



Horsenden Hill

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West London Gay Men's Project

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Introduction

This report outlines the main findings of a defined number of outreach¹ sessions carried out at Horsenden Hill, a park in Ealing, London. It is by no means exhaustive but provides a “snapshot” of the men using this site as a public sex environment (PSE).

Background

The West London Gay Men’s Project (GMP) is an HIV prevention and sexual health promotion organisation and part of The Public Health and Health Improvement Unit based in the Civic Centre in Hounslow. Amongst its services, GMP carries out outreach work in gay venues across West London. GMP supports work to encourage the reporting of homophobic crime.

In early April 2007 Ealing police had contacted an outreach team CLASH who are based at Camden and Islington. Clash referred GMP to the police as it was thought more appropriate that GMP become involved because our geographical area of work includes Ealing. In accordance with Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Guidance on the Policing of Public Sexual Activity (See Appendix 1) interested parties met to agree strategies to deal with complaints about public sexual activity. There had been a number of complaints about men who were seen to be having sex with men in a park.

Context of complaints

In this report this group of men will be referred to as Men who have Sex with Men (MSM). The term describes men who are behaviourally homosexual but who may not identify as gay or bisexual.

On the 25th April 2007 a meeting with interested parties including representatives from OutWest community group, GMP, Ealing Community Safety Team, the police and John Gallagher (Ealing Councillor) was held at Northolt Police station. The outcome was an agreement that GMP would undertake six exploratory sessions at Horsenden Hill and report back to the group. This is in line with ACPO Guidance to use a graduated response to complaints. It was envisaged that health outreach workers would be used to inform and dissuade MSM from sexual behaviour in public that could cause offence to those who unwillingly witness it.

GMP has not previously undertaken PSE work but individual staff members have much previous experience in this area from different projects in various parts of the country. Additionally, GMP has considerable expertise in outreach work carried out in gay commercial venues and sexual health settings.

¹ Outreach – sometimes called detached work happens out of office settings

Horsenden Hill is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. There are nature conservation areas of ancient woodland and hedgerows, and wildflower meadows.

The then Head of GMP, Simon Mitchell and George Leonard, the Community Outreach Officer, carried out an exploratory visit.

Evidence of sexual activity - such as used condoms and soiled tissues - were found among bushes and trees. The car park, close to where activity was noted has a gate and is open from early morning until early evening in the summer. In winter the gate is locked before dusk.

Aims and Objectives

Aims

To engage and communicate with MSM about complaints about public sexual activity

Objectives

- To conduct outreach at different times of the day on weekdays and weekends
- To advise MSM to be aware of other park users and to avoid giving offence by displays of overt sexual behaviour.
- To encourage MSM to dispose of any materials such as condoms, lube or unhygienic litter appropriately
- To encourage the reporting of homophobic crime as it is recognised that MSM engaging in public sex activities are also potential victims of crime or witnesses to crime
- To provide information, referral and advice on sexual health
- To distribute HIV prevention resources including free 24s bags of condoms and lubricant

Methods

In a literature review a report on PSEs² stated that outreach at one site was curtailed following police advice because of a sharp increase in homophobic attacks caused by publicity in the local press.

The GMP Community Outreach Officer consulted with the Outreach Manager of Terrence Higgins Trust in the early part of 2007 about an attack on workers at a PSE site in Central London. Advice and information to ensure the safety of outreach workers was shared.

In September 2007 Camden LGBT Forum publicised in the gay press an increase in the number of attacks on gay men in the West Heath area of Hampstead Heath (PSE).

² R. Fleet A Report on PSE Outreach Projects 2000 GMFA

A risk assessment was undertaken before starting work at Horsenden Hill.

Aware of the dangers of homophobic violence the two workers stayed close to their car at all times. The doors were unlocked and the keys left in the ignition should the need arise to leave quickly. They were within hearing and sight of each other at all times.

It was agreed that they would leave immediately and without debate if either felt unsafe.

A mobile phone was carried and used to log on and off with the GMP line manager. Personal attack alarms were made available. The police were informed and aware of the times and days they would work. GMP identity cards were displayed at all times.

The outreach team worked with the boot of the car open to allow a display board to be used. The board had posters identifying GMP and the work it does and encouraging the reporting of homophobic crime. The car was parked alongside other cars and next to a path leading to the PSE site.

The findings from PSEs studies in London and Brighton differ. In Brighton³ they found that PSE users report lower levels of UAI (Unprotected Anal Intercourse) than men in the local gay community but higher HIV prevalence. In comparison The Gay Men's Sex Survey (2001) Sigma Research found significantly higher levels of UAI. In discussing the Brighton findings the conclusion is "Whether men who use PSE are more or less likely (than men who do not use them) to be involved in sexual HIV exposure and sexual HIV transmission continues to be unclear."

