young people and children.

Information leaflets and sessions about easing stress and pressure on young people – the feedback from professionals was that a lot is expected from young Koreans. As well as parental pressure to perform, they also have cope with learning another language and translating between two cultures & languages.

Interviews with Korean residents suggest that many do appreciate that education is less 'stressful' here. This means that rather than starting from scratch information about the effects of stress can plug into existing conversations. Also some participants rightly pointed out that the accusation that their children were subject to more stress was somewhat hypocritical, given the pressure some parents in UK exert on children sitting 11+ exams. This also suggests that information about stress, education and young people can become part of wider conversation amongst parents (reaching out to the Korean community but not exclusively targeting them).

Develop and distribute information about safeguarding

Concerns about safeguarding (linked to cultural differences in parenting and discipline) was expressed by professionals. Given the comprehensiveness of the research and the sensitivity of the subject project this was difficult to further in community focus groups. Although what is clear is that compared to similar research we carried out in 2010 (Davidson, Huq, Seetzen 2011) attitudes to parental disciplines are changing. However, given that a recent serious case-review identified violence as on aspect in the suicide of local Korean teenager, these concerns are still a very current.

According to educational professional, information leaflets distributed in schools (produced by the Inspire project) had made a material difference. Given their effectiveness, continuing and extending the distribution of information is a recommended strategy.

Medium Term

Undertake further targeted research into issues affecting young people and issues around safeguarding.

Given the scope of this needs assessment, focusing on this issue was difficult. Given the sensitivity of the topic, more focused exploration of this issue would be helpful.

Provide activities for North Korean children. North Korean mothers were very concerned that they lacked resources to provide children with activities other than school (particularly in the holiday).

5. Cultural Engagement

The research identified culture as a strategy for engagement.

Short term
Support Korean events and festivals.

Medium to Long Term
Consider engagement strategy based around cultural exchange rather than 'education'.