



CHAPTER 3

— CONSULTATION —

THE COUNCIL STAYS AWAY

3.1 The Inquiry's first report said that the best form of accountability of the police would be for the present legal position, whereby the Home Secretary is the police authority for London, to be changed, and for London to have a police authority composed of elected representatives. However, given that the present Government has no intention of introducing such a reform, the Inquiry urged all parties to make full use of the existing consultative arrangements. The report said "there is a crisis of confidence in the police in Tottenham today, and it must be tackled within today's legal framework." The Inquiry reviewed the formation of the present Haringey Community and Police Consultative Group, which first met on 21st October 1985, and criticised the Council in having indulged in obstructive tactics when first invited to hold discussions about consultation arrangements. The Inquiry urged the Council to enter as a matter of urgency into discussions with the Consultative Group with a view to participating fully in its work. The Inquiry also criticised the Consultative Group for having decided not to include the monitoring of racial attacks as one of its aims, and expressed concern about the unrepresentative nature of the Group's membership.

3.2 On 24th October 1986 an informal meeting took place between Councillor Chalk, Vice Chair of the Council's Police Subcommittee, and representatives of the Consultative Group. After discussion on a number of points of concern, the conclusion of the meeting was that the meeting had been helpful in establishing a dialogue and the points raised could be taken back to the Consultative Group.

3.3 At its Annual General Meeting held on 23rd March 1987 the Group amended its constitution by including an extra aim:-

"To consult with the police regarding their responses to incidents of racial sexual or religious harassment."

The newly elected Chair of the Consultative Group, Bob Searle, wrote on 9th April 1987 to the Chief Executive to propose a further meeting.

3.4 Unfortunately Mr Searle died on 14th April 1987. From then on, communications between the Council and the Consultative Group virtually dried up. The new Chair of the Consultative Group, Leslie Cohen, wrote to the new Council leader Steve King on 19th May 1987 and 7th July 1987, but received no reply. The next letter coming from the Council speaks volumes about the Council's concern with the Consultative Group. It is dated 22nd September 1987, and was addressed to Bob Searle, who had died over 5 months before. It thanked him for his letter of 9th April 1987. It was written by Mr Gary Scottow, Clerk to the Police Sub-Committee. It said that the Council considered that it was now "time to take stock and review the whole situation, and further increase community involvement." It continued that the Council was proposing to convene a broad based consultative conference on policing, and therefore it would be premature at this stage to resume discussions with the Consultative Group. This consultative conference took place on 30th January 1988, and was attended by about 30 people. It has not led to any further communications between the Consultative Group and the Council, who appear to be waiting for the Inquiry's second report before deciding what to do.

3.5 It is clear that the Inquiry's recommendation, that the Council enter urgently into discussions with the Consultative Group with a view to participating fully in its work, has not been complied with by the Council. The Inquiry at its oral hearings asked for the reasons. Councillor Chalk, Chair of the Police Sub-Committee from summer 1987 said that negotiations ground to a halt due to the death of Bob Searle. After that, he claimed, "we didn't have any further approaches from the Consultative Group." Given the correspondence quoted above, this statement cannot be accepted. On further questioning it became clear that Councillor Chalk had no great enthusiasm for dialogue with the Consultative Group. He said:-

"There is no groundswell of opinion within the party locally that we should get involved in the Consultative Group. There is no pressure on our electorate, from the Labour Party itself, from those community organisations with whom the Council is most closely involved. The only pressure really has been both your report and from the Metropolitan Police and from the Government and to some extent from the Labour front bench nationally. So the pressure is coming from above rather than below, and as a democrat I would rather listen to those below me than above, and I haven't felt the need to make a big push towards the Consultative Group. It does not seem to fulfill any useful role or function."

Councillor Martha Osamor who was Chair of the Police Sub-Committee before Councillor Chalk, had a similar position:-

"The community isn't clamouring at the moment for any kind of meeting with them".

Bernie Grant MP, who was leader of the Council until May 1987 told the Inquiry that he had not been able to persuade the Chair of the Police Sub-Committee to follow up the informal meeting of 24th October 1986, although he himself wanted to see progress towards Council participation in the Group.

3.6 Given the views of the two Chairs of the Police Sub-Committee who gave evidence to the Inquiry, it is necessary for the Inquiry to restate the reasons why it considers that a representative Consultative Group, including strong Council participation, can play an influential part in shaping policing in Haringey. First, the Consultative Group is the only meeting which local police leaders are obliged to attend, and at which they are obliged publicly to face questions put and proposals made from representatives of the local public. Secondly, if the police representatives fail to respond satisfactorily to the questions asked and suggestions made, then the representatives of the community can expose that failure by publicity, by further questioning, and by representations to local Members of Parliament. The wealth of information which is gathered by the Council's Police Research Unit can be used to brief Council representatives on the Group and to strengthen the arguments being made. While there is ultimately no power in the Group to order

the police to do anything, the persuasive influence of publicity and open discussion should not be underestimated.

