

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 00.01 ON FRIDAY 4 SEPTEMBER 2026



An inspection of the police's role in safety advisory groups: planning for major public events

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Foreword

In October 2025, the Home Secretary commissioned us to inspect the contributions police forces in England and Wales make to [safety advisory groups \(SAGs\)](#) and other bodies responsible for public safety and the licensing of high-profile public events.

This has been a challenging inspection. It deals with the complex framework of legislation relating to the roles and responsibilities of individuals and organisations involved with public safety at major events. The framework of legislation, statutory guidance and governance for such events is far from complete. Much of it stems from tragedies at sports stadiums over the past 50 years. The legislation focuses, therefore, on safety at sports stadiums and on football in particular, rather than other types of public event.

Our commission required us to consider how well the police assess risks associated with public events. But it also asked us to examine their role in working with local authority SAGs. We don't inspect local authorities, other agencies, landowners or private event organisers. But when assessing risk, the police consider their role and legal responsibilities, along with their ability to meet those responsibilities. The police must judge how to balance their enduring duty to protect the public against the extent to which they can trust event safety plans.

Safety at sports grounds, particularly football stadiums, has significantly improved since the 1990s. This is in part due to improved stadium design, safety certification and regulation. SAGs are voluntary. They differ in name, role and structure across the UK. Therefore, it is harder to assess whether the police interact effectively with them. Local authorities issue safety certificates to sports grounds. So the direction from a SAG managed by the same local authority influences decision makers at football stadiums. The same influence isn't available to SAGs or the police in relation to many other public events, where there isn't a requirement for safety certification.

Threats and risks to public safety have changed dramatically over the last 20 years. Music concerts, fairs, airshows and celebrations have all been the setting for serious injury and deaths. Sadly, occasions that bring together large crowds of people have also been a target for those causing harm and fear through acts of terrorism.

It is in relation to the arrangements for these events that we found the framework to be insufficient. Others have the same concern. At the same time as our inspection, representatives from national bodies involved in public events gave evidence to the Culture Media and Sport Committee. The committee heard the same concerns shared by many of those we interviewed. The absence of legislation, statutory guidance and regulation with regards to many public events, leaves the police wrestling with inconsistency. This inconsistency extends to the methods by which the police can legitimately recoup the substantial additional costs associated with public safety operations at events. It makes keeping the public safe harder.

To assess the effectiveness of the police in planning for public safety at these events, we needed to consider the roles of other organisations and individuals in bringing about a safe public event. In doing so, we have identified [areas for improvement](#) in public safety that extend beyond the work of the police. As this relates directly to public safety, it would be remiss of us to not highlight them in this report.

We would like to thank all the local authorities, national organisations and event organisers that contributed to this inspection. The commentary and suggested improvements in this report are intended to assist them in carrying out their valuable role in future events and to help keep the public safe.

In our inspection, we reviewed 856 documents and held interviews with 113 [police officers](#), [staff](#) and members of other organisations. We examined [risk assessments](#), command strategies and SAG records for 28 public events. We sent a detailed questionnaire to all 43 police forces, and all 43 completed it.

We identified four areas that we believe require improvement.

Firstly, SAGs have no basis in law. They are non-statutory. Most local authorities have them, but some don't. The way they operate and the events they consider differs vastly.

Secondly, the guidance and training for police commanders doesn't prepare them adequately to work with SAGs. There is no national risk matrix for non-football public events. This contributes to inconsistent planning and the absence of a coherent escalation process.

Thirdly, there is no safety certification regime or regulation for most public events, unlike those held at certain sports stadiums or football matches.

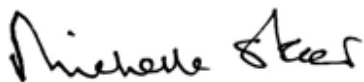
Fourthly, the roles and responsibilities for event organisers are set out in the [Purple Guide](#). This guide is written and published online by the events industry. It has no basis in law. It overstates the level of legal responsibility event organisers actually have. So it downplays the important role for the police and other emergency services.

Having reviewed the evidence, we believe that the absence of legislation, statutory guidance and independent governance surrounding non-sporting public events contributes to widespread inconsistencies. The differing approaches taken by SAGs and police forces compound these inconsistencies.

When public safety operations at events go wrong, it damages public trust and confidence. The warning we heard from too many people we spoke to during our inspection was that it was a question of when, not if, it will go wrong.