A common factor reported in studies is the higher number of sexual partners with users of PSEs.^{3,4} Men over 50 were more likely to have higher numbers of sexual partners than men under 30⁴. The greater number of sexual contacts may lead to a greater risk of sexually transmitted infections.

21% of men using PSEs agreed or strongly agreed they had problems getting hold of condoms and 18% reported condom failure – torn, split or slipping off in the last year.⁵

It is believed that the use of PSEs appears to be falling due to the increased use of public sex venues (PSVs) and the internet.⁴ It is also believed that

³ JS Frankis, P Flowers (2006) Cruising for sex: sexual risk behaviours (2006) Cruising for sex: Sexual risk behaviours and HIV testing of men who cruise, inside and outwith public sex environments (PSE) AIDS Care, 18(1), 54-59.

⁴ P Davies, D Reid, P. Weatherburn (2002) Putting It About Health Promotion for gay men with higher numbers of sexual partners Sigma Research

⁵ V Strange, C Bonell et al (2004) In The City: An evaluation of detached work in commercial premises and public sex environments. SSRU Instit. Education

PSEs are used less in winter than in summer. Bad weather and rain impact on site use.

The six outreach sessions took place between 18th May and 6th August 2007. Each session lasted three hours and was undertaken at various times from morning to afternoon and on different days.

Sundays were discounted as MSM reported there were a greater number of heterosexuals using the site and fewer MSM.

The two workers presence was also advertised by placing GMP postcards encouraging the reporting of homophobic crime under the windscreen wipers of parked cars.

Findings

Initially it was difficult to open conversations with the men. Sex is the main purpose in visiting a PSE. To quote from "In The City"⁵ Sex without personal connection or communication was commonly viewed as the goal:

The sort of accepted norm is that you don't talk and ... that's one of the attractions.

Accessibility increased as the GMP outreach team became known and trusted. In the first session we were only able to contact 2 men. As we became recognised and word spread this increased to a highpoint of 15 in one session. On average we contacted 8 men per session.

Men were greeted and if they responded were told who we were, whom we worked for and what we were doing. Those who returned the greeting but did not stop were treated as contacts. Although we contacted 48 men during these six sessions we were able to engage at a more in depth level with 26 men (54% of contacts).

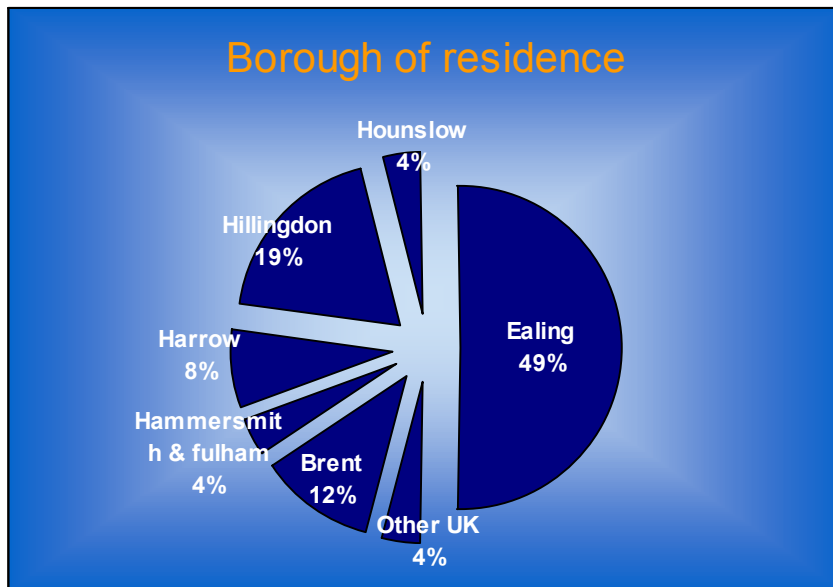
This is not a true reflection of the number of MSM using this site. It was learned that some MSM parked elsewhere and walked to the site to avoid contact with the police. The greatest number of parked cars however corresponded with the greatest number of contacts. This occurred on a Friday afternoon between 12noon and 3pm when 27-parked cars were noted and 15 contacts made. Of course not all the cars belonged to MSM as heterosexual couples, families and dog walkers use the park.

None of the MSM reported that they found outreach workers at PSEs sites unacceptable. On the contrary two welcomed our presence and said that we were doing a good job. There is a social network of MSM using this site and it was not unusual that men who had spoken with GMP referred other MSM to talk and find out what GMP were doing.

