

Area Board Briefing Note

On 1st January 2010 Anjem CHOUDARY announced that Islam4UK intended to march through Wootton Bassett to draw attention to the number of Muslims killed in the conflict in Afghanistan.

There was no specific intelligence at the time to indicate if, when or where any march would actually take place. However, the item became the focus of national press speculation that resulted in significant Community Impact.

A number of political and community groups such as English Defence League (EDL) stated an intention to counter demonstrate in opposition of Islam4UK should a march take place. Mainstream Muslim groups condemned the proposed action by Islam4UK and emphasised that Mr Choudary was not representative of the majority Muslim view. Also, several senior politicians, including the Prime Minister, made comment in the press on the subject.

Due to the potential consequences of such an event and the impact it would have on public order and community confidence a Gold Group was established. The membership of the group consisted of a wide range of internal key managers from Wiltshire Police and various senior members of other agencies including the Fire Service, Ambulance Service, Health Authority and the Local Authority. Swindon Borough Council and local communities were included in the operational plans to ensure a pan Wiltshire approach was adopted.

Regular meetings were held and a great deal of work was carried out on how to contain a protest and counter any potential fall out from it. The planning of this demonstrated the benefits of a network of partners working together to achieve a desired aim and all involved should be congratulated for their dedication.

One of the main areas for consideration within the early meetings was the key messages which should be included in any media statement. As a result of using the shared experiences and knowledge of the partnership it was felt that any press release should remain impartial and contain the following:-

- Wiltshire Police & Wiltshire Council are aware of the recent media reports and the significant concern this has caused.
- Within the Public Order Act 1986 there is clear legislation that allows for either the imposition of conditions upon or an application to the Local Authority for the banning of a demonstration where *serious disorder* is anticipated.
- If a demonstration does go ahead, Wiltshire Police will facilitate peaceful, lawful demonstration where public safety is the paramount concern.
- This is a very emotive issue where normally passive members of the community are expressing strong and sometimes unpalatable views. However the local community within Wootton Bassett have supported the solemnity and dignity of the repatriation of service personnel. It is our intention to work closely with the community to maintain what has been achieved over the past 2 years in over 100 repatriations.

As a result of our efforts, when a rumour of Islam4UK attending Wootton Bassett on 10th January 2010 hit the Internet, we were prepared for the influx of people into the town to manage it.

Although, Islam4UK had no intention of attending, the rumour was nurtured by EDL resulting in a significant show of strength. The general nature of the crowd was calm and there were no significant incidents due, in no small part, to the prior planning and hard work leading up to this event.

During the evening of Sunday, 10th January Islam4UK issued a statement that they no longer intended to march through Wootton Bassett. This has received widespread national coverage. On

12th January 2010 the Home secretary announced that he will proscribe Islam4UK and its various derivatives.