

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

Present:

Councillors Paul Gleeson (Acting Chairman), Richard Austin, Elliott Fountain, Mike Gilbert, Richard Leggott, Paul Mould, Dr Samra and Judith Skinner *[Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Paul Kenny]*

Officers: Andy Fisher, Andrew Malkin and Janette Collier

Witnesses giving evidence:

Nick Purkiss (Editor) and Graeme Holmes (Reporter) – Boston Target
Stephen Stray (Editor) and Andrew Brookes (Deputy Editor) – Boston Standard

Questions from members of the public:

Do reporters feel they are given freedom to report current news without being told cover or hush things up?

N: Yes, we have complete editorial control. The only concern is legal proceedings; if active, they had to avoid them or risk libel or defamation.

S: It is down to our own editorial judgement.

As reporters who deal with local issues daily how would you describe the town's current vibe regarding immigration?

N: It is complex, but it is improving. We don't look at immigration in isolation; we look at how it impacts on jobs, the economy, schools, service provision. It's an important element of many discussions.

S: There is still tension and this transparent process is welcome. We hope organisations are more proactive than reactive, as in the past.

A majority of court briefings in local papers lead us to believe that the majority of offences are being committed by migrants is this true?

S: We attend court on Wednesday mornings when criminal cases conclude. There is a mixture of foreign nationals and English people. The courts are public; you can sit in the gallery and see the court listings.

N: It varies from week to week and so do the offences.

A: It is the magistrates' court that we go to, which deals with lower level cases; more serious cases go to the Crown court.

What would you say are Boston's 3 big issues from a reporter's point of view?

N: Employment, like most towns, public services, including health, education etc

S: and the bypass!

At a previous meeting, the job centre said employment was not affected by immigration and the schools said they were not affected by immigration; you have contradicted that. Are you saying we were being lied to?

N: No. People will always have a range of views on immigration, speaking from personal experience it won't be the sole point of a discussion.

When dealing with immigration issues do you feel local employers and landlords are forthcoming with information or do they prefer not to comment?

S: We get examples of both. Some are concerned about coming forward regarding how their comments will be perceived. For example, no employers turned up to the Task and Finish Group's meeting on employment. There is still some work to be done.

When Peter Hitchens wrote his article in The Mail on Sunday on the impact immigration had on Boston, as a reporter, in your personal view did you think it was a fair and accurate article?

N: He was writing for a different paper and to a specific audience. It was typical of a national paper looking at a local issue. He took a predetermined stance and it was not the balanced piece that we would do. We know the issues and the impact far more. We were not surprised by it, but did not give it great credence. It was a narrow look at a complex issue. He wasn't in Boston long and 500 words can't scratch the surface. The Task and Finish Group is doing good work, breaking the issue down into all its aspects.

S: It was a national perspective in the style of a comment or columnist piece and was his own experience of one or two days. But it can't be written off; it was partly why we are here tonight; it resonated with some. Some won't have agreed with it. It was one personal perspective and you would get different views from different people who live in the town.

A: The article struck a chord and some people wanted these issues aired. Most people would read the Mail on Sunday looking at it from the national perspective; Boston will always be the first focus for us. The article was interesting and relevant, but it did not have our focus, though I agreed with some points. It was an influential piece. We start from the local and go to the national perspective; he did it the opposite way round.

There have been a lot of letters in both papers since this article; it has brought the matter into the public domain. Do you feel the local press could and should have highlighted the issue of vast numbers of migrants arriving in Boston and the issues it was causing?

N: The issue is in every week in some shape whether it's in the letters or specific articles. Peter Hitchens gave an overview on it; we report on it daily. We are tackling the same thing in a different way and take different views on it.

Prior to this piece there was little in the local press.

G: We first highlighted it a decade ago and we got some negative responses to it. We have continually tried to highlight it when issues arose rather than do a generalised piece like Peter Hitchens.

But we seemed to have vast numbers coming in and it was not reflected in the press.

S: We did a Portuguese pull-out in our paper, which shows that we were aware. We have done a vast array of stories about immigration though they are not always been the way people would like them to be written. We have never shied away from reporting on the issue.

Immigration is a much vaster problem now. There are some posters about drink/driving, parking and anti-social behaviour. Could the local press do more to

help alleviate these, to explain to the migrant community about our laws and what is socially acceptable? Possibly print a supplement in various languages?

