

All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration

Address: APPG on Social Integration, c/o Chuka Umunna MP
 House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

Email: APPG.SocialIntegration@the-challenge.org

Website: SocialIntegrationAPPG.org.uk

Telephone: 07722553856

Notes from visit to Boston – 22/08/2016

Present (APPG members)

- APPG Chair – Chuka Umunna MP
- Matt Warman MP

Present (Boston Borough Council)

- Phil Drury, Chief Executive, Boston Borough Council
- Andy Fisher, Head of Housing, Properties & Communities, Boston Borough Council
- Councillor Peter Bedford, Leader of Boston Borough Council
- Councillor Michael Brookes, Deputy Leader of Boston Borough Council
- Councillor Paul Gleeson, Vice-chair of the Task & Finish Group on Population Change
- Councillor Michael Copper, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Property & Communities at Boston Borough Council
- Pauline Chapman, Executive Assistant, Boston Borough Council

Present (others)

- One member of staff from the Chair's office
- Two members of staff from The Challenge (the Secretariat)
- Stuart Hellon, Boston Citizen's Advice Bureau
- Reverend Alison Buxton, St Botolphs Church
- Liz Hopkins, Chief Executive, Centrepont Out Reach
- Paul Drury, Lincolnshire County Council
- Members of the local Age UK community group
- Members of the University of the Third Age (U3A) community group
- Damian Bemben, Boston Youth Council
- Bruna Cardoso, Boston Youth Council
- Four police cadets
- Neal Mugglestone, Churches Together
- Amanda Mosek, Principal Boston College
- Superintendent Paul Timmins, Lincolnshire Police
- Ziedonis Barbaks, Chair of Latvian Community in Boston

Overview

The visit to Boston was held as part of the APPG's inquiry into the integration of immigrants, which explored how communities could be better supported to manage demographic and cultural change and better facilitate integration, and what the division of responsibility for integration policy should be within government.

As part of the inquiry, the APPG conducted a series of site visits, including this one to Boston, to speak to different communities across the country, and learn about the views and perspectives of a wide variety of people on the integration of immigrants. The evidence gathered on these visits informed the inquiry's interim and final reports, published in January 2017 and August 2017 respectively.

Session 1 – Cllrs, council officers & community leaders:

Alongside Chuka Umunna MP and Matt Warman MP from the APPG, and members of staff from the Chair's office and the APPG's Secretariat, The Challenge, this session included:

- Phil Drury, Chief Executive, Boston Borough Council
- Andy Fisher, Head of Housing, Properties & Communities, Boston Borough Council
- Councillor Peter Bedford, Leader of Boston Borough Council
- Councillor Michael Brookes, Deputy Leader of Boston Borough Council
- Councillor Paul Gleeson, Vice-chair of the Task & Finish Group on Population Change
- Councillor Michael Copper, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Property & Communities at Boston Borough Council
- Stuart Hellon, Boston Citizen's Advice Bureau
- Reverend Alison Buxton, St Botolphs Church
- Liz Hopkins, Chief Executive, Centrepoint Out Reach
- Paul Drury, Lincolnshire County Council

Discussion proceeded as follows:

- The Chair of the APPG, Chuka Umunna MP, began the discussion by saying that the APPG was ready to listen to a wide range of voices on the subject of the integration of immigrants, following the EU referendum in which immigration was a key topic of debate.
- The group noted that, between the 2001 and 2011 censuses, Boston attracted ten thousand new residents – experiencing a **wave of mass migration**.
- The officials voiced a view that both the **Leave and Remain campaigns** in the EU referendum failed to convincingly convey a sense of the decision facing Britain to Bostonians. They suggested that many local people voted for '*a mass exodus of Eastern Europeans from the town, or at least no new arrivals*'.
- A number of officers suggested that **anti-immigrant sentiment** in Boston should be interpreted as an expression of frustration at the '*gross failure of central government to recognise or act on pressure on public services*'. Whilst the government bases funding allocations on census figures, the group felt that the census had failed to capture the extent of the town's population growth.

