

Social Impact of Population Change in Boston Task and Finish Group
Notes of Evidence-Gathering Meeting of 22nd March 2012 (6.30 pm)

Present: Councillors Paul Kenny (Chairman), Paul Gleeson (Vice-Chairman), Richard Austin, Mike Gilbert (Portfolio Holder), Paul Mould, Dr Samra and Judith Skinner. [Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Richard Leggott.]
Officers: Phil Drury, Andy Fisher, Janette Collier

Witness giving evidence: Chief Inspector Paul Timmins

Chief Inspector Timmins answered questions from members of the public as follows:

How are police managing to cope when their budget has been cut but their work load has doubled due to the influx of migration into Boston?

The police look at demands and direct resources accordingly. There was a small 0.2% reduction in crime in the last 12 months, indicating that the situation is similar to that of the previous year. Four years previously there was a 10% reduction. Importantly, there was a reduction in violent crime over the last 2 years, which was 8% last year. There had been no change in the number of police on the streets and this will not change; budget cuts resulted in a reduction in officer numbers, but those lost were back office staff, not frontline.

The service has come under strain. However, murders are dealt with through a regional response; Boston police start initial enquiries during the first 24 hours and then the East Midlands take over with a pool of officers from across the region, including Lincolnshire. Therefore, the day-to-day operation of the local police was not affected and there was a great response from officers.

How much do police spend on translators per year?

Figures are not available, though efforts are being made to obtain some. These costs have increased for police generally over the last 10 years, but it has not had a significant adverse effect.

Knife crime - it is common knowledge a lot of EU citizens are carrying knives – why are there not more random stop and searches being carried out in a bid to crack down on this?

Police intelligence and experience is that this is the same proportion across nationalities and it is not thought to be a problem of knife crime or culture. Applying very strict stop and search powers has led to an accusation previously that the Metropolitan force is 'institutionally racist'; police officers have to have reasonable suspicion to stop and search someone. Officers use street skills and if suspicion was aroused during questions and answers they would search people; this was the proper way.

Why do police media feel the need to cover up serious crimes like the violent disturbance down West Street over Christmas which involves groups of Russian and Poles fighting and stabbing each other?

This is surprising; I heard nothing about this despite working over the Christmas and New Year period. Nothing was reported and the hospital, with whom the police has a good working relationship, confirmed that no-one had been admitted with stab wounds.

How difficult does the language barrier become when dealing with EU citizens who don't speak English and how much time does this problem consume?

There are issues no matter where you are. It increases the time taken occasionally, but then so does having to deal with someone who is drunk. The police approach is the same and if there is sufficient evidence of an offence, the person will be arrested and officers will wait for a translator or for the person to sober up.

When you arrest and charge an EU citizen how often do they disappear without a trace before their trial and what measures do you take to stop this happening?

This is an issue, not just with respect to Eastern Europeans; it is prevalent across all communities. Local people have roots in Boston, so they are usually still there after they have been charged. Migrants can be difficult to trace, but the police use their legislative powers fully. They decide whether to keep people in police cells until their court appearance or bail them, taking into account whether they have a permanent address, employment etc. It is frustrating that they often keep people until they appear in court and then the courts bail them and then they disappear, both British and migrants. But the courts and jails are under pressure too.

What measures are police taking to ensure that trouble doesn't flare up like it did a few years ago over football as we all know tensions are running high between locals and migrant communities?

To say that what happened in 2004 was due to tension in the town was a complete disservice; the trouble was caused by drunken football fans, it could not be linked to tension. They moved towards certain groups, but it was started initially purely by football. There are many nationalities and football fans so it did bring added issues. However, the police are well prepared for it, there will be a visible presence and officers are working with licensees where the football will be shown.

Why is it reported that no-one is to be charged over the illegal distillery that exploded in Broadfield Lane – surely this gives out completely the wrong message to the perpetrators? The ones who died have paid the ultimate price but it appears many will go unpunished?

This was a long investigation and a lot of work before the case was presented to the Crown Prosecution Service and it was the decision of the CPS. The police could not comment further; enquiries will have to be made of Lincolnshire CPS which is obliged to give reasons why a case is not brought to court.

Action: The Chairman confirmed that the Task and Finish Group will ask Lincolnshire CPS for the reasons why the case relating to the illegal distillery explosion is not being brought to court.	Cllr Paul Kenny
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Having spoken to local police officers I have been told that a judgement call has to be made by the officer concerned when dealing with the current DPPO, the officer has to decide the level of inebriation and the possible consequences before they will enforce the DPPO. What are your comments on this?