N: Yes, we could always do more, but it is not just down to the press. We promoted the drink/driving initiative and publicised it as much as possible. Our role is communication and we are being proactive. Our sister paper in Leicester did a supplement in foreign languages and it didn't work particularly well.

S: We trialled a supplement in foreign languages for a number of months, written by someone working at a local solicitors to ensure it was legally safe, but it was not viable; advertisers didn't want to use it, people didn't want to read it and regular readers didn't want it in the paper. It can't be forced on people. We give plenty of coverage whenever there's an initiative. We can see how many times our website is used and the number running it through translation software is increasing.

We seem to have seen a large amount of the migrant community in the court briefs in recent times. Are all cases heard in local courts listed in the paper or are they just a random selection and if that is so, is it just a tip of an iceberg that we read and do any of the accused have a right to decline not to be published ?

S: No, it is not the full list. The court sits every day, but we go on Wednesdays because that is the most productive day, with most criminal cases coming to conclusion on that day. There can be a lot of cases or a few, because they take a long time to process. Cases vary from day to day. The public can go along and hear them. No, people can't decline to be published and everyone is treated the same. They are not just Boston cases; they are from across the county.

G: Wednesday is also the best because of the production cycle. The court sits four or five days a week and on a Wednesday there are two court rooms in session. On a Thursday it is the youth court.

Do the press suffer from any censorship from any authorities on incidents that have taken place and then be prevented from publishing such, for example the incident at the Jolly Crispin?

A: I personally asked the Police about that and they said it had not happened. Chief Inspector Paul Timmins had said so at a previous meeting and he had been on duty that week. We have to be aware of contempt of court and defamation, of course, but we do keep asking questions and can use the Freedom of Information Act to get information. We have key relationships with the Police and want to maintain them.

Do the Police take the Task and Finish Group process seriously? The papers don't seem to cover it a lot.

S: We've done four or five stories on it.

A: We put the first meeting on the front page and have had half a page for each since. It is informative and interesting. We've covered the meetings and will ensure that the questions raised and answered are fed back to people to see that there are tangible results and that this is not just a talking shop.

You are technically on our side.

A: We're on no-one's side; we just want to ask questions at the right time so the key issues go forward so that something tangible comes out of it.

S: At the end of the process it will be important to take something forward; something has to come from it; we want to see Boston in the best possible light because we care about it.

You did a four-page spread years ago. At that time, people felt the press, especially the Target, were saying yes, there is a massive impact. Now you are more 'pc' and on the fence.

N: We're still holding people to account and highlighting issues and we hope to be part of the solutions; that's why we're here tonight, to improve things for everyone. We serve the community as a voice for everyone.

What interest is taken from the media regarding bloggers, social media etc. Would it be worth considering using these as a gauge of how the real grass roots population see the current problems that Boston is facing? Boston Eye in particular is fantastic and probably says what the press can't.

S: We regularly go on Twitter and Facebook and get many stories from them. For example, the story we did about the May Fair came from a tweet. I don't feel we could print what some bloggers print, because some of it is legally unsafe. It is very easy for someone to do, a faceless person because they don't have to be held to account – we do. The May Fair story came from a tweet about a stabbing – we phoned the Police and there hadn't been a stabbing; someone had seen someone with a knife. It is like Chinese whispers. We don't dismiss them; we follow up what's worthy of a story and print it as factually as we can.

N: Twitter and Facebook both have a place because they stimulate debate, but we take to a different level with other views and legal considerations and produce a constructive piece.

On this issue why is it so often that letters to the press are either heavily edited or not published at all when surely a simple heading point could be that the paper doesn't endorse any views noted.

N: Because of the legal issues, if comments are libellous or defamatory.

S: It's not a matter of if they are our views.

Could you respond to the letter writer about editing?

N: We do sometimes, but we have to consider what space we've got and get a balance of letters. Some go beyond fair comment; then we have to use our judgement, either legally or subjectively. We try not to suppress views, but have parameters.

S: For two weeks we had four pages of letters and people welcomed getting the debate out there.

Your deadlines are worse now, which sometimes means it's old news.

S: Some pages have to have earlier deadlines.

N: It's not as flexible as it used to be because other papers are using the same press to go to print for example.

A: Our digital output is more reactive.

Questions from Members

Is any pressure from any source guiding your coverage of 'matters migrant'? You say you use your editorial judgment with respect to legal considerations and space and that it is subjective; could you say more?

