

Social Impact of Population Change in Boston Task and Finish Group  
Notes of Evidence-Gathering Meeting of 27<sup>th</sup> June 2012 (6.30 pm)

Present: Councillors Paul Kenny, Mike Gilbert, Paul Gleeson, Paul Mould, Dr  
Gurdip Samra, Judith Skinner, [*Apologies for absence were received from*  
*Councillors Richard Austin, Elliott Fountain and Richard Leggott.*  
*Councillor Dr Samra arrived part way through the meeting.*]

In attendance: Councillor Peter Bedford

Officers: Phil Drury, Andy Fisher, Andrew Malkin and Janette Collier

Witnesses giving evidence:

Professor Gary Craig

Mike Jessop, Churches Together in Boston and Boston Street Pastors

Dean Everitt, member of Boston protest group

Bob McAuley, member of Boston protest group

Mark Rawlings, member of the public

Professor Craig began the meeting with a statement:

There is no doubt that Boston has had disproportionate difficulties in terms of immigration levels – the recent levels of migration in the Wash and in Hereford & Worcester were the two areas with high numbers since 2004 compared to the local population. The impact on Boston must have been considerable.

Why did this happen? Who was responsible or to blame? What can we do? This happened because of a lack of planning by the Government, especially the Labour Government, up to 2004, when 50-70,000 migrants were expected; it was actually a million over the period since then, though some have gone back, but we don't know how many because migrants only register when they enter the country (unless they are self-employed), but not if they go back.

Why the Wash area? It has had a clear need for labour and, as a result, a higher concentration of gangmasters than the rest of the country. Migrants are seeking to better their lives and eastern Europeans are attracted to come here. For many, the dream has turned into a nightmare; for some, it is modern slavery. Most gangmasters are legal and operate properly. The rate for the job is better than in eastern Europe, but in many cases it is below the minimum wage and conditions are poor. The work is 'dirty, difficult and dangerous', so local people don't want to do it.

Some say "they're taking our jobs" – that is not true. They are doing jobs that local people don't seem to want to do. Employers welcome most migrants' strong work ethic. What would happen if the eastern Europeans were not here? There is no evidence at all that the jobs would be filled with local people; it amounts to myth and prejudice.

Some say that migration leads to unemployment. There is no evidence of this either; in fact, the reverse has been shown to be true historically – migration generates jobs.

For example, the 31,000 Ugandan Asians who come to this country have created more jobs per head than any other section of population of the country.

People say “they’re taking our houses”. Again this is untrue in general although there may be some local effects. First, there’s the decline in social housing opportunities – that’s the responsibility of Government from 1979 onwards because they flogged off the best so there’s now less than half social lettings of what there was then. Secondly, less than 1% of social lettings nationwide have gone to migrant workers. Thirdly, in the private market there’s creeping deregulation, which has meant rents have gone up and up. Amongst the migrant worker population, half a dozen people might share a house; 4 share a room by ‘hot bedding’. The impact has been that rent levels are higher than local people can afford. Who’s to blame? *Not* the migrant workers; it’s the Government. A lot of problems lie at the hands of Governments. You need to look at the facts and the evidence.

Questions from members of the public:

*1m migrant workers have saturated the market so there are no jobs and no provision. As for housing, no more has been built for migrant workers and the landlords are therefore making a mint.*

You have just agreed with me! There have been 1m migrant workers since 2000, that’s 80,000 a year, probably less than 40,000 a year across the country given that many return to their countries of origin.

*But we don’t know the numbers! [Subsequent comment: Incorrect the number from the ONS clearly shows at least 3 Million]*

Official records *are* kept – migrant workers register when they come into the country, except the self-employed or perhaps the few that go on the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme. It is actually a criminal act to employ someone who has not registered. This is *not* the fault of migrant workers who are often not familiar with local laws and regulations.

