



Crime, order and social control

Improving police procedures

MICHAEL MANSFIELD Q.C.

I don't think it's a question of procedure, I think there should be a new offence, but I'm much more anxious to ensure that we're dealing with an educative process whereby those responsible for ensuring these communities feel secure recognise the extent of the problem. So it's not so much to do with the law, and it's not so much to do with procedures, it's to do with the need for the investigative authorities to take it seriously.

INSPECTOR ROBERT BECKLEY:

With racial violence and racial incidents we've been turning around and saying to officers on the beat, no, this is actually a lot more serious because of the impact it has on the victims, disproportionate to the nature of the crime, so we've had quite an uphill battle in shifting the culture and making officers realise that this is something to be taken very seriously. We found that in London that the setting up racial incident units, or having dedicated staff that deal with racial incidents, has actually helped improve not just the investigation of those offences, but the support provided to victims.

V/O:

We'll look at the daily workings of one of the racial incidents units in the Metropolitan Police area, at Plumstead in the Borough of Greenwich. It was set up in 1990 with one white police constable.

PC MICHAEL KEARNS:

We primarily see ourselves as investigators but we go further and wider than investigating crime in terms of investigating what would normally be regarded by police as settling disputes, but because our terms of reference are to investigate anything with a racial motivation that's perhaps non-crime, we can dedicate more time, give a, although we obviously aim to give a high quality of service across the board, we are giving an even higher quality of service to the victims of racial crime and racial incidents, and that's the object of it.

DCI LES OWEN:

The standard way of measuring performance might be in terms of the number of cleared-up solved crimes, but in this particular unit it's very clear that we have gained success in the way we've made contact with the community as well, and people from ethnic minorities are now more willing to speak to officers on the unit.

WULATI SINGH:

My name is Wulati Singh and I'm a lawyer for the London Borough of Greenwich Legal Department. I was seconded to this unit in September 1994. The reason for my secondment was basically me. I, after watching several documentaries on the Racial Incident Unit, I felt that the Unit, even though it was doing well, could improve the service that it was providing, basically because the victims that they go and see are of an ethnic minority group, and I felt that the Unit having all-white officers was underperforming in that sense that they could do with someone from an ethnic minority group.

V/O:

As a local authority lawyer what powers does Wulati Singh bring to the Racial Incidents Unit?

WULATI SINGH:

Well the tenancy conditions basically says that the council tenants are to behave themselves towards other tenants, they're not to racially abuse, not to threaten, not to harass other tenants because of their colour and racial origin or ethnic group. That's like a specific one for

racial incidents, but there is also other general where the tenant is required to keep, to let other tenants have peaceable enjoyable of their property, and therefore the council can either go on the racial element, or just on a general nuisance.