

HARINGEY COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING, 23 SEPTEMBER 1982

REPORT OF THE SENIOR COMMUNITY RELATIONS OFFICER

BROADWATER FARM

1. A short report on Broadwater Farm arising out of the serious deterioration in the relationship between the Police and sections of the Residents.
2. The estate was opened in 1970 when it was acclaimed as an up-to-date example of modern design and good industrialised building techniques. It is made up of 1.063 units with seven deck access low rise blocks, 27 terraced houses and two tower blocks. A shopping precinct, with a doctor's surgery, was included.
3. By mid-1970, a number of problems were obvious. There were water penetration and dampness, a faulty district heating system and cockroach infestation through the piping ducts. A substantial number of tenants were refusing offers of rehousing on the estate. The people who more readily accepted accommodation were invariably those with the least choice. They included a disproportionate number of homeless and one-parent families and a significant number of the unemployed.
4. The resultant effect was, among other social and economic factors, imbalance in the age ranges on the estate. In an attempt to redress this worrying situation, the Housing Committee, in 1978, implemented a policy of letting to the children of existing tenants to the newly-wed and to single people sharing flats. By 1980, the 1978 policy was abandoned due to the acute housing shortage across the borough and the feeling that allocations were sufficiently flexible to avoid any further undue concentration of low income and homeless families on Broadwater Farm. This assumption, as it turned out to be, was wrong and in a nine months period ending in early June 1981 eighty five per cent of the two and three bedroom units on the estate were allocated to the homeless.
5. In the meantime, the specific problems and the general dissatisfaction about the estate inevitably led to increasing frustration and racial tension. There was violence between tenants, a spate of burglaries, vandalism, swastika and other racist daubings, and attempted arson on black families. As a result, police surveillance was noticeably increased. This increase coupled to the police methods adopted led to a most serious deterioration in the relationship between tenants and the police, including the home beat officers. In July this year, on two separate occasions a policeman was hit over the head and injured. On a third occasion, another policeman was similarly hit but was only slightly stunned.

6. Our Police Liaison Officers have been intermittently involved with incidents on the estate and have made several visits to the estate usually in response to appeals from the police. The ambivalent attitude to our Police Liaison Scheme has made it extremely difficult for us to establish and subsequently maintain consistent and ongoing links with the estate. There have been, however, several instances when assistance has been rendered to individuals and families.
7. One significant reason for the level of racial tension has been community involvement or lack of it by the black residents on the estate. In 1970 a Tenants Association was established and was continually under white control and domination until 1979 when it was forced to deal with the wide range of problems affecting the estate. By May 1982, a new constitution was adopted making the Association and its Social Club more democratic and multi-racial. This change resulted in a degree of acrimony between different interests groups on the estate and although the acrimony has subsided some tension still persists.
8. A Community Worker had been allocated to the estate, but has now left due to the situation outlined in the preceding paragraph. He has not been replaced thereby leaving the estate without the badly needed services of such a worker. The Youth Service has placed a detached youth worker on the estate and the Community Development Unit has been giving support and advice to the new community self-help initiatives, particularly the Broadwater Farm Youth Association, who recently promoted a highly successful weekend festival on the estate. Our Council gave financial assistance to this particular project and has also, over a period of time, given substantial assistance to the Blue Archers Netball Team based on the estate.
9. The deteriorating situation, particularly with the police, forced the Local Authority to positively respond to the fear that there could be an outbreak of serious disorder on the estate. As the landlord, the Authority was seen as having an obligation to take action. It was decided to allocate approximately £160,000 in 1982/83 for improvement to security doors controlled entry systems, fencing and play facilities. A further £500,000 have been embarked for planned maintenance involving painting and renewal of woodwork. A series of meetings have been held between the Police, Senior Councillors and Officers and Residents of the estate in the Civic Centre and more recently on the estate. The tension has since dropped considerably and there has been a reappraisal of policing the estate. The fear of serious disorder now appears to have receded.
10. In the absence of any ethnic records being kept, it is estimated that the level of black tenants is between sixty per cent to eighty per cent of all tenants. There is general agreement that it is sixty per cent at least. Allegations are somewhat rife that there is a deliberate policy to turn the estate into a black 'ghetto' while there might be no hard evidence to substantiate this claim, the fact that black tenants are disproportionate on the estate was bound to lead to several assumptions.

The physical state and appearance of the estate does not readily support the allegation of being a 'ghetto' or 'sink' estate and the recent decisions to spend two substantial sums of money on improvements are indicative of a policy decision to avert such a situation. But, however, there remains the irrefutable fact that successive housing policies have resulted in the incredibly high concentration of black tenants on this estate as against other estates.

11. It is also strongly felt that management transfers have exacerbated the situation. White tenants on the estate would appear, in the absence of any ethnic records, to be able to successfully lobby for transfers elsewhere while black tenants on the estate who similarly apply for a transfer are usually turned down.
12. Throughout the several discussions I had with people about the estate, it was strongly felt that the Local Authority had abrogated much of its responsibilities over the past decade. There was no response to the early changed situation on the estate when it was obvious that the residents would have needs different from the needs envisaged by the planners. It was also obvious that the racial mix on the estate was swiftly becoming different from the racial mix on other estates in the borough and elsewhere across the country. It was a known fact that racial tension had been growing since the mid-1970s and no action was even contemplated, let alone taken, to deal with this situation. There was no positive response to racist literature sent to black tenants, racist daubings, and attempted arson until the recent spate of daubings nearby in North Tottenham, followed by the public demand for a positive response.
13. The several initiatives taken in the past two years should, if continued and strengthened, avert the likelihood of the estate degenerating into a 'ghetto' or 'sink' estate. The Local Authority will be central to the future of the estate, and must be seen to be playing its part to the full. I would, therefore, recommend that:
 - (1) there be an early inquiry/survey into the situation on Broadwater Farm to accurately and objectively determine the extent of the several problems, personal and collective, affecting all tenants on the estate.
 - (2) two experienced Community Workers be allocated on a full-time basis to the estate as speedily as possible and that one worker be black and the other worker white to maintain an equilibrium of trust, confidence and impartiality between black and white tenants on the estate.
 - (3) an early meeting be held between the Police, and the Local Authority, and Haringey Community Relations Council to discuss and take appropriate action on the problems on the estate as they affect policing on the estate and environs.

Jeff Crawford
SENIOR COMMUNITY RELATIONS OFFICER

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