

Report on Five Focus Groups conducted to
establish the experiences of Black and Minority
Ethnic Police Personnel working in the London
Borough of Lambeth

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Summary

This report documents the experiences of thirty six Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) police personnel working in the London Borough of Lambeth. The exercise conducted in Lambeth on 23 October 2008 was designed to establish whether BME personnel had suffered a detriment as a result of the recent and often sensational media coverage of senior BME officers in the Metropolitan Police; and secondly to ascertain to what degree BME personnel perceived their chosen career to offer ‘equality of opportunity’ on a par with their majority ethnic peers. The resulting analysis and commentary offers a contemporary insight into a set of revealing perceptions that illustrate a snapshot of working life inside the Metropolitan Police Service, the Capital’s largest employer of BME men and women. It provides concluding comments and seeks to make recommendations that will progress the much visited debate around ‘race and policing’ in a meaningful way.

The purpose of this report

Canvassing the views of BME¹ police personnel, in a 'safe and confidential place', to establish perceptions and experiences of their working environment is considered to be an absolutely necessary exercise if we as an organisation are to understand our 'baseline' from which we seek to achieve and most importantly understand what equal opportunity means for an historically disadvantaged demographic in the MPS.² Without this understanding and recognition it is difficult to perceive how diversity and equality action plans and policies might be managed and indeed afforded any real credibility. The recent media attention around the experiences of senior BME police officers in the Metropolitan Police Service and a recent BBC Panorama documentary which appeared to illustrate significant perceptions of racial inequality in the police service nationally prompted the Lambeth Equalities and Diversity Task Force (LEDTF) to consider whether such issues were having a detrimental impact upon Lambeth's BME personnel. As a result of those deliberations, a Lambeth specific exercise whereby all BME police officers and personnel would be invited to a 'confidential half-day seminar' at Lambeth Support HQ was agreed as a means of assessing the extent of the additional pressures (if any) facing BME staff. The intended outcome was to 'develop appropriate interventions in the LEDTF action plan by establishing the extent of inequality and or difficulties facing BME staff'.

How the focus group discussions were conducted

Focus groups offer a way of acquiring qualitative data on specific topics. Using the 1990 Bristol Seminars³ as an inspirational template, it was decided to introduce the attendees to five distinct themes considered to be pertinent and integral to the diversity and equality philosophy; Faith, Organisational Culture, Complaints and Discipline, Communications and Training and Development. These themes were to be discussed in a facilitated forum with comments and views noted.

¹ Black and Minority Ethnic or Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

² Home Office research (1999), on recruitment, retention and progression of Black and Asian police officers, found "institutional racism" was blighting the careers of ethnic minority officers. Black and Asian officers were leaving the force at double the rate of whites.

³ Bristol Seminars (1990), where black officers were required to attend two-day seminars to assist the MPS in understanding the issues underpinning the high resignation rate amongst 'Black and Asian' officers.

Facilitators

Paula Williams – Equalities Officer, Lambeth LA.

DC Wayne Blackwood – Harrow BOCU

Pamela Morton – Band D, Lambeth BOCU

Zenobia Cowan Davies – Band D, Lambeth BOCU

Supt Paul Wilson – Lambeth BOCU

Lambeth Police - ethnic demography

BME police officers = 10% or 102 officers

BME police staff = 43% or 95 staff members

BME Police Community Support Officers (PCSO) = 35% or 54 officers

On 23 October 2008, 36 police officers and police staff responded to an invitation to attend Lambeth Support HQ to participate in a series of discussions. By far the majority were from African and African Caribbean ethnic backgrounds. In terms of rank/band they tended to be for the most part junior police officers however the police staff included both junior, middle and senior managers. Facilitated discussion took place at five tables, each table with a facilitator and distinct theme. Attendees were initially split into five groups and given a 'theme' to commence their discussion. After 20 minutes the groups rotated to the next table and so on. In total the attendees were involved in approximately 100 minutes of facilitated discussion across the five themes. Following the discussions each facilitator presented the emerging 'headline' issues from each of their respective themes. Facilitators were then instructed to retain their notes and submit a report (8-900 words) of their findings. These reports have now been introduced into this final report.