Councils can apply for a Designated Public Place Order for a given area and ask the police to provide data relating to anti-social behaviour / drunkenness etc. The DPPO gives powers to police officers to seize alcohol from adults if they fail to hand it over when asked to or fail to give their name and address. There is a misconception – it is not a drinking ban. It gives powers to deal with people drinking when anti-social behaviour is involved and officers use those powers proactively. The police have been slow to publicise their successes; there has been a steady decline in incidents since the DPPO was introduced with fewer than one call a day.

The police are not obliged to record the number of seizures they make and so they have not kept records, but this should happen, as the police are accountable. It has now been set in place that numbers will be recorded locally.

Quite a lot of people call the police about groups of people drinking alcohol, but sometimes the police find that it is not alcohol, but they deal with littering and other issues. They are not all street drinking incidents.

Would a bye-law with on the spot fines be easy to enforce?

A bye-law is for the Council to consider. The police can give the Council information regarding number of crimes etc. With respect to the DPPO, the police got it right most of the time. A bye-law would take the judgement out of it and if it is introduced the police would enforce it. However, the DPPO is working fine.

What can be done about people who gather near Carlton Road school roundabout at 8 am, smoking, drinking alcohol, and intimidating us when we walk past every day taking our children to and from school? They urinate in the bushes and the children see.

The details will be taken to the Neighbourhood Policing Team. The DPPO does not cover that far, but urinating, littering and disorder (which intimidation is) are things the police can do something about. Fixed penalty tickets can be issued and people can be charged with disorderly conduct. The police are trialling a new system, especially regarding urination, to deal with offenders more easily. It is easy to pay a fine, but the behaviour may continue. With the Council, the police have purchased a street cleaning/graffiti removing machine to use as 'restorative justice'. This focuses on how the victim of crime feels, for example in cases of low level shoplifting or urination, and they can ask for an apology either face to face or in writing, which the offender does as well as cleaning part of the town. Experience shows that, if faced with victims, offenders are more likely not to reoffend. The trial has only been going for a few weeks in Boston and Skegness, but it is succeeding.

The police have no control of an extension of the DPPO, but could provide information for the Council.

NB: the Environment and Performance Committee will be reviewing the DPPO on 9th May and members of the public are welcome to attend and can submit questions.

Population size and costs

Does the under estimation of population impact on police numbers? If the population figure was right would we have more police on the street?

A lot of different factors are considered with respect to where police are allocated: crime numbers over 3/5 years, the number of calls in areas, population density etc. The Neighbourhood Policing resources have just been looked at. Population demographics / deprivation figures / alcohol dependency / unemployment etc – all are given values in the Vulnerable Local Index. Boston is categorised as a priority area. As District Commander he constantly looks at resources and demands. There has been very little overtime in the past year and the area receives its fair share of officers.

What are the main changes that have been necessary to the police service in Boston as the result of the arrival of ten to fifteen thousand eastern Europeans in the last eight years?

Interpreters are used a lot more across the country – for offenders, victims and witnesses. Schools would say the same, as would the Home Office.

There are 'response officers', Neighbourhood Policing, PCSOs etc, and part of their work is engagement activity and listening. Across Lincolnshire and the region over the last 8 years, the way people interact with the police has changed; people are less likely to tell the police things now. For the PCSOs the opposite has happened; people trust them and work with them. PCSOs do fantastic work, forming contacts and picking up intelligence; the police would struggle without them.

Other changes – the police reflect the public. The UK police do their job by consent not force. They are not armed in most cases. They do not stop vehicles, handcuff people and then talk to them; in this country policing is much more consensual. Comparing crime and detection rates, the UK stands up far better than any other European country. Forensic work and the court system in this country is the best in the world and miscarriages of justice are rare.

The community in Boston, as in South Holland and across Lincolnshire, is changing; so, there have been changes. For example, leaflets are printed in different languages, which is the same for every public service.

In terms of staff, there are three European members of staff in Boston, two Polish and one Bulgarian, who spoke perfect English and are invaluable in terms of connecting with communities where trusts needs engendering.

What has been the extra cost caused by the introduction of these extra services?

It is impossible to say. Budgets are set each year for the regions, but the boundaries have changed numerous times and data is very difficult to obtain. Boston has the least-funded police force in the county. The Government formula favoured metropolitan and urban rather than rural areas; it uses data relating to industry, population density, crime numbers etc so it is stacked against sparsely populated areas. For the population increase to be a significant factor in Budget setting, Lincolnshire's population would have to double! The force does very well with the money it receives. Prior to the Comprehensive Spending Review, the budgets had been audited by PricewaterhouseCoopers, who could find nothing that could be carried out more efficiently.

Do you use a translation firm?

