

Racist incidents monitoring

The role of Citizens Advice Bureaux

Summary

Racist abuse and violence is still part of the experience of CAB clients and it is not confined to larger urban areas with high concentrations of black and minority ethnic (BME) communities.

Social policy evidence submitted to Citizens Advice nationally by member bureaux contains significant instances of racist incidents. The evidence from Citizens Advice Bureaux about such incidents however extends across the range of day to day interactions and activities that most people undertake without a thought such as, going to work, shopping, leisure activities, claiming benefits, etc. Much of the social policy work submitted by bureaux relates to harassment within the clients home environment, striking at the heart of the clients life and right to quiet enjoyment of their property.

This report is based on an analysis of questionnaires sent to Citizens Advice Bureaux in England and Wales in 2004 asking them about their involvement in racist incident monitoring schemes. A number of bureaux have developed significant expertise in this area of work and have taken on a community leadership role in developing reporting schemes and multi agency partnerships. A lot of progress has been made in tackling racist crime since the publication of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report and the development of the Home Office *Guidance on the Reporting and Recording of Racist Incidents*.

This report outlines the involvement of the Citizens Advice service in England and Wales in reporting and recording racist incidents. It provides information about the types of racist incidents reported by victims to Citizens Advice Bureaux. The report identifies examples of good practice and makes recommendations, improvement in training and capacity building for voluntary sector members of multi agency partnerships. The Code of Practice is currently under review and this report makes recommendations regarding minimum data content of reports and feedback to partner agencies. The report reiterates the link between community safety and community cohesion and the importance of the contribution Citizens Advice Bureaux make to Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships.

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Introduction

The Citizens Advice service is committed to playing a part in encouraging community cohesion and race equality. At the launch of its Bridging Communities initiative in 2001, Citizens Advice Bureaux in England and Wales were encouraged to join local racist incidents monitoring schemes as a very practical and immediately useful way of signalling their interest in and support for safer and more cohesive communities. Every bureau in England and Wales was issued with a "Report Racism" poster in 12 languages and the information resource used by Citizens Advice Bureau workers to give advice to the public was updated. The public information website Adviceguide was also revised to give greater prominence to advice for victims of racist crime. The Bridging Communities action guide gave bureaux information on community cohesion and race equality initiatives in which they could become involved.

Race equality is a priority for the Citizens Advice service. We have potential to become a first point of help for all discriminated against groups. In order to achieve this we realise that the Citizens Advice service has to play a higher profile role in helping communities respond to racist incidents. In this report the Citizens Advice service reflects upon the progress it has made in working with racist incident monitoring schemes.

A national strategy

The Government has recently issued its strategy to increase race equality and community cohesion¹. Two of the key aims of the Government's strategy are to help ensure that racism is unacceptable by:

- improving the way in which the police and other agencies handle reports of racist or religiously motivated incidents
- improve the reporting of racially and religiously motivated incidents, including ensuring that everyone in Britain has

access to an effective racist incident helpline.

Citizens Advice supports these aims and would like to see better and more strategic investment by Government to ensure that multi agency partnerships can play a robust role to help achieve these aims.

Racist abuse and violence affects the lives of CAB clients. Evidence from Citizens Advice Bureaux across England and Wales shows that the experience of racist abuse and violence impacts upon the social and mental health of individuals and their families. The cost to communities of racism is immense and the prospects for building a more cohesive society are compromised by the patchy nature of the responses to and recording of racist attacks.

In 2000 The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report provided what is now the most commonly accepted definition of a racist incident:²

"A racist incident is any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person."