Faith in the Workplace

We have a very diverse workforce and a question frequently asked was whether or not we do enough to accommodate the different faiths. A number of delegates felt that we, as an organisation, do not tolerate faith groups but this was more through ignorance than for any other reason.

- A quiet/prayer room of proportionate size should be set aside at each sub command and Frank O'Neill House.

It was the view of many attendees that currently we half-heartedly pay lip service to providing far from suitable facilities. Frank O'Neill House it was thought had a quiet room but that it was also used as a sick bay and an "odds and ends" storeroom. The room is untidy and unclean. A comment was made that if an inspector required a room; one would be quickly found and cleaned. If the room has multi uses who would be given preference?

Some requested Management's support for prayer meetings to be arranged, once a week (in their own time), to include the different faiths. It was agreed that staff should not be made to feel uncomfortable or different in wanting to set aside time in a busy working day/week to pray.

Suggestions were made as follows:

- A timetable of all the religious events should be circulated to Lambeth's SMT and the Borough Commander could send appropriate greetings to staff celebrating a specific religious day/event.
- It should not be just about celebrating Christian religious festivities. Staff requested that management should be consistent and sincere in their support. Time and time again, staff mentioned that if something was deemed to be important, they would prefer not too much of the "talking" but more of the "doing".
- It was felt by some that faith is important even in the workplace as it defines who you are and understanding and respect should start at the top and feed down.
- A consistent message – Communication is key and Lambeth SMT should involve our Communications Unit to spread positive messages on Lambeth's intranet to promote faith issues.
- We should make greater use of posters and they should be displayed in more prominent areas. For example, a display of messages in the foyer at FON.

Admiration was frequently expressed regarding the Black History Month Display in Lambeth HQ's foyer. Clear, simple messages in plain English, it was agreed, could help improve communication.

Apparently, during Ramadan a link was circulated to staff but a number of delegates felt there could have been greater visibility such as posters and information about Ramadan on Lambeth's intranet.

Staff were generally very philosophical and accepted that we will not achieve perfection as the MPS is a microcosm of society. However, others felt strongly that the MPS must reflect the society and police force it is policing. Political posturing is not at all helpful.

It came up time after time, that there is a general lack of awareness.

- Staff should be educated in order to help change MPS culture as White police officers and atheists are very disrespectful of colleagues who value their religion.
- Lambeth's SMT to become more involved and to acknowledge the diversity of our staff and their festivals.

An important example was given of the consequence of lack of awareness. Eid celebrations at Lambeth were held at the Streatham Mosque at different times. These events and prayers were all extremely well attended but there was *no* police visibility. It was felt that the police should have been aware and there should have been sufficient police presence as there could have been racial tensions. Once again, the importance of communication was mentioned. This could have been an excellent opportunity for sharing information (currently, this does not happen) and linking-in with police officers/staff, partners and Lambeth's community. A great opportunity to include Somalian PCSOs and Muslim Police Officers was missed.

Do we do enough to recognise the importance of the Festival of Diwali? Staff tend to keep quiet about their special religious festivals.

Since '9/11, there is a general perception that some religions are more dangerous than others. Attendees were of the view that currently it is the Muslims in a similar way the Catholic Irish were demonised prior to the Peace Accord. This it was thought can impact upon operational delivery.

There was considerable debate around the position of the MPS in that it purports to value all faiths in the same way as it does Christianity. However many disagreed that this was indeed the case and wondered if it really respects other faiths. Staff of other faiths felt that they do not receive equal treatment. They have to go to sometimes extreme lengths to explain why they need time off to celebrate their special religious events. However, a number of people felt that Faith was the only aspect that the MPS was really delivering in that, as far as possible, the MPS does accommodate the requirements of different faiths.

An interesting discussion was held with one group. They did not want the MPS to go 'overboard' in appeasing different faiths. They did not want special treatment and did not want to be patronised. For them, it was important that things were not taken out of context. Example of pork was given. "Can't eat pork, don't have to ask for it". This group was predominantly non-Christian.

Some felt that isolation with regard to being of a different faith could cause problems. They asked not to be judged because of difference and placed great value on integrity and principles.

There was discussion how staff of different faiths are *coerced* into joining in the celebration of Christian festivals, especially Christmas. Some commented that they were made to feel like spoilsports when refusing to join in.