N: We get a number of letters and have to reflect a range of views rather than say we agree with this and not that. Boston is very cosmopolitan and we don't want to alienate any groups. We need to give a balanced representation of views. And it's not just letters; if a claim is made that something has happened we go to the authorities to substantiate it and talk about both sides of an issue.

S: A story has to be fair, accurate and balanced. Any two people will come to two different conclusions. It's the same whether it's a national or local story.

If you fail to substantiate a story do you not print?

N: If we can't get hold of people we either don't print or we say that a person was not available and leave their comments to the next week.

S: Same here and if a piece is time-sensitive we print and follow up the next week.

Do you now make, or have you in the past made any, what you could call extraordinary, attempts to have representation of migrants' point of view in your publications (Interviews/letters/articles)? I know that the translation would have to be accurate.

S: We seek foreign nationals' views as much as we do English. All are welcome to send in letters. We have asked foreign nationals for views and printed them in English. We seek all the views of the community.

I can't recall any.

A: Some stories affect all; foreign nationals and English. If they are interested in the area in which they live, those stories are for everyone.

S: We went out and sought the views of foreign nationals and have printed their letters too.

Do you encourage this on a regular basis?

N: Seeking views builds up trust and relationships. We have done it for cultural and sporting events. It should be encouraged but it won't happen overnight.

G: How do you get the 'migrant point of view'; they are all individuals.

Would you be amenable to any approach from the migrant community for such a 'platform'?

S: There already is a platform for all to use to put their views and everyone is aware of that.

Have you got trust yet?

N: Not trust; it is understanding and relationships. Foreign nationals have their own perspective about the press; the local press is very different in other countries.

A: The press is a forum for anyone and everyone.

You're saying you're not against it and that it is a problem with people's perception?

N: We don't want to alienate anyone. They are potential customers!

So if they approached you, you would not turn them away?

A: We judge information on its merits, not who it has come from.

How do you see your role in promoting community harmony?

S: We report on initiatives affecting the town, e.g. the Alchemy project, which we have publicised. I attended the event and it involved as many English as foreign nationals. We publicised the Lithuanian Festival at the PRSA. Some people think such events aren't for them, but they are for everyone. Alchemy doesn't pigeon hole people; it is getting groups together. One way we can get the message out is to say that all are welcome. The town is becoming proactive, rather than reactive. We happily publicise and attend community events.

I attended an Alchemy event and there were very few English people there; they were mainly foreign nationals.

S: I was talking about my experience, a snapshot of an event.

Do you think that the need to generate news tends to direct investigations towards more extreme opinions? For example, Peter Hitchens' article and the extremely negative press following the illegal distillery explosion. Boston gets a lot of negative attention, especially on migration.

N: No. The explosion was big news. We tackle things from the inside out and look at all aspects. We don't look for extreme things; you see a lot of different, positive news in our papers. We don't shy away from difficult issues, but we print positive, light-hearted and quirky articles too, to provide balance. We wouldn't last if we just printed sensationalist, negative articles.

S: We would soon lose credibility. We offer balanced reporting and can't hide from big news events; they receive national attention.

A: When there are national articles on Boston, we need to check they're right and address them, for example, the claim that Boston has been put at the top of the flood risk list by insurers. We looked at this and queried it and actually Boston is towards the bottom of the list. We use local contacts and expertise and put an appropriate perspective on a story.

Do you think the media stories on the subject of migration were too simplistic and unsophisticated fuelling unrealistic expectations by some members of the community? It is a complex issue; did your stories miss that? Boston is pan-European and there's nothing we can do about that; perhaps this point could be made more strongly.

S: We present as many facts as we have as possible and put it to the readers so they can understand, but we have not shied away from complex issues; we put them in a readable way and then it's down to the readers to interpret or take on board.

N: Like you, we have to break issues down into elements, as they are relevant to other daily issues. That's the way to educate and inform; not tackle everything at once and make it unreadable.

FROM CLLRS GLEESON AND KENNY

What is the circulation of your newspaper within Boston?

S: Over 8,500 are paid for. We are one of only 29 in the country showing an increased circulation last year.

N: Around 7,500 are paid for and the same number again are distributed free.

How many staff do you employ, what are their nationalities and gender mix?

N: Graeme is our one dedicated reporter for Boston and there is a community news editor. There are others for other editions.

S: Our staff are listed on page 6 of the paper each week.

Who makes the decisions about what goes into your newspaper every week? What makes a good story? Do you follow national stories and then link them up to Boston?