In response, the Home Office published the *Code of Practice on the Reporting and Recording of Racist Incidents* in April 2000.³ The Code of Practice applies to all statutory, voluntary and community groups involved in multi agency reporting and recording of racist incidents. The Code of Practice envisaged that there would be "core agencies" who would be directly involved in the reporting and recording of racist incidents, in particular, police and local authorities, housing and education departments, victim support, race equality councils and Citizens Advice Bureaux.⁴

Recent research by the Home Office⁵ that evaluated the effectiveness of the Code of Practice found that:

- the code has helped to improve and increase reporting and recording of racist incidents
- the availability of third party reporting centres and multi agency panels has increased and these have helped to improve the handling of racist incidents (although this was not consistent across all police forces)
- all police forces and agencies, with the exception of schools, have adopted the *Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report* definition of a racist incident but there are still questions over how this definition is used
- further work is needed to ensure that victims are treated with respect and kept informed.

Citizens Advice Bureaux in England and Wales have contributed to the progress identified by the Home Office evaluation by being active members of multi agency panels and reporting centres.

Citizens Advice acknowledges the progress that has been made, however our own survey of Citizens Advice Bureau's involvement in these schemes indicates that much more could be done to promote the Code of Practice and engage the Citizens Advice network more fully in improving reporting of racist crime and promoting awareness of schemes.

The national picture

The British Crime Survey (BCS) estimates that in 2002/03 there were just over 200,000 racially motivated incidents. The figures include incidents which do not reach a criminal threshold. This seems to suggest a decline in the figures for racist crime reported in the BCS. The numbers of racist incidents recorded by the police has increased most likely as a result of more victims reporting incidents and improved recording. The Crown Prosecution Service brought racially

aggravated offences against 3,616 defendants in 2003/04, an increase of 500 on the previous year. The overall conviction rate was around 86 per cent.⁶ The Community Security Trust which tracks and receives reports of anti-Semitic attacks recorded 532 incidents in 2004, the highest total ever reported.

However there is no way of calculating the numbers of unreported incidents and it is likely that many cases still go unreported by victims and unrecognised by the agencies dealing with other aspects of the victim's problems.

The one very clear fact is that racist abuse and violence is still part of the experience of CAB clients and it is not confined to the larger urban areas with high concentrations of BME communities. Social policy evidence submitted to Citizens Advice nationally by member bureaux contains significant instances of racist incidents. What is less clear from the evidence is whether all of these cases have been recorded formally via a monitoring scheme.

Since the introduction of the Code of Practice in 2000 communities have become more diverse because of asylum dispersal policies. In other areas of England, Wales and Northern Ireland there has been an increase in the activities of extremist political groups. There is a continuing need to ensure that mechanisms for reporting racist crime are highly visible and robust.

Incidents reported to Citizens Advice Bureaux

Research suggests that the majority of racist incidents recorded are concerned with verbal harassment or damage to property rather than assault.⁷ This does seem to be borne out by evidence submitted to Citizens Advice.

However it would be misleading to suggest that the impact of these experiences of racial harassment is any the less important or that

the impact on the individuals and their families less acute.

In general the bulk of social policy evidence submitted by bureaux relates to harassment within the clients home environment, striking at the heart of the clients life and right to quiet enjoyment of their property. Evidence submitted suggests that asylum seekers and refugees in some areas are particular targets of repeat attacks:

A bureau in the North East reported that one of their clients, an asylum seeker from Africa, was forced to leave his property because of racist attacks. He and his fiancée awoke one morning to find a burnt cross propped up outside the house and a letter made from magazine cut-outs stating 'you're dead nigger'. The client reported this to the police but there was insufficient evidence against those suspected. The case is now closed.

The same bureau reported more racist attacks against asylum seeker families in accommodation provided by North East Refugee Service (NERS):

A client from a family of Turkish asylum seekers had experienced repeated persistent serious incidents of violent harassment, including verbal abuse, destruction of property, two broken windows, and a firework pushed through the letterbox. On one occasion a brick landed in the baby's cot through the window, which could have left him seriously injured if he had been there asleep. The client had reported most incidents to the police and accommodation provider but he has not been given new accommodation and police enquires did not solve the problem. The bureau contacted the Public Harassment Team at NASS who confirmed that the family would be re-housed as soon as possible.

