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# Meaningful action and responding to far-right violence

Post-roundtable briefing: August 2024

# Introduction

On the 29th of July 2024, a mass stabbing took place at a dance studio in Southport, Merseyside. Six year-old Bebe King, seven year-old Elsie Stancombe and nine year-old Alice da Silva Aguiar died from their injuries. A 17 year-old British citizen named Axel Rudakubana has been arrested and charged with three counts of murder and ten counts of attempted murder. Mr Rudakubana is a British national with a Christian upbringing, and was born in Cardiff.

Due to the suspect's age, police did not initially release any details about him to the public. With this gap in information, far-right commentators began circulating misinformation that he was an 'illegal immigrant' and a Muslim. This became a trigger event causing several Islamophobic and racist riots across the country. This, sadly, not only negatively impacted many individuals and communities, but also largely eclipsed the fact that three young girls had been murdered. It is important to recognise the dual (and often intersecting) issues highlighted once again by these events - the racist, anti-immigration and Islamophobic hatred often brazenly displayed in the UK, and the ongoing increase in violence against women and girls (VAWG). Police-recorded VAWG related crimes have increased by 37% between 2018-2023, accounting for 20% of all police-recorded crime during 2022/23.

In response to the events following the murders in Southport, we organised a virtual roundtable discussion for our members to discuss their immediate responses, short-term and long-term strategies, and how the sector can play its part in preventing similar behaviour in the future. Due to high demand, we restructured the event slightly to hear from three speakers, with an opportunity for conversation afterwards.



# Berneslai Homes



The first presentation was from Amanda Garrard, Chief Executive of Berneslai Homes. Berneslai Homes is based in Barnsley, South Yorkshire. In Manvers, at the border of Barnsley and Rotherham, a Holiday Inn was vandalised and set on fire during the rioting.

Only two weeks earlier, the Berneslai Homes board had had a session with HDN Chief Executive Mushtaq Khan about equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) where the rise of the Reform party and far-right extremism in the area was a key issue raised and discussed.

## About Barnsley

- The population of Barnsley is roughly 244,00 people.
- Barnsley has a BME population of only 3.1%.
- Barnsley has seen job growth of 10% in the past ten years, but those jobs remain in low-skill areas with minimal job security.
- There are very few professional and managerial jobs available in the area.
- During the general election, Barnsley South voted with 33% support for the far-right Reform Party.



Amanda Garrard, CEO, Berneslai Homes

## How the riots impacted Berneslai Homes

- Some Berneslai tenants were in local hotels so were understandably worried about potential attacks on where they were staying.
- Many staff and tenants of Berneslai Homes felt unsafe as they lived very close to the area in which the riots were occurring. The office is also in a central location that was potentially to be targeted for disruption.
- Berneslai learned from intelligence gathering on social media that far-right activists were planning a riot in Barnsley on 8th August, which resulted in the office being evacuated as a precaution.
- It became apparent that 50% of the people present at the riot in Manvers were in fact from Barnsley.

Following the arson attacks at the Holiday Inn in Manvers, which was targeted due to housing asylum seekers, Berneslai Homes created an action plan to handle the situation as it was unfolding. Below is a summary of some of the actions they took.

## Support for tenants

- Contacted tenants they thought might be vulnerable, including any tenants living in nearby hotels, to offer individual advice and support.
- Offered informal support to any affected tenants through their tenancy support & neighbourhood teams.
- Implemented a zero-tolerance policy for their tenants that would allow them to evict any tenant convicted for actions taken during the riots.

## Support for staff

- Issued regular communications to their staff to ensure that everyone was informed as the riots unfolded.
- Discussed personal security, risk assessments (RAs) and dynamic RAs.
- Evacuated their building after a riot warning was issued in the local area.
- Held individual discussions with affected staff, particularly staff from Black or Minority Ethnic backgrounds or those who were personally affected by the unrest.

Amanda acknowledged that going forward, there is work to be done both in the organisation and local communities to address real and perceived challenges faced by a largely working-class local population with a lack of ethnic diversity. Unaddressed issues can often allow far-right ideology and extreme opinions or prejudices to take root unless they are adequately countered with genuine social and community cohesion.

Berneslai Homes has good links with partner organisations, including those it works with on the Prevent agenda, and an existing relationship with their local MP, Dan Jarvis - also the incumbent Minister of State for Security - who met with the organisation during the week of the riots.



Holiday Inn, Manvers, following the arson attacks.  
Image: Michael Taylor, via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

# Calico Homes

The next presentation was from Anthony Duerden, Chief Executive at Calico Homes. Calico Homes are based in Burnley, Lancashire and help deliver housing services across the northwest of England.



