

Stop and search discussions and workshops on the Pepys Estate in Evelyn Ward

Cllr Alex Feis-Bryce

Some local community leaders and volunteers in my ward, who run the 2000 Community Actions Centre, drew my attention to the fact that there had been a number incidents where members of the local community, particularly young black men, had been inappropriately treated and targeted by the police. I was shown videos, taken by independent observers, of incidents where men had been assaulted. There was also a high profile incident on Deptford High street involving a local man who is active in the community and something of a role model to many <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2018/apr/25/the-brothers-who-were-searched-by-the-police-for-a-fist-bump>.

As someone with a background in criminology, who has worked with the police and advised them at a senior level in previous professional roles, I wanted to arrange a 'safe space' discussion with the men who had been targeted to give them an opportunity to talk about their experiences. The local Safer Neighborhoods Team did request to be involved in the meeting indicating a willingness to engage with the young men but after consulting the participants it was clear that many of them wouldn't have attended if police were invited, which only served to illustrate the level of distrust.

The meeting was arranged with the support of 2000 Community Action Centre and myself and my ward colleague Cllr Caroline Kalu met a group of around ten young men and listened to their stories. Each one of the men had been questioned by the police or had experienced what they described as 'stop and search' (though it could have been 'stop and account' or something else resembling 'stop and search' which may not have followed the formal process) at least once and most said it was a regular occurrence. It was also pointed out that many of the interactions hadn't been official or formal and to their knowledge the police hadn't made records. Consequently, it was felt that 'stop and search' was being used as a means to target and harass them and take advantage of the general lack of understanding of the limits of police power. It is important to note that the general consensus was that most of the incidents involved police officer from outside the borough without local knowledge. I was also informed that very few, if any, of the incidents resulted in any kind of arrest and none of the men had been charged for anything related to the incidents.

One of the men I spoke to had been chased by two plain clothed police officers who caught him and grabbed him and then asked why he ran from them to which he responded, fairly I feel, that most people would run from two plain clothed men who spontaneously decided to chase them. There was another incident where a man had incurred facial injuries due to being assaulted by police. It is clear that, in these cases and the majority of the cases I was told about, there were no reasonable grounds to believe that the individuals in question had been involved in a crime or were in possession of a weapon or prohibited item. It was also clear that the actions were not led by intelligence and if they were targeted it was driven by racial profiling rather than any justifiable, ethical or evidence-based factor.

Appendix C

Most alarming to me was that each one of the, without exception, indicated that formally complaining about police misconduct wouldn't even occur to them and, even more concerning, the majority couldn't imagine any circumstances in which they'd call the police if they were the victim of a crime.

Following this, I arranged a workshop led by Y-Stop, a stop and search project run by young people for young people, with the aim to inform the attendees of their rights and support them in diffusing situations and resolving conflict if targeted by police officers. The workshop was productive and was attended by about 15 young men from the community who developed a deeper understanding of their rights, the extent of police powers around stop and search and felt that were better equipped to deal with any future situations.

The community leaders who first highlighted the issues with me, and who are often the people who these issues are disclosed to by the men targeted, have expressed their willingness to seek solutions to the issue locally. In light of the regular 'stop and search' and related incidents, the community is communicating problems through Evelyn Safer Neighborhood panel. However, concerns have been raised that due to the Violent Task Force not including local officers on the panel or any direct liaison with the community the situation has gotten steadily worse, primarily due to the fact that these incidents are usually led by undercover police officers targeting and, in a number of occasions, chasing young people to check if they're carrying knives.

In conclusion, I submit to the Committee that police 'stop and search' powers, the lack of accountability for them and the misuse of these powers has led to a fundamental breakdown in trust resulting in a whole generation of BAME young men on the Pepys Estate feeling that they wouldn't voluntarily report to or engage with the police in any circumstances. As well as demonizing and, to a certain extent, isolating these young men from the authorities, this will inevitably lead to the police being unable to communicate with and work alongside sections of the community on the Pepys Estate when it comes to gathering intelligence or evidence relating to future crimes in the area. This, I believe, will have a broader detrimental impact on the safety of the wider community.