

REPORT

COME TOGETHER

LESSONS FROM BEDFORD ON
REACHING OUT TO BRITAIN'S
MOST ISOLATED MINORITIES

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February 2017
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Institute for Public Policy Research

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Registered charity no: 800065 (England and Wales), SC046557 (Scotland).

This paper was first published in February 2017. © 2017

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This briefing would not have been possible without the generous support of the Harpur Trust. We would like to thank stakeholders in Bedford Borough Council, local community groups and organisations and local schools for their insight and advice for our research. In particular, we would like to thank Patrick Murphy from Bedford Borough Council and Ambia Khatun from Sports4Wellbeing. While this report has been supported by the Harpur Trust, the contents and opinions in this report are those of IPPR alone. IPPR is an independent thinktank and retains editorial control of all its publications. At IPPR, many thanks to Phoebe Griffith, Marley Morris, Bill Davies and Kieren Walters for their advice and comments on this report. All errors and omissions remain the author's own.

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Citation

If you are using this document in your own writing, our preferred citation is:

Murray C (2017) *Come together: Lessons from Bedford on reaching out to Britain's most isolated minorities*, IPPR. <http://www.ippr.org/publications/come-together-lessons-from-bedford>

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SUMMARY

60-SECOND SUMMARY

Migrant integration is one of Britain's most politically sensitive topics. Yet what facilitates and impedes integration, and even the definition of what 'integration' actually means, are difficult to pin down. This report looks at the town of Bedford, to gain an insight into what works, and what doesn't, in creating a socially cohesive town. Having had similar levels of immigration as most towns and cities in Britain, and given its diverse population and conventional socioeconomic profile, Bedford is an instructive case study to investigate integration in Britain today.

The government recently commissioned Dame Louise Casey to undertake a review into the integration of Britain's most isolated communities. That review raised alarm at the poor state of integration in Britain. While it made some important observations, it offered few concrete suggestions for what can be done. This report looks at how Bedford's residents have made integration work for their community. We argue that Bedford's experience shows how concrete, empowering interventions can boost integration.

Some factors make Bedford a well-integrated place: the pace of demographic change has been steady and there has been good local leadership. Local people have made small adaptations to make the process of integration easier for newcomers. Community groups have proven resilient.

But for some parts of Bedford's community, integration has been more difficult. There is some evidence that enclaves are starting to develop. Bedford can try to head off these developments – by using planning legislation to foster ethnic diversity, for example.

The least integrated groups include eastern European migrant workers – particularly men who tend to socialise with others of their nationality and may be in Bedford transiently – and some groups of Asian Muslim women. Our focus groups with women from this hard-to-reach group found that household responsibilities, very low levels of confidence, traditional views of women's roles in the family and little understanding of the options available combined to inhibit many of these women from engaging with wider Bedford society.

Some have argued that these women should be compelled to integrate, and penalised if they do not; yet our research found that the most effective strategy to overcoming this lack of integration is through actions to empower these women to overcome their obstacles. Simple adaptations to existing provision have been effective in Bedford, making a significant difference to many lives. Further small, sensitive adaptations to service provision could help build levels of confidence and mitigate family members' concerns about women's integration. These empowering adaptations offer instructive examples to other parts of the country, where there are concerns that some parts of the community are not integrated.

KEY FINDINGS

Bedford has a long history of immigration, with major waves arriving from the 1950s, from a variety of different ethnicities. Civil society has broadly responded well to the challenges posed by increasing diversity, and local decision-makers have shown leadership in prioritising the issues of cohesion. But the pace of change is picking up. High levels of immigration are having an impact. Internal migration of ethnic minority Britons and higher birth rates among the non-white British population mean that all areas of Bedford have become more diverse over the past 20 years – and this trend is set to continue.

Barriers to integration for eastern European workers and Asian Muslim women

While the town is largely well integrated today, there are signs that enclaves are beginning to form. Data analysis from the 2011 census suggests this, as does our qualitative research undertaken with local residents, civil society stakeholders and service providers. Increasingly, there have been concerns that some migrants are not integrating well in the town, leading separate lives that leave little room for engagement with the rest of Bedford's population. This is particularly the case for eastern European workers and among the Asian Muslim community.

For **eastern European workers**, EU free movement rules meant that while some settle in Bedford and gradually become part of the community, others come only transiently. Working largely among speakers of their own language, living in bedsits and with little call to establish passing contact with the rest of the town, these migrants – particularly men, who have less contact with services such as schools than women – do not follow the pathway of integration that previous migrants to Bedford have laid down.

Some **Asian Muslim women** have apparently struggled to establish even basic indicators of integration, such as learning some English or establishing connections outside the cultural group even after living in the town a long time. A range of factors combined to impede their integration.

- Hostility of family members to their engagement with people outside the social group, from husbands, mothers-in-law and parents for social and cultural reasons, and from some sons on religious grounds.
- Low levels of confidence impeded these women from making the steps that facilitate the integration of other migrants. Engaging with public services, going somewhere on their own, approaching authority figures or travelling to an unfamiliar part of the town were simply too intimidating.
- Household and caring responsibilities reducing the time and opportunities available for integrating.

We found evidence that sensitive adaptations that allowed women to overcome these obstacles could have a transformative impact on their integration. For example, a local swimming pool secured permission to run a women-only swimming class, which it targeted (primarily, but not exclusively) at Asian Muslim women. Over time, this swimming class reduced scepticism from hostile family members. Women's confidence increased, and they managed to collectively organise their

childcare responsibilities. Small, judicious and empowering adaptations made integration easier.

Adaptations such as these can be controversial. Gender segregation, especially in order to cater to religiously conservative groups, is a contentious issue. Similarly, using compulsive strategies to compel migrants to integrate causes concern in some quarters – but when used judiciously and in ways that are empowering and not punitive, there is a place for such measures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Target English language learning at the most isolated migrants and set up an interest-free loan to pay for tuition.
- Educate boys on the role of older women as well as girls of their own age.
- Develop the provision of culturally-sensitive childcare.
- Set up an integration hub in areas where migrant workers congregate.
- Establish a selective landlord licensing scheme.

1. INTRODUCTION

Bedford is a socially integrated town that is coping well with diversity and migration. This has partly been due to the nature of immigration to the town: flows of migrants have been slow and steady rather than sudden. New arrivals have come from a wide range of places, meaning the town's population profile is mixed and less likely to fall into patterns of residential segregation. Bedford's history of receiving migrants, which dates back to the 1950s, has also made it easier to absorb larger flows of newcomers in recent years. Alongside these factors, strong leadership and a resilient civil society have actively helped preserve levels of trust throughout the community. Local public services have been adaptable as their client base has changed, making it easier for newcomers to access the support they need to integrate. However, for social integration to continue and for positive attitudes to diversity to take root, focused and consistent effort is needed.