- Educate the police officers and police staff to respect/accept difference. However, there was no consensus how to go about educating staff. A good example was cited. in how all the canteens across the Borough have special Christmas lunches but ignore the other festivals. Some felt that other faiths should be as vocal about their own festivals as the Christians are.

Dietary requirements – very much ignored, even in the canteens.

- Suggestion that we label the food – Halal/pork. Ensure that there are Halal food choices on the menus for police officers on AID.

There was some stress that people make too many assumptions. It was noted that on AID commitments the organisation tends to play safe with cheese and not include pork but at New Scotland Yard, officers on AID have far greater choices.

- Educate the canteen staff to cook dishes celebrating other faiths' festivals. A suggestion was made for the canteens to provide a special dish once a month. It was mentioned that Halal foods should also be provided for detainees.

There was one group who were positive and, interestingly, comprised mostly of non-Christians. They felt that the MPS is good at making allowances for Muslims to celebrate Ramadan. Police officers are allowed to wear turbans. They wondered if there was stereotyping going on. They agreed that there should be a quiet room set aside for staff and that all festivals should be acknowledged. Some said that they had not suffered unpleasant experiences because of their faith.

There was a comment that there is a lot of acknowledgement with respect to faith but *not* culture.

An interesting point was made that there is a whole array of difference so there should be some unity and agreement otherwise we would have confusion. One person felt that within the workplace there were too many differences to properly accommodate them all. This is the workplace – do what you are paid to do. However, that person stressed that all staff should be respectful of difference.

Some felt that management are relaxed in granting permission for their staff to attend Friday Prayers. However, it seemed to be (White) colleagues who tend to be suspicious and BME personnel felt they had to continually justify the time off.

Others had positive experiences and have received support to enable them to practice their faith. There was mention made about conflict in supporting the various faiths. Muslim officers are allowed time off on Fridays but Jehovah's Witnesses are not allowed to take time off on Saturdays and Christians are not allowed time off on Sundays if they are on duty. It was felt that Management should recognise the importance of faiths across the spectrum and make sensible adjustments.

Someone brought up the fact that as Borough Commander, Marin Bridger, had *promised* a Quiet/Prayer Room.

- More awareness training about the different faiths to be arranged for police staff and police officers. Police officers receive bare minimum as probationers at Hendon. Training around the subject of faith for probationers at Hendon has to be improved. Apparently, currently, it is too simplistic, even non-existent, or designed just for the officers to pass.
- A leaflet should be prepared of "Do's and Don'ts" about the various faiths and distributed to all staff.

"If officers know and understand the different faiths and make an effort to understand the community they serve it would pay dividends. Understanding, awareness and respect of the different faiths could break down barriers when dealing with Lambeth's diverse communities."

- The Organisation should confront officers' negative perceptions. For example, some Muslim officers find it difficult to acknowledge their faith in the workplace.

General comments not related to faith issues

It was accepted that changes are being made, but some of the changes are not good enough. It was mentioned that "bullying is still rife" and a few staff commented they found that working for the MPS to be a "hostile" environment. A number of issues are now hidden. Nowadays, racism, for example, is more covert.

Communicating the issues affecting BME personnel

The discussion was intended to elicit ideas and views as to how issues unique to BME police personnel might be better communicated to senior managers and indeed supervisors. However a common view running through many of the discussions was that the collective experience of BME staff⁴ tends not to be understood or considered important by management; this it was said is reflected in the absence of discussion on race and diversity at senior management meetings. However, many agreed that the indifference is not the exclusive domain of senior managers as it was also felt that majority ethnic colleagues tend not to perceive that BME staff might have a different workplace reality to the majority. Furthermore, evidence of management indifference was usually to be found in a pattern of behaviours whereby potentially contentious issues raised by BME staff are “sat on” by managers and supervisors. This led some to ask the question, ‘Is the MPS ready for equality?’ and others to express a widely held view that ‘the MPS is behind when considering and addressing race and diversity issues’. Matters of consistency regarding management approach was a topical issue as it was felt that all too often key staff move on and important issues are then forgotten.