S: The final decision is mine, and Andrew's when I'm away. A good story is one that's relevant and interesting, which is different to different people, so we have diverse news features and comment pieces for as many readers as possible. We follow national stories if they are relevant.

N: I have the final decision. With national stories, relevance is key.

Do you get contacted by national papers/ TV companies asking for local stories?

N: Some dig for information and some land on us and expect us to 'spill' information, but it doesn't work like that. It is rare to have a mutual exchange.

How do you react to national stories? If it is a bad news story about Boston – what do you do? If it is a good news story – what do you do?

N: We print local stories and how they affect local people. With national stories, we ask if they are relevant, why and what they are saying. Local relevance is key.

S: We treat good and bad stories the same; we get the views of those involved and the facts and produce a balanced article.

What kind of effects has the internet had to your paper? Has Twitter/Facebook or other blog sites had any effect on how you report the news in your paper? What kind of stories have you taken from these new media sites? Can you see any down sides to these new media sites that would affect tensions in Boston?

N: The internet has had a huge impact. Longevity; we're still struggling with. The disadvantage is the week between editions. On the internet we can react more quickly and can contact people quickly. Our work is very different now; the sources of information on the web are huge; all reporters use them.

S: We can react to situations as they happen and gauge reactions to use in the paper; we use them in tandem. The web is the equivalent of pubs; people used to go to pubs to pick up information and hear views.

N: The internet is very difficult to control and police. It is a fantastic tool but it is open to abuse. We refine the information and decide how relevant it is and control it without stifling it. We have to judge its credibility.

S: We know what is acceptable as trained journalists; others aren't so we have to be careful when we're taking information from them. The Police high-lighted issues about postings on Facebook that inflamed the May Fair.

A: The Police and other authorities can't dismiss the internet; it is to be welcomed and harnessed, but it relates to views and rumours. WE can put things to the Police and Council straight away and can ask the right questions and find out if the information is correct.

Some things on the web can be damaging to relations; do you intervene on the web and say a story is wrong if that's the case?

A: Yes, that's what happened for example when someone said there'd been a stabbing at the May Fair; we publicised the correct information on our website.

S: And we sent the link to our site to the person on Twitter who first got in touch.

N: The Police and Council should look at the internet too.

The press litter campaign, can this not be extended to publicise other incidents, e.g. urinating, illegal parking, camp sites etc? Litter is not so much an issue.

A: We would welcome use of footage, but we don't have open access to it. We are open to doing that.

S: We did do a story about a camp site.

What changes have you noted in the types of stories you report over the last ten years? Have they had more of an emphasis towards EU workers? What kind of stories have you reported?

N: We reflect people in the community; if the community changes it will affect stories.

S: We're here to serve the community and we try to reflect it as it changes and how that affects lives. We can't pin point changes over the decade; it is ever-changing.

But you are here to sell papers. Why do you mention the nationality of a story when they have gone to court? Why did you take the decision to mention nationalities within your reporting? Do you feel that mentioning nationalities increases tensions within the town?

N: We don't mention them per se; we have a duty to report what happens and nationalities are often mentioned as mitigation.

G: We report what is said in court and it is often mentioned; we report facts not judgments.

S: We don't censor what's said in court; they may say, for example, 'he spoke through a Polish interpreter'.

Could you give us some examples of good partnership working within your paper? What benefits do you think this has given you and the town? Can you give us any examples of where partnership working hasn't worked so well?

N: The Sea-Bank Marathon; Jubilee celebrations; Best Kept Garden; Boston College games etc. They are a key part of what we do; they form good relations and we support organisations like that. We evaluate and hope there are some positives, but sometimes we don't get the reaction we want, though there are usually some positives.

S: We are involved in a number of initiatives: the litter campaign, the Jubilee Queen, the Pride of Boston. We are here to work with people to promote the town in the most positive way. We're here to sell papers, yes, but to the community we serve; if we are not responsible they wouldn't sell.

Are there any community leaders you can approach? For example, in the Muslim community there is the Imam.

G: We're not aware of any. The foreign nationals are of different religions. CVS can point us to someone, but there aren't spokes-people for the different nationalities.

S: If there was we would welcome them.

Do you ever get any complaints about the stories you run? Have you then changed the way you report things following a complaint? Are you bound by any Code of Conduct?

S: We will always get complaints. If we are wrong, we would apologise and correct it in the next edition; we wouldn't change because of it. We treat each story exactly the same way so it would be wrong to be swayed. We are bound by the Press Complaints Commission.