Other individuals from established BME groups also continue to experience harassment and violence from neighbours. A common strand of concern that appears in some evidence reports is that there is unwillingness on the part of the police to accept the victims' perception that they have experienced a racist incident. This is contrary to the guidance in the Home Office Code of Practice.

A bureau in Lancashire reported a client who was from Bangladesh, who was experiencing problems with neighbours in his predominantly white area. He had been subjected to excessive noise, broken windows and had been burgled more than once. The police advised the man to contact the Environmental Health Officer as they thought it could make matters worse if they became involved. They seemed unwilling to consider that the attacks were racially motivated.

Advice and practical support for some victims remains patchy and awareness of the Code of Practice for Social Landlords may be low.⁸

A bureau in south London reported that a client who had neighbour problems and who was subjected to abuse, violence, racist remarks and threats was sleeping in a local mosque because she was so frightened. Her Housing Officer had told her to go to the County Court to get an application for an injunction and then ask a solicitor to help her complete it. The client tried five solicitors to no avail.

Repeat offenders continue to blight the lives of vulnerable families and it is often difficult for the client to obtain a resolution to their problems despite the involvement of a number of agencies.

A bureau in Surrey reported the case of a Muslim family who were owner occupiers living next door to local

authority tenants who were moved from their previous home because of neighbour problems. The family had been suffering from physical, verbal, racial and religious abuse from the neighbours for the past two years. The problems had escalated to include stabbing of the brother and the fuel pipe on the client's car being severed. The police, Council Housing Department, Community Relations Council and local councillor were all aware but nothing had visibly been done to change the situation. The client has not kept them all up to date. The lack of response had put her off.

The harassment experienced in the home can follow a child to school. The responses of, or willingness of some schools and colleges to deal with racist incidents effectively is illustrated by the following two cases from different London Boroughs:

A Chinese client suffered verbal racial abuse from a neighbour. This continued into the school playground and the perpetrator abused her children and encouraged her own children to bully the client's children. The head teacher saw this as a neighbour dispute and not a school issue.

In the second case the perceived religious identity of the student was the reason for the attack:

A young Asian woman of East African descent and Christian faith was attacked by a group of Sikh students because they thought she was a Muslim. Since complaints were made to the College she has suffered further harassment at home and at the homes of relatives. The young woman is now suffering from severe panic attacks, depression and agoraphobia.

Citizens Advice Bureaux involvement in monitoring schemes

Citizens Advice distributed a questionnaire to bureaux in the English Regions and Wales in December 2004 asking about their current involvement in racist incident monitoring schemes. Citizens Advice Bureaux in North West Region had been surveyed earlier in 2004 as part of regional research into work with BME communities. The data on participation in racist incident monitoring schemes from that research is incorporated into this report. We received 200 responses to the two surveys. The findings of the surveys provide an outline of current Citizens Advice Bureaux involvement in monitoring schemes but by no means a complete picture.

There is enough data however to gain a sense of how the Citizens Advice service has engaged with multi agency groups and reporting schemes and how the Code of Practice is operating.

CAB membership of schemes

Bureaux were asked:

"Is the bureau part of a racist incident monitoring scheme?"

Just over half of the bureaux that responded said that they were members of schemes (102 out of 200 responses).

Barriers to Involvement

A total of 92 bureaux reported that they were not members of racist incident reporting schemes.

The reasons for not being members of schemes were not always clear but some of the following responses give some clues:

A bureau in Hampshire reported that as a result of the Citizens Advice survey

they had contacted the local police to ask how racist incidents were reported in the city. They were told that there was no scheme in that part of Hampshire but were given information on the numbers of incidents reported to the police. Twenty three racist incidents were recorded over the last year mainly around corner shops owned by Asian people

A bureau in a large town in Cumbria reported that there was no local service although the police had set up meetings mainly to talk about Traveller issues.

A bureau in Greater Manchester reported that they had been approached by the police but that the contact had not been followed up.

