

“Policing: Building Safer Communities Together” Chinese Community Consultation Report



Organised by
London Chinese Community Network
and
Min Quan

June 2004

Report on the “Policing: Building Safer Communities Together” Consultation Seminar for the Chinese Community

Date: Friday, 28th May 2004
Venue: Chinese Community Centre (London Chinatown)
Organised by: London Chinese Community Network (LCCN) and Min Quan
Speaker: Mr Jabez Lam (Min Quan)
Ms Deborah Glass (Independent Police Complaints Commission)
Sergeant Sean Donovan and PC Reg Greenacre
(Chinatown Unit, Metropolitan Police Authority)

Background

In 1st April 2004 a major change to the way the police complaints system was introduced in England and Wales. The new system is designed to raise standard, cut delays, increase public confidence and transform the way police forces handle complaints from public. The system is overseen by a new body which is independent of the police and government - the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) is to replace the Police Complaint Authority (PCA).

In view of the new system and the impact of policing in respect to the Chinese community, LCCN and Min Quan (a Chinese branch of The Monitoring Group) joined in partnership to organise the “Policing: Building Safer Communities Together” Consultation Seminar to look into all these issues and a platform to reflect the comments to the police authorities.

Chinese community and voluntary organisations in London including some ethnic minority network organisations were invited. The seminar is funded by the Third Sector Alliance’s Accessibility Fund.

Purpose of the meeting

- To inform the Chinese community of such changes and the Police Reform.
- To reflect to the IPCC of the needs of the Chinese community.
- To raise the awareness of the Chinese community on the role of IPCC in the Criminal Justice System.

Speakers

Mr Jabez Lam (Min Quan) – to put the perspective of Police Service to the Chinese community.

Ms Deborah Glass (IPCC) – to put across the vision and the roles of IPCC
Sergeant Sean Donovan and PC Reg Greenacre (Chinatown Unit, Metropolitan Police Authority) – to put across the role of policing in London Chinatown Unit.

The seminar was chaired by Richard Lam, Manager of LCCN.

Attendance

Over 50 delegates from various Chinese organisations and individuals attended the seminar. Media coverage includes Sing Tao Daily, a Chinese daily newspaper in Europe and the Phoenix CNE, a Chinese TV channel.

Presentation from the speakers

Mr **Jabez Lam** spoke of his work in supporting Chinese victims of crimes, in particular race crimes, and the shortcomings in police response to Chinese community. He stated that the Chinese community has suffered on crime and on unfair treatments in silence from the police. The Chinese community's expectation on the criminal justice system is not any difference from that of other communities. He illustrated by three case studies he dealt with resulted in taking complaint action against the police, and the complaints were upheld. He pointed out that despite the complaints were being upheld in all three cases, the crimes itself were unresolved. All it meant was that the PCA confirmed the victims were right to feel aggrieved of the Police.

Mr Lam focused on the following observations from his dealing with the Police Complaint Authority:

- Under the Police Complaint Authority, the police investigate complaints against the police, it lacked the independent and transparent.
- The complaints under Crown prosecution Service (CPS) achieved very little. At best, the individual officers learnt from the lesson and tried to improve their future performance. It has no impact to the underlying causes which allows such injustices to happen, i.e. institutional racism.
- It is by far more important to ensure the Police provide a proper service to the Chinese community.
- It is important that lessons being learnt from the complaints can be shared amongst the police authorities to improve and raise police standards, and stop such injustices from happening again.

Deborah Glass thanked the LCCN and Min Quan to invite her to the seminar. Ms Glass introduced the vision of the IPCC:

The IPCC is independence from the Police Forces; its structure contains 18 Commissioners under England and Wales with responsibilities for a particular geographic area. IPCC have over 70 its own investigation officers across four regions.

The role of IPCC is a supervising body on police complaints – Most complaints will still be investigated by the Police Forces but under the supervision of the IPCC; on more serious cases such as death in custody, and serious race crime the IPCC will investigate the complaint with its own officers.

IPCC has greater power and roles in comparison than previous with PCA – for example, it can take on complaints against civilian staff and also to take the role of monitoring the trend of the complaints in order to identify areas of weaknesses for improvement in the police services.

Ms Glass concluded by acknowledging that there had been criticism of police complaint lacking independence (by police investigating police), she believes the IPCC has the structure to change this. The IPCC is aware of the communities have high expectation on it and that it will endeavour to fulfil its vision. The purpose of the IPCC is to ensure lessons learnt from police complaints can be turned into actions to raise the standards of police services.

PC **Reg Greenacre** has introduced the history of the Metropolitan Police Authorities Charing Cross Police Station's Chinatown Unit. The Unit has six full-time officers with specific brief to serve the London Chinatown area. It is the only specialist Chinese Unit

amongst all Police Forces in the country. The Unit has a very stable team although recent changes in team members, the MPA is committed to maintain the level of resources of the team, and that the experience of the Unit will be maintained. PC Greenacre pointed out that the Unit also provide advice and assist Police Authority on crimes prevention and the understanding on Chinese community.

PC Greenacre emphasised the importance of community relation and trust between the Unit and the Chinese community that is the strength of the Unit. For examples, the close working relationship with the Chinese community organisations in London and the Chinatown community in dealing with crimes and community safety. He cited the regular Liaison Meeting between the Police and the Chinatown Community in London as an important vehicle to ensure communication and address concerns.

PC Greenacre encouraged the community to participate in such forums to make sure that their concerns are being heard. He believes that it is important that the Police and the community are learning from each others, improve communication and understanding which can avoid or minimise mistakes to happen. He gave the example of the procedures developed by the Chinatown Unit in dealing with problems of “Eat and Run” as a model of successful communication resulting in co-operation to address community concerns.

Floor discussion

The participants raised questions and shared their experience in police services and the complaints against the police. Some of the points raised included:

- Lacking of interpretation service is an area of concerns.
- Vulnerable groups of the community find it difficult to report crimes, e.g. women suffered from domestic violence, people have immigration problem are afraid to report crimes to the police.
- Police’s indifferent attitudes in dealing with race crime.
- Communication with victims on progress of the investigation.
- Is the IPCC be another toothless tiger?
- Even those many voices about dissatisfaction on the raised on the police service, the Chinese community also recognise the good jobs the police has done for the community.

Next step forward

Looking forward to the future, the speakers concluded:

Jabez Lam – community participation is important to make sure the police and IPCC are accountable to the community. There are many public funded Chinese organisations which he wishes them to provide services on supporting their users in setting police services, when needed.

Deborah Glass – acknowledge the scepticism of whether IPCC is toothless body; things will not change overnight. She believes that the IPCC has the right vision and power to make things change. Time will prove how sharp the teeth of IPCC have. IPCC’s achievement would not be on more police complaints or more complaints upheld. Its aim to raise police standards and its success will be measured by more satisfaction in police services.

Sergeant Sean Donovan – the Chinatown Unit has achieved a lot over the years, there are still a lot to do. Despite recent changes in the Unit's personnel, he is committed to maintain the high standards of the Chinatown Unit.

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