

Tool three: Making the best use of ‘open sources’

There is a vast amount of information in the public domain, freely available, which can be a cause or an expression of tension or aggravate matters. This is a brief section, but its importance in understanding and monitoring tension is significant.

It includes

- An introduction to open sources
- The kinds of open sources to explore
- Tips on collecting open source information
- What the information looks like ‘in practice’

Introduction

‘The ambassadors of 10 Muslim countries have complained to the Danish Prime Minister about a major newspaper’s cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad’ (BBC News)

‘It all began with a rumour that an African Caribbean teenage girl was gang raped ...on Tuesday 18th October the allegations were given even wider circulation on a pirate radio station . . . ‘ (UK Indy Media Website – re: Lozells).

Cartoons in a Danish newspaper and a local rumour that was never substantiated - just two examples of sparks fanned by media activity, turning tensions into disorder and loss of life. Regardless of our views of the actual events, the issues and players involved, both the mass media and the plethora of information sources available contribute significantly to community dynamics.

The Metropolitan Police and the National Community Tensions Team provide a weekly ‘open source digest’ which distils notable articles and main news items relating to Faith, Race and Extremism, locally, nationally and internationally which may have an impact on community tension. These reports are collated for Borough, Operational and Area Police Commands to inform tensions monitoring meetings. They are made available to local police services and can be shared through the Tensions Monitoring Group.

This ‘open source digest’ should be supplemented with information in circulation locally, collated at a central point – either the police or local authority press office or nominated tensions monitoring officer. Press officers will already be scanning local media - make them aware of the need to be alert to stories and issues which might affect community tension.

Open sources to be alert to include:

- Local newspapers, including free papers – how particular events are being reported, the letters page, opinion columns
- Radio – including phone ins and pirate radio
- TV channels – eg Sky 813 reports news from a Muslim perspective
- Newsletters from local organisations, protest groups, campaigns
- Websites such as YouTube, youth sites, right wing and extremist organisations – and their guest books flyposting and handouts in the street or around clubs or places of worship
- Music press, gay press, BME publications

All of these help add to the information from other sources and assist in knowing the temperature, identifying potential problems and adding to the knowledge of forthcoming events. Literature which may be deemed to be inciting racial or religious hatred should be passed to the police immediately for investigation.

Information gleaned from open sources needs to be combined with other community information to build the intelligence picture.

Tips:

- ▶▶ ask your press office to inform you on a daily basis of stories in the local media which may impact on tension
- ▶▶ nominate one person to whom information from open sources should be sent
- ▶▶ acknowledge all contributions – people need to know that the information is useful
- ▶▶ allocate a couple of hours per week to check out websites which may have a bearing on what's happening in your area
- ▶▶ bring 'inflammatory' material to the attention of the police and your legal departments

In practice

In practice: Some examples of the information included in the NCTT Open Source Digest

Racist attacker tried to rip veil off Muslim woman

An attacker tried to rip off the veil of a Muslim woman while racially abusing her, police said today. The 37 year old woman was crossing a busy park near Solent University in Southampton on Thursday when a white man aged in his 20 approached her. He started shouting racial abuse and told her to remove her veil.

13/01/2007 www.thisishampshire.net/news

Italian gays protest at the Vatican

A group of around 150 protesters attended a rally in St Peters Square on Saturday to protest against the anti-gay stance of Pope Benedict XVI. The protest, organised by gay rights group Arcigay, was held on the ninth anniversary of the suicide of writer Alfredo Ormando. He doused himself in petrol and set himself alight in St Peters Square in 1998 in protest at the Roman Catholic Church's attitude towards gay people.

16/01/2007

Muslim barred in extremism probe

An alleged Islamic extremist who said non-Muslim Britons were dirty and unclean has been banned from attending prayer meetings in Sutton. Abdul Lateef has been barred from meetings of the Muslim Cultural and Welfare Association of Sutton (MCWAS) after he was accused of using them to stir up religious hatred. He is also to be interrogated by Sutton Council who rent buildings to MWCAS and another local Muslim group – Companions of the Mosque – in which Mr Lateef plays a key role.

19/01/2007 www.thisislondon.co.uk/news

Big Brother crashes into politics

The power of Big Brother to turn people – even individuals who wear their ignorance like a badge of honour – into overnight celebrities in the UK is legendary. It can now add causing a diplomatic incident and damaging Britain's reputation abroad to its list of achievements. That is thanks to the uproar over the alleged bullying and racism being inflicted on one of the contestants, Bollywood star Shilpa Shetty, by the likes of Jade Goody – whose fame was built on things such as saying she thought East Anglia was a foreign country.

17/01/2007 news.bbc.co.uk