A bureau in Yorkshire became involved in a local hate crime reporting scheme in 2003. However since the launch there has been no publicity to promote the scheme or opportunity to provide feedback. The bureau has kept in touch with the local authority Safe Communities Team but the scheme seems to have a low priority.

A bureau in the rural South West tried to contact their Racist Incident scheme to check if the self-reporting forms were up-to-date. Police HQ were unsure who to put the call through to, so the call was transferred first to one Police Station and then to another, where the Desk Sergeant said 'I don't deny we have the forms, but they've never been used'.

It seems clear from responses such as these that in many parts of the country Citizens Advice Bureaux would like to play a more active role in the reporting and recording of racist incidents but the local arrangements are not transparent or the local lead agency has not included bureaux in its multi agency partnership.

Bureaucracy can also get in the way of involvement:

A bureau in Yorkshire had previously been an active member of a local hate crimes initiative. However a difference in interpretation on the part of the scheme's organisers on what partner agencies could accept as reports has led to the bureau not being able to participate.

Citizens Advice Bureaux all have to conform to nationally agreed policies such as client confidentiality and limitations on acting on behalf of third parties but none of these should prevent a bureau from taking an active part in racist incident monitoring schemes.

Some bureaux commented on the level of detail required on reporting forms and some provided copies of forms used locally. The format and content varies and the guidance on minimum data content contained in the Code of Practice is clearly not being followed.

"Relevant agencies should adopt the same minimum data content for recording racist incidents that has been adopted by the Police Service. Consideration of necessary guidelines for using the form and also of what additional data might be collected should be done at the local level."⁹

It is perhaps time to revisit the guidance in the Code of Practice and consider the context in which reports are generated. Not every victim wants their case to be referred to the police for action, reports are taken by a variety of agencies all with differing capacities and the Code of Practice should reflect this diversity.

A bureau manager in the rural South West with previous recent experience of operating a racist incident reporting scheme in London commented:

“Without clear benefits, racist incident reporting is at risk of quickly becoming seen as another piece of bureaucratic form filling rather than an option for solving the problem. There might be a risk of causing disillusionment with the whole issue of reporting racist incidents”

Where else can victims go to report incidents?

The 92 bureaux which told us that they were not members of reporting schemes were asked about how racist incidents/hate crimes were reported in their area. Thirty seven respondents either didn't answer the question or didn't know where victims could report incidents. Thirty-four bureaux identified the police as the main source of help. Race Equality Councils were cited 18 times and Local Authorities/Housing Departments had 11 mentions. Victim Support was mentioned on seven occasions.

The 92 bureaux that are not members of schemes are geographically diverse and have widely differing demographic profiles. Twelve bureaux from inner and outer London boroughs told us that they were not members of reporting schemes despite having significant numbers of BME communities in their areas. Equally surprising are the absence of some large towns in the North West, Midlands and North of England all with substantial BME communities.

Rural racism

It is apparent from some of the questionnaire comments that the necessity for membership of a scheme is seen as less relevant in areas that have low numbers of BME communities. There are a number of issues to consider here not least that in rural areas research still indicates that that BME people have a greater chance of experiencing racially motivated incidents.¹⁰ A recent study in West Norfolk found that there was reluctance on the part of

BME people to report incidents for many reasons not least because they felt “it was not serious enough or that too little evidence was available.”¹¹ Research undertaken by Chakraborti and Garland in Suffolk showed that significant numbers of their research sample had experienced actual or attempted damage to their property, and racial incidents on school premises.¹² Nearly one in two of the respondents to the Chakraborti and Garland survey had experienced racial harassment in the street. One in four had experienced harassment at work or in shops.

The evidence of rural racism is stark and unpleasant and there is no room for complacency. The following case studies illustrate that it is possible to develop robust partnerships with statutory and other agencies to tackle racist crime in predominantly rural areas and to involve Citizens Advice Bureaux as active participants.

