

Minutes of Meeting 32

Saturday 10th March 2007

China Fleet Club, Saltash

ATTENDANCE

Carl: Police Authority
John: Force Diversity Inspector
Kay: Gender Trust/Press For Change
Mark 1: RESPECT Youth Group
Mark 2: Plymouth Pride Forum
Michael: Intercom (Chair)
Nic: Gires/Western Boys/Press For Change
Rhea: Independent Member
Tess: Intercom Trust

APOLOGIES

Andy: Intercom Trust
Danny: Eddystone Trust
Juliet: Force Diversity Manager
Kate: Cornwall Lesbian Line
Keith: Plymouth Pride Forum
Kevin: Number One Centre/Broken Rainbow
Martin: Cornwall GMHP
Nicky: Beaumont Society
Sorrel: FFLAG
Steve: Western boys
Teresa: Force Diversity Officer

Meeting opened at 10:30am.

Welcome and introductions

Michael welcomed Inspector John Jackson and Mark from Plymouth Pride Forum to the Group and highlighted that priority should be given to restoring momentum back to the PLG after the break, particularly in terms of recruiting new members.

Michael also passed on DCC Tony Melville's apologies that he could not attend this meeting but said that he looked forward to doing so in the future.

Minutes and matters arising

The minutes were agreed as a true record. It was reported that the letter for Inspector Jim Gale, thanking him for his dedication to the Group, had been sent and the reply had been circulated.

1. Matter for report: recent crime statistics

Copies of recent statistics collated by the Police on homophobic, racist and disablist crime were distributed for the Group's information.

The issue of under-reporting was raised and it was agreed that this subject should have the duration of the meeting devoted to it at a later date as there was not sufficient time today to fully discuss the problem. It was felt it would be particularly useful to discuss this at the next meeting where Andy and Teresa could discuss the Safer Cruising project they have been working on.

Mark 2 raised his concerns that there was not a separate category for transphobic crime in the statistics and queried why this was being grouped together with homophobic incidents. John informed the Group that currently incidents cannot be prosecuted as being motivated by transphobia (an issue for the CPS) but, while they may be on the system as homophobically motivated, they can be recorded as transphobic in the incident log itself. John also clarified that the flag put on hate crime logs reflects the motivation of the offender and not the status of the victim. Given the importance of raising this issue with the CPS it was agreed that the Chief Crown Prosecutor should be invited to attend at his first convenience to discuss the matter.

Action: Michael to contact Roger Coe-Salazar

Mark 2 felt it was important that it be noted that there is some positive work being done – for example the recent Trans Weekend in Manchester was a very successful event. The Group also agreed that there was good work being done in Devon and Cornwall on these issues.

Michael asked if everyone felt comfortable with the term ‘phobic’ being used as convenient shorthand to include both types of hate crime.

The issue of more frequent reporting of racist crimes than phobic ones was raised. Michael noted that it should be taken into account that BME organisations are better funded and so have more community workers. He encouraged all members to do all we can to encourage reporting. John said that from the Police point of view work is very similar on all hate crime. Carl said that this is not the only problem of its kind, for instance the Police still have huge hurdles to overcome in terms of under-reporting of domestic violence. The Group asked that John look into the data sharing protocols that exist across the four primary authorities.

Action: John to circulate paper on data-sharing protocols

2. Middlemoor (police headquarters): changes and updates

John reported that Mr Stephen Otter is proving to be a dynamic, transformational Chief Constable, driven by community focus and customer service. He is challenging BCU Commanders to deliver results by urging them to think not only in terms of strategic planning but also tactically. Carl assured the Group that in the near future there would be much greater corporacy across the four BCUs than we have seen hitherto because of Stephen’s presence. Stephen is reported as being conscious that they are currently operating as four different police services, working towards vague locally-agreed targets, and is determined that the disparity will be addressed. Performance management will now be undertaken by the Police Authority to hold BCU Commanders to account.

John updated the Group on other changes at Middlemoor such as Andy Hollingshead’s appointment as Acting Assistant Chief Constable, Caroline Winters’ move to Centrex, and news of Acting Chief Constable Richard Stowe’s imminent departure on April 6th to work in the national CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear) team. John also informed the Group that Elaine Marshall is due to be starting at the end of April in her new role as Acting Chief Superintendent in Plymouth. Supt Steve Swani will be moving permanently to the Territorial Police but there is currently no news on his replacement in North & East Devon BCU.

