

Strathclyde Police Equality & Diversity Strategy Review **Response of the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities**

SECTION A

Are you aware of the contents of the current Equality & Diversity Strategy for Strathclyde Police?

We have read the Strategy, and entirely support the view that equality and diversity are *not about minority issues [but]...have implications for us all.* We particularly welcome the Strategy's focus on practical measures, and its clear depiction of responsibilities at Force, Divisional and Departmental, Managerial, and individual levels in relation to each of the equality "strands".

In what way (if any) can the current Equality & Diversity Strategy be improved?

The Strategy gives the impression of being a series of separate papers that have been strung together to form a single document. The effect is an imbalance between "strands", which must be addressed in order to prevent the inadvertent creation of a hierarchy of equalities in which some "strands" appear to be more important than others. Compare, for example, the unequivocal statement:

"Strathclyde Police will ensure that no age related and unjustifiable barriers exist that could impact applications for employment, lateral development or promotion."

with

"Nothing in the Act stops an employer from appointing the best person for the job, as long as disability is not a factor in the selection process. The provisions apply to employment, facilities and services."

which could be read as providing a justification (or excuse?) for not employing a disabled person. The statement is, of course, correct. However, it is equally true of each of the other "strands", so its placement, in a highlighted box in the "Disability" section of the Strategy, misrepresents a general condition as applying only in one particular case.

We also note the statement *"Research suggests that there is substantial under-reporting of homophobic incidents"*. This is true of all hate crimes, not just those related to homophobia. Despite the fact that we encourage people to report all antisemitic incidents to the police, we know that, in the majority of cases, this is not done. The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report¹ refers to "significant under-reporting of racial incidents", the UK Government response to the All-Party Committee report on Antisemitism² states that "Hate crime is significantly under-reported", and the Home Office website³ reveals that whilst "Nationally, the police recorded 50,000 racially or religiously motivated hate crimes last year, the British Crime Survey, which is based on interviews with a wide sample of people and picks up crimes that are not reported to police, indicated that there were 260,000 such offences last year."

¹ <http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm42/4262/sli-06.htm>

² <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm70/7059/7059.pdf>

³ <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime-victims/reducing-crime/hate-crime/>

It is, therefore, misleading for the Strategy to imply that underreporting is only an issue in relation to homophobic incidents.

Furthermore, the requirement for

“All staff to take personal responsibility for developing their knowledge and understanding of disability issues and legislation”

could be understood as giving lower priority to disability than to religion and belief, for which the Force must

“Ensure all staff are made aware of current legislation.”

Clearly both actions should apply in relation to all of the “strands”. Every member of staff must take responsibility for his/her own professional development, but the Force has a prior responsibility to ensure that all staff are informed about relevant legislation.

There are many other similar examples, and the Strategy should be revised in order to make it a more unified document, and to eliminate the above imbalance, by ensuring that any point made with reference to one strand is also made with reference to all the others to which it is applicable.

What should be included in the Equality & Diversity Strategy that currently is not?

i) Highlighting existing resources

Relevant resources should be referenced from within each section of the Strategy, rather than simply including a general list of “Key Influences” in Appendix B.

ii) Provision of information in languages other than English

The “Religion” section of the Strategy states that

“Where English is a second language, we will make pertinent information available in the languages of the targeted audience”

and also that the Force will

“Make relevant information available in a language and format that will be readily understood by members of our communities”

This is an important measure which we strongly support. However, this commitment should also be included in the “Race” section of the Strategy, since people in minority ethnic communities are at least as likely to lack fluency in English, as are people of any particular religion.

It should also be noted that research has shown that a substantial proportion of speakers of minority languages who can not read English can also not read their native language, so that it may be more cost-effective to provide oral translation on demand than to prepare printed publications in a wide range of languages.

iii) Recording personal information

Since the difficulty of transliterating non-English names results in variant spellings being used for the same name (there are, for example, many different spellings of “Mohammed” in common use) a system of cross-referencing should be introduced to ensure that there are accurate and useable records both of victims who have been subject to multiple offences, and of repeat offenders.

iv) Religious Festivals

It is important for the police to be aware of each faith's significant religious festivals, as well as of multicultural events, so an additional bullet point should be included under "Force Actions" on p26: "Publicise the significant religious festivals of all faith groups in the area, in order to raise awareness and monitor potential community tension". The dates of significant religious festivals are readily available from a number of sources, including the BBC (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/tools/calendar/>)

v) Responding to injury and death

Many faith communities have specific requirements in relation to injury and death, and the necessity of responding sensitively to such requirements should be included in the list of "Religion and Belief Actions".

vi) Gender issues

The strategy should include reference to the policing needs of different genders, in addition to equality and work-life balance issues for staff. These should include showing particular sensitivity to women as the predominant victims of domestic and sexual abuse, and should also recognise that there can be particular issues about dealing sensitively with women victims of men perpetrators where there are cultural background factors that disempower women and empower men.