Calico Homes was not directly impacted by the rioting, however there were several notable areas in which they were impacted indirectly. Burnley was notably the scene of inter-racial riots in 2001, and had a far-right presence on the council from 2002 for ten years.

## About Burnley

- Burnley has a population of roughly 78,000.
- Burnley has a BME population of roughly 14.1%.
- According to the [Office of National Statistics](#), of people aged 16 to 64 years living in Burnley, 76.0% were employed in the year ending December 2023.
- 9% of Burnley's population voted for Reform UK.



Anthony Duerden, CEO, The Calico Group

## How the riots impacted Burnley

- There were no major riots in Burnley itself.
- Several Muslim graves were vandalised during the two week period of unrest.
- Several riots were being planned on social media, but the Lancashire police were quick to respond.
- Calico has noticed a significant increase in reported hate crimes as a result of the riots.

## 'Protest' warning

Calico received news that a far-right march was being planned that would pass by their main office. Due to their resettlement services having links to immigration services, Calico had been directly named as a target by this march.

Calico prepared for the worst by reviewing and testing their emergency procedures and were preparing to board up the office if the need arose. Thankfully, the march didn't end up taking place.



## Steps taken by Calico

- Prepared for the riots impacting them by reviewing and testing their emergency procedures such as fire safety to make sure they were ready in case a riot did happen in their areas of operation.
- Issued regular communications to their staff and community which provided a calm, measured response to reassure their staff that the situation was under control.
- Moved all of their meetings and communications online, having learned from their previous Covid-19 response.
- Reviewed and reissued all advice they had given on travelling and lone working in the area.
- Offered ongoing support to colleagues who were concerned.
- Prepared potential external communications, and reviewed upcoming social media that was scheduled.
- Reviewed the [guidance issued by HDN](#).



Burnley Town Hall  
Image: Reading Tom, via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

## Devonshires Solicitors LLP

The final presentation was from Baljit Basra, Housing Litigation Partner at Devonshires. Baljit discussed various legal remedies available for perpetrators of anti-social behaviour, including injunctions, possession claims, and exclusion areas. She explained the conditions under which these remedies could be granted, such as the need for the behaviour to directly or indirectly affect housing management functions.



Baljit Basra, Partner, Devonshires

### Legal definition of a riot

A riot is defined as 12 or more persons who threaten the use of violence as a tool for a common purpose (Public Order Act, 1986).

### Legal Options

Housing Associations have two legal options available to handle tenants who are involved with rioting.

- Injunction
- Possession

Both of these options require witnesses / evidence of wrongdoing on the tenants part.

### Anti Social behaviour

Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) is defined as behaviour which causes, or is likely to cause, harassment, alarm or distress to persons' (Antisocial Behaviour Act 2003 and Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011).

Additionally, most tenancy agreements consider anti-social behaviour to be a breach of tenancy and grounds for eviction.



# Reflecting on Riots and Planning for Future Unrest

After the presentations, there was some interactive polling to find out what actions attendees' organisations had been taking so far and what they thought was most important going forward, then we opened the floor for people to speak.

One discussion point was the renewed importance of community cohesion as a goal for housing associations. Mushtaq pointed out that community cohesion should not have stopped being a priority in the housing sector following the riots in Oldham, Burnley, and Bradford in 2001.

These riots in 2024 have brought the issues back into the public eye, and are likely to happen again in the future when there is another 'trigger' event.

Another point agreed on was the need to embed anti-racism - not just via a specific strategy, but also by setting out that commitment very clearly in wider strategy by including in business / corporate plans.

The concept of 'two-tier policing' was discussed in the context of how actions taken by housing organisations against those involved in the riots could be perceived - with the risk of potentially exacerbating tensions within communities.

Evictions can also just shift problems from one part of a community to another if the underlying problems are not adequately addressed, so providers need to think carefully about how to deal with issues around tenancy enforcement measures.

The final topic of discussion was around the need to ensure the conversation (and action) continues outside of the news cycle, with the goal of preventing future violence and disruption. Key to this is collaboration - both within the housing sector and with partner organisations - along with ensuring the sector's voice is heard by the government.

At HDN we believe that the role of housing organisations goes beyond just rejecting and condemning the actions of those involved in the wave of violence. This behaviour has been fuelled by hatred, Islamophobia and misinformation, which is in direct contrast to the values of a fair, just and inclusive society. We encourage the housing sector to play a leading role in the community response to this violent unrest - supporting those most affected, redoubling their efforts to maintain continuity, and playing their part in healing the harms caused by this violence. Boards and executive teams should show leadership and direction and this work form an important part of an organisation's EDI & corporate strategies.

As we continue to develop our work in this area, click below for details of some of our workshops that may be useful-

- [Driving Diversity and Inclusion - The Role of Boards](#)
- [Hate Crime and Housing Providers](#)







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