

**GENERAL SYNOD****“TESTING THE BRIDGES”:  
UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH AMIDST RIOTS,  
DISTURBANCES AND DISORDER****A report from the Mission and Public Affairs Council****Why this report now?**

1. Much research and analysis has been devoted to the disturbances which broke out in many neighbourhoods in August 2011. It is not the intention of this paper to duplicate that work or to reach definitive conclusions about the disturbances as a whole. Rather it seeks to highlight and reflect upon the actions of the churches in those neighbourhoods, during and after the disturbances, drawing on actions and events as the church people themselves described them.
2. Nor is this simply a retrospective exercise. The financial crisis of 2008, the impact of austerity measures introduced by the Coalition government since 2010, the “double-dip” recession and the ongoing effect of the wider economic problems in Europe, are pressing hard on many communities in Britain. Inevitably, it is the most vulnerable communities which are hardest hit and, as in previous recessions, local churches are becoming acutely aware of the stresses on individuals, families and community resilience.
3. At the meeting of the College of Bishops in September 2011, reports were received from many dioceses about the responses of clergy, laity and church groups during the disturbances. It was clear that the significance of the church’s ministry, and the lessons to be gained from it, needed to be gathered together and the Mission and Public Affairs Division was commissioned to produce a report.
4. The fieldwork for the report which follows was conducted by the Revd Dr Andrew Davey before he left MPA in February 2012 to return to urban parish ministry and was developed in close collaboration with the Urban Bishops’ Panel. The report has been discussed by the MPA Council and is offered with their authority and following engagement with the Bishop of Bath and Wells who has taken a close interest in the work.
5. The causes of the 2011 riots are complex and disputed. They have been attributed variously to social tensions, a reaction against cuts to government and local authority funding, the impact of social media or simple wickedness. No one explanation is likely to be adequate. It remains that the impact of current economic problems on already-vulnerable people contributes to a feeling of hopelessness which may sometimes emerge in destructive and anti-social actions. The fact that the current pressures on the vulnerable are taking place against a background of very wide, and growing, inequality of wealth, adds a further dimension to the problems of building social cohesion.

6. None of that background helps to predict whether similar disturbances will happen again. But the ministry and mission of the church continues, embedded in every local community, and a focus on last year's events from the point of view of Christian witness carries many lessons for other areas and other contexts. Often, the social capital which remains in hard-pressed areas is provided by faith communities and especially by the churches with their long history of presence in every community.
7. The simple acts of ministry and citizenship performed by churches and their members last August deserve to be highlighted because they represent a commitment to the common life, and common good, of local communities in ways which are not common. Such actions deserve to be widely recognised, not least by strident secularists who see religious commitment as an anti-social tendency.
8. But there is no room for complacency in the church. The report draws out something of the unpreparedness and vulnerability of clergy and laity who sought to respond authentically to what was going on. To a great extent, they made it up as they went along – and, often, their instincts, informed by faith, were right. But in hard economic times many communities will face intolerable stresses – and the church's response, whether to high profile disturbances or hidden local despair – matters intensely.

### **The Disturbances of August 2011**

*One priest described the events in his area as a 'testing of the bridges' – the relationships which had been developed over the years had taken the strain, and might prove able to hold as new challenges arose.*

9. Sixty six areas or neighbourhoods experienced civil disturbances between Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> August. Looting, arson, violence against the police, damage to homes, vehicles and businesses, and five deaths have all been widely reported. Much effort has gone into understanding events and attempts to find underlying causes – the results published by the Guardian/LSE, the Riots Panel for Communities and Victims, Nat Cen and others all bring analytical resources to bear on events and subsequent data. Our purpose here is not to duplicate this work but to focus on the role and witness of the churches in the affected areas.<sup>1</sup>
10. The media were not slow to explain the causes of the disturbances in terms that fitted their preoccupations. But contrary to the early media accounts, the evidence of serious research has shown that the events did not escalate through the use of Twitter (although other electronic communications were involved at times) and the activities were not orchestrated by gangs. Intuitive explanations often turned out to be false. It has become apparent that the causes were complex, and the absence of a single forensic narrative has left many uneasy about drawing conclusions about what happened. Many are reluctant to label all the events as riots – while disturbances and disorder were witnessed on a widespread basis there was little to indicate a cohesive notion of protest or discontent behind what happened.

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<sup>1</sup> For those who wish to explore the literature as it emerges, there are interesting cross-overs. The interim report of the Riots Panel identifies church leaders as key participants in community alliances which help build resilience in places at risk.

11. Inevitably, comparisons were drawn with the urban disturbances of 1981 – events which led to an Archbishops’ Commission on Urban Priority Areas and to the seminal Church of England report, *Faith in the City*. Much in 2011 is very different from 1981. But one major similarity was the presence and witness of the local church, clergy and laity, both during the disturbances and in their aftermath.
12. This report draws on the experience of Church of England clergy in Birmingham, Hackney, Manchester, Leicester, Salford, Peckham, Toxteth, Clapham, Tottenham, Croydon, Walworth, Deptford, Walthamstow and Wolverhampton during and after the disturbances. Individual interviews took place during the autumn with 16 clergy, plus 1 Archdeacon and 2 bishops. Group discussions were held with one clergy chapter in Liverpool, and a small seminar in South London. Clergy were interviewed in their own locality and this often involved a walk around the area affected, along with further informal conversation. One priest shared her report to the Riots Panel who had visited her area. We have also shared material with the research project sponsored by the London Churches Group which is considering the role of churches in the capital.

## The Disturbances

### **Exploring the Context**

13. With so many different areas affected, it is not surprising that the stories have varied greatly from place to place. Basic matters of demographics, context and geography were significant in affecting what happened and how people were able to respond – for example metropolitan city centres and retail parks with electrical ‘box stores’ were targeted differently to local urban shopping areas. The levels of aggression against non-portable property and the police were not consistent. A minority of places experienced arson which affected commercial and residential buildings whilst in other places damage was confined to windows and parked cars.
14. The mobile nature of the events makes a locational analysis problematic in relation to those involved, and particularly those arrested. Much of the disorder passed through places, drawing participants from a larger area through social networking, rather than being the actions of local residents. A locational approach is more appropriate in considering how those whose ministry places them in a particular situation responded in their communities during the disorder as well as in the aftermath and clear up.
15. Policing tactics varied greatly. There were a number of different strategies for police officers attempting to control or disperse crowds and protect different types of property. Efforts to prevent crowds reaching some high value shopping areas often meant that the crowd’s frustrations were worked out in side streets on parked vehicles and small businesses. A number of people have commented on how the assignment of local police to other cities, followed by drafting in police from other forces into unfamiliar communities and terrain, made it more difficult to establish a context-sensitive approach.
16. For many, the initial response was one of astonishment and shock. Even in some places where disorder broke out later (on the Tuesday and Wednesday) it was a surprise when trouble came to particular places. There seems to be no specific pattern of behaviour or conditions that sparked activities, and no immediate reason why some areas suffered rather than others. The televising of disturbances in London seems to have led to some ‘copycat’ opportunist behaviour where there was no obvious local spark or discontent. Very similar conditions exist in many places which were unaffected and attempts to initiate disorder and looting through social media seem to have fallen on stony ground. Many places did not experience unrest but were bombarded with the media coverage of events. Such blanket coverage has altered or reinforced negative perceptions of the areas affected, and interviewees reported conversations with friends and relations who were fearful for them.
17. Clergy became aware of activity and potential incidents in a variety of ways – they observed groups gathering, or picked up news of events through congregation and community contacts, or social media. One particularly well connected source of information seems to have been head teachers who were working during the summer vacation. While rumour levels were high, some found it hard to distinguish what was going on from the regular levels of anti-social activity normally present in the area – ‘causing bother’, or everyday ‘low level grumblings’. In some areas there was an awareness of previous riots, not least as the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1981 disturbances

