



**Rex**

**v**

**Stuart Williams (42MR2437225),**

**Dean Smith (42MR2437025)**

**and**

**Martin Peagram (42MR2457225)**

**SENTENCING REMARKS**

1. I must sentence each of you for your participation in an episode of violent disorder, that occurred outside the Bell Hotel, Epping.

**Summary of facts**

2. On 11<sup>th</sup> July 2025, a peaceful protest developed outside the Bell Hotel in Epping. This area is rightly described as a small, low-crime residential location. The initial protest was policed by local officers and attended by 200 people. However, this protest quickly expanded, and tensions escalated. The protest developed into a series of running clashes with police, both in Epping town centre and around the Bell Hotel.
3. The most serious example of such an incident was on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2025. This is the date that concerns the present case. That day, the manager of the Bell Hotel received a call from an unknown male, asking “Are you ready for tonight?” Further phone calls were received by police, describing that group chats had been established to organise attendance at the Bell Hotel. Police were informed that attendees had been advised to “mask up” and bring “rage”, and that the plan was to attack migrants at the hotel for being “racist scum”.
4. At its peak, the protest involved approximately 500 people gathered outside the Bell Hotel. Officers were subject to sustained attacks for many hours, including being pelted with

bottles, eggs and other objects. A counter-protest, in support of the refugees, was also organised, but unable to take place, being driven into retreat by aggressors outside the Tower School (near to the Shell garage). Over 100 officers were called away from core police duties for deployment on this operation. Officers were deployed in riot gear, with helmets and shields, supported by multiple police vehicles. Several officers were assaulted, although thankfully none seriously so.

5. However, the impact on the community is important to note. Damage was caused to public locations, including Tower School (which specialises in care for neurodivergent children), and businesses were also forced to close. Chief Inspector Fisher describes Epping as close-knit community and the cumulative impact of this outbreak of violent disorder has been profound—causing anxiety among residents, distress to those working in the area, as well as the cost of physical damage to which I have already referred. The impact on police resources was also significant—mutual aid agreements were relied upon to provide officers from other police forces. Chief Superintendent Anslow describes the financial cost as being a projected £1.54 million, which far exceeds the annual budget for specialist operations. I’ve also taken into account the impact statements made on behalf of Shell, Tesco, a local landlord, a resident’s association in Epping, and other groups, all of which paint a distressing picture.
6. As Chief Inspector Fisher puts it, “In my 20 years of policing, I have never witnessed disorder of this scale in Essex, and certainly not in a town like Epping. The events of 17<sup>th</sup> July have left a lasting impact on the community, our officers, and the wider policing response across the county.”
7. Each of you played a role in what happened. In deciding on the appropriate sentence, I must of course focus on your actions, but the context of wider public disorder is also relevant. Let me make plain—attending a protest is not the issue, and that is not what you are being sentenced for. But what each of you did went beyond attendance at a protest, and that became criminal when you acted as you did.
8. Mr Williams, you were identified from social media and via BWV footage. You were wearing a distinctive outfit, including a union flag as a cape. You got onto the roof of the Bell Hotel and attempted to ring the bell thereon. You got onto the roof of the Tower School.

To do the latter, you forced entry to the school. You also engaged in aggressive conduct towards the police cordon, attempting to maintain order. During this clip, you were encouraging others to breach the cordon—shouting “line up, line up!” and you then charged the police, laughing as you did so. You kicked at an officer. You were arrested on 20<sup>th</sup> July, having attended a further protest planned that day.

9. Mr Smith, you were seen punching at an officer’s shield, participating with others in an attack on the cordon. You were also captured on BWV remonstrating with officers that counter protestors had been allowed into the same area, arguing that you were present to order to protect children rather than any reason related to race. During part of the incident, you had your hood up in an attempt to disguise your identity. There was pushing between you and officers as the line was choked with aggressors. You were recorded drinking what appears to be beer from a glass bottle, again covering your face. Around this time, numerous missiles were thrown at police (although I cannot be sure you were responsible for throwing the bottle). You were arrested on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2025, attending another protest outside the Bell Hotel.
10. Mr Peagram, you were identified from BWV and other footage. You were seen to kick a police carrier door (having pushed through the crowd specifically to do so), throw an unknown object at a police carrier and throw a can at police. You were part of a group seen to push the police cordon, grabbing an officer’s shield and kicking out. You were present at the location for several hours. When interviewed, to your credit you admitted your conduct and said you thought you had behaved childishly. From what I’ve seen of the footage, you appeared—at the time—to find the whole thing very funny. You were arrested an address in Stansted, on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2025.