A national body is used, called Language Line, which is based in locations all around the country and sends representatives into police stations. Schools also employ translators; it may be an idea to share.

People report incidents to the police and nothing happens, so people then don't bother. They get no crime reference number or anything.

Please give specific examples, I do want to know. To make a report at the station and get fobbed off is not acceptable. The police get a lot of similar complaints, but also a lot of comments that we are giving a good service.

EU/foreign registered cars

What is the situation on vehicle licensing? Can they easily evade licensing vehicle? Does this hinder enforcement? If a problem – what do the police believe is the way forward?

This is taxation and there is no difference. Cars can be brought into the UK for six months without having to have UK road tax. If a vehicle is stopped because it is not showing a tax disc, or if it is a foreign vehicle, a form is completed to send to the Driver Vehicle Licence Agency (DVLA) as notification that the vehicle is now in this country. It is very straight forward and quick. Or, they can deal with it like everyone else. Insurance is immediately invalid if a vehicle is not taxed, so the vehicle is seized and if the owner does not come forward with the documents, the vehicle is crushed. The numbers are not available, but they will be obtained from the traffic department.

How do you know when a vehicle first comes into the country?

The police do not know, which is an issue with respect to cars and lorries. There needs to be questions around vehicles coming into the UK. EU countries have freedom of movement between them, policies are in place. There are agreements regarding points on licences. HGV drivers get frustrated because there is high taxation on UK vehicles, not elsewhere. If there is a strong feeling about this, people need to go through the MP.

Why is there no number plate recognition at ports?

That is a reasonable question.

Can I report a vehicle?

Yes. The appropriate form is CLE27. If a vehicle is parked inappropriately, take its registration number and country and give the details to the police, who would send the information to the DVLA so that the six month period is set. The traffic office receives notification through regarding vehicle stopped and over six months – so get flow of information. But the DVLA has only done this in the last 12 months.

How easy is it to enforce minor road traffic violations on EU registered cars e.g. parking, speeding etc? If a problem - what do the police believe is the way forward?

Feedback from speaking to staff is that prosecution files with respect to speeding and parking on double yellow lines happen as a matter of course, no matter what a person's nationality. If a person is foreign, they use Language Line, so it is slower, that is just a fact of life.

Is there a deliberate policy not to give tickets to immigrants who park on double yellow lines? People living at the top of Frampton Place receive tickets but cars belonging to immigrants are ignored by the police.

No, there is no policy in place regarding not dealing with foreign vehicles. I cannot comment in detail, but if there is a problem it needs to be reported to the police. You can give me the details after the meeting.

People are parking all over the road in West Street and this has been reported.

There is a parking issue in the town generally. It is not just European cars; recent parking enforcement showed it is British and foreign.

NB: A new scheme will be introduced in the next couple of months when there will be proper enforcement officers in Boston and it is hoped this will tackle the problem.

Drinking on the street / DPPO - consequent violence/ antisocial behaviour

Is the problem greater in Boston than elsewhere in Lincs?

No. A number of towns, including Lincoln, have DPPOs and the problem is proportionate to the size of the town.

Is the problem greater amongst the migrant community than the indigenous community?

No; the same number of the indigenous community have alcohol taken off them and more of them are involved in repeat incidents than foreign nationals. There is a perception that it is foreign people, because of hearing foreign languages, but there are not more of them drinking in the streets.

What is the way forward to resolve issue?

The DPPO is one asset and it is working. There is also the public order and licensing legislation. Matters can be followed up, for example where people have sold alcohol to someone drunk. A lot of alcohol has been seized and the cheapest is from the supermarkets. Batch numbers or L code on items, not just alcohol, can be traced back to where they were purchased. With respect to cans found around benches, it is a fact that English people buy foreign beer and it is completely wrong that it is just Europeans.

One difficulty with the DPPO is that the notices about it are in English; they need to be provided in other languages.

Can drinking be banned on the streets of Boston?

No, it cannot be banned, but there are other avenues open to the police. When the licensing laws changed in 2004/05 this changed opening hours significantly, but the police still only have the same resources. About 9-10 premises were inspected recently and all passed, which is good.

The police can use Section 27 Dispersal Orders if people are acting disorderly and are drunk or drinking: they can order them to leave the area, which can mean that street or the town. This is used in Boston every weekend to good effect and has led to a reduction in assaults and public disorder offences.

Legislation

With the benefit of your experience to date, what changes in legislation at European, National and District level would help your service in its efforts to reduce tension in the town?

