



SOLACE RESPONSE TO THE RIOTS PANEL CALL FOR EVIDENCE

1. SOLACE welcomes the establishment of the independent panel and the open, evidence based methodology being used. In particular, it has been encouraging to see the panel visiting local authorities across the country to learn lessons from both those councils directly involved in the August riots and those areas untouched by the events. We are also grateful that the panel Chair was able to attend the SOLACE Summit in October and give local authority chief executives and senior managers the opportunity to talk through these issues directly.
2. We know that the panel will have received a wide range of evidence from local areas detailing the individual circumstances in each locality. You will have heard how disturbances developed in different ways, how the underlying circumstances are often different, as well as the way in which local public services responded. This submission does not seek to repeat these submissions, but instead starts to develop an overarching prognosis which we hope will assist the panel in reaching their conclusions.
3. The evidence presented so far suggests that there are a wide range of issues that are said to have caused the riots. There has been a wide spectrum of response which suggests there will be considerable complexity in dealing with the causes. Indeed, there were different triggers to the violence in different parts of the country, and across the time that the events spread. For example, in London many of the disturbances were particularly violent, while in other parts of the country the disturbances were focused primarily on looting. In some areas we have heard how those arrested came from the local area, while in others those involved travelled some distance to a centrally agreed destination. With such variety, it suggests that when looking for policy responses, there is no silver bullet.
4. One consistent message has been the excellent response to the events from local government. In your visits across the country you will have heard how quickly and effectively local government was able to clean up after the trouble, support those directly involved and build confidence in the broader community of their ability to move forward. This leadership role is clear, supported by local public sector partners and we strongly argue that this not just relevant to the immediate clear up, but also to find and deliver local solutions over the long term.
5. Despite the wide range and variety of comment purporting to explain the reasons for these riots, two drivers do seem to emerge. Indeed, as Jerry White from the London School of Economics suggests, the drivers of perceived inequality and injustice applies to riots, not just of this year, but historically. And that whatever the individual circumstances of each locality, broad, shared economic growth would provide communities and individuals with a sense of purpose that would play a part in preventing such events in the future.
6. SOLACE believes that local government has a central role to play in stimulating economic growth because growth happens in places, not in government departments. But also because growth driven from within localities will see the benefits shared more

equally across areas and communities, with local government bringing an insight of communities that Whitehall can't match. This work requires local leadership to patiently explain the need for improvements in infrastructure, permissions for new buildings and extensions to public transport options that may cut across current interests. To understand the mix of the local economy, the skills required but in short supply, and the ability to shape local programmes to deliver more of what's required. Only local government can hold the ring on these issues and shape delivery to suit local circumstance.

7. SOLACE therefore welcomes the commitment to breathe new life into community budgeting and 'total place'. Councils are best placed to show leadership and play a co-ordinating role for public services in their area. However, SOLACE wants the government to go further. If government is to make best use of its resources and target them where they can make the biggest difference, this approach must go beyond 'problem families'. Local government should play an overarching co-ordinating role across a much broader range of public services. Such benefits can only be realised if all Government departments support this approach and enable their local staff to work closely with local government to deliver community priorities, not top-down national priorities.
8. To successfully perform this role local government should continually strive to better understand the needs of its communities. This is why SOLACE is seeking to develop a code for democracy. This seeks to ensure that democracy goes beyond the party politics of the town hall and supports local communities shaping the development of public services in their area. Councillors should expect support from senior management in understanding their areas, support in being able to act as advocates for their community and engaging local people in decisions about their area. We feel that the riots have only highlighted the need for public services to engage, particularly with those who do not want to talk. We need to better understand their views, their expectations and priorities. Not only will this design better, more effective services, it will also build trust between people and their public institutions placing stewardship in the hands of those directly involved.
9. While democracy can ensure it is the priorities of local communities that shape local services, SOLACE also believes that this is done most effectively when well informed. SOLACE is therefore calling for more emphasis on an evidence-based approach to policy. If we have learnt one thing from this summer's riots it is that communities across the country and the policy required to support them is increasingly complex and multi-dimensional. The causes of the riots, and many contemporary issues, are not clear, simple or straightforward. It requires detailed research, such as that undertaken by this panel, to even begin to understand causes and potential solutions. In an environment when we need to be more focused with our resources, and where we seek more certainty that interventions will be effective, the support of sound, authentic and long-term research enables us to be more confident of our decisions and more able to support communities. SOLACE will be taking a more visible role in supporting evidence-based policy making and seeking out what works. We will be seeking government's support in doing this and ensuring that research, and the evidence it supplies, is a core outcome of the support given to government across the country.



10. A good example of the need for a greater focus on research is perhaps the success or otherwise of tackling gangs in the UK, and their impact on the recent riots. We have heard mixed messages about gang involvement, the numbers involved and their significance in directing trouble. Nevertheless issues associated with gang crime, such as recreational violence and toxic group dynamics, where reasonable individuals can resort to terrifying behaviour in a group, do seem to resonate with lessons from the riots. Indeed the drivers of gang crime – poor parenting, fractured families, youth unemployment, school exclusion – and conflict caused by jealousy and debt, have also been proposed as explanations for the disturbances. We would therefore urge the panel to study the lessons we have learnt in areas such as Strathclyde and Manchester, and how these can be evaluated and shared across the country.
11. We look forward to the panel's interim report and the opportunity to comment further.

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SOLACE