



Chief Officer Team Briefing Report Community Outcomes Meeting

Title: Harehills Disorder
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INTRODUCTION

This report is an extraordinary report to the Community Outcomes Meeting, requested by the Mayor and Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime, relating to the violent disorder seen in Harehills, Leeds on the evening of Thursday 18th July 2024.

The aim of this report is to update the Mayor, Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime and members of the public on the circumstances leading up to the disorder, the disorder itself and the police response and the on-going investigation. The scope of some aspects of the report is deliberately limited so as not to impact on the on-going criminal investigation and to avoid sub-judice in relation to several pending prosecutions through the criminal courts.

BACKGROUND

On Thursday 18th July 2024, West Yorkshire Police received a 999 call from Leeds City Council social workers who were acting on an order from the Family Court to remove four children from an address on Luxor Street in the Harehills suburb of Leeds. The social workers reported that they were encountering difficulties at the address, including a hostile crowd gathering outside. The police had no prior knowledge of the court order or the removal of the children from the address.

The activity of the police and social services in carrying out the order of the court led to large crowds forming outside the residential address which later became hostile and engaged in acts of criminal damage and disorder. The criminal damage was firstly directed to police vehicles but then evolved into setting fires in the street and also to a public bus. The disorder continued throughout the evening and a multi-agency response was put into action. This involved police, the local authority, the fire

service, the ambulance service, elected officials, and other key influential individuals from the local community.

There were no serious injuries to the police, other responding agencies, or the public. This is despite the police being struck by missiles aimed at them by the crowd. By around midnight much of the crowd had dispersed and the disorder had abated. A significant policing and community engagement operation took place in the following days to ensure that disorder did not return to the streets of Harehills. This community engagement operation was largely successful and there was no repeat of the scenes seen on the Thursday evening.

A large-scale investigation was launched immediately in response to the disorder which has so far seen five people charged with offences such as arson and violent disorder. Four of those have been sentenced already, some remain under investigation, some we are actively seeking and others we seek to identify. The investigation continues and is likely to do so for several months yet.

POLICING RESPONSE

Officers arrived at the address within seven minutes of the initial call and in support of the social workers began facilitating the removal of the children in line with the judges' directions and the court order that had been imposed.

As officers were at the residential address a crowd began to form outside, growing in both number and in hostility. After around an hour of negotiating a safe removal in line with the court order, the need to remove the children became more pressing due to the ever-changing crowd dynamics.

Whilst attempts to safely remove the children were going on inside the address it was necessary to draw in more police officers to try and manage the burgeoning crowd outside and create a safe area where the children could be removed by social services. The attempts to sensitively remove the children went on for just under an hour. After attempts to calmly remove the children, one was arrested for a breach of the peace and removed in handcuffs. A second child was removed. Once away from the location and calmed, the handcuffs were removed, and the child de-arrested. The final 2 children were helped from the property a few minutes later. Police officers (unprotected patrol officers) cleared a significant crowd from the road to enable the police vehicles to leave the area with the children and social workers safely. Those officers were the same officers that would ordinarily answer calls for assistance from other members of the public.

Immediately following the removal of the children, the crowd dynamics changed, and hostility turned into violence with missiles being thrown at police officers. The officers who had initially responded started to withdraw and began to leave in their vehicles in the hope that the crowd would dissipate. As the officers were leaving the area a section of the crowd began to attack a police vehicle that had been parked on Harehills Lane. Another section of the crowd began to throw missiles at some of the police vehicles whilst they were leaving the area causing damage. Whilst those officers are equipped to deal with the day-to-day threats that modern policing can throw at them, they are not readily equipped to

have masonry and other missiles thrown at them as they are undertaking their duties, which requires extra protective equipment and training. The officers were attacked whilst trying to protect four children and the social workers acting on an order from the courts.

An initial tactical withdrawal saw officers rendezvous at a nearby location approximately half a mile away. The crowd continued to cause damage to police vehicles that remained at the scene, and one was turned on its side as was widely shared on social media at the time.

At around 7pm a large crowd made its way down Harehills Lane towards the location officers had withdrawn to. More patrol police officers began to arrive and form a cordon. The presence of the large crowd meant that a significant number of officers needed to be drawn from across Leeds and other areas of West Yorkshire, instead of being in their communities answering calls for help.

At 8:15pm whilst taking missiles, officers were directed to withdraw. As the officers withdrew the crowd followed before stopping near to the Compton Centre. The crowds prevented some vehicles passing through the junction and stopped a bus travelling into the junction from Foundry Approach during which the windscreen is smashed. Shortly after this a van arrived at the junction and deposited some cardboard and rubbish which the crowd set alight and begin to add more debris onto.

