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## Policing Diversity: Lessons from Lambeth

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Policing and Reducing Crime Unit  
Paper 121

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# **Policing Diversity: Lessons from Lambeth**

*A. Benjamin Spencer*  
*Michael Hough*

Policing and Reducing Crime Unit  
Paper 121

# **Policing Diversity: Lessons from Lambeth**

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Home Office*

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### **Policing and Reducing Crime Unit: Police Research Series**

The Policing and Reducing Crime Unit (PRC) was formed in 1998 as a result of the merger of the Police Research Group (PRG) and the Research and Statistics Directorate. PRC is now part of the Research, Development and Statistics Directorate of the Home Office. PRC carries out and commissions research in the social and management sciences on policing and crime reduction.

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## Foreword

This report describes a local initiative, Policing Diversity in Lambeth (PDL), which was developed to address the challenges of policing a highly ethnically diverse population.

The report is timely. The report of the Macpherson Inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence has substantially redrawn the policy landscape in relation to policing and race issues. The Home Secretary's priorities for policing in 2000-1 emphasise the need for improved community relations. The follow-up report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, 'Winning the Race Revisited', further stressed the need for urgent action. Parallel with these developments, the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act imposed a duty on police and local authorities to work to reduce crime in partnerships with local communities, and to engage more fully in consultation with local communities.

The report provides a snapshot of PDL at a particular stage in its development, and this report may seem of historical interest only. However, the analysis of underlying relations between the police and the community will have wider applicability for both the police and crime and disorder partnerships, as do the lessons that can be drawn from PDL's first year.

### **Ken Pease**

*Acting Head of Policing and Reducing Crime Unit  
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January 2000*

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### **The authors**

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PRC would like to thank Dr Marian FitzGerald for acting as an independent assessor for this report.

## Executive Summary

This study was carried out in 1998 as a preliminary evaluation of the Policing Diversity in Lambeth (PDL) strategy. This strategy was a local initiative in one London borough, addressing the challenges of policing a highly ethnically diverse population. This report analyses the problems the strategy was designed to tackle, and assesses the quality of the strategy and the extent to which the objectives of PDL's Year One Action Plan had been achieved or were being successfully implemented by mid-1998. The study was based on interviews with police officers, members of the Lambeth Community-Police Consultative Group (C-PCG) and members of the general public. It also draws on a number of police and public documents.

When the report was in draft stage, it became clear that the report of the Macpherson Inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence would substantially redraw the policy landscape in relation to policing and race issues. Since then a great deal of change has taken place within the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) over a short period of time. Within Lambeth, PDL is now focusing on a Year Two Action Plan which takes account of the successes and failures of the first year; and there have been other related initiatives. In a sense, therefore, this report may now seem of historical interest only. Clearly its assessment of the strategy is now out-of-date, providing a snapshot of the PDL strategy at a particular stage in its development. However, our analysis of the underlying dynamics of relations between the police and the local community may have wider applicability, as may the lessons that can be drawn from PDL's first year.

### Key points to emerge on police/community relations in Lambeth

- Police/community relations in the borough had undoubtedly improved over the last fifteen years.
- Public confidence in the police in Lambeth was significantly below the average for the Metropolitan Police in the late 1990s.
- This largely reflects the poor ratings of the police given by black people.
- In general black people's low levels of confidence in the police arose from a sense of being over-policed as crime suspects, and under-protected as crime victims.
- Stop-and-search, CS spray, deaths in custody and the investigation of racially motivated crimes were all specific sources of concern.
- Police morale was not high; many officers felt that the community failed to recognise the value of their work and the difficult circumstances in which they operated.
- Police officers tended to think that community concerns were overstated and based on rumour, anecdote and misunderstanding.

- They thought that stop-and-search tactics were an essential part of their crime-fighting armoury.
- Some police officers felt under intense pressure to achieve statistical targets, which skewed their work towards strategies to yield arrests.
- Probably the most important point to stress is that both the police and their critics had considerable difficulty in appreciating the viewpoints of each other.

#### **An assessment of PDL's first year**

- Implementation of the strategy had been subject to some slippage.
- This had damaged relations between the C-PCG and the police; some C-PCG members saw the slippage as a sign of a reduction in police commitment to the strategy.
- Some of the strategy's Year One objectives had been met, but others had not.
- In particular, rank-and-file police awareness of PDL was low, and community awareness very limited indeed.
- The C-PCG had played a key part in initiating PDL, but the effectiveness of the group in promoting the strategy was limited and constrained by in-fighting between individuals in different organisations.

This stock-taking exercise has exposed some of the pitfalls which threaten any attempt to improve relations between police and the community. First, and unsurprisingly, progress is often slow – slower than key participants would wish. Second, the natural impatience to see progress puts pressure particularly on police participants to take an optimistic view of what can be achieved within short time-frames: people are tempted to offer hostages to fortune in such circumstances. Thirdly, optimistic plans can very readily be derailed by unexpected factors, including new legislative demands and new management priorities. Finally, if and when this occurs, a dynamic is triggered in which previously established trust is rapidly eroded. Even the most adept of communicators may find it difficult to retrieve such a situation.

#### **Strengths and weaknesses of the strategy**

As reflected in its Year One Action Plan, the strategy had several strong points. First, it promoted the development of a broad spectrum of community contacts. Second, it placed substantial priority on Community and Race Relations (CRR) training as a mechanism for educating police officers on community race relations. Third, it promoted the recruitment and support of ethnic minorities in the police force. Fourth, PDL objectives were incorporated into policing plans and the staff appraisal process. Finally, the importance of improving links and relations with youth in the community was made evident by the commitment in the strategy to



engage in a number of efforts involving youth and schools. Each of these components are valuable parts of the process of bringing the police closer to delivering a service that is fair and equitable and seen to be so. The strategy should thus be viewed as a good starting point, for it initiated a process focused upon CRR issues and developed some mechanisms for improving the way the police service interacts with the public.

However, in the state of development that it had reached in mid-1998, several aspects of the strategy needed addressing:

- Organisational “sticks and carrots” were probably needed as much as other initiatives such as training programmes to ensure that PDL principles become embedded in everyday practice.
- Without such sticks and carrots, day-to-day pressures and demands of police work would continue to shape the nature and style of policing.
- There was a clear need for a better developed communications strategy within PDL. This needed to cover both internal and external communication – to ensure that all police officers were fully aware of the strategy, on the one hand, and to reach the wider public on the other.
- To be effective, the internal communication strategy needed to stress that pursuing PDL is in officers’ own interests. There were two main possible “selling points”: the first was that achieving PDL objectives would make their job easier, safer and more rewarding; the second was that doing so would unlock organisational rewards (or ward off organisational punishments).
- The C-PCG clearly had an important role to play in communicating the PDL strategy and its achievements to the wider community. C-PCG members were better placed than the police to convey to some sectors of the community the nature and objectives of PDL.
- Little progress had been made in implementing the recruitment elements of the PDL strategy. There was a need for sustained long-term action both at force level and at OCU/borough level.
- Stop-and-search was one of the major sources of public concern and real improvement in this area would do much to improve relations between the police and the public.

## **Recommendations**

When this study was completed in mid-1998, we offered police managers in Lambeth a series of recommendations about the development of PDL. For the purposes of this report, we have translated the recommendations into general principles which we think will apply to any CRR strategy designed to improve

relations between the police and the public. These recommendations are intended to be consistent with those contained in “Winning the Race” and “Winning the Race Revisited”, the reports of two thematic inspections by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary on police community and race relations (HMIC, 1997, 1999).

- CRR strategies must be firmly embedded within police forces’ organisational reward system, with a comprehensive mix of “sticks and carrots” designed to ensure that officers take the strategy seriously.
- CRR training is of obvious value, but cannot be relied upon as the only or primary means of changing officers’ behaviour and beliefs. Equating CRR strategies solely with CRR training is a recipe for failure.
- CRR strategies need a well-designed internal communications plan. Such strategies will need “selling” to officers on the ground. The payoffs in terms of effectiveness, safety and organisational rewards will need spelling out.
- To aid internal communication, local senior managers need to signal loudly and clearly to their workforce that they attach importance to the CRR strategy.
- CRR strategies need comprehensive plans for external communication. It is essential to get across to the community the nature of crime problems, and the ways in which the police and their partners are tackling crime.
- The police themselves may lack sufficient credibility to get the message across to those who most need to hear it. “Allies” may be needed, such as the C-PCG in Lambeth, who can command more trust in relevant sectors of the community.
- Local crime reduction partnerships established by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 need to be fully involved in CRR strategies.
- The impact of formal and informal performance indicators needs to be carefully assessed, to ensure that they do not distort policing practice in ways which damage community relations. This is especially important in relation to stop-and-search practice.
- CRR strategies should place emphasis on the early identification of sources of concern within the community about policing practice; sources of concern need to be acknowledged and debated openly by the police.
- CRR strategies need to find ways of educating and training people – and especially youths – from ethnic minority groups about policing practice and ways of interacting successfully with the police.
- CRR strategies need to foster a more explicit debate about appropriate levels of stop-and-search and about acceptable “hit rates” in terms of arrests.
- Where special operations involving high rates of stop-and-search (or other such tactics) are used, there needs to be closer consultation with local permanent beat officers and, where appropriate, members of the public.
- CRR strategies need to assess fully the scope for effective local action to stimulate ethnic minority recruitment.

