

RESIDENTS UPDATE

on the 'anti-terror' raids on Lansdown Road in Forest Gate

Seven Weeks On, Police Still Struggle To Answer Concerns On Local 'Anti-Terror' Raid

It has now been seven weeks since an 'anti-terror' raid on two homes in Lansdown Road led to the closure of streets, the shooting of an innocent Forest Gate resident and two families found their lives turned upside down. And yet despite admitting that they need to 'learn the lessons' of the failure to communicate with local people, Newham's police have failed to provide answers to the concerns that have been raised about both the raids themselves and the aftermath. They say they have spoken to 'community leaders'. This update pieces together information for the benefit of everyone else.

Why weren't local people kept informed?

On the day of the raids, 2nd June, the Metropolitan Police press bureau issued a statement (bulletin 413, subsequently altered on the Met's website) saying that "local Safer Neighbourhoods' officers will be working closely with affected residents and members of the community to provide support, advice and reassurance." This turned out to be untrue. The sergeant leading the Green Street East team was on holiday but no other efforts were made to ensure that local officers with a knowledge of the area were involved in providing reassurance to the local community. As we all soon discovered, the officers patrolling the cordons of the roads that were closed were from across London. They had been given no information as to why there were road closures when there was no threat to the safety of the public or why residents had to be escorted to their homes. This led to considerable confusion about whether visitors were allowed in, whether they had to be met at the cordon and (in the case of Lansdown Rd) whether they had to provide identification.

Both the local and national press reported that the police would be delivering a letter to local people, answering some of their

questions. At a meeting of the Green Street Community Forum on 13 June, Newham's senior officer in charge of Operations, Superintendent Phil Morgan, said that a letter including 'questions and answers' had been drafted but that *Scotland Yard had refused to agree its wording*. At a meeting of the Newham Community and Police Forum on 24 July, Superintendent Morgan went further, saying that the police had been unable to write to residents because 'logistics' could not keep up with 'changing events'.

However, when it came to the information that was really needed – about the cordons, about escorting residents to their doors, about how long the police operation might take – nothing fundamentally changed between 2 June and 10 June, when the cordon was finally lifted. *Why was it so difficult to communicate with 300 homes?*

On 22 July, a letter from Chief Inspector Derrick Griffiths was finally drafted, but it has never been delivered. It is far from adequate and far too late, **but you can read its contents overleaf**. It seems a shame that it has been necessary for Newham Monitoring Project to pass it on to local people, rather than the police themselves.

Why WON'T the police say anything?

There are many questions that need answering about the raids themselves and understandably, some information will not be available until after an investigation by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC). This is to ensure that any possible disciplinary or legal action is not put in jeopardy. However, this only applies to the complaints that the IPCC are investigating, not to everything to do with events from 2 June onwards. On 24 July Michael Johnson, Borough Commander for Newham, was extremely unwilling to

July/ August 2006

In the absence of any information since 2nd June for local residents from Newham police, this update has been prepared by Newham Monitoring Project, a local civil rights group that has worked in the borough for 25 years. You can contact us at the following address: NMP • PO Box 273 • London E7

answer questions and kept taking refuge behind the IPCC's investigations as an explanation for why he will not comment in more detail.

The IPCC have told us: "*The Metropolitan Police are not prevented from providing information to the community about the aftermath of the Forest Gate incident. We are aware that, in some quarters of the police, the perception exists that they are prohibited from divulging any information; however, the IPCC has clarified the correct position to the police whenever possible.*"

Why CAN'T Newham police answer our questions?

Maybe part of the reason that senior officers are hiding behind the IPCC investigation is that they simply do not have the answers. It is clear that our local police were shut out of an operation planned and directed from Scotland Yard, making a mockery of the idea of 'community policing'.

Borough Commander Michael Johnson has said that he does not feel his role has been undermined by the exclusion of local officers from one of the most significant and high profile police operations in Newham because the raids "were a very tiny part of the work of the police in the borough", but that sounds unconvincing. Seven weeks on from 2nd June and despite promises that the police will 'learn the lessons' from the poor communication to local residents, it also looks as those Newham's police are still shut out. Michael Johnson looks like a man struggling to talk about issues without so much as a briefing from his superiors.

