

## **Tackle worklessness, reduce immigration**

*Charlie Elphicke, the candidate for Dover and a research fellow of the Centre for Policy Studies, argues that the challenge of worklessness is being shirked by importing migrant labour.*

How many workless people are there in the UK? This question has been under the spotlight recently. Across the country as a whole there are nearly 8 million workless people of working age - and experts tell us that 5 million of this number could work but do not. Yet the Government has ducked this challenge and gone for masses of migrant workers instead.

Tackling worklessness could mean that immigration will fall sharply as there won't be the same call for people from abroad to do the work that needs to be done. It could help to realise the hopes, chances and opportunities that currently pass the army of workless people by. At the moment, those hopes are too often dashed.

These lost chances and opportunities have been rising in recent years. Take Dover, where I am the Conservative Parliamentary candidate. Official figures from the ONS tell us that Dover's working age workless has soared from 10,000 five years ago to 13,000 today (they call it "economic inactivity"). That's a massive rise. Meanwhile the number of people in work has remained steady at 39,000.

The Government prefer to look at the claimant count as this is a very low number and so good for their spin. Yet when we talk about workless people, we should tell it straight and talk about people who are not in work. The 13,000 people in Dover who do not work means there is 1 workless person out of every 3 in work. We know that some people won't ever be able to work. Probably about 4,000 locally are really ill or suffer disabilities that are too serious. But around 9,000 should be able to work, yet do not.

On the doorsteps, I hear time and again concerns about the amount of immigration. The people who express these concerns are not ugly, vicious, uncaring or – dare I say it - racist. Their worry is that our little country is already full. They wonder how can schools and hospitals cope with the 500,000 or so how come to Britain each year. To "blame" immigrants is to shoot at the wrong target. And those who rail against workless people as "shirkers" have the wrong target too.

The blame for the very high number of people who are workless falls fairly and squarely at the Government's door. The number of workless has risen strongly in the last ten years. Why are there so many immigrants in the UK? Sure, some immigrants play the benefits game - but most are here to work. The number of people from Eastern Europe working on building sites, in pubs, restaurants and the like is something we all see in our daily lives. They come because they can get jobs, earn money and have a better life. Get our home grown workless working and the demand for people from overseas can be expected to fall.

In Dover and across Britain, the Government is not facing up to the big challenge of some 5 million people who could work, but do not. Instead of tackling worklessness, the Government has sold the pass. They think it's easier to get migrant workers to fill the jobs than to deal with the real problem. The Government is the real shirker of a serious national challenge.

This is unacceptable. It's unacceptable because the Government is effectively throwing on the scrap heap the potential of 5 million in Britain - some 8,000 blighted lives in Dover alone. These are people who have the right to lead productive lives filled with self respect and a sense of dignity. All the evidence shows that people in work have greater wellbeing. It is unacceptable because we all pay for it in our taxes, when we could and should be so much richer as a country and a community. What a waste.

Work needs to be made more attractive as an option. Benefits are too often paid out to those who can and should be in work. Work is respectable and it should be seen as a bad thing not to work - as used to be the case.

We also need to make it easier for the workless to get work. That means a revolution in vocational education. Training the workless will equip them to work. Access to courses is too often too difficult and that must change. We need to have the collective courage to encourage the workless to work - encouragement that we know will not always be seen as welcome.