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Select Committee on Communities and Local Government Committee [Written Evidence](#)

Memorandum by the West Norfolk Partnership

BACKGROUND TO KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK

The Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk is predominantly a rural district within the county of Norfolk. The borough is the 8th largest local authority by area in the country at 1,428.8 square kilometres, containing 102 parishes, as well as the unparished urban area of King's Lynn. The total population of the borough is 142,300,^[45] making it the 355th most sparsely populated local authority nationally. The predominant urban area is the town of King's Lynn (with a population of 41,679^[46]), although the distance from the larger cities of Peterborough (38 miles), Cambridge (45 miles) and Norwich (50 miles) means that the town performs the service functions of a much larger centre.

Over the past decade parts of King's Lynn and the wider borough have received a significant influx of economic migrants, mainly from the accession A8 countries that joined the EU in 2004. Between 2004 and 2007 the borough wide area has received the third highest number of migrant workers in the Eastern region- just behind Peterborough and Luton.^[47] The arrival of large numbers of migrants, particularly from Poland, Lithuania and Latvia, as well as Portugal has increasingly become a contentious issue in certain parts of the borough and has put a certain strain on the provision of certain public services, as well as having an increasing effect on existing community relations.

The West Norfolk Partnership (WNP) is the local strategic partnership (LSP) for the borough.

The report "Our Shared Future" published by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion identifies five descriptive types of area where community cohesion issues have been identified. This was done in a bid to highlight local distinctiveness in experiences of migration. We believe that West Norfolk very much falls into the category of "changing less affluent rural areas"—identified by the report as a particular type of area experiencing cohesion challenges. Appendix A, taken from this report clearly shows that data collated from the 2006 BVPI survey indicates that King's Lynn and West Norfolk is part of a larger area around the Wash experiencing lower than national levels of cohesion. We recognise, as the commission's report does, the local context and factors that influence responses to migration and contribute to community cohesion. Similarly the invitation for evidence for this inquiry asks for particular regard to areas that have experienced rapid increases in new inward migration and areas that have lack of experience of diversity. We believe the challenges facing King's Lynn and West Norfolk are very much influenced by these broad criteria and appreciate the opportunity to expand on these further through this invitation.

SYNOPSIS

We would like to draw the committee's attention to the following points, which are considered important to community cohesion in King's Lynn and West Norfolk. In this memorandum these factors are divided into thematic paragraphs, for ease of the committee. However it is worth noting that we recognise and indeed emphasise that many of these factors act in conjunction with one another and do not operate in isolation, particularly when examining their overall impact upon community cohesion.

GAPS IN STATISTICS

It has been noted generally that there is a certain lack of knowledge and confidence in statistics relating to levels of in-migration to the UK over recent years. Although there is a lack of confidence in statistics nationally, the lack of robust statistics at a local level has been a considerable problem facing West Norfolk. Whilst there have been attempts to ascertain a figure for A8 accession migrants in West Norfolk, either via National Insurance number registrations or the WRS (Worker's Registration Scheme) these numbers have tended to underestimate the true level of migrants. In 2006 the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Inclusions Project report by the Norwich and Norfolk Racial Equality Council (NNREC) estimated that there was a minimum of 7,000 migrants from the A8 countries registered with an employer in Norfolk. Data provided by King's Lynn Asylum and Refugee Support (KLARS), supported by various anecdotal sources suggest that figures are much higher.

This gap in knowledge of who is moving to West Norfolk is further compounded by the lack of any national data that is collected along grounds of nationality opposed to ethnicity. Census data is collected along predominantly ethnicity lines—ie "White-British", "Asian-British" and "White-Other". However this information often fails to highlight differences that can impact substantially upon community cohesion, particularly in an area such as West Norfolk. The category of "White-other" encompasses all of the nationalities of those EU-accession migrants that make up the bulk of those coming to King's Lynn, therefore masking the national and particularly linguistic differences which has a significant impact on planning for service provision and on community relations.

The lack of accurate numbers makes it difficult to predict and plan for change. The difficulty in being able to accurately map the diverse and rapidly changing communities of West Norfolk has implications for strategies for tackling community cohesion.