PURPOSE AND CONTEXT OF THIS REPORT

This report provides an analysis of the social integration of different communities living in Bedford today and recommendations for ensuring that integration continues in the face of increased diversity in the town (the research methodology is described in box 1.1). Because the ethnic makeup of Bedford represents the demographics of England as a whole remarkably closely, many of the issues addressed in this report go to the heart of our national debate.

Our research reveals growing local concerns that certain groups are increasingly separating themselves from the mainstream community. Two groups in particular are seen to be struggling to integrate: a minority of south Asian Muslim women, many of whom arrive in the country as dependents, and migrant workers from Central and Eastern Europe working in temporary, low-skilled jobs. We argue that this is by no means inevitable. With the right policies and interventions, these groups can be brought into the mainstream of the community.

The UK's decision to leave the European Union will likely have long-term consequences for the diversity of towns like Bedford, as the government seeks to reduce the scale of future migration to the UK. But questions on dealing with diversity should not be put on ice while we await the outcome of the Brexit negotiations. Diversity will continue to be a fact of life in Bedford and other British towns, even after the UK leaves the EU, and the challenges and opportunities presented by a diverse community are too significant to be ignored by local policymakers in the interim.

While the report focuses on the challenges and opportunities within Bedford, there are lessons to be learned for wider society and the UK's approach to social integration more generally. As such, the recommendations we provide reach beyond the geographical borders of Bedford itself.

STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

Chapter 2 examines the diversity of Bedford now and in the future, including key demographic trends and patterns of immigration. Chapter 3 then draws on our research findings to explore whether or not the town is becoming more segregated and the challenges of diversity. Chapter 4 considers the reasons why Bedford is relatively resilient to the challenges presented, and provides examples of good practice. These are built on in our concluding chapter, which provides recommendations for actions to further foster and consolidate integration in the town.

Box 1.1

Project methodology

The research for this project took place between February and September 2016, and was comprised of three components:

1. Desk-based research looked at census data, council statistics and the existing literature.
2. We held 12 semi-structured interviews in Bedford with key stakeholders working in civil society and voluntary organisations, as well as local service providers, council officials and head teachers.
3. To gain a greater insight into the challenges faced by groups who find it particularly difficult to integrate in Bedford, we held four focus groups: the first two with Asian-origin Muslim women who described themselves as having integrated relatively well in Bedford, and the second two with Asian-origin Muslim women who said they had struggled to integrate.

These problems are by no means unique to Bedford. Late in 2016, Dame Louise Casey reported on her government-commissioned review into exclusion and opportunity in Britain's most isolated communities. Dame Louise's review raised serious concerns around sexism in minority communities, increasing segregation in certain areas, and too little being done to promote integration (Casey 2016). There is a regular, steady drumbeat of stories in the national press raising concerns about poorly integrated groups, particularly from the Muslim community. For example, the former head of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, Trevor Phillips, warned in 2016 that Britain's Muslims risked becoming a 'nation within a nation' (Barrett 2016). Others push back against such an analysis, warning that demonising minorities risks making matters worse (Kamm 2016).

It is important that our national conversation on integration is robust and honest. But we must ensure that that conversation does not identify problems without also looking for pathways to a solution. The debate on

integration can be febrile and heated. IPPR believes that, on integration, we should be focussed on practical, workable solutions that can demonstrably improve integration on the everyday level. This report on Bedford, therefore, looks at the concrete, quotidian actions that help or hinder integration. Our research finds that looking at Bedford allows us to better understand how the integration of isolated groups takes place in today's Britain, away from the dichotomy set up by the national debate.

2. BEDFORD

AN INCREASINGLY DIVERSE PLACE

Bedford is no stranger to ethnic diversity. Workers, family members, students and refugees from divergent parts of the world have made the town their home over many decades. Migrants first started arriving in significant numbers – mainly from Italy and Poland – to work at the London Brick Company in the 1950s. Today there are around 14,000 people of Italian ancestry living in Bedford (BBC no date). Later migrants included Indian Asians, some of whom arrived after being expelled from Uganda and Tanzania in the 1970s, and others who came from the subcontinent in the 1970s and 1980s. African and black Caribbean communities have also settled there. Most recently, the expansion of the EU in 2004 has driven increases in migrants from Central and Eastern Europe, as many came to Britain to work, primarily in the construction and agricultural sectors (Rienzo 2015). The number of Polish-speaking children enrolled in Bedford's schools has doubled since 2012 (Bedford Borough Council 2015a).

This is in contrast to some other parts of the country, which have recently seen abrupt changes as a result of immigration; instead, Bedford has diversified steadily over the course of several decades, and it continues to do so. The proportions of almost all minority ethnic groups in the town increased between the 2000 and 2011 censuses (Wohland et al 2016).

In some ways, Bedford can be seen as an English 'everytown'. Unemployment is roughly in line with the English average (1.9 per cent of the working-age population in Bedford compared with 1.6 per cent in England in September 2015). In Bedford 8.4 per cent of people are in receipt of out-of-work benefits, compared with 9.1 per cent in England overall. And for many ethnic groups, the proportion of Bedford's population that they comprise is roughly similar to the overall figure for England (Bedford Borough Council 2016a).

However, Bedford is more ethnically diverse than England overall: 28.5 per cent of Bedford borough's population is from a black or minority ethnic (BME) background, according to the 2011 census, compared with 20.2 per cent of England's population (with the figure falling to 14 per cent if London is excluded). Bedford has higher-than-average numbers of residents of south Asian and central and eastern European origin (Bedford Borough Council 2016b).

The town's diversity is on track to increase both in absolute terms and as a proportion of the borough population. Forty-one per cent of children aged 0–4 in 2011 were from BME groups, almost twice as diverse as the overall population; these children will be the adults of Bedford's future, and therefore they give us a glimpse of the future ethnic composition

of the borough. Bedford's increasing diversity is also being driven by people moving in from both abroad and within the UK. According to the council, all minority ethnic groups are likely to experience rising populations, including a significant increase in the numbers of mixed/multiple ethnicities (Bedford Borough Council 2016b).

IMMIGRATION FROM ABROAD

Whether coming on visas to work, join family or to study, the number of immigrants in Britain is growing year on year. For the past two years, net migration to the UK has been historically high, exceeding 300,000 a year, despite the government's efforts to reduce it to the tens of thousands (BBC News 2016a). Even if Britain withdraws from free movement as we leave the EU, the factors that are driving migration to the UK are unlikely to disappear, whether they be pull factors (such as the demand for migrant labour in the UK) or push factors in the source nations (fewer employment opportunities, or political instability in some developing countries).