Case study

Citizens Advice Bureaux in Suffolk are all members of Suffolk County Council's Racial Harassment Initiative. The award winning Racial Harassment Initiative provides a 24 hour reporting telephone line and a case worker. All Citizens Advice Bureaux in the county are able to take third party reports of racist incidents.

Case study

North East Somerset CAB has joined forces with SARI (Support Against Racist Incidents) to provide a trained caseworker at a weekly surgery in the bureau. SARI is an independent charity, which was originally set up by a group of people who had experienced racial harassment. SARI is based in Bristol but has service users from across South Gloucestershire and North East Somerset.

In areas that are perceived as predominantly white there is a need to challenge perceptions about the existence of racist incidents. Whilst the numbers of reports may always be low there are simple practical things that bureaux can do to ensure that the profile of racist crime is kept as high as possible. At a minimum, bureaux could display the Report Racism poster and provide forms for self-reporting of racist incidents.

Monitoring schemes whose responsibility?

Comments from some bureaux who are not currently members of reporting schemes indicate that multi agency partnerships are vulnerable when a key member leaves or is disbanded. Two bureaux from the Midlands both reported the collapse of reporting schemes where the local Race Equality Council had been disbanded. One bureau in an inner London borough commented that as there was no Race Equality Council in their area this left quite a gap in the services available. Another bureau in Yorkshire also commented on the absence of a Race Equality Council in their area and how this had impacted upon the effective development of a multi agency approach to the recording and reporting of racist incidents.

Community leadership

A number of bureaux have developed significant expertise in this area of work and have taken on a community leadership role in developing reporting schemes and multi agency partnerships. One of the longest standing is Stoke CAB.

Case study

Stoke CAB began race harassment casework in 1995. They initiated a multi agency partnership along with the police and Race Equality Council (REC) in 1997 called PARINS (Partnership Approach to Racial Incidents in North Staffordshire). The Partnership's work is focussed on increasing the reporting of racist incidents and ensuring that victims are offered casework support where necessary. The day to day operation of PARINS is delegated to Stoke on Trent CAB and North Staffordshire Racial Equality Council. The Partnership employs a Training Officer based at the REC and caseworkers based at the CAB. There are 210 reporting centres across North Staffordshire.

PARINS participates in three Community Safety Partnerships in North Staffordshire. It has worked with Stoke City Councils to ensure that the new Stoke-on-Call service can receive reports of racist incidents 24 hours a day. The service operators have all received training from PARINS.

PARINS caseworkers dealt with 86 victims in 2003/04. The complaints concerned harassment, verbal abuse, criminal damage and physical assaults. PARINS has adopted a model used by the Criminal Justice Agencies to implement multi-agency programmes for offenders. The Good Practice Panel is called by the PARINS caseworker when he is unable, through his own efforts, to mobilise other agencies to agree or to carry out actions needed to meet the victim's requirements. The panel is chaired by a senior member of the Probation Service and the caseworker invites senior members and practitioners from relevant agencies to attend. The caseworker will report back progress to the victim. On occasions the victim may attend the panel supported by the caseworker if she/he wishes. The case is discussed, the victims' needs outlined, strategies and an action plan are then agreed.

Case Study

The Chief Executive of Wakefield District CAB is the Chair of the Wakefield Harassment Group. This is a multi agency forum which meets every six weeks. West Yorkshire Police are very active in setting up hate incident reporting centres via the group. The group has managed to get some money from the Community Safety Initiative to fund a caseworker for victims of racist crime who is managed by Victim Support.

Equipped to do the job?

The Home Office Code of Practice on reporting and recording racist incidents is very clear:

“It is important that the agency that receives reports of racist incidents is well-equipped to deal with them”

Sixteen out of the 76 bureaux which are members of reporting schemes told us that they had not received any training on how to recognise and report racist incidents. We would not suggest that all 16 bureaux have never received any training at any time. However, Citizens Advice Bureaux have a predominantly volunteer work force and the turnover of staff can be substantial. To ensure engagement and continued motivation particularly in areas where the frequency of reporting is likely to be low there is a need for systematic retraining of partner agencies.