Just before 9:30pm public order police officers, drawn together from across the force, were tasked to clear the junction and allow the fire service to tackle the fire but were quickly and continually pelted with bricks and other missiles. The officers were heavily outnumbered and withdrew.

Within a few minutes some of the crowd try to push the bus, which had earlier been stopped, up to the fire in the middle of the junction but instead some of the crowd set the bus alight where it had been parked. By 10:45pm some of the crowd began to disperse. At approximately 1:00am, public order officers redeployed to the location to disperse any remaining pockets of disorder and accompany the fire service to extinguish any residual fires.

PARTNERSHIP RESPONSE

During the evening of the disorder the police called a Strategic Coordination Group (SCG) which brought together senior leaders from policing, the local authority, the fire and rescue service, the ambulance service and others. This enabled a joint response at a strategic level that would then translate into joint tactical and operational working. The fire service co-located with police in the police control room on the evening of the disorder to ensure police and fire commanders could have a shared understanding of any risk and what proportionate and safe responses could be.

Immediately in response to the tension and disorder, neighbourhood policing resources were deployed. This included the local neighbourhood policing inspector who was liaising directly with key individuals and elected members on the ground in Harehills.

The neighbourhood policing inspector was able to report directly to the Silver Public Order Public Safety commander in the police control room. The police were continually receiving information from key individuals and elected members which was fed into the control room and helped inform decision

making. This included suggestions that the police were quickly becoming the target of the disorder and that intervention by key individuals and elected members may help to reduce tension and disorder. Key individuals from the community and elected representatives deployed into the large crowds and were seen to challenge those who were engaged in disorder and those on the fringes who were at risk of being drawn in. These partners worked throughout the night alongside officers to try to quell the disorder.

Police had an engagement officer located with the family concerned from early in Thursday evening and for the following days to ensure a continual flow of accurate information in an effort to reduce tensions amongst the community.

Neighbourhood policing officers attended a range of community meetings to provide reassurance and accurate updates regarding the disorder and the investigation.

The Chief Inspector neighbourhood policing lead at Leeds District produced a comprehensive engagement strategy for the area which continued the work of the Clear, Hold and Build initiative in partnership with statutory and third sector agencies. This included seconding Roma officers from other parts of West Yorkshire Police into the engagement efforts in the days after the disorder.

The 'CommUnity Harehills' project - a wide-reaching initiative based on the Home Office's 'Clear, Hold, Build' tactic was launched in the area in March 2023. Extensive work has been underway since then with officers from Leeds East Neighbourhood Policing Team working closely with partner agencies including Leeds City Council, West Yorkshire Trading Standards, Leeds Anti-Social Behaviour Team, HM Revenue & Customs, Serious Environmental Crime team, Licensing, HM Revenue & Customs, Immigration and DVLA. Results of this work included:

- 59% reduction in violent crime
- 46% reduction in offences involving weapons
- 257 arrests
- 387 people stop searched
- 59 warrants executed
- £8.2 million worth of cannabis seized and taken off the streets
- Convictions for multiple offences including possession of drugs with intent to supply, cannabis production resulting in 39 years in prison
- 12 licence reviews with 8 licences being revoked from premises
- Multiple days of actions undertaken – one of which seized £450,000 worth of illicit cigarettes.
- Eight successful closure orders

The Clear, Hold, Build, approach is a longer-term strategy that engages and empowers the local community so that the issues that affect their daily lives the most set the priorities for partnership action.

Through a combination of targeted enforcement and community work, the initiative sees police and partner agencies clear an area of organised criminal activity, hold that location to prevent another group from filling the void, and build resilience so the area is less susceptible to criminal groups. Links with CATCH (Community Action to Create Hope) mean that the police can work intensively with young people in the area to build healthy relationships with the police and where possible divert them from engaging in instances of disorder or criminality.

On 19th July 2024 Leeds City Council announced they would undertake an urgent review of their child protection case.

CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION

The criminal investigation into those who engaged in the disorder began in earnest on the night and continues to this day. An accredited senior investigating officer was appointed immediately under the direction of a strategic investigator. The investigation was adopted by the forces Homicide and Major Enquiry Team supported by detectives from across the force and other specialist departments. There was early liaison with the Crown Prosecution Service and a strategy formed for dealing with the differing levels of offending seen that night. It is anticipated that there will be in excess of 100 individual suspects to identify and bring to justice.