(or ‘uprisings’ as some described them) had been marked with high levels of media coverage. Other areas were caught unprepared because they had not had previous histories of unrest. One priest suggested that the act of boarding up shops had surrendered the area to destructive behaviour – ‘it was a moment when virtue went away and evil entered’.

18. Since the disturbances, there have been many arrests and some severe prison sentences for offenders. As noted in the Appendix, a high percentage of those convicted had one or more previous convictions. There has been much speculation that (especially with modern identification technology) the police found it easier to identify, and therefore arrest, those already known to them, hence the high proportion of repeat offenders apparently involved. Since the riots involved many more than were arrested or convicted, it is very difficult to draw a really accurate profile of those involved.

### **Churches within their communities**

<p><i>Churches had earned their place as part of the community through their pastoral presence and links within local networks.</i></p>
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19. Interviewees spoke about their churches’ place in the community. Most have an embedded, well rooted presence that is already engaged with the issues of the parish community. A London incumbent felt that, despite high turnovers in congregations and local populations, churches had earned their place as part of the community through their pastoral presence and links within local networks, and that this was widely acknowledged. Open and well-used church buildings were a sign of outward looking congregations providing space and potential for interaction. (Church buildings were almost entirely unscathed during attacks on local property, although one church in London was damaged). Through their concern for community ‘wellbeing’, churches had often become partners in community initiatives and regeneration activities in recent years. But, in the face of spending cutbacks, many partnerships and programmes are coming to a planned end or face closure, and this means that such modes of involvement in the community need rethinking. However, it was felt that past involvement in such activities had provided a clear foundation for future engagement.
20. For those interviewed, their work with schools (church and community) was seen as a particularly effective way to ‘get underneath the skin’ of communities. This involved support for staff as well as pupils. Extended school activities and youth work provided important points of contact but seemed to be increasingly under threat.
21. Those working in less populated city centres spoke of rebuilding the church’s presence in areas that had been much changed by retail-led regeneration and new patterns of residence. They felt that the church’s future presence would need to be less dependent on buildings, existing in a ‘network of living relationships’, and manifested through groups such as street pastors. One pioneer group found itself developing relationships with those who were in the city centre outside the times when traditional churches were usually active.

## Considering the causes

*The rise in youth unemployment, with little prospect of worthwhile work or training, may mean that young people are undeterred from risks which, in a different economic climate, might have damaged their chances of accessing work. Now that the prospect of work seems so remote, there are fewer deterrents.*

22. In conversations about what had happened in different places it was apparent that there was no single cause or reason for disturbances breaking out, yet a general discontent seems an unsatisfactory explanation for events. There was some surprise and puzzlement that some groups who might have been expected to figure in the disturbances were mostly absent. There were no significant tensions in areas with significant Asian populations (except in Birmingham), and few reports of disturbances on outer estates (although mapping projects which plotted where the known perpetrators lived, as well as the locations of disorder, do demonstrate a connection with such estates even though the disturbances took place elsewhere).<sup>2</sup>
23. Those in poorer areas speak of a sense of increasing pressure and despair as services disappear - youth work and youth centres, legal and advice services are under threat or have already been shut, the Educational Maintenance Allowance has been slashed and people are fearful about the impending impact of further cuts. (Most of those spoken agreed that the full extent and impact of cuts was not yet evident). Detached youth workers were still active in some areas, one council having delayed its redundancy plans to staff summer holiday activities. Many interviewees shared their fears that these options will not be available in the future. The rise in youth unemployment, with little prospect of worthwhile work or training, may mean that young people are undeterred from risks which, in a different economic climate, might have damaged their chances of accessing work. Now that the prospect of work seems so remote, there are fewer deterrents.
24. In some places, it was suggested that there was little evidence of the disturbances being protests – what was witnessed was seen as destruction for the sake of destruction and general looting which targeted specific stores.
25. Nevertheless, the trigger event for all the riots was the police shooting of Mark Duggan in Tottenham, and the perceived failure of officers in Tottenham to respond appropriately to the concerns of the black community. Clergy in the immediate context thought that this was a significant factor in what followed, but those caught up in subsequent events away from Tottenham, who saw the involvement of a broad cross-section of communities, were definite that the disturbances could not be caricatured as ‘race riots’.
26. However, the disorder in Liverpool and Tottenham was felt to have highlighted certain issues for and in the black communities, particularly with the anniversary of the 1981 disturbances in the background. When clergy spoke to those on the streets, they heard many accounts of the perceived abuse of stop and search powers by the police. One priest reported that the policing on the night by officers from outside the area had been heavy handed. Church people in other areas mentioned a distrust of, or contempt for, the

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/interactive/2011/aug/16/riots-poverty-map>

police. One priest reported overhearing contemptuous comments made by adults to children as police came under attack. Some of the businesses and retail areas which were attacked were those claiming to provide new employment opportunities for local people but which were perceived to be discriminatory in who was hired. For some, this heightened the feeling that little had changed since 1981.

27. When some Asian-owned small shops had been targeted in other areas, it was suggested that there were racist motives. In Birmingham, the need to protect local businesses near to the city centre brought many local residents onto the streets leading to clashes with those going to or coming from the city centre. The killing of three Asian men who had been trying to protect their area created considerable tensions in the community.
28. Perhaps the most impressive and memorable response to the disturbances was the reaction of Tariq Jahan, the father of one of the men who died, who publicly repudiated retaliation or revenge and called for calm within hours of his son's death. "I don't blame the government. I don't blame the police. I don't blame nobody. It was his destiny and his fate, and now he's gone", he said.
29. The deaths in Birmingham emphasised how the disturbances had an impact across the culturally diverse urban communities and how the solidarities within some communities created a degree of resilience. The Christian churches were not the only faith communities whose ethos enabled them to witness to reconciliation and understanding.

