

Chapter 2

Background to this Study

2.1 The Local Gay and Lesbian Community

There are several community-based bisexual, gay and lesbian organisations in Berkshire. They include a helpline, several support groups, and two youth groups. There are four commercial venues in Berkshire: one in Maidenhead, two in Reading and one in Slough. These constitute the 'scene'.

Estimating the number of gay and lesbian people in Berkshire is a useful exercise from a service planning perspective, and in terms of this research.

These estimates provide the Berkshire Anti-Homophobia Group with an indication of its potential service user base. They also provide a guide for the research, in terms of what proportion of this population was sampled. Figures 1 and 2 summarise the results of British general population surveys that have attempted to estimate the incidence of homosexual experience among men and women.

Figure 1: Percentage Rates of Homosexual Experience within British General Population Surveys of Men

The Cox Report (Department of Health/Welsh Office, 1988)	3 – 7 %
Forman & Chivers (1989)	1.5 %
Orton & Samuels (1990)	4 – 6 %
McQueen <i>et al</i> (1991)	2.3 %
Johnson <i>et al</i> (1994)	6.1 %
Average:	4 %

Source: Health Education Authority (1996)

Figure 2: Percentage of Homosexual Experience within British General Population Surveys of Women

Johnson <i>et al</i> (1994)	3.4 %
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Source: Health Education Authority (1996)

It should be borne in mind that these studies suggest that *at least* 4 per cent of men are gay and 3.4 per cent of women are lesbian. These are conservative estimates and do not include those who are bisexual, behaviourally bisexual or trans-gendered (all of whom may be victims of homophobia and homophobic crime as discussed earlier). However, it is possible to apply these figures to Berkshire's population and estimate how many gays and lesbians there are locally (see Figure 3 and Table 1).

Figure 3 Berkshire's Population (from 1991 Census)

Total Berkshire Population	724,660
Bracknell Forest	94,361
Newbury	135,550
Reading	128,266
Slough	98,790
Windsor and Maidenhead	131,021
Wokingham	136,672
Female (50.5%)	370,540
Male (49.5%)	363,706

Source: Berkshire County Council (1993)

Table 1 Estimated Number of Gays and Lesbians in Berkshire

	Total Population	Estimated Number who are Gay or Lesbian
Berkshire	734,246	27,147
Bracknell Forest	95,949	3,550
Newbury	136,700	5,055
Reading	128,887	4,764
Slough	101,066	3,737
Windsor and Maidenhead	132,465	4,892
Wokingham	139,189	5,149

On a conservative estimate, there are 27,147 gays and lesbians in Berkshire.

2.2 Local Issues

The Berkshire Anti-Homophobia Group initially identified two basic and broad tasks. These can be summarised as:

- (a) Improving individual and community safety for bisexual, gay, lesbian and trans-gendered people in Berkshire;
- (b) Improving the delivery of services by the police (and other agencies charged with individual and community safety), more specifically, improving the delivery of services for victims of homophobia and homophobic crime.

To meet these objectives, it was felt necessary to first ‘map’ the incidence of homophobia and homophobic crime locally through a county-wide Homophobic Incidents Survey. This need reflected a recognition of three local issues. Firstly, that homophobia, homophobic crime, and police response were not being systematically recorded or monitored. Secondly, (and as a result of the first) that under-reporting encouraged the false belief that homophobia and homophobic crime are not important or significant issues. And thirdly, that anecdotal evidence from individuals and community organisations suggested that homophobia and homophobic crime *are* important and significant issues.

It is the Berkshire Anti-Homophobia Group’s intention – armed with the results of the survey – to develop services for the victims of homophobia and homophobic crime; to introduce these issues onto the agenda of local agencies, decision-makers, opinion-formers, etc; and to raise the issues of homophobia and homophobic crime in the wider community.

2.3 The Crime and Disorder Act

As well as the local impetus discussed above, the Crime and Disorder Act (1998) placed a duty on local authorities and police areas to work together to address the issues of crime and disorder. More specifically, there is a requirement for these agencies to work together to implement a three-year strategy, including short and long-term performance targets for reducing crime and disorder. This involves:

- (a) Reviewing the levels and patterns of local crime and disorder;
- (b) Publishing a report analysing the audit's implications for a crime reduction strategy;
- (c) Consulting with partners prescribed by the Home Secretary and others with an interest;
- (d) Formulating and publishing a strategy for the reduction of crime and disorder.

The Home Office recommended that local authorities and police areas pay particular attention to hard-to-reach social groups, including the gay and lesbian community:

It is absolutely central to the success of the partnerships that they should be seen as credible and inclusive by *all* sections of the community. It is likely that the Home Secretary will use ... [the] powers [in the] Crime and Disorder Act to require the police and local authorities to invite the full participation of gay and lesbian groups in the work of the new partnerships. This should do much to ensure that issues of concern to these groups are not overlooked when the audit is conducted and the strategy developed. Seeking the involvement of the gay and lesbian community must be an *active* process not a passive one. This community is not always visible, and may for historical reasons not find it easy to engage in a dialogue with some of the groups involved in the partnerships; it will *not* be enough just to write to the local pressure group inviting it to send a representative to a meeting and then thinking that your obligation to this sector of the community is discharged. You must develop creative and flexible ways to break down any barriers which may exist locally, and to encourage full and active engagement in the work by local gay and lesbian people (Home Office,1998).

It is anticipated that the results of the Homophobic Incidents Survey will inform the county's crime and disorder audits and strategies, and that it's future work will contribute to the on-going process of community safety and crime reduction.