Vehicles have already been covered. With respect to licensing, the laws should be reassessed in relation to control / opening hours etc. A lot of areas are starting to develop their own licensing agreements, so where there is a problem premises Licensing Boards are getting tougher on restrictions or close down. But the national policy should be looked at because of the strain on public services, including hospitals. It is less about legislation; it is more about the town itself. Boston is a hard-working area. It lacks investment like a lot of Lincolnshire and local authorities get less. Things are changing, such as the improvements to the Market Place. The Boston Area Partnership, looking at heritage and tourism, will all help. We need to look at all this as a community.

Police Neighbourhood Panels

How many police neighbourhood panels do you hold in Boston?

There are nine police neighbourhood panels in Boston and the rural area.

What are the most common issues that come up at these panels?

Dog-fouling, parking and cycling on pavements; not serious crimes, but ones that affect day-to-day living.

How can people find out about these and how can they get invited to attend?

Go to the Lincolnshire Police website and enter your postcode for the nearest panel or ask at the local police station or ask a policeman. Events are held in the town and panels are advertised in the Boston Target and Standard newspapers.

The panels are not run by the police; they are run by the community and the police provide support and information. They discuss crime and general issues such as street lights. To raise an issue you just need to contact the chairman of that panel.

How many people attend?

It does vary from quite low to quite high attendance, depending on people's interest. There is a place for the panels in neighbourhood policing but there were other things too: street forums, libraries etc.

Crime against migrants

There is a belief that migrant workers are the targets of exploitation and criminal activity. Do the police investigate this?

This does happen, though it is difficult to say to what extent. The police receive intelligence. There was previous experience with gang-masters but this was not exclusive to migrant workers.

Is there any evidence of organised criminality preying on the migrant community?

No more so than any other part of society. There is always an element that will prey on people such as the elderly. There are organised criminal gangs in Lincolnshire just as there are in every part of the country and the police deal with them. People need to have confidence in the police.

Is there any evidence that this criminality originates in the home countries of the migrants?

I do not know; there is no information. Some are British, from London and Manchester, and some are foreign. The police work to keep their activity to a minimum.

Crime by migrants

There is a general perception that a disproportionately high proportion of crime and antisocial behaviour is being caused by the immigrant population. What statistics are available to either support or disprove this perception and what do they show?

This data has been requested. Perception is at the heart of a lot of this and they police the reality and the perception in the same way as the fear of crime and victims

of crime. The reality is that crimes are not committed by a disproportional number of foreign nationals. It is the same misconception that more crimes are committed by people from Council estates. This is not true; criminals are from all walks of life, which the police see when going through the booking in procedure that recognises where a person is born.

What are the police doing to change the perception of the public that Foreign Nationals are being let off crimes?

Every person has the responsibility to look at their perception. The police need a cohesive strategy to publicise what is achieved. The police are reliant on how they are reported in the press and how the courts deal with cases. Communication is key through different arenas such as this. It is invaluable and good to have people involved and airing concerns and I want to be part of that.

There is an impression in Boston that serious offenders in South Holland are being sent back to their country of origin but that is not the case in Boston. Is there any substance to this perception?

No, not at all; there is an organisation that has been working with the police for a few years – the Crime Reduction Initiative (CRI), which is a charity that helps reconnect people with their home country. Boston CRI had repatriated the second highest number (about 100) out of six organisations, coming second to London.

In terms of serious offenders who go to jail, the Home Office decides whether to deport them; it was not the responsibility of the police. The police put the case together for conviction. Boston has been used as a stand-out area that is using this successfully.

It will be important to talk to the Border Agency and explore with the MP the possibility of talks with the immigration minister.

The police have a very good working relationship with the Border Agency, which has officers within Boston.

Behaviour / culture

There is a misconception about how strict the societies are that many migrants come from as to behaviour in public; they are not in a lot of areas, but an element of force is used by the police.

I was a custody sergeant about eight years ago and on a number of occasions, foreign nationals, especially Polish, covered in the station, awaiting a beating. The conduct of police officers should be top level at all times.

Licensees are working very hard to run their premises well. The police are located at strategic points around the town and best use is made of resources and CCTV to prevent problems before they start. There has been a reduction in violent crime, which was very good; it was increasing in the rest of the country. The force has the

best detection rate in Lincolnshire and one of the best in the country. Officers work very hard and very well and I am happy with police performance.

Foreign nationals already know what acceptable behaviour is; public order crimes are committed more by local people than Europeans. The same people committed these offences every week over the years and it is the same in South Holland, Lincoln and Skegness.

Is lack of understanding of local cultures a significant factor in everyday tension levels between migrants and indigenous population? And vice versa - local lack of understanding of European cultures?