Carl talked to the Group about the recent mergers debate and how this has impacted on appointment of high-ranking officers within the BCUs. Gordon Brown deemed the merger to be

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unworkable due to the huge financial implications of equalising every council's precept. In anticipation of a change in structure a significantly reduced number of officers have been put on the strategic command course. Now that the decision to abandon the proposed changes has been made this has left the whole of the Police Service very short of qualified candidates for strategic posts.

Chief Supt Andy Clarke has been working on the possibility of amalgamating the two BCUs that cover New Devon and Torbay, but it has been decided that this is unworkable. For the foreseeable future the structure of the Basic Command Units will be staying the same. One implication is that resources cannot be shared across borders to under-resourced areas such as S & W Devon.

The issue of Police commitment to the Group was raised. Michael reported that DCC Tony Melville was planning to attend alternate meetings as he wants to sit on all the IAGs. John informed the Group that Juliet would now only be attending twice a year and that he and Teresa would also be taking a lead on all the IAGS. The Group expressed deep concern that they had moved from a situation where Juliet and Nigel were attending almost every meeting to one where there would be no regular input from any police members. Michael noted that this effectively meant the Group would be losing out on access to the top level of decision-making within the Police. The Group asked that Michael write to Tony and ask for justification for this decision and evidence that this would be in the best interests of the LGBT community.

Action: Michael to write to Tony Melville

Michael asked who now held the diversity portfolio as it had been previously stated that this would be at the centre of the new Chief Constable's job description. Carl informed the Group that Steven had delegated all diversity issues to Tony, as is in his power to do. The Group reaffirmed their position that they had to be there not only for strategic and tactical work but also to provide scrutiny. John said he was happy to take back any challenges to be looked at and felt that scrutiny of the Police Service could only be seen as healthy.

Michael queried the level of community involvement in John's appointment as Force Diversity Inspector. John stated that Sonia from the race IAG had been involved but there had again been no involvement with this Group. The Group expressed deep concern that despite their efforts to challenge Andy Clarke and Colin Terry on this very issue in the past that they were still not being consulted. John felt that because of the shortage of applicants the Police may be more focused on the applicant's ability to be trained rather than their knowledge of all the issues. The suggestion was made of having a community review of new members of the diversity units and it was agreed that this particular issue should be given its own agenda item at a later date to be fully explored.

3. Update: Arthur Eathorne case in Plymouth

The Group was reminded of the visit we received from DCI Chris Brown for meeting 29 to talk on the re-investigation of the Arthur Eathorne case. Michael raised his concerns that the outcome of this re-investigation was very different from the one suggested at that meeting, and felt that the lack of warning of this was evidence of a huge communications issue (particularly as Chris had seemed to understand the sensitivity of the case and wanted the Group to go back and reassure the community). John was asked to make such enquiries as he could, and to brief us at the next meeting.

4. Policing of street-preaching: new guidelines in Cornwall

The Group expressed their interest in these guidelines given the possible homophobic/transphobic implications. John said that he would try to locate a copy of these guidelines and circulate them to the Group.

Action: John to locate street-preaching guidelines

5. BCU diversity units: proposed changes

John informed the Group that he had been tasked with writing a paper on the future of the BCU diversity units which was centred on the four outcomes given in neighbourhood policing guidelines – access, influence, intervention and answers. This paper has involved trying to ascertain minimum staffing levels for the diversity units, and also addresses the issue of how diversity unit hours should be allocated between police officers, police staff and PCSOs (a number of PCSOs would make full-time equivalents rather than occupying specific posts). A draft was presented to DCC Tony Melville along with the BCU Commanders and the staffing numbers have been deemed unrealistic. Evidence will need to be gathered to support these proposed figures and the Group agreed that this was a process they should be involved in.

John explained that the confidential nature of some parts of the document (for instance salary figures) had been a barrier to consultation. The Group agreed that they should see a version of the document in which all of these potentially sensitive details had been removed as they would still be able to get a fuller sense of the proposals. Concern was expressed that if the proposals are put to the BCU Commanders before going out to the communities for consultation, the numbers could be signed off leaving no recourse for changing them at a later stage. John said that the final version will go out for consultation but that they had to get a steer from their sponsor first to see if it was untenable.

The subject of an appropriate title for the revised diversity units was raised. They had been given the provisional title of 'Virtual Neighbourhood Teams' which the Group felt did not have positive connotations. Another suggestion from the police was 'Minority Communities Unit' but the Group had similar reservations. However, the suggestion of 'Diverse Communities Unit' had a much more positive response.

The issue of consultation highlighted processes that needed to be made to work between the Police and the PLG. Two in particular were mentioned: incident and crime figures need to be distributed as soon as they come out for the Group's information and the Group must be informed of changes in staffing of diversity units.

The meeting closed at 1:20pm.