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TRANSCRIPT OF "FILE ON 4"- 'CRACK COCAINE'

CURRENT AFFAIRS GROUP

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REPORTER: Allan Urry

PRODUCER: Rob Cave

EDITOR: David Ross

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“FILE ON 4”

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ACTUALITY OF POLICE RAID

POLICEMAN: Come downstairs and have your fag down here, yeah? I can't let you wander round the house, you need to stay in one place.

URRY: Police raiding a suspected crack den.

POLICEMAN: We're going to be doing a search of the house, so we're going to put you in one room. That'll be the last cigarette that you'll be able to have.

URRY: It's a scene being played out almost daily across Britain. Our research shows crack cocaine has broken out of the inner cities and spread across the UK, from Bodmin to Inverness. Police are trying to grapple with the crime and violence crack dealers bring to town, and there's increasing concern about the consequences for those who use it, including a disturbing rise in children taken into care. Tonight File on 4 reports from the frontline in Middlesbrough and from Brixton in South London, two very different communities sharing a common curse.

SIGNATURE TUNE

ACTUALITY OF RAID

URRY: On Teeside, police don't bother to knock if they think you're dealing crack.

SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS

POLICEMAN: All right, calm yourself down. Put your tracksuit bottoms on, come on.

URRY: The sun's already up, but the suspect isn't.

MAN: Will I get locked up?

URRY: Detective Sergeant Tom Drysdale is wondering how a man living on a council estate, who's apparently out of work, affords such a lifestyle.

DRYSDALE: People in the crack business, they make a lot of money. He's obviously in the throes of decorating, there is a lot of work going on. How he's paying for it? Well, you can only sort of assume it's from drugs dealing. There is a lot of wealth in there. Massive TV, one of the biggest I've seen, good quality too. He's going to be arrested now and he's going to be taken to Middlesbrough police station and then all the work starts. We're going to put a drugs dog in. That'll search the whole of the house and surrounding garage, garden etc and should be able to indicate if there are any drugs here.

URRY: These raids are part of a strategy they've nicknamed "A dealer a day" - an intensive effort by Cleveland police to disrupt and jail those responsible for street supplying. They've kept it up for eighteen months - a measure of their determination, but also the extent of the problem. The Chief Constable of Cleveland, Sean Price, says he's trying to keep organised and violent gangs out of his patch.

PRICE: We needed to stop the establishment of organised criminals distributing crack cocaine, because to me that does seem to be the number one

PRICE cont: threat we have, that if we allow that to happen, we'll get to the levels of violence that we've seen in other parts of the country. It's a day in day out real attack upon those who deal in crack cocaine and sometimes we will do forty premises in a day. Sometimes we will only do two. But it's a relentless campaign to stop the setup of an organised dealing network, and obviously also to stop people from outside the area moving in to what they will see as a lucrative set of towns here in Cleveland to ply their trade.

URRY: What's the state of the market right now then?

PRICE: Well, at the moment I think we're at our high in relation to crack cocaine usage. This is the third time certainly while I've been in the police service that crack cocaine has had an emergence, and I think this probably is the highest level of usage that I've seen in those three times that it's emerged.

URRY: Crack has found its way into the poorest parts of Middlesbrough; places like Gresham. Narrow streets of tightly-packed, terraced brick houses, which look as though they almost could have been designed with drug dealing in mind.

ACTUALITY IN CAR

AFFLECK: On that particular road over there, for instance, there was four crack houses on just that particular side.

URRY: It's right by a children's park as well.

AFFLECK: Yes, exactly.

URRY: Richard Affleck, a reformed crack addict who was brought up in Gresham, agrees robust policing is having an impact, but as we drove around his neighbourhood it was obvious there's still some way to go.

AFFLECK: Stop here, see where the house was boarded up?
That's the one.

URRY: Oh yes. That was a crack den, was it?

AFFLECK: Yeah, that was a crack den.

URRY: It must be very frustrating though for people living in roads like this, if they've got four crack dens in a tiny little terraced road like this, which is – what, I don't know – thirty houses maybe?

AFFLECK: Yes. Just turn right down here. See, every street we're going down, there was always one or two dealers that I can remember that either were there or are still there, sort of thing. This is a really bad area for drugs.

URRY: How many of these houses are boarded up?