## Contents

|   | Page      |
|---|-----------|
| Foreword  | (iii)     |
| Acknowledgements  | (iv)      |
| Executive summary   | (v)       |
| List of tables  | (x)       |
| <b>1. Introduction</b>  | <b>1</b>  |
| Research methods  | 4         |
| The structure of this report  | 5         |
| <b>2. Police/community relations in Lambeth: a snapshot in 1998</b> | <b>6</b>  |
| Public concerns about policing in Lambeth                           | 6         |
| Views from the police   | 10        |
| Chapter summary   | 14        |
| <b>3. The PDL strategy</b>  | <b>16</b> |
| The PDL strategy in 1998  | 16        |
| Progress on Year One objectives                                     | 18        |
| Police perspectives on PDL  | 20        |
| Community perspectives on PDL                                       | 22        |
| The role of the Lambeth Community-Police Consultative Group in PDL  | 23        |
| Chapter summary   | 25        |
| <b>4. Conclusions and recommendations</b>                           | <b>27</b> |
| Quality of the strategy   | 27        |
| Recommendations   | 32        |
| <b>5. Epilogue</b>  | <b>34</b> |
| References  | 36        |
| Recent PRCU Publications  | 37        |

## List of tables

| Table No. | Caption                              | Page |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|------|
| 1         | Community versus police perspectives | 15   |
| 2         | Progress on Year One objectives      | 19   |



## 1. Introduction

This report started life as a preliminary evaluation of the Policing Diversity in Lambeth (PDL) strategy. The strategy is a local initiative in one London borough, addressing the challenges of policing a highly ethnically diverse population. It can be seen as an attempt to break the cycle of mutual distrust which has characterised police/community relations in Lambeth and many other inner city areas with large ethnic minority populations. It was designed to be broad-based; its aim was to infuse all aspects of policing with greater sensitivity to Community and Race Relations (CRR) issues. The Year One Action Plan included staff training, improvements in internal and external communications, plans to incorporate CRR issues into staff appraisal and integration of the strategy into the Borough Policing Plan.

The evaluation was carried out in mid-1998, at the end of the first year of the PDL strategy. It aimed to analyse the problems the strategy was designed to tackle, to determine the quality of the strategy, and the extent to which the objectives of PDL's Year One Action Plan had been achieved or were being successfully implemented.

When the report was in draft stage, it became clear that the report of the Macpherson Inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence (Macpherson, 1999) would substantially redraw the policy landscape in relation to policing and race issues. There have been other developments in Lambeth, many of them related. For example, building on earlier work on stop-and-search (MPS, 1998), the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) has launched an initiative in Brixton and six other areas designed to improve police practice and public understanding in relation to stop-and-search (FitzGerald, 1999). This work on searches stemmed from a recognition that the disproportionate search rates for some minority groups could not be wholly "explained away". Community Safety Units have been set up in all three Lambeth police divisions. The PDL strategy itself has been revised and developed; and the programme of community and race relations training which was just starting in early 1998 has now covered all police officers in Lambeth.

In a sense, therefore, this report may now seem of historical interest only. It provides a snapshot of the PDL strategy at a particular stage in its development. Clearly its assessment of the strategy is now out-of-date; PDL is now focusing on a Year Two Action Plan, which takes account of the successes and failures of the first year.

However, our analysis of the underlying dynamics of relations between the police and the community may have wider applicability, as do the lessons that can be drawn from PDL's first year. The Home Secretary has set a Ministerial Priority of

## INTRODUCTION

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“improving trust and confidence in policing amongst minority ethnic communities”. We hope that this analysis will be of some value to police forces struggling to improve on the patchy state of affairs revealed in “Winning the Race” and “Winning the Race Revisited”, the reports of two linked thematic inspections by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC, 1997, 1999). Though substantively unchanged, the present report has been revised to take into account the publication of the Macpherson Report and its aftermath, and to provide a broader context in which to locate the development of PDL.

Lambeth is an inner London borough with a population of a quarter of a million. It is policed as three divisions of the MPS. In thinking about policing in Lambeth, it is easy to adopt various stereotypical misconceptions. It is certainly a poor borough, but there are other inner city areas such as Southwark, Tower Hamlets and Hackney which score higher on indices of deprivation. Parts of the borough are affluent, and bear the signs of many years of gentrification. Whilst its recorded crime rates are high - especially for burglary and robbery - there are several other boroughs with similar rates, including Westminster, Camden, Southwark and Hackney. Lambeth has the largest black population in London, with 13% describing themselves in the 1991 Census as Black Caribbean, 7% as Black African and 3% as “Black Other”. However, the white population stood at 70% in 1991 - more than Brent at 55% or Hackney at 66%.

Lambeth occupies a special, if unhappy, place in the history of police/community relations. In the summer of 1981, rioting erupted in a number of British cities; the ones in Brixton were some of the worst seen in twentieth century Britain. There were two further distinguishing features, however: a large proportion of those involved in the disturbances of the early 1980s were black; and the main object of their action was the police. The events both in Brixton and elsewhere could be seen as the culmination of deteriorating relations between the police and local ethnic minority communities.

The 1981 disturbances led to an enquiry by Lord Scarman, whose report was published in the same year (Scarman, 1981). Its main conclusions focused on the need for styles of policing which were more responsive and sensitive to local needs, and it contained a great many recommendations, including the establishment of better consultative machinery, in the shape of community/police consultative groups. These were set up under Section 106 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984; they now derive their statutory authority from the Police Act 1996, which requires the police authority to consult on priorities, the local policing plan and the prevention of crime (Section 96, Police Act 1996).

The Lambeth Community-Police Consultative Group (C-PCG) has been one of the more active of these, and has some notable achievements to its credit. Over the years following Lord Scarman's report, a great deal was done to mend fences between the police and the public, both across London and more specifically in Lambeth.

While progress has continued, relations between the police and various segments of the community in Lambeth remained quite seriously strained at the time of fieldwork. Many of the sources of public disquiet were recognisably those which triggered the 1981 disturbances: a sense that policing strategies are discriminatory, especially in relation to the targeting of stop-and-search. A further focus of concern was deaths in police custody.

A final factor was a belief that minorities got sub-standard treatment from the police as victims of crime. Whilst such beliefs may have been partly grounded in direct experience, attitudes will also have been shaped by a number of high profile murders which clearly or very probably had racist motives. The problem posed for police/community relations was not that these murders were racially motivated, but that the police response to some of them was judged inadequate. The most visible case was that of Stephen Lawrence, who was killed by a gang of five white youths in Eltham in 1993.<sup>1</sup> The Government asked Lord Macpherson in 1997 to carry out a Public Inquiry into the aftermath of the murder. His final report (Macpherson, 1999), published after fieldwork for this study was carried out, contained strong criticisms of the police. It concluded that the investigation into the murder was marred by a combination of professional incompetence, leadership failure and institutional racism.

Stephen Lawrence was murdered not in Lambeth but in the nearby borough of Greenwich. However, there can be no doubt that five years' worth of media coverage of the case will have had a corrosive impact on police/community relations in Lambeth. In crude numerical terms racist murders of this nature are rare. However people inevitably generalise from the particular, leading to a widespread sense that black victims of crime can expect second-class justice.

Until recently the legitimacy of these community concerns was contested ground. Whilst it was agreed that minorities were disproportionately subjected to stop-and-search procedures, there were disagreements over whether this could be explained by disproportionate involvement in offending. Some senior officers also rejected suggestions of institutional racism within the MPS. The Macpherson Report has effectively foreclosed the arguments. It argued that the police and other public authorities needed to take a more active role in challenging racism. Coupled with the Ministerial Priority to improve ethnic minorities' confidence in the police and

*<sup>1</sup>The murder of Michael Menson and suspected murder of Ricky Reel have also attracted a great deal of media attention, but there are at least a further ten widely reported cases in London since 1990 where racial motivation was established or strongly suspected.*



## INTRODUCTION

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the HMIC CRR thematic inspection, the report has placed overwhelming pressure on the Metropolitan Police – and other forces – to ensure that credible and effective CRR strategies are in place at both force and OCU level.

Another source of pressure to improve police/community relations comes from the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. This legislation includes provisions which restructure police relationships with statutory bodies on the one hand, and with the broader community on the other. The police are required to develop a crime reduction strategy in partnership with the local authority, probation and health services. The Act places great emphasis on the need for this strategy to be responsive to local public views. Moreover, the Government has accepted Recommendation 70 of the Macpherson Report, which proposes that the crime reduction strategies should, where appropriate, include initiatives to promote cultural diversity and address racism. To meet the new statutory duties, therefore, there has to be a culture of openness and trust between the police, other agencies and the wider community.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See the Home Office guidance to Sections 5 & 6 of the Act (Hough and Tilley, 1998).