3.7 The Inquiry therefore considers that the Council, and particularly the Police Sub-Committee Chairs, have not only ignored the strong recommendation of the Inquiry, but in doing so have failed to allow the people of Haringey the opportunity of using a potentially effective, even though imperfect, means of calling the police to account. Their reasons are not good enough. They represent the whole borough, whose citizens are concerned about crime and about policing. They should be using this opportunity to make their voice heard in public, on behalf of their electorate, on the policing issues which now concern that electorate.

3.8 The Consultative Group itself has continued to meet about once every 8 weeks. On the positive side, there has been the change in the constitution to include reference to racial attacks, a change welcomed by many witnesses. There has been established a Lay Visitors Scheme whereby a panel of lay visitors has been given access to police stations at any time in order to enquire into the welfare of detainees. The Scheme, which was recommended in the Inquiry's first Report, was praised by Nick Wright, former head of the Council's Police Research Unit, in his evidence to this Inquiry:-

"People shouldn't underestimate the importance of that. It is not perfect. Sometimes police officers limit the scope of its operation. Sometimes the people who make up the Lay Visitors panel don't pursue their duties as energetically as they should do. But the principle of the Lay Visitors panel is an extremely good one. It is a kind of window opportunity, both for the community to try to gain some insight into what goes on in police stations, and also a window opportunity for the police."

The Group has also introduced discussions at its meetings on topics of concern, such as alcohol abuse, the use of offensive weapons, and crimes against women.

3.9 In response to the Inquiry's concern about the narrowness of its membership, the Consultative Group sent over 200 letters to community groups from lists supplied by the Council. The

Chair expressed the view to the Inquiry that further membership was hampered by the non-participation of the Borough Council. The Consultative Group has not shown any inclination to review its own constitution with regard to membership, and membership of the Group therefore remains "open to all bona fide formerly constituted community bodies, which represent a significant number of local people, as decided by the Group, which support and have an interest in the aims of the Group."

3.10 In practice in Haringey this form of constitution means that the meetings of the Consultative Group comprise a marked preponderance of one type of organisation, namely Neighbourhood Watch groups whose catchment area of members, and sphere of interest, usually comprises one street. There are around 100 Neighbourhood Watch groups in Haringey, and the minutes for successive meetings show their participation as follows:-

Date of Meeting	Total Number of Groups Attending	No. of Neighbourhood Watch Groups
23rd March 1987 (AGM)	54	28
6th June 1987	38	26
3rd August 1987	36	20
5th October 1987	38	21
30th November 1987	35	20
1st February 1988	39	15
TOTAL	240	130

3.11 The Inquiry has to state frankly that, whether or not the Borough Council joins the Consultative Group, this high preponderance of Neighbourhood Watch Groups cannot be allowed to continue if the Consultative Group is to have any credibility as a group representing the views of the Haringey com-

munity. This preponderance only comes about because Neighbourhood Watch Groups happen to be organised along geographically much smaller areas than are any other community organisations. Their voice in the Consultative Group is therefore greatly disproportionate to the numbers whom they represent, and they represent only one type of legitimate interest among others which are or should be represented in the Consultative Group. So long as every organisation has an equal vote in the decisions of the Group, the attempts to widen the membership will not get very far.

3.12 Since the Inquiry reported, a significant new membership model for a Consultative Group has been pioneered in Southwark and followed in Newham. In the constitutions of the Consultative Groups in those two Boroughs, the groups are composed of local Members of Parliament, the Borough representative on the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority; up to 10 Borough Councillors; up to 4 Metropolitan Police Officers; and 20, or in the case of Newham 21, community representatives. The community representatives are elected every two years by an election conducted by the Electoral Reform Society. The electoral process involves two stages, nominations and voting. In the nomination stage, every bona fide community group in the Borough has the opportunity to make one nomination from its organisation. The nominations are then circulated to the same community groups requesting them to vote for the candidates in order of preference, in order to implement the "single transferable vote" method of election. Furthermore, in order to ensure that the Consultative Group has the necessary balance between different sections of the community, constraints have been built into the electoral process. In so far as the nominations received permit, the group in Southwark must include not less than 6 women and 6 men; not less than 4 council tenants; not less than 6 members of the Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities; 1 person over the age of 60; 1 person under the age of 25; a representative of the churches or of commercial interests, and of the gay community. In the case of Newham the requirements are for no fewer than 10 women; 8 members of the ethnic minority communities; and 4 young people aged under 25.