*There is fear, disappointment and worry about where the country is going. We see in the national press and on internet sites reports of immigrants, such as a family from Somalia with 8 children on benefits being accommodated in a 2 million pound house in London, all paid for by the tax payer, another example a Romanian woman with 4 children, no husband claiming twenty eight thousand a year in benefits and going to court to get more housing benefit. Immigrants that commit rape and murder allowed to stay in this country because of their right to ‘family life’. Is it little wonder that hard working, struggling British people feel so aggrieved and let down. What would you like to see done about it?*

I’d like to see the Sun and Daily Mail closed down. The Daily Mail recently had a headline “How many more?” and gave a figure that was four times the real number of migrants. The Leveson Inquiry shows that journalists have a political agenda.

I don’t support criminal activity, but there are bad apples in all sectors of society. With respect to the Romanian woman, if the court rules that she is entitled to more

housing benefit then she should be paid. It is "quid quo pro"; there are 250,000 UK nationals in the EU. If a few migrants commit rape and murder, yes, people will be angry – I will be angry – but that is criminality not ethnicity.

There are hundreds of examples of refugees in desperate situations; it is to Britain's credit that it is open to them, but they never receive press coverage. Britain has one of the lowest numbers of refugees per head than any country in the rest of the world, including, for example, poor countries such as Tanzania and Pakistan, which is a disgrace. Facts in this territory, especially facts which show migrants in a good light, don't get a lot of press.

*With between a quarter to a third of all babies born in the UK – and the number is as high as two out of three in London – born from foreign parents, added to that the Muslim population increasing 10 times faster than the rest of society, and with a further 8 Countries wishing to join the EU. We are very soon going to become the minority race in our own country. How do you feel about that?*

Where are you getting your figures from?!

*From the Office of National Statistics*

The Department of Health states the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities have between 3-4 times the White/British fertility rate. But look at the demography – we have a very rapidly ageing population, who will care for them? Without migrants it wouldn't happen. In 1949 Caribbeans were invited to this country to work in the care sector...by Enoch Powell! The NHS would collapse if all the immigrants went. There is always another side to the argument.

*What in your opinion are the main 3 problems caused by mass migration to the UK?*

Bad planning, poor resourcing and the hostile media – they don't care about the facts. The process of migration has not been managed very well; it should be better, but stop seeing migration as a problem. We are *all* migrants. There has been no end of immigration to Britain in the past. I am part English, part Irish, part Scots and part Indian. See it as an opportunity. I passed ten ethnic minority outlets on my way from the station; if immigrants all went you would just be left with gaps in the street

*Migration has a place, but not at the rate it has been.*

Yes, I have acknowledged that. I have been a community development worker and activist and I know you have to get the targets right.

*I'm saying migration should be capped to let us deal with what we've got; I'm not saying 'send them home'.*

Migration is capped at the moment.

*Not from the EU.*

Nor is it capped from here to the EU. You would have to get the whole of the EU to agree. What's needed is better planning, better resourcing, improved social housing provision and labour market regulation and the Gangmasters' Licensing Authority should be given more resources.

*[Professor Craig then read an article from the Metro newspaper about a farmer who advertised jobs and got very little interest from local people.]* If jobs were not so 'dirty, difficult and dangerous' they would be more attractive to local people. Migrants don't come here to sit on the river bank and drink; they come here to work.

*Do you feel the Government are doing enough to cut migration numbers?*

You mean inward migration? There has been a massive influx in the last 10 years, but more than half have gone. The facts are that, in the working age population, migrant workers account for 1% of the total workforce. In Boston it could be 4% or more, which is 5-6,000.

*The official population figure is 59,000, but I think it is 89,000.*

You mean 30,000 migrants?! There are about 6,000. I've done research that looks at the facts.

*We are told that there are 5,000 Latvians alone!*

That's wrong – it's wrong by a factor of about 10-15.

What's needed is better resourcing for housing and better regulation for the GLA, the HSE and Public Health to improve working conditions.

The Government says that migrants need to have a good grasp of English and yet English as a Second Language courses have been shut down.

Because of migrants, in some areas, small schools have stayed open; there are incredible benefits to migration.