AFFLECK: Too many. People won't live here because of the problem with drugs around here.

URRY: Terraced houses on both sides, I can just see ...

AFFLECK: They offered me one of these places and I told them bluntly, you can't put me back there in the midst of six or seven dealers. Look, they're burnt out, look.

URRY: Yes.

AFFLECK: You can't put someone who's just coming out, trying to get out of that sort of way of life of taking drugs and being around ... and someone who wants to change their life, you can't put them back into places like this basically.

URRY: But in this whole street, and I don't know how many houses there are here – thirty, forty, fifty maybe – there are just two cars in this road.

AFFLECK: Yeah, I know.

URRY: Everything else is boarded up.

AFFLECK: Uh huh. And them two cars probably belong to drug dealers. It's terrible, it's a terrible way of living.

URRY: Crack is a form of processed cocaine, made into small lumps or rocks. It produces intense highs and is usually smoked in crude, homemade pipes. Richard Affleck says street prices here are so low, almost everyone can afford it.

AFFLECK: What did help crack sort of evolve around here was that people in Middlesbrough were knocking it out for cheaper prices than they were elsewhere. I mean, you could buy tenner rocks. If you knew the person well enough, you could buy fiver rocks, which ...

URRY: £5?

AFFLECK: £5 rocks, yeah, which you would get one really good pipe or maybe two average pipes out of.

URRY: That's a child's pocket money, isn't it?

AFFLECK: Yes. And apparently it's still the same.

URRY: In fact, Middlesbrough has earned a reputation as one of the cheapest places in the UK to buy crack. However, those who pick up the habit find it's expensive to feed - one hit is never enough, and users like this man, who we've agreed not to name, tend to binge.

COLIN: It is very strong, you know, it does give you a really, first time really high, but after that it's not really that high, you know, you never get that again. That's what you're chasing after it all the time. Then, when it wears off, after a few minutes, yeah, and then you start sweating and you're all tense and you can't think

COLIN cont: belly. And it bounced off my backbone, cut my intestine, sliced my bowel, cut my main arteries to my heart. So I'd lost five pints of blood when I got to hospital and my heart stopped three times.

URRY: The sort of reckless behaviour driven by crack is causing other concerns. According to Aisha Janjua, senior policy advisor for the national drugs charity, Turning Point, it's creating a major public health risk.

JANJUA: People using crack share their equipment and so the crack pipe is passed around a large number of people. People have chapped lips and blood is captured on the crack pipe. A person who is infected with a blood-borne virus may then transmit that to other people also sharing that equipment.

URRY: It's quite likely, isn't it, this chapped lips thing, because of the heat that's generated by the crack itself and because of the lifestyles these people are living?

JANJUA: Indeed. There are only a very small amount of blood to be exchanged that is needed for a transmission of blood-borne viruses, so it is a major concern. Crack users may also be at greater risk of HIV and hepatitis because of increased sexual risk behaviours, and also because of the close association of crack use with sex work.

URRY: The link between drugs and prostitution is nothing new. Jesse Jo Jacobs, who runs a service on Teesside helping women get off the streets, says many of those she's been seeing had stabilised, even though they may have an addiction to heroin. But once they started taking crack as well, they go right back out.

JACOBS: It's just changed the culture of the prostitution in that the ones who are working, you know, it'll be that if they're on a binge they'll have to maybe go out and perform acts seven, eight, nine, ten times a night and a lot of, I suppose, women who had dealt with the issues of like who had come off the streets, are actually going back onto the streets.

URRY: So, what, former clients that you thought you'd managed to persuade to get out of that lifestyle, they're coming back into it again?

JACOBS: Yes, yes, we're seeing them back on the streets, so we're getting them to treatment and we're getting them methadone prescription, so they actually, you know, become quite stable. But then, as crack's been introduced into their, I suppose into their lives, then they've actually gone back over again, which is really sad to see.

ANNA: I think I started using heroin when I was about fifteen. I started work on the streets when I was sixteen and using crack when I was about eighteen.

URRY: How old are you now?

ANNA: Twenty-three.

URRY: This woman, who we've agreed not to name, is part of Teeside's drug addicted sex trade. She may only be twenty-three, but she looks older and less healthy than she should. She'd used both heroin and crack the day we met her, and told us that was typical of others she knew.