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### **What happened?**

30. Interviewees were aware that the crowds that gathered were rarely local and were often made up of people testing areas to see if there was the possibility of easy spoils. People had seen what was possible and it needed very little prompting for a crowd to gather. After Tottenham, many spoke of 'copycat' behaviour – the possibility of 'something for nothing' or the thrill of being part of a series of events which were fixating the national media. One priest felt that the constant and repetitive media coverage had an almost 'hypnotic' affect as people seemed to be 'getting away with it'. The numbers of spectators have also been mentioned, some of whom were drawn into events they had only come to watch. Another priest said that her first impression was of a crowd gathering as 'an audience for a riot that wasn't happening', which needed some action to justify being there.
31. Clergy witnessed looting in shopping areas – this included sportswear, electrical, and high-end goods, as well as food and everyday things, even water and nappies, from supermarkets and 'pound shops'. A more organised criminal approach was observed when stashes were seen in a churchyard waiting to be collected, maybe using the disorder as a cover for prearranged raids. Elsewhere people appeared to be concerned with obtaining goods for personal use or as trophies – one interviewee reported seeing looters comparing trainers to obtain the right size. Peer pressure was evident, as were parents sending children into shops with bags. It was not obvious that gangs were

involved, observers report that the animosity between ‘postcode gangs’ was not apparent in the internal behaviour of the crowds.

32. The line between spectators and participants often became blurred, a degree of voyeurism being reported. Some who had come out to see what was happening were quickly caught up in the thrill of the moment or just picking up things that had been discarded on the streets. Events which had been relayed in the media were a spectacle and there were reports of people using their phones to take photos and videos, sometimes of the activities they were directly involved in. A number of people in vulnerable areas mentioned the obvious presence of outsiders – some seen in cars (often larger 4x4s and people carriers) driving around to see what was happening, or egging on already worked up groups of young people.
33. The targets of aggression varied. Commercial premises suffered – particularly through looting, this was not solely large branches or franchises but some locally managed pubs and shops. A housing office was ransacked in Salford, as well as employment offices in Tottenham. Police stations were also attacked.
34. Those who found themselves in the crowds have spoken of mayhem and anarchy – people were ‘feeling high, it was almost a party’, ‘a party out of control’, ‘not feral but without boundaries’, ‘laddish on a big scale’. For observers the atmosphere was not always personally threatening with aggression mostly directed at property and the police. Others speak of general confusion as people found they were unable to comprehend what was happening around them as they witnessed familiar places taking on unfamiliar and alarming aspects.
35. Some were distressed by what was happening, they were left anxious and frightened, particularly those who felt stranded or trapped as public transport was blocked off or closed down. The prevalence of hoods and balaclavas added a sinister element. Incidents involving arson seem to have been the greatest threat and most feared – the ‘torching’ (or threatened torching) of premises, particularly those with adjacent accommodation. In Tottenham and Croydon numbers of people were made homeless after this type of arson. While churches and community spaces seem to have been left alone, a large fire in neighbouring commercial premises came very close to damaging Croydon Minster.
36. There have been mixed reactions to the police response and the role of the police in the run up to, or aftermath of, the disturbances. Some felt that the police were unprepared, and it was certainly apparent that they were overstretched. Smaller crowds seem to have been quickly dispersed allowing the police to move on. The police obviously had to make decisions about spatial tactics and to judge the importance of some places over others. One bishop described it as ‘an extraordinary job in difficult circumstances’. A general observation was how the policing of the disturbances differed to the regular community policing of the areas affected.



## Witness on the streets

*“We needed to be there ... it was the right place to be ... the church needed to be visible out there in some shape or form”*

37. As it was August some clergy were ‘in residence’ and others on holiday. Those who were away from parishes spoke of feeling ‘displaced’; if they knew what was happening they were in touch with parishioners and colleagues immediately. We have not encountered clergy who returned early from holiday (although some bishops did). One retreat at Walsingham was cut short to enable the group to return to the parish where they joined in the support that was being offered from the church hall to local residents and emergency services.
38. During the events, and in the aftermath, some clergy felt it important to be out on the streets and visible (collars and cassocks), though it was not always apparent to them what they were meant to do once they were out there. Most discovered a role as some kind of ‘prayerful presence’, deliberately stopping and praying with those they encountered, as well as engaging in numerous conversations about what was happening, the causes and the prospects. People needed to talk about what they were witnessing and how they understood events. Those who interacted with the police felt that their visibility was appreciated as ‘another uniform’ and a church which provided a respite centre for the hard-pressed police officers received numerous cards of gratitude later. Some felt that they deflected and absorbed some of the anger. There seem to have been few other ‘public figures’ out on streets – some interviewees have mentioned encountering councillors or ecumenical colleagues such as city mission members on a prayer walk.
39. In Hackney the Bishop of Stepney joined the Rector on the streets, at one stage they found themselves negotiating with police and crowd when an elderly woman who had experienced a fall needed to be moved to an ambulance. In Manchester, a city centre priest tried to help a group of boys who had come into the city centre with their skateboards and found themselves stranded. In Toxteth clergy stood with local parents who had gone out in hi-viz vests to encourage young people to get off the streets. A priest/chaplain in Salford found herself at the centre of the disorder during a regular visit to her local shopping centre, wearing her collar she found herself engaging with others in the crowd as well as being a deterrent for some she encountered. Another found himself alongside a member of a church youth group looking for a younger brother.
40. Street pastors and similar groups were not present on the streets, or were advised to keep away by police during the disturbances. In the nights following the disturbances their attendance was greatly appreciated when the police presence was still quite high. Their visibility, and the conversations they engaged in with police, private security and those who had ventured into city centres, was felt to contribute to the ability of the night time life of the city to return to normal.
41. In Walthamstow, a casual conversation between a local MP and two church leaders led to the creation of a respite centre for police officers from across the country who were working extraordinarily long shifts under great pressure. This continued for eight days

and offered a makeshift dorm, up to 200 hot meals a day and even a suite of phone chargers. This was supported by local volunteers and businesses.

42. Those who were not on the streets spoke of the strangeness and anguish of seeing local landmarks on the televisions as they phoned around congregation members in affected areas. Congregational and house group networks sprang into action. From this experience, some realised their lack of contact information and the need to keep lists updated. Others found they had social networking skills of which they were previously unaware.

