Date: 3 May 2013

Subject: Living in a different world: joint review of disability hate crime

Dear Theresa,

I am writing in response to your joint review of disability hate crime, which I welcome and which certainly highlights some key issues for me as the Police and Crime Commissioner for Greater Manchester.

It is clear that, despite recent efforts across the country to raise the profile of and response to disability hate crime there are still fundamental issues, which are preventing both the reporting of this heinous crime and also the appropriate responses from the criminal justice agencies responsible for dealing with this issue.

It appears that we find ourselves in a similar position to the one which we found ourselves in regarding the low levels of reporting of racist incidents to the police, a decade ago. I am clear that there is a lot more to be done in relation to disability hate crime and I am certain that there are lessons that can be learned from our approach to raising the reporting levels of racist hate crime, ten years ago. One thing I am keen to do is learn from best practice and this is something I will encourage through my discussions with partners.

One of the elements the report alludes to is the importance of community engagement and community advocacy. Clearly, by engaging with people from the disabled community, alongside working with those organisations that support people with disabilities, will enable us to obtain a better picture in terms of what the barriers to reporting are. I myself have visited a number of projects working with people with disabilities and it is encouraging to see how much support these organisations give. It is my intention, over the course of my term in office, to encourage these community relationships and this work has already started to be developed.

You will see that protecting vulnerable people is highlighted as a priority in the Greater Manchester Police and Crime Plan, as is putting victims at the centre-two key elements of
seeking to ensure a service and response to victims that is of the highest quality. We need to acknowledge that disability hate crime has a unique position in our society and that in order for this type of crime to be treated on an equal footing, we must work in partnership to ensure that collectively disability hate crimes are recognised and treated as such.

In Greater Manchester, we are aware of some good practice, which can be used to inform the development of other projects. Greater Manchester Police holds a hate crime steering group on a quarterly basis, where divisions are asked to present updates in relation to the work they have been undertaking in relation to this issue. I am aware that a great deal of work has been done to arrange court visits for vulnerable people in order that they are familiarised with where they would have to go, should their case progress and locally, partnership teams have organised “know your criminal justice days”, for people with a disability to familiarise themselves with those agencies who they may come into contact with, during their criminal justice journey. Work has also been undertaken with third party reporting centres; however I am sure that we can improve the way in which we engage with these organisations. I am also aware that the Crown Prosecution Service operates a hate crime scrutiny group, which analyses past cases to identify any lessons to be learned. In all of these good pieces of work however, what is evident is that the focus is on all aspects of hate crime, perhaps consideration should be given to dedicated disability hate crime work and this is something I intend to discuss with partners.

That said I am also aware that there have been a number of Local Authority campaigns to attempt to raise the reporting of disability hate crime, specifically. Disappointingly there has been little or no evaluation of these projects, so it is difficult to determine whether the small rise in reports has been as a consequence of this work, or other efforts. In my capacity as Police and Crime Commissioner, I will ensure that in the future, innovation is followed with evaluation, to ensure that we understand the impact of and can learn from, our new ideas.

Regarding the recommendations your review proposes, I understand that Greater Manchester Police have already made contact with Superintendent Paul Giannasi, to discuss the definition. As I understand, all Criminal Justice agencies signed up to agreed definitions for hate crime motivation, hate crime prosecution, hate crime and hate incidents in 2007, so clearly some clarity is required here.

In relation to the medium term recommendations, I have mentioned that hate crime is highlighted as a priority in our Police and Crime Plan and I will continue to monitor progress in relation to this. One of the issues which the review highlights and which does concern me is the reference to a lack of sensitivity and awareness around disability issues, on the part of both the police and the Crown Prosecution Service. Clearly this is important and will affect charging capability. As such, I intend to raise the issue with both the Chief Constable and the Chief Crown Prosecutor, asking them to highlight this to their officers and reconsider their disability hate crime training packages. Finally, I have already asked my community engagement team to work with both the public and
private sector in Greater Manchester to not only determine what reporting mechanisms are available to people with a disability, but also to work with those organisations to encourage better access to reporting and to determine what the specific barriers and needs are. To begin to develop this work, I hosted a consultation event on the 29th April with both victims of crime and partner agencies and it is intended that much of the work I’ve highlighted above will follow on from this event.

It was useful to read in your review, some examples of good practice that have been undertaken across the country. I would welcome information regarding good practice in other areas of work and I hope that this is something which your organisation intends to replicate in any future reviews it undertakes.

Thank you once again for giving me the opportunity to respond please do not hesitate to contact me if you require anything further.

Yours sincerely /Roger

Tony Lloyd
Police and Crime Commissioner

CC: Roger Baker, HMIC