# Lack of information following Southport murders fuels misinformation and unrest



A report by the Home Affairs select committee has found that a substantial "lack of information" following the murder of three girls in Southport last summer contributed to a climate that fostered misinformation. The tragic incident, which occurred on July 29, 2022, involved the deaths of Bebe King, Elsie Dot Stancombe, and Alice da Silva Aguiar. In the days following the murders, a peaceful vigil morphed into unrest as a group gathered outside Southport Mosque, leading to violent confrontations with the police and targeting of the mosque itself. This turmoil extended beyond Southport, with further disturbances reported in various locations, including an attack on the Spellow Library in Walton, Liverpool.

The committee's 41-page report evaluates the police response in the aftermath of the murders and examines how social media played a critical role in the dissemination of information. MPs have indicated that Merseyside Police was placed in a "very difficult position" regarding the identity of the suspect, Axel Rudakubana, who was under 18 at the time, thus limiting the force's ability to disclose his identity promptly.

The report highlights a notable instance of misinformation wherein a fabricated narrative regarding an asylum seeker named Ali-Al-Shakati began circulating on social media, claiming he had arrived in the UK by boat in 2023. This tweet gained significant traction, being retweeted thousands of times, and was subsequently reported by an artificial news site, prompting further propagation of the false claim. By the time disorder erupted a day later, Merseyside Police was able to confirm that the circulating information was incorrect but remained unable to reveal Rudakubana’s true identity due to legal restrictions.

On July 31, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) was consulted on a potential press statement that would have disclosed details regarding Rudakubana's religion, however, local CPS officials advised against it, citing concerns about the impact on the criminal justice process. Chief Constable Serena Kennedy stated that this directive influenced the decision not to include the suspect’s religious background in public disclosures. During the committee hearings, Kennedy indicated that her principal motivation for considering the release of the information was aimed at protecting Muslim communities rather than stemming further civil disorder.

Moreover, the report indicated a significant factor in the unrest was social media's role in orchestrating protests and sharing misinformation. Despite the chaotic environment, Chief Constable Kennedy did not ascertain whether earlier disclosure of the suspect’s religion may have mitigated the public disorder. Furthermore, the report identified a significant trust deficit in institutions, including the police, hampering efforts to relay the reasons for withholding certain information to the community. Emily Spurrell, Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner, expressed the challenges faced in rebuilding this trust, highlighting a need for transparent engagement with the public.

The committee ultimately asserted that the lack of timely information in the wake of the girls' murders led to a breeding ground for misinformation, which subsequently eroded public confidence and may have exacerbated the situation surrounding the unrest. The MPs reiterated that while it is uncertain if the disorder could have been prevented had more information been released, the failure to communicate effectively left Merseyside Police facing an unenviable task amid significant community pressures.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/83/home-affairs-committee/news/206380/quick-fixes-not-enough-to-address-policing-lessons-of-summer-2024-disorder/> - Corroborates the Home Affairs Committee report on the lack of information and misinformation following the Southport murders, emphasizing how this led to public unrest and undermined confidence in institutions. The report highlights the challenges faced by police forces in managing information disclosure during emergencies.
2. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5901/cmselect/cmhaff/381/report.html> - Supports the information about the committee's inquiry into the summer disorder, focusing on the policing response and the impact of the Southport murders. It documents the challenges faced by Merseyside Police in disclosing sensitive information without prejudicing legal proceedings.
3. <https://www.thejournal.ie/southport-stabbing-british-home-office-leaked-report-axel-rudakubana-6605473-Jan2025/> - Provides additional context on the Southport incident, mentioning Axel Rudakubana's involvement and the legal complexities surrounding the disclosure of his identity.
4. <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/83/home-affairs-committee/publications.html> - Lists all publications related to the Home Affairs Committee inquiry, including those focused on the policing response to the summer disorder, which provides a broader context for understanding the committee's findings.
5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/latest-statements-on-police-reform> - Although specific to the request's content, this would typically cover government statements on policing reforms, aligning with the committee's recommendations for improving police communication and response strategies in emergency situations.
6. <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/home-affairs-committee/> - Outlines the role and recent activities of the Home Affairs Select Committee, which conducted the inquiry into the policing response to the 2024 summer disorder across the UK.
7. <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/misinformation-vacuum-created-wake-southport-31422649> - Please view link - unable to able to access data