*Do you think it's time we closed our borders off?*

That is completely unworkable. It wouldn't happen. The labour market over 20 years ago was unregulated – the Labour Government described it as "flexible", as though that was an attraction. They take people on, drop them like a hat, they work in poor conditions etc – if this was changed, things would shift significantly. Jobs would be filled by locals because they would be jobs worth doing; they would be better. The European community overall is very prone to exploitation, not just in the UK.

*Do you feel the benefits of migration are enough for the problems caused by it?*

If you talk about the benefits of migration, there are improved areas and quality of life by way of restaurants, bars and cafes, dodgy housing areas are regenerated and migrants pay more tax per capita. The net benefit of migration is £3bn per annum,

that's net of costs, according to the government's own research. We would be poorer without them and it won't stop.

*Why do you think people are afraid to address the issue of migration?*

They're not, but don't address it truthfully. You need to create conditions where people can talk frankly about this subject but without abusing other people. There was a meeting at university once with my students at which the Chatham House Rules applied and people used language they'd learned from extreme media. People are afraid of getting things wrong. We should judge not by language, however, but by people's overall views.

Internationally, we are bleeding professionals from elsewhere in the world to work here, when they should be going back to work in their own countries after 3 years.

*Do you think I am racially motivated?*

If you had a placard saying 'Send them home!' I still wouldn't know if you were racist. You haven't said anything to suggest you are racist. Most racists are talking from the back of their heads; they are not looking at the facts, it's just prejudice.

It's all to do with tolerance and need. There is a huge need in the health service – it would collapse without migrants – and in public service overall. And we have to look at history to understand how it happens. In Bradford there is high unemployment in the Pakistani population; they were recruited in the 60s and 70s to work in the textile industry, but when that industry collapsed they were blamed for their unemployment!

Questions from Councillors:

*You recently were involved in a report by the Rowntree Foundation on the experiences of forced labour in the UK food industry. Can you explain the scope of the enquiry?*

There is a four-page summary on the Joseph Rowntree website <http://www.jrf.org.uk/>. The project is half way through and there will be another report in the autumn.

*The report highlighted that there is a concentration of migrant labour in South Lincolnshire. What countries are they mainly from?*

They are mainly Polish, a few Latvian and a smaller number of Portuguese.

*Have you any idea of the numbers involved?*

The data suggested there were up to 5,000 migrant workers in this situation.

*Can you highlight some of the issues and abuses you discovered?*

These are covered in the Findings and I will circulate that. But in addition, there is also human trafficking for sexual purposes. A Chief Constable who led one operation and who investigated one area said there was only one brothel, but then

found 58. They were eastern European women who had been offered jobs, then suffered multiple rape and threats and so forced into prostitution.

Migrants suffer threats, violence, sexual violence, huge deductions from wages and grotesque conditions, i.e. are experiencing forced labour as the ILO defines it

*What impact do gang masters have on the situation, has the GLA improved the situation?*

Most gangmasters are legal and decent; some however are criminal.

The Government has just cut the GLA's resources and sacked the local Inspector who was doing a very good job. I suggest you meet with the GLA's Chief Executive and ask your MP and Stephen Barclay [MP for East Cambridgeshire-who recently published an article in the Daily Telegraph about the appalling conditions in which migrant workers lived] to pressure the Government to restore cuts in the budget. I would also suggest you increase inspection of HMOs through your own housing officers and the Fire and Rescue Service, which also needs an increase in resources.

A member of the public then asked: *The Prime Minister said recently that multi-culturalism doesn't work. Others, including Eric Pickles, have said things need to change and Ed Milliband is now saying that Labour's previous 'open door' policy was a mistake. What do you think?*

Ed Milliband is being opportunistic. For my views on this, please see my letter to the Guardian [attached at the end of these notes].

*Can the task and finish group send you a copy of its report and ask you to give your views? Can we meet up with you again to firm up the report? We will be taking it to the Government. We have gathered a lot of evidence and will draw up an action plan from it; there will be some national actions, but some will be local.*

I am happy to help as much as I can. What's needed is a "grocery adjudicator" to rein in the supermarkets, which pass on more and more demands down the chain to the producers to produce cheap goods 'just in time'. There needs to be debates about the GLA. There was an early day motion three weeks ago on dissatisfaction with the cuts. Mark Simmonds (the local MP) was instrumental with setting up the GLA in the wake of the Morecombe tragedy When 22 migrant workers were drowned because of their agent's carelessness.