The sheer volume of digital media and visual footage from mobile phones, social media, CCTV and police helicopter and drone footage has been challenging to review but it has allowed officers to make use of facial recognition technology to identify many of the offenders involved.

The latest arrest and outcome statistics are shown below:

Total arrests	43
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Arrests by age:

No of adults arrested (age range 18 to 58)	25
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No of children arrested (age range 11 to 17)	18
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Arrests by ethnicity:

Romanian	26
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British	13
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Czech	1
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Iraqi	1
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Irish	1
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Pakistani	1
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Outcomes:

Charged:	8
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Released on bail pending further enquiries	21
Released on bail for a decision from the CPS	9
Released under investigation pending further enquiries	1
No further action	4

Where interpreters have been required for those arrested these requests have been serviced through existing contracts with no identified issues. For those detained who required an appropriate adult, this has been met either by using parents of the children arrested or by making use existing appropriate adult providers, independent of the police.

So far four men have been jailed in relation to the disorder.

Iustin Dobre was jailed for six years for arson and violent disorder after he was seen setting light to the bus which had been stopped on Foundry Approach. Mark Mitchell and Milan Zamostny received six years imprisonment and five years four months imprisonment respectively for the same offences. Celan Palaghia was jailed for three years for arson and violent disorder after he was seen setting fire to debris in the road outside the Compton Centre.

We expect more offenders to be charged as the investigation continues for many more months.

COMMUNICATION

The viral nature of videos taken at the scene appearing on social media led to significant press and public interest at very early stages whilst the incident was still ongoing. Not only did this create additional demand for the police press office function but also emergency call handlers as calls came into West Yorkshire Police from across the country reporting what they had seen online. During the peak period of the disorder there were 414 additional 999 calls and 189 additional 101 calls compared to the week previous.

There were also challenges brought about by misinformation. Press statements were issued to provide up to date accurate information at the peak of the disorder and in the hours and days afterwards. In addition to the traditional circulations, press statements were also provided to Romanian broadcasters to reach the widest possible audience and also through key community contacts and through regular briefings with key strategic partners.

CHALLENGES

Public order resourcing

Whilst most public order policing operations are planned in advance allowing for the deployment of dedicated resources, this same luxury is not possible in instances of spontaneous disorder. It is during these spontaneous incidents that public order trained officers are required to be withdrawn

from their normal patrol and investigative duties across the force and mobilised to form into groups, collect equipment, don protective clothing and travel to the seat of disorder.

The national disorder which took place across the country this summer highlighted the challenges in mobilising a large number of police officers to spontaneous disorder. On the 2nd of September 2024 the Home Secretary made a statement to Parliament that she had asked His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services to work with the National Police Chiefs Council, the College of Policing and the National Lead for Public Order to review lessons from this summer's events particularly around strong coordination and intelligence systems to support public order policing. The following weeks saw police officers in West Yorkshire being mandated to work 12 hours shifts, having their rest days cancelled and plans changed to be able to resource a significant public order policing footprint for Harehills to ensure we did not see a repeat of the disorder.

Misinformation

Whilst proactive press releases were issued both during the height of the disorder and in the days afterwards there were challenges experienced with misinformation. The volume of public interest and desire for information needed to be delicately balanced with the need for criminal investigations and criminal justice processes to take place unhindered and sensitivity in relation to the family court proceedings of which the police weren't party to.

LEARNING

As with any major incident or event, the police are de-briefing those key individuals who were involved in the response to identify any learning in terms of what worked well and what could be done differently. The de-briefing process is still taking place, starting with the officers deployed on the evening and the operational, tactical and strategic commanders. The full de-brief will take some months to fully compile and analyse the results of, and it is worth noting that those officers who facilitate the de-briefs were fully engaged on supporting the recent national disorder and so this has meant timescales have needed to be adjusted accordingly. The police are not in a position to share learning at this stage, and it would be inappropriate to do so whilst the formal structured de-briefing process takes place.

West Yorkshire Police's public order capability was tested once again as we were asked to provide significant resources to the national mutual aid requirements for the disorder seen across other parts of the country this summer. Whilst there was one instance of affray during a demonstration in Leeds city centre, West Yorkshire did not see the violent disorder that had taken hold elsewhere in the country. This operation saw officers from West Yorkshire deployed to Merseyside, Cleveland and South Yorkshire in various capacities. West Yorkshire Police were also proactive in our approach to tackling incitement offences and secured the first national charge (and subsequent conviction) for publishing written material intended to stir up racial hatred.