

Community Policing Inquiry

Evidence from the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

We strongly support the concept of community policing in terms both of developing safer communities for everyone, and of specifically addressing the needs of the Jewish community in Scotland. In common with Jewish communities across the UK, and indeed across Europe, the Scottish Jewish community is currently experiencing a rise in the level of antisemitism, and, consequently, in Jewish people's perception of being threatened. 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.

In common with perceptions of being at risk of crime in the community more generally, 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.

Benefits of Community Policing

By personalising the police response to crime, community policing contributes to increase the perception that, should an individual unfortunately become a victim, or fear that they are about to become one, they can rely on a known individual with whom they have built a relationship to respond, and, moreover, to respond in a concerned and caring manner.

Local Jewish communities have, therefore, welcomed approaches from the police to develop such relationships. This has been done in a variety of ways both informal and formal. For example, by attending communal events community police officers have raised awareness of their presence, becoming the familiar and approachable face of their local police force. More formally, community police officers have worked with communal organisations to address the significant underreporting of antisemitic crime. This has, for example, led to the development of a third party reporting structure with the Glasgow Jewish Representative Council which enables victims to report incidents more easily, and without necessarily having to engage directly with the police. The resulting higher level of reporting enables the police to collect more accurate data, thus contributing to a better understanding of the problem, and also permits the police to follow-up incidents of which they may previously have remained in ignorance.

Responsibilities of Communities

Community policing is a two-way process, and there is a responsibility on communities to engage with the Police Service to raise awareness of their needs, and of cultural and religious issues that may impact on policing. To this end, the Jewish Community Security Trust has published a booklet "A Police Officers' Guide to Judaism", available online at http://www.scojec.org/Judaism/files/Police_Guide.pdf for use both as a training resource and as directory of relevant communal organisations in Scotland.

Obstacles to effective community policing

However, community policing can only be as effective as the mechanisms supporting it, and we are aware that these have sometimes not worked as effectively or as efficiently as either the police or the community would have hoped.

For example, 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 antidiscrimination policies, legislation, and initiatives. 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. The development of mechanisms to record religious and racial hate crime more precisely should therefore be viewed as a priority.

Data-sharing between police forces and even between different police offices within a single Force is also important both to the development of a better understanding of the problems and to permit a more effective, and more reassuring response to individual victims. For example, a teenager living in East Renfrewshire was the victim of two antisemitic attacks within a year, one close to his school in Glasgow, and the second not far from his home. He referred to the first incident when reporting the second, but was informed that, had he not done so, the community police officer would not have been able to identify him as having been the victim of more than one attack. The officer explained that police IT systems in Glasgow and East Renfrewshire were completely separate and did not permit officers in either area to view records created in the other. An individual who has unfortunately been the victim of multiple incidents is likely to feel particularly vulnerable, but, due to the lack of an effective IT infrastructure, community police officers are prevented from being able to provide an appropriate level of support.

As mentioned above, we welcome the introduction of third-party reporting schemes. However, these should provide an additional route for reporting incidents, and should operate in combination with other forms of reporting to provide a more comprehensive service rather than being perceived as a replacement for existing alternatives. A community police officer recently complained to us that incidents reported directly to the police take nearly a week to reach his desk whilst incidents reported through the third-

party scheme take only a day. Effectively addressing the underreporting of hate crime requires that victims should be able to report incidents by whichever means they prefer, and it is vital that the police develop internal mechanisms to enable them to address all reports equally promptly and effectively.

Structures are, however, only as good as their implementation, and we are aware of occasions on which procedures have broken down. For example, community police officers have generally been very supportive, particularly when antisemitic incidents have been reported by individuals, and have assured the community that calls from vulnerable addresses will receive a prompt response. However, there have been a number of occasions on which 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.

Summary

Community policing has the potential to deliver improved services to communities, enabling individuals to feel that they have a closer relationship with the police. However, its delivery requires the police to develop relevant structures and mechanisms to permit effective communication, and to provide training to ensure that procedures do not break down, leaving communities and individuals feeling more vulnerable than they would otherwise have done.

Note: The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) 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. SCoJeC is Scottish Charity SC029438, and its aims are to advance public understanding about the Jewish religion, culture and community. It works with others to promote good relations and understanding among community groups and to promote equality, and represents the Jewish community in Scotland to government and other statutory and official bodies on matters affecting the Jewish community.

In preparing this response we have consulted widely among members of the Scottish Jewish community.