

Tool two: Capturing and pooling what we know

In this section we look at ways of capturing informal information and pool it, then devise methods of analysing it in order to take appropriate action. It includes:

- Introduction
- Some techniques for capturing and pooling information
- Some 'in practice' examples

Introduction

In any locality the list of people with tension relevant information is vast. Any worker with face-to-face contact with the public is likely to hear or be told things during the course of their daily work which may contribute to a better 'real-time' picture of the way people are feeling. Local councillors also have information from their surgeries and daily contacts.

Each locality might start capturing and pooling what they know by thinking about who it is that residents tell when there are issues that may move from concern to conflict. Personnel who may hold information in isolation that might contribute to building a bigger picture include:

- Ward councillors
- Youth workers
- Head teachers and school staff including police liaison officers
- Caretakers, cleaners and other 'street' staff
- Housing officers and resident involvement teams
- Community development and neighbourhood staff
- Community Support Officers and beat officers
- Voluntary Organisations – Citizens' Advice Bureau, Neighbourhood Watch, Victim Support, Race Equality Council
- Street leaders, community wardens
- Faith leaders

Techniques vary from relatively simple means of collecting information on a personal basis to more sophisticated technology based methods. Areas will need to consider the level of investment that is proportionate to the level of tension in their locality.

Some techniques

A single email address – Some areas have set up one central email address where frontline staff, particularly estate-based workers, can send in information they glean in the course of their everyday work. The information may help in building a picture of community tensions without using extra resources.

It can be hard for staff to see how important seemingly trivial/'common knowledge' information could be in preventing an escalation of tension into conflict. So, the system requires training and support to become common practice.

Debrief after every engagement - task staff to ask set questions or have standing agenda items about community tensions to use in community encounters.

- How are people feeling? Or how are people feeling about...?
- What are people concerned about at the moment?
- How are relations between... and ...?

Encourage staff to reflect on discussions and to 'deconstruct conversations' for useful information.

Staff asking about community concerns will then need to report what they have been told to the nominated community tensions lead officer. The lead officer will need to understand the key messages coming from residents in order to pass them on through the appropriate channel for a response to be made.

The lead officer may find it useful to conduct a 'Friday ring around' each week to ask key contacts for a 'tensions update' and pass on the information for action by relevant players as well as collating this for the tensions monitoring system.

Use the joint tasking arrangements - Many areas are reducing crime by pooling data and (human) resources so that wardens, police, licensing, street care and community safety staff are tasked at the same time to tackle priority issues and respond to community concerns. These groups could enhance their existing role in relation to community tensions by putting the question "How are communities feeling?" at the beginning of their meetings. In any event, this may impact on how they respond to other hot spots or problems identified through the National Intelligence Model information and influence the responses that are identified. Another enhancement to this approach could be the closer involvement of community development practitioners in the tasking groups.

Non-police reporting schemes – staff at non-police (or 'third party') sites for reporting hate crime, including bullying and domestic violence, are important sources of information. These initially followed a recommendation of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry to encourage the reporting of racist incidents and crimes, the ability to report at locations other than police stations and the ability to report 24 hours a day. Information collected through this system is a vital contributor to tensions monitoring.

Regional multi-agency monitoring and networking groups – there are a number of such groups which have been set up to monitor activity that may increase tensions, for example, racist groups.

One such group in the Midlands defines its role as:

- To **share information** and **agree action** on combating racist groups
- To gather and share **robust intelligence** on community tensions
- To **respond quickly to rising tensions**
- To get agreement for a joint party statement in the **run up to elections**
- To work effectively with the **media**
- To be a catalyst for **joined up action** at regional and sub-regional levels

Technology-based solutions

- **Turning informal conversations and meeting notes into intelligence**

If captured by minutes which are sent to an agreed folder in an organisation's IT network, or if written as notes into the agreed folder, the information can be scanned by pointing Google (an internal search mechanism) at the resulting collection for internal staff use only. Knowledge Management staff say that users of a system can have areas that are identified by business say '**Community Tension**' and are available to users via the Google search interface. Then decisions are needed about sharing this information with external partners.

A prerequisite of this method of capturing what we know is an agreed classification scheme as a template for folder structures (as well as established folders).

This method of copying existing minutes or writing notes to a central point may not be too onerous on staff but training and support are required, as well as stage-by-stage consultation in order to assist with this new practice becoming second nature to already busy staff.

- **Concept mapping software - analysing tensions data**

There may be an alternative non-human means of analysing community tension data using concept mapping software. One US-based software supplier of this is Autonomy - **www.autonomy.com**. There will be other suppliers to explore.

