



Crime, order and social control

Training police in Plumstead

DCI LES OWEN:

Whether it's a racial crime, whether it's a burglary, or a major crime, the normal people to the incident first are the uniformed officers, the frontline troops. What we're trying to instil in all officers is initial investigation is important, and we get them to obtain ownership of the problem.

PC MICHAEL KEARNS:

Our input today from the Racial Incident Unit is basically to make anybody who's not familiar with what the Unit does aware of our role, and I'll hand you over to Wolati to explain his role, as seconded to us.

WOLATI SINGH:

I actually go out with Mick and Nick now on investigations after an incident's been reported on the street by either an officer of the police, or from the council's estate officers, or from a race adviser. If it involves council tenants then there are several remedies that the council can apply under the tenancy conditions. Sometimes it's a more powerful weapon to have an eviction order over somebody's head rather than a prosecution or a very short prison sentence.

POLICE OFFICER:

Your role, being from the local authority, are you restricted to dealing with council tenants? Is there any action you can take when an incident involves private owners or other tenants?

WOLATI SINGH:

In fact yesterday there was an incident involving a shopkeeper who had been racist towards customers coming in, and I made some enquiries, and the shop was actually leased from the council, so the council couldn't take action on cases where perhaps where leased properties on a commercial basis to people. But also generally the council has a responsibility under the Race Relations Act anyway for peace and harmony within the community. So even though they may not have direct powers, they can influence, put pressure on various groups or an individual to behave themselves.

PC MICHAEL KEARNS:

Our investigation of racial incidents is totally based on the Metropolitan Police definition where it has a racial motivation that motivation can be perceived by the person who's the victim, the officer who's actually reporting the incident he's called to and sees or perceives that it is a racially motivated attack or crime, or any other third party that you come across when you attend the scene of an incident.

We've come from the patrolling element of the police so they know us and we hope that they can relate to us. As we pursue our investigations we gather a lot of information, and feelings on the ground as such. Vulnerable addresses or potential situations where they will need to be made aware that they're approaching an address or an area where there is unrest. The people who are committing the racial type crimes may well be anti-police as well, and the officers need to be warned, so there's an exchange of intelligence and information over and above the actual reports that they send in to us.

POLICE OFFICER:

We're obviously getting sent to incidents where we might just exchange details, you know they might say oh, there's no actual crime committed and we'd just like your advice or

whatever. Are you saying to us that you want to know about those incidents as well, or do you want us to just make a crime sheet, not even if we've got no offence as such?

PC MICHAEL KEARNS:

If you've put the sheet in, even for information purposes only, if you've put it in as racial incident, name-calling over wall of back garden, for information only, we will look at it, log it and it'll go into our system, and then if we get another call or anybody asks about it, we're already aware that there is a problem there, but we will then also let the intelligence unit downstairs know that if there's a potential assault situation there for other officers on different shifts that might go there if there's a potential situation there, and they're going to be involved in assaults or whatever, then we can feed that through the system.

POLICE OFFICER:

If these people ask us we can refer them to you then, we'll say well, we'll make a note of it and it will obviously go to yourselves.

PC MICHAEL KEARNS:

And if they want to contact us.

POLICE OFFICER:

Well exactly, that's what I'm saying.

WOLATI SINGH:

The police may not have powers to actually do anything in those circumstances but if their information through the unit can be used by the local authority in a civil action where the evidence requirement is much lower, then it gives us a picture of what's been happening over a period of time. So it's important to actually log those calls. Up until now when a case was reported to either the police or the council, the police would go and do their own investigation, and the council would do their own investigation, there was never an overlap. Hopefully by me being in this unit there's going to be an exchange of information.

POLICE OFFICER:

You were talking about any incident whatsoever that has a racial motive to be reported on a crime sheet – obviously when there isn't a crime, and there isn't any suggestion of a crime but something's happened with a racial background, a racial motive – what sort of action can you take?

PC MICHAEL KEARNS:

We can visit both the victim, if you like, or the person who perceives himself as a victim, and the perpetrators, the neighbours, or whatever, and as Wolati has said there are various other agencies that we can refer them to as police, or as the local authority, and there's numerous – if you look at our notice boards in our office, there's so many self-help groups, professional groups, and just by mediation ourselves or refer them to another agency – mediate between the aggrieved parties and resolve them. In a lot of cases we do, that's why I emphasised before – if the incident happens and you immediately think the way that we've all been trained, what evidence have I got to substantiate a crime, and we haven't got a crime, commit it to the crime sheet.

It's a very fine line as to what is committed to a crime report and what is intelligence, for example, but we try and communicate with them on their regular training days and get feedback from them.

POLICE OFFICER:

With regard to you getting the information, you're saying put that on a crime sheet – isn't that then going to have the effect that it's going to show that Plumstead as a division has got a very high amount of racial incidents?

WOLATI SINGH:

Even though the actual numbers may seem higher because you're reporting every incident that has a racial connotation to it, at the end of the day the statistics are separated and you'll

see, you know, 'x' number of crimes, 'x' number of burglaries, which has a racial connotation, criminal damage, or minor incidents.

PC MICHAEL KEARNS:

If we get a sheet that we decide is no criminal offence, we actually put the sheet in as logged and it doesn't get a racial incidence number, when we're fully investigating it as a racial incident, so we're actually if you like separated out, so it doesn't actually affect the figures of the incidents that we investigate we ourselves on our own in-house training are making everybody aware that the problem of racial crime is a problem that is all owned by ourselves as a police station.

WOLATI SINGH:

We will attempt to communicate with the victim within 24 hours and then carry out the investigation because we feel that the investigation has to be done soon after the incident when details of the incident are fresh in your mind, witnesses can be spoken to, whereas you leave it after 3 or 4, 5, 6 weeks people are not interested because it loses momentum, so it's very, very important that this joint visit is done at a very early stage.