In this report, [we make 37 recommendations](#). Our recommendations are designed to provide the clarity police forces need to collaborate effectively with local authorities and event organisers and improve public safety by:

- improving the training and guidance for police officers and staff involved with planning for public events and working with SAGs;
- improving the guidance to police forces in relation to [critical incident](#) management, [community impact assessments](#), business impact assessments and [people impact assessments](#);
- clarifying the funding protocols for police resources deployed at public events;
- improving the training and guidance for police [public order public safety](#) commanders, including how they should communicate with all parties involved;
- developing a national police support function for events and the introduction of a national risk assessment matrix for all public events;
- improving the guidance and training for SAG chairs and attendees; and
- a wide-scale review of the framework of legislation and governance arrangements in relation to the roles and responsibilities of parties involved in planning public events.



Michelle Skeer OBE QPM

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Recommendations

In this report, we make 37 recommendations.

Recommendation 1

By 31 December 2026, [UK Resilience Academy](#) should publish refreshed guidance for [safety advisory group \(SAG\)](#) chairs, other SAG members and attendees. The guidance should mandate appropriate training for SAG chairs and provide greater clarity on their role and responsibilities, including how to deal with conflicts of interest and how to communicate SAG advice to local authorities and the public.

Recommendation 2

By 31 March 2027, the [Health and Safety Executive](#) should publish refreshed guidance for [safety advisory group](#) chairs that is consistent with the refreshed [UK Resilience Academy](#) guidance.

Recommendation 3

By 31 March 2027, the [UK Resilience Academy](#) should introduce a [safety advisory group](#) support network to share national best practice.

Recommendation 4

By 31 March 2027, the [UK Resilience Academy](#) should introduce a national oversight and monitoring function for [safety advisory groups](#) to benchmark and promote a consistent approach in the way safety advisory groups operate across the country.

Recommendation 5

By 31 August 2027, the [College of Policing](#) should refresh [public order and public safety command training](#) to include greater detail on working with [safety advisory groups](#), including police responsibilities within safety advisory group discussions/meetings. This should be included in annual refresher training.

Recommendation 6

By 31 August 2027, the [College of Policing](#) should provide guidance that defines when forces should request a [safety advisory group](#). The new guidance should include the roles and responsibilities of silver commanders in working with safety advisory groups. And it should set clear protocols for the material they share, including [risk assessments](#), and the manner in which they share it.

Recommendation 7

By 31 August 2027, the [College of Policing](#) should develop and provide comprehensive [safety advisory group](#) guidance for [officers](#) and [staff](#) who work with safety advisory groups, but who aren't [public order public safety](#) trained.

Recommendation 8

By 31 August 2027, all chief constables should provide specific [safety advisory group](#) training for police safety advisory group attendees who aren't [public order public safety](#) trained.

Recommendation 9

With immediate effect, all chief constables should satisfy themselves that their [officers](#) always use the crowd and event safety template when they engage with event organisers.

Recommendation 10

By 31 August 2027, the [College of Policing](#) should refresh its [public order public safety](#) and [events](#) training material and guidance. The refresh should encourage police commanders to take proportionate risk-based decisions about directly warning and informing the public where this would help reduce safety risks.

Recommendation 11

By 31 March 2027, the [College of Policing](#) should provide guidance to forces about the practice of [officers](#) commanding concurrent events or doing so while holding other critical command responsibilities. The guidance should cover:

- managing and mitigating the risk of concurrency; and
- the type of circumstances in which concurrency would be inadvisable.

Recommendation 12

By 31 March 2027, all chief constables should satisfy themselves that the demands on gold commanders are manageable and support public safety, especially where public safety events and other responsibilities happen concurrently.

Recommendation 13

By 31 August 2027, the [College of Policing](#) should refresh the guidance and [public order public safety command training](#) to:

- reflect the importance of documenting and testing command handover protocols; and
- specify the resources required to take control of an event, should that become necessary.

Recommendation 14

By 31 August 2027, all forces should have a documented handover protocol between the police and event organisers for command responsibility for all public events. This should state that forces may need to take command, to meet the core responsibilities of the police under common law (long-standing custom, based on previous legal cases).

Recommendation 15

By 31 August 2027, the [College of Policing](#) should provide guidance to forces to prevent police-led planning meetings inappropriately replacing the important role of a [safety advisory group](#). Safety advisory groups should independently assess safety risks and offer advice.

Recommendation 16

By 31 August 2027, the [College of Policing](#) should define, within relevant guidance and training material, the title of police planning meetings for events and sporting fixtures. This is in addition to the current definitions of tactical co-ordination group and strategic co-ordination group structure.

Recommendation 17

The [National Police Chiefs' Council](#) should notify force [public order public safety](#) leads once the refreshed National Police Chiefs' Council '[Events Guidance](#)' [document](#) is published.