ANNA: More girls go on the streets and work for crack cocaine rather than go on the streets for heroin.

URRY: Why's that?

ANNA: If you've got money to go and buy crack cocaine and you'll like take it, and then once you've took it you feel high, so obviously you need heroin to come down, and if you can't get the heroin at that specific time, you go back out on the streets to get more crack to keep you high, go on until you can get heroin.

URRY: So it's a difficult cycle really, isn't it?

ANNA: Yeah, it's just one vicious circle, isn't it? You go out on the streets to get your money for your crack, and then if you're planning on just coming home and getting heroin and staying in for the night, if it's not a very good night, you'll end up buying more crack, so you can't stay in because you're high, so you have to go out again, do you know what I mean? So it's just, basically you can take the heroin and then just stop the crack cocaine for the night, but most girls don't, and most girls just go out and get money for crack and heroin and have it both at the same time.

URRY: But her problems extend beyond addiction and sex work. She got pregnant and there was an unhappy outcome.

ANNA: Before I fell pregnant I was doing it, and then through my pregnancy I was using it, and then when I'd had my son and they told me that I could have a chance to keep him, I stopped.

URRY: What happened?

ANNA: Well I just, I was clean for a little bit in hospital when I had him, because when my son was born he was born addicted as well, so he went into foster care for a while.

URRY: Was that a condition of you trying to keep him?

ANNA: Yeah.

URRY: That you were to stop crack?

ANNA: Yeah, I did, I stopped both heroin and crack and was willing to come off my methadone, and then I got him back and I went to a mother and baby unit, but I just walked out of there once, they'd taken me off my methadone, it was a bit too much for me, so I just walked out of there, and then he got adopted. I still write to him now twice a year and get photographs and that. Like some people, when their kids get adopted, they just forget about them, but I've been writing to him twice a year.

URRY: What's the situation now then? Do you stand a chance of seeing him or is that an impossibility?

ANNA: No, no, I think when he's eighteen, if he comes looking for me, but I can't see him till then.

URRY: She's not alone in having to give up her child for adoption. File on 4 has found pioneering research which confirms crack cocaine misuse among parents is driving up the numbers of children placed into care. Studies by Judith Harwin, professor of social work at Brunel University, into cases involving social services referrals, have begun to uncover the extent of the problem.

HARWIN: This was the thing that truly startled us. We had expected that we would find quite a bit of heroin, but in our study we found that the proportion of children whose parents were misusing crack was much larger than those who were misusing heroin – a third of the children approximately were affected by crack. And this has never been found before, so it really took us by surprise. In a more recent survey we carried out for another study, in three central London authorities 60% to 70% of all cases going forward for care proceedings involved illegal drugs, alcohol or both. That study doesn't have a good breakdown of the proportion that are crack, but we know that it will be certainly in there.

URRY: It's a significant factor, isn't it, given the chaos it causes?

HARWIN: It is a significant factor and the figures are increasingly on the up. A shocking rise in less than a decade.

URRY: In fact, in that time, the research shows numbers have almost doubled. Yet, according to Judith Harwin, few have woken up to the problem.

HARWIN: Because we've had our eyes shut, we haven't been able to set up good systems where we're routinely collecting information on just how much crack misuse there is in the families of cases seen by social services. We've not

JANJUA: One would hope. It does seem that the Government has taken its foot off the pedal here and focused primarily on traditional services and targeting the heroin and opiate users.

URRY: The Government has been going through a consultation process before deciding on a new national drugs strategy for the next ten years. But for now, without treatment, people are falling into the final safety net, where only their most basic needs are being provided.

ACTUALITY AT DROP-IN CENTRE

URRY: A night time drop in centre at a church in Middlesbrough. Here crack addicts mingle with the drunk and the damaged to get sandwiches and cups of tea in preparation for a night sleeping rough as temperatures fall.

ADDICT: Where will I sleep? Everywhere sometimes on the streets, doorways stuff like that because sometimes I look all right and sometimes I look really bad. When I've woke up on the street I've seen my family and that, and people always come back and talk, like tell our mum things like, 'Oh I've seen your son on the streets,' stuff like that. It's the family part that hurts the most. My mum always tries to be strong, a couple of times I've seen her upset, crying and that, and it does hurt me. It's just that relying on it now, you get used to it, it just always spirals out of control.

