

F22b Emergency Motion: Responding to the Riots

Guildford, Glasgow North and 12 conference representatives

Conference:

- I. Condemns the August riots as unjustified and outright criminality and understands and regrets the deep trauma caused to the residents and businesses affected, particularly the families of those who died.
- II. Appreciates with gratitude the effective nationally co-ordinated actions taken by police and emergency services who put themselves in harm's way to protect lives and livelihoods.
- III. Notes the use of private networks and social media not only by those set on rioting, but, also in a more effective way, by those getting help to people at risk, and mobilising the clean-up operations.
- IV. Recognises that it was the threat of arrest and prosecution due to CCTV images and higher police concentration, rather than interventions by politicians, that brought the disturbances to an end.

Conference notes with concern:

- A. The temporary loss of control by the forces of law and order to gangs of looters and arsonists, suggesting a shortage of deployable officers with appropriate training and equipment.
- B. The large number of lengthy custodial sentences and remands handed down by the courts which put much more pressure on our overcrowded prisons, when research clearly shows that prison is not an effective way of rehabilitating non-violent offenders or preventing re-offending.
- C. The proposal that social housing eviction be extended, beyond a sanction for causing a nuisance to other tenants and the immediate local community, to one for criminal behaviour generally; and that this would not only be unfair to innocent family members but would also discriminate against social housing tenants compared with private housing tenants or owner occupiers.

Conference believes that:

- i) Sentencing is a matter for the courts, taking into account the crime, deterrence, and the impact on the defendant and their family, but not calls by the media or politicians for tougher sentences.
- ii) The way communities responded to the disturbances demonstrates that society is not broken, but that there are examples of a lack of respect for the law and rights of others to be found at

the top and bottom of the socio-economic scale.

iii) Additional powers to censor, restrict access to or close public social networking sites beyond existing arrangements are neither justified nor practical.

iv) The reduction in the provision and funding of Youth and Connexions Services, especially at a time of high youth unemployment, and the increase in gang culture leaves young people more vulnerable to an antisocial way of life.

v) The imposition of curfews and over-use of dispersals would be counterproductive and breed resentment among young people.

vi) The removal of benefits from those involved in the disorder and their families will simply create more deprivation and encourage more criminality.

vii) More needs to be understood about the causes of the riots, and also the actual impact on the communities concerned in order to ensure that government responses are based on evidence and not knee jerk reaction.

Conference also reaffirms its policies outlined in policy paper 96, Free to be Young, and policy paper 99, Taking Responsibility, which would focus on effective ways of preventing young people from being drawn into gang culture and lead more productive lives.

Conference supports the actions taken by the Deputy Prime Minister to:

a) Establish a Grassroots Communities and Victims Panel to listen to the views of those affected by the riots.

b) Implement a 'riot payback scheme' using restorative justice to make offenders build up their local communities and be confronted by those that their offending harmed, and calls for the inclusion of people released from imprisonment post-conviction to ensure that as many as possible do not re-offend.

c) To undertake an urgent review of the causes of the riots, together with the implementation of the proposed programme of research and community liaison to identify lessons to be learned.

Conference also calls for:

1. The imposition of custodial sentences only where no other sentence is justified but encourages, wherever justice permits, the use of non-custodial measures that allow the offender to carry out productive work, retain their livelihoods, homes and family ties, and thereby not be driven to future reliance on the state.

2. Recognition of the important work of the Probation Service in promoting rehabilitation, especially in the context of the cuts it faces.
3. The continued separation of politicians and police operational control and for there to be stronger checks and balances on any elected police commissioners by locally elected representatives than are currently set out in legislation.
4. A full inquiry into the riots following the publication of the findings of the Grassroots, Communities and Victims Panel in Spring 2012 should this be necessary.

Applicability: England and Wales.