### Research methods

This effort was a small-scale, exploratory study, with fieldwork conducted over a four-week period in May/June 1998. Only a small number of interviews could be carried out in the time available. Thus, the findings presented here must be seen as provisional, though the consistency and clarity of the picture that emerges gives us considerable confidence in our conclusions.

The principal researcher carried out a number of interviews with police officers and local community members. He interviewed fourteen police officers, including eight PCs, two Detective Constables, three Sergeants, and one Detective Inspector. He also attended a CRR training session in which twelve police sergeants participated, together with nine youths from the local community. Many views from both groups were gathered on this occasion. A number of police documents were reviewed, including current and past local and MPS-wide policing plans and police surveys of public opinion.

Six members of the Lambeth C-PCG were interviewed, as well as one senior council official. These respondents had a wide range of local associations with community organisations. Information from members of the public was gathered through formal interviews with 14 local residents who ranged widely in age and who were not involved in active local community groups. Given the limited time available for the research, we focused mainly on Brixton Division, which covers roughly a third of the borough. We cannot say to what extent attitudes and the experiences of police officers and residents in the other two Lambeth divisions

would be similar. Nor - given the small scale of the study - can we assess with any certainty to what extent we have captured representative views of the police and the public within Brixton division.

All fieldwork was carried out by the principal researcher, an American. It proved to be to the study's advantage to have a researcher whose status as an "outsider" allowed for the posing of awkward questions. Our judgement is that this allowed respondents to be more open and honest with their responses.

### **The structure of this report**

This study not only aimed to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of the PDL strategy but also tried to help all those involved in the process to discover how they could adjust the strategy to make it more effective and successful. Section 2 offers an analysis of police/community relations in the area. It does not aim to offer a quantified description – though it borrows from previous survey work. Its main aim is to characterise the main features of the mutual distrust which exists and to consider how it might have developed. Section 3 describes the origins and content of the strategy originally devised to address some of the problems associated with this, and the extent to which the objectives of the strategy had been achieved at the end of the first year. Section 4 offers some conclusions and recommendations. The final section serves as an epilogue, summarising how PDL and related initiatives have developed in the eighteen months since fieldwork was completed.

## 2. Police/community relations in Lambeth: a snapshot in 1998

In discussing a topic as sensitive as relations between the police and minority ethnic groups, the first thing to stress is that things *have* got better in Lambeth since the 1981 disturbances. There was unanimity amongst the members of the C-PCG whom we interviewed, and amongst prominent members of ethnic minorities, that relations between the police and ethnic minority communities had significantly improved over the past 15 years. They felt that the quality of dialogue and exchange between the two groups had improved, with greater mutual respect and less defensiveness on the part of senior police. They also thought that the police were more actively involved in the community and were having greater success in tackling crime:

*“Overall they do a good job; it’s a tough environment to police.”*

*“In the past there was a barrier between police and youth; a good deal of hostility. Now, they are in the schools, they come into the youth club.”*

Nevertheless, while progress should be acknowledged, police/community relations in Lambeth remained poor by comparison with other areas in London. A MORI survey conducted for the MPS in 1997 found that ratings of the police in Brixton Division were substantially lower than the MPS average. For example, 31% of Brixton residents thought that the police had a good understanding of the local community, as against 48% across London; 23% said that the police had a lot of respect, as against 48% across London.

The first step in explaining these findings is to examine which groups had least confidence in the police. An NOP survey carried out for the MPS across the borough of Lambeth in early 1998 showed very clearly that the views of black people were less favourable than those of white people and of other ethnic groups. 32% of black respondents thought the police did a good job in the area, compared with 53% of white respondents and 51% of Asians. Our research, whilst small-scale, can go some way to identifying the factors which contributed to low police ratings.

### **Public concerns about policing in Lambeth**

Those members of the C-PCG whom we interviewed identified several concerns about local policing, which they regarded as being widespread across the black community. Overall they felt that the young, the poor, and ethnic minorities saw themselves predominately as being policed, not as clients of police services.

They thought that:

- black people were over-represented as victims of crime;
- they did not receive sufficient attention as victims of crime;
- police behaviour towards minority groups was guided by negative stereotypes, so that
- they received excessive attention as crime suspects.

These negative attitudes among the general public were regarded by C-PCG respondents as deeply held and surprisingly resilient in the face of objectively improving circumstances. The strength with which these views can be held was exemplified by one community respondent who remarked, “*I have total distrust of the police.*” A C-PCG respondent explained such feelings by pointing out that the memory and history of the disturbances had been quite enduring and continued to colour public perspectives towards the police. There were several more specific concerns.

#### *Stop-and-search*

While C-PCG respondents appreciated the importance and legitimacy of the police power to stop and search, they identified this as a central source of friction between the police and the community. The concerns were that black people were disproportionately picked up, too many innocent people were stopped, and the treatment that minorities received during stops was sometimes objectionable.

There can be little doubt that black people were and still are disproportionately subject to stop-and-search. Nationally, stop-and-search rates are five times higher for black people than white; within London both black and white people are stopped at much higher rates, but the ratio of one to five is preserved (Home Office, 1998). The London stop-and-search rate in 1997/98 for black people of 181 per 1,000 population was the highest in the country, roughly five times higher than the London rate, and ten times higher than the national rate, for white people. The figures are complex to interpret (cf MPS, 1998; FitzGerald, 1999); in particular comparisons between the MPS and other areas may be misleading (FitzGerald and Hale, forthcoming). But it is hard to avoid the conclusion that some element, at least, of institutional racism has been embedded in MPS stop-and-search practice.

An MPS/NOP survey found more scepticism in Brixton about police use of stop-and-search than in four other London areas. 68% of respondents in Brixton felt that the police *in practice* stop and search anyone they like; corresponding figures for other areas were: Tottenham – 54%, Hounslow – 40%, Plumstead – 47%, and Kingston – 37%.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Samples were small (between 113 and 144 per site) but differences of this order are statistically significant.

<sup>4</sup> Across London, the arrest rates for black and white suspects in 1997 were 12% and 11% respectively; roughly in line with other forces; however, the higher rate of stop-and-search in the MPS means that 10% of all arrests in London are derived from these, compared with 5% nationally (Home Office, 1998). FitzGerald (1999) presents arrest rates for Brixton Division in 1998 and 1999 of 13% and 18% respectively, with little difference between ethnic groups.

Our respondents made reference to the low number of arrests that result from stops as evidence that most of those who are stopped have committed no offence.<sup>4</sup> Some suggested that the police use the tactic to harass black youths and then come up with flimsy reasoning to support their actions; “*When no drugs found, police seek something else.*” Others looked to ignorance as opposed to dubious intentions as an explanation: as one said, “*Police make many mistakes and nick the wrong guy; police can’t distinguish between many of the Blacks.*”

It was also put to us that during these stops, police treated suspects disrespectfully and verbally abused them. The problem was seen in terms of youths failing to offer sufficient deference, prompting the police to reassert their authority. It was thought that in some cases, police disrespect – or perceived disrespect – towards suspects prompted negative reactions which resulted in the situations spiralling out of control. Again, the MPS/NOP survey of Lambeth residents echoes these concerns: 29% of black respondents compared to 14% of white people and 19% of Asians thought that the police are very or fairly impolite when speaking to people from ethnic minorities.

A final concern was that much stopping activity does not get recorded. One respondent explained, “*Stops only don’t get recorded, just stop and search. This is a big issue. There is a dark figure here. No explanation is given [in unrecorded stops].*”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> One of the Macpherson Report’s recommendations was that all stops should be recorded; the present legislation requires a record to be made only of those involving searches.

#### *CS spray*

The possession and use of CS spray by police officers was a source of much public concern. The anxiety was that CS spray had been – and would continue to be – used disproportionately against black people and against black youths in particular. Respondents cited concerns about health risks, and felt that it was premature to use the device until more conclusive tests regarding its safety had been conducted.

#### *Deaths in custody*

Some of those we interviewed expressed continuing concern over deaths in custody. There was a history of concern in the borough, relating most specifically to deaths occurring in the mid-1990s. Though no deaths had occurred recently in the borough, they felt that the risk remained significant in the absence of tighter controls. The 1997 MPS public attitude survey reveals that public concern over the treatment of people in custody continued to be a significant source of mistrust of the police.

*Poor police handling of racially motivated crimes*

At the time of our research, the Macpherson Inquiry was in progress, receiving a great deal of media attention. The Menson case was also beginning to receive attention. According to the 1998 MPS/NOP survey in Lambeth, only 16% of black respondents thought the police did a good job in dealing with racially motivated crime, compared with 29% of white people and 34% of Asians.<sup>6</sup> Our respondents identified perceptions of the policing of racially motivated crime as a highly significant factor behind dissatisfaction amongst minority groups.