RISE OF THE FAR RIGHT

The recent rise of the British National Party in parts of King's Lynn is worthy of note. In the local elections held on the 3 May 2007 one BNP candidate in North Lynn came within 59 votes of being elected, with both BNP candidates picking up 34% of the vote in this ward between them. It has been noted that if the BNP had fielded a single candidate opposed to two in this two-member ward then the BNP probably would have been elected. Such a dramatic rise in an area not normally considered politically extremist attracted national media attention:

For the first time the BNP will be fighting for votes in such areas as King's Lynn, Norfolk, anti-fascists campaigners suspect the BNP is attempting to exploit fears over the arrival of eastern-European workers to pick up support.

(Nigel Morris, Home Affairs Correspondent Independent 13 April 2007)

The near electoral success in one ward in King's Lynn highlights not only the rapidly changing demographics but also the spatial variances in experiences of migration and the small scale that these often operate within.

Misconceptions

Intrinsically linked with the potential for the increase in BNP support in King's Lynn are more widespread misconceptions about the perceived threats of inward migration into the area. Anecdotal evidence suggests that common perceptions amongst members of the resident population are that immigrants are "taking all our jobs". This perception is contradictory to statistical evidence that overall unemployment across the borough is low and immigration has had limited impact upon this. In fact many migrant workers constitute an important element of the local economy, taking on jobs in the agricultural and food processing industries, contributing to the success of these industries locally.

The committee will be aware that such misconceptions and sentiments are not limited to King's Lynn but have a national resonance and can lead to a resident population feeling not only fear and threat towards migrants but a certain degree of victimisation at the hands of in-migration. In King's Lynn such misconceptions have been fuelled by the local media, who are equally unused to reporting the complex issues and impact of these on society locally. For example headlines related to criminal activity mention the nationality of the perpetrator in the case of people of non-British nationality (see appendix B, taken from the *Lynn News* on 15 January 2008).

The West Norfolk Diverse Community Forum, established by the West Norfolk Partnership, has recognised the impact on community cohesion that the local media can induce. Appendix C to this memorandum is a copy of correspondence sent on behalf of the West Norfolk Diverse Community Forum to a local newspaper in response to the concerns highlighted above.

Lack of Knowledge and Skills

The often provocative prose of the media, as well as the more overtly inflammatory literature distributed by the BNP is often not being challenged enough. As mentioned previously King's Lynn is one of the areas that is experiencing large scale in-migration for the first time in recent history. There is lack of dedicated resource capacity and knowledge and skills to address many of the aspects around community cohesion or to challenge many of the negative impacts upon this mentioned above. As a consequence, the following statement resonates strongly with our experiences:

Those rural areas with clusters of migrant workers can face significant public service challenges. Local authorities and their partners can have capacity challenges (compared to larger and better resourced urban authorities) as well as issues around knowledge and skills they need to respond effectively.

(A8 migrant workers in rural areas, Briefing paper.

Commission for Rural Communities: January 2007)

We are clear about the challenges this element of local community leadership presents to the council and its councillors, largely inexperienced in handling issues of this nature and sensitivity. Much of the expertise available on managing migration and community cohesion is urban-centric. In West Norfolk and across similar rural authorities, particularly around the Wash, we recognise that there needs to be a greater understanding of the issues involved in service provision and the impacts on community cohesion that the recent migrations from the A8 accession countries are having. The WNP has recently been successful in securing funding and support through the IDEa Migrant Worker Excellent Practice Programme and has been working closely, at both a strategic and operational level, with our neighbouring authority Fenland District Council to jointly promote equality and diversity in a bid to tackle the cohesion issues arising around in-migration. The WNP believes that increased research needs to be undertaken to examine the geographies of migrant workers' lifestyles, as they often differ greatly from that of established populations. Better cross-boundary working would be one way of approaching this, recognising that traditional district, county and regional boundaries are regularly crossed and have little relevance to many of the new migrants, particularly around the Wash area.

