Law Student Experiences Homophobia by Senior Lincolnshire Police Officer

Wednesday 29 May, 2013

Reece Wilkes a 20 year old University of Lincoln Law Student applied to Lincolnshire Police as Special Constable and was shocked by the interviewing officer's homophobic comments. Reece attended an interview on 23rd January 2013 and was happy that the interview seemed to be going well until Inspector Gary Elliot asked him if he could recall a time when he 'had to tell someone something which they may find difficult or upsetting' Reece felt he had the perfect answer and told Inspector Elliot about his experience of coming out to his mother and how this had upset her. Inspector Elliot's demeanour changed and he interrupted Wilkes blasting 'Of course she would as she won't have any grandchildren'.

"I felt dehumanised and humiliated. I felt that it was morally wrong to be gay and at that point I wished I was heterosexual. It still makes me feel like that to this day. As people who are gay, have to constantly 'come out' throughout their lives, I personally now feel worried and ashamed of myself" Reece Wilkes. Following the outburst by the senior police officer, Wilkes felt uncomfortable for the remainder of the interview and decided to contact Lincolnshire Police afterwards and make a complaint to ensure the force were aware of the comments made by the Inspector. A number of emails were sent backwards and forwards and Lincolnshire Police offered Mr Wilkes a second interview in front of a different panel and assured him that the new panel would not be made aware of his first interview, the incident during the interview and his subsequent complaint.

It transpired that the new interview panel were made aware of his first interview and the new panel included the Head of the Special Constabulary, who admittedly doesn't sit in on interviews of new recruits. A letter from HR confirmed that Mr Woodhouse (the Head of the Special Constabulary) had been made aware of the situation and had agreed to a second interview. Despite assurances from the force after the first interview, Reece endured a second interview with a panel who were fully aware of the previous incident and his complaint against the interviewing Inspector.

"Mr Woodcock lied to me about not been aware of my prior interview. I explicitly was reassured that the subsequent panel would not be aware, however it has been confirmed that the Head of the Special Constabulary – Mr Woodcock who interviewed me was in fact aware and I believe this has prejudiced the decision. Clearly the force does not want to think there will be 'distension in the ranks' so to speak." Reece Wilkes.

Reece who aspires to be a Member of Parliament has been offered a third interview by Lincolnshire Police but remains too upset and angry to entertain the idea of a third interview:

"I find it an insult that I have been offered a 3rd interview and that the onus lies with me to remedy this situation. Any reasonable person would consider this to be absurd, considering it was I who was the victim of a homophobic remark. This mess was created by Lincolnshire Police and it should be them who deal with it in a professional manner. I will not act in a defeatist manner – the objective was to become a Special Constable and I believe it is important to be persistent, however due to the prejudice of Lincolnshire Police I doubt this will happen". Reece Wilkes.

"Comments of this nature have no place in a modern police force let alone a work place. I am shocked and saddened to hear not only of the incident but the bungled investigation to-date which has served only to perpetuate the insensitivity and compound the hurt experienced by Mr Wilkes. This isn't simply a matter of political correctness or offence caused by a technicality, this is a significant statement in the negative, uttered by a senior officer sitting as a member of an interview panel and the false assurances given to a complainant in order to quell frustration and upset following the incident.

This case highlights the insensitive and offensive comments by a senior officer towards someone wishing I volunteer his time as a special constable to better serve the community in which he lives. The follow up and initial investigation was flawed and fell significantly short of what any person would accept. It isn't good enough and it is back to the drawing board for Lincolnshire Police!" Rob McDowall, Chairperson, LGBT Network.

-ENDS-

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NOTES TO EDITORS

The LGBT Network is a collective of human right activists and is a registered charity in Scotland which campaigns and lobbies for true equality for the LGBTQ community.
LGBTQ is an acronym of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer or Questioning.

Lincolnshire Police adopt the acronym of PRIDE to highlight its aims and objectives. PRIDE stands for Professionalism, Respect, Integrity, Dedication and Empathy. More details at: http://www.lincs.police.uk/About/Our-Vision-and-Values/

Special Constables are volunteer police officers who receive expenses but no substantive remuneration for the work carried out. More details at: http://www.lincs.police.uk/Join-Us/Special-Constables/

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