



This article, 'Community and Communication' written by Lynda King Taylor, appeared in the Spring issue 2005 of *Policing Today*, the Journal of the Association of Chief Police Officers of England, Wales & Northern Ireland.

For more background on Lynda King Taylor and her work visit
<http://www.lyndakingtaylor.com/>

For the Winning Community Relations training background visit
<http://www.padpolice.com/relations.php>
and the programme contents and delegate feedbacks can be found at
http://www.padpolice.com/docs/Winning_Community_Relations.pdf

For more information on the Paddington police/community Sector Working & Safer Neighbourhoods Group, referred to in the article, operating in North Westminster, Metropolitan Police Service, London visit <http://www.padpolice.com/>



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Community and Communication



In Birmingham as in London: officers of West Midlands Police meet their local community

Photo: Karen Bristol, WMP

Lynda King Taylor chairs a Safer Neighbourhoods Group in London and runs courses for the Metropolitan Police on presentational skills to improve relations with minority communities. Here she writes about the steps police need to take to build local trust and confidence

Over the past twenty years or so, since I first became involved in working with the Police Service, there have been many major changes in its relations with different communities – some remarkably

ahead of their time. But there have been some constant, consistent criticisms too. In particular, community meetings sometimes take place for the sake of it, and while there may be listening there is no action.

And still too often the style of some senior officers is not well received at street level, either with constables or the community. When there is a desperate need to build community confidence and candour, reassure residents, win over hearts and minds of minorities, encourage reporting and reap intelligence, our community groups receive instead a set of police priorities which are devised and presented from the top downwards.

Police seldom get a second chance to create a first impression. Sadly, there are still too often pitiful police presentations to community groups and media, especially following critical incidents or when tackling cross-cutting and sensitive problems. Far from winning the hearts and minds of 'hard to reach' and minority communities, people are being turned off by the words and ways of police which above all assert their own priorities or justify actions which were doubtfully received by the public in the first place. Police are not always well prepared for the challenge of working in disadvantaged neighbourhoods or receiving the cross-professional training which enables them to communicate with communities in high-performing teams capable of making a real impact on local problems.

This problem is compounded by the fact that safer neighbourhood policing and partnership groups (or whatever they are named at the local divisional level) are not statutory or publicly funded in any way (unlike the s106 groups established under PACE and many operating beyond their usefulness). They are not funded by either Home Office, police, Councils or other partners. They operate purely on community goodwill alone and the commitment of the few for the many. That is dangerous when building community relations that truly represent all groups across neighbourhoods.

The need for these local consultative groups to become statutory is a strong one for a number of reasons. They are :

- usually much more representative of the community in their diversity;
- vital to providing a grass roots interface and intelligence between community and police;
- more responsive and offer speedy access to local police for problem-focused solutions to issues;
- proving their value as the way forward in reassurance policing.

Everyone will agree that the way forward is for the public to have a real say in local policing, and for them to have the information they need on crime levels and

performance. How can the Home Office, Councils or police chiefs expect to meet the objectives outlined in the Police Reform Programme, more accountability at service delivery level, or more say by local citizens in policing without any mandatory requirements and funding for such neighbourhood groups? Regularly more than 100 community leaders on the group which I chair, representing all the diverse interests across our part of north Westminster, meet police to help tackle crime. The pivotal interface provided by our Sector Working and Safer Neighbourhoods Group, is not only aiding communication but also is building trust and confidence between the community and the police. It is by having confidence and trust that vulnerable communities often gain a voice.

When that confidence and trust is established positive indicators become apparent, such as the increase in community-led evidence, victims becoming witnesses and attending court, third party reporting and the use of Crimestoppers for instance. The community becomes resolved to help police tackle some of the crimes that plague any area, such as aggressive prostitution and anti-social behaviour.

Our own research across multi-cultural communities discovered that improved communication and presentation skills were seen as a critical success factor. They help build effective police partnerships within areas and with local 'hard to reach' neighbourhoods reduce crime and disorder, encourage the vulnerable to report crime, especially minority groups and to be prepared to become witnesses and attend court. Police themselves agreed that, as well as 'traditional' policing and crime prevention skills, they would benefit from gaining greater self-confidence and communications capability to better work with all communities and win their confidence.

Community members want the same result as many others. That is a police service whose job is to strive to protect the community from the worst excesses of violence, gun crime, drug warfare and terrorism – and simultaneously from the proliferation of petty crime, disorderly and anti social behaviour. But how can it all be achieved in a seamless service? How to tackle terrorism, the national and organised crime in London – and elsewhere – through to local street crime? There is no doubt that 'safer neighbourhoods' and dedicated policing teams can be the foundation of this as they provide visibility, reassurance and inform-

ation – all critical components in community relations. However, how can the media, community leaders and the Service themselves be convinced that it can be done? It cannot be done without the appropriate skills, development and training to work with neighbourhoods and communities across our part of a multi-cultural inner city, whilst simultaneously dealing with the complex criminal activity at all levels.

Police are not always well prepared for working in disadvantaged neighbourhoods

Community leaders want to repair relationships. They appreciate that some asylum seekers and immigrants can bring some negative aspects of their culture with them. These include the disapproval of relationships outside the community, forced marriage, imprisonment and assault in the home, hate and honour crime plus human trafficking, prostitution and economic crime. Partnerships contain representatives of all communities and represent the majority of citizens who do not wish such crime or criminals within their midst and want to work with police to build safer neighbourhoods together.

If police do not win the 'hearts and minds' of those leaders then there is no hope for working with them either to prevent criminality, reassure the vulnerable in those communities or indeed to solve crime. Far too often only when a crime became a critical incident do CID or specialist units consult our partnership and seek intelligence from those leaders. From the 'consumer' perspective, this has been all too reactive, when much could have been done proactively from officers who should be part of the community. That is why this training and awareness is desperately needed at SIO level. The need for more focussed training programme was apparent to help officers deal with the media or address local groups on controversial, difficult matters relating to complaints against the police and allegations of police malpractice.

From the perspective of the community, the challenge of delivering legitimate policing in an increasingly diverse, dynamic and demanding environment

compels continuing credibility in policing. The self-confidence of officers is vital: many express fear and nervousness at being in a climate perceived as defensive and having to address hostile or aggressive audiences of multi cultural community leaders who are increasingly sophisticated in their knowledge and expectations.

The 'Winning Community Relations' programme was launched to assist those managing and requiring to communicate in an environment of building safer diverse communities. Whether an individual's role requires them to speak in public, communicate with diverse communities in partnership arenas and the media, the programme is tailored to be accurate, relevant, realistic and challenging for the Police Service and its partners in other agencies and the community. The programme's practical work has been developed from experience gained working with diverse communities across a variety of operational, confrontational and critical incident events – especially where there is a need to win the hearts and minds in community relations in order to better achieve policing by consent and co-operation. It delivers best practice communications and presentations skills for improving working partnerships across inner-city multi-cultural communities.

If the Service is to develop officers for the future who are capable of leading, developing and winning community groups and others, current omni-competent police training approaches will not suffice. The greatest danger for most when giving police presentations whether to community leaders, hard to reach groups, the media or public inquiries, is not that their aim is too high and they miss their target, but that often they aim too low and they reach it. We can not afford that if we are to meet the challenges of police-community partnership currently being demanded of us all.



Lynda King Taylor chairs the Safer Neighbourhoods Group in Paddington. For more information on the Group or on the 'Winning Community Relations' programme see

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