Citizens Advice has ensured that the information available to its advice workers is up to date with the current Code of Practice. However the challenge is how they can apply that information and knowledge most effectively within their localities. The intention of the Code of Practice is to provide guidelines for local agencies to establish effective procedures for the reporting and recording of racist incidents, more attention

needs to be given to systematic skills development.

Maximising the benefits of partnership working

The *Code of Practice on Reporting and Recording Racist Incidents* is clear that victims should be kept informed of how their cases have progressed.

“A locally agreed protocol should ensure that someone is responsible for keeping the victim informed of progress, whether that is the police, the agency that took the initial report, or another agency.”

Keeping partner agencies informed and aware of progress seems to be much less certain. In our survey we asked if bureaux received feedback on cases reported. Twenty-eight out of 76 bureaux involved in schemes (national survey) gave negative responses or indicated that feedback was not regular. This is unsatisfactory and the Code of Practice should be revised to ensure that feedback to partner agencies is seen as essential. Not all bureaux can be members of multi agency panels and in areas where the levels of reporting are infrequent there is a need to encourage and build capacity through direct feedback.

Membership of multi agency panels was widely reported by respondents to both surveys. A number of multi agency groups covered all hate crime within their localities. The level of involvement is very encouraging. Other information submitted about involvement in Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships demonstrates real progress by the Citizens Advice service in developing its role in community safety and crime reduction initiatives. However not all of those bureaux who told us that they were members of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships were involved in racist incident monitoring schemes.

The recent guidance to local authorities on community cohesion is very clear about the role of partnership working in tackling crime

and anti social behaviour.¹³ It recommends that community cohesion is a standing item on the agendas of all Crime and Reduction Partnerships. The guidance is also very clear about the local authority leadership role in establishing effective racist incident reporting schemes:

Local authorities should encourage effective multi-agency arrangements for addressing racist incidents and where possible set in place third party reporting arrangements.¹⁴

Citizens Advice has received some feedback from bureaux that are members of multi agency partnerships about the lack of sustained financial support for their work. Given the emphasis on the importance of developing multi agency partnerships this is a matter of concern.

Successful multi agency partnerships have energy and a visible commitment to tackling racist crime. They can adapt and respond to the needs of local communities and partner agencies.

The manager of Poole CAB told us:

“Poole Action Group on Race and Homophobic Incidents has grown from an initial handful of agencies, which included the Citizens Advice Bureau, to over 30. Members come from faith groups, Travellers, police, health service and education and the local council. The interaction with the police is very positive and there is great enthusiasm in the group to increase the levels of reporting. The numbers of people from BME communities in the Poole area is relatively small but the group takes the problem of “hidden” racism very seriously.

The group is working on a common reporting form which would make reporting easier for partner agencies and

their clients. The Youth Service has indicated that some of their clients are unwilling to provide the level of detail currently required on the monitoring form. The group is also currently looking for funding to undertake research into under reporting in the Poole area.”

The Police Reform White Paper¹⁵ and the current Crime and Disorder Act Review offer opportunities for reflection on how community safety initiatives and effective neighbourhood policing can be delivered through partnership working. Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships will have greater potential for influence at a neighbourhood level. Citizens Advice Bureaux are a key community resource and can play an active role in community safety work.

Race and religious hate crime

The Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 introduced a number of new religiously aggravated offences. The Serious Organised Crime and Police Bill currently going through Parliament expands on the current law relating to incitement to racial hatred and extends protection against incitement to religious hatred.

