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**Officers disciplined after Newtownards gay couple complain**



The officers worked at Newtownards police station

Eight police officers at a PSNI station in County Down station have been disciplined following a complaint to the Police Ombudsman's Office.

It concerned the way in which a string of homophobic crimes were investigated.

They were alleged to have failed to investigate properly attacks at a gay couple's Newtownards home in 2007/08.

The PSNI has agreed to pay damages and costs, apologised to the couple and said it is committed to ongoing training for its officers.

[Continue reading the main story](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-18498588#story_continues_1)

**Vandalised**

**We deeply regret that our service fell short of the standard our communities rightly expect and deserve and lessons have been learned from this case”**

**- Mark Hamilton PSNI Chief Superintendent**

In total, there were 12 separate attacks on the home of Vincent Creelan and his partner over the period of a year.

Windows were broken, eggs were thrown the property and their car was vandalised.

Mr Creelan - who is a former police officer - said the PSNI's response to the attacks had made him feel "sick" and "vulnerable".

He added: "I'm not saying I should get special treatment because I was an ex-Peeler or because I was involved with the Gay Police Officers Association or whatever, but it made you realise there was something very, very wrong and it made you feel very, very vulnerable".

The officers from Newtownards station were disciplined in 2010 following the completion of the Police Ombudsman's inquiry.

The two men also took a separate civil action against the PSNI claiming they had been denied proper policing because of their sexual orientation.

It had been due to run for five days, but was settled on the steps of Laganside Courts in Belfast on Monday morning.

**'Regret'**

The PSNI said it had accepted the findings of the Police Ombudsman’s Office report into the issue in 2010 and has since acted on its recommendations.

It pointed out that there were "no findings of institutionalised homophobia in the concluding report".

PSNI Chief Superintendent Mark Hamilton said; "We deeply regret that our service fell short of the standard our communities rightly expect and deserve and lessons have been learned from this case.

"The PSNI takes reports of hate crime very seriously, we are continuously working to improve our response to these crimes and would urge victims to report incidents to us."

Dear All,

As you may be aware from the recent press reporting, the case my partner and I had taken with assistance from the ECNI has been concluded and settled at court after 4 long years. The headlines related to the PONI actions regarding 8 officers, which was something we had asked both the PSNI and PONI to look at when that occurred last year; to no avail. I would like to make you aware of the ‘contract’ the police entered into with us as part of the settlement process which is most important.

The PSNI (in brief);

·         Accepted that the investigation into the 12 reported homophobic hate crimes at our home, fell short of the standards required and regrets any hurt or injury as a result of police omissions.

·         Affirms their commitment to equality legislation in NI.

·         Confirmed that all police officers should and do have the most up to date police policy documents re the police response to hate incidents, are aware of the importance of compliance with the directives in the treatment of victims of homophobic hate crime and the role of HIMLO’s

·         Has ensured that relevant training has been made a priority in Ards Police District

·         A system has been introduced where Inspectors **must** now review each incident and the evidence trail etc re these matters.

·         They agree to again examine and consider specifically the implementation of the recommendations in the TRP report Through Their Eyes, commissioned by the PSNI in 2009.

·         And they agreed damages and paid all reasonable cost incurred in the case by the ECNI.

This is but another small stepping stone, but one where we will never again allow the police to use ignorance or failings in systems, or unprofessional mind-sets to be used as excuse for failing to deal effectively and sensitively with the LGB&T community when they report crimes against them to the police.

We should not have had to take this case, 10 officers in Ards should not have needed to be reported for discipline in one police station, and ***we should*** all be concerned that this maybe happening again and again elsewhere in NI, to our community and to be frank to other sec 75 minority groups too.  We have had information disclosed to us as part of this process which simply beggars belief at the insight it gives to the attitude of officers to Hate Crime reporting, minorities;  and anyone who challenges them. We need to make sure those that do have our support.

I will be writing to the Chief Constable, The Policing Board, The Ombudsman, The Equality Commissioner and The Justice Minister asking them how and why the system as is remains a series of tremendous hurdles to victims rather than a system to protect and enable them to get the service they deserve and the re-dress in circumstances where it is clear that has  not been the case.

I for one look at the journey of the past 4-5 years and ask myself would I ever do that again and regrettably I cannot say that I would or encourage others to do so. That is wrong and we all need to do something to alter that conclusion.

Thank you for the support and good wishes many have offered over the years.

Warmest regards

Vincent.

**Poots sticks to his guns over gay blood ban**

**Newsletter Monday 18 June 2012 10:24**

HEALTH Minister Edwin Poots said yesterday that he had acquired a number of new reports that strengthen his decision not to accept blood donations from gay people.

However Mr Poots said yesterday he was not singling out gay people but was concerned about a range of donors who engage in “risky behaviour”.

“I think that people who engage in high-risk sexual behaviour in general should be excluded from giving blood,” the DUP minister told the BBC’s Sunday Politics programme yesterday.

“And so someone who has sex with somebody in Africa or sex with prostitutes, I am very reluctant about those people being able to give blood.”

The Health Minister said he had received two new pieces of research in the past week that strengthened his position.

In February Great Britain partially lifted its lifetime ban on gay people donating blood, which had been in place to reduce the risk of HIV transmission. Gay men are now allowed to donate blood provided they are not sexually active and have not been for at least a year.

Yesterday Mr Poots said he would continue to keep restrictions on people donating blood if they had sex with people in an African state or with prostitutes.

Defending his policy yesterday on the BBC, Mr Poots said: “If it ain’t broke don’t fix it”.

Asked if this infringed the rights of gay people to donate, he responded that “the rights that are important are the rights of those receiving blood to have confidence they will not be infected”.

Asked if screening methods would not be adequate to keep donations from gay men safe, he said that blood screening is sometimes done very quickly. “There are two phases to the screening,” he said. “The first stage eliminates possible donors who would engage in risky behaviour. The second stage examines the blood itself that has been donated.”

He affirmed yesterday that he would continue to receive donations from other parts of the UK which do not share his policy.

Asked if he was acting in accordance with his ministerial advisors, he said he had “taken a whole range of advice from a range of people” – however he said that some of it was “conflicting”.

The “vast majority” of European countries have the same position as Northern Ireland, he said, with only a few countries in the world, such as Great Britain, allowing such donations.

Responding in a personal capacity, health committee MLA Sue Ramsay of Sinn Fein said: “My view is that Mr Poots is bringing his own prejudices to this. We are crying out for blood. We will be asking for the reports he is talking about.”

She said that all blood that is donated is screened.