Migration will remain a key driver for increasing diversity in towns, cities and villages across Britain. Towns like Bedford are likely to see further 'chain migration': new migrants opting to settle in the town due to the fact that they already have relatives or connections. Native Bedford residents who have a migration background are also more likely to marry non-British spouses. This is likely to be more prevalent in communities with origins in the Indian subcontinent, who make up a substantial proportion of Bedford's BME population. It has been estimated that one in four British Indians is married to someone born in India and estimates of ethnic British Pakistanis married to people born in Pakistan range from 46 to 70 per cent (Home Office 2011). Analysts estimate correspondingly similar levels among the British Bangladeshi community (but the literature for that community is more limited) (Economist 2009).

Bedford's local economy is also likely to continue to need migrants in the future. Attracted by the promise of work in the construction industry and processing work, increasing numbers of central and eastern Europeans have come to Bedford in search of work. Even as the UK negotiates its exit from the EU, migrant labour from overseas will still be needed to plug some skills gaps in the regional economy. For example, the local enterprise partnership that covers the Bedford area has argued that the current delivery model does not provide sufficient numbers of appropriately qualified people to keep pace with demand from key sectors as the economy grows (SEMLEP 2015). Migration will continue to play a role in the regional labour market.

Bedford is also likely to see an increase in foreign students. Currently some 4,500 of the 15,665 students at Bedfordshire University, which has a campus in Bedford, are international students and the university has launched an active recruitment programme to attract more (topuniversities.com 2016). Foreign students now make up a growing proportion of new arrivals to the town.

Refugees, too, are likely to continue arriving in Bedford, a town with a long history of receiving refugees. Although it was never an official dispersal area, the local authority is reported to have received informal dispersals from some London boroughs (Johnson 2003). Between 10 and 20 per cent of the foreign-born population in Bedford originally came to the town as asylum-seekers or refugees. Bedford is home to one of the biggest Afghan communities outside London. Other refugees have come from Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Eritrea.¹ In 2016 it was estimated that there were around 500 refugees in Bedford (ibid). The local authority has committed to taking at least 20 vulnerable Syrian families in the coming years as part of the British government's pledge to resettle 20,000 of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees over the next five years. While asylum application levels are no longer at the high peaks seen in the early 2000s, the number of asylum-seekers in the UK has increased since 2010 (Blinder 2016). Given the world today has more refugees than ever before (BBC News 2016b), it is unlikely that numbers seeking sanctuary in Bedford will decline.

DOMESTIC MIGRATION AND DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

Bedford is a relatively affordable town, located close to London which is one of the most diverse cities in the world (60 per cent of primary school children in London are from a BME group [Department of Education 2015]). The increasing pressure of rising house prices and the desire for space to raise families causes many to look for homes outside the capital that are more affordable, and a proportion of these will be from a BME or migrant background. The average price for a terraced property in Bedford in 2015 was £198,485, and semi-detached properties sold for an average of £244,032. In London – only half an hour from Bedford by train – the average terraced property cost approximately three times the amount in Bedford (Rightmove 2016).

The combination of the ethnic diversity of London's families and the affordability of Bedford's housing make it extremely likely that a high percentage of incomers from the capital will be from non-white UK groups. For many ethnic minorities considerations such as better housing, employment opportunities, more pleasant surroundings and better housing matter far more than living with others who share the same background. This is a well-documented pattern of behaviour, as international migration by one generation is succeeded by internal migration by succeeding generations.²

The fact that many migrant and BME groups who have settled in Bedford have higher birth rates than the non-migrant population will also contribute to greater levels of diversity in the future. For example, women of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin have more children on average than white British women, and these ethnic minorities are particularly prevalent in Bedford. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the percentage of births to foreign-born mothers has been steadily climbing in the UK since 1990, hitting 27 per cent of all births in 2014

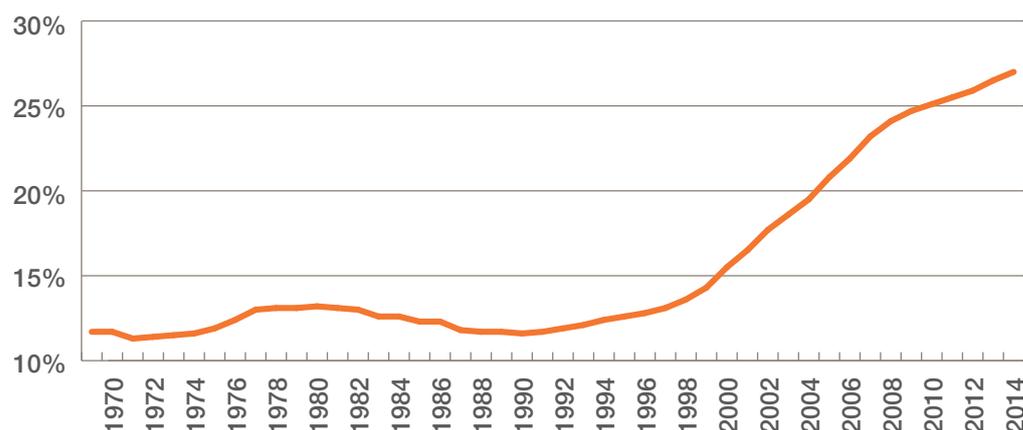
1 This information was provided to the author by staff at BRASS – Bedfordshire Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support – during an interview in August 2016.

2 For more on the patterns that characterise the behaviour of second generation migrants, see Thomson and Crul (2007).

(cited in Coleman and Dubuc 2010). That means well over a quarter of children born today have at least one parent who is an immigrant, compared with only 11 per cent of people born in 1990. Additionally, some BME groups tend to have higher birth rates than others.

FIGURE 2.1.

Percentage of live births in Britain born to mothers from outside the UK, 1969–2014



Source: Office for National Statistics (2014)

The fact that some communities have become established cohorts within Bedford's population does not mean that they will automatically integrate with each new generation. In some communities, the first generation of children is educated in the British school system, speaks English fluently and makes connections throughout British society. Succeeding generations continue to integrate almost completely, and after a few generations there is almost no substantive distinction between migrant-descended groups and the wider domestic population. In other communities, however, patterns of marriage and family formation make this generational pattern of integration less likely. In south Asian Muslim families, arranged marriages are common and new arrivals often come to the UK to join their British-born spouse. This means there is frequently a sizeable cohort of newly-arrived migrants, even in communities that have longstanding links in Bedford.

In short, Bedford is likely to see greater diversity in the future, irrespective of future migration policy and flows – but will it also see more segregation? We explore this question further in chapter 3, which draws on our research with local residents.

3.

CHALLENGES TO INTEGRATION

IS BEDFORD BECOMING MORE SEGREGATED?