Citizens Advice has received a number of evidence reports from bureaux indicating that clients have been subject to detrimental treatment because of their actual or perceived Islamic faith. In the London Borough of Brent the Citizens Advice Bureau has set up a project with other voluntary sector agencies to tackle race and religious hate crimes:

Brent Reporting Network is working to eradicate race and faith hate crime. This project aims to address the under-reporting of race and in particular faith hate crime within the borough. It is a voluntary sector partnership which also involves the statutory sector; Brent Police, the Local Authority and Brent Primary Care Trust. The project is aimed

at the community and voluntary sector. The project understands the constraints that voluntary organisations face. However third party reporting gives communities within the Borough, the opportunity to report such incidents without fear and within their own communities.

The organisations that are involved are Brent CAB, providing a trainer who trains organisations in becoming sites for third party reporting (3 PR).

Victim Support, Brent provide a systems co-ordinator who has set up a database to monitor the reported incidents and provide the relevant bodies with the requisite statistical data e.g. incident hotspots.

Brent Indian Association, a local community organization provides a caseworker in racial/religious harassment. Having a specialist caseworker is absolutely vital to 3 PR, in part because they can go out into the community but also so that the community can feel confident that 'something will be done on their behalf'.

It is not likely that someone will take the trouble of reporting an incident if they did not feel that something could be done for them to change that situation, except for when it is a 'layered issue' e.g. housing and harassment, employment and hate, etc.

An appropriate incident form has been designed to fit the needs of the project which is quite different from the one the Local Authority uses because of the strong faith bias that this project has which is not the same for the Council's which flags all incidents as 'racial'. The partnership meets once a month to discuss strategic/operational issues and

has been attended intermittently by the police at Detective Chief Inspector level.

Recording racist incidents

In 2003/04 the Citizens Advice service dealt with over 45,000 advice issues related to discrimination¹⁶. It is not possible at the moment to break down those figures into instances of racial discrimination or racist attacks. From April 2005 bureaux will be required to monitor ethnicity. The roll out of an electronic case recording system across the Citizens Advice service will enable more accurate analysis of data and trends. The numbers of social policy evidence forms submitted to Citizens Advice nationally provide compelling case studies but only concern some of the cases of discrimination reported to Citizens Advice Bureaux in England and Wales.

There are also cases of discrimination or racist attacks that go unrecognised in the course of advice interviews and are consequently unreported. Elsewhere in this report we refer to the consistent body of research that points to under reporting by victims. We noted also that not all bureaux which are members of reporting schemes have had training in how to recognise and report racist incidents, and many bureaux told us they were not members. Further research is necessary to establish how far the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report definition of a racist incident is embedded into our advice practice and reflected in our own training for advice workers.

Some current work being undertaken in the South West is taking an innovative approach to raising awareness of racism and racist incidents amongst the Citizens Advice service in that region. Citizens Advice South West Region has a long track record in anti-racist work. The region was the location of the ground-breaking Rural Race Equality Project whose influential report *Racism in the Rural Idyll*¹⁷ provided the blue print for similar

studies of rural racism across the UK. Because of this track record, the region has never felt complacent that the issue of racism in the South West was being adequately addressed and the rise of far right activity in the region has added another cause to be vigilant.

Racist incidents in the South West have continued to rise in most counties in the region – figures from South West Police Force areas show an overall steady increase from 528 (1996/97) to 2,436 (2001/02). While the latter figure represents a 9 per cent drop over the previous year, incidents have continued to rise in Devon, Cornwall and Gloucestershire and in 2003/04 incidents rose in Dorset by over 200 per cent.

A recent evaluation of the social policy evidence submitted to the regional office of Citizens Advice in the South West suggested that the experiences of BME groups in the region were not being adequately reflected. As a result the region has started the What the Papers Say Project.

“We are asking that everyone in bureaux collect any items in the local papers that they consider racist – for example comments made by people interviewed in a press article, letters to the press expressing racist or white nationalist views, reports of racist motivated attacks on people or businesses, negative views about asylum seekers, Travellers or migrant workers.”

Bureaux are being encouraged to discuss their findings in their offices, trustee board meetings and report incidents to the monitoring group based in the South West. All of these activities are intended to raise the profile for racist incident monitoring in the South West.

