Policing Hate Crime

Mario Matassa and **Tim Newburn** reflect on developments within the Metropolitan area and elsewhere in the policing of 'hate crime' since the Lawrence Inquiry.

The term 'hate crime' is a relatively new one, having been coined in the United States in 1985 (Jacobs and Potter 1998). Its currency was not extended to Britain until much more recently. The murder of Stephen Lawrence, and the subsequent inquiry into the police handling of the case, placed the problem of racially motivated crime back into the public spotlight. The April 1999 nail bombing of the Admiral Duncan pub in the heart of London's gay community, which killed three and seriously injured 79, was a further turning point.

Such racist and homophobic attacks exposed, with dreadful clarity, the vulnerability of all minority communities to crime motivated by prejudice and hate. The ongoing response from the police service to the recommendations of the Lawrence Inquiry was broadened to incorporate all hate crimes.

This was reflected by the publication in 2000 of the ACPO *Guide to Identifying and Combating Hate Crime* (ACPO, 2000) which replaced what had previously been a good practice guide focusing solely on racial incidents. The guide explicitly acknowledged that a victim of 'hate crime' does not necessarily have to be a member of a 'visible' minority but that the term incorporates crimes motivated by prejudice against lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgendered (LGBT) people. The guide also discussed other less recognised forms of hate crime against faith groups, groups within faiths (sectarianism), asylum seekers, refugees, disabled people and other groups.

Within the Metropolitan policing area over the past few years we have witnessed a flurry of activity reflecting the elevated status of 'hate crime' within policing priorities. On a corporate level developments include the formation of the Racial and Violent Crime Task Force, the establishment of the Independent Advisory Group for visible minority ethnic communities and, slightly later, a similar body representing the LGBT community. Community safety units, with a remit to investigate hate crime, were established in every London borough and minimum standards for the investigation for hate crime were published. The latest phase of the Met's diversity strategy - Protect and Respect: Everybody Benefits - was launched last April with a plan reflecting a more holistic approach, endeavouring to work with all London's various communities.

Whilst these developments are welcome, tackling hate crime effectively requires more than the creation of structures. Speaking after the first anniversary of the publication of the Lawrence Report, the then Home Secretary Jack Straw was optimistic but noted that there was "a long way to go. Changing policies can be done on paper but changing attitudes is much more difficult" (*The Guardian*, 24th February 2000).

Resurgence of interest

The Government's Crime Reduction Programme (CRP) provided a timely opportunity to capitalise on the resurgence of 'public' interest and the revitalised sense of urgency within the police service and other agencies in addressing the problem of 'hate crime'. The Home Office's Targeted Policing Initiative (TPI) funded three programmes focusing on various forms of hate crime. Two of these initiatives were implemented in L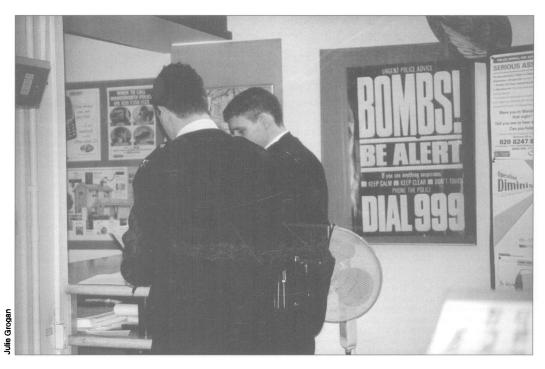ondon: The Four Boroughs Racially Motivated Crime Programme and the Southwark Anti-Hate Crime Project: PPACTS (Police Partners and Community Together in Southwark). The third, the Brighton and Hove Anti Victimisation Initiative was sponsored by Sussex Police in addition to Home Office funding. For the past two years we have been responsible for evaluating these three initiatives.