Recommendation 18

By 31 August 2027, the [College of Policing](#) should refresh its [intelligence management guidance](#) to make sure forces use accredited intelligence functions when they plan and [assess risks](#) for public events, including football. The guidance should include how forces should use artificial intelligence technology within intelligence functions.

Recommendation 19

By 31 August 2027, all chief constables should take steps to make all [intelligence](#) products and [risk assessments](#) for public events, including football fixtures, comply with the refreshed [College of Policing guidance for intelligence management](#). They should have robust quality assurance checks for processes using artificial intelligence technology.

Recommendation 20

By 31 March 2027, all chief constables should make sure a force [intelligence](#) representative attends [safety advisory groups](#) for those public events where a formal intelligence command structure is in place and shares any [risk assessment](#) in line with information sharing protocols.

Recommendation 21

By 31 August 2027, the [College of Policing](#) should refresh its [public order public safety](#) and [events authorised professional practice](#) to make sure forces complete business impact assessments and [people impact assessments](#), on a proportionate basis, when they plan for public events.

Recommendation 22

By 31 August 2027, all chief constables should make sure their forces complete [community impact assessments](#), business impact assessments and [people impact assessments](#) for events on a proportionate basis, in line with [College of Policing](#) guidance.

Recommendation 23

By 31 August 2027, the [College of Policing](#) should provide guidance recommending widening the role for the [chief officer](#) lead for [public order public safety](#) in every force to include responsibility for overseeing [safety advisory groups](#).

Recommendation 24

By 31 March 2027, all chief constables should make sure the silver [public order public safety](#) commander (or their nominated deputy) attends all [safety advisory groups](#) that consider the events they command.

Recommendation 25

By 31 August 2027, the [College of Policing](#) should refresh the training on [public order public safety command courses](#) to encourage commanders to recognise, declare and manage [critical](#) and [major incidents](#) associated with the events they command.

Recommendation 26

By 31 August 2027, the [College of Policing](#) should refresh the [critical incident management authorised professional practice](#) to encourage forces to notify the relevant [police and crime commissioner](#) or mayoral equivalent of all [critical incidents](#).

Recommendation 27

With immediate effect, all police forces should decline any payment from private individuals or companies for the provision of police services at public events unless it complies with [section 25 of the Police Act 1996](#).

Recommendation 28

By 31 December 2026, the [United Kingdom Football Policing Unit](#) should make sure that it has a representative present in all relevant meetings between UK police forces and international law enforcement agencies.

Recommendation 29

By 31 March 2027, the [National Police Chiefs' Council](#) should specify its requirements for extending the remit of, and capacity within, the [National Police Coordination Centre](#) to include public events.

Recommendation 30

By 31 August 2027, the Home Office should grant all police forces access to the event portal, so that each force can place a link to it on its public-facing website.

Recommendation 31

By 31 August 2027, all chief constables should have the events portal available on their force website. They should submit relevant information and [intelligence](#), collected via the portal, to the [National Police Coordination Centre](#) strategic intelligence and briefing team.

Recommendation 32

By 31 March 2027, the [National Police Coordination Centre](#) should develop a national risk matrix for events, to include a threshold for escalation to a regional or national level. It should be available for all forces to use.

Recommendation 33

By 31 March 2027, all chief constables should make sure their force uses the new [National Police Coordination Centre](#) events risk matrix in operational planning for all public events.

Recommendation 34

By 31 March 2027, the [National Police Coordination Centre](#) should include information on those events that meet the national threshold in the weekly monitoring report that is shared across government.

Recommendation 35

By 31 December 2026, the [UK Resilience Academy](#) should publish revised guidance to those involved in [safety advisory groups](#). It should include advice for event organisers and safety advisory group members on the appropriate use of artificial intelligence technology.

Recommendation 36

By 31 December 2027, the [UK Resilience Academy](#) should refresh the guidance to those involved in [safety advisory groups](#). It should include advice for safety advisory group chairs on the recording of minutes and actions that is compliant with [Freedom of Information](#) requirements.