Language Difficulties

One of the biggest challenges facing local service providers are issues around translation. The ability to deliver effective translation has significant resource implications for the council and partners, but also has the ability to impact on community cohesion. Norfolk Police Constabulary has spent £192,000 pounds on translation costs in the Western division of the county in 2006-07, mainly on Polish, Lithuanian and Russian. This figure represents two thirds of the police's county-wide spend on

translation services. The amount of money spent on translation across local service providers remains a contentious issue, as demonstrated by the reports in the local media:

Translation costs you £100,000 a year (*Lynn News* front page head line 2006)

The scarcity of resource for translation costs, crucial for increased integration and understanding between migrants, service providers and established populations is a concern in West Norfolk and providing an effective and comprehensive translation service is seen as important tool in tackling many of the issues around community cohesion highlighted within this evidence to the committee.

The West Norfolk Partnership, as well as many of the component service providers, has taken forward a number of local initiatives in tackling this issue. A "Welcome Pack" for West Norfolk has been developed since 2005. Supported by the West Norfolk Diverse Community forum, "Welcome to West Norfolk is a booklet, translated in five different languages, containing key information on five key themes of employment and benefits, housing, health, education and community services. Information is included on rules and procedures surrounding ownership and the use of vehicles and on the electoral register and voting. A second edition of the welcome pack is in development and funding has recently been secured from GO-East for an audio version of the pack.

Service providers have also actively recruited from the recent migrant groups in a bid to improve their service provision to new members of the community. Both the local police and PCT have recruited multi-lingual staff as an approach to this problem. The West Norfolk Partnership is also in the process of developing English courses for new migrants in community centres. Despite the positive activity in addressing language barriers, led by the WNP, there is considerable concern about continuing ability to resource such initiatives. For example government funding for ESOL training has been withdrawn.

Demand on Services

The influx of a predominantly young migrant population has impacted on the ability to provide key services and has led to increased pressure on certain specific local services. The rapid pace of this change has increased this pressure too. For example the Queen Elizabeth Hospital has reported that maternity services are particularly under strain from the changing demographics of the local area, as migrant Latvians especially place a greater demand on resources.

A recent report has also highlighted a problem which is difficult to tackle and is becoming increasingly prevalent:

Those with ongoing medical conditions or sudden health needs have occasionally turned to the hospital based services such as Accident and Emergency at Queen Elizabeth Hospital, King's Lynn. Sometimes gangmasters or even the police have been involved in getting such patients seen. Because anyone can access emergency care at A&E without having to produce documentation or proof of address, and because the GUM clinic stresses confidentiality, they are considered safer than other NHS outlets be undocumented migrant workers. Unsurprisingly this involves requests for help with problems beyond the remit of hospital services.[48]

Such increased demand on specific services is by no means unique to West Norfolk, but a consequence of an influx of migrants in other parts of the country. However the rural nature of the borough has magnified the effect of this increased pressure, with fewer access points to key services than many more urbanised areas. Services such as maternity care and schooling experience "bottle-necks" as a consequence and often there is lack of resource to deal with all the issues involved with increased pressure from a new migrant community. The concentration of new migrants in certain parts of a sparsely populated borough can be highly visible which in turn also exacerbates the problem, and can increase community tensions, particularly if perceived inequalities are seized upon by the media. The example of certain key services experiencing increased pressure in certain spatial locations is demonstrated by the increase of Eastern European enrolment in primary schools. In certain parts of King's Lynn, such as the Greyfriars Primary School the percentage of pupils with English as a second language has increased to over 30%, whilst in other parts of the borough it remains extremely low.

Obviously such unequal impacts of migration require more spatial specific solutions than borough-wide initiatives. This has significant community cohesion issues especially when the possibility of unequal allocation of resources between localities and different groups can be viewed negatively.

45 ONS (2006) Estimate. [Back](#)

46 ONS (2004) mid-census figure. [Back](#)

47 Workers registration scheme approved applications by Government office region, local authorities and nationally (May 2004-07). [Back](#)

48 Dr Becky Taylor and Dr Ben Rogaly (2003) Report on Migrant working in West Norfolk. [Back](#)

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