What should be removed from the Equality & Diversity Strategy that is currently included?

Terminology

The glossary includes the term "minority ethnic", which it defines to include "*communities whose origins lie mainly in South Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and China, as well as people from English, Irish, Polish and Italian communities...refugees, asylum seekers and gypsy travellers.*" However, the "Race" section refers twice to "*black and minority ethnic staff*". Given the above definition, the word "black" appears to be redundant, and, moreover, should not be used since many people regard it as offensive to be described by the colour of their skin. Furthermore, since recent publications have used "black" variously to refer to:

- i) all minority communities regardless of skin colour
- ii) all visible minority communities (based solely on skin colour)
- iii) visible minority communities excluding Asians
- iv) minority communities that are neither "white", "Asian" nor "Hispanic".

the term is so ambiguous as not to be useful for identifying which group or groups are intended.

Other Issues

Monitoring

We strongly support the Strategy's emphasis on monitoring, and stress the importance of obtaining data that are unambiguous, intelligible and useful. What is being monitored must be relevant and meaningful to those from whom data is obtained, as well as to those who require to use it. Ethnic monitoring poses particular difficulties in this respect,

since there is no single factor identifiable as “ethnicity”, but rather a variety of factors that contribute to an individual’s sense of “identity”, including the respondent’s nationality, descent, race, religion, culture, and language, among others. All of these must be taken into consideration if the data are to provide useful information in this complex and often sensitive area.

We have already referred to the ambiguities associated with the use of “black” as a descriptor. The category “white other” is also the object of widespread criticism for concealing the presence of many minorities, especially those that are visible for reasons other than the colour of their skin, because, for example, *“it does not distinguish between Turkish, Polish and Italian minorities, for whom culturally sensitive provision will be entirely distinct”*. (“Ethnicity Monitoring: Involvement Guidance for Partnerships on Monitoring Involvement”, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, August 2004).

It is important that Strathclyde Police does not repeat the failings of the 2001 census question that offered an irrational mix of colour, nationality and geography as possible answers to a question about “cultural background”. We therefore strongly recommend that people should be allowed to define their own ethnicity by means of a “write-in” answer, but if this is deemed not to be possible, the available answers must be relevant, understandable, and not offensive.

However, in this context it needs to be said that whereas the victim can describe his/her own identity with precision, a witness (or the victim describing the perpetrator) is likely to be able only to use very general categories. (“I am an Indian Sikh; he was south Asian”; “I am Welsh; he was Caucasian”).

SECTION B

Which organisation / area of diversity do you represent?

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities is the representative body of all the Jewish communities in Scotland comprising Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee as well as the more loosely linked groups of the Jewish Network of Argyll and the Highlands, and of students studying in Scottish Universities and Colleges.

What is the remit of your organisation?

The Council advances public understanding about the Jewish religion, culture and community, and develops and provides information and assistance to educational, health and welfare organisations. It also works in partnership with other organisations and stakeholders to promote good relations and understanding among community groups and to promote equality. In furtherance of that end, it represents the Jewish community in Scotland to government and other statutory and official bodies, monitors the Scottish Parliament and liaises with MSPs and others on matters affecting the Jewish community.

What are the main issues affecting the people represented by you / your organisation?

There are fortunately fewer antisemitic incidents in Scotland than in the rest of the UK, but because of small numbers this may not be statistically significant. It has been documented that any media reporting of the Middle East – not necessarily of Israel or Palestine – results in an increase in the number of antisemitic incidents and in turn in Jewish people’s perception of being threatened.

For example, during the last Parliamentary session we were approached by Lothian and Borders Police who informed us that antisemitic graffiti had appeared on a wall on Regent Road above the Parliament, and that they connected the incident to a discussion about Israel and Palestine that had taken place during a public meeting of the Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee meeting earlier the same day. We do not for one moment suggest that any MSP intentionally said anything to encourage or provoke antisemitism, nor do we know what led Lothian and Borders Police to this conclusion. However, the fact that they did make the connection, presumably on the basis of evidence, illustrates the way in which some people are only too willing to interpret statements in a manner that suits their own views, and that antisemitism can sometimes be concealed behind a façade of criticism of the Israeli government.