Recommendation 37

By 31 August 2027, the government should complete a ministerially-led cross-departmental review to secure improvements in event safety. As a minimum, the review should address the following matters:

- the absence of a safety certification regime for public events similar to that for sports stadiums and football matches; this should include the consideration of mandating all event organisers hold appropriate public liability insurance;
- whether [safety advisory groups](#) should become a statutory body rather than voluntary;
- the absence of a single agency or body with regulatory responsibility for oversight and guidance in relation to non-sporting public events and those sporting events that aren't covered by the [Sports Grounds Safety Authority](#);
- the absence of independent, statutory guidance for event organisers;
- consideration of legislation to confer similar powers to those conferred by the [Public Order Act 1986](#) to place conditions or restrictions on events where there is a significant risk to public safety;
- the lack of clarity about the level of responsibility the police have in relation to public events; this should include the consideration of a more contemporary interpretation of archaic common law duties (long-standing custom, based on previous legal cases) to protect the public and prevent crime at all times;
- the lack of clarity about the level of responsibility in law that event organisers have in relation to public safety and crime prevention;
- the inability of forces to reclaim the costs associated with deploying resources at public events through [section 25 of the Police Act 1996](#);
- the absence of an effective funding stream and application process for forces to use when additional resources, and the associated costs, become a factor in [risk assessments](#) and operational decisions;
- the disparity in the level of professional qualification required to manage public safety at different types of public events;
- the lack of clarity in section 27 guidance for the [Terrorism \(Protection of Premises\) Act 2025](#) insofar as it relates to Zone Ex; this should include a consideration of the opportunity to align the attributes of premises or qualifying events and attendee volumes, with other aspects of the wider framework for public events;
- the lack of a single point of contact within the government for public events that police forces, national police bodies and local authorities can engage with for support; and
- the absence of a clear definition for events that attract co-ordination and financial support from the government, and those that don't.

Introduction

Background

Much of the legislation and governance arrangements for safety at public events in the UK relate to sporting events. Sadly, most are a direct consequence of the lessons learned following disasters. This has resulted in a robust framework of legislation, certification, guidance and governance for sports stadiums and football matches. Lord Taylor recommended establishing [safety advisory groups \(SAGs\)](#) in his report following the 1989 Hillsborough disaster, primarily to consider public safety at football stadiums.

Over subsequent years, the role of SAGs has grown to include assessing risks and advising on public safety in relation to a wider range of public events. Many of these public events aren't covered by legislation or governance in the same way some sports stadiums and football matches are.

For events such as Christmas markets, music festivals, other sports, car rallies, cultural celebrations and religious celebrations there is only guidance and a duty of care under the [Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974](#). This duty of care applies to all parties involved in the event's planning and organisation. But this legislative tool isn't preventative in the same way sports grounds safety certification is. It is a way of holding event organisers, the police or others liable after something has gone wrong. Unless the organiser intends to sell alcohol or have live entertainment, they aren't required to obtain an event licence or safety certificate.

The main guidance available to event organisers and other agencies is the [Purple Guide](#). The Purple Guide is a non-statutory document published by the [Events Industry Forum](#). It can only be purchased on a subscription basis. The guidance states that the event organiser is responsible for public safety at their event. In parallel, the police also have an enduring duty in common law (long-standing custom, based on previous legal cases) to protect the public and prevent crime.

Many of the events SAGs consider don't result in police operations. But those with greater risks or with larger attendances often do. The way the police plan for public events, assess risk and work with SAGs might influence the way events take place. This includes restrictions on those attending. Police advice may lead to another body making a decision that prevents the event from happening altogether. Therefore, the police need to take great care with the advice they offer.

Usually, SAGs, and the part the police play in them, don't attract attention from the wider public, senior politicians or the media. But some events attract more attention. Sheer scale, the nature of attendees, performers or players, or the different countries involved may give them greater national significance. The actions and decisions that surround these events can have far-reaching consequences.

The Home Secretary commissioned us to carry out this inspection after one such event. In this event, the actions of the police and the SAG collided with the complex geopolitics of conflict in the Middle East. A SAG decided to prevent all Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters from attending a game against Aston Villa in November 2025. The international political and media outcry was extraordinary. It led to accusations that politics had influenced the police to exaggerate [intelligence](#), resulting in the SAG's decision. This accusation about police influence on the decision of the SAG damaged public trust and confidence in the police.

In this report, we explore the police's role in the complex and incomplete framework surrounding different types of major public events. We examine how the police assess public safety risks and their potential consequences, including those that reach beyond police or local authority boundaries. We consider the resourcing and legislative options available to the police to reduce risks. We also consider how effectively the police work with SAGs and event organisers to keep the public safe. And critically, what they do when they can't easily mitigate risks.

About us

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) independently assesses the effectiveness and efficiency of police forces and fire & rescue services to make communities safer.

In preparing our reports, we ask the questions that the public would ask, and publish the answers in accessible form. We use our expertise to interpret the evidence and make recommendations for improvement.

Our commission

On 31 October 2025, the Home Secretary commissioned us under [section 54\(2B\) of the Police Act 1996](#) to inspect the contributions police forces in England and Wales make to SAGs and other bodies responsible for public safety and the licensing of high-profile public events.