What the data tells us

All wards in the area covered by Bedford borough council are becoming more diverse: not just those in the town centre, but the more rural wards too. For example, the Biddenham and Bromham ward is one of Bedford's least diverse wards, yet it has been becoming steadily more ethnically diverse, with its white British population declining from 99 per cent in 1991 to 90 per cent in 2001 and 86 per cent in 2011. Similarly, the ward of Wilshamstead went from 97.3 per cent white British in 1991 to 87.4 per cent in 2011. This is the result of people from a range of different ethnicities moving in, rather than a single group: in 2011, Wilshamstead's ethnic makeup was 1.7 per cent black, 3.2 per cent Asian, 4.3 per cent white other (non-British) and 3.4 per cent mixed (ONS 2011). This shows that as diversity has taken root in Bedford, it has spread beyond the centre of the town and into more rural and suburban areas that previously had little experience of a diverse population. The slow, steady and manageable pace of this change, and the fact that all parts of the locality are affected, suggests that the people of Bedford are integrating well.

However, as with many parts of the UK, some wards do have disproportionately higher levels of diversity than others. In the two Bedford wards of Cauldwell and Queens Park, the majority of residents are not white British. According to the most recent census data, Queens Park has seen significant increases in the Pakistani- and Bangladeshi-origin populations, which has reduced the white British population in percentage terms (ONS 2011). Queens Park ward was recorded as 47.5 per cent ethnically Asian in the 2011 census (ibid), but only 22.4 per cent ethnically Asian in 1991 (Integration Hub 2016). In its most recent inspection, Ofsted noted that the local primary school, Queens Park Academy, had a proportion of students speaking English as an additional language ('EAL' students) that was well above average for both the UK and the region (Ofsted 2012).³

Yet Bedford is still a long way from developing the kinds of enclaves that have traditionally been seen in some American cities like Chicago, or indeed in British towns like Bradford and Luton. While Queens Park has a growing proportion of people of subcontinental origin, according to the most recent data they still represent less than 50 per cent of the ward (ONS 2011). The proportion of white British residents in Queens Park was 25.2 per cent in 2011 (ibid). The local school told us of a wide range of languages and backgrounds – not just a single dominating

³ This census data was provided to IPPR by Bedford Borough Council Intelligence, for which the source is ONS. The Integration Hub data is based on sources drawn from Ordnance Survey, Royal Mail and National Statistics Data. Due to ward boundary restructuring there may be slight discrepancies between the different datasets, but the most accurate and up-to-date dataset has been used in each case.

second language. And the good, and increasing, level of mixing by more integrated members of the same ethnic group more widely in the town does not suggest the development of enclaves ‘proper’ (where an ethnic group lives almost exclusively in one area of a town and seldom moves out, with very few other ethnicities alongside them), as traditionally defined by the academic literature (see for example Peach 2009). Wards like Queens Park are still mixed, if super-diverse. By comparison, wards like Dallow and Biscot in nearby Luton are around 10 per cent white British and 35–40 per cent Pakistani (Integration Hub 2016).

FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Our research with local people suggests that residents do perceive patterns of segregation starting to form in Queen Park. When we asked locals about the patterns of settlement, the people they saw living around them, and how they thought migration was impacting different communities, they described the following.

- Areas that had previously been highly diverse with lots of different minorities, such as Queens Park, were perceived as becoming more ‘bicultural’: increasingly some areas were moving to having one large minority group living alongside the white British population. Several residents told us that communities that had been multi-ethnic increasingly seemed dominated by only two groups. In Queens Park, many observed that the south Asian Muslim community had grown substantially in recent years.
- Better integrated ethnic minorities told us they were choosing to leave areas with high concentrations of people from their own ethnic group, to settle elsewhere in Bedford. This was driven by several factors. We heard that some felt constrained by the opportunities available in the area where their group has predominantly settled, for example in terms of housing options. Others wanted to educate their children in a more mixed cohort. More integrated groups spoke better English, with many having been educated in Britain and some to a high level. This, they told us, equipped them with more confidence and more resources to look beyond the smaller area inhabited by others from their ethnic group. They saw this decision to be an outcome of their integration, not a cause of it. In summary, residents who were well integrated, fluent English-speakers and worked with wide networks spoke of their desire to move beyond their communities into other parts of Bedford; residents with poor English and low self-confidence relied on the close-knit, monocultural community as their support network.
- Residents told us that those who are well integrated tend to become even more so, settling in all areas of Bedford and becoming fully part of the local community. But those who have found integration difficult live increasingly only among people from their own ethnic group, narrowing their options, reducing their interaction with people from outside their group and hindering their integration opportunities (such as learning English and getting to know people from other communities). This is then reinforced by chain migration, as new arrivals from the same background settle in that community, reducing the day-to-day contact the average resident has with people from other backgrounds.

Perceptions of central and eastern European migrants

There was a sharp dichotomy in how people saw the integration of the Polish community. The established Polish-origin community whose arrival dates back to the postwar years was viewed as very well integrated. Of the more recent Poles, who have arrived since 2004 when Poland and other central and eastern European countries acceded to the EU, some were thought to have integrated well, particularly those who had service-sector jobs in the town and young children in school.

Others, however, particularly those who were perceived as more transitory, were seen as poorly integrated, keeping themselves to themselves. This is one of the results of free movement rules, under which EU citizens have been able to come to Britain to work on short-term contracts or for seasonal work. The increasing number of cheap flights to provincial destinations in Central and Eastern Europe from nearby Luton airport has enabled many Europeans to come to Bedford for a short time while maintaining links with their home country (Gill 2015; London Luton Airport 2014). Many such migrants live in temporary accommodation or bedsits (often near the railway station), organised by a speaker of their own language; work long, often antisocial hours, also alongside people who speak their own language; and take cheap flights home to see their friends and families when their contracts end or whenever they have holidays.

Many people we spoke to worried that this flexibility meant that migrant workers were unlikely to integrate and more likely to experience a variety of problems. For example, local schools said they had concerns that families were living in substandard housing. There have been reports of increases in the incidence of homelessness among central and eastern Europeans in Bedford in recent years, even though there should be no need, under the council's policy, for anyone to have to be sleeping rough in the town (Bedfordshire on Sunday 2013; Bedford Borough Council 2015b). There is also evidence in the literature that migrant groups can be more likely than average to live in poor quality housing; issues such as overcrowding are well-documented sources of community tension (see for example Perry 2012). Finally, lack of familiarity with local customs and culture mean that incidents of low-level anti-social behaviour are common (to do with noise levels, alcohol consumption and spitting in the street, for example – as reported by residents, service providers and community group leaders).

Men from the Polish community were generally seen as less well integrated than Polish women, as the men's jobs in construction, agriculture and factories did not require strong English language skills while, by contrast, Polish and other eastern European women tended to speak better English because they worked in the service sector in outwardly-facing roles and had to interact with schools after they had children. This helped them to integrate better than their male counterparts, who tended to work and socialise in their own language, with fewer interactions with other ethnic groups.