The rationale behind the TPI generally is to help the police, in conjunction with local crime and disorder partnerships, to better understand and develop a problem solving approach to tackling crime. The primary objective, in keeping with the underpinning logic of the CRP, is to develop cost effective interventions to reduce crime, and to improve the evidence-base about what works in reducing crime. The tactics and interventions employed in the anti-hate crime initiatives varied significantly, across and within programmes and between the three sites. All of the projects were delivered within a partnership framework, although the initial conceptualisation, and subsequent evolution, of 'partnership' differed significantly in each. Likewise the focus of the individual programmes varied but broadly a number of common themes or foci of attention emerged. These included enforcement, education and awareness raising, victim support, community development and offender identification, deterrence and rehabilitation.

The interventions (actual and proposed) involved a combination of both innovative and more traditional methods for addressing the problem. Among the more innovative, for example, were much-needed work in relation to identifying actual and potential hate crime offenders through risk assessment, together with a desire to develop programmes directed at challenging such offending behaviour. Equally innovative, and inevitably challenging, were mechanisms designed to encourage and enable community involvement in strategy design, implementation and monitoring. Simultaneously, more traditional policing enforcement tactics were combined with intelligence led and problem oriented approaches to attempt to reduce or prevent hate crime within specific 'hotspots'. Finally, tried and tested mechanisms were combined with more innovative approaches to support victims and engender greater trust and understanding.

Results

The results of the programmes have to date been somewhat mixed, with some indications of good practice as well as some difficulties and problems. Perhaps predictably the ideal did not in all cases live up to the reality. All of the projects were ambitious; indeed, perhaps too ambitious. They were implemented at a time when public institutions, including the police, were subject to unprecedented public scrutiny. This was particularly the case in the field of hate crime. Sensitivity to this atmosphere of scrutiny clearly shaped the undertaking, both in design and implementation. There were innumerable practical and organisational hurdles to overcome in establishing inter-agency work in this area (see Bowling, 1998), and the myriad networks, partnerships and consultative bodies created meant that leadership, purposes and interests were sometimes in conflict. On occasion, such difficulties were compounded by over-complicated lines of communication, a lack of consensus

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over responsibility and fractured chains of accountability. These organisational issues play out in different ways in different contexts, but appear an almost ubiquitous part of partnership working in this difficult arena.

In conclusion, as we draw towards the close of these programmes (one project ended in March 2002, the others finish at the end of the year) a number of questions require serious consideration. The big one is to what extent were they successful? From a purely crime reduction perspective it is unlikely that even the most ardent project champion will be able to claim significant success. Given the long and intractable history of these problems this should perhaps not be a huge surprise. Nonetheless, within the programmes there are indications of where future activity should be concentrated. It is clear, for all that partnership working is now fashionable, that an holistic approach that seeks to involve all the key agencies, and to combine a focus on offenders, victims and communities, remains an attractive and important strategic approach (Sibbett, 1997). However, there remain massive problems in connection with inter-agency working in criminal justice – many of them related to organisational culture. Reform of criminal justice agencies is on the agenda. The experience of attempting to respond to hate crime suggests that such reform may be a necessary precursor to more effective engagement in this area. On a positive note, the multi-agency work in London has at least done some of the groundwork for what remains arguably the least developed aspect of work in this area: interventions with convicted racist offenders. Considerable effort should surely go into expanding work in this area in the future.

Whatever the problems that have been experienced on the ground, the bottom line is that every time such work is undertaken lessons are learned. It would be all too easy to focus solely on the negative and the greatest danger is that identifying hurdles and problems will serve to deter practitioners from similar work in the future. Ultimately the key is to capitalise on the lessons and consider these in themselves as a measure of success. Doing so requires an ability and willingness to acknowledge shortcomings and accept criticism, and then to try again. This is perhaps the area where organisational culture is most intransigent. The understandable sensitivities around hate crime reinforce the old adage about success having many parents whilst failure remains an orphan. If we expect only success, rather than cultivating a willingness to learn all lessons, we run the risk of putting yet more obstacles in the way of future progress in this area. It is profoundly to be hoped that these projects pave the way for much more work on hate crime in the next few years.

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