N: We get complaints because people don't like things, rather than because we are wrong. If we are wrong we are duty and legally-bound to put it right and we learn and take things on board.

How do you think we could develop better communications between you and the council? Do you feel the council are selective in the information they give you? What would you want from the council to improve communications?

G: We get on with the Council's Marketing and Communications Manager; he is very helpful and quick to respond. If a matter is political it is more difficult. But we've had no problems. It has been other organisations that it has been difficult to get answers from.

S: We get a lot of information from the Marketing and Communications Manager and the Council, though not always in the way we would like to report it; the Council's press releases may appear differently worded. Communication could be improved by being able to speak to Heads of Departments ourselves rather than go through the Marketing and Communications Manager, in case answers generate more questions.

Why did you stop putting stories out in other languages? I have got a personal initiative to integrate Polish people. The press was asked if they would regularly print letters in Polish and Russian in their papers and the answer received was that they are frightened that publication would decrease.

S: We tried it and it didn't work. The Council has the means to do it. We would have to have a Polish or Russian solicitor to go through it. We don't run every story through a solicitor; we have legal training ourselves. Using Google translation it is easy for people to do it themselves online with the stories we publish to the web.

How could we develop better communications between the locally born community and the new communities that have come to Boston? Do you believe the communications are as good as they can be?

N: It is beholden on us all to see how we can facilitate good communication. We have an open door policy and we want to build relationships, but we can't force people to engage with us.

S: Our door is always open from any section of the community.

What tensions do you think there are?

S: They are social and economic.

Do you think that any of your stories perpetuate myths or increase tensions in the town? Do you feel that your stories help to dispel myths and relieve tensions in the town?

S: We have a responsibility to dispel any myths and would not print anything that is deliberately inflammatory.

N: Yes, we have a responsibility regarding how we portray things.

Would you find it helpful to meet more often to find ways that could help to report issues that occur in Boston in a more positive light?

N: We print a lot of positive stories every week.

S: We welcome any meetings we can facilitate, but we need to report things accurately without any spin. We won't put a positive spin on something if there is not one there.

Are you going to work with the new Alchemy project over the next 12 months?

S: We are and we will continue to do so.

Would you be prepared to be part of a working party and help to develop a strategy that promotes Boston?

S: Yes, if we are able to do so, because there are constraints on us.

N: Our role is to promote so yes, we want to be a part of this. We have to judge relevance and whether we have a role to play.

Why don't you put the date of the next meeting in the paper?

We do.

What would you call successful integration?

S: It would be different for everyone. It is an ongoing process. It is a shame you had to wait until this meeting to ask these questions. You are welcome to ask questions of us anytime, other than Tuesday afternoons (deadline day). It needs a will on both sides to make it work and allow those who want to, to do so.

N: If different communities feel part of the wider community and bring things to it that are valued. There are many different measurements. Identify tangible goals through the task and finish group and have objectives to work towards.

The Chairman thanked the witnesses for attending and for their contributions.

The dates of the next meetings were announced as 30th May and 8th June 2012.

(The meeting ended at 8.30 pm)

Attached below: comments from Malcolm Swire of New Boston Eye

Task & Finish Group on Social Impact of Immigration in Boston: Responses from Boston Eye.

Please note that replies have been given to appropriate questions *only*.

Questions from members of the public

1: Most of the main court cases should appear in the newspapers. They used to be the lifeblood of a publication because of all the local names and addresses. The fact that a large amount of the migrant community appear in the court briefs may mean nothing more than that they dominated the lists for that particular week.

2: Certain crimes, such as kidnapping, often go unreported until after their resolution by mutual agreement between editors and the police. Again, stories with security considerations can fall into a similar category. Normally, none of this impinges on the local media - unless the incident involved is on their doorstep..

3: Nationally, the press now devotes a considerable amount of time to reporting "celebrity" Blogs, Tweets or Facebook entries. Locally this does not happen much – perhaps because blogs in particular are regarded as competitive, and a bit *infra dig* to follow. Whether they are used or not, they are often a better indicator of opinion than local newspapers, where comment outside of recognised areas is discouraged. The editing or withholding of letters is a matter for individual editors. This often happens due to lack of confidence as to content, or a desire not to be associated with criticism of the authorities, which I have noticed in some our locals.