Lived experiences of Asian Muslim women

We held four focus groups with Asian Muslim women, some of whom were well integrated into the local community and others of whom had struggled to integrate: even though they had lived in Bedford for decades

they still spoke poor English, had few links with people from outside their community and had limited knowledge of local institutions such as schools and the police. We identified a range of dynamics and issues among the women we spoke to, described below.

Attitudes of family members

When asked about what factors helped or hindered their integration into Bedford society, many Muslim women told us that the attitude of their family members could be the decisive factor. In many families, members including husbands, mothers-in-law and sons were reluctant to see women socialise outside the home and extended family. This opposition was attributed to a range of factors. We heard that it was linked to cultural heritage, as traditionally women did not often leave the home in their country of origin. Some women and service providers told us it was motivated by concerns that women would become westernised and subsequently neglect their duties at home. For many Asian women, the pressures of housekeeping and caring duties meant they were needed by their families and had little time for activities beyond the home anyway.

Thus, the attitude of family members is a critical obstacle to the integration of many Asian women. We heard how justifications for this attitude have changed – as families have become more settled in the UK – from one generation to another (although for the women, the outcome was the same). For example, one focus group participant told us:

‘Husbands believe women have to stay home because that’s how they were brought up: it’s traditional. But sons are more educated, more curious. They read the Qur’an and they see the role of women in there, so they are able to tell us, “You have to stay home, it’s in the Qur’an, it’s God’s word.”’

In contrast, for some Asian women, family members were the facilitators of their greater integration. One woman told us her parents-in-law had been very conservative, refusing to allow her to learn English. Her husband interceded and he and his wife moved away from his parents to ensure she was able to pursue English lessons. We also heard from many women that they were keen to facilitate their children’s language development and wider integration. For some, children had been instrumental in helping their parents’ integration – for example, mothers’ accompanying their children to kindergarten classes, or becoming involved with their schooling, in some cases spurred their own English language development.

Self-confidence

Almost all the Asian women we spoke to reported low self-confidence as a key inhibitor of integration. Many told us they were reluctant to speak to authority figures such as teachers or council staff. This lack of confidence was perpetuated by both cultural and practical factors. Firstly, women from conservative cultures traditionally engaged only rarely with authority figures. Secondly, they were reluctant to show their lack of knowledge of how official systems worked, or their poor English skills. (Box 4.2 explains further cultural barriers to engaging with schools and how they might be overcome.)

The women's lack of confidence constrained them in other ways. For example, it contributed to a reluctance to leave an area where they could be sure there were other members of their community. A service-provider explained some of the practical issues involved:

'The [Asian Muslim] women are particularly unlikely to drive. Their English is poor so they're afraid of going to unfamiliar areas in case they get lost and there's no Bangla-speakers [sic] they can ask for help. They have no money to get a taxi if they get stuck, so it's impossible to leave their little area.'

TO WHAT EXTENT IS SEGREGATION A PROBLEM AND WHAT COULD BE DONE ABOUT IT?

As we have seen, while social integration in Bedford has been largely successful, many residents do express concerns about the growing tendency among some communities to cluster together. Does this matter?

We conclude that while seeking out co-nationals is a natural and effective way of helping migrant communities find their feet, problematic patterns of segregation do exist. For example, Asian women who have struggled to integrate can become caught in a self-fulfilling cycle of isolation, particularly women with caring responsibilities who are not in employment outside the home. Because they are isolated, their opportunities to learn English and meet people from outside their own culture shrink. This damages their confidence and makes these women more likely to seek out others from their own communities. It also limits their ability to forge the kinds of ties that would enable them to become more involved in their children's education or to become economically active.

The case for and against compulsive measures

Recent years have seen growing concerns about the trend of migrant and BME communities settling together without integrating with the mainstream community. For example, the previous prime minister David Cameron raised concerns at the beginning of 2016, and linked these groups' isolation with concerns around the spread of extremism (BBC News 2016c). As a consequence, Cameron and others have argued that there is a need for policies that actively disrupt the separation of the most isolated groups, particularly when this isolation is seen to undermine the life chances of women or children. For example, in order to compel migrants arriving in the UK as spouses to learn English, Mr Cameron announced in 2016 that they would have to sit a follow-up language test two years after arrival. Those who failed would have to face the prospect of extradition (ibid).

During our conversations with frontline service providers we found some support for these types of approaches. Some practitioners agreed that this could be a way of, for example, ensuring that family members did not block women from registering at English classes. They agreed that compulsory measures could tip the balance within BME households in a way that would benefit these women in the long term. However, most of the practitioners and women we spoke to were sceptical that measures of this kind were the best way forward. On the whole, women, even those

living in isolation, had a strong desire to integrate, but many felt unable to due to their lack of English language skills.

Almost all of the Asian women we spoke to, even those who had been in Bedford for decades but spoke no English, acknowledged that learning English was important. For the majority, a lack of funds to pay for English classes, combined with cuts to classes in ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) were the key obstacles to their doing so. The government has completely withdrawn funding for the ESOL Plus Mandation (Lauener 2015), and some £45 million nationally has been withdrawn from the ESOL budget (Staufenberg 2016). Several of the non-English-speaking women we spoke to said their husbands would encourage them to learn if they could afford to pay for tuition. One said she had given up her own opportunity to learn so that her children could have English lessons. An ESOL course at Bedford College costs £530, and entails two two-hour lessons per week over six months. The local living wage is £8.25 per hour (Wye 2016) (and the national minimum wage £7.20 [gov.uk 2016]) and the average rent for a two-bedroom property in Bedford is £886 per month (home.co.uk 2016). As such, the cost of an ESOL course for a single-earner family with childcare commitments is significant. Furthermore, caring and household responsibilities leave little time to devote to language learning for many of these women.

In addition, many practitioners were concerned that punitive approaches that compelled women to learn English could in fact undermine the work they did to promote confidence and empower women. Many underlined the importance of having room to make adaptations, including leaving space for some judicious segregation to make the integration environment more hospitable. As shown by the case for the local swimming group, which runs women's-only sessions (see box 4.3), barring such practices would simply lead to isolated women retreating further. Integrating Asian women may also require giving some basic training to staff, for example at local gyms, in the socio-cultural issues this group faces (for example, being uncomfortable shaking men's hands). It may mean restructuring some events where Asian women's participation is sought, such as at schools and nurseries, to reduce the likelihood of undermining their confidence. This includes, for example, avoiding having occasions that require participants to approach figures of authority, or to speak in front of a group.