3.13 The Camden Consultative Group has achieved the same objective of having a limited but representative community

organisations component, through a different constitutional means. 21 representatives are elected every two years by different "interest categories", as follows:

CATEGORY	NO. OF REPRESENTATIVES
Women	1
Ethnic Minorities	3
Gay/Lesbian	1
Religious Denominations	1
Over Sixties	1
Youth	1
Victims of Crime	1
Neighbourhood Safety	3
Private Sector Tenants	1
Commercial Interest Groups and Ratepayers Groups	2
Voluntary Groups	2
Disabled Persons	1

There is a discretion to admit further organisations as members, but only after having regard to the existing balance of representation for the relevant interest category. Non-member groups may attend meetings and receive minutes, but have no voting rights.

3.14 The Inquiry finds that such arrangements, which have been worked out by agreement with both police, council, and community representatives in the boroughs concerned, provide for a much more representative and effective consultative group. Variations can be made to suit local conditions. The Inquiry strongly recommends that discussions take place so that at the Consultative Group's Annual General Meeting for 1989, a fresh basis for membership can be adopted through amendments to the constitution. The Inquiry does not stipulate that a particular blueprint should be followed, so long as a genuinely representative membership is established.

3.15 The adoption of a new constitution along these lines would not limit the numbers of people who could attend meetings. The constitutions of Southwark and Newham provide that meetings of the Group are open to the public, unless the Group

determines that the discussion of a particular topic justifies a closed session. At the discretion of the Chair, members of the public may speak on any agenda item and may raise topics of concern under "any other business". In this way, meetings can retain their character of openness, but if and when it comes to a vote, the voting body is one which carries legitimate representative influence.

3.16 The Inquiry therefore makes two strong recommendations:

- (1) that the constitution of the Consultative Group be amended in the way described above;
- (2) that the Council resolves to take part in the Consultative Group.

The Inquiry emphasises that both these recommendations need to be implemented for an effective Consultative Group to function. If the constitution is amended but the Council stays away, the Group will be weak and lacking in influence. If the Council joins an unreformed consultative group, there will be conflict and frustration, for any proposals made by Council representatives for the improvement of policing, or the functioning of the group itself, are likely to be voted down by the present majority which in practice has shown itself to be hostile to the Council. But if these two recommendations are both implemented, other progress could be made. In the first report the Inquiry recommended that the Consultative Group should set up sub-committees, and should press for funding for its own staff. Council participation in a reformed group could make these ideas a reality.

3.17 the Inquiry makes clear that the Council's participation should not be conditional upon, or delayed until after, the restructuring of the Group. If that line were adopted, it would be a recipe for further impasse and stagnation. The Council should join now, and push from the inside for the necessary constitutional amendments. If its proposals were entirely thwarted, it could then review its position. But the Inquiry believes that the Council, once inside the Group, will prevail in its desire to see the Group become properly representative. The Inquiry is aware of dissatisfaction expressed by very senior police officers with the present structure. The argument, why should not the structure approved by the police in Southwark, and Camden be accepted by them in Haringey, is unanswerable.

CHAPTER 4

THE THREE MURDER CONVICTIONS A MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE

4.1 Winston Silcott, Engin Raghip, and Mark Braithwaite were convicted on 19th March 1987 for the murder of Keith Blakelock and were sentenced to the mandatory term of life imprisonment. In the case of Winston Silcott, the Judge recommended that he should serve a minimum of 30 years. Their application for leave to appeal against the conviction has been turned down by the Judge who considered it on paper. The 3 men have exercised their right to renew their application for leave to appeal before a Court of 3 Judges who will hear full argument. At the time of writing, that hearing has not taken place.

4.2 Lord Gifford visited the 3 men in prison on behalf of the Inquiry. Each of the three spoke of their innocence and of the pressures on them in the police station when their alleged 'confessions' were made. Engin Raghip, then aged 18, said:

"When I was in the interviews, it was questions and questions, and no matter what I said, they just discredit it. They said 'Oh come on we're wasting time' and telling the other one 'stop writing, stop writing'. Not everything was recorded. If I wanted to say what my side was it would stop. Until he got the answer he wanted he wouldn't stop. I was scared, I was really confused. Eventually I did crack up. I just started agreeing".

Mark Braithwaite, then aged 18, had a similar experience:

"At the beginning I wasn't agreeing. But it was going on and on. I had an empty belly. The food they gave me was