*<sup>6</sup> Asians are the group most at risk of racial victimisation, according to the British Crime Survey (Percy, 1998).*

*Direct or indirect experience?*

Our community respondents thought that these concerns came less from personal experience and more from learning of the experiences of others. Media, parental, and peer influences are all likely to play a part in the process by which negative views about the police are sustained. When asked about the source of their concerns, a common response was that it happened to a friend, they heard about it from someone, or they learned of this through the media. (Police officers were sensitive to this, and recognised the potential impact of a single *cause célèbre* both within an individual police force, and across the country. In the words of one officer, “*One bad incident can have big ramifications.*”)

*Police consultation with the public*

Community respondents were heavily critical of the style with which the police communicated to, and consulted with, the public. As one C-PCG respondent said, “*The police don’t have open arms and aren’t very willing to talk.*” One local resident clearly expressed more specific concerns:

*“The police don’t truly consult with local people, people on the estates. They mount operations in their area without consulting and as a result, may undermine arrangements or plans locals had for handling things. There are consequences of police actions that they are insensitive to because they don’t engage locals on how to police the area.”*

Some felt that the police acted first and informed the public after the event, as opposed to truly involving local people in shaping decisions about the policing of their areas. It is obviously not simple to resolve the tensions between community pressure for more openness and the operational requirements not to reveal tactics in advance.

It was suggested that if more imaginative ways of working with people were developed, the police could better engage the public in consultative processes and engender much more public confidence and support. In the words of one respondent, “*Community relations is reduced to PR and needs to be more. . .there’s a need for new and imaginative ways to consult.*” The recent Youth Conference held in Lambeth was put forth as an example of a creative way to get young people involved in sharing their perspectives and concerns regarding an array of local issues. Getting local people involved in a process to improve police/community relations was also bedevilled by the problems of all “grass roots politics”. As one respondent put it, “*Most folk don’t want to spend an evening in the Town Hall.*”

The police also came in for some criticism for the way in which they managed partnerships with other agencies and community groups. One respondent suggested that the police tended to alienate their professional partners by acting unilaterally. It was felt that more energy needed to be put into partnership, since other agencies were sometimes better placed than the police to take effective action.

Many respondents – including police officers – said that the typically very short periods of tenure for senior police managers created problems both in establishing a dialogue with the community and in managing inter-agency partnerships. With so much of progress in community relations relying on personalities, the brief tenure of OCU commanders was seen to undermine efforts to effect change in police practices and build understandings between the community and the police.

### **Views from the police**

Our account of community perspectives on policing will come as no surprise to anyone familiar with police work in, and criminological research about, high crime areas with ethnically diverse populations. The corresponding views from rank-and-file police are less often heard. The overwhelming impression we had was of a workforce that felt beleaguered and demoralised by issues to do with race and crime. Several expressed the view that they were doing a demanding job under difficult circumstances and were getting little thanks for this from the community.

Respondents generally described police morale as middling or low. The frustration arising from the lack of public support, appreciation, and co-operation was cited as a major contributing factor to low morale. The most extreme case was an officer who said, “*Morale is rock bottom. . . I don’t want to be a police officer any more.*” Another PC’s rather measured response was probably more representative: “*The community’s attitude moderates our enthusiasm.*”

This sense of grievance stemmed from a belief that local people failed to appreciate the realities of crime and policing. They tended to regard police suspects first and foremost as potential victims of police mistreatment; they rarely confronted the fact – so it was thought – that suspects may have inflicted considerable suffering on their victims. The argument was that police were as much the subject of stereotyping as those whom they policed. One officer related that while he had pursued suspects, people had obstructed him, surrounded officers, threatened them, and pulled suspects away to protect them. As he put it, people jumped to conclusions too quickly: *“They don’t even know; this guy could have just attacked your daughter.”*

Some officers expressed the view that the local community had to face up to responsibilities of its own:

*“They need to put their own house in order before throwing stones. . . need to be more positive and take a stand against crime.”*

*“. . . local population need to turn around and alienate the criminal element in their community.”*

*“They don’t ever own up to the wrongness of violence and drugs and the difficulty of the police job.”*

Many officers appreciated that there may be variations between ethnic groups in styles of social interaction and that it was important to be sensitive to these. However, their grasp of these variations was often limited, and in our view it was this, rather than overt racism, that seemed to lead officers to be oblivious to the presence or significance of relevant differences. Some adopted a “colour-blind” stance, saying that issues of ethnic diversity affected their work only when there was a language difference. One officer in particular made this very clear: *“We all speak the same language so there’s not a problem. . . there’s no communication problem in Brixton.”* Another stated that *“it doesn’t affect our job; it makes no difference. . . the law is the law.”* Similar sentiment is reflected by the officer who stated, *“Police don’t deny anyone their identity; but they do have to obey the law.”*

This tendency to underplay race issues often co-existed with a fairly narrow “crime fighting” definition of the police role, and an “ends justifies the means” pragmatism. Several officers explained that they knew who the criminals were and would use *“any means necessary”* to get them. The implication was that procedural corners would be cut if this would catch the criminal. One PC explained his



personal approach to stop and search as follows: *"It's a means to an end. . . it is technically misuse but practically necessary to get to the heart of the matter."*

Some police respondents thought that there was some validity to the concerns expressed by members of the public about police behaviour. They expressed the view that there was a modicum of police misbehaviour demanding investigation, and that these relatively rare incidents contributed to the public's concern and distrust. However the majority of interviewed officers tended to see public concern over police practice largely as a function of misunderstanding and an over-reliance on anecdotal evidence. They thought that people tended to generalise from a small number of well-publicised incidents of malpractice when assessing general standards of policing. For example:

*"Anecdotes and myth contribute to negative attitudes."*

*"These people will only see the negative things."*

*"It all comes down to lack of understanding of what we have to do and how we do it."*

*"I'm not naïve enough to believe there aren't bad cops, but we're not all the same."*

Most officers felt that they and their colleagues dealt fairly with people: *"I believe in treating people the same"*; *"Most [officers] do their job fairly and correctly. . . it's not fair to beat us over the head."* Several adopted a more qualified position: *"Their [the public's] worries aren't valid but I can see why they feel the way they do"*; and, *"People are legitimately concerned but not objectively justified in their concerns."*

#### *Police views on stop-and-search*

<sup>7</sup> Section 1 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1994 empowers constables to "detain in order to search any person.... in any place to which the public has access, if he or she has reasonable grounds for suspecting that stolen or prohibited articles will be found."

The power to stop and search<sup>7</sup> was universally thought to be an important one. All except four respondents recognised the risk of the power being misused, and most said they were aware of misuse and abuse. They were well aware of the legal requirements as set out by PACE, but stressed how subjective the process often was. For example:

*"You must have reasonable grounds. Most officers adhere to this. However, an officer can 'create' reasonable grounds."*

*"Plainclothes officers came in and searched the wrong person. . . officers don't have the necessary information to properly discern whom they should and should not search."*

*“Abuse has not been totally eradicated... it’s very subjective; often grounds are weak.”*

*“PACE formalises police’s sixth sense. . . However, when officers misuse the power, they try to explain and create a justification on the form; you can’t write ‘hunch’ or ‘sixth sense’ on the form.”*

*“Many officers don’t follow protocol to the letter of the law.”*

Asked why black people were disproportionately stopped, officers said that was because black youths were disproportionately involved in the crimes targeted by stop-and-search tactics – street robbery and drug offences. Many said that tactics were intelligence-led, and that information about the identity – or at least ethnicity – of suspects justified the differential stop rates. Respondents tended to view the low arrest rates for stop-and-search as a function of suspects’ skills in defeating searches (e.g. swallowing drugs or hiding them in body cavities).

Several officers believed that patrol officer performance was assessed against rates of stops and arrests. They thought that the array of MPS and Home Office performance indicators pressured officers to secure arrests regardless of the longer-term costs in so doing. They regarded their managers as preoccupied with statistical targets; one officer vehemently suggested that *“all the Home Office care about is what figures we give them.”* Another said, *“Management looks at arrest record. . . There is pressure to make arrests; that’s what we’re supposed to do.”* He went on to say that this is done to motivate officers to go out and do their job, but that *“this pressure can steer the odd individual to make arrests at any cost.”* A sergeant suggested that reducing such pressure was an essential ingredient for improvement in this area, saying, *“we have to remove pressure from young PCs to go out and collect figures.”*

#### *CS spray*

When asked about CS spray and public concerns about it, most officers said that it was an important tool for officer safety. Several were aware that the public questioned its use. However they thought that this was due to their lack of understanding of the importance of CS spray and how it is actually used in practice: *“The public don’t understand the job police have to do and the importance of CS spray.”* The minority who saw some legitimacy in the public’s concerns thought that in the eyes of the public the police use of CS spray represented a departure from the tradition of an unarmed police force.

Some officers who valued CS spray's protective value further intimated that they would use it if necessary, meaning if the situation at hand warranted its use. One PC stated, "*You can't govern use on the street. . . it's the 'human factor'; guidelines won't help.*" Another said that "*police throughout the Met would use it [CS spray] if necessary.*" This point, that situational factors determine officer behaviour, was made by officers with reference to other police tactics as well, and will be an important consideration as this report looks at the ability of policy to impact police actions on the ground.