London based knowledge management staff are already planning the link between informal information, analysis and action and could pilot the community tension technology, subject to resources.

The technology minimises the need to have employees and partners manually categorise, tag and insert hypertext links between related content. For example, as new information is created by a local government, the software analyses the main concepts and then automatically categorises it and inserts links to related content in real-time. At the heart of Autonomy's software is its ability to analyse text and voice (in any language) and identify and rank the main concepts within it. It can then automatically categorise, link, personalise and deliver that information.

- **Using wireless CCTV**

Local problem solving partnerships have found wireless CCTV easy to use and helpful in gathering information and responding to incidents.

In practice: non-police reporting scheme - Waltham Forest

Launched in March 2000 initially with 6 pilot sites, the Waltham Forest scheme now has 20 centres which have been assessed for their appropriateness for someone wanting to report a hate incident/crime. The non-police reporting centres currently include: places of worship, young people's services, advice centres, gender based and sexual orientation organisations, educational establishments and registered social landlords. A directory of these organisations has been published.

As well as encouraging people to come forward so that victims can be supported, a key rationale for Waltham Forest 'is that recording all such incidents allows the police and other agencies to identify tension indicators early on which can be used to prevent further incidents of crime or can provide useful information if the incidents later escalate to the level of crime. The aim is to identify underlying trends and build up a picture of hate-motivated incidents/crimes in the borough'.

In practice: Using wireless CCTV - Westminster's Wireless City and reduced crime

Westminster City Council and Vertex, are delivering a wireless technology project that transmits data over radio waves using standard protocols at broadband speeds. The system involves establishing the infrastructure for a Wireless Metropolitan Area Network (WMAN) includes CCTV and noise monitoring devices and is interconnected with the City Council's corporate network. The network allows web-based remote monitoring and management systems, integrated with mobile devices including pan tilt and zone video cameras, laptops and handheld devices.

The pilot has centred around three different areas of service delivery: the wider use of CCTV to help in the management of a 24 hour city; the use of a wireless network to support more productive mobile working and various other applications such as remote noise monitoring.

The impact on crime and disorder is reported as positive and significant and the cameras had a deterrent effect immediately after installation.

In practice: Regional multi-agency monitoring - Commission for Racial Equality Midlands Office: Safe Communities Initiative on the far right

The CRE Midlands Office was concerned about the effect which the racist far right were having on community tensions in the Midlands region. Many areas in the region were electoral targets for racist political parties and leaflets had been circulated exploiting community concerns and misrepresenting facts, particularly about asylum seekers.

CRE Midlands organised a conference in Walsall in March 2004: "Combating Racism through the Ballot Box: Meeting the Challenges of the Racist Far Right". It was attended by 200 people from local organisations, received a large amount of positive press coverage and made a big impression locally. It was followed up by a conference report concentrating on the practical action which local organisations can take to counter the myths spread by racist organisations.

The conference identified a need to bring local agencies together to look more systematically at organised racist activity and working in partnership to tackle it. To fill this gap, the CRE Midlands Office decided to establish the Midlands Monitoring and Networking Group on the Far Right.

The membership list for the group includes: Race Equality West Midlands, West Midlands Police, Regional TUC, Regional Action West Midlands, EMBRACE, Citizens' Advice Bureau, Midlands Race Equality Councils, Crown Prosecution Service, Local Criminal Justice Boards, Government Offices for the Regions, Wolverhampton City-wide Black and Minority Ethnic Community Forum, Regional Development Agency, organisations which work with asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants, representatives of faith groups

The group meets every three months and meetings are usually attended by around 12-20 people. They agreed to widen their original aims to look at general community tensions and religious, as well as racist, extremism. The meetings provide an opportunity for sharing information on community tensions, potential hotspots and good practice in tackling racial hatred. They exchange advice and agree ways to work together to achieve the aims which their organisations have in common. Meetings also provide an opportunity for representatives of different communities to share their views on the effect which racist activity is having on them.

Achievements:

- Provided robust intelligence on community tensions in the Midlands
- Acted as a think tank, advising on the development of Safer Communities Initiative's agenda.
- Able to respond quickly to rising tensions in the Midlands region. Following the London bombings on 7 July 2005, the group met promptly to share information
- Produced an outline joint party statement for local areas to adopt in the run up to elections. The statement provided an opportunity for local politicians to make a commitment to the multicultural make up of their area and to making sure that their political campaign is conducted fairly and free from racial hatred and prejudice. The statement was adopted by many areas in the region.

Lesson: Tackling racial hatred can involve challenging political parties, particularly the racist far right but sometimes mainstream parties as well. Make sure you are aware of how far your organisation can go and take legal advice if necessary.