### **Sentencing guidelines**

11. In respect of each of you, I have considered and applied the sentencing guideline on violent disorder.
12. Your offending is culpability B, because each of you participated in an incident which involved large-scale acts of violence on property, the offending involved significant

planning of unlawful activity, and you participated in an incident involving persistent and sustained unlawful activity.

13. Your offending is harm category 1, because it involved an incident that resulted in serious fear, distress and disruption, caused serious disruption or severe determinantal impact to the community, caused substantial costs to businesses, incurred a substantial cost to the public purse, and resulted in attacks on public servants. The multiplicity of harm category 2 factors means that this is properly a category 1 case, as indicated by the guideline.
14. I am invited to find this case as less than harm category 1, on your behalf, because each of you was involved in only part of the wider violent disorder. I disagree with that assessment. The use of the term “incident” involves a wider purview of the protest and considering of the actions of others involved; it is not right to isolate your individual acts.
15. The starting point is therefore 3 years’ imprisonment.

#### **Section 66 of the Sentencing Act 2020**

16. The Prosecution asserts that in each of your cases, s 66 of the Sentencing Act 2020 applies, in that the seriousness of your offending is aggravated because it was motivated wholly or partly by hostility towards members of a racial group based on their membership of that group.
17. I have considered *Taylor v DPP [2006] EWHC 1202 (Admin)*, which suggests that the “hostility” under this provision does not need to be directed towards a particular victim of the offending but is rather concerned with an offender’s state of mind.
18. I am satisfied that the definition of “racial group” in para 6 (a) of s 66 encompasses those seeking asylum—by definition, such persons are of foreign nationality or citizenship.
19. I am satisfied that, in each of your cases, the offending was at least in part motivated by hostility towards the asylum-seekers residing in the Bell Hotel. What was your ultimate goal in attending the protest, and in due course behaving as you did? You wished for the asylum-seekers to be removed from the area. You did not wish for due process to run its course; you wanted to take matters into your own hands. Each of you attended the Bell

Hotel, the very location where asylum-seekers—many of whom had nothing to do with the event that triggered this incident—were resident. In the course of your attendance at the scene, you all engaged in violence against police because they were attempting to manage the protest. Hostility towards a racial group may not be the only reason for the offending, but it is at least partly so.

20. I have therefore considered the guidance on sentencing hate crimes and I will explain my findings and the relevant uplift in each of your cases. I should add here that I have given each of you the opportunity to challenge my findings on this issue, but in each case, you have declined to do so.

### **Stuart Williams**

21. You are aged 36. I've read the pre-sentence report on you, which describes your personal circumstances and background. You denied any racist motive for your offending and said that the protest had got out of hand; explaining that you had attended the location to voice concerns about a child who had been sexually assaulted by a resident of the hotel. As to your conduct toward police, you said this was done to tease officers. You were showing off when you climbed onto the roof of Tower School.
22. In terms of aggravating factors, you have 8 convictions for 15 offences including for dishonesty, traffic related, drugs, and breaching court orders. In 2014, you were convicted of racially aggravated harassment. Your most recent conviction relates to failing to remain or attend for a drug assessment. You are apparently in breach of a recent community order, for failing to attend for unpaid work.
23. You were also an active and persistent participant in the violent disorder. You incited others. The incident occurred in a busy public area.
24. In terms of mitigating features, you expressed remorse in the pre-sentence report. You are also employed as a painter and decorator.

25. After trial, the sentence I would have imposed is 3 years 3 months.
26. I am satisfied that this offence was motivated, at least in part, by hostility towards members of a racial group based on their membership of that group. I treat this as a further aggravating feature, which increases the sentence to 3 ½ years.
27. You are entitled to 33% credit for your guilty plea.
28. Your offending crosses the custody threshold. Neither a fine nor a community order can be justified.
29. The sentence is therefore 2 years 4 months' custody.
30. You will serve up to 40% of this period in custody, and the remainder on licence. If you fail to comply with the conditions of this licence, you will be liable for recall, and may be made to serve the remainder of the sentence in custody. Any time you have spent on remand will count against your sentence.

**Dean Smith**

31. You are aged 51. I have read the PSR prepared on you, wherein you curse your stupidity for getting involved in this offending. You blamed your involvement on the decision to mix alcohol and medication. You describe your living arrangements and how you act as unofficial carer to your mother. You said you had been drinking prior to the protest, then purchased alcohol on the way to the protest.
32. In terms of aggravating factors, you were an active and persistent participant. You attempted to disguise yourself by putting up your hood. The incident occurred in a busy public area. You were under the influence of alcohol at the time of your offending, by your own account.
33. In terms of mitigating factors, you have no previous convictions (although you have a caution for common assault). You expressed remorse in the PSR. You also said you were

carer for your mother, who has restricted mobility (although you work, you would prepare her food). You were in employment. You have made good use of your time in prison and I have reviewed the certificates provided to me this morning; you are described as a model prisoner.