As part of this commission, on 27 November 2025 the Home Secretary requested a rapid inspection of the match assessment and categorisation that West Midlands Police provided to the Birmingham City Council SAG in respect of the Aston Villa versus Maccabi Tel Aviv fixture on 6 November 2025. We refer to this first element as phase 1 of our inspection.

In phase 1 of our inspection, we examined:

- the match assessment and categorisation that West Midlands Police carried out before the fixture; and
- the extent to which the information and intelligence the force gave the SAG accurately reflected the full information and intelligence picture, including information and intelligence the force had received from the Netherlands Police.

In phase 2 of this commission, we evaluated how police forces take into account the full range of strategic considerations when providing their safety advice. It also required us to examine:

- the risk appetite of forces in their advice and assessment;
- the degree to which the police take into account wider community impacts and other factors that might be relevant (such as an event's national or international significance) beyond narrow community safety considerations;
- whether forces strike the right balance between these factors; and
- how forces communicate their assessments and contributions to the public.

Our terms of reference

In our inspection (phases 1 and 2) we examined:

- legislation, policies and processes in relation to the role of the police in SAGs;
- national and force-specific guidance on planning major events, how forces use it to assess risk, and how forces use the SAG process;
- the extent to which forces take account of local community impact assessments, as well as wider local, national and international factors, when planning their approach to these events;
- whether forces are striking the right balance between risk, financial costs and national and international factors when they assess risk and compile their advice;
- when forces advise SAGs, how effectively those forces communicate that advice to the public; and
- when event organisers or local authorities make decisions, how effectively forces then communicate those decisions to the public.

Methodology

Our inspection took place between 1 November 2025 and 5 May 2026. We carried out fieldwork in seven police forces in England and Wales. This consisted of:

- a document review, in which we examined 856 documents, including operational plans for a range of major public events, policies, national guidance and SAG records;
- a total of 62 interviews with [police officers](#) and [staff](#) in police forces, including senior officers with command responsibility and event planning leads;

- a total of 21 interviews with the chairs of local SAGs and event organisers; and
- a further 30 interviews with [chief officers](#), national police leads, government officials, Police Scotland, Police Service of Northern Ireland and external organisations.

Questionnaire

We sent all 43 police forces in England and Wales a questionnaire. We used this to collate the number of SAGs they work with, the types of events they support and the role each force plays in planning for public safety. The full list of responses can be found [in annex B](#).

Events

We selected the forces for this inspection based on some of the significant public events they police. In our inspection, we considered a broad range of events which we describe in detail [in annex C](#).

We also interviewed police commanders from Police Scotland and the Police Service of Northern Ireland about their role in major public events and parades.

Terminology in this report

Event footprint

The area where an event takes place. It is defined by a building, perimeter fence, turnstiles or access restrictions.

Event safety advisory group

A [safety advisory group](#) providing safety advice on planned events outside the sporting environment. These groups are forums for discussion, co-ordination and sharing professional advice. They don't approve, authorise or prohibit events. In some areas of England and Wales, the term refers to a virtual safety advisory group, held wholly or partially online rather than in person.

Gold, silver and bronze commanders

Police commanders in charge of an event or operation;

- gold commanders are responsible and accountable for strategic policing;
- silver commanders are responsible for tactical policing; and
- bronze commanders are responsible for specific parts of operational delivery.

Green Guide

Detailed guidance to ground management and all relevant authorities on spectator safety at sports grounds. It is written by the [Sports Grounds Safety Authority](#).

Multi-agency planning meetings

Planning meetings bringing together representatives from various organisations to co-ordinate efforts, share information, and manage risks collectively.

Attendees include emergency services, local authorities and event organisers.

Some police forces use the term multi-agency strategic co-ordinating group.

Purple Guide

The principal source of good practice for event planning and safety management in the UK. Published by the Events Industry Forum as the primary reference document for managing health, safety and welfare at outdoor events.

Special police services

In line with [section 25 of the Police Act 1996](#), this applies to funding, paid for by event organisers, for police services that are not part of normal core police duties.

Special grants

Emergency financial support for local policing bodies facing unexpected or exceptional events.

Zone Ex

Public areas surrounding a venue or event, used by spectators travelling to or from an event, including transport hubs, public spaces and car parks.

The structure of this report

The starting point for this inspection was the Aston Villa versus Maccabi Tel Aviv football match in November 2025, accompanied by wider terms of reference about the police contribution to SAGs. However, during our fieldwork, it became apparent that the circumstances under which SAGs operate raise substantial public safety concerns. These aren't just about the police; they are about the law, commercial interests and the roles of several parts of government too. The police have an important role in a wider system.