### **Chapter summary**

The following are the key points to emerge from this brief review of police/community relations in Lambeth in 1998:

- Police/community relations in the borough had undoubtedly improved over the last fifteen years.
- Public confidence in the police in Lambeth was significantly below the average for the Metropolitan Police.
- This largely reflected the poor ratings of the police given by the black community.
- In general the black community's low levels of confidence in the police arose from a sense of being over-policed as crime suspects, and under-protected as crime victims.
- Stop-and-search, CS spray, deaths in custody and the investigation of racially motivated crimes were all specific sources of concern.
- Police morale was not high, and many officers felt that the community failed to recognise the value of their work, and the difficult circumstances in which they operated.
- Police officers tended to think that community concerns were overstated, and based on rumour, anecdote and misunderstanding.
- They thought that stop-and-search tactics were an essential part of their crime-fighting armoury.
- Some police officers felt under intense pressure to achieve statistical targets, which skewed their work towards strategies to yield arrests.

Probably the most important point to stress is that both the police and their critics had considerable difficulty in appreciating the viewpoints of each other. We have attempted to illustrate the contrasting viewpoints in Table 1 by drawing on comments made by police and community participants in the CRR training session in which the principal researcher participated.

**Table 1: Community versus police perspectives**

|   | Community  | Police  |
|---|--|---|
| CS spray                                | “Lots of blacks have died from CS spray.”                              | “We need to protect ourselves.”   |
| Disproportionate use of stop-and-search | “Police are targeting more young black men.”                           | “They’re stopping the blacks because the blacks are committing the robberies.”                  |
| Police stereotyping of black people     | “If a black has a flash car, police think he’s a drug dealer.”         | “Stereotyping helps us to categorise people; it helps us eliminate suspects.”                   |
| Treatment during a stop                 | “It’s the way you’re stopped that upsets us.”                          | “How they react to us determines how we react to them.”   |
| Deaths in custody                       | “I think there’s been an increase in the number of deaths in custody.” | “Do you know about the lay visitors’ scheme? . . . It [police station] is quite an open place.” |

This inability to understand alternative viewpoints is most clearly illustrated by the issues surrounding stop-and-search. The police perspective emphasised the crime control benefits of stop-and-search, and down-played the costs in terms of public dissatisfaction and sense of grievance. Those groups in the community which attracted the highest rates of stop-and-search not surprisingly took the opposite view. Both “sides” were able to marshal statistical evidence – often the same statistics – to support their position to some extent. Whilst the facts are important, what is really at issue is the right balance to strike between short-term crime control objectives and long-term objectives of consolidating confidence in the police. We shall return to this issue in the final chapter.

### 3. The PDL strategy

The PDL strategy had its origins in the mid-1990s, with a growing sense both within C-PCG and amongst senior police managers that improving police/community relations had to be a priority in Lambeth. The strategy was developed collaboratively by the C-PCG and the police, with the police Borough Liaison Office taking on a significant co-ordination and development role. It was originally presented in February 1997 as “The Lambeth Police Joint Community and Race Relations Strategy.” This document called for a number of things:

- a strong commitment from Operational Command Unit (OCU) Commanders to the plan’s implementation and the passing on of CRR practice and structure to their successors;
- key workers to inform the whole division of the strategy, ensuring that CRR maintains a clear and consistent profile;
- extensive local consultation with the C-PCG on these issues through its Black Issues Forum and any other similar groups;
- the development of a deeper and wider partnership among police and the C-PCG to deal with racial incidents;
- the participation of key personnel in the CRR Training Strategy and for the incorporation of CRR strategy initiatives “into all stages of the probationer cycle including Hendon, street duties and final confirmation”;
- the infusion of strategy issues into all aspects of divisional selection to “ensure that Lambeth officers are encouraged to appreciate the importance and seriousness of CRR issues”;
- research into the possibility of local positive action recruitment projects to increase ethnic minority representation among officers in Lambeth;
- integrating CRR issues into the annual appraisal system of all significant ranks;
- the achievement of equality in service delivery;
- the development of incident response plans for major CRR incidents, making use of community mediators to inform police actions; and
- the establishment of a CRR information resource centre housed in the Borough Liaison Office.

This document was self-consciously ambitious, designed not as a paper exercise but as “a vehicle for lasting, positive, change in Lambeth.” In its Foreword, the three local OCU commanders said that they felt their objectives were bold and confident, while also being achievable and realistic.

#### **The PDL strategy in 1998**

The PDL strategy at the time of the research was embodied in the Year One Action Plan adopted in the Autumn of 1997. While this document was not

markedly different from the original, aspects of the strategy had been dropped. Primary among these were efforts to address minority recruitment issues locally, and the infusion of CRR issues into probationer selection and training processes. These were arguably key components in any effort to make progress on CRR issues locally. Recruiting officers who have an understanding of the importance of fair and equitable policing, and training them from the outset in such a manner, is one of the main ingredients needed to create a police force that can live up to the ideals promoted by the strategy. And, as will be discussed later, taking steps locally as well as centrally to address minority recruitment could prove an important way of ensuring that the under-representation of ethnic minorities in the police force will be sufficiently addressed.

The Year One Action Plan itself also saw some slippage in implementation (see Table 2 below). The reasons for this need examining. Since the Action Plan had been drawn up, there had been substantial staff turnover at senior level – in the Borough Liaison Office and amongst OCU commanders. The new senior management team took the view that – whatever the practicability of the strategy at the time it was drawn up – new legislation and other operational developments had created overwhelming pressure to reschedule the implementation timetable. In particular, the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 imposed a number of new requirements on the police and other local agencies:

- to establish new inter-agency partnerships for reducing crime and disorder;
- to develop fuller mechanisms for community consultation; and
- to restructure youth justice services.

Senior managers felt that they could only meet these requirements within the specified deadlines if they adjusted the timescales of other commitments.

C-PCG respondents felt that the changes in the strategy were for the worse, and argued that significant commitments had been watered down to a great extent. It was thought that resource constraints and shifting priorities had resulted in “*a dilution and reduction of the effort.*” As one put it, “*PDL has become simply an internal police training exercise.*” Moreover, respondents tended to see the retrenchment as a consequence of changes in senior staff, rather than of changes in the political and legislative context. Responding to these concerns in a Policing Diversity Working Group meeting, senior police managers argued that any perceived slowing of the process was about “getting it right”, not changing its direction.

It is likely that there is some merit and validity to both perspectives, and we are certainly not in a position to adjudicate between them. A difficulty for PDL,

however, is that C-PCG respondents saw the changes to the strategy's implementation as unilateral, not having been explained and justified by police managers. The result was an erosion of their confidence in the strategy's ability to bring about change, which discouraged them from taking an active role in making the strategy work and selling it to the public at large.

### **Progress on Year One objectives**

We have assessed PDL's progress against its success in achieving the objectives set out in the Year One Action Plan. Table 2 provides a snapshot of progress achieved by the middle of 1998. It divides the objectives into those which were concrete and short-term – whose attainment could be readily assessed – and the longer-term ones which defined the programme's aspirations.

#### *Accomplished objectives*

Several aspects of the strategy had already been accomplished by mid-1998. Incorporating the strategy into the policing plan strikes us as an important step; and many of the other PDL achievements provided a better organisational foundation on which to build further implementation. The working group mandated by Objective 2.1 had been established as the Policing Diversity Working Group and was meeting on a regular basis. It comprised police personnel and community representatives, and discussed and directed the progress of the strategy's implementation.

As proposed by Objective 1.5, PDL thinking had been incorporated into local policing plans as well as the policing plan for the entire MPS. Objective 6.6 of the 1998-9 Brixton Division Policing Plan committed the police to "increase the confidence and involvement of the local community in the way that Brixton is policed." Further, that document stressed the importance of achieving this objective by stating that "failure to deliver an effective service that is tailored to the diverse community of Brixton will hinder our ability to harness the support of local people in reducing crime and disorder." Such an inclusion meant that components of PDL were now divisional objectives, and thus officers would be assessed for their awareness of, and sensitivity to, these issues in addition to other appraisal mechanisms.

At the time of fieldwork the CRR training regime was well underway. Senior officers had gone through the training and sergeants and other supervisors were participating in training sessions throughout the summer months. A Vulnerable Persons Unit had been established as proposed by the strategy and was fully operational. Finally, several independent surveys of the community had been

| Table 2: Progress on Year One objectives  |              |                            |
|---|--------------|----------------------------|
| Short-term objectives   | Accomplished | Not yet fully accomplished |
| 1.5 Incorporate strategy into policing plan   | ✓            |                            |
| 2.1 Establish working group to develop strategy action plans  | ✓            |                            |
| 2.2,2.4,8.3 Establish consultation mechanisms with core ethnic minority communities   |              | ✗                          |
| 5.1 Establish VPU   | ✓            |                            |
| 6.4 Incorporate CRR into staff appraisals   | ✓            |                            |
| 7.1 Develop CRR training strategy for all officers in Lambeth   | ✓            |                            |
| 8.2 Undertake independent surveys of the community  | ✓            |                            |
| 9 Youth strategy  |              | ✗                          |
| 10.1 Enhance the community's awareness of the PDL strategy  |              | ✗                          |
| 10.5 Ensure all police service personnel in Lambeth are aware of the police service's commitment to internal and external fairness and equality |              | ✗                          |
| Middle/long-term objectives   | Accomplished | Work in progress           |
| 1.6 Widen and deepen understanding of CRR issues  |              | ✓                          |
| 6.1, 6.2 Minority recruitment and support   |              | ✓                          |
| 8.1 Build the confidence and trust of all communities in the Lambeth Police Service   |              | ✓                          |
| 8.4 Strive to achieve an equality of service delivery   |              | ✓                          |

undertaken by the MPS in an attempt to stay in touch with public attitudes towards the police service and to inform the MPS's efforts to make progress on policing diversity issues.

