



FEEDBACK TO THE COMMUNITIES AND VICTIMS PANEL

FROM THE CHURCHES REGIONAL COMMISSION

FOR YORKSHIRE AND THE HUMBER

In response to the request to feedback into the Communities and Victims Panel we have gathered views from individuals in various communities around Yorkshire and the Humber and discussed it at a meeting of our Social Inclusion Task Group. Those who contributed to this process came from Leeds, Hull, Sheffield and Doncaster. We were familiar with other towns and cities in the region as well as with more remote rural areas through CRC's work with the farming community.

None of our group lived in places where there was any direct experience of rioting, though some live in or work with deprived urban communities. Yorkshire and the Humber was relatively unaffected by rioting during the summer. We still felt able to offer observations to the first three questions:

Why do you think the riots happened in some areas and didn't happen in other areas?

- We were of the opinion that what happened in the UK in August ought to be described differently in different places. Much of what took place could better be described as looting, so it is unhelpful to describe every disturbance as a riot.
- Where there were riots, it was our perception that people were rioting against a variety of things:
 - The police
 - Specific shops
 - Authority in general
- Obtusely, an informal capacity for self-organisation seemed to be a factor
- We wondered whether the summer weather, combined with a reduction in summer activities for young people, may have been a factor.
- In some parts of our region, especially where deprivation is acute, we believe that the population has learned to acquiesce in the face of authority. They have become habituated to exclusion and oppression in such a way that creating a disturbance barely occurs to them. This is not a good reason for their being no "riots" there.
- Equally, there are some communities who do not come into daily contact with the wealth that other people own. It may well be that London juxtaposes wealth and poverty in a way that exposes the social disparities that create tension.
- It is possible that the culture of local gangs is significant. In Sheffield, for instance, some observers believe that:
 - local postcode gangs have such a history of violence between them that working together to riot simply could not take place.
 - It is difficult for gangs to attack shops in local areas (where they felt safe and familiar), because there are no national Footlockers and Car Phone Warehouses. Many shops are small enterprises, takeaways/restaurants owned by local people that are not natural targets for angst.

How do you think communities can be made more socially and economically resilient in the future, in order to prevent future problems?

- The question is phenomenally complex with many factors at work. We therefore would choose to start by considering the bigger factors. Where advertising targets people with an image that "you are what you shop" and gives them the impression that they are less than human for not having the latest gadget/clothing/device, looting will become an attractive opportunity. The inequalities generated by our market society need to be addressed at a political level. Inevitably, young people

will feel harshly treated if they are given a sentence for handling stolen goods whilst bankers are given a bonus for increasing national debt which means that there are less services/ resources available to the local communities from which they (the young people) come.

- Powerlessness is an issue for particular communities, rather than in general. In these places, it may be necessary to find ways of helping people to voice to their anger without resorting to violence and theft.

In your opinion, what could have been done differently to prevent or manage the riots?

- We observed an over-reaction of the courts as a shock tactic to reinstate order rather than to see justice prevail. We felt that whilst society does need to say a clear no to riots, it is disappointing when that occurs at the expense of fair sentencing.
- The media response needs to be addressed. Where young people are described as “feral rats” it dehumanizes in a way that is unhelpful.
- One respondent recommended the reduction of police numbers, to be replaced by a disproportionately larger number of PCSOs.

We were unable to contribute to questions 4-6 as no significant disturbances took place within Yorkshire and the Humber.

We would conclude by suggesting that a proper piece of independent academic research around these questions is critically important. We would be disappointed if the Communities and Victims Panel was the only research work undertaken.

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