In the following chapters, we explore all these issues. We begin by offering [a description of SAGs and how they operate](#). In relation to [the police](#), [national police bodies](#), the Home Office and other organisations, we make recommendations and indicate [areas for improvement](#) throughout. In relation to the government, rather than make a large number of discrete recommendations, each addressing a single point, we concluded that a single recommendation to the government ([Recommendation 37](#)) would be a more helpful way of presenting our views.

Safety advisory groups

Before offering our detailed judgments about the police contribution to [safety advisory groups \(SAGs\)](#), we set out an explanation of how SAGs have developed over recent decades and how they operate across the UK.

Legislation, guidance and governance

The learning from public inquiries following disasters led to SAGs

The [Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975](#) followed the [deaths of 66 spectators at Ibrox Stadium](#) in Glasgow on 2 January 1971 and the public inquiry by Lord Wheatley that followed. In the wake of the fire at Bradford City Football Club that claimed the lives of 56 people in 1985, the government enacted the [Fire Safety and Safety of Places of Sport Act 1987](#).

In his 1990 report following the deaths of 97 people at the [Hillsborough Stadium disaster](#) in 1989, Lord Taylor recommended all local authorities implement voluntary independent SAGs to assess public safety at football stadiums and matches. In his report, Lord Taylor agreed with Lord Wheatley's 1972 report, which stated:

"It can come as no surprise to the football world, and in light of happenings over the years, the demand for an independent appraisal and determination of the safety of grounds becomes almost irresistible. I certainly cannot resist it."

In 2011, the [Sports Grounds Safety Authority \(SGSA\)](#) took over from the Football Licensing Authority with expanded responsibilities. The SGSA issues licences to the 92 [designated sports stadiums](#) within the Premier League and English Football Leagues. It also oversees local authority safety certification of these stadiums. This same provision covers the national stadium at Wembley in London and the Principality Stadium in Cardiff. The stadium designation requirements apply to football stadiums with a capacity of over 5,000 people and for other sports stadiums with a capacity of more than 10,000. The SGSA's oversight of local authorities in their duties regarding safety certification includes, among other things, the effective use of SAGs in relation to licensed football grounds. This is the only form of statutory governance for the role of SAGs.

The SGSA sets safety standards for organisations involved in the design and management of events at sports stadiums. These standards are set out in the [Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds \(Green Guide\)](#). This guidance is applicable to all sports played within a stadium, which includes those operating under an SGSA licence and a local authority general safety certificate. The SGSA also publishes supplementary guidance for the use of stadiums for other events, such as music concerts.

These alternative uses often result in spectators watching the performance from the pitch area. This isn't generally covered in the general safety certificate. In these circumstances, the event organiser should apply to the local authority for a [special safety certificate](#). While the SGSA provides governance and oversight for designated football matches, its legal remit doesn't extend to stadiums being used for other types of events. Occasionally, the SGSA provides advice about alternative uses of football stadiums or for other sports played at non-designated sports grounds.

There are various sources of guidance available for SAGs, but it isn't always consistent

The [UK Resilience Academy \(UKRA\)](#) publishes guidance for those who work as part of SAGs. It first published the guidance in 2015 and refreshed it in 2019. At the time of our inspection, the UKRA removed '[The UK Good Practice Guide to Working in Safety Advisory Groups](#)' from circulation. The UKRA told us it was writing a new version that it planned to publish in September 2026. Therefore, in this report, references to the UKRA guidance for SAGs relate to the 2019 document.

The SGSA provides guidance on SAGs in the Green Guide. While it is similar to the UKRA guide, it understandably concentrates on sports stadiums, football and safety certification. The [Health and Safety Executive \(HSE\)](#) also provides [guidance](#) on this topic.

The [Events Industry Forum](#) publishes the [Purple Guide](#) for event organisers. This is the primary reference document for those responsible for managing health, safety, and welfare at outdoor events. In 2014, the Events Industry Forum took over responsibility for writing and publishing the guidance from the HSE. The police and other agencies use the Purple Guide as the principal source of good practice in the UK for event planning and safety management. But this isn't statutory guidance, and only subscribers paying a fee can access it.

The Purple Guide is a comprehensive resource. A chapter covers the role of SAGs and how organisers should work with them when planning their event. We reviewed the guidance and compared it with the UKRA guide and other sources. Although there are similarities, the guidance differs in some respects.

None of these guides define which events should be the subject of SAG consideration or who is responsible for making this important decision. The UKRA guide recognises that some local authorities only consider events with larger numbers of attendees. It warns that this approach might miss smaller events, some of which may have greater risk.

