



**COHESION,
DIVERSITY,
EQUALITY
CONFERENCE
SEMINARS**

Policy into Practice Seminars: (5) Criminal Justice System

Chair: Sarah Isal, Runnymede

Presentations:

David Reardon, Home Office Criminal Justice Service

Elena Noel, Hate Crimes Project Manager, Southwark Mediation

Maqsood Ahmad, Director of Diversity and Confidence, National Probation Service

Liz Dixon, Diversity Training and Development Officer, Community Probation Service

Note takers: Kirit Mistry and Tauhid Pasha

The ohps of Elena Noel's presentation can be seen on the Runnymede website [www.runnymedetrust.org]

Presentations

1. **David Reardon** opened the session with a presentation that focused on the Criminal Justice System's Strategy to improve public confidence, in particular the confidence of BME communities engaging with the CJS. His report indicated an improvement in public confidence overall. Key objectives of the strategy's programme were to improve:

- Frontline delivery – engage service users, improve stop & search methods, remember that how people are treated counts for a lot
- Communications – public confidence can be significantly affected by major events, e.g. the Lawrence and Mubarak Inquiries; and the drip drip effect of good or bad news is substantial
- Community engagement – in particular; to try and grow the percentage of BME people who think they are being treated equally;

Among the statistics quoted were: an improvement in public confidence particularly amongst the minority ethnic community, recorded at 56% in comparison to what was targeted, 49–52%; and, for the five CJS agencies (Courts, CPS, Police, Probation, Prisons) 48% against a target of 51–53%, with confidence in the Police having gone up.

2. **Elena Noel.** Until recently the London Borough of Southwark had the highest recorded level of hate crime. Hate crime impacts on everyone regardless of race/faith, and mechanisms are needed to deal with it. In Southwark the Targeted Police Initiative on hate crime has had some success: hate crime went down by 50%, therefore people working together achieved direct results. Bringing in the police can increase intimidation at first. Others choose the mediation process to enforce their rights of enjoyment and access to shared space. Mediation means understanding and working with those causing the hate crime.

The largest category of people involved in hate crimes are aged 11–18. Hate crime is no longer characterised as a black/white issue. Tensions occur between different youth groups, often of the same ethnicity. Those causing hate crime often perceive themselves

as victims – so work in schools and youth clubs can improve policies and practices for the frontline staff.

3. **Maqsood Ahmad.** Good leadership is needed. Poor leadership, in terms of a lack of collaborative work between Police, Local Authorities and

Institutions, has failed communities. The Oldham riots, for example, were partly due to such gaps in community cohesion. Maqsood stressed that we need to ensure good political leadership and a change in cultural leadership. Decision-makers and leaders need to be in touch with the realities of life in the communities they serve. If leadership is working well then the strategy needs to be got right, which must involve the community and be driven with passion, commitment and a sense of realism. We need to address the issue of racism and meet the aspirations of young British people.

4. **Liz Dixon.** When 22% of the minority ethnic population in the prisons is black, compared to 5% of the population as a whole, the social exclusion factor is visible. With community sentence programmes still failing to engage with BME communities, we need to work for legitimacy, engage with people through their racial identity and then take them beyond it. Learning different strategies to engage and stay connected with the communities will help ensure that the RR(A)A 2000 impact assessments are implemented according to community needs. More tolerance is the key. Perceptions of 'privilege' for some communities and an 'unsafe' social climate can only be erased through engagement. Race Action Network website was recommended as a gateway for contributing to building tolerance through dissemination of knowledge-based information.

Discussion points

1. Progress with race hate crimes?

The questioner raised several points here. With the Mubarak Inquiry currently under way, had there been any real progress since the Macpherson Report on the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry? Also, how had the CPS dealt with race hate crimes and the reluctance by some judges to prosecute perpetrators? New elements to the myths used by the BNP and the media need to be challenged. Leadership by institutions, politicians and governments needs to move away from playing the race card. (MB)

In response Liz Dixon stressed the need to listen to people's experiences. There are different levels of perpetrators and there is a need to work with these groups. Myths are not necessarily the same – the myths do change, so listen to people and work on all fronts. Elena Noel felt there are too many consultations; the jargon of documents needs to be made meaningful for the communities to understand. David Reardon commented on the Gus John report, which confirmed that judges were not dealing with race crime – a committee has been set up on this issue. While Maqsood Ahmad thought that use of

the word 'Muslim' in race hate crimes was not adequately researched. Contrary to what Liz had said, stereotyping of black and Asian people would go on, and through being used by professionals would persist in the media and in other arenas.

2. Comments from floor included:

(a) The most tolerant staff are the ones that need to be retained, but they are the ones most likely to become disillusioned with the service and leave. (DJ)

(b) We have legislation and Inquiries, but not enough mechanisms to implement the legislation. Institutional racism will inhibit community cohesion/diversity unless and until the Government removes racist barriers from its institutions, increases sanctions on such behaviours and exhibits more political will for change. (MH)

(c) Restorative justice is needed to prevent people from reoffending. (JB)

3. On engaging with communities

Maqsood Ahmad recommended engagement with those communities who are not being reached.

Elena Noel commented that a drawback of Mediation is that it is voluntary and not compulsory. Mediation works with the mindset of perpetrators, takes a holistic approach and entails a commitment to continue work with perpetrators, individuals and groups, for up to a year. Liz Dixon believes that we do now have tools to identify and deal with racists.

In a response to Elena it was observed (by MH) that all governments who come into power fail to address the needs of black communities. Instead we see more exclusion and criminalisation of black young people. Elena Noel replied that we need to start at a local level and look at education in conjunction with the authorities.

Maqsood Ahmad thought that potential leaders needed to be involved with those in the decision-making positions. Targets for equality are needed on a corporate level to address and make accountable those who fail to engage with BME and Faith communities. 'Perceived' leaders are not sufficient.

4. Other issues raised from the floor:

(a) Sentencing practice for Gypsies and Travellers, is it being monitored by the CPS? David Reardon said it was, but there was some dissent from the floor.

(b) Young people are not involved in decision-making within the CPS, Probation and Prison services, said one delegate. There were concerns also about institutional racism within CPS, concerns that CPS is failing the BME communities and associated organisations.

(c) The words leadership and strategy have been mentioned many times today amid concerns that BME professionals and communities have access neither to the information nor the strategies. Those in positions of power should share information and strategic thinking with other BME professionals for them to be able to work and empower the communities. Strategies are no good if they stay on the shelf or in the heads of those who developed them; they need to be communicated and implemented. □

Liz Dixon (standing) addresses the Criminal Justice Seminar, with Sarah Isal in the chair