⁵ V Strange, C Bonell et al (2004) In The City: An evaluation of detached work in commercial premises and public sex environments. SSRU Instit. Education

26 men provided data. They were asked their age, borough of residence and asked to choose their ethnicity. The resources they accepted and the main topics of conversation were noted.

Borough of residence



All respondents gave their borough of residence.
49% gave their borough of residence as Ealing.
19% gave Hillingdon, 12% gave Brent, and 8% gave Harrow.
4% gave Hounslow and 4% gave Hammersmith and Fulham.
4% were from other UK.

Age

The age of men answering questions ranged from 33-68 years, the average being 52.
50% were 50 or over.

Ethnicity

81% of men reported being White,
8% were Asian/Asian British and
8% were Black/Black British.

Demand for sexual health resources

21 bags of the free condom and lube service 24s were given out.
(21 bottles of lube and 504 condoms were given out).
44% of contacts took free condoms

19 Copies of the Cruising Safely were distributed to men. This leaflet encourages personal safety.
40% of contacts accepted Cruising Safely leaflets.

Frequency of use

There is clearly a wide range of frequency of use of this PSE site. One 48 year old told how he had been using this site since he was a young man. Long-term use by MSM was not uncommon. Some used it more regularly such as the 43 year old that went there most weeks after work Monday to Friday.

Homophobic Crime reporting

On 23rd May information was given to the Hillingdon Police about Homophobic attacks at another cruising ground. A site user at Horsenden had reported to GMP that cars had been vandalised and MSM threatened by a gang of men. The information was given to the Slough Police. They were aware of the incidents and unfortunately there were similar incidents on the following bank holiday weekend.

A positive outcome of this outreach was the intelligence gathering and sharing of information with the police.

Relationships between MSM and Police

The relationship with MSM and the police is ambivalent. One man told the GMP workers he had reported to the police in the past that he saw three men with baseball bats at the site. The implication was the potential for a homophobic attack.

Another came and spoke to us after being referred by a police patrol. He was asked about but was not aware of any recent crime.

One man said that the police were the problem and harassed people. Preventative patrolling by uniformed officers in marked police cars is used to deter potential offenders. Men reported to GMP that the police visit the site and take down the registration numbers of parked cars. This served to antagonise some MSM who felt "intimidated" when the police asked men in parked cars what they were doing there. Some avoided this contact by parking further away and walking to the site.

Summary and recommendations

Objectives

The outreach sessions were successful within the stated objectives. All the sessions were completed and took place at different times and on different days of the week with a view to assessing variations in patterns.

MSM were made aware of the complaints to the police about displays of overt sexual behaviour. All the men that were contacted responded positively and agreed that it was undesirable. There was agreement to dispose of unhygienic litter. "Quite right too" was a typical response.

Homophobic Crime Reporting

Experience of homophobic crime more often affects younger men and the proportion of men who had experienced physical and verbal abuse decreases with increasing age.⁶

Although the average age of the men contacted at Horsenden Hill was 52 years old they provided GMP with useful intelligence on homophobic crime, which was shared with the police.

There have been reports of homophobic attacks at PSEs.

- **Recommendation: before considering any outreach work in PSEs a comprehensive risk assessment should be undertaken.**

Ealing PCT or Council do not at present commission any work to encourage the reporting of Homophobic crime work from GMP but do however support the provision of services for MSM in a sexual health context by funding GMP.

- **Recommendation: Homophobic Crime partnership work should be considered between Ealing and GMP.**
- **Recommendation: An ASTOR of what the intervention should involve be completed before starting future work.**

Evidence of Need

Information on sexual health was distributed and HIV prevention resources including free 24s bags of condoms and lubricant were readily accepted.

While there is a demonstrated demand from the MSM at this site for HIV prevention resources it was outside the remit of this piece of work to explore the sexual health needs of the MSM.

⁶ F.Hickson, P Weatherburn, D Reid et al (2005) Consuming Passions Findings from the United Kingdom Gay Men's Sex Survey 2005 Sigma Research

It may be that the local MSM community influences each PSE. Research findings from other PSEs need to be tempered with caution – Ealing is not Hampstead Heath or for that matter Brighton, which have sizeable gay populations and higher HIV prevalence.

The greater number of sexual contacts of PSE users may lead to a greater risk of sexually transmitted infections. Men with higher numbers of sexual partners are a priority group for HIV prevention initiatives. (LGMHPP*)

It is also believed that PSEs are used less in winter than in summer. Bad weather and rain impact on site use.

