# Police urged to tackle social media misinformation after Southport riots



In a significant report published by His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS), Sir Andy Cooke, Chief Inspector of Constabulary, emphasised the need for police forces to enhance their response to misinformation on social media following the riots that erupted in Southport after the tragic murders of three young girls last summer. The report highlights that authorities were caught "off guard" by the rapid spread of online falsehoods, which contributed to the ensuing violence.

The riots, which followed the brutal killings of Bebe King, Elsie Dot Stancombe, and Alice Da Silva Aguiar, saw a considerable outpouring of public anger, with social media platforms flooded with erroneous claims about the alleged assailant, Axel Rudakubana. This misinformation fuelled public outrage, drawing large crowds to the streets and resulting in extreme levels of violence directed at the police. By the end of January, over 1,000 arrests had been made, including 147 children, with the oldest arrested being 81 years old.

Sir Andy warned that police must not remain passive in the face of such misinformation. He stated, "They need to fill the information void that was filled during this disorder with so much misinformation. That misinformation and disinformation can go viral very very quickly. So policing cannot be passive when police safety is at risk." He further called upon prominent social media companies such as Meta, TikTok, and X (formerly known as Twitter), to assume greater social responsibility and prevent their platforms from being misused to incite violence.

The report identified a "massive void" of accurate information that was exploited by individuals aiming to stir up hatred, asserting that the authorities must proactively manage public communication in crisis situations to prevent a recurrence of the violence seen last summer. Sir Andy described the situation as "not acceptable," advocating for police forces to create dedicated teams for monitoring and responding to online threats during major incidents, labelling such an investment as prudent if it helps avert further disorder.

In addition, the report highlighted that there was no evidence supporting the notion that the riots were orchestrated by any specific group, indicating most individuals participating in the unrest were local residents. Emily Spurrell, Chair of the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC), echoed Sir Andy’s concerns, acknowledging that misinformation played a significant role in escalating tensions and violence during the riots. She stated, "Officers responded admirably to a complex and fast-moving situation... It is extremely concerning that the inspectorate finds forces have failed to learn lessons following previous incidents of widespread violent disorder."

Sir Andy’s comments come at a time when the Labour government has pledged to bolster neighbourhood policing with an increase of 13,000 officers across England and Wales, starting with the recruitment of 3,000 by March. He noted that neighbourhood policing is crucial in anticipating and mitigating risks of future violence, referencing a "withdrawal" from such policing in recent years as a contributing factor to the challenges faced.

The report serves as a call for the police service to improve its systems and processes related to disorder-related intelligence, emphasising the need for a proactive approach in the age of rapid digital communication. This development underscores the urgency for the police and relevant authorities to adapt to the evolving landscape of information dissemination, ensuring public safety amidst the complexities of social media.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/british-teenager-goes-trial-over-girls-murders-uks-southport-2025-01-20/> - This article details the trial of Axel Rudakubana, the 18-year-old accused of murdering three young girls in Southport, providing context to the tragic events that led to the riots.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/667cd691-79ee-45aa-8002-1ab88cc428ec> - This article discusses the sentencing of Axel Rudakubana to life imprisonment for the murders of three children at a Taylor Swift-themed dance class in Southport, emphasizing the severity of the crime.
4. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/crime/police-inspector-southport-riots-report-b2665848.html> - This article reports on the HMICFRS's findings that police were unprepared for the scale of the disorder following the Southport murders, highlighting gaps in intelligence and the need for better coordination.
5. <https://www.itv.com/news/2024-12-17/southport-riots-review-finds-police-underestimated-risk-of-disorder> - This article discusses the HMICFRS's review, which found that police underestimated the risk of disorder following the Southport riots and were unprepared for the scale of the unrest.
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7. <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMihAFBVV95cUxQWVVvOGUwSE5xSThkZFVvY0VJWEJNbXlKTjQ2N0pTNUV3elVWUTY5VXdIWG5Dd2FGMElKQTJ5R2Rfd251M0RvempqTUxCbjhvZWxPeTVNTDF2M1dNVnZBU1BxSFpOWnVENWN1cFJyUjBJNnpNdmE0UzhBVlUwSjJGZDJUZnjSAYoBQVVfeXFMUDE2cExsRGQ2ZjBEQlc1Q0hwZHVFWUhGaGJpVW9Zd09QSHhlNVU4OXpBRzd0QTlZd2xNSnlYMFN0RnRRWE1mdXhudEwyaUhNdGVrVDhIX1p5c1h1OUtJSmpjNXA2Y1pTUEpLSXVmZFN4eHBzNkJHM09wUGJ3dmRTSDYyNVllYzRCYVN3?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data