- The officers noted that Boston ranks amongst the **bottom five towns for average salary** in the UK – workers in the local agriculture industry in particular often receive the minimum wage and are subject to zero-hour contracts – and yet its housing market is characterised by the highest rents in the East Midlands.
- A leading local councillor said that changes to in-work benefits have further squeezed household incomes amongst Boston’s population.
- The group also stated that rogue landlords had taken advantage of the town’s population growth to exploit new residents, and said that a sense that **‘the free market is broken’** spurs on feelings of dissatisfaction and frustration.
- The group noted that members of the host community often complain about immigrants *‘hanging around the street’*. Whilst this is often the result of private sector landlords only allowing tenants access to their room at certain times of day – renting beds in shifts and converting communal spaces in larger properties into bedrooms in order to maximise rent – all Bostonians see is what they perceive to be **anti-social behavior**.
- The officers agreed that the biggest barrier to integration in Boston is a **lack of basic English language skills** amongst more than 50% of the town’s immigrants. Immigrants do develop these skills organically, but this process usually takes at least five to 10 years. Children, who typically pick up the language much more quickly than their parents, often act as interpreters for their parents, but this is a limited and unsatisfactory solution. **ESOL classes are too expensive and too difficult to access** for immigrants who work long hours for little pay.
- There are also **less obvious cultural barriers to mixing** between immigrants and members of the settled population. The officers noted that many native Bostonians tend to avoid visiting shops run by members of immigrant communities. This is partly a result of nuances such as how these shops are presented – some Polish and Romanian shops have been influenced by the Soviet-era Eastern European practice of filling shopfronts with pictures (to disguise or distract from a sparsity of goods,) which alienates and discourages White British shoppers.
- The officials noted that it can be **unhelpful to conceive of Boston’s migrant community as a single entity** – it features both single young workers who *‘are just passing through’* and aren’t interested in making a home in the town, as well as families who share many of the same concerns and aspirations as the host community.
- The group argued that the **‘old-fashioned multicultural model’** of engagement with migrant communities hasn’t worked in Boston, as traditional community structures and hierarchies haven’t been imported to the town, as with waves of immigration at other points in history or in other parts of the UK. Some officials suggested that there should be more emphasis on developing Eastern European community leaders.

Session 2 – Over 65s:

Alongside Chuka Umunna MP and Matt Warman MP from the APPG, and members of staff from their respective offices and the APPG's Secretariat, The Challenge, this session included 14 over-65s, who were members of the local Age UK and University of the Third Age (U3A) community groups.

Discussion proceeded as follows:

- The vast majority of those present said they **had voted to leave** the EU, and stated that was a response both to the way Boston had changed as a result of immigration, and the transfer of decision-making powers to Brussels. Some also suggested they had voted to leave in order to protect a sense of English national character.
- The group expressed a sense of **bewilderment and unease at the pace of change** in Boston – saying they were not opposed to immigration as a concept, *'it's just that it's gone too far and too fast'*. One woman said that Boston was *'not our town no more'*; another said that the town was *'not where you come from no more'*; an elderly man said it *'stopped feeling like home around eight years ago'*.
- Some of the older Bostonians voiced a complaint that the arrival of migrants had meant that young people, including their children and grandchildren, were unable to afford property in the town, and had led to a shortage of school places: ***'If there was more provision, we probably wouldn't feel so overwhelmed'***.
- A number of older women expressed a view that **migrants were consciously seeking to 'gain control'** of areas of the town: *'foreigners move in, buy a house, fill it with fifteen people, draw the money from that and buy up the street'*.
- Some members of the group suggested that **migrants 'feel no need to integrate'** into Boston as they had arrived in the town *'a ready-made community'* alongside family members and friends.
- Most agreed they had **very little social contact with migrants**, who attend different cafes and pubs to them. One woman noted that the local English and Polish catholic communities attend separate parishes led by separate priests and affiliated to separate religious bodies.
- Some did, however, describe meeting and mixing with migrants at BBQs and community picnics and through community centres.
- A number of older Bostonians also commented on the **positive impacts of immigration** on their town – noting the *'buzz about town'* and the thriving local high street.

Session 3 -Young people:

Alongside Chuka Umunna MP and Matt Warman MP from the APPG, and members of staff from their respective offices and the APPG's Secretariat, The Challenge, this session included Damian Bembem and Bruno Cardoso from Boston Youth Council, and four police cadets.