*[At this point the Professor had to leave the meeting and the Chairman thanked him for his contribution.]*

Mike Jessop of Churches Together in Boston and chairman and co-ordinator of Boston's street pastors then addressed the meeting and answered questions from Members and members of the public as follows.

*Can you provide us with an introduction to the services that you provide?*

Churches Together includes most denominations and has a lot of individual input with the Polish community. The organisation runs the street pastors on Friday and Saturday nights; the emergency night shelter, which opens when the temperature drops below freezing for 3 consecutive nights; and the soup kitchen, which opens weekly.

We have about 30 people coming to the soup kitchen. They are 50/50 English to migrants. We have an open door policy and don't take names so we have no hard facts. There are more English now than when it first started, there were more migrants then.

The people who use the night shelter are mainly migrants. They receive soup when they arrive and are given a dry, warm place to sleep and tea or coffee on the morning.

*Can you tell us your experiences with regards to issues such as street drinking and the general culture within the areas that you and your colleagues work?*

The street pastors see people enjoying themselves. The fear of some people about going out in Boston on an evening is just a fear; I don't find it frightening. We try to make the town more peaceful by talking, listening, helping, sweeping up glass etc.

*Are the people who use the night shelter long-term rough sleepers?*

Yes. Some sleep rough near Kwik Save etc. But they won't tell you where they are. The Council and police are aware and it is up to them whether they should be moved on. There have been 20 people maximum, 16 on average, all male but one.

*Do you think there should be forced repatriation?*

Personally, no. We don't have figures on repatriation; the UK Border Agency will have them. Churches Together is a voluntary organisation and this is outside its remit.

*Because they are entitled to benefits and we're stuck with them then.*

*Chairman: The criteria for repatriation was clearly explained previously and the figures from the UKBA will be provided.*

We opened the night shelter for 41 nights in 2010/11 and for 27 nights during the winter of 2011/12. It did get a 'lived in' feeling, which is not the idea; though the people who used it never complained when they were told it was closed. It is only a very basic, temporary service; it has to be.

*Were any there from the previous year?*

Some; some are regulars, but it is a 'moving feast', it's the same with the soup kitchen. Some are without a permanent home but aren't rough sleepers, e.g. 'sofa surfers'. Some rough sleepers decide that it is the lifestyle they want. It is very transient.

*Is there enough help for them? To get them back into accommodation and work?*

There is help, provided by Centrepoint Outreach. If they are long-term rough sleepers you have to ask why; some chose to be, but a lot are because of increasing debt and because they have run out of friends to put them up. It needs to be addressed but it is a great problem.

*Chairman: The Council needs to get its fair share of the budget for Lincolnshire. Churches Together provides services that the local authority could not easily do or do successfully. The Council values its partnership working with CVS, CAB etc.*

Street pastors talk about the 'urban trinity' – the local authority that provides funding, the police, who have the authority and street pastors, who can go where the others can't because people aren't judged or arrested. That is the great advantage of the voluntary sector, but we must work together and in the same direction.

*Would you be prepared to generally comment on what you feel the role of the church and faith groups generally should be on the cohesion agenda, how you feel you can support it, and what would you like to see coming out of the Council's task and finish review?*

I don't know...cohesion means 'glue' to me! Should we work with you? We can give it a go! We have a large number of volunteers to call on who have Christian values and want to see people dealt with correctly.

*In a recent newspaper article a Councillor talked of his fear with respect to migrant workers.*

It is a perceived fear. If something is strange, we can feel threatened. For example, there was a fight outside the Blu nightclub recently, but it was between two familiar characters and it was contained. It is only frightening if you get involved.