The UKRA also advises SAGs to be cautious about stepping too far into event planning because it can present conflicts of interest. The HSE guidance contradicts the UKRA guide by suggesting a SAG may not be necessary when an event organiser has developed an event planning group. It states:

“To facilitate this, some events establish a planning group/s. In these circumstances, it is often unnecessary to set-up a separate SAG.”

We weren't, therefore, surprised to find an inconsistent and confused approach to the role of SAGs. The absence of a single agency or body responsible for oversight and guidance isn't helpful and needs addressing urgently.

The role of SAGs has evolved over the years but still has no basis in law

SAGs are non-statutory multi-agency forums and have no basis in law. In the years that followed the Taylor report, safety at sports grounds across the UK significantly improved. The part SAGs played in this success has resulted in a broadening of their remit to include other types of public event. We found evidence of the advice SAGs provided to event organisers and local authorities at a wide variety of public events.

But, as our inspection has exposed, there are wide variations in the ways SAGs operate for these events. Despite the national governance and oversight provided by the SGSA, this lack of consistency also extends to SAGs that consider football. This means that there are different risk tolerances. So the management and mitigation of risk across force and local authority areas differs. We discuss the inconsistencies and their effects in more detail in several parts of this report.

In March 2026, giving [oral evidence](#) at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport select committee on Major Events, Ken Scott MBE (SGSA) commented:

“I keep coming back to Lord Justice Taylor's words about not being complacent. He coined the phrase, ‘Complacency is the enemy of safety’, and there is not a truer phrase in the world in which we operate.”

A representative of the UK Crowd Management Association also gave evidence at the same session. They had a warning about event management:

“When it does go wrong, Hillsborough, Brixton Academy, Manchester Arena, for a wealth of different reasons, suddenly it becomes incredibly important. For me, I want to get ahead of that before we have the next Manchester, and before we have the next Brixton Academy.”

Putting SAGs on a statutory basis means the law would require and empower them to offer guidance and advice, rather than being voluntary, advisory bodies. Primarily, their focus would be to improve consistency, accountability, and public safety at events.

SAGs engage with thousands of events each year, many without police involvement, and the vast majority pass without incident

The 43 police forces in England and Wales operate across 317 principal authorities in England and 22 unitary authorities in Wales. We asked all 43 forces to report on the number of SAGs they work with across the spectrum of public events. In total, forces reported working with 759 different SAGs. In many areas there were multiple SAGs with a focus on specific types of events. They included:

- 149 football-related SAGs;
- 298 for general types of events;
- 104 for music, concerts or festivals;
- 97 for events such as rallies or Christmas markets;
- 87 for sporting events other than football; and
- 24 for other, non-specified events.

SAGs are typically co-ordinated by the respective local authority. They give organisers an opportunity to simultaneously consult multiple regulatory bodies, such as the police, ambulance service, and highways department. SAGs review event management plans, [risk assessments](#), and contingency arrangements. They highlight safety concerns and advise event organisers. SAGs shouldn't be a decision-making forum.

The UKRA guidance for those who work with SAGs states that the functions of a SAG should be distinct from those of the event planning group. It states that SAG members shouldn't confuse their role with the arrangements for the practical management of the events. We were concerned to find that very few SAGs adhere to this guidance.

The responses to our questionnaire to forces showed that only 15 of 40 forces reported that SAGs appropriately offered only advice to local authority event safety certificate decision makers. Most forces (22 of 40) reported at least one SAG was operating outside their primary function, as they were responsible for the decisions on the granting of safety certificates.

The absence of any statutory basis means that, beyond sports stadiums and football safety certification, SAGs have limited levers with which to influence public safety at an event. One interviewee explained that in their position within the local authority, they inherited the role of chair of the multi-agency strategic co-ordinating group (MASCg) for a cultural event that is steeped in tradition. They told us there was an expectation that the event would go ahead regardless of any risk. They added that

there was nothing the authorities or emergency services could do to prevent it. We address this in [Recommendation 37](#).

In some areas, we found that the local authority had decided not to operate a SAG. We were told that this was because of financial pressures across other services. One SAG representative told us that the volume threshold placed on intervention meant many smaller events that might need multi-agency intervention didn't get the benefit of a SAG overview. So responsibility for safety at many events is left to the respective police force under their statutory responsibilities. Of the many thousands of events that take place, most pass without incident. But we found examples of significant risks at events, and some that have had tragic consequences.

The absence of a clear legislative framework for SAGs beyond football safety results in an inconsistent approach to safety planning. One event organiser told us that touring shows are particularly challenging. They have to "jump through many different hoops" depending on the venues where they play across the UK.