Discussion proceeded as follows:

- The young people who participated in this discussion expressed **significantly more positive views and attitudes towards immigration** than the older Bostonians. One young woman said: *'Change is a good thing and community identity is about who's there at the time'*.
- One young Bostonian, himself the son of Polish migrants, said he felt **disenfranchised** as a result of the *'false claims and empty promises'* of the Leave campaign, and disgusted by Leave campaigners describing *'a swarm'* of migrants: *'These are people you're friends with, and suddenly you see a campaign calling them rodents'*.
- Another young man voiced a view that **migrants have 'used our country'** and *'don't give back'*, describing the practice of sending benefits to their families abroad as *'abuse of the system'*.
- Despite the obvious variety of views within the group, all of the young people agreed that none of those migrants who were already living in Boston and the UK should be forced to return home.
- The young people agreed that **Boston High School** is **fairly integrated**, with pupils of different heritages mixing regularly. The group agreed that this was in large part as migrant pupils at the school are very comfortable speaking English, and noted that teenagers have to pass Eleven Plus to gain entry to the school.
- On the other hand, some of the young people said that the White British and Eastern European pupils at **Boston College** mix with one another less – describing the college as **'very segregated'** and *'split down the middle'*.
- The group felt that their generation was more integrated than that of their parents. One young man of Polish descent said of his father, *'he has English friends but they're rooted in where he works. He doesn't hang out with them outside of work'*.
- They noted that the **local economy can discourage mixing** between migrants and members of the settled population: *'When you're time poor, making friends isn't a priority – you focus on finding and keeping work and on your family. You don't have the energy for community'*.
- The teenagers suggested that better enforcement of minimum wage laws would facilitate integration.
- The group also suggested that **uniform public service and youth social action programmes** work to boost social mixing, as do **community events** (they described a Lithuanian Užgavėnės celebration held in the town centre.) One young man also suggested that people should be taught more about where casual racism can lead societies, citing his own experience of the *Lessons from Auschwitz* initiative.

Section 4 - Police, college, community:

Alongside Chuka Umunna MP and Matt Warman MP from the APPG, and members of staff from their respective offices and the APPG's Secretariat, The Challenge, this session included Neal Mugglestone

from Churches Together, Amanda Mosek, Principal of Boston College, Superintendent Paul Timmins from Lincolnshire Police, and Ziedonis Barbaks, Chair of the Latvian Community in Boston.

Discussion proceeded as follows:

- The group spoke about changes that have occurred within churches – the Catholic congregation has increased from approximately 60 to 600.
- Looking back historically, the group said there is now a lack of community leaders compared to previous waves of migration.
- The group alluded to **two distinct migrant groups** that live in Boston – young people who come over with parents who have high aspirations, and young men seeking work on a short-term basis.
- A teacher present at the session said they weren't sure the Brexit vote was an expression of anti-establishment feeling, but rather a response to what people saw before their eyes in Boston: a crumbling NHS, street drinking, and neighbourhoods over capacity. The isolation that people in small market towns feel also played a part.
- As in previous sessions, some of those present **related the Brexit vote to a sense of national pride**. *'We like England. We didn't just vote Leave because of issues or sovereignty or economics, but because we wanted to preserve our national character.'*
- The **wide array of different languages** present in Boston was cited as a key reason for a lack of integration, with some in the discussion saying that hearing other languages generates a *'sense of dislocation.'*
- The group engaged in a detailed discussion on **street drinking**, and how this is often a social problem attributed to migrants in particular. In reality, the split between migrants and White British people when it comes to street drinking is 40/60 – while this is disproportionality high in terms of the number of migrants, the migrant population is also disproportionately of a lower income. Repeat street drinking offenders tend to be Bostonians.
- The group said the demographic make-up of a wave of immigrants can be the problem, rather than the wave itself. The 2006 wave was made up of a large number of young males, aged 18-35 - the demographic group that commits by far the most regular crime.
- 47% of people who go through custody in Boston are from migrant backgrounds, often because they do not have sufficient English skills to receive fixed penalty notice. Most serious offences are not disproportionately committed by migrant groups. More broadly, police have seen an influx of organised crime, including a rise in human trafficking and counterfeit goods.
- Within **schools**, police perceive **children to be well-integrated**, but this doesn't necessarily translate into mixing between their parents. A teacher present at the discussion followed on from this by saying that at college, children from different ethnic backgrounds do mix, and that where they don't, it's because they don't have the English language skills.

- In contrast to the mixing that teenagers engage in at school, **20-30 year-olds don't mix** as much, which is partly the result of their working environments. People from different ethnic backgrounds within this age group often live completely separate lives, with both their work and accommodation co-ordinated by agencies.
- The discussion also touched on **intergenerational issues** around Brexit, and the fact that there is a "*ticking time bomb of grievance*" felt by young people who voted Remain, and believe the older generation robbed them of their future.
- **Churches Together** was referenced as positive outdoor event which helps bring communities together.