



The 'anti homeless' spikes were installed outside Selfridges in December

Vendor in spikes row

A vendor of *The Big Issue in the North* has blasted Selfridges in Manchester after a row broke out over 'anti-homeless' spikes installed on a ledge outside the city centre store.

Manchester Metropolitan University professor Cathy Urquhart launched an online petition last week after noticing the spikes, which have previously been used in London to deter rough sleepers. The petition has been signed more than 6,500 times and received coverage on national television.

Chris, 47, has been selling *The Big Issue in the North* outside Selfridges for ten years. He said his relationship with the upmarket store in Exchange Square had soured after they asked him to move from the front of the building.

'Nightmare'

"It is a nightmare working outside Selfridges," he said, claiming he was not even allowed to use the toilet in the store. "They are awful. It is my pitch by rights, but they keep coming out and moving me.

"Now they have put in these studs because people were begging there, and one or two times people have slept there."

Mike Barlow, 67, a retired civil servant, heard about the controversial spikes on the local news and decided to stage a protest. On Tuesday last week, he placed a wooden board on top of the spikes and then sat on top of it in a bid to draw attention to them.

"I am here because I am incensed that they have put

in pest control spikes," he said. "This will just make homeless people feel even worse. These people are all known in Manchester. They are all liked."

A spokeswoman for the store said: "Selfridges installed the studs on 1 December last year as part of a number of measures to reduce litter and smoking outside the store's team entrance, following customer complaints."

Barlow said he did not believe the store's explanation. "Staff are coming out of the door, leaning on the rail and smoking. They say it is anti-littering, but people are still littering," he said. "If a kid falls on the spikes, there will be big trouble."

The Big Issue in the North contacted Selfridges for further comment but received no response.

RICHARD CRAIG

Courts have come under fire for handing out thousands of "extreme and arbitrary" punishments to people involved in the 2011 UK riots.

A review of more than 3,000 sentences has accused the justice system of "acting with judicial abandon" and "collective hysteria" in its handling of the looting and violence that gripped Manchester and Liverpool four years ago.

"They were picking numbers out of a hat and we had some really shocking sentences," said Hannah Quirk, co-author of the research and a senior lecturer in criminal law and justice at Manchester University.

"The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) are prosecutors, not Judge Dredd. While the offending may have been impulsive, sentencing should not be."

Deterrent sentences

The report cites examples including mother-of-two Ursula Nevin, who was jailed for five months after she admitted accepting a pair of shorts looted from a Manchester shop by a friend. Her sentence was later reduced on appeal to 75 hours' community work.

Lawyer Franklin Sinclair, whose Manchester firm defended riot-related cases, said a defendant like Nevin would normally only be cautioned.

"It became evident from the outset that bail was simply refused for anybody, whatever the charges, and that sentences were very high," he added.

"Guidelines were set aside on the basis that all the offences

Riot sente

were hugely aggravated by the background of the riot and the justification that deterrent sentences were needed. It was a sad time for the fairness of the justice system."

The study analysed data from the Ministry of Justice and the *Manchester Evening News*. Around two thirds of defendants appearing before the courts for riot-related offences received an immediate custodial sentence, with an average length of 17.1 months – compared with just 3.7 months for similar cases in 2010.

Of those suspects who appeared at the Crown Court, 85 per cent were given immediate custodial sentences. This compares with just a third for similar cases in 2010 – and the average sentence rose from 11.3 months to just under 20 months.

Suspects were routinely charged with burglary, which carries a much longer sentence than theft. Two in three people charged in connection with the riots were remanded in custody while facing trial, compared with just one in ten for serious offences in 2010. Youth offenders were also routinely named.

"It was not just the courts that over-reacted," said the report's co-author, Carly Lightowlers, a lecturer in criminal justice at Liverpool John Moores University. "An 'uplift' was applied at every

LITERATURE FESTIVAL FUNDING UNDER THREAT

The Ilkley Literature Festival, the biggest of its type in the north, is in danger of losing its £11,178 grant from Bradford Metropolitan District Council, which organisers say is vital for its work to continue.

The festival, which takes place every October, also works with children and young people across Bradford to bring authors into schools.

The Big Issue in the North is proud to be a media partner of the festival, which attracted 26,000 people to its events over 17 days in 2014.

Rachel Feldberg, festival director, said arts funding in the north was vital, even during a time of budget cuts: "The arts are essential to the lifeblood of the UK. They improve our lives, health and happiness and give our young people confidence and skills. How can we argue for arts funding when children's services and support for



older people is being slashed? We understand the very difficult decisions facing Bradford Council, but funding from Bradford is vital in helping to ensure that people who don't always have access to the arts can still see exciting events."

The festival is estimated to have an economic impact of £1.3m on Bradford, supporting local businesses such as hotels, shops and taxi companies.

If the proposed funding cut is implemented, it could lead to changes to the festival's programme, raised ticket prices and an end to the inner-city school workshops. It may also jeopardise future funding from Arts Council England.

CATRIN LEWIS