There was a general agreement that the experiences of BME officers as highlighted in the recent BBC TV ‘Panorama’ documentary (Secret Policeman) were ‘easily identifiable as the general experience of all BME staff’. An overwhelming majority felt that these unique experiences necessitated regular (quarterly) and confidential opportunities to share experiences and offer support to others. The benefit of meeting in a safe environment was discussed and many tended to view the experience as psychologically uplifting whereas written reports would be “flat” and incapable of conveying the emotions expressed at these events. It was felt that key issues from these events should be raised at Command Team meetings and that ideas from these events should be considered for implementation through the Lambeth Equality and Diversity Task Force Action Plan. Race and Diversity, it was thought by a majority, should be on the agenda for all senior management meetings. ‘Race’ was seen as a separate item from ‘Diversity’ given its historical implications and challenge for the MPS. It was however perceived by some that managers have little interest or support for events that bring BME staff together and examples were given of officers being refused permission to attend in duty time.

⁴ This experience was explained by one officer as ‘joining the MPS and then the need to prove yourself to join the Force within the Force and that’s the toughest’ Others talked of feelings of isolation with colleagues refusing to speak or sit near them in the canteen.

A discussion forum for BME staff

The desire and indeed requirement for these events to take place in a safe environment was paramount; as trust amongst colleagues was perceived as being integral to achieving the outcomes all staff should wish to see. There was also considerable consensus around the need for these events to be publicised, as staff didn't want to be perceived as meeting in secret. The recent poster publicity campaign in support of gender workshops was cited as an example of the profile required by these (BME) events. Terms of reference for future meetings should also be considered. The general consensus was that these events should be exclusively for BME staff however at some stage in the future consideration should be given to inviting members of the Command Team.

Reasons for BME staff failing to attend these events were given as 'apathy', believing that nothing is going to change, disappointment in the inconsistency of senior managers in the recent past and general concerns from BME staff regarding how such events are seen by colleagues and how those perceptions might impact upon their 'acceptability' in the workplace.

Staff Associations

There was a widely held view that the Police Federation/PCS Union are not responsive to BME issues, fuelled by the noticeable lack of BME representation in the Union and Federation. This led many to speak about significant trust and confidence issues as it was felt that BME staff needed "someone who looks like you and has shared experience". One officer, using an old African proverb, expressed a perhaps unkind but popular perception of the BME officers' relationship with the Police Federation; "A sick lion will not go to a vulture for treatment". It was further suggested by a number of staff that the Federation should explore the possibility of 'reserved places' for BME officers and generally agreed that the Federation and the PCS Union both have a significant role to play in highlighting and indeed publicising the unique diversity/faith issues and experiences of staff from BME communities. There was unanimity around the perception that the Federation tends to be 'silent' on issues involving BME officers. The issue of trust, in particular for probationary constables, was considered to be a critical and priority issue. The idea of a development officer/mentor was discussed at some length. Others held the view that the Federation representatives were too close to senior management.

The role of the BPA⁵ at Borough level was met with mixed views. Some staff had been supported by the BPA through difficult experiences however others thought that the role of the BPA was too strategic and that what was required was local representation reflecting local issues. It was suggested by some that the BPA should work more closely with the Federation, particularly if BME officers gain representation on the Federation.

Communications

It was thought that all officers should be encouraged to capture events that may impact on race and diversity e.g. festivals and other significant religious celebrations. There was a general view that the Communications Unit failed to address or reflect the racial diversity of the Borough. While recognising the challenges around organisational culture, it was generally agreed that BME staff must take more time and responsibility to communicate with one another.

Training and Development

This discussion provided an opportunity for BME staff from Lambeth borough to come together to discuss training provision, development and ascertain where efforts can be made to address the needs and problems faced by BME staff within the Metropolitan Police Service.

This involved five groups of BME staff. The following provides a brief, but overall account of the discussion

Training

The general consensus by Police Officers, considered that standard training was adequate to do the job. However, though mainstream training is specific to all, once officers had experienced the initial training, it was felt that there was little if any effort to target and support BME staff that wish to progress to senior ranks

There was general agreement that Police Staff experiences are by no means too dissimilar. In contrast Police Staff, in particular those in mainstream administration

⁵ BPA representatives were not present during the exercises

positions receive little or in most cases no training whatsoever, being encouraged to 'learn on the job'.