URRY: He's only in his early twenties and further evidence of how crack has reached into a damaged community of heroin addicts.

ADDICT: We get our heroin first, then we get the crack, so then you know you've got some heroin afterwards, because that's what you need, to come down you need heroin. It's bumping into people and stuff like that meeting people, I'm never, it's always there. Cos when you grow up, you don't meet new people, all the people that you know is drug users, that's who you've knocked about with, that's who you've scored with. So when you bump into people, it's always users that you know, so the temptation is always there.

URRY: He and his mates who share pipes of crack are sitting ducks. Cleveland police told us how dealers cynically target heroin addicts by offering free samples of crack to get them hooked on that as well. It helps to explain the march of crack cocaine across Britain. Chief Constable Sean Price says it's reached communities up and down the land.

PRICE: Speaking to my colleagues it's very clear that there are very few parts of the UK that haven't experienced some level of crack cocaine, and it's sadly true that most areas that have had heroin problems in the past will have experienced some crack cocaine problems now.

URRY: So there still seems to be plenty of crack available on the streets – that's what we're told anyway.

PRICE: Crack is certainly available on the streets, despite our very best efforts to deal with the dealers. They continue, but I think what we have to do, from an enforcement point of view, is hold the line in trying to stop any further expansion.

URRY: With Teesside having all the pre-cursors in place for a serious escalation in crack, Mr Price also discovered, through drugs operations and intelligence gathering that his area was being sized up by organised crime.

PRICE: The picture that was emerging was that, that Cleveland was seen as a hub for distribution to the north of the country and up into Scotland, and for that reason was seen as being a very attractive target for organised criminals from outside. At least one of the groups that we looked at had come from as far away as Jamaica to try and set up a network here in Cleveland which would have been part of a hub for other parts of the country. Once we saw that information, we knew that we had a serious problem facing us, and unless we took some very rapid action we'd be looking at serious problems in the future.

ACTUALITY OF SURVEILLANCE TAPE

URRY: Police surveillance tapes of a Jamaican-born crack dealer, 64 year old Reginald Johnson, known locally as Shaggy.

ACTUALITY OF SURVEILLANCE TAPE

URRY: Johnson opened dealing dens in houses among the tightly packed terraces of Gresham, using phone boxes at the end of his road as part of his set up.

ACTUALITY AT PHONE BOX

ASHLEY: This phone box was used to make contact with one of the dealers that lived in this street, and what we would do, the users would come down here, they'd ring in on his mobile ... his associates, and they would either be invited to the premises further up the road or they would actually come down and meet them here and the deals would be done very close to the telephone box.

URRY: Let's walk down the road here and look at his house.

Detective Inspector Mel Ashley, the head of the town's drugs squad, says Johnson was rightly suspicious about being infiltrated, and used a system of codes to sell from his house further down the street.

So this was his house here. Was it the crack den?

ASHLEY: Yes, this was the one that Shaggy was last living at, and this was where a good amount of the crack cocaine dealing in the area was being run from.

URRY: It was like a little corner shop business really, wasn't it?

ASHLEY: Yes, I mean, you could say that.

URRY: How would he have known who to trust and who not to trust?

ASHLEY: Well it's sort of built up through his association with people. People will have been introduced to him by other users and they would vouch for those people.

URRY: But you had to make a special approach to this house, didn't you?

ASHLEY: Yes. To get in here was basically a code, and it was that if you knocked on the door you were treated as suspicious, but if you knocked on the window, that was the accepted code for him to come and answer the door.

URRY: The final knock Johnson got on his door was from police. In April, the 64 year old, and two of his associates were jailed for conspiracy to supply Class A drugs. But officers had also been able to piece together more about the network he'd been buying from. A week after Johnson began his five year prison sentence, Cleveland police led raids by more than four hundred officers across Britain, aimed at smashing that network. Chief Constable Sean Price believes Middlesbrough had been targeted from the other side of the world.

PRICE: What we saw was a very large, in fact huge amount potentially of crack cocaine coming all the way from the West Indies over into London, then from London working its way up the east coast mainline to ourselves and then the start of a distribution network here in Cleveland. And we also found that much of the money that was coming from that was then being moved back into Africa to be laundered effectively.

URRY: I mean, how much money are they making?