Boston has always had a migrant community because it's a port. There had been a large increase in population that has not been recorded and this is made more acute because people notice the different languages. I do not think there is a lack of understanding of cultures because they are not very different really. It boils down to acceptance. People's perception is what we have to tackle and change, but it is complicated.

Under-age alcohol sales

We have read recent reports of a test purchasing exercise checking for underage alcohol sales, which found good compliance from both established shops and newer shops more recently opened by migrants - how often are these exercises carried out? Are there signs of the situation improving?

The tests are carried out quite regularly. There has been a 100% pass rate in recent ones so the message is getting through, though this is to a lesser extent with respect to the supermarkets, perhaps because of the numbers of customers.

Under-age drinking is a problem, particularly in housing estates and parks, and we often find that they have got the alcohol from home. Parents should be held to account. There is a parenting problem in this country and some children are given free-range, which is inappropriate parenting. Some even buy alcohol for their children.

The police take children home and speak to their parents; some have uncaring attitudes and are difficult to deal with. Under-age sales are well under control but there needs to be a more co-ordinated and cohesive approach with respect to parenting skills.

CCTV

The Council spends a huge amount of money on CCTV – what would the effect be if it could not continue to fund it?

I would want urgent talks with the Council. It is absolutely invaluable. It is expensive, but the results are second to none. There is no clearer evidence, to see someone and identify them; it is a crucial and valuable tool. I am a great supporter of CCTV. There is a need to ensure it is not used inappropriately, but it is reassuring

and people would want to know why if it was discontinued. It is difficult to answer if it positively affects crime rates, it has a limited area; it probably reduces crime or does it push it to another area? It certainly helps the police to detect crime and I believe it does work.

Drink driving is a huge problem amongst the European people - what are police doing to combat this - could we have more road side checks and random breath tests like they do near Christmas time? The Road Safety Partnership has said that drink-driving by Europeans is "horrendous".

It is not horrendous. Drink-driving has increased dramatically across the county and it is in proportion with that in Boston and the majority are not eastern Europeans.

A member of the public has queried this part of the notes, which have been summarised to some extent. The member of the public asserts that the question to the police was: "We see reported in the local papers that most of the drivers caught for drink driving are foreign nationals, could you not do more roadside random test to deter this."

The first part of the reply answer was to say this is not true so the member of the public asked "Why is it then reported as such in the local press?"

The hand written notes confirm that the Chief Inspector then turned to a member of the press and asked "Where did you get your information from?" and the reply from the press was "The Road Safety Partnership".

It is a serious offence no matter who commits it, but the police cannot do a blanket stop on vehicles; they have to suspect something. Over the Christmas period it is known from decades of data that people are more likely to drink and drive and police stops are part of a national campaign. Police officers are paid extra and do overtime in order to follow vehicles to see if drivers commit offences and then take action. The police deal with it proactively. This cannot be done throughout the year because it is expensive. The police have no powers to stop a vehicle if they have no reason to suspect an offence and can only arrest someone if they have caused an offence. They have no power to force a driver to give a breath test unless they have reason to suspect an offence has been committed and, if they have no such suspicion, they cannot arrest someone if they refuse to give a breath test.

What pro-active work is Lincolnshire police doing in Boston around social cohesion at the present time and what is the benefit of this work?

The police are putting together a strategy with partners with respect to long-term social cohesion and members of the public such as those here tonight have brought important issues right to the forefront. The police are currently actively recruiting "kins"; members of the public from European countries who are helping in relation to languages and culture and talking with the Council and others about how to deal with issues. It is difficult to say what benefits there are as this is still in the early stages. And how should benefits be measured? Around tension monitoring, racist graffiti, race hatred etc the figures are expected to fall and they are low now.

If tensions continue to rise in the town what extra policing could this demand and at what cost?

I cannot put a cost on this. In 2004, there was a significant cost in terms of police resources, but it also affected perception, tourism etc. It is very important to get it right.

There will be no increase in the police budget over the next few years, so they must use resources as efficiently and effectively as possible. If significant problems start to emerge in Boston the police would have to decide to put more resources in.

Why don't we have more police officers patrolling our streets as a visible deterrent to anti-social behaviour?

I am in favour of that. The police force has gone away from that in recent years. I have finite resources to provide services in Boston and there is a limited number, or appropriate minimum, of police officers, neighbourhood police and PCSOs. The police cannot be everywhere, but we can be smarter about how we deploy ourselves. For example, when going from one job to another, officers could go through the town centre to increase their visibility. I don't think this happens at the moment. I would certainly take extra officers, but I will not get any.

The Chairman thanked Chief Inspector Timmins for his time and his answers.

(The meeting ended at 8.55 pm)