#### *Objectives not accomplished at the end of Year One*

Many of the objectives falling into this category were being pursued by police but could not yet be regarded as achieved. For instance, Objective 1.6 which seeks "to widen and deepen understanding of police-CRR issues" among the police service and general public had not been achieved. Understandably perhaps, those police



constables we interviewed lacked the sophisticated understanding of the issues which we found amongst senior managers and community members of the C-PCG. Furthermore, Objective 10.5, which sought to “ensure all police service personnel in Lambeth are aware of the police service’s commitment to internal and external fairness and equality”, had not been accomplished. This is not to say that officers did not understand that they have a duty to provide fair and equitable services; it is to say that they remained unaware of the PDL policy explicitly committing the police to improving the fairness of police practice.

With regard to the establishment of consultation mechanisms with the main ethnic minority communities in Lambeth and the development of new channels for positive interaction between police and public, both the Borough Liaison Office and the divisional commanders were keen to develop additional community contacts in an effort to reach the community not represented by the Lambeth C-PCG, and were making efforts to do so.

Progress had been very limited in relation to the objective of increasing minority recruitment and support. Achieving this goal is obviously a long-term process: it will take significant attitudinal changes among youth towards the police, changes in police culture regarding the treatment of minority officers, and an improvement in the qualifications of ethnic minorities, to see a significant enhancement of minority representation in the police service. The officers we interviewed related the hard time that officers from minority groups had within the force and the difficulty they had in getting promotions. Unfortunately, as is discussed below, the scope for tackling such issues unilaterally at OCU level is limited.

With regard to the youth strategy, community leaders suggested that more needed to be done in this area. Several thought that positive interaction with youth should be an ongoing practice that involves more officers on a more regular basis. Given the importance of this to the development of greater community support and co-operation, as well as its importance in the effort to make the police service something that more young people will consider joining, the police should not down-play or underestimate the need to remain committed in this sphere.

Objectives 8.1, 8.4 and 10.1, which dealt with community perceptions and experiences, are discussed below.

### **Police perspectives on PDL**

Police managers were clearly committed to the PDL strategy and were engaged in active efforts to implement it. In a number of fora, divisional commanders had

expressed their understanding of the importance of making the strategy work and their determination to see it achieved. This was important as it meant that subordinates could take cues from their leadership that these issues were important, forming an integral part of the police organisational landscape.

By the time of fieldwork the original signatories of the PDL plan had moved on, leaving their successors to implement it. The rapid turnover of senior police staff created difficulties for PDL. Inevitably, the new senior management team had their own perspective on the strategy, which was at some points at odds with that of their predecessors. Implementing the substantial provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 provided an added complication. The net effect was that from the point of view of C-PCG members, negotiated agreements and shared understandings had withered away. This undoubtedly set back progress in implementing PDL substantially.

Police respondents identified a related but slightly different problem in the policy of transferring all constables once they have served eight years in one division. Several officers commented on the loss of experience and local knowledge, and the damage to community relations, that such moves could sometimes entail. For example, one permanent beat officer (PBO) reaching the eight-year threshold explained that he had only now come to understand the many different facets of the local community he policed. The transfer policy was designed to limit inefficiencies and the opportunities for corruption that can occur when officers have become very well-established in an area. Assessing the policy clearly lies well outside the remit of this report. We appreciate that introducing some flexibility to allow for exceptional cases could prove impractical. If there is no scope for flexibility in such cases, clearly it is of particular importance to ensure proper transitional hand-over arrangements in cases where an officer has a special relationship with the community.

#### *Officer awareness and perceptions of the PDL strategy*

All interviewed sergeants and constables were asked about their awareness of PDL. Out of the fourteen officers interviewed, four were sergeants who had been through the CRR training<sup>8</sup> and thus were roughly familiar with the strategy; five – all constables – equated PDL with the CRR training course, and five said that they had heard nothing about it. Some of those who equated PDL with CRR training saw its potential, whilst others expressed ambivalence:

*“The training is a good thing.”*

<sup>8</sup> At the time of fieldwork only sergeants and above had had access to the CRR training programme.

*“It is trying to get cops to understand and communicate with the various cultures in the area”; “deals mainly with Black and White issues”; “anything is better than nothing.”*

*“I don’t understand its objectives and potential benefits. We’ve had these things in the past and our preconceptions will get in the way of learning.”*

*“Officers were frightened of it. . . seen as another political thing.”*

*“I wonder if it will help. . . most [officers] feel things won’t change.”*

The biggest anxiety seemed to be that it would point the finger at them and charge them with being racist. It will be a challenge to overcome negative preconceptions of the training and achieve any significant impact on officer thinking.

The fact that several officers were completely unfamiliar with the strategy or the training pointed to the need for managers to communicate more effectively to front-line officers about PDL.

### *Officers’ experience of the CRR training*

Feedback from officers who had been through the CRR training was mostly positive. In discussing issues relevant to the PDL strategy, such as the impact of ethnic diversity on policing, these officers demonstrated an appreciation of its impact and the importance of being able to understand and constructively communicate with persons from other backgrounds.

### **Community perspectives on PDL**

An integral part of judging the PDL strategy and its impact involves the community. This section presents the perspectives of C-PCG members and of the general public.

#### *Public awareness of PDL strategy*

C-PCG members were obviously well aware of the strategy, as several of them had participated in its development. All were familiar with the strategy’s various components and had a clear idea of what the strategy was trying to accomplish. However, many expressed doubt as to its ability to bring about change in actual police practices. As one put it, *“Any commitment to change personal behaviour of an individual takes an enormous amount of commitment and willpower. Multiply that by 30,000 and that is how difficult it is to change this organisation. . . Policy ain’t gonna cut*

it.” The general attitude seemed to be that it was early in the life of the strategy and they would have to wait and see if it had an impact on police activity on the ground. Unsurprisingly perhaps, those members of the general public whom we interviewed were completely unaware of the existence of the strategy or any effort on the part of the police to improve the fairness and equity of their interactions with the community.

Despite the fact that the PDL plan, according to the minutes of the Policing Diversity Working Group, was distributed widely to several agencies including schools and youth centres, there was little awareness of the strategy’s existence at the end of its first year. Such a failure to communicate in this regard — on the part of both the police and C-PCG – hindered progress on these issues, leaving the public to feel that no action of any sort was being taken to address their concerns.

Neither C-PCG respondents nor others had yet sensed any change in police practices. While acknowledging that police managers were engaged in efforts to implement the PDL strategy, C-PCG members expressed doubt that it was having any impact on the ground yet. Two quotes illustrate this:

*“I don’t know if there has been a shift at the front line. . . There is a pull between what happens on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor [i.e. senior management] and the ground floor.”*

*“There are lots of equality policies, very little equality on the ground.”*

### *Views about the implementation of PDL*

The dominant view about PDL’s implementation was that it had been damaged by the revisions to the implementation timetable. It was thought that this had had the effect of scaling back PDL from its original conception. There was a widely expressed view that senior police were not as committed to the PDL strategy as would be required for it to be a success. We cannot assess to what extent this was true. Clearly, however, the Borough Liaison Office had served as a “lightning conductor” for C-PCG concerns about PDL; a wide range of criticisms of police staff were made to us with great intensity of feeling. Whatever else may have happened, there had clearly been a breakdown in communication about the reasons why PDL had not been implemented as originally planned.

### **The role of the Lambeth Community-Police Consultative Group in PDL**

As with many community organisations, the C-PCG makes significant demands of time and energy on its membership. The voluntary nature of the Group’s

membership and the constraints on their time combine to limit what can be asked and expected of the people who sit on the C-PCG and its various committees. Not surprisingly, those we spoke to – including members of the C-PCG itself – had fairly ambivalent views about the Group and its achievements.

On the positive side, many thought that the C-PCG had been pivotal in getting the PDL strategy off the ground. As one said, *“Nothing would be happening without the C-PCG. Their pressure has been key.”* It was also thought that the Group had played an important part in getting the MPS to take steps to address public concerns over deaths in custody and the use of CS spray. It was put to us that these achievements were all the more remarkable in view of the lack of any direct controls over police decision-making.

Indeed some respondents argued that the C-PCG tended to be judged against unrealistic criteria. Properly viewed for what it is – a forum for police and community communications – they thought that it had been quite effective and had provided the opportunity for *some degree* of scrutiny and accountability. Regardless of their views on its achievements, C-PCG respondents did not regard the group as an adequate substitute for democratically elected control and authority over police. They argued that it should not be the only vehicle for consultation locally and that police accountability structures need to be strengthened. Many put their hopes in the new Police Authority and the forthcoming elected London Assembly.