*Churches opened their halls as respite centres for the emergency services as well as those who were made homeless, networking began with other community groups, support was offered to those who had taken on specific responsibilities.*

### **The morning after, and beyond**

*The presence of bishops and archdeacons was appreciated.*

43. Immediate responses to the disturbances drew in more participants. Churches opened their halls as respite centres for the emergency services as well as those who were made homeless, networking began with other community groups, support was offered to those who had taken on specific responsibilities, such as the Salvation Army's emergency centre in Tottenham. Cakes were taken by one church group to the local police station.
44. Churches were kept open for prayer and reflection, as well as being quiet and safe spaces in case people needed them. Vigils and prayer services were publicised by local radio stations. One congregation used Post-it notes attached to a cross to express their prayers for the community, in a similar way to how people had left notes of hope on broken windows on a nearby shopping street.
45. Clergy were back on the streets assisting the clear up and engaging in many conversations. In one encounter a priest found his task described as 'spreading the love'. Some encountered shock and trauma, particularly in places where fires had destroyed homes. Clergy were central to setting up hardship funds and support for those who were left without accommodation or clothes by fires.
46. Congregation members took part in a number of the impromptu sweep up events that took place, often joined by church dignitaries who were visiting affected areas. In one place the clean-up was initiated by a city centre priest through Twitter – 'it was more cool to be clearing up than rioting' — and this had drawn in young people from a broad cross section of ethnic and religious communities. This was seen as an act of civic solidarity that contradicted the media message by putting young people in a positive light. In some places it was difficult to use all the voluntary help that was offered, particularly in places where police cordons were in place. One priest described the offer of help to clear up the trashed shop of one small business as being a 'spontaneous moment of grace'.
47. Clergy appreciated the support they received from Bishops and Archdeacons. Those who were not on holiday (or who returned) were very evident in their visits and presence at vigils and other events. (Though at least two places have mentioned a sense

of disappointment with church leaders posing with broom armies rather than engaging with the communities most painfully affected). Pastoral letters which were sent to all churches in the diocese were appreciated as they addressed a wider circle of concern.

48. The convening of diocesan and deanery forums was felt to be important as they enabled clergy to talk freely about what had been happening with each other and plan possible responses. (One church had had an ecumenical prayer gathering planned for the Monday night to intercede for communities affected and pray for peace in that locality, and had to cancel the event when local disorder broke out.)
49. The following Sunday saw congregations reflecting on what had happened. This was the opportunity for larger gatherings of prayer, mutual support and commitment. Inviting in the community to such events was seen as important, with invitations going to local traders, the police etc. Again the presence of bishops and archdeacons was appreciated. Partner churches from richer unaffected areas also provided support and often crossed cities despite some initial fears to join vigils and services.
50. Peace and prayer walks took place. One church used the opportunity of the Feast of the Assumption for a street procession. Larger ecumenical gatherings took place in retail areas or parks. In Birmingham churches initiated a larger community gathering which then had to negotiate the needs of a multi-faith gathering during Ramadan.
51. A week on, one church was instrumental in holding a street party – using the church tables and tea urns, and well supported and fed by local and larger businesses. Local children were given chalks to create hopeful pavement art, and the event was described as a significant healing moment.
52. Clergy were targeted by the media for comment in the following days. As eye witnesses and representatives of the local community most seem to have found this an important role. Diocesan communication officers sprang into action, though some did not always have a working knowledge of the areas involved or an awareness of parish boundaries. Blogs were used and sometimes picked up by national media.<sup>3</sup>
53. Existing and new formations of community networking swung into action in the aftermath. Clergy were invited into community forums and were in contact with local councillors and MPs. The presence of bishops and others was appreciated in some places where there were tensions in community meetings, particularly with the police. A number of universities set up impromptu forums of academics and activists to reflect on events and possible responses.
54. A few clergy who were comparatively new in post have found their local orientation rapidly speeded up – ‘six months community induction in a few hours’. These contacts were seen as important, though councillors were considered increasingly powerless and peripheral.
55. In Birmingham a priest commented that it had been the woman curate who was able to traverse some of the ‘gendered spaces’ which became apparent during a time of

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/aug/10/salford-riots-greed-disenfranchised>  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2011/aug/10/tottenham-riots-church?INTCMP=SRCH>

community and family mourning for the three Asian men who had been killed. She was able to go into domestic situations which he would have been unable to access.

56. Clergy are participating in ongoing local and national inquiries, including the Independent Panel on Communities and Victims, as well as that instigated by Citizens UK in North London. One group had already found that their involvement during the disturbances, in the clear up and as a continuing presence had brought them into the civic imagination of the council, and they were being asked to take on new responsibilities and take leadership in city centre events. 'Our voice has been authenticated by service'.

## **Reflecting**

*“...we sometimes wonder what we are doing going round having conversations and connecting – maybe that’s the thing: there’s something quite profound that we mustn’t stop doing.”*

57. Interviewees were asked how they had reflected on events, what theological insights had they drawn on and how their understanding of their role and that of the church had been affected.

### **Theological reflections**

58. Most interviewees reported how the regular services were used as the opportunity for intercession and reflection through sermons and discussion. On subsequent Sundays clergy have reflected on various aspects of what has happened in the light of already planned lections. One church had embarked on a sermon series looking at the Ten Commandments, ‘relevant in every age’. It was expected that the tenth commandment would have particular relevance because the looting had shown that ‘coveting is a big issue’. Some felt there was a need for prophetic engagement with the culture of acquisition and consumption.
59. The role of the watchman in Ezekiel 33 emerged in the lectionary in early September, with insights on how that role had been played out by the church at national and local levels during August. Another parish had considered the reality of redemption against the reality of sin and suffering; while another had reflected on the nature of Christian hope in a climate of hopelessness. One congregation, which was working through Romans, had considered the confusion between sin and crime, as well as the structural sin inherent in unstable family relationships. A city centre congregation had reflected on the ‘exile options’ offered by Jeremiah – do we abandon hope, withdraw and keep ourselves pure, or settle and seek the peace of the city? Their determination was to order their life around ‘worshipping fully, loving all and serving the city’. The feast of the Assumption had allowed one parish to reflect on the role of Mary as mother of a man condemned as a criminal and a sign of the potential of redemption through suffering. One group of clergy said there was little change in tempo as their sermons were always contextual, engaged and political.
60. The ultimate end of the Church’s engagement with those involved or affected by the disturbances was seen as transformation, but different emphasises were apparent in the types of transformation sought or recognised. This was a matter of emphasis rather than a polarisation of approaches – for all, the transformation of individual lives was put alongside the transformative changes hoped for in the local community. For some, the priority was the personal transformation of those connected to their youth work or related programmes. For others, the priority was given to transforming communities into places of hope and affinity. Most expected such work to happen in partnership with the local authority and/or local ecumenical or community partners. A minority thought that their church community had the resources that were needed for the task ahead.
61. One incumbent, however, mentioned that there had been little reflection or comment in the congregation on what had happened; events were seen as a ‘one night wonder’ in an

area ‘known for its criminality’. He also commented that a broom army in his area would never happen.