The message from Bedford is that trust, confidence and capacity to integrate can be built among marginalised migrant groups through judicious adaptations. This can make the activities that foster integration more accessible. This work – examples of which are provided in the next chapter – is slow, developmental and granular. But ultimately it is likely to be more effective than compulsion.

4.

BINDING BEDFORD TOGETHER

WHERE IT'S WORKING

Immigration, and the social change that it entails, can put pressures on communities. In chapter 3 we described how social integration in Bedford is strong overall. Indeed, previous IPPR research has indicated that, in comparison to other towns in Britain, Bedford's profile makes it predisposed to make the most of diversity and build good levels of community cohesion (Griffith and Halej 2015). In this chapter we identify four contributory factors that have enabled this resilience.

FACTORS ENABLING BEDFORD'S RESILIENCE

Steady and diverse population change

The trend of migration to Bedford has been steady rather than sudden, from the 1950s onwards (as described in previous chapters). Many studies find that communities that have already experienced migration are generally well equipped to respond to the pressures placed on them by the arrival of new immigrants (for a full account see Griffith and Halej 2015), whereas rapid increases in migration over a short period of time can cause tensions for local communities (Katwala et al 2016). The steady pace of migration and diversification meant that Bedford has not seen the kind of abrupt change that people can find unsettling and to which local services struggle to adapt.

Furthermore, the flows have been diverse, with communities from a range of backgrounds settling in Bedford, thereby avoiding the formation of a single-ethnicity enclave alongside the white British population. As detailed, some migrants have come to the town in search of new jobs, a process that began in the postwar era when Italians and Poles came to work in the brick factory, and that continues today. Others have come to join family members, or a pre-existing community of their own origin. This has been the case for many African Asians.

Committed leadership

During our field visits and interviews with people in Bedford, we heard about the high level of commitment from leaders and institutions to making diversity work.

Responsibility for diversity and cohesion sits with the directly-elected mayor. One of the key strategies is the Cohesive Community Strategy, which includes building community cohesion and inclusion, and ensuring services are adapted to all. The council's diversity strategy identifies a range of objectives against which indicators can be measured. Of course, most councils have put in place a diversity strategy. However, our interviews with service providers and stakeholders both inside and outside the council indicated that Bedford's diversity strategy has

had particularly good buy-in and people were aware and supportive of the town leadership's efforts to promote and celebrate local diversity, believing the council to be committed to it and to making social cohesion a priority. There was a clear sense of engagement and buy-in at senior levels to making Bedford a shared community for all its residents. At the most recent review of the strategy earlier in 2016, the council decided to continue with the previous four years' objectives.

The council also runs the Bedford Borough Equality and Diversity Network, which brings together representatives from a range of different community organisations that work to build social cohesion, which can monitor the council against its diversity objectives.

A strong and viable community sector

As with many local authorities, budget cuts have meant Bedford borough council has had to substantially reduce the resources it dedicates to managing diversity. Currently, there is only one member of council staff responsible for diversity work. Additionally, the council moved to a commissioning model, rather than a grants model, for third sector funding, in April 2016 (Bedford Borough Council 2016c). This is in line with the practice of many local authorities, who see a commissioning model as a means to give greater predictability and longer-term security to third sector organisations in straightened financial times. While this model does bring advantages, it reduces the opportunities for those organisations that provide the kind of one-off, or less programmatic, community work that helps build the necessary weak ties (see box 4.1) among people from different backgrounds and helps foster links through shared activities at the local level.

However, in Bedford, provision by the local authority for local community projects has been supplemented by grants made by other local organisations. Bedford has a good level of grant-making and civil society projects that are able to build contact and weak ties among local people on a project-by-project basis, which reinforces the other community projects supported by the council on a commissioning-model basis.

Box 4.1

The importance of building 'weak ties'

In trying to understand social integration in diverse communities, academics and observers frequently look at the relationships people have with others from outside their ethnic group. Relations can be divided into **strong ties** – people whom we know well, who are part of our close social group – and **weak ties**, acquaintances we engage with in a light-touch way. Typically, a person has a small group of strong ties, who resemble each other in attitudes and share overlapping close-knit social networks, and a larger group of weak ties or acquaintances.

Some theorists see the existence of weak ties as critical for social cohesion (see for example Granovetter 1983). Each of our acquaintances likely has some close relations of their own. Therefore, a weak tie between two people of different social or ethnic groups is not a trivial relationship but a link between two

close-knit groups of different types of people. Without weak ties in communities – people who live near each other, for example, or meet at the school gates – then these clumps of people would not be connected to each other at all. Information about social norms, acceptable behaviour and key information about surviving everyday life and local news cannot pass between close-knit groups without some weak ties to link them. Thus people with few weak ties are deprived of the critical information from other parts of the social system. This can include finding out essential information (such as important developments at their child’s school) and also information that would help improve economic and social outcomes (what job opportunities there are, when the exercise class is, and so on).

These networks can also transmit social codes and help people understand the culture and mores of an unfamiliar society. This works in both directions: migrants learn about the practices of the culture in which they now live, while established residents learn about the behaviour of new arrivals as information passes through weak ties and spreads within close-knit networks. The transmission of such information is key to social cohesion (Granovetter 1983; Pietka 2011).

We observed this dynamic at work in Bedford. At the Sports4Wellbeing swimming class, run primarily for Muslim women, women who had lived in Bedford for years and did not speak any English were able to mix with women from their own community who were better integrated. Most of the women we met at the class for this research had made friends there, and most had heard about the class via their network of close friends and acquaintances. (More information about the good practice occurring via this class is provided in box 4.3.)

Facilitating the weak ties between well-integrated women and those who struggle with integration from the same community, who increasingly live in different parts of Bedford, enables information to travel through social networks and different groups to learn about each other’s culture and issues. These networks of weak ties, which link poorly integrated people to the wider community through the gateways of well integrated BME residents, demonstrate how social cohesion is fostered by sharing a common social sphere and its associated behavioral norms. Integration in a community as diverse and large as Bedford’s can be hard to measure or compel. But by thinking about how many weak ties different communities are able to build between one another, we can trace where communities share common links and where they stand separately.

Adaptable local services

Social integration in Bedford has also been facilitated because many public service providers have made small, strategic and judicious adaptations aimed at easing the integration of hard-to-reach groups, particularly in local schools.

We set out a number of examples of local good practice in boxes 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4.

Box 4.2

Case study: Opening up schools to parents

Many schools in Bedford with high numbers of BME pupils had low parental engagement. The schools found that the reasons for this were complex. Some communities had little understanding of the school system and the fact that in Britain parents are expected to play a role in their children's education (talking to teachers is deemed disrespectful in some societies). Studies confirm that parents, particularly those with poor English or strong accents, are reluctant to engage with the authority figures in a school and lack vital information on how to engage with schools (Evans et al 2016). For others, the barriers were more practical: attending parents' evening can be problematic for those doing shift-work or with caring responsibilities.