On the negative side, some scepticism was expressed about the Group’s representativeness. On the one hand there was the suggestion that its day-to-day operation was in the hands of white, middle-aged members. On the other, some thought that geographically it was *“Brixton dominated”* and, in terms of issues, *“race has been the number one agenda item at the C-PCG.”* Both C-PCG respondents and the police acknowledged that it represented some interests and perspectives much more effectively than others.

Many commented on the highly politicised nature of the group, and on the tendency for this politicisation to compromise its effectiveness. Both police and C-PCG members had strong feelings in this regard:

*“These are people playing politics, trying to get somewhere.”* Police officer

*“C-PCG meetings are hijacked by activists.”* C-PCG member

*“They cause a lot of noise and hot air, but are unrepresentative.”* Police officer

*“Meetings are political theatre, not consultation.”* C-PCG member

Indeed, it would be hard to ignore the highly politically charged nature of debate about policing in Lambeth. It was clear that there were distinct factions at community level espousing sharply conflicting perspectives on policing issues. Given this, a wide range of issues considered by the Group tended to become politicised and racialised. Several respondents commented on the significant personal animosities within the Group, and the considerable distrust and mutual scepticism. In this context, the police were constantly defensive and the vocal community continually combative. This frustrated partnership efforts, confounded efforts to understand differing perspectives, and prevented an appreciation of any positive things that did take place. The most pessimistic views expressed were that the Group served as nothing more than *“a soap box for pet concerns,”* and was simply a *“talking shop”* with few accomplishments.

One theme which emerged in interviews with both police and C-PCG members was that the Group was open to criticism for failing to put the same fervour into challenging crime and criminals within the community as they did into challenging police practice. The view was expressed that in adopting an adversarial or even antagonistic stance towards the police, C-PCG members were at risk of ignoring the culpability of police suspects.

### **Chapter summary**

The main points to have emerged in this assessment of PDLs first year are:

- implementation of the strategy had been subject to some slippage.
- this had damaged relations between the C-PCG and the police; some C-PCG members saw the slippage as a sign of reduction in police commitment to the strategy.
- some of the strategy’s Year One objectives had been met, but others had not.
- in particular, rank-and-file police awareness of PDL was low, and community awareness very limited indeed.
- the C-PCG had played a key part in initiating PDL, but the effectiveness of the group in promoting the strategy was limited, and constrained by in-fighting between individuals in different organisations.

This stock-taking exercise has exposed some of the pitfalls which threaten any attempt to improve relations between the police and the community. First, and unsurprisingly, progress is often slow – slower than key participants would wish. Secondly, the natural impatience to see progress puts pressure particularly on police

participants to take an optimistic view of what can be achieved within what time-frames: people are tempted to offer hostages to fortune in such circumstances. Thirdly, optimistic plans can very readily be derailed by unexpected factors, including new legislative demands and new management priorities. Finally, if and when this occurs, a dynamic is triggered in which previously established trust is rapidly eroded. Even the most adept of communicators may find it difficult to retrieve such a situation.

## 4. Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter aims to pull together the conclusions which can be drawn from our preliminary evaluation of Policing Diversity in Lambeth. We examined the PDL strategy at the end of its first year of life. It would obviously be premature to attempt conclusive statements about the impact of the strategy on policing. Since we carried out the fieldwork the strategy has continued to evolve. It is important to continue monitoring developments when more of its components have been fully put into practice. What can be judged at the end of Year One, though, is whether the strategy is capable of adequately addressing local problems and whether the police and community are doing what is necessary to bring about long-term positive improvements. First we offer our view of the strengths and weaknesses of the strategy, and then we offer some more specific suggestions for the future of strategies of this sort.

### Quality of the strategy

PDLs formal objectives, as stated in its Year One Action Plan, were:

- to ensure that no member of the Lambeth public is treated in a discriminatory way on the grounds of sex, colour, race, sexual orientation, religion or disability;
- to ensure that all officers operating in Lambeth comply with these principles; and
- to enhance police/community relations in our area and thereby help reduce crime, assist in bringing offenders to justice, and promote the quality and safety of life in our community.

The strategy had several strengths. First, it promoted the development of a broad spectrum of community contacts. Second, it placed substantial priority on CRR training as a mechanism for educating police officers on community race relations. Third, it promoted the recruitment and support of ethnic minorities in the police force. Fourth, PDL objectives were incorporated into policing plans and the staff appraisal process. Finally, the importance of improving links and relations with youth in the community was made evident by the commitment in the strategy to engage in a number of efforts involving youth and schools. Each of these components were valuable parts of the process of bringing the police closer to delivering a service that is fair and equitable and seen to be so. The strategy should thus be viewed as a good starting point, for it initiated a process focused upon CRR issues and developed some mechanisms for improving the way the police interact with the public. However, in the state of development that it had reached in mid-1998, several aspects of the strategy needed addressing.



## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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### *Organisational “sticks and carrots”*

Arguably the weakest link of the Year One Action Plan was its failure to specify in any detail mechanisms to “ensure that all officers operating in Lambeth comply with these principles.” Whilst the priority given to CRR training was in itself desirable, it should not in our view have been regarded as the primary means of effecting change in officer behaviour. We do not doubt the value of CRR training. *By itself*, however, it is unlikely to bring about a significant change in police practice.

Training initiatives and management controls have only a limited ability to impact on police working practices. Police working culture does not evolve by accident, but is a response to the day-to-day pressures and demands of police work. Policing routinely involves physical risks; it routinely involves the management of conflict, and challenges to personal authority, and can be highly stressful; it constantly exposes staff to the least attractive facets of human behaviour. It is hardly surprising that researchers in developed countries<sup>9</sup> across the world have identified a consistent occupational culture characterised by:

- intense solidarity and mutual support at working level;
- a heavy emphasis on the maintenance of police authority on the streets;
- scepticism about senior managers and their initiatives;
- cynicism about people’s motives and behaviour;
- a tendency towards simplification in thinking about crime problems and the police function;
- an accompanying stress on crime-fighting goals; and
- a pragmatism about ends justifying means.

Without effective oversight, this occupational culture can lead to serious problems in police/community relations even in culturally homogeneous areas. In culturally diverse areas with high crime, it can have seriously perverse effects. It can lead to the development and maintenance of practices which bear disproportionately on minority groups – without there necessarily being racist intent on the part of any individuals.

For strategies such as PDL to get properly established, therefore, a comprehensive system of organisational “sticks and carrots” needs to be put in place to counteract the possible effects of occupational culture. These might include:

- making the complaints process more responsive to incidents in which racism or bias is at issue;

<sup>9</sup> See Waddington (1999) for a review which argues the need for a more intelligent understanding of the “canteen culture” and its relationship to police practice.

- providing more support for police officers and members of the public who report and sanction improper behaviour of officers;
- ensuring that formal and informal performance indicators do not encourage patrol officers to over-use stop-and-search tactics;
- removing institutional rewards from those who substitute quantity for quality in their stop-and-search or arrest tactics;
- rewarding officers for pursuing PDL objectives;
- withholding rewards from those whose appraisals reveal indifference to PDL objectives; or
- signalling that a successful tour of duty in a challenging borough is a stepping stone to rapid promotion.

Some officers suggested that a compounding factor undermining policy initiatives such as PDL was the sheer rapidity of policy development and frequency of new initiatives within the MPS. It was suggested that PCs get overwhelmed and confused with the level of change, meaning that new policies like PDL get lost in the shuffle. The chances of implementing strategies like PDL successfully are much reduced if they are competing for the workforce's attention with other innovations.

### *Communication*

Our findings point to a need for a coherent, organised, and effective communications strategy within initiatives such as PDL. We have argued that poor communication and mutual misunderstanding lies at the heart of poor police/community relations. Strategies such as PDL need to give attention both to internal communication within the police and to communication between the police and community.

Improving internal communication is more difficult than it might appear at first sight. Attempts had been made to explain PDL to officers on the ground, but these had met with limited success. We suspect that part of the problem lies in the way that day-to-day pressures of police work insulate patrol officers from their senior managers. An effective internal communication strategy may have to stress that pursuing PDL is in officers' own interests. There are two types of "selling point": the first is that improving relations between the police and the community will make the police job easier, safer and more rewarding; the second is that doing so will unlock organisational rewards (or ward off organisational punishments).

Improving external communications is more challenging. The problem is that when police/community relations are poor, whatever the police say will be weakened by their low credibility. The establishment of a CRR Information

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Resource Centre as proposed in the Year One Action Plan may provide a means of facilitating greater public awareness of police efforts. Any strategy for improving external communications will require the police to co-opt “allies” who have greater credibility than themselves with relevant sections of the community.

The C-PCG clearly has an important role to play in communicating the PDL strategy and its achievements to the wider community. We recognise that there are limits to what can be expected of busy people working in a voluntary capacity. However, C-PCG members are currently better placed than the police to convey to some sectors of the community what PDL is, and what it is trying to achieve.