Development

The image of development is often negative, and seen as a struggle, creating a barrier to participation, that resulted in lack of motivation from BME staff to undertake training and pursue their career pathways within the MPS.

Reasons:

- Few positions to the next band, in particular for Police Staff
- No promotional prospects, in particular to PCSO's
- Offer of positions in the lower bands. This is despite having more than above the required qualification. It is worth noting at least one member of staff from all five groups held a first degree or above. None were in Senior Management Positions, but had been employed with the MPS for at least five years.

Likewise, little or no confidence is held with the PDR system due to the following:

- The onus of responsibility is often left to staff to set their own objectives, and targets for progression.
- No reviews are made to ascertain whether objectives are being met.
- Line Managers fail in their duty to manage.

Issues

This does not mean that BME staff needs are unmet but demonstrates in particular a concern that MPS support strategies lack clear policies to help BME staff due to;

- Lack of clear targeting
- Lack of recognition of the additional disadvantages faced by BME staff as opposed to their white colleagues.
- Failure to provide an awareness of viable training opportunities to BME staff.

For instance, not one member of staff from the all five groups had any understanding of Positive Action, or awareness as to whether the policy existed in the MPS. Similarly, some were vaguely aware of the Leadership Course offered to BME staff.

Conclusion

Arguably, training and development issues are generic to all members of MPS staff. However, there is a clear indication of the omission and enormous under-representation of BME staff in middle and senior management positions

If the MPS intends to ‘bridge this gap’, and permit BME staff to get ‘a foot on the ladder’, there needs to be indicators of recognition and commitment to reduce the barriers to participation in training and development faced by BME staff within the MPS.

Complaints, Discipline and Fairness at Work overview

Group 1

This group spoke about ‘double standards’ in the way BME staff are treated when they make complaints in comparison to when they are complained about. They felt that their personal complaints were not taken seriously or ‘brushed off’, whilst complaints from members of the public against them were always robustly carried out often with BME’s feeling vulnerable with no support base. They felt BME officers were subjected to complaints too often. They thought that the MPS has a lack of cultural awareness with senior managers ‘often worse than lower ranking staff’. They felt that managers should manage issues fairly and proportionately, not make a problem into a crisis.⁶ They expressed a lack of faith in MPS discipline process, expressing the view that the main culprits are not punished or seen to be punished. They were united in stating that negative stereotypes of BME staff are rife and endemic in the MPS. They expressed that this is not acknowledged by the organisation and this therefore undermines faith in the discipline system. They thought that the Federation was not always impartial when BME staff made complaints and that BME representation in the Federation was far too little.

⁶ An issue highlighted during the Morris Inquiry into professional standards and employment matters in the Metropolitan Police Service 2004

Group 2

This group stated that BME senior managers are not objective regarding issues concerning BME junior staff. They thought that BME staff are reluctant to speak to one another for fear of being further excluded and definitely not being accepted by colleagues. They spoke of Police supervisors having the same expectations of civilian staff as they do lower ranking officers and expecting them to be equally aware of the rank structure and inherent roles. There was a view that BME staff are avoided and ignored with officers preferring to go to white civilian staff. Generally they thought *that negative experiences were greater than that of positive experiences* in the MPS and expressed that senior managers were fearful of dealing with BME complaints.

Group 3

This group mentioned a positive experience and spoke of a Custody Sergeant's demotion as a result of unacceptable conduct towards a BME officer and talked in positive terms in relation to senior management. They then went on to discuss a Territorial Support Group (TSG) stop of one of the talk group - BME Police officer - resulting in a complaint from that officer that was not taken seriously. They spoke of regular informal discussions, raised by suspects regarding TSG conduct with the words "You know how they are" frequent. They then talked about Sergeants "picking on BME staff" in the disciplinary process for promotional purposes as they were 'easy targets' because of their differences e.g. accents, popularity, general interests, etc and that this focus came above developing BME officers. This meant that BME staff were often wary of them.

Group 4

This group spoke of feelings of isolation in the Organisation and thought that there were not enough BME support networks. They mentioned that BME have to prove their value and often have to be better than their counterparts to be recognised. They also mentioned that there is a distinct lack of BME leaders in the Organisation, especially African-Caribbean. They also spoke of awareness of '*evidence gathering*' by senior officers and thought that it was more difficult for BME males in the organisation. They also thought that the stereotypes picked up by Police officer's day-to-day street work affected their interactions with BME personnel in the workplace.

