Grandmother who objected to gay march is accused of hate crime

By Andrew Levy

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After witnessing a gay pride march, committed Christian Pauline Howe wrote to the council to complain that the event had been allowed to go ahead.

But instead of a simple acknowledgement, she received a letter warning her she might be guilty of a hate crime and that the matter had been passed to police.

Two officers later turned up at the frightened grandmother's home and lectured her about her choice of words before telling her she would not be prosecuted.



Threatened with prosecution: Pensioner Pauline Howe was warned she might be guilty of a hate crime after complaining about a gay rally

Mrs Howe, 67, whose husband Peter is understood to be a Baptist minister, yesterday spoke of her shock at the visit and accused police of 'wasting resources' on her case rather than fighting crime.

'I've never been in any kind of trouble before so I was stunned to have two police officers knocking at my door,' she said.

'Their presence in my home made me feel threatened. It was a very unpleasant experience.

'The officers told me that my letter was thought to be an intention of hate but I was expressing views as a Christian.'

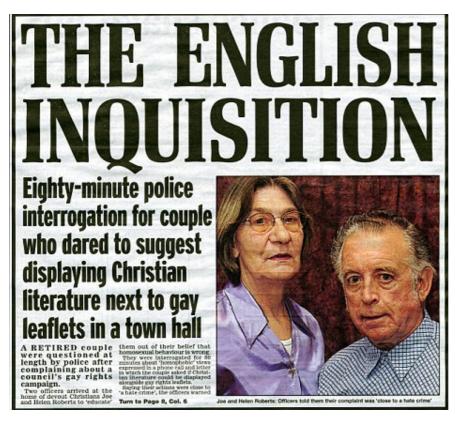
Mrs Howe's case has been taken up by the Christian Institute, which is looking into potential breaches of freedom of speech and religious rights under the Human Rights Act, either by Norwich City Council or Norfolk Police.

And homosexual equality pressure group Stonewall has branded the authorities' response 'disproportionate'.

Mrs Howe claims she was 'verbally abused' while distributing 'Christian leaflets' at the march in the centre of Norwich in July. She said someone 'whispered something in my ear and disappeared'. She fired off a letter to the council describing the march as a 'public display of

indecency' that was 'offensive to God'.

She wrote: 'It is shameful that this small but vociferous lobby should be allowed such a display unwarranted by the minimal number of homosexuals.'



An inspector calls: How The Daily Mail broke the story of Joe and Helen Roberts' police interrogation

The letter went on to describe homosexuals as 'sodomites', said homosexuality had 'contributed to the downfall of every empire' and added that 'gay sex was a major cause of sexually transmitted infections'.

But Mrs Howe told the Sunday Telegraph her comments were an expression of her beliefs, not homophobia. She received a response from the council's deputy chief executive, Bridget Buttinger, who said it was the local authority's 'duty... to eliminate discrimination of all kinds'.

She went on: 'The content of your letter has been assessed as potentially being hate related because of the views you expressed towards people of a certain sexual orientation.

'Your details and details of the contents of your letter have been recorded as such and passed to the police.'

The two police officers later turned up at her home in Poringland, near Norwich, and informed her the contents of her letter had caused offence.

The incident has echoes of the case of a pensioner couple who were lectured by officers from Lancashire Police on the evils of 'homophobia' and 'hate crimes' after criticising gay rights in a letter to Wyre Borough Council. Joe Roberts and his wife Helen, both Christians, were later awarded damages.

Christian Institute spokesman Mike Judge said yesterday: 'People must be free to express their beliefs - yes, even unpopular beliefs - to government bodies without fear of a knock at the door from police.

http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1222861/Pensioner-complained-gay-pride-march-warned-police-hate-crime.html

'It's not a crime to be Christian but it increasingly feels like it.'

Stonewall's chief executive, Ben Summerskill, said: 'Clearly her views are pretty offensive but nevertheless this [response] is disproportionate.'

Norfolk Police defended their treatment of Mrs Howe, saying: 'We investigate all alleged hate incidents. In this instance the individual

concerned was visited by officers, the comments discussed, and no further action was taken.'

 $Read\ more: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1222861/Pensioner-complained-gay-pride-march-warned-police-hate-crime.html \#ixzz0W6MZBCQx$