### **Engagement and credibility**

*“The last five years of leg work (has) built relationships.”*

62. While the disturbances made unprecedented demands on clergy, their staff and the networks they were involved in, most said that they did not have to start from scratch: ‘the last five years of leg work (has) built relationships’. There was confidence in how clergy were able to approach the situations they were confronted with, and this confidence had grown from being in the eye of previous storms. In Manchester and Leicester, the recent work of networking in the city centre communities when faced with the English Defence League meant that there were good relationships in place with town centre managers, the council and police. Others considered that Street Pastors, and similar schemes, had built important relationships over the years which had now been highlighted in recent activities.
63. For most the events have underlined ongoing strategies of community engagement – ‘*being* good news before we *share* good news’ – as well as provoking reviews of existing plans for youth work, work with ex-offenders, mentoring and other forms of volunteering. One church has been emphasising the need to shop locally and support local businesses that had been affected.
64. Most see the task ahead as ‘business as usual’, recognising that existing and planned programmes intend to reach those beyond traditional ministry through partnerships to develop social, spiritual and economic wellbeing in the community. A ‘galvanised resolve to keep doing what we do’, was how one priest described his team’s response. Another spoke of continuing to be a place of unconditional welcome and hospitality, and ‘an advocate for those who were overlooked’ and the investment that was vital if there was to be meaningful community engagement. One priest described the events in his area as a ‘testing of the bridges’ – the relationships which had been developed over the years had taken the strain, and might prove able to hold as new challenges arose. Another emphasised how a positive response had overcome the negative - ‘we have grown, and are stronger’
65. There was felt to be a lot still to reflect upon and develop. The riots had revealed the need to work at a number of different levels in neighbourhoods as well as within local authorities – some of the models of community development and organising did not fit every situation. Others commented that the riots did not respect the imaginary boundaries of local authorities, neighbourhood councils, parishes, or police divisions.

### **Impact and community**

66. Some fear that the disturbances will lead to an exodus of those who are able to move out of the affected areas with a subsequent impact on the numbers and skills within the congregation. Most felt a determination not to let areas be defined by what had happened or developed a victim / ‘sob-story’ mentality. Attempts by the media to denigrate the areas where disturbances had happened, as well as the way people were degraded or rejected as ‘feral’, needed to be strongly resisted.

67. The rapidity of change in some urban communities, and increasing disparities such as between those in private and social accommodation, those in and out of work and those in different schools, were felt to be increasingly entrenched locally and across cities. 'We are hugely disconnected (in this area)' was one comment. What had happened was significant spatially as people had come into (or attempted to enter) spaces from which they felt increasingly excluded. One priest suggested that a broom army had been a claim on space by local gentrifiers that had alienated long term residents.
68. A number of interviewees saw the events as a '*kairos* moment' of opportunity, confirming plans for work with young people and other marginalised group. Others sensed an urgency to engage, having prayed for wisdom it was a time to have faith that the word of God would lead to right action. Another said 'It is my hope that this will reawaken the sense of social responsibility of churches. The question is now being asked as to how this will help in the bigger picture.' One priest commented on it being a moment that would begin to help the congregation think more outwardly. Another commented that God's mission had become apparent, it was now the time to 'see it, grasp it and follow'.

### **Role of clergy and Church**

69. Most clergy have reflected on their visible and representative role in their parishes. One person commented that it was probably only the clergy who could be a visible presence and a sign of the church's concern. It was a role that has been earned, but one where there was a certain reticence about the significance because it was hard to explain logically. Comments included:

*'We needed to be there...it was the right place to be.....the church needed to be visible out there in some shape or form'*

*'You do the parish priest stuff...when the riots happened the relationships were there'.*

*'...we sometimes wonder what we are doing going round having conversations and connecting – maybe that's the thing, there's something quite profound that we mustn't stop doing. ,*

70. Others talked of the need to be seen at a moment of crisis, the ability to meet expectations of availability and mediation - 'someone who can tell them', a community champion or just 'knowing what to do as a priest'. The experience on the streets has unlined the need to renew the confident assertion that the church is here, recognisable, resilient. Many voiced the need for vocations and training to be orientated to working in affected areas; the potential of current models of formation to cultivate a mature and confident urban ministry was questioned. 'We need a confident assertion – the church is here doing what it should – recognisable, resilient'. The maintenance of a locational parish based ministry was emphasised – 'don't take the incumbents away' – as an expression that certain places still matter to the church and to God.

In a subsequent email a priest commented:

*There is nothing so powerful as the local church in its better moments. It is truly present where few others are; it offers a unique hope; it isn't dependent on short-term grants and ephemeral projects - and it doesn't go away!*

## **Christians, Churches and Communities**

*If these are the kind of things Christians are motivated to do for the sake of the good of the community and the wider society, what reasonable conclusions might we draw about what Christians actually believe?*

71. So far, we have given an account of what happened: the experience of communities during the disturbances and the responses of local churches (clergy and laity) to the events and their aftermath. The “what” is important, but so is the “why”. Some sense of the motives of those involved will already have emerged from the factual accounts above, but one thing that became apparent from the interviews is that relatively few church members and ministers have a clear and confident rationale for the actions that they took, often almost instinctively. In theological language, it is possible, retrospectively, to feel the presence of the Holy Spirit in the responses of churches and church people to the riots. But is it also possible to make a more systematic and theological statement about what was going on?
72. Attempting such a task is significant both for the church and for the worlds beyond the church. It is sometimes surprising how rarely Christians are affirmed – whether by the institutional church or by their fellow Christians – for the significance of what they are doing. For many church members, living the Christian life – and the ethical and social stances which flow from this – are so deeply internalised that they seem unremarkable. But in a wider context where deep religious illiteracy is common, the actions of Christians – not least in extraordinary circumstances such as those pertaining in August 2011 – are often very remarkable indeed.
73. As noted in paragraph 27, faithful responses to difficult situations are not confined to Christians – but it is with the actions and reflections of the Christian churches (especially the Church of England) that this report is primarily concerned.
74. Many church members are aware that their own ethics and practice are increasingly at odds with the predominant culture around them, but have few tools to express this to themselves. One result is that the distinctive Christian rationale for social action is obscured, even to those who are doing it, and many Christians feel somewhat vulnerable within wider circles of acquaintance, especially when explanations of their actions are met by blank looks or worse.
75. The significance of the actions which churches undertook after the riots is part of a bigger argument too. The place of Christians in society is increasingly fragile as a dominant discourse of human rights is often, in practice, taken to marginalise religious rights – indeed, religion is increasingly seen as a private matter to be conducted only behind closed doors and to be shunned in public debate and public activity. Christian action for the common good, along the lines exemplified by the churches in this survey, can be invisible to the wider community or even regarded as strange and transgressive behaviour. In a context where “rational choice theory” is assumed to be the sole significant motive for any social interaction, and where doing anything because it is right, rather than because it brings a direct benefit to the doer, is treated as irrational, acts of Christian altruism just don’t fit well into the dominant narrative.