Group 5

They thought that the disciplinary process was not being followed by the Senior Management Team and that the disciplinary process should be a last resort, not first course of action as it appears at present, when dealing with BME personnel. They thought that the disciplinary process was therefore inconsistent with BME staff more likely to be reported for discipline while white staff are more likely to be given “words of advice.” In relation to the Federation, it was thought that they are *not supportive of the needs of BME officers*.

Organisational Culture

Tokenism

“Even though Black staff feel/are obliged to deny themselves, the MPS still ‘uses us tokenistically’ to disguise racist behaviour or ‘get them out of hot water’. So they make you arrest a black person so they can’t be accused. No one ever discusses how you might feel.”

Dealing with diversity

“The organisation is slow to learn and behind in terms of communication. It doesn’t equip staff with capacity to deal adequately with diversity and difference. Diversity is addressed at a superficial level if at all. You have to question whether the training can help at all especially when people hold negative attitudes.”

“They (Communication Unit) could better communicate issues affecting BME staff via intranet, events, leaflets, forums etc. The visibility needs to be increased.”

“BME officers are reluctant/fear observing their faiths. Training is needed but we have the resources internally already. Staff would be prepared to help. Specific diversity whilst being on the ‘agenda’ at a senior level is not actually on the agenda because it is too sensitive and they are scared to discuss it. *Fear is pervasive*, people won’t talk formally. It’s all ‘informal’.”

Stereotyping

“As a BME member of the police service, there's an assumption that you can't do well in the force without being involved in some form of ‘dodgy dealing’.

Respect issues

“White officers let you know that you are different and there's no respect. But they need to recognise that we are all different. Within the office environment there is a real lack of respect from supervisors and colleagues, you are the last person to be asked about anything, e.g. social or for information etc.”

“They have low expectation of us, there is an assumption that we are a ‘civvy or administrator’ and often end up having to apologise as they (white officers) assume black and clothed = civvy, while white and clothed = CID. There was a view that BME personnel have to be ‘really obvious’ in the work environment in order to ensure recognition. “You have to perform 110% better, it's still not enough and your performance is never rewarded”.⁷

Senior support

“There is a pressure to be ‘objective’ and not to use the ‘blackness’ or cultural understanding to inform or explain a situation. BME staff tend to be seen as the culprits, ‘in the absence of due process we need Black officers with strength of character’”. “Senior [BME] officers are in fear of supporting you for fear of being seen as a radical – they buy into this stereotype. There is a false assumption that assimilation affords protection.”

“There are significant trust issues between junior and senior staff.”

Social/support networks

“When we're all at Hendon together it's black and white together, but when you move on, so do they, you're alone; they (white officers) don't associate. You really feel

⁷ The perception that BME officers and staff have to ‘work twice as hard to be noticed’ was commented upon by Chief Constable Mike Fuller in the recent BBC Panorama documentary.

isolated, there's a pub culture if you don't do that; you're not in. You find that conversations stop when you go into the canteen. You get really paranoid".⁸

'Culture of support and acceptance is specific to particular branches. Some can be quite family-orientated and supportive. Black officers often feel socially excluded from informal networks.⁹ The BPA is good but too distant and you'd only call on them as a last resort'.

"There is no sustainable network at a local level, and you don't feel you can be open for fear of being labelled as doing the 'black panther thing'. But it appears different for LGBT, they as a minority group seem to be more acceptable."

Conspiracy theories

"There a real divide and rule approach, *you never see two black officers in a car together.*"

"This is all part of their (white officers) conspiracy theory. We can't talk together without a revolution being planned.¹⁰ You often get asked what you were talking about. I'll be asked that when I get back from this workshop. It's all head down, no unity, it's really divisive".

Nepotism

"Not convinced that the best staff are in the most appropriate roles, 'it's a face fit thing'. E.g. Trident, is for black on black - but where are the black officers?"