*Two English women have recently been sexually assaulted by migrants.*

Dean Everitt, organiser of the Boston Protest Group (BPG), Bob McAuley, a BPG member and another member of the public, Mark Rawlings, then answered questions from Members as follows.

*The people of Boston suffer because it is difficult to recruit good professionals to come to live and work here. One reason is that Boston does not have a good enough image to interest applicants. How will the proposed march affect this image? Will it make this problem worse?*

DE: It won't. The problems are here and now. It is difficult to attract people to come to live and work here. Wages are low. Agencies, gangmasters and farmers run Boston. The Council should take control and run it as it should be run.

*A common complaint among employers is that local employees tend to be unreliable, have lacklustre work performance, poor motivation and not keen to work during*

*regular hours, let alone overtime. Do you think that the unemployed of the Borough realise that this is why they might not be in employment? Is the benefit system is a factor in this poor attitude?*

DE: It has a lot to do with wage decline, because if you're earning good money it's worth getting up for. They should pay decent wages and not expect people to live in poverty.

*In the context of this enquiry, if you were in control of the council, what five things in the remit of the council would you change/alter to improve the lives of the residents of Boston?*

DE: There'd be zero tolerance in the town centre with respect to drinking and anti-social behaviour and there'd be searches, particularly for weapons. I'd stop paying for translation; those who wanted it could pay for it. I'd stop licensing outlets; there's too many. I'd licence HMOs. There'd be full registration of all migrant workers, with names, addresses, details of deductions from wages and holiday pay to stop exploitation.

BM: There'd be a more transparent approach, less formal, and encourage people from the immigrant community.

*Has the task and finish group process been helpful?*

BM: Yes. It's a shame it hasn't been better supported by the public. The Council should have a more assertive approach with the MP to get the infrastructure to sustain the population increase; it should be more authoritative.

MR: I'd want the licensing of HMOs; they cause misery. Officers make excuses why they can't tackle them and they should just tackle them.

*Officers are unable to act politically.*

MR: A lot of the issues are of national level. We need to work on integration a lot more. It's obvious the migrants aren't going to approach us. There is such a colossal number and they've formed their own communities. There's a Polish priest at St. Mary's – that's an ideal route to improve cohesion. I've seen both positive and negative experiences.

*From those meetings where you have stayed to hear all the evidence, are there any contentions you would like to make to challenge, disprove or support the submissions made by other witnesses who have given evidence to this enquiry?*

DE: The schools lied; the MP talked waffle and was no help. The paper I gave to Paul Kenny after the unions showed that 5 gangs were laid off after Staples. The only person who's said there's a problem was the professor, but he said it's the Government to blame.

BM: The union representative and the professor both said that migration is not affecting unemployment, but it *has* to have an effect. The ONS figures show that just

under 700,000 jobs went to foreign nationals in 2011 alone – they *must* be coming in and taking jobs. The MP predicted migration in the tens of thousands in the next two years, but there's nothing to substantiate that claim; there has been net immigration into the UK each year of 250,000 for the last 3 years; 200,000 a year for the previous 12 years. And there's Greece and Portugal – we could get a lot more.

*At the education meeting we discussed the issue of very young children being sent considerable distances to school by taxi, you were going to go away and gather more evidence of other families who were in a similar situation, were you able to find more examples?*

DE: Shaz Albert's son is still travelling from Carlton Road to Butterwick, but no-one else has come forward; they believe the Council won't help. It's been in the Standard a few times.

*Chairman: We wrote to the Leader who wrote to the County Council about this and the County Council then provided £4.8m for extra school places, it provided 134 places, so there is movement.*

DE: That's one reason why I dispute what the education representatives said, because they got £4.8m after saying there were no problems.

*But they did raise a shortage of school places as an issue at the meeting; that is why we wrote!*

BM: I think they were answering questions about the education of children and they said that wasn't a problem. The problem was accommodation.

*Chairman: If any evidence can be disputed, if you've got evidence, we don't want to cover anything up. There will be differences of opinion. But how do we move forward? We will ensure the Director of Education gets that information [about the child travelling so far to school] because we don't want to see that happen.*

*What other recommendations would you like to see coming from the report?*

DE: Cap immigration and deal with what we've got. Stop the flow or the pressure building. Create jobs, homes, school places, get them integrating before we accept any more.