76. In the actions of Christians such as those we have described, there is an important element of what might be called public and practical apologetics. Secular and atheistic assumptions often start with the suggestion that, because Christians (and other religious people) believe things which are claimed to have no foundation in reason, so their actions as Christians are sure to be irrational also. In crude terms (not so very far from the way it is often expressed) Christian belief is “bonkers” so Christian actions will be both bonkers and probably anti-social (since society is conceived atomistically as a free-for-all of diverse ideas and ideologies).
77. The globalisation of information has brought images of strident Christianity, especially in the USA, directly into the consciousness of everybody, but with little to help contextualise the images or explain how far they diverge from most indigenous British Christianity. But the actions and attitudes described in this report allow us to argue in the opposite direction: if these are the kind of things Christians are motivated to do for the sake of the good of the community and the wider society, what reasonable conclusions might we draw about what Christians actually believe? Below are six conclusions about Christian belief which can properly be deduced from the evidence of their actions during and after the riots.
- We noted the ministry of prayer in the heat of disturbing times; a ministry appreciated by all sorts of people, including local traders and members of the emergency services, although few clergy went out with the deliberate intention of praying in this way. The clear implication is that the ministry of prayer retains a considerable “traction” among ordinary people especially in stressful situations. **The fundamental Christian commitment to prayer meets a need in people that transcends the support and comfort than can be offered through conversation alone.**
  - We noted the refusal of the churches to collude with the sweeping generalisations often made against those perceived to be rioters, especially the young people of the neighbourhood. This was possible because the churches’ long term engagement with young people meant that the church members knew them as individuals and could resist the media desire to see them as a “feral mob”. The refusal to allow scapegoating is a crucial element in any civilised society and is a lesson which may need to be revisited more often now that the direct memory of Nazi and Communist totalitarianisms is fading. In the end, the commitment to avoid generalisations about whole classes and groups of people is intrinsic to a commitment to human equality where people are judged for who and what they are rather than made guilty by association. **Christians believe that all human beings are of equal worth and this motivates their actions in society.**
  - We noted that, in some cases, the sheer numbers of volunteers for the police respite centre or who turned up for the clean-up operation were greater than could easily be deployed. This abundant offer of time and effort is part of the Christian understanding of the gift relationship. Not every human transaction is adequately described by the dominant market model whereby nothing is offered without an overt or covert return. **Christians believe that social relationships run deep and that people are motivated by more than the expectation of personal benefit.**

- We noted the frequent references to conversations, and to connections. We saw how important the long term presence of the church, symbolising its commitment to the place, could be in enabling Christians to be trusted and to mediate in stressful situations. We saw how that presence needs to be visible for its commitment to be recognised. We saw how a ministry of welcome and hospitality continued onto the streets during and after the disturbances. **Christian commitment to the common good is not an abstract concept but a lived reality: the church is not only physically present in every community but believes in the significance of place for everybody’s well being.**
- We noted how churches had acted as advocates for people who are too often overlooked in society. But, at the same time, the churches were able to offer a ministry to the police and other services who had to confront the rioters. We saw how partnerships between richer and poorer parishes brought support to those experiencing fear and distress. We saw how some clergy and others were working with the concept of structural sin which recognises how people on all sides of conflicts can face moral choices that are not between what is clearly right and clearly wrong but which are necessitated by circumstances in response to situations where much has gone wrong already. **Christian beliefs about sin prevent them from stereotyping others and from dividing the world between good and evil in ways which ignore the complexity of moral contexts.**
- We noted how what goes on in church feeds and is fed by the actions of Christians on the streets and in communities. Churches are not to be judged as valuable merely because they supply volunteers or do laudable social work. The life of worship and prayer is integral, not peripheral, to the social witness of the church. As one parish response put it, the aim is to “worship fully, loving all and serving the city”. The church is not just another voluntary sector institution which happens to be based around religion. **Christians do what they do for the good of all because they worship a God who created all things and who gave his Son for the life of the world. Belief is not an optional extra for Christian activists any more than action is an optional extra for believers.**

78. Members of the churches involved – and the wider membership of the church – need to understand just how significant their actions have been, even though many are inclined to see what they did as unexceptional. None of the beliefs identified above are routinely attributed to Christians in society today. Nor is the behaviour which Christians routinely displayed during and after the riots entirely common across all sectors of society. Much of what the churches did – especially their role in the clean up operations – received widespread affirmation in the media, but their street-level witness in the middle of the troubles was largely unreported and may be difficult to convey to a wider audience as it seems so counter-intuitive to many.
79. On the whole, Christians have not been well schooled in connecting their beliefs to their actions. But in a wider social context where basic assumptions about love of neighbour and Christian charity have been eclipsed by a more instrumentalist view of other people and crude stratification of society along class or ethnic lines, instinctive Christian solidarity with neighbour and witness to the good in every community is uncommon and takes courage.

80. It has often been suggested, by church members as well as others, that one doesn't have to go to church to be good. Certainly Christians do not have a monopoly on virtue. Nevertheless, the evidence of this report, undramatic though most of it is, is that the church in its life of prayer and worship is a school for virtue – virtue, moreover, which the wider community can recognise, admire and celebrate, even if it does not always fully understand it.
  
81. The essential theological message of the churches' response to the riots is that Christians have, once again, risen to the challenges of a deeply divided and fragile society, and that they are enabled to do this because of, not in spite of, their beliefs about God, God's relationship to the world in Christ and the hope which the Spirit brings even to apparently hopeless situations. This is not an invitation to smugness but an invitation to look afresh at the centrality of faith in the cities of Britain and the ways in which worshipping God feeds a courageous commitment to the community, to one's brothers and sisters and to the wellbeing of all.

### **The Longer Term Significance of the Events**

82. How to assess the significance of last August's events is controversial. If no further disturbances of a similar nature occur in the near future, those who gave great attention to the events of August 2011 will no doubt be told they were exaggerating a mere "spasm" into something of deep significance. If further disturbances do break out, the August riots will be interpreted as a harbinger of a deep-seated social malaise and there will be wringing of hands that lessons were not learned sooner.
83. The church's practical responses to the events suggest that the disturbances were simultaneously unusual and deeply regrettable, but that they brought out something in the nature of the church's witness and mission which is, paradoxically quite normal and strangely laudable. The church's task is to stand publicly for a vision of a good society. The disturbances are tangible demonstrations that the society we have is deeply flawed and serves many people poorly, with a high incidence of alienation and the absence (or undervaluing) of mutual bonds. But a flawed society (and structural sin, already noted) is part of the Christian understanding of life on this side of the eschaton, so it is unsurprising that the Christian response to a sudden intensification of deep-seated problems was, in a sense, "business as usual".
84. The church is no more equipped than anyone else to make predictions about future behaviour or events. Judging whether the riots of August are of lasting, or merely transient, significance is more of a political question than a social one. That such events can happen, and spread so rapidly, suggests something deeply awry. The sinfulness of human nature cannot be ignored but neither can the part played by flawed social structures in creating the conditions for sin to manifest itself.
85. Both the Guardian/ LSE report and the Riots Panel suggest that unless a number of factors behind the disturbances are addressed further disorder is likely in the future. The Panel report raises the fear that cuts and other demands in summer 2012 will overstretch police forces and again leave gaps, particularly with the policing of the Olympic Games making demands on security and emergency services. The reflections of the clergy and people in the areas most affected drew strong attention to the, often fragile nature of the social institutions, projects, initiatives, and sheer good neighbourliness which have hitherto helped hard-pressed communities to hold their own.
86. The riots emphasised how near the edge life in such communities can feel. Those clergy and other involved Christians are looking towards the future and see, at best, no sign that those helpful structures and initiatives are going to become stronger. At worst they see whole swathes of good work disappearing under the impact of austerity and financial pressure. The implications for the future of vulnerable communities are easily imagined. Nothing is inevitable – but the auguries are not reassuring.