Community dynamics and impact

"The organisation reflects society. The first contact some white officers have with black people is negative, so they tend to view us all in much the same way. It's all they know it reinforces what they think they know about us.¹¹ But .it is hard for us especially when you know that the known criminals are black. It impacts on us on an unconscious and

⁸ This very same suspicion was noted in Ron Hope's (1986) 'The Experiences of Black and Asian Police Officers' Cranfield

⁹ A common view expressed in the MPS (1990) Bristol Seminars Report

¹⁰ This fear of black officers congregating was noted in the (1990) Bristol Seminar's Report

¹¹ This view is consistent with the BPA oral evidence provided at the (1999) Stephen Lawrence Inquiry

conscious level. There is a tension between being a member of staff and how they (white officers) treat the black community and their attitude towards them.” “I hate the police *when you are in the car and they stop someone, you feel bad, it’s horrible*”.

There was a popular view that the Territorial Support Group’s approach ‘is really unhelpful’ to furthering positive community relations. Black officer and white TSG approaches are so different. “Where White officers want to arrest Black people. Black officers prefer to talk, find out what’s going on. When Black officers do this, they are seen as colluding with criminals or providing them with information to get them out of trouble”.

“The TSG approach is ‘too cliquey’, there are too few black officers and white colleagues are not socially aware. That helps to keep the tension up. They want to use their batons, and we want to talk. Talking has to be the first position. The police have a profound effect on communities. They (community) have negative perceptions of the police including black officers, and this feels irreversible.”

Bullying and Harassment

“The mentality of the Met is racist but there is a tendency to deny racial dimensions to a situation. Experiences of bullying, harassment and intimidation are widespread but cases are undermined by a lack of evidence. If you challenge racist jokes, you are vulnerable to challenge especially if you are the only one in that branch.”

As a career choice?

“Fantastic career but you need to trust your own judgement. Regardless of our (BME) well documented struggle, we can’t allow one ethnic group in London to run the police service alone – we all need to be in there! Knowing what happens in here is important as knowledge is power.” “*There is nothing wrong with the Met as such - it’s just the people in it*”.

The post-Stephen Lawrence Inquiry policy context

The reoccurring issues and concerns threaded throughout many of the themes would suggest that ‘equality of opportunity’ for at least some BME personnel in Lambeth has

failed to materialise or indeed advance in what is significantly ‘the post-Stephen Lawrence decade’. Some of this can arguably be attributed to an over zealous performance management culture which has prioritised service delivery in terms of ‘crime-fighting’ where BME communities are perceived as requiring ‘specialist attention’ through a series of moral panics i.e. terrorism, gun-crime and knife crime. Whether top-level commitment to ‘Diversity and Equality’ has effectively percolated through the Organisation can perhaps be answered in the considerable weight of opinion to be gleaned from numerous studies into police performance, suggesting that there is little evidence of linkage between the Metropolitan Police’s strategic goals and the routine drive for specific quantitative objectives in those areas where policing is delivered to the general public, the Borough Operational Command Unit.¹² Therefore, this disconnect between policy, strategy and delivery has in the unprecedented challenges of recent times, become ever more apparent, arguably resulting in key recommendations from the Stephen Lawrence and the Morris Inquiries being placed on hold, thereby enabling the MPS to address ‘real policing issues’¹³. This view is borne out in the collective experiences of the personnel attending Lambeth Support HQ on 23 October 2008 where significant consensus was achieved and concerns expressed within the context of a deep-seated, still largely negative, ‘organisational culture’, highlighting issues that many would have expected (and believed) the post-Stephen Lawrence work to have addressed. On the contrary, these negative issues continue to pervade the work-place realities of at least thirty-six BME staff within Lambeth. Furthermore, the experiences of a statistically significant number of BME personnel will inevitably lead to questions concerning the MPS’s commitment to progressing and supporting BME personnel, so woefully underrepresented in middle and senior management, and whether the whole diversity and equality of opportunity agenda has seen appropriate investment and leadership in the post-Stephen Lawrence Inquiry decade. Actions plans, it can be argued, are only useful in delivering change where there is clear and unequivocal support, commitment and vision expressed from the top down¹⁴. However, effecting organisational change at the BOCU

¹² Fitzgerald, M., Hough, M., Joseph, I. and Qureshi, T. (2002) *Policing for London*, Cullompton, Devon: Willan Publishing