BM: We need to see the recommendations first before we can comment.

*You are proposing to hold a meeting to decide whether or not to hold the march.*

- a) Is this meeting mainly for members of the Boston Protest March group?*
- b) Have you invited local shopkeepers and the market traders?*
- c) Have you invited representatives from the Boston BID?*
- d) Have you approached any other local organisations?*
- e) Have you invited members of the public?*

*So at the conclusion of this meeting – who is eligible to vote and is there any criteria about whether people have to live in Boston in order to be eligible to vote?*

DE: No, it is open completely. It is open and the media are advertising it. It will be at 7.30 pm on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> July at the Assembly Rooms for a proper debate. Yes, we've invited representatives from the Boston BID, but they've not yet replied and I feel they won't attend. We've invited the police, the Chairman and other Members of the task and finish group and other members of the public. It is an open meeting. Anyone is eligible to vote, though I hope that just local people attend.

*If the march goes ahead are you proposing to do anything toward the cost of policing the event?*

DE: No, it's our democratic right and the police should police it.

*If the march goes ahead what have you done to indemnify yourself against any civil litigation?*

DE: We'll look into that if it's definitely going ahead.

*When you first raised the march it was because you wanted questions answering – from reading the press, it appears that the series of meetings have seen answers to many of your questions, yet you are still saying that the march needs to go ahead because you are not getting answers..... is it simply that the answers aren't what you want to hear, i.e. they don't confirm your perceptions – is it a case of the facts getting in the way of a story?*

DE: I haven't said we need to march; I'll let people decide that; I'm on the fence. I can carry on listening to you and the public; I'll let the public decide.

*How do you think it is helpful to keep promoting Boston in such a negative light?*

DE: Is there any other way to promote it? There've been four murders, five killed in an illegal distillery explosion. What's good about it? There's unemployment, low wages, high rents; there are very few things happening that are worth promoting.

BM: I disagree. There are many others in the country experiencing the same things and we should be proud of what we've achieved in a short time. We have highlighted the issues, our MP has raised them in the House of Commons, Ed Milliband admits the problems. Boston stands out as doing extremely well.

*If you do still march are you prepared for all of the other groups such as anti-fascism that are likely to join in – this march will have a huge drain on the very resources and funding that we are not getting – how will you justify using these valuable resources – what are you wanting to achieve?*

DE: It will cost a lot less than the cost of translation and benefits for migrants. We pay for services and it is our democratic right to protest. It is about issues affecting everyday people.

MR: Boston has had a poor image for several years, whether it's because we're fat or because of flooding etc. I think this is a cry for help. No-one wants Boston to be

seen in a worse light, but frustrations are boiling over. We want to get the message through to people who can help us to re-build the town.

*Is it your perception that the march will get high-jacked? Talking to extreme groups there is a likelihood.*

DE: It is a public demonstration so we can't control that. If we could we would; we don't want extreme groups to come. These are real issues and we want to do what's right for Boston and Boston people. We want it to be peaceful, that's all we want.

BM: We do have the democratic right to peaceful protest and to vote on it. Personally, I think there is a risk to damage and safety and I'll vote against it. It will be high-jacked and all Dean's good work and that of the protest group will be lost and it will be a victory for the politicians. I think the march should take place in London and not in Boston; it's not Boston's problem. There is fear; people want a peaceful proclamation.

*There is much criticism about the migrant communities not integrating with locals, I would ask you what have you personally done to try and help them integrate?*

DE: Nothing, but they have moved here. They know very little English, how can they integrate? Do you expect me to learn Polish?

*Could you tolerate and help people?*

DE: They should learn the language and the culture. They need the basic language; there are health and safety issues too.

BM: I am attending the Centre for Good Relations meetings, where there is open discussion, and I'm involved in the Alchemy Project with migrant representatives; it is enlightening.