## Learning for the Church

87. **This exercise has not been an attempt to explain the disturbances that happened during August 2011, to trace their origins or to make them fit into a specific narrative, but to understand the role being played by clergy and churches in the urban communities that were affected.**
88. The events of the August put the spotlight on the lives of urban communities. During those four days clergy were interviewed by the media as key people who knew the communities involved and were able to offer insight into their realities and potential from an engaged local perspective. This expectation and role is an important indicator of how the clergy are taken seriously as spokespeople and commentators. There seems to have been little or no surprise that clergy were able to take on this role at such a crisis moment in the lives of their communities. The clergy were there: they were the obvious people to ask.
89. There appears to be little evidence to suggest that the ministry practices in areas that experienced disorder are any different to that in areas which did not. This may be a matter of context that similar approaches, intuitions, knowledge and skills play out differently in different places. Those who were *there* 'rose to the occasion' – what was reported was often intuitive and improvised born out of a commitment to place and people from within a long term presence which is, in the ecclesial terms of *Faith in the City*, 'local, outward looking and participating'.
90. The interviews have revealed a variety of responses to events – particularly when disorder was at its most difficult. What is apparent is that the church was able to ground its response in effective and earthed locational ministries, which proved flexible and creative. Unlike police officers, clergy do not have regular training in responding to public disorder – much of the response in August was intuitive based on a sense of role, a concern for well being (or the common good), the desire to intercede, and an inside knowledge of the complexity and multilayered nature of urban communities. The congregations gathered around these ministries have also been empowered and enabled to respond to events – whether it's a street party in Hackney or opening facilities for emergency services and those made homeless. This was 'the local church in [one of] its better moments'.
91. The research raises a number of issues about the nature of ministry and presence in urban communities. Clergy have talked a lot about how they understand their role in relation to the geographical parish. When something happens you know that it's your responsibility to do something. Most of those would say, 'we were there when we were needed'. This ministry is often vulnerable, overstretched, and under resourced. A number of respondents spoke of colleagues who were less confident and not prepared to act or collaborate in the way they had. Building confidence and resilience in ministry seems to be a priority, a key element of this must involve an expectation of mutual support and partnership across parish borders. Area deans and archdeacons appear to have played an important role in some situations where clergy might have been vulnerable to taking too much on or operating on their own.
92. At parish, deanery and archdeaconry levels it is vital to ask what happens when there is a crisis you cannot prepare for on your patch. Some have spoken of the usefulness of

major incident training which, while not directly applicable, enabled them to imagine a creative response. Other spoke of the importance of training and networking that had taken place when communities have been faced with demonstrations from the English Defence League that have occupied significant city centre spaces.

93. Clergy are used to change around them. Many long-term urban parish priests describe how their roles and job descriptions change with local demographics, changes in local and central government policy, economic regeneration and the overhaul of the built environment. 'Being urban' is seen as being part of an on-going process not an unchanging set form that is an accepted given. There is no room for nostalgia. This is a challenging environment in which to minister, often with high congregational turn over, and little ecumenical stability as new churches emerge and historic congregations disappear.
94. The retelling of the gospel story 'afresh in each generation' means revisiting questions of commitment to buildings and place, as well as models of ministry which operate beyond congregational chaplaincy. A number of clergy spoke of how their preaching and the practice of liturgy were directed at the empowerment and equipping of the people of God. Rooted in this is a deep questioning that enables some tentative first steps, which can lead to the imagining of possible futures, and self-articulation which many urban communities have been denied, as new stories of faithfulness and resilience emerge.
95. There are connections here with the notions of social and faithful capital explored by the *Faithful Cities* report. That report identified a number of ways in which Churches and people of faith contributed to the wellbeing of urban areas through intentional commitment to collaboration and partnership, not least through the classic social capital building activities of linking, bridging and bonding. What has emerged from the Church's experience during the August disorders has not been a quantifiable contribution based on numbers of volunteer hours or financial investment through buildings and staffing but a confident witness through the practice of virtue, wisdom and holiness.
96. Elsewhere it has been suggested that the practice of 'everyday faithfulness' provides the basis on which Christians intervene, reshape and contribute to the future of their communities.<sup>4</sup> This was summed up in 1985 by Professor Tony Dyson who suggested that the Church needs to be:

'searching for, holding to, living and struggling, and dying in, the creative centre of culture...not an artistic conception, nor is it a geographical location. It is found at those critical points in society where God's creativity and redemptive acts are contending with forces of meaninglessness, dispersion, disorder and despair...To be and to persist, to bear portions of the world's sufferings, to fall and be picked up, to seek to be "salt" and "light" at these points, in the day to day fabric of our human lives, is the common Christian calling.'<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Davey A (2007) 'Locating Everyday Faithfulness' in *Contact: Practical Theology and Pastoral Care* 152.

<sup>5</sup> Dyson A. (1985) 'Clericalism, Church and Laity' in *All are called: Towards a Theology of Laity*, London; CIO 1985 p.16

97. Our churches and clergy are often the remaining anchor points in communities where other anchors have disappeared – often seen as marginal, but vital when a crisis comes upon a neighbourhood. It is a long term commitment. There are no quick-fix solutions to improving the self sufficiency of our urban congregations or communities, but at the same time it recognises the potential for transformation enacted and owned by its subjects. Our work to examine the disturbances and their aftermath demonstrates how firmly the ministry of the church is based on resilience, faithfulness, and discernment.

*“We need a confident assertion – the church is here doing what it should – recognisable, resilient.”*

Philip Fletcher  
Chair  
MPA Council June 2012

✠ Peter Bath and Wells

### 1) HOME OFFICE AND MINISTRY OF JUSTICE REPORTS

Police and court statistics have been used to give a profile of those who participated in the disturbances. According to the Home Office just under 4000 people were arrested. Indicators suggest that a high proportion of those arrested have previous convictions 76%, and a significant percentage had more than ten previous offences (26%). The overwhelming majority were male (89%), 35% of adults were in receipt of out-of-work benefits, while 42% of young people were in receipt of free school meals. 64% of these lived in one of the 20 most deprived areas of the country. (Home Office. October 2011). 66% of juveniles were classified as having some form of special education need, and 36% were identified as having had at least one fixed period of exclusion. (Ministry of Justice 2011)

While those from the black community seem to be disproportionately represented among those arrested, percentages do vary greatly according to the localised area involved. In London the ethnicity of those brought before the courts was 32% white 55% black, in Greater Manchester the proportions were 74%:21%, while in Salford the proportions were 94%:6%. (Ministry of Justice 2011)

These statistics do not give a full picture of those involved – crimes are recorded on a per victim basis, rather than by perpetrators – therefore there is an immediate divergence in the number of crimes recorded (5112) compared to the numbers arrested (3960). Policing during the disturbances focussed on public order rather than arresting criminals – those arrested in later operations have mostly been identified through existing records. (Home Office 2010)

#### **Sources**

*Statistical bulletin on the public disorder of 6th to 9th August 2011* – October update.  
Ministry of Justice 24 October 2011.