¹³ One trainee reported an instructor at a police training college telling the class: “You’ve done the diversity. That’s a load of b***s. Now let’s get on with the real stuff.” Times Online, 8.3.2005

¹⁴ In 1999, Home Secretary, Mr Straw demanded action to “ensure black and Asian police officers were promoted at the same rate as their white colleagues and steps to halt the current rate at which officers from ethnic communities are leaving the force - double the rate of white officers and still rising”.

level, in order to address and correct the negative environment experienced by some BME personnel in the present performance centric culture is perhaps an unrealistic expectation according to Irving and Bourne's qualitative research¹⁵ in a number of Metropolitan Police BOCUs, which revealed that;

“Management above the level of Inspector was seen as having virtually no impact on working practices at relief level except as a source of directives, and sanctions against officers who failed to comply with directives, rules and regulations.”

“There was a general derisory attitude to exhortatory campaigns emanating from Scotland Yard that laid out their wares in glossy brochures accompanied by PR activity in the media.”

Irving and Bourne further questioned whether the obsession with a narrow and largely unrepresentative raft of quantitative data is conducive to providing the leadership necessary to enable and promote change in an increasingly complex policing environment. If we are to accept these findings and acknowledge a view that the current social policy context may actually *entrench* racism, then BOCUs it could be argued do not have the resource, expertise or appropriate performance management structures to affect the degree of organisational change necessary to begin to address the negative aspects of a culture that has challenged the values of the MPS for generations.

Recommendations

1. Establish a 'Gold Group' to examine and advise on the significant implications within this report for police/Black and minority ethnic community relations; police/partnership working; the advancement and development of BME staff; service delivery to the wider BME communities and of course managing the reputational risk to the MPS. The 'Gold Group' should consider whether opportunities exist for managing organisational change within the present arrangements on the BOCU and to make recommendations accordingly. Recommendations should be subjected to independent review and monitoring, possibly through an IAG process.

¹⁵ Irving B, Bourne, D., (2002) Enhancing performance in BCU's: London : Police Foundation

2. The introduction of a Balanced Scorecard¹⁶ approach at BOCU level whereby the Borough Commander's performance is assessed across a number of key indicators, including HR management and the effective policing of plural communities.

3. Disseminate this report to the numerous Inquiries, (MPA, NPIA, MoJ etc), recently established to examine the organisational barriers impeding the progression and development of BME police officers and staff.

¹⁶ A control methodology which uses a multi-dimensional framework for describing, implementing and managing strategy. The balanced scorecard adds value by providing concise, relevant and balanced information.

Annex 1

Focus sessions for Lambeth's BME personnel

Lambeth Support HQ

Thursday 23 October 2008

Programme

9.30am - Arrival and registration

10.00am – Welcome and opening remarks - Supt Paul Wilson

10.30am – 15 min facilitated sessions

- A. Organisational Culture Paula
- B. Training & Development - Zenobia
- C. Complaints/Discipline/Fairness at Work - Wayne
- D. Faith issues in the workplace - Pam
- E. Communicating the issues - views on regular meetings of this nature/BME forum/ and or with members of senior management - Paul

11.30am - Break

11.50am - Brief (2 min) presentation from each facilitator on emerging issues

12.05pm - Discussion and next steps

12.30pm - Lunch

1.30pm - Finish

Annex 2

Complaints and Discipline

Start with positive experiences of how C&D has been applied fairly

Is it always applied fairly?

What are the key inconsistencies?

Are there disparities?

Are there disparities between the way police officers and civil staff/PCSOs are treated?

What needs to improve?

Annex 3

Faith in the workplace

Do we tolerate different faith groups?

Is faith an important issue in the work place?

If you are of a non-Christian faith what are your positive experiences in the workplace?

What are the difficult experiences you have faced?

Should all police buildings have quiet rooms/prayer rooms?

Does Christmas for example cause any particular difficulties for other faith groups?

Are dietary requirements being satisfactorily met.....example Muslim police officers on AID?

What quick solutions would you suggest?

Any longer term solutions?

Annex 4

Training and Development

What's going well in this area?

What's not going well?

What are your solutions?

Do you understand Positive Action?

What support should be given if any?

How should that support be managed?