PRICE: Millions and millions and millions. Certainly in the operations that we've been looking at recently here in Cleveland, it was multi million pound deals just for the town of Middlesbrough – coming with money, going back into South Africa, originally coming from Jamaica together with the drugs, so a sort of triangle that had been set up there.

URRY: Cleveland and other provincial forces in Britain are targeting dealing as hard as they can to try to stop that level of organisation and criminality moving in and forming alliances with local networks. But in some places they've already taken root, including at the other end of the East coast mainline.

ACTUALITY AT TUBE STATION

URRY: Brixton, in south London. It's not just tickets for rock concerts which are being touted outside the tube station on the high street. Here drugs are still being sold openly in some parts of town, and it doesn't take long for a visitor like me to see the effects.

URRY: It's just after 4pm on a very pleasant October afternoon and I've just got out of the tube at Brixton, taken a left turn down Brixton Hill and I'm walking past now a little thin strip of open land with a children's park in it and some big trees called Rush Common. And in the common, on the far side, about thirty feet away from me, there's a series of benches. On those benches are three men and, with schoolchildren all around and a pretty busy thoroughfare, they are openly injecting and that's in broad daylight in a very busy part of this small community. That shocking introduction didn't surprise the London assembly member for the area, Labour's Valerie Shawcross, who met me a short time later on the busy high street.

SHAWCROSS: When I come through Brixton in the evening, in fact almost any time of day, you usually see groups of drug dealers. You can see transactions taking place and this is in the middle of one of the busiest public transport interchanges in the whole of London. Thousands of people standing side by side with drug dealers.

URRY: Valerie Shawcross said she'd seen dealing going on close to where we were standing, by a cluster of phone boxes.

SHAWCROSS: I've been told by the police that there's been dealing here at certain points and it's used basically to duck behind, to hide behind. You can see there's a little bit of something strange going on there right now.

URRY: Yes, they've got a system, haven't they, about how they do it. How does it work?

SHAWCROSS: They'll have spotters. Quite often there's a tout who is looking for the customers, who doesn't have anything on him himself, but he will take the customer round the corner to somebody who has. You do see dealing from the mouth, so the dealer will have a rock of something wrapped in cellophane inside his cheek, and then he'll either spit it into the hand of the customer or it'll be kissed through a girl onto somebody and of course they haven't got a lot of stuff on them, they've got a stash hidden somewhere. So a lot of effort is taken to avoid being caught dealing.

URRY: All this is happening five years after a major drive was launched to combat the problem. According to a Government report, crack dealing in Brixton reached crisis point in 2002. Guns and violence ensured the area had a formidable reputation. The then Home Secretary met with local politicians and drugs services, an action plan was put in place and the Home Office started to talk about progress being made.

ACTUALITY ON STREET

URRY: Patrol Officers showed us some of what had been achieved. On Electric Avenue, PC Mark Suaznabar says it's now only groceries and other legal goods which can be bought at this iconic market.

SUAZNABAR: This was the centre of the kind of the crack world in Brixton, where these two roads meet. It's very difficult to police. There's crowds, there's obstructions to cameras, there's plenty of posts where people can see, you know, if we're coming from a distance. But through lots of proactive operations and working with the stallholders, trying to maybe change the environment, make it less friendly to the drug dealers and to the drug users, you know, speaking to the stall holders, their lives, you know, are considerably better. You obviously still have people in the town centre, but the traffic through here has just been reduced to a fraction of what it was before.

URRY: So they are still dealing openly somewhere in the town centre, aren't they? We were told this.

SUAZNABAR: Compared to how it was before, it's openly if it occurs on the streets, so therefore by definition it's in the open, but the areas of the street it now occurs in are further away, out of the public view, compared to where they would be here before, you would be walking down buying your shopping and it would be happening right in front of you, whereas now it's been pushed to the fringes of the town centre by, you know, maybe putting a bit of fear back into the people who deal the drugs, that if you do do this, you know, in the town centre you are going to get caught.

URRY: There may be fewer dealers but there's still plenty of crime committed in the town centre to feed crack habits. That became clear as patrol officers met with the security manager in a prominent high street department store.

ACTUALITY IN STORE

POLICEMAN: How's it been anyway?

MANAGER: Yeah, same as always. We're never quiet, never quiet.

URRY: He's never quiet because of the addicts who come here to steal.