*An overview of recorded crimes and arrests resulting from disorder events in August 2011.*  
Home Office October 2011



## 2) OTHER REPORTS

### i) Communities and Victims Panel

Following the disturbances the Deputy Prime Minister announced the government's intention (with the support of other parties) to set up a Communities and Victims Panel : 'which will be chaired by an independent figure, will produce a report within six to nine months to be presented to the leaders of all three main political parties.'

On 31<sup>st</sup> August the DPM announced the Panel would be chaired by Darra Singh (Job Centre plus, previously CEO London Borough of Ealing). Other members of the panel (each nominated by one of the main political parties) were Simon Marcus (Boxing Academy, Hackney), Maeve Sherlock (ex CEO Refugee Council, House of Lords) , Heather Rabbats (ex CEO London Borough of Lambeth and Millwall FC).

The Panel's task was to look at:

- the motivation for a small minority of people to take part in riots;
- why the riots happened in some areas and not others;
- how key public services engaged with communities before, during and after the riots;
- what motivated local people to come together to take civic action to resist riots in their area or to clean up after riots had taken place;
- how communities can be made more socially and economically resilient in the future, in order to prevent future problems; and
- what they think could have been done differently to prevent or manage the riots.

The Panel determined their methodology as 'a purely grassroots exercise to listen to the experiences of those in communities affected by the riots and disorder including residents, shopkeepers, parents and young people.' (The Panel was not established under the Inquiries Act.)

The Panel produced its interim report: *Five Days in August* at the end of November <http://www.5daysinaugust.co.uk/> .

The interim report acknowledges that there is not a single narrative about the disturbances, their causes or how they played out. The report offers a thematic basis for understanding what happened, as well identifying significant issues that need to be addressed if the events are not to be repeated. It identifies some of the factors which might have prevented rioting spreading to other areas – robust policing, coordinated cross sector responses, early response in vulnerable areas – as well as the built environment and transport links. The report also notes that 71% of the riots occurred in areas ranked in the worst 10% for social cohesion.'

The report identifies what it calls 'riot heroes' – people who attempted to turn around communities through clean-ups, acts of neighbourliness, providing space for communities to reflect and state the riots were 'not in my name'.

‘Watching people pull together, including huge numbers of young people, helped a shocked country to remember that the overwhelming majority wanted to build society rather than tear it down’.

The panel point to some critical issues such as what happens to convicted rioters when they are released from prison, as well as how we combat a culture of pessimism by understand what is stunting the potential of young people in realising their ‘hopes and dreams’. They also identify churches and church leaders as key anchors, potential places of safety and vital members of community resilience partnerships.

The intention was to test the Panel’s initial findings and recommendations by inviting further comments

The recommendations include:

- The importance of honouring the riot heroes: those that supported communities during the riots and in the clean up
- The importance of honouring the service personnel who protected communities at great risk to themselves;
- Stop and Search needs immediate attention to ensure that community support and confidence is not undermined
- All local and police authorities are called upon immediately to review their emergency plans to ensure that they properly cover public disorder on the scale of the August riots.
- There should be clear plans from public services, including the probation service, youth offending teams and local government, to deal with the return of (convicted) rioters to reduce the potential for re-offending and to safeguard communities.
- Central and local government and the police should ensure that all victims who wish to meet the people who committed crimes against them face to face have the opportunity do so.
- Local authorities and emergency services should review their processes for assisting and/or evacuating residents and bystanders caught up in riot areas, including through designating particular sites ‘safe havens’.

The panel set out their key themes for the consultation during the next phase of work in the following terms:

- ‘Hopes and Dreams’ – the absence of hopes and dreams amongst many we spoke to is a danger for society. We need young people who are able to improve their education, get a job that fulfils their ambitions and allows them to achieve their potential. We were concerned at the level of despondency and anxiety amongst the young in particular;
- Building personal resilience – we heard a lot about the sense of hopelessness felt by young people in many areas. We want to look at how we can help all young people become more responsible, ambitious, determined, and conscientious members of their community,

- Children and parents – we were frequently told by communities that poor parenting was the underlying cause of the riots. We want to consider what more we could do to improve parenting, achieving the right balance between individual responsibility and the role of public services in supporting parents;
- Riots and the ‘Brands’ – the rise in consumerism was raised as a concern by many people. The latest brand or gadget increasingly defines an individual’s identity. We want to explore how commercial community
- ‘The Usual Suspects’ – a common view focused on the relatively small number of people who commit multiple crimes and our inability to prevent re offending. We want to explore what more can be done to improve rehabilitation to better protect communities from repeat offenders;
- The Public and the Police – good relationships are at the heart of maintaining order. We are disturbed at the reports we heard about the breakdown in trust between some communities and police. We want to explore what more we can all do to improve relationships across communities.

The Panel’s final report was published in March 2012 and develops these themes in much greater detail. A link the panel’s final report can be found here:

<http://riotspanel.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Riots-Panel-Final-Report1.pdf>

## **ii) Guardian /LSE: *Reading the Riots***

*Reading the Riots* is a research study into the causes and consequences of the summer riots involving interviews with large numbers of people who actually took part in the disorder. A project run jointly by the Guardian newspaper and the London School of Economics (LSE), aims to produce evidence-based social research that will help explain why the rioting spread across England. The research was inspired by a study of the Detroit riots in 1967 which involved collaboration between the Detroit Free Press newspaper and the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research. The first phase of *Reading the Riots* was completed in November 2011 using confidential interviews with hundreds of people directly involved in the riots in six cities. It also involved a separate analysis, by academics at Manchester University, of a database of more than 2.5m riot-related tweets. The second phase – to be completed in 2012 – will involve interviews with police, court officials and judges and a series of community-based debates about the riots. A link to the study can be found here:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/series/reading-the-riots>

The first stage of the research found:

- In every major city that experienced disorder there is widespread anger and frustration at people’s regular treatment by the police. Central to this is a sense of a lack of respect, evident particularly in the conduct of stop and search.
- The role of gangs has been overstated. During the disorder gangs operated in an atypical manner.

- Contrary to media speculation *facebook* and *twitter* were not used in any significant way by rioters. The free messaging service BBM was used extensively to communicate and plan actions.
- Although mainly young and male, participants came from a broad cross section of communities.
- Opportunism was the significant motivation behind looting.
- Rioters were generally poorer than the country at large. 59% came from the 20% most deprived areas.
- 81% of those interviewed thought that there would be repeat events. 35% of those who expressed opinions said they would get involved again. 63% expected this to happen within 3 years.

The *Reading the Riots* project is continuing to gather evidence and stories.

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