Conclusions and recommendations

Progress

A lot of progress has been made in tackling racist crime. This survey of Citizens Advice Bureaux involvement in racist incident monitoring schemes confirms the commitment of the Citizens Advice service to community-based approaches to dealing with race and religious hatred. The Citizens Advice service has developed considerable expertise however we need to ensure that this is more widely disseminated within our organisation:

- Citizens Advice will ensure that good practice from monitoring schemes is made available to member bureaux

Citizens Advice Bureaux have differing levels of involvement in monitoring and recording of racist incidents, ranging from leading multi agency partnerships to simply being reporting centres or referral points. The report suggests that if the local political environment does not have a high priority for tackling racist incidents then it is unlikely also that a bureau will have a high profile for these issues. We make recommendations about Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships elsewhere in this report. There are however some very simple things that all bureaux can do even in rural areas to raise the profile of racist incidents with their staff, trustees and clients.

- We recommend that all Citizens Advice Bureaux display the Report Racism poster in their waiting rooms, and interview rooms. Every bureau should make efforts to contact their police service and local authority to find out the current arrangements for reporting of racist incidents. Every bureau should ensure that all members of staff are up to date with local reporting procedures.

Capacity building needs

The report points to a lack of consistency in providing on-going training for agencies involved in monitoring schemes and a need to review how well the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report definition of what constitutes a racist incident is integrated into the day to day advice work of the Citizens Advice service. We recommend that:

- the guidance in the Code of Practice on training for agencies which receive reports of racist incidents needs to be translated into a consistent, nationally validated programme of training
- further research is necessary to establish how far the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report definition of a racist incident is embedded into Citizens Advice service advice practice and reflected in training for advice workers.

Citizens Advice would welcome the opportunity to work with the Home Office and other partners to develop appropriate training for the independent advice sector on reporting and recording of racist incidents.

Community safety and community cohesion

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act places a positive duty on public bodies to promote good race relations. The guidance to local authorities on community cohesion is clear about the need for effective partnership working to combat racist crime. The guidance also places community cohesion firmly on the agenda of local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships. The cross Governmental strategy on community cohesion and race equality is equally clear about the need to tackle racist crime. Citizens Advice Bureaux are a key

community resource and can play an active role in community safety work.

- Local authorities and the police service have important roles in bringing together relevant agencies to address hate crime in general and race crime in particular. We recommend that the guidance issued to local authorities by the Local Government Association concerning the formation of third party monitoring schemes and their link to community cohesion needs to be re-iterated.
- Guidance to Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships should be reviewed to ensure that race and religious hate crime has a higher profile.
- Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships should consult with/involve Citizens Advice Bureaux on a consistent basis and seek to jointly raise the issues of race and religious crime at a neighbourhood level.

Home Office Code of Practice

We are aware that the Code of Practice is currently under review and we recommend the following:

- The suggested format for case recording and the minimum data content be reviewed and consideration given to the widely differing contexts in which reports are generated. Not every victim wants their case to be referred to the police for action, reports are taken by a variety of agencies all with differing capacities and the Code of Practice should reflect this diversity.
- The Code of Practice should be revised to ensure that feedback to partner agencies is seen as essential. Not all bureaux can be members of multi agency panels and in areas where the levels of reporting are infrequent there is a need to encourage and build capacity through direct feedback.

References

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Citizens Advice annual statistics 2003/04

Discrimination	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Yearly total
Benefits	1,047	1,140	1,022	869	4,078
Consumer	1,229	979	981	1,299	4,487
Employment	5,689	5,846	5,321	6,121	22,976
Housing	1,286	1,273	1,175	1,442	5,176
Legal	721	603	663	514	2,500
Relationships	949	1,056	1,058	1,171	4,234
Tax	108	114	103	110	435
Utilities	372	367	300	385	1,424
All discrimination issues	11,400	11,377	10,623	11,910	45,311

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