In response, one local school with a large number of EAL students scrapped traditional parents' evenings and replaced them with day-long 'independent learning days'. Children showed their parents to different areas of the school where teachers were stationed and were accompanied by roving (often multilingual) classroom assistants. Children and parents completed tasks together, while the staff explained the children's progress. In this way, rather than simply feeding back to parents, teachers were able to show and explain the value of the tasks to parents.

Following the introduction of the open days, parents' attendance at parents' events increased significantly, to around 98 per cent. This structure allowed the parents to learn about the way a child learned and the support they needed. It also provided a less intimidating, less top-down way for parents to engage with teachers. Finally, this meant parents did not have to come alone (which previously proved intimidating for some) as they travelled with their children or came with other members of their community who also had children at the school.

Box 4.3

Case study: Sports4Wellbeing women's swimming classes

Sports4Wellbeing is a community group attended by around 50 women primarily from Bedford's Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities. Its women-only swimming classes are attended by women of a range of ages, from schoolgirls and young mothers to older women. They include many fluent English speakers who were born, educated and now work in Bedford; others who have lived in Bedford for decades without learning English; and some recent migrants to the UK.

Targeting services aimed at just one gender is somewhat controversial in Britain today. The decision to launch a similar programme in a swimming pool in Luton in 2016 caused considerable local controversy, for example (Polden 2016), although that may have been because the intention there was to provide a *men*-only session, for reasons that proved more divisive. In Bedford, creating the women-only class was not considered a problem because the benefits (both physical and

mental) of keeping these women active simply outweighed the potential impact on social integration, and because women-only sessions are common practice in pools and gyms notwithstanding cultural distinctions.

For many of the Muslim women we spoke to, the idea of swimming in a pool with men would simply not be possible. As explained by one sports facilitator, ‘providing a bit of segregation won’t make [these women] any more segregated’, but not providing it would mean that they would just stay at home. Therefore, by organising women-only sessions for the pool club, the sports club has facilitated social integration, particularly for the most isolated women. Many women talked about how it had built their confidence by introducing them to other Bedfordians. They described the critical role played by other women from their own community – women who were further along the road to integration. The ensuing relationships have been an important source of information about jobs and services, as well as boosts to self-confidence.

Unlike many community activities that have stopped and started, the club has run at the same time on the same day for years. This consistency has helped to encourage the attendance of those who have to travel to leave their comfort zone. It is also critical for those with poor English – many of whom are loath to leave areas where their community is heavily present for fear of getting lost and unable to ask a stranger for help (especially given they would not wish to approach an unknown man), or of not being able to find the bus home. More practically, the consistent time enables the women to plan far in advance and organise childcare.

This pragmatic and consistent approach has allowed the class to become embedded in the fabric of daily life – it is a part of the community, trusted by all.

Box 4.4

Case study: Building trust through the Faith community group

Many community groups in Bedford work hard to build trust with residents. They are sensitive to the fact that it could inadvertently be undermined, and where this has been the case they have worked hard to turn this around quickly.

We heard from many people about Faith in Queens Park – a community group that brings together people from different communities in one of Bedford’s most diverse areas. Initially started as a basketball club, the group has built links with the local Muslim, Sikh and Christian communities, as well as liaising with the local schools. The activities it runs to foster social integration include the following.

- **Faith tours**, where people from the surrounding area can visit the mosque, gurdwara and church to learn about other faiths and find out about the culture, origins and practices of their neighbours.
- **Plays and musicals** put on by the young people about the history of the local area, where children play characters from different

ethnic backgrounds to their own, so they can learn about the different communities they live alongside, the reasons they came to Bedford and their cultures and traditions.

- **Link-building with local schools**, acting as intermediaries between the community and the schools, helping resolve issues of bullying, passing on messages to parents who struggle with the language barrier, and explaining residents' cultural contexts to schools.
 - **A women's singing group**, launched to bring together Muslim and Christian women to sing religious songs from each other's faiths. This has not been without controversy, however: we heard that many Muslims in Queens Park objected when they discovered that the government's counter-terrorism strategy, Prevent, part-funded the singing group. The group was disbanded, and the organisers worked with those who objected and promised to declare all sources of funding for their projects in the future.
-

5.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Bedford has done well to build a shared town. This has been thanks to a combination of external factors – the slow and steady migration flows over decades – and factors within Bedfordians’ control, such as making small adaptations to build cohesion. However, some groups in Bedford – such as eastern European men and Asian Muslim women – have integrated less well than others, and will remain outside the shared town that is being built around them unless measures are taken to address this.

SUMMARY OF KEY CHALLENGES

- **Lack of affordable English-language tuition**, meaning many non-English-speaking residents remain excluded from full integration.
- **Persistence of traditional views of women’s roles** due to the cultural heritage of Asian Muslims, and increasingly due to sons coming to these conclusions as a result of Qur’anic study.
- **Childcare and home duties preventing Asian Muslim women from integrating**, by reducing their free time and flexibility to build their skills and confidence. In addition, within the Asian community there is frequently no culture of childcare, and a reluctance to leave children in the care of strangers from outside the community.
- **Little knowledge of public service provision** in the UK among transient workers from EU countries, despite the fact that they pay taxes to support these systems and, under current EU law, are entitled to use these services.
- **Very low levels of confidence** among many Asian women, meaning that steps of integration that would be straightforward for other types of migrant or minority group can become almost insuperable obstacles.
- **Vulnerability of migrants – particularly recent arrivals – to rogue landlords**, due to their unfamiliarity with their rights as tenants and difficulties navigating a complex system. This can be due to cultural factors (where some communities typically live in larger households than the average British household) or because they view factors such as overcrowding as less critical than those who have been in the UK for a longer time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Britain’s immigration policy is outside the hands of Bedford’s local policymakers. But that does not mean that all policy related to immigration and its effects is the preserve of central government. The town has strong foundations it can build on, and there are actions

it can take in order to maintain these advantages and knit all communities into a shared social fabric as the town becomes more diverse. Below, we make recommendations for policymakers and service providers in Bedford to help them achieve this.

Target English language learning at the most isolated migrants: set up an interest-free loan

As a relatively small town, where there are generally good levels of social integration, Bedford is well positioned to target some outreach specifically at those migrants who are the most excluded from learning English, largely as a result of prohibitive costs.

We recommend establishing an interest-free loan for migrants with very low levels of English who are long-term Bedford residents. This should be a locally-led project: we suggest the council's diversity outreach group convenes stakeholders such as the local ESOL providers, community groups that already work with isolated women, and local schools that engage with parent communities. This group could work to identify targets for the loan, set the criteria for eligibility (such as length of residence, gender, previous access to language support, income threshold, terms of repayment, and so on), and establish a work plan to reach out to them.