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 created a new role for the local authority in tackling crime, which explicitly embraces community consultation. In developing a crime reduction strategy with the police and other partners, the local authority has to consult extensively, and is expected to convey to the public the nature of the resultant strategy. The responsibility which the local authority shares with the police to audit crime problems – and to take account of the public’s view of crime problems – provides a significant new opportunity to educate and inform the community about the nature of crime and the steps which are taken to tackle it. Initiatives such as PDL properly fall under the umbrella of local crime partnerships’ crime reduction strategies, and need to be integrated with these.

### *Recruitment*

Both police and community respondents cited various factors as working against minority recruitment:

- real and perceived racism within the police force;
- youth perceptions of police;
- peer influence against joining the police; and
- a limited pool of qualified ethnic minority applicants.

Clearly the problem is not amenable to a “quick fix”. It is one that is endemic to British policing. There is a need for sustained long-term action both at force level and at OCU/borough level. Little progress had been made in implementing the recruitment elements of the PDL strategy, because there was a lack of clarity about the division of labour between central personnel services and staff in OCUs – and indeed a lack of agreement about whether there was any role at all for local action.

Action *can* be taken locally to address ethnic minority recruitment. One example is the scheme in Tottenham called “Equal Opportunities in Action” which offers 10 weeks of pre-entry training to help potential candidates meet the required

standards for sitting the police entrance tests. Clearly, there are many steps in the process to increase recruitment of ethnic minority officers. Youths from minority groups who are in the pool of potential future recruits need to have positive experiences of, and interactions with, the police. Those who eventually join need to have rewarding careers and access to promotion. This in turn will encourage others to contemplate a police career. Making these processes a reality requires action at OCU level as much as at force level.

Action is also being taken to address ethnic minority recruitment at a national level. In July 1999, the Home Secretary announced employment targets for the police, prison, fire and probation services and for the Home Office. Targets have been set for each police force, and they are intended to go some way towards ensuring that local public services are truly representative of their communities, and consequently able to serve them better.

### *Stop-and-search*

Stop-and-search is one of the major sources of public concern, and real improvement in this area would do much to improve relations between the police and the public. As found in this study, it appears that the *interaction* between police and stopped individuals often leads to an escalation of stop situations. Thus, in addition to getting officers to learn how to communicate and interact better with persons from ethnic minority groups through the CRR training, members of the public, especially youths, should be trained on how to interact with police so as not to escalate the situation when they are stopped. This is done at present by groups such as the 1990 Trust, but more effort needs to be put into ensuring that such training reaches as many persons as possible.

Beyond the issue of interaction during stops, there are particularly difficult questions about acceptable rates of stop-and-search. First of all, a view needs to be taken about overall acceptability of "hit rates". What proportion of stops should yield an arrest - or a conviction? Each time that the suspicions leading to a stop turn out to be unfounded, there are costs, in the shape of damage to police/community relations. A high level of unproductive stops will carry a high cost, and at some level this cost will outweigh the benefits gained from successful stops. It is a matter of fine judgement when this level is exceeded.

An even more difficult question concerns the disproportionate rate of stops for ethnic minorities. The community needs to recognise the possibility, if not probability, that some sectors of some minority groups may be disproportionately involved in some sorts of crime. Equally, the police need to recognise that policing

<sup>10</sup> The statistics may be less reliable in forces other than the MPS (cf FitzGerald and Hale, forthcoming).

methods premised on such beliefs may well produce biased “evidence” about minority involvement in crime and lead to self-fulfilling prophecies. National and MPS statistics indicate that black people are five times more likely to be stopped and searched than white, and that the tactic is particularly heavily used in London.<sup>10</sup> This is compelling *prima facie* evidence that the tactic is being used in a way which bears disproportionately and without full justification on black people. The statistics need fuller examination, however; in particular, rates of *persons* stopped and searched per thousand population need to be compared with rates of *stop-and-searches* themselves.

A related issue concerns special operations mounted by officers unfamiliar with an area. Police respondents suggested that, when poorly executed, these tended to inflame local concerns about the police without achieving any significant success. The problem was seen to lie in officers’ ignorance of local issues and local personalities. One way of minimising risks of damage to community relations is to ensure that there is better and fuller consultation with local permanent beat officers and, where appropriate, members of the public.

### Recommendations

When this study was completed in mid-1998, we offered police managers in Lambeth a series of recommendations about the development of PDL. For the purposes of this report, we have translated the recommendations into general principles which we think will apply to any CRR strategy designed to improve relations between police and public.

- CRR strategies must be firmly embedded within police forces’ organisational reward systems, with a comprehensive mix of “sticks and carrots” designed to ensure that officers take the strategies seriously.
- CRR training is of obvious value, but cannot be relied upon as the only or primary means of changing officers’ behaviour and beliefs. Equating CRR strategies solely with CRR training is a recipe for failure.
- CRR strategies need a well-designed internal communications plan. Such strategies will need “selling” to officers on the ground. The payoffs in terms of effectiveness, safety and organisational rewards will need spelling out.
- To aid internal communication, local senior managers need to signal loudly and clearly to their workforce that they attach importance to the CRR strategy.
- CRR strategies need comprehensive plans for external communication. It is essential to get across to the community the nature of crime problems, and the ways in which the police and their partners are tackling crime.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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- The police themselves may lack sufficient credibility to get the message across to those who most need to hear it. “Allies” may be needed, such as the C-PCG in Lambeth, who can command more trust in relevant sectors of the community.
- Local crime reduction partnerships established by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 need to be fully involved in CRR strategies.
- The impact of formal and informal performance indicators needs to be carefully assessed, to ensure that they do not distort policing practice in ways which damage community relations. This is especially important in relation to stop-and-search practice.
- CRR strategies should place emphasis on the early identification of sources of concern within the community about policing practice; sources of concern need to be acknowledged and debated openly by the police.
- CRR strategies need to find ways of educating and training people – and especially youths – from ethnic minority groups about policing practice and ways of interacting successfully with the police.
- CRR strategies need to foster a more explicit debate about appropriate levels of stop-and-search and about acceptable “hit rates” in terms of arrests.
- Where special operations involving high rates of stop-and-search (or other such tactics) are used, there needs to be closer consultation with local permanent beat officers and, where appropriate, members of the public.
- CRR strategies need to assess fully the scope for effective local action to stimulate ethnic minority recruitment.

## 5. Epilogue

This study assessed the Policing Diversity in Lambeth (PDL) strategy at the end of its first year, in mid-1998. Since then, the MPS has experienced rapid change on a number of fronts. Crucially, the report of the Macpherson Inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence has transformed debate about police/community relations, and in particular about relations between the police and ethnic minority groups. The Home Secretary's priorities for policing in 1999 emphasised the need for improved community relations. The follow-up report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, "Winning the Race Revisited", further stressed the need for urgent action (HMIC, 1999). Parallel with these developments, the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act imposed a duty on police and local authorities to work to reduce crime in partnership with local communities, and to engage more fully in consultation with local communities.

Together these developments have created a significant impetus for change. While some negative reactions may be expected in the short-term post-Macpherson, there seems to be a real determination by the MPS to see real improvements. One senses that major cultural change could be starting to occur within the police service.

As befits a borough with its demographic profile and its recent history, Lambeth secured a head-start over many other London boroughs in developing a strategy to improve police/community relations. PDL was getting established well before the Macpherson Inquiry presented its findings. This report has offered a snapshot of progress achieved - and pitfalls encountered - in Year One of the strategy's life. We have probably focused more on pitfalls than progress, simply because one learns more from mistakes rather than successes. Thus it is only fair to the C-PCG and to the Lambeth police borough to end this report with a summary of progress in PDL since mid-1998. The following account depends very largely on what we have been told by the police and C-PCG well after fieldwork on the project was completed.

The PDL initiative has served as a valuable pilot for work in other boroughs within the MPS. The CRR training has been rolled out successfully, and almost all serving officers and civilian staff in Lambeth have now been through the programme. Staff moving to the borough have a much improved induction process. Comprehensive briefing packages have been prepared for both police and civilian staff about the nature of institutional racism.

Policing in Lambeth has also seen some structural changes which will support PDL objectives. As elsewhere in the MPS, borough-based policing has been introduced, whereby there is a single operational command unit for each borough, rather than the previous two or three divisions. The borough's crime reduction strategy has

been agreed and published. The community policing system has been reorganised, to provide increased support for community-led problem-oriented policing. Three Community Safety Units have been established to support this process. Lambeth has served as a pilot site for improving stop-and-search procedures.

It is early days to say whether these initiatives are paying off, but there is room for some optimism. A clue to the effectiveness of the Policing Diversity initiative may be found in the nature of the response to the nail-bomb attack which took place in Brixton in April 1999. After this incident the police and members of the community worked well together not only to help the immediate investigation but also to minimise the potentially divisive impact of the bombing. Indeed the local response seems to have strengthened the Brixton community. Of course we cannot say for certain, but we are doubtful whether a similar situation would have received a similarly positive response a few years ago.



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