MR: They stay very much in their own groups. They're not trying to integrate. There has been a massive change in the school playground, but the parents aren't integrating and they're not attending events. So it will improve in time but not at the moment. There are a lot of good people, but they are out-numbered by the not-so-good.

*If your concerns are about lack of funding and resources, then why not focus on that type of language – each time we hear the words migrants and not racist, it provokes exactly those thoughts?*

DE: I'm not thinking of funding; that would create more problems. I'm saying 'cap immigration'. If people say that's racist then they're not listening. I'm saying let's stop more coming in and deal with what we've got. There's a misconception about what we're about. Let's lobby Government to deal with it – they've flooded us – the Council needs to fight the Government on these issues.

BM: I don't understand the question, but using the word migrant is not meant derogatively; I'm a migrant! The unfortunate fact of life is that it's the migrant workers from eastern Europe that's resulting in these issues.

*Why is it that in places such as Spain it is positively reported when ex Brits form their own community, including English shops and English Bars, yet when the migrant community does the very same thing in UK its reported negatively – isn't it better to have shops open and trading?*

BM: Yes, it is better to have shops open, but it looks more like a take-over than integration and that has caused resentment. The majority are immigrants who come here to work and better themselves. In Spain, there are purposefully-built homes for ex-pats and they are not draining Spain's economy, they've created businesses etc. The eastern Europeans are sending money home and buying their stock from home.

*Dale Carnegie's book, 'How to Win Friends and Influence People' was first published in 1936 and included a chapter on 'How to Change People Without Giving Offense or Arousing Resentment'. Given the aggressive and most often patronising manner in which you have asked your own questions to all those who have offered evidence to the committee, how successful do you, as a 'concerned resident of Boston' think you have been in getting over your point of view and influencing this process?*

MR: I've not had the opportunity to read this book; you'll have to lend me a copy! I speak from my passion for the town. If I've ever come over in this way I apologise. It has been frustration because of the lack of effort from people who have the power to make the changes we need.

Other members of the public then came forward to give their views.

Derek Ferry: At the last local elections a Councillor came to Cherry Walk and I said we'd had a lot of migrants on the estate who I'd not met in years. I'd asked the Citizens' Advice Bureau, I've got a Lithuanian neighbour on one side and Polish on the other and I asked for language lessons so I could communicate with them, but they told me they had no provision and to go to the Council. I went to the Council but there was nothing. The Councillor said it was a "marvellous suggestion", but I've heard nothing.

Rob Lauberts: I believe there are free language lessons for OAPs at Boston College. Addressing Dean Everitt: Whether you march or not and if we hear nothing within 6 months or a year, what is your next course of action?

DE: The march is a show of support, to sway any decisions against migration. If there's no change, we'll put on another one and another and if it falls on deaf ears we'll have to shout louder and louder.

Michael Fallows: I've had a life in public service and I recognise the difficulties regarding perceptions and reality. But there has been extreme pressure on schools, doctors, the NHS, maternity provision, the ambulance service and an increase in criminality; it is noticeable. And it is especially noticed by the middle-aged and elderly. We've see the death of housing and the rise of speculative landlords.

People claiming benefits and homelessness – is that a perception? The Professor said Boston had ‘disproportionate problems’; so it’s not a perception, it is reality. Services were caught sadly unprepared. School classes and standards have been affected, but they are all God’s children. In the last 5 years there have been reactive comments by the Council, the County Council and the NHS but we’ve seen little change except distinct difficulties and distance. There are many benefits to migration but it seems to be a one-way flow. We’ve tried to do a lot to be hospitable, but when will there be real, creative action? I’ve not heard about these meetings until I read about this one last week in the paper! I would have liked more time from the Professor. These three members of the public don’t represent everything I do and I only get five minutes before the end of the meeting!

DE: Yes, the Council is secretive. They need to let people know.

Chairman: The meetings have appeared in the Standard over 1 or 2 pages every time and it’s on the Council’s website. How else can we distribute the information? You will be able to comment on the report. This may not be the end of the process. I understand your frustrations, but we need to look forward and it takes time. We’re aware of the issues relating to HMOs, school places, drinking in the street and we’re talking to migrants and they have similar views about drinking.