- **Recommendation: outreach work during the spring and summer months at Horsenden Hill should be commissioned.**
- **Recommendation: undertake a sexual health needs assessment of the MSM who use this site.**

Appendix 1

ACPO Guidance on the Policing of Public Sexual Activity

Introduction

In 2000 the newly formed Association Of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Working Group identified a need for national guidance for responding to complaints from the public of men visiting public toilets and other public environments for the purpose either of engaging in sexual activity with other men there (cottaging) or elsewhere (cruising). The intention was that this model would assist police forces throughout England and Wales in providing a consistent response to complaints from members of the public within the framework of a comprehensive LGBT policing strategy centred around anti-homophobia.

It soon became clear that to comply with both the spirit and legal requirements of anti-discrimination, such a model needed to address all consensual public sexual activity and not just such activity between men.

That said, two important points need to be kept in mind. Firstly, that it is likely that the majority of complaints from members of the public are still likely to be about public sexual activity between men. Secondly, there needs to be a clear public acknowledgement that the reasons why men engage in public sexual activity are several and complex, in many cases reflecting personal experiences of homophobia. Thus, this model emphasizes the value of building trust with local LGBT communities and engaging in consultation at all stages of the process. This will help ensure that action, if and when taken, will be seen by all members of the community as fair, necessary and legitimate. Thirdly, there is no doubt that men who engage in such activities run a risk of falling victim to homophobic crime and the clear message needs to be sent (and received and believed) that victims of such crimes will be supported by police.

Protecting lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people from homophobia, and reducing crime in general and disorder is a responsibility of police and other statutory agencies acting in partnership and this is reflected in the model.

Principles:

Sexual behaviour in public can cause offence to those who unwillingly witness it, and may result in people feeling intimidated when using public spaces and facilities.

Anti-discrimination, with recognition of the proposed changes in sexual offences legislation. Should not discriminate unnecessarily between men and women or between those of different sexual orientation.

Responses to complaints must be fair proportionate, legal, accountable and necessary, and based on best information.

Responses should be set within the duty to reduce crime and disorder and provide a safe community for all its members.

Where it is a same-sex issue the response needs to be an integral part of LGBT Policing Strategy – at national, force and local level– with a recognition that people engaged in public sex activities are also potential victims or witnesses of hate crime.

The SARA (Scan-Analyse–Respond-Assess) problem-solving approach should be used to address complaints (see The Police Research Crime Detection and Prevention Series Paper 85, Getting the Grease to the Squeak – Research Lessons for Crime Prevention).

The model should be adopted only after consultation with a wide range of consultative groups, including LGBT and C&D partners, and should be a C&D Partnership (not just police) policy. The process should be set out in a clear, transparent public document.

There should be built in methods of regular policy review, at national, force and local level, through consultation with community consultative groups.

Because of the sensitivity required in responding to public sex issues it is essential that all stages of the process are subject to a strategic (Gold) overview and review. All stages of the process should be monitored and evaluated, and carefully documented through the use of a policy, decision, and action log.

It is recognised that occasions will arise where a police officer witnesses sexual activity in a public place, or receives a complaint from a member of the public that such an activity is taking place or has just taken place. The officer should assess the circumstances and determine if immediate action is required. Such a decision should be guided by the above principles.

Stage 1 – receipt of complaint of public sex activity

Within police service, responsibility and accountability for initial processing of a complaint from a member of the public should rest with the sector inspector.

The sector inspector should carry out an initial assessment of the validity of the complaint and apprise the appropriate member of the BOCU senior management team. BOCUs should have in place a system to allow a strategic decision and review, in concert with their C&D Act partners, and where appropriate with the advice of community groups.

Gold Review of initial complaint and decision whether to proceed.

Stage 2 – scanning and analysis

Is it an isolated incident or one of several, i.e. a community problem? What other information is available? What is the nature of the complaint, i.e. is it about observed behaviour, hearsay, or about unhygienic litter, etc?

Has the issue been raised at sector consultative groups or the PCCG?

Local community groups (e.g., LGBT groups) are a valuable source of information and advice and should be an integral part of this process.

Should be carried out as a C&D partnership process (this assumes that the Crime and Disorder partnership have in place mechanisms for analysing nuisance and quality of life issues)

Gold Review and decision. Should there be a more focused approach to information scanning by interrogating own and other agency databases and community intelligence systems, with view to verifying nature and extent of problem? It is important to realise that valuable information may have been captured on an existing CCTV system.