The majority of people in the Scottish Jewish community have not curtailed their communal activities either religious or social as a result of this perception, but significant numbers say they do feel more apprehensive about attending religious services and events at known Jewish locations such as synagogues and community centres, and in particular about appearing visibly Jewish (e.g. by wearing a skullcap). Most Jewish organisations in Scotland have been advised by the police to take measures to improve security and, where financially possible, this has been done. Scottish Jewish people’s perception of being at risk of an antisemitic attack is higher than the actual risk of being a victim. However this does not mean that the risk is imaginary. Antisemitic incidents are increasing and people are justifiably alarmed by this.

Historically inter-Christian sectarianism has been the most prevalent religious hatred in Scotland, and public discussion and policies tend to use ‘sectarianism’ as a blanket term for religious hatred. We believe this to be unhelpful, and have frequently been at pains to point out that sectarianism refers only to inter-Christian hatred and that it is important not to diminish the experience of other faiths by subsuming all religious hatred into sectarianism.

Understandably the Holocaust has shaped the way many Jewish people relate to the world. It is extremely unusual to encounter anyone in the Scottish Jewish community who did not lose at least one member of their family in the Holocaust, and often many more. Many in the Scottish Jewish community are first- or second-generation refugees and may as a result feel more vulnerable. As a result, they may be reluctant to identify themselves as Jewish on an official document such as a census form for fear of negative consequences, and it does not take a great deal of imagination to appreciate that the experience of seeing one’s parents, children and siblings shot or sent to the gas chamber will have enduring effects on someone’s psyche, feelings of security, behaviour etc.

This may result in some Jewish people reacting more strongly to a feeling of threat or vulnerability than would someone without that experience. However, this is emphatically not to say that they are over-sensitive nor that they see antisemitism where there is none.

What are the main issues for the Police Service affecting the people represented by you / your organisation (if different)?

i) The Police Service generally responds sensitively to the needs of the Jewish community, and demonstrates respect for our religious and cultural requirements. We recommend that the booklet “A Police Officers' Guide to Judaism” (published by the Community Security Trust, and available online at www.j-scot.org.uk/Judaism/files/Police_Guide.pdf) should be used as a training resource, and that all police offices should be advised that it includes contact details for relevant communal organisations in Scotland.

ii) It is important that incidences of hate crime are recorded accurately so as to gain a true understanding of the problem, and of the success or otherwise of anti-discrimination policies and legislation. However, racial and religious hatred incidents are generally recorded in a single category, obscuring the full extent of both types of incident. We appreciate that it may not always be easy to categorise an incident (for example, to decide whether a hate crime against a Pakistani Muslim is due to his ethnic origin or religion), but unless the attempt is made, data will simply not be available to inform the development of policy and legislation. We therefore urge that the development of mechanisms to record religious and racial hate crime more precisely should be viewed as a priority.

Has the Police Service failed to meet the expectations of the people represented by you / your organisation?

In general the Police Service has been very supportive, particularly when antisemitic incidents have been reported by individuals. However, there have been a number of occasions when the local police office has failed to respond to a call from Giffnock Synagogue (the largest, and most visible synagogue in Scotland) to report either that there was an intruder, or else a threatening group of people hanging around the entrance. On each of these occasions the police were informed that the caller, a woman, was alone in the building, and was, therefore, particularly vulnerable. The harmful effect of this failure extends beyond each individual incident, since it engenders a fear that the police may also not respond on future occasions, and therefore causes members of the community to feel more vulnerable than they would otherwise be.

We are concerned that, in the large majority of incidents of which we are aware, the victim was a communal leader, and yet the nature of the incident was not such as to suggest that he or she had been targeted for that reason. This leads us to worry that the number of incidents may be hugely under-reported, and that ordinary members of the Community regard low-level antisemitic abuse as just a “fact of life” and not worth reporting either to the Police or to ourselves.

If so, how can the Police Service improve in this regard?

We hope that in future the local police office will respond to all calls to ensure that members of the community feel secure, and that their confidence in the police is not diminished. A visible response to those incidents that are reported will encourage other people to come forward to report their experiences of antisemitic abuse, since they will be confident that what they say will be taken seriously, and not dismissed.

The revised Equality & Diversity Strategy is due to be completed in December 2007, when it will be sent out for consultation and (if necessary) amendment. If you are interested in assisting in this process, please provide contact details below.

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