MANAGER: The persistent and our most problem people are, it's usually to feed a drug habit. Menswear and cosmetics predominantly, obviously the perfumes, after shaves, they can easily get fifteen or twenty quid over the road or down the pub. It can literally be sold within thirty seconds. Makes our life quite interesting.

URRY: What sort of losses do you take on this sort of behaviour?

MANAGER: Considerable. It runs into hundreds of thousands of pounds per year. Enough to warrant, you know, a lot of investment in security and loss prevention.

ACTUALITY IN CUSTODY SUITE

URRY: At the custody suite in Brixton police station, the scale of the problem emerges. More than five thousand people under arrest have passed through here in the last six months alone. Those suspected of stealing, robbing, drugs or violence are all tested for heroin or cocaine use. Superintendent Dave Musker is looking at a big white board on which the results of today's testing have been written.

MUSKER: Two have been arrested, one for shoplifting, one for possession of controlled drugs and drugs ... Both of them tested positive and will see a drugs worker. So out of the people arrested for acquisitive crime, well, they're all tested positive.

URRY: All of them?

MUSKER: Yes. But of course that may not ...

URRY: It's just a snapshot of today, is it?

MUSKER: Yes, Thursday afternoon in Brixton.

URRY: And while the town centre bears the brunt of crime committed to feed drug habits, there's recognition of more serious concerns about people's safety.

MUSKER: There is a substantive issue with criminal gangs, organised criminal gangs in Brixton, who are involved in guns, drugs and serious violence. We are committed to really deal with that as an issue. We are making strides to deal with that, but there is substantially more to do.

URRY: How much of that goes hand in hand though with crack dealing, the guns, the violence?

MUSKER: I think it's an integral part. I deal and see the symptoms of that and police accordingly. What I see is the damage, young men killed out of their time, grieving mothers, communities that are really hurt by this. I see the symptoms, because it is hugely damaging to people.

URRY: Police say community confidence has improved as dozens of crack dens have been closed down and some areas are designated dispersal zones, giving special powers to stop dealers and others congregating. But you don't have to go far from that zone near Coldharbour Lane, in the town centre to find other estates where people are living in fear.

ACTUALITY OF FOOTSTEPS AND GATE OPENING

URRY: We were taken to an address in an area we've agreed not to name, to meet those frightened by the violent behaviour which accompanies crack. In this neighbourhood, we met older residents, who say they won't even come out of their houses after dark. We were warned not to walk around at night because of concerns for our safety.

WOMAN: There's a lot of dealers on this estate here and that is disturbing the environment a lot. It's not a safe area at this moment in time.

URRY: But as far as you're concerned, if you look out of your front window here and to the left, that's where the crack den ...

WOMAN: All of that stretch. Positive, at least three houses over there.

URRY: And how long's that been going on for?

WOMAN: Long time, long time.

URRY: Whose window was it that got shot through? It was yours? Can you tell me what happened?

WOMAN 2: When we was sitting in the kitchen and there all of a sudden there is [makes noise] like that, you know, and one of my sons, my two sons, they opened the door and see two young men that were riding the bicycles, and one was pedalling and the other one was shooting. I living here for thirty years and I am frightened now, you know.

WOMAN 3: They chopped her grandson in the neck ...

URRY: Tell me what happened to your grandson.

WOMAN 4: He was actually coming in and along with his friend and their bikes, and this other man came along on his bike, but he just, he had an axe. He just took out the axe and went straight across his neck here. So he was very very lucky, very lucky to survive. They said a fraction of an inch and he could have got the jugular vein. Now my grandson didn't even know the men.

URRY: Are you scared about living on an estate ...?

WOMAN 4: I wouldn't go out, I would not go out on my own after dark, no way round here, no no.

URRY: These people are demanding more action, and they get a sympathetic hearing from Valerie Shawcross, their London assembly member.

SHAWCROSS: This fight is still a very much a hands-on, ongoing battle. We are struggling to deal with drug dealing and so much crime comes from it and it really undermines the community and it undermines businesses. We are pouring regeneration money into so many areas of London and in a way, you know, it's pouring it into a sieve. Crack and other drugs suppress the economy, I think a lot of businesses would move into the area, would expand, existing businesses would invest in the area if they felt that the area was up and coming and safe.