We need someone who CAN answer our concerns

Andy Hayman, an Assistant Commissioner for the Metropolitan Police, was in charge of the raids in Lansdown Road and had a central role in assessing the intelligence and co-ordinating the police response. Newham Monitoring Project wrote to him in June expressing some of the concerns

raised with by local people and suggested that he is best placed to respond directly to you about those concerns. Now the Green Street Community Forum has written to him, asking him to come to the borough and answer the questions that the police in Newham are unable to address. Ian Johnson has also agreed to pass on this request.

It is vital that Andy Hayman comes to Newham and talks to local people at a public forum in person. It is clear that our local officers, pushed aside by Scotland Yard, are unable to answer any local concerns.

Text of the letter from Newham Police that was never delivered to local residents

Dear Resident, Business Owner

This message seeks to address some of the current issues that have been raised by the local community following the Police operation in Lansdown Road on Friday 2nd June.

First of all let me reassure you that your local Police understand your concerns and understand why such an operation can be unsettling to the local community. We apologise for the lack of information that has been available in respect of this operation, which is due to circumstances beyond our local control. The Muslim community is one of many that co-exist peacefully in Newham. The contribution of all of these communities is highly valued and makes Newham the vibrant place it is. The fact that so many different communities live together in peace and harmony is our greatest strength and it is only by us all continuing to speak and work together that we can grow ever closer and resist pressure from those who would seek to cause unrest and division. Despite the tensions of the past couple of weeks we find that the community are still united and we therefore seek your continued support and confidence

I would personally like to thank those residents who kindly supported the officers staffing the cordons with drinks and other refreshments. These officers were from other boroughs, but they have asked me to pass on that your kindness was very much appreciated.

**Chief Inspector
Derrick Griffiths**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHY WERE 250 OFFICERS NEEDED FOR THE OPERATION?

Only a small number of officers were needed for the actual search of two premises. The vast majority (about 200) were never deployed. Their presence was essential in order that we could ensure the safety of local residents should events have unfolded differently. Fortunately their deployment was not necessary.

HOW MUCH DAMAGE HAS BEEN CAUSED TO THE HOUSES?

Recent media reports suggested that a lot of damage has been caused. This is not the case. In fact, given the extent of the searches little damage has been caused to the houses during the operation and subsequent search. Immediately prior to handing the houses over to the control of solicitors acting for the families I arranged for them to be viewed by the Chair of the Barking and Dagenham Independent Advisory Group. This person is entirely independent of police in Newham and is also a Muslim. He shares my views about the extent of the damage, however, I do understand that any such event must be very traumatic for the families concerned and so even small amounts of damage can seem significant.

WAS THIS OPERATION CARRIED OUT BY LOCAL NEWHAM POLICE OFFICERS?

Local police had no part to play in this operation and the search of the premises. Our role was to ensure that the community were kept informed of events (as far as was possible) and to protect the local Muslim community

WHAT IF I STILL HAVE CONCERNS?

I acknowledge that such a high profile incident happening on your doorstep must have an unsettling effect. However, if you still have any outstanding concerns then please feel free speak to one of your local Safer Neighbourhood officers or contact me at East Ham Police Station (0208 217 4372). If you do not wish to speak direct to police then you can contact one of your local councillors at their advice surgeries, they have agreed to help address any concerns that you may have. Your local councillors are Cllr Sharaf Mahmood, Cllr Rohima Rahman and Cllr Abdul Shakoor. Details of their surgery times can be found on Newham Councils website, www.newham.gov.uk

WHAT COMMUNITY CONSULTATION HAS TAKEN PLACE SINCE THE EVENT?

On a daily basis local police have contacted and sought the advice of members of our local Independent Advisory Group and community leaders both elected and otherwise. On the day of the event the local Borough Police Commander visited five of the local Mosques to explain what had happened and why. We have also worked closely with the Alliance of Mosques, other community leaders and local ward councillors to listen to community concerns. May I take this opportunity to thank all of these people and organisations for their continued advice and support.. Finally, being under the media spotlight brings with it the risk of inaccurate information being circulated within the local community. Your local Police work very closely with the people mentioned above in order to ensure that through this community consultation process we can keep people as informed as possible."