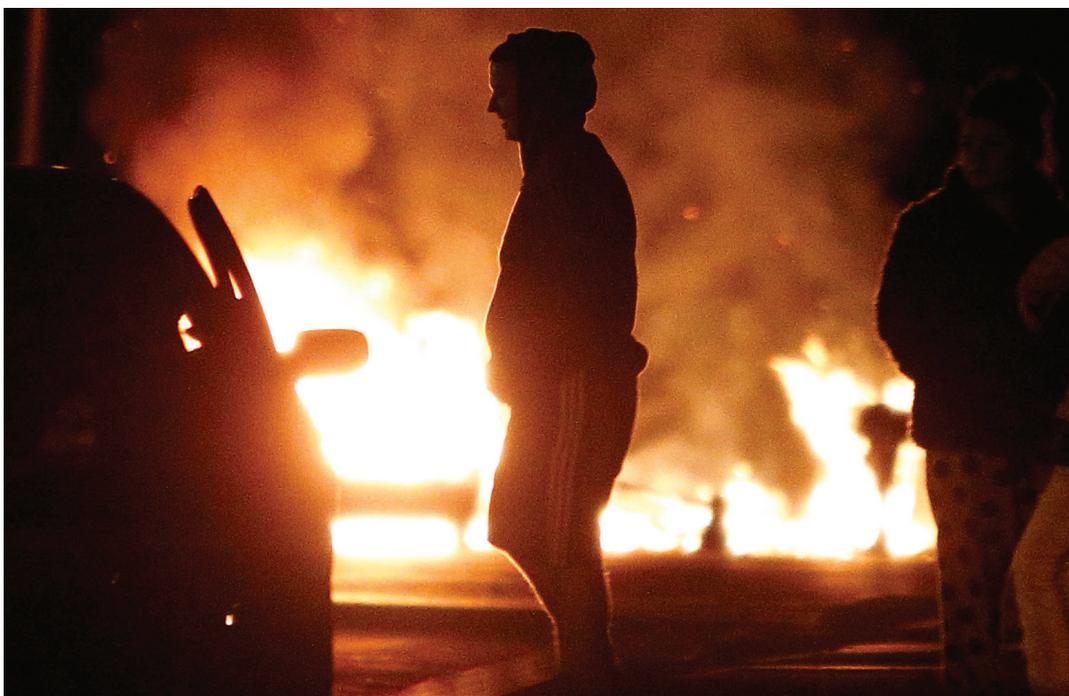


ncing 'extreme', says report



The riots of 2011 caused damage to property across Manchester, Liverpool and Salford (pictured)

stage, from arrest, charge and remand to which court dealt with the case.”

Root causes

Manchester was the first city to prosecute riot-related cases. Guidelines issued by Recorder of Manchester Andrew Gilbert QC stating that riot-related offences were “completely outside the usual context of criminality” were criticised by the Court of Appeal, but they set the standard for how other regions responded.

Quirk said courts should make decisions on an individual level, rather than creating blanket guidelines. She added that political influence from an ‘adversarial’ Crown Prosecution Service appeared to compromise the independence of the courts.

“Magistrates and district judges were talking to the press gallery as much as to the defendants. But you shouldn’t use individual defendants to make a political point.

“I’m concerned about the way in which the CPS is becoming

much more partisan. If they see themselves as fighting for justice on behalf of communities, there’s a danger of a miscarriage of justice.”

Andrew Neilson, director of campaigns at the Howard League for Penal Reform, agrees that the courts acted disproportionately. “At the time of the riots, it was hard not to feel that hysteria was drifting from the streets into the courtroom,” he said.

“We know people were almost four times more likely to be sent to prison than would normally be the case for comparable offences, and prison sentences were roughly doubled in length.

“Filling the prisons for a few weeks with people caught up in the riots, some of whom had no previous convictions, was unnecessary and did nothing to answer questions as to why the 2011 riots happened in the first place.”

One Liverpool defence lawyer who worked on riots-related cases agrees that

harsher sentences did not address the root causes of the disorder: “Generally, I believe that invoking higher criminal sentences through the courts is not a way to stop people acting the way they did. We need to create avenues of access to education, employment, healthcare and housing.”

‘Swift and firm justice’

Justice minister Mike Penning insisted that magistrates and judges were independent of government and did make their sentencing decisions based on the individual circumstances of each case.

“The courts, probation, youth offending teams and prison services worked hard to ensure that those who attacked their own communities during the public disorder faced justice quickly,” he said.

“They played a key part in stopping the riots from spreading further by delivering swift and firm justice.”

HELEN CLIFTON



NEWS IN BRIEF

COURTING ADDICTION

A court to help parents beat addiction so they can keep their children will open in West Yorkshire. Unlike a traditional family court, the Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) will administer therapy and treatments. Studies have shown that FDACs in other parts of the UK are more effective at helping mothers fight addiction. However, critics have expressed concern that the service will only receive government funding for one year.

INVESTMENT CYCLE

Yorkshire cycling is to receive heavy investment ahead of the Tour de Yorkshire, an international cycle race designed to build on the success of last year’s Tour de France Grand Départ in Yorkshire. Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg said £500,000 would be invested in county cycling facilities, including new circuits, with a further £300,000 going towards promoting the tour. The race is on 1-3 May.

UNEMPLOYMENT FALLS

Unemployment is falling, according to new figures released by the Office for National Statistics. In Yorkshire, 164,000 people were unemployed between October and December – a 15 per cent drop during the quarter. The number of people unemployed in the north west also fell. However, unemployment in the north remains higher than in many parts of the country and youth unemployment has not fallen.

PETITION FOR BEAUTY

Nearly 5,000 people have signed a petition against beauty spots in the Lake District National Park being sold off. The National Park Authority intends to sell parts of the area for as little as £20,000 after budget cuts forced it to re-evaluate its assets. But petitioners fear the measures may restrict public access, harm conservation efforts and affect its World Heritage Site bid.

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