Seed funding for the loan could be sought from Bedford council's community chest programme, which awards one-off grants up to the value of £1,000 from grant-awarding bodies, in conjunction with local credit unions. The lesson fees should be paid to the course provider directly.

Allowing people to borrow money to pay for English lessons brings several advantages. Paying it directly to the course provider rather than providing a cash payment to the family or individual ensures that it will be used for that purpose only rather than being subsumed into the family budget. By setting the eligibility criteria, the scheme will be able to target the people in the local community who are most in need.

Targeting relatively high levels of resources at a small section of the community is a significant policy decision and should be properly evaluated and consulted upon. But the development of local segregated enclaves, the compounding obstacles these migrants face, and the disproportionate impact of severe isolation on some residents, provide a robust basis for justifying such targeting.

Educate boys on the role of women

To tackle traditional views of women's roles among those young people from the Asian Muslim community in Bedford who see their mothers as purely homemakers, Bedford residents should talk at local schools about the importance of women's roles. Messages about women's empowerment are important for all pupils, but schools should reflect in particular on whether or not their personal, social and health education (PSHE) education contains elements that would be relevant to Muslim boys who are questioning their mothers' roles in society. Local schools should evaluate their teaching of this curriculum to ensure they are taking account of the issues around women's roles in different cultures, including mothers' and older women's rights as well as those of younger women.

Develop the provision of culturally-sensitive childcare

For Asian Muslim women unfamiliar with childcare provision in the British model, small adaptations – such as locating available childcare in a local mosque or childcare services hiring an Asian staff member – could encourage them to take up childcare provision. Local service providers (such as early years centres, schools or community groups) should consider partnering with places that have a track record of working with Muslim women, such as the local swimming pool, local schools' out-of-hours services, or the mosques, to provide childcare in places where Muslim women feel comfortable. There is strong direction from the government for ambitious expansion of early years provision, and there is evidence that childcare uptake is low among BME communities. Bedford is well placed to spearhead innovations to expand childcare access in a way that fosters parents' integration.

There is no need for this childcare provision to be exclusively for Muslim families. Women who used the local swimming pool, for example, were clear that they would welcome other women using the facilities at the same time as them as part of their swimming class. But targeting childcare provision at groups who currently do not use it could help increase community integration.

Set up an integration hub in areas where migrant workers congregate

An integration hub should be set up to help familiarise transient workers from the EU with basic services, such as informing them of the existence of the local A&E and GP services and that these are free at the point of use, and with their rights and responsibilities that will facilitate their integration, such as information on their workplace rights, the minimum wage, the rules on rental accommodation, and how to report hate crimes. It could be as simple as a council-run stand located in the high street near shops and churches frequented by the eastern European community. As well as making the migrants better informed, it would help some migrants to come into contact with local Bedfordians when they use public services.

The current time is an opportune moment for Bedford to establish such an integration hub. Following the Brexit vote, many central and eastern European migrants in the UK are keen to get as much information as possible about their rights and likely future developments. There is a risk that false or partial information gives people an ill-informed analysis on which to base their decisions. Furthermore, the increase in racist attacks since the Brexit vote, particularly the tragic murder of a Polish man in Harlow, not far from Bedford, has made many Europeans afraid. An integration hub is a good way of sending a message to Bedford's European community that the town will protect their rights, and has the means in place to do so.

Establish a selective landlord licensing scheme

Because of the vulnerability of migrants, especially new arrivals, to rogue landlords, the council should apply to the secretary of state for local government for the power to implement a selective landlord licensing scheme. This would give the council oversight of private landlords in the local area, what other properties they own and who lives in what kind of accommodation. The council could draw on

resources such as information on which households are claiming housing benefit and information that local schools collect on how many adults children normally live with (this gives schools a picture of how many children are living in overcrowded accommodation or in non-traditional households). These pieces of information can be compared to give local authorities intelligence with which to target rogue landlords. The council could also seek to incentivise raising standards through a scheme similar to Liverpool's, for example, whose council offers a fee discount to landlords who are members of its accredited landlord scheme (Liverpool City Council 2016).

Where landlords of houses in multiple occupancy (HMOs) are found to fail the 'fit and proper' landlord test⁴ (for example as a result of fraud, housing illegal migrants, or breaching housing standards provisions), they can be banned from letting. If Bedford council were given the power to run a selective landlord licensing scheme, it could investigate the other properties let by these landlords in the area. Councils need permission from the secretary of state before they set up a selective landlord licensing scheme. Currently, the government is minded only to grant such licences when there is a compelling case, to avoid the creation of unnecessary red tape for landlords. Liverpool and the London Borough of Newham have been granted such power, while others, such as the London Borough of Redbridge, have been refused. Should Bedford wish to pursue this route, the council will need to present a convincing and well-evidenced case to central government.

However, should the council wish to set up a selective landlord scheme for an area that covers less than 20 per cent of its geographical area, or less than 20 per cent of the private rented sector, it may do so without permission from the secretary of state (Lewis 2015). Bedford should therefore consider whether there are some key areas, such as Queens Park and the area around the railway station, where a targeted scheme would be most useful.

As a commuter town close to London, Bedford is a prime location for property developers. Already, new housing developments are being built, and, with increasing pressure on the housing stock in the South East, that is likely to continue. The town's expansion offers an opportunity for Bedfordians to reflect and think proactively of the implications of this for integration. The council is developing its *Local Plan 2035*, which consults with local residents on planning rules to decide how much growth there should be in the borough, and how and where that should take place (Bedford Borough Council 2016d). This provides an excellent opportunity for the leaders and residents of Bedford to take stock of current integration and ensure future planning decisions are used to create a more cohesive place to live.

When granting planning permission to new developers, the council should consider ways to give Bedfordians first dibs on new homes. For example, the new Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, is currently looking at ways to ensure that existing London residents are given the

⁴ The 'fit and proper' test is a condition of HMO licensing, designed to 'ensure that those responsible for operating the licence and managing the property are of sufficient integrity and good character' (DCLG 2010: 24).

first opportunity to buy homes in new developments. St Ives council in Cornwall is developing a policy to ensure that all new open market housing is not bought by those seeking a second home. A similar approach could serve Bedford well in mitigating the development of ethnic enclaves and ensuring newly built areas of the town remain accessible for the diverse communities in the town.

Housing allocation is a sensitive issue, and the local authority has to balance a range of concerns. It would, of course, be wrong to create a system that gives preferential access to housing for people from one community at the expense of others who have greater need for it. But a focus on whether or not enclaves of certain communities are forming, and proactive steps to head off isolated communities before they develop further, could be used judiciously and sensitively to build community cohesion.

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