Gold Review and decision Consider use of formal information gathering by use of plain-clothes officers, cameras, etc. (however, this raises serious human rights issues). This is to help inform, not to detect and gather information about individuals. This proactive gathering of information should only be approved if the use of such evidence gathering techniques is considered proportionate to the problem. Where appropriate, LGBT groups should be closely involved in this decision.

Gold Review and decision Is commercial sex involved? If so, the problem should be dealt with under the force commercial sex policy.

The problem analysis triangle (PAT) breaks incidents down into features of: the victim, the offender, and the location. The analysis should determine when, where, how, by whom, and reasons behind peoples' behaviour, and those at risk from or disadvantaged by the behaviour. Again, community groups (particularly, where appropriate LGBT groups) will be able to contribute to this process.

Is there likely to be a displacement of the problem if action is taken?

Time spent on scanning and analysis will help ensure:

Police and partners are able to frame the issue in proper terms and in context.

Action is not (and not seen as) knee jerk.

That police and partners are able to evidence decisions to take action.

Police and partners are able to counter allegations of negligence when the decision is not to take action.

Do not forget to keep the complainant informed of what is being done to examine and address the concern.

Gold Review and decision. Is there a community problem and if so, should a stepped response be implemented? Not every complaint will result in a response. The scanning and response stage may show it to be an isolated incident and not a symptom of a problem. If this is the case the reasons should be explained to the complainant. It may also be decided, that whilst there is a problem, on strategic grounds it would be inappropriate to implement a stepped response at that stage. This decision should be taken in consultation with the appropriate community groups (including LGBT). The decisions, and grounds, should be recorded.

What do we want to achieve and how will we know when we achieve it (see Stage 4)? Ideally, the C&D Partnership should have a mechanism for agreeing on the allocation of resources.

Stage 3 – stepped response

Step one – inform, dissuade

Use of health outreach workers

Posters

Media

Through LGBT network

Gold Review and Decision before embarking on:

Step two – situational crime and disorder prevention measures

The aim here is opportunity reduction and the following options should be considered:

Target removal, e.g. closure of facilities.

Access control, e.g. restricting hours of opening of facilities.

Capable guardians, e.g. toilet attendants, park patrols. It is important that such personnel are provided with proper training and work within intervention protocols.

Signage.

Landscaping and cutting back of shrubbery.

Lighting.

Overt surveillance, e.g. CCTV.

Staff vigilance and guidance (e.g. gardeners).

Environmental design (long term).

Gold Review and Decision before embarking on:

Step three - preventative patrolling

Use of local officers in uniform.

Risk assessment to be conducted before such deployment.

First line supervision of operations.

Briefings:

The Police Service commitment to anti-discriminatory should be emphasised and explained.

Consideration should be given to the participation of community groups such as LGBT, and where appropriate LAGPA officers, in briefings.

Problem should be placed in strategic context, i.e. LGBT policy, tackling homophobia, etc.

Awareness by officers of issues of public sex issues - a key role for community groups such as LGBT. Officers to be provided with clear explanation on why action is required and what is hoped will be the result.

Officers should be given clear instruction that purpose of the patrol is prevention, but that offences coming to light should be dealt with in an appropriate manner.

Clear instruction on powers and options open to officers.

Clear guidelines on how to use discretionary options.

All such patrols need to be effectively supervised.

Offenders arrested or reported for offences should be dealt with in accordance with the force case disposal policy.

Facilities should be agreed for counselling referrals where appropriate.

It may be appropriate depending on the location and responsibility for venue that the patrols are undertaken by local authority or private security patrols, either alone or jointly with police. In these cases it will be essential that similar guidelines are agreed, understood and signed up to by these agencies.

Important: this model does not include a separate detection or enforcement stage, nor does it allow the use of plain clothes officers for any purpose other than information gathering in the scanning and analysis stage. There is no evidence that using plain-clothes officers in a detection and enforcement role is an effective means of solving problems of this type. Indeed, such a tactic risks actions of agent provocateur.

Stage 4 – Assess (throughout and at conclusion of above structured stages)

It is essential that the whole process is monitored and evaluated. Both the police and their partners, and the community need to know what the process has cost and what it has achieved, i.e. has the problem identified been solved?

(Getting the Grease to the Squeak – Research Lessons for Crime Prevention, provides a model for monitoring and evaluation as part of the SARA method of problem solving.)

Gold de-brief. Learning needs to be fed into the C&D Act crime and disorder prevention programme, and shared nationally.

Glossary

*Outreach - sometimes called detached work, which is conducted out of the office environment.

*LGMHPP –London Gay Men’s HIV Prevention Partnership