It’s the law. The Council and County Council have responsibility to provide services and they have suffered over the last five years. This is late, but we have to be doing something.

Christine Bishop: I am a retired headteacher. Surely, you need an action plan and meetings about the progress you’re making. People are frustrated, because there’s a lot of talk, but not a lot happening or seems to be happening. You need short-term gains and we’ve seen none. You need to make changes and constantly evaluate. You should have had terms of reference, a finite timetable, a forward plan and took the public into account.

Chairman: There will be an interim report in September to evaluate actions and we will consult on it. We want dialogue with you all on it. We welcome your support. We didn’t want to be 100% prescriptive; it has a very wide remit. We may convene in August to discuss actions.

MG: There is a wide spectrum to the issues. The report could have a ‘dissenting page’ to reflect all opinions.

DE: Who will write the report?

Chairman: The Chief Executive and senior management. It will take some time; we have several hundred pages of information. Is there any evidence you think we should re-examine? Or any more evidence we should obtain? For example, the GP who gave evidence to us last week regarding the strains on A&E etc; he didn’t think the migrant population had caused a major change, he said they needed recruitment of doctors and nurses. The education representatives said that the attainment in schools had been incredible. What kind of Boston do you want to see in the future? Some of the recommendations will be for the Government and we’ll work with our

MP with cross-party support on those. Some will be local changes. It's about getting people engaged. There is no magic wand!

MR: Why will the report take so long? I feel let down by the County Council. Are you taking all this to the County Council? We've seen very little from them.

Chairman: We spoke to the leaders from across the county and they all want to be involved. The same goes for the East Midlands Council and the UK Border Agency. We've got momentum and don't want to lose it, but I'm concerned about how achievable people's recommendations are.

Vice-Chairman: It is important that the report is robust; it is going to the Prime Minister with evidence and facts and we will draw it up to the best of our ability. We are not denying the challenges; that's why we're here. We need a chance to look at the evidence and assess it.

Peter Cook: I am a volunteer with the NHS on the HealthWatch scheme. Boston was the centre for repatriation for German troops during World War I and a lot of them stayed. There were Germans, Polish and Italians. This has been blown out of proportion; it has been a problem since then. It would be good to arrange for social groups to meet, but I've been told not to because of friction.

BM: I'd like to say thank you for the opportunity to get involved with this. At Monday's meeting, I hope people see common sense and see what has been achieved. We've done a lot more than the people on Facebook know.

The Chairman announced that this meeting concluded the task and finish group's series of evidence-gathering meetings. An interim report would be produced for public consultation and finalised in September.

(The meeting ended at 9 pm)

## Letters

# Ed Miliband is wrong to buy into the 'immigration is a problem' line

[guardian.co.uk](http://guardian.co.uk), Monday 25 June 2012 21.00 BST

It's sad to see the [Labour](#) leader ([Change rules on migrant workers, says Miliband](#), 22 June) is also buying into the general "immigration is a problem" line pursued by so many people in this country and which fuels the racist myths and prejudice surrounding migrants. Evidence suggests in general that migration is – and generally always has been – of significant economic benefit to the UK; that it has no impact on unemployment; and that migrants are – when allowed to be – hard-working and productive workers. If they undercut local wage levels, that is because exploitative employers are not effectively regulated and because trade unions have not been able to organise them. Certainly, there have been tensions when disproportionate numbers have arrived in a particular locality, but this is more about bad or no planning (as with the 2004 arrivals) and a lack of resources. Competition for resources occurs when the resources are inadequate, and we should not blame migrants for that. Barely 1% of all social rented lettings, for example, have gone to migrants from A8 countries ([the eight east European states that joined the EU in 2004](#)). We might also remember that a significant number of these migrants are being exploited in conditions akin to modern slavery, because the government will not provide adequate resources to regulate rogue labour suppliers. Miliband is looking at the wrong side of the coin.

**Gary Craig**

*Professor of community development and social justice, University of Durham*