

# NEWS LETTER

## THE INDEPENDENT ADVISOR

SMBC

1<sup>st</sup> Quarter  
2007

### Independent Advice: reflecting on its origin in the policing sector

*Article by Dr Jeffrey Brathwaite QPM*

A striking feature of the Independent Advisory Group is its unusual origin insofar that it only came into existence because the police deliberately set out to invent a group of people who would critically appraise their operating ethos. The individuals, who were external to the police service, had no conception that such a group was possible given the traditionally closed nature of policing. Police saw lay involvement as the means of reaching out to ethnic minority communities in order to secure their confidence. The police's intention to:

To improve communication with the communities we police in order to develop successful strategies to tackle racial and violent crime (MPS 1998d:3)<sup>1</sup>.

Out of that strategic approach was developed the Lay Advisory Group. This name was later changed on the 17<sup>th</sup> December 1999 by its membership, to the Independent Advisory Group. The Lawrence agenda and the crisis in policing caused an urgent search for a process through which communities and police could work together on building community confidence. The evidence shows that a significant number of IAG members felt that they had something positive to bring to the process of addressing racism in the police. In many ways, they felt that the Lawrence Inquiry presented an opportunity not to be missed in so far that for the first time, there was a convergence of agendas which made the likelihood of long-term change more possible than ever before. The police were at a loss as to how best to win minority ethnic community confidence. The government agenda was one of social reform and social inclusion. It was therefore determined to hold the police to account for the failings of the Lawrence murder investigation. Most worryingly for the police at the time, public opinion was against them on this issue.

It is useful to examine the role of lay involvement in governance. In the policing sector, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) employ lay involvement in its inspection processes. The advisers are normally paid a salary and enjoy the usual benefits and constraints of an employee, in contrast to Independent Advisers who are paid nominal expenses. HMIC is independent of Police Forces and Police Authorities and exists to monitor and improve the police service as a whole. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary, normally a former Chief Constable and the Lay Inspector (no police background) are appointed by Royal Warrant. Lay Inspectors provide an additional expertise and work with assistant HMIC Inspectors, who would generally lead the inspections.

Lay involvement has long been an established feature of the Criminal Justice System and is represented primarily by Lay Magistrates, where the court is presided over by a bench made up entirely of lay people; as in the case of most Magistrates' Courts in England and Wales. Lay magistrates may mix with professionals to make up the bench, for example in the Youth Court in Northern Ireland. This is one area where there is significant lay involvement in adjudication at trials involving juveniles. A Youth Court is normally made up of a resident Magistrate sitting with two lay panellists of whom one is a woman. Decisions of the court on guilt or innocence and on sentence are made by a majority of its members, although the resident magistrate's view prevails in law. (Doran and Glenn 2000: 7.4 and 7.16)<sup>2</sup>.

If we look at USA, the Chicago police in the late 1990s had the District Advisory Committee in the City of Chicago. These committees had a local problem-solving function and assisted police commanders in identifying solutions to problems encountered in policing Neighbourhoods.

Thus, lay involvement can be seen to bring added benefit to the roles and functions of professionals. What is clear is that there is a tradition of lay people contributing to public life and therefore having and influence on governance. In the case of the IAG in UK policing, the Metropolitan Police Service formed the first UK group. It can be argued that this was a unique occurrence because the group was predominantly black, had a pressure group status and was the first of its kind in the policing sector in the UK. Most police forces in the UK now support Independent Advisory Groups and Networks.

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<sup>1</sup> Footnote: Doran, S. and Glenn, R. (2000). *Lay Involvement in Adjudication*. Belfast: The Stationary Office.

<sup>2</sup> Metropolitan Police Service. (1998d). *Action Plan "Operation Athena" Racial and Violent Crime Task Force, CO24*. London: Metropolitan Police Service.

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### Reflections from former Chair of the Met IAG – April 2003 to April 2005

Eight years after the first Independent Advisory Group (IAG) was set up by the Metropolitan Police so many Police Forces around the UK have developed their own model of the IAG. It is impossible to imagine that the Met Police survived for over hundred years before it took on the process of communicating directly with communities across London.

The IAGs were developed because of the recommendations of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry. Stephen was murdered by racists because he was Black. Since his tragic murder and the shambolic investigation which followed, most police forces have developed processes which help them involve community members in a number of investigations.

I have been part of the IAG development and was one of the first members to be recruited by Dr Jeff Brathwaite who was then a Chief Superintendent in the Met Police. Jeff has gone on to develop systems or a Master Class which helps IAGs look at themselves, re-examine how much of a “Critical Edge” they continue to retain and to fill any gaps which have emerged.

Over the years, the IAGs faced a number of challenges. Since being set up to deal with race equality issues, a number of other Advisory Groups have been evolved to deal with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender issues; other Advisory Groups deal with Young People, Safeguarding Children, Gun Crime, Disability, Traveller and Gypsy issues and Training, to mention a few. The process has been so successful that most police forces in the country have set up their own IAGs. As the process evolved, Advisors contributed in a number of ways, for example in Critical Incident Training and Gold Groups and policy development.

My continuing commitment to the IAG process remains very strong. But I am continuing to review my involvement as a “Critical Friend”. These Master Classes will enable me to re-focus and exchange ideas with people who have come to be involved recently. In my view IAGs remain the most creative and challenging way of engaging with communities.

*John Azah is the Director of the Kingston-upon-Thames Racial Equality Council and a former Chair, of the Met Police IAG .*

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