34. After trial, considering both aggravating and mitigating factors, the sentence I would have imposed is 2 ½ years.

35. I am satisfied that this offence was motivated, at least in part, by hostility towards members of a racial group based on their membership of that group. I treat this as a further aggravating feature, which increases the sentence to 2 years 9 months.

36. You are entitled to 33% credit for your guilty plea.

37. Your offending crosses the custody threshold. Neither a fine nor a community order can be justified.

38. The sentence is therefore 1 year 10 months.

39. As this is a sentence of less than two years, I have considered the imposition guideline and whether I should suspend this period. In your favour, you have no previous convictions, the sentence is likely to impact a third party (your mother), and you have reasonable prospects of rehabilitation. Against those factors, the offending calls for an immediate prison sentence, you have a medium risk of future offending and pose a medium risk of serious harm to members of the public. I note, for example, that notwithstanding your explanation for why you attended the protest, you were arrested at a further protest shortly thereafter. Overall, I have decided that I cannot suspend the sentence, given the seriousness of your offending, and it must be immediate.

40. You will therefore serve up to 40% of this period in custody, and the remainder on licence. On your release from custody, you will be subject to post-sentence supervision for a period of one year. You must comply with the instructions given to you, failing which you will

commit a further offence punishable with imprisonment. Any time you have spent on remand will count against your sentence.

### **Martin Peagram**

41. You are aged 33. I have read the PSR prepared on you, which describes how you happened upon the protest while driving with a friend (despite living 25 minutes' drive from the location). You denied any racist intent and maintained you had multi-racial connections in your wife and friends.
42. In terms of aggravating features, you have significant previous convictions—14 convictions for 26 offences, including for dishonesty, relating to the police, drugs and weapons. You've failed to comply with court orders, committed offences on bail and possessed prohibited items in prison. You've previously served prison sentences (albeit some years ago). You were made subject to a suspended sentence order in 2019, which you breached 6 months later by committing a further offence. Your last offending related to drugs and failure to attend court, in 2023.
43. You were also an active and persistent participant in the events of 17<sup>th</sup> July 2025. You threw a can at a police officer and an unknown object at a police carrier.
44. In terms of mitigating factors, I've read the material relating to your daughter, who suffers from autism. Your wife also writes of the impact of your absence on the family home. Your daughter in particular is suffering from your absence. You also pay your son's school fees, and being in custody has impacted that. You are also the main breadwinner and I am told that if you remain in custody, your accommodation is at risk. However, I must balance what is said about you in this material against your previous convictions and your conduct that day—it is hard to accept you are a "changed man", as argued by your family, when presented with wanton violence as shown on the BWV. It is a great shame that you did not think of your family when you behaved in the way that you did on 17<sup>th</sup> July. You were also in work and can return to that employment; I have read the reference from your employer.



45. After a trial, the aggravating and mitigating features balance—the sentence I would’ve imposed is 3 years.
46. I am satisfied that this offence was motivated, at least in part, by hostility towards members of a racial group based on their membership of that group. I treat this as a further aggravating feature, which increases the sentence to 3 years 3 months.
47. You are entitled to 33% credit for your guilty plea.
48. Your offending crosses the custody threshold. Neither a fine nor a community order can be justified.
49. The sentence is therefore 2 years 2 months’ custody.
50. For the avoidance of doubt, I have considered whether—given your paternal responsibilities—I ought to make any additional reduction to this sentence, which could result in a sentence I could suspend. However, even if I could, I would not suspend the sentence. You have a very poor criminal record, you have breached multiple court orders, have a poor history of compliance (although I accept you successfully completed your most recent order), but are unlikely comply with such an order, and the nature of the offending is such that appropriate punishment can only be achieved by immediate custody.
51. You will therefore serve up to 40% of this period in custody, and the remainder on licence. If you fail to comply with the conditions of this licence, you will be liable for recall, and may be made to serve the remainder of the sentence in custody. Any time you have spent on remand will count against your sentence.
52. There will be no order for costs in any of your cases, given I have imposed sentences of immediate imprisonment.

53. The victim surcharge will apply and will be drawn up by the court in the usual way.

**HHJ Sawyer**

6<sup>th</sup> October 2025