4: First and foremost, the piece by Peter Hitchens should be read or re-read by all members of the T&F group – as I am sure some of them only know it by reputation. The view of the council leader has already been made clear – he claims that there were many "inaccuracies" in the report which he had raised with the author and asked for them to be addressed in the interests of "fairness, accuracy and balance." He felt that to write at such length about Boston without a word of recognition for the hard work done by committed staff and partner agencies was an insult that he had to respond to. Peter Hitchens is a man of strong opinions, and his article was not meant to be "balanced" *per se* – it is an observation and an opinion piece written from a totally personal viewpoint. Frankly, I think that the leader was seeking political exoneration rather than anything else. I had an interesting dialogue with Peter Hitchens at the time "*Boston Lincolgrad: Peter Hitchens investigates the troubling transformation of a sleepy English town after mass immigration from Eastern Europe*" He told me: "I specifically and rather pointedly don't attack the local authorities for what has happened, or for their handling of the matter. I don't say nobody is doing anything about it. I say that the local people have virtually no say, for or against, over what has happened to them, which results from decisions taken elsewhere. I really cannot see what rule, moral or journalistic, obliges me to seek boilerplate on-the-record self-serving quotes from people I haven't even mentioned,

let alone attacked. Such things take up valuable space better used for reporting the truth.” He also referred to the leader as a “concrete headed” councillor.

5: Yes, and yes. It’s supposed to be their job.

6: That is *not* their job. Boston Borough Council has a department to deal with anti-social behaviour; the law can be explained by the police and the courts. There enough do-gooders around the place without the need to expect the newspapers to do the job as well. Ask yourself how many foreign language speakers are likely to read a newspaper published in English. Unless an entire local paper edition was printed in another language it would appear patronising. And which language would be best? All in all, it is something that is too expensive, time consuming and pointless to undertake.

Questions from Councillors: Comments are only offered where relevant.

3a: How long is a piece of string? You cannot define it. A good journalist knows a good story when he/she sees it. It doesn’t have to be a murder or a big fire – it could be a spaghetti eating cat. If you read newspapers regularly, you will have seen the range of stories that go into them. And always remember that papers cater to specific reader groups – so what might be a good story for the Daily Telegraph will most probably not appear in the Daily Star – and *vice versa*. It doesn’t mean that one paper knows what a good story is, whilst another doesn’t.

3b: Of course. It’s part of the job.

4: Sometimes - usually for background.

5a: Report it.

5b: Report it.

6: It has made research much easier.

6a and 6b: These sites reflect a broader culture and comment spectrum than appears elsewhere.

6c: The views are sometimes extreme and need to be reflected with caution – or in some cases, not at all.

8a and b: Why not? You may as well ask why newspapers mention the names or the ages of defendants. Nobody worried when the defendants were seasonal Irish landworkers 50 years ago – so what this question implies is a change in attitude towards what is broadly termed “racism.” The nationality of a defendant is part of a broad base of information made available in the court and is used to inform the reader. As information, it is in not in any way an inducement towards prejudice.

10: In five years of blogging, *Boston Eye* has received only *two* official complaints – both of which were from the current leader. One was an obvious sense of humour

failure, and the other an inaccurate complaint coupled with an unfounded and possibly defamatory allegation which he attempted to withdraw.

10a: I pride myself on having certain standards – even though they may not be especially popular with some readers of *Boston Eye* within Boston Borough Council. In a nutshell, I see the role of the blog as similar to that of Jiminy Cricket and Pinocchio – *Boston Eye* tries to act as a *conscience* for the great and the good who style themselves as our leaders.

10b: No. But that doesn't mean I lack a conscience of my own!

11: Hell will freeze over before Boston Borough Council will officially communicate with *Boston Eye* in any way, shape, or form to pass on news.

11a: The council does not give me information. More often than not, my e-mails to West Street seeking it are ignored and unanswered.

One final observation: Boston Borough Council gets off very lightly at the hands of the local media. They seldom, if ever, question or criticise its decisions. On occasion, letters that do have been edited or gone unpublished. The spoon-feeding of “council news” to the local papers appears regardless – even when it is contradictory. In some ways the newspapers cannot be overly criticised. The quality of journalism today is not what it once was. Low levels of newspaper staffing in some cases means that the council can “write” large sections of a newspaper and save its hacks the effort of leaving their desks. Doubtless, there is an element within the council which feels that this is a good thing, because the council view prevails. In fact, the lack of accountability which results is a disservice to local democracy, and encourages complacency. The losers are the electorate.

Malcolm Swire

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