Most SAGs have terms of reference, but often stray beyond them

SAGs generally operate to terms of reference and provide specialist advice to a local authority. This is so the local authority can discharge its legal responsibilities under the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975 and Fire Safety and Safety of Places of Sport Act 1987. There are suggested terms of reference in the various guidance products available to event organisers. Inevitably, they differ in content.

The UKRA issues guidance to those involved in SAGs. It includes a set of generic terms of reference for SAGs to use:

- "To promote clarity of roles and responsibilities relevant to the event(s) within the SAG's remit. This should include the SAG members roles and may include the powers and policies of those organisations in relation to events";
- "To establish clear timelines for the provision of paperwork to the SAG and agree attendance and timelines with organisers. Where events have failed or been problematic in the years since the first iteration of this document, it is often noted that timeframes previously agreed have slipped significantly or no timeframes had been set in the first place";
- "To advise the local authority and/or event organiser in order to ensure high standards of health and safety";
- "To promote the principles of sensible risk management and good practice in safety and welfare planning. In doing so to balance all reasonable matters of safety and not permit specific members to focus on just one source of danger. The holistic view is essential to ensure all aspects of safety have been considered";
- "To promote a consistent, coordinated, multi-agency approach to event planning and management";

- “To advise the local authority and/or event organiser in respect of the formulation of appropriate contingency and emergency arrangements”;
- “To advise the local authority and/or event organiser in respect of relevant legislation and guidance”;
- “To encourage arrangements to be made to minimise disruption to local communities”;
- “To consider the implications of significant incidents and events relevant to their venue(s) and events, especially in view of the new definition of safety within the Green Guide and considerations regarding [Zone Ex]”;
- “To consider emerging threats to events, such as terrorism methodologies, drone use and the still developing threat of cyber terrorism and deniability of service”;
- “To consider the implications of significant incidents and events relevant to the surrounding areas and facilities”; and
- “To receive reports relevant to debriefs, visits and/or inspections of the venue or event.”

The guidance recognises that in some cases it will be relevant to consider specific terms of reference in addition to these generic examples. They include:

- “To advise the local authority with regard to its functions in relation to safety certification”; and
- “To advise the local authority with regard to its powers under the licensing legislation.”

In responding to our questionnaire, 36 of 43 forces stated that all or most SAGs in their force area worked to agreed terms of reference. Four forces told us that some SAGs had terms of reference and three forces responded to this question saying they didn’t know. The UKRA guidance and the template terms of references clearly state the purpose of a SAG is to consider matters of public safety and to offer advice. Despite this, we found numerous examples of SAGs making decisions more closely linked to event planning rather than an independent assessment of safety. Consequently, we are concerned that a lack of independence in the role of SAGs contributes to the inconsistency we have found.

Chairing and membership

SAG chairs aren’t always independent from the events they consider

SAGs are essentially a group of professionals from statutory agencies who provide competent and consistent advice on event safety to event organisers and venues. They liaise with event organisers and make sure that the organiser’s contingency plans work with the statutory agencies’ own emergency plans for major incidents. Although the event organisers and some of the services or agencies in a SAG may be involved in planning for the event, the chair should be independent.

The UKRA guidance highlights that some events present a conflict of interest for members or the chair. It states that:

“It would be appropriate to avoid suggestions of bias by having the chair declare any conflict of interest, if necessary, in order to avoid such allegations. Where such conflict exists, alternative chairing arrangements (preferably independent) should be made.”

Some of the SAG chairs we interviewed recognised the importance of their role being independent from the events they advise on. One chair told us that their independence was crucial in making sure the correct focus remained on safety. They said:

“I have great experience in events, event safety, emergency planning and the SAG. I am now the independent chair for [the event]. I am also the SAG chair for other events in [another local authority area] where there is a conflict with the council.”

However, most of the SAG chairs and senior police commanders we interviewed told us that SAG chairs are rarely independent. One police silver commander described three dimensions that have a negative effect on the perceived independence of SAG chairs:

- the close partner relationship between police and SAG representatives;
- the SAG chair’s involvement in the planning phase of events; and
- a conflict with the SAG chair’s day job, which is often as the local authority licensing lead for events.

Responding to our questionnaire, 39 out of 43 forces told us that SAG chairs were appointed by the respective local authority. Each local authority issues safety certificates to sports stadiums, approves licences for alcohol and entertainment, and is often the landowner for events. These functions all result in significant revenue for the local authority. We heard from SAG chairs who recognised the substantial tourism revenue that larger events generated in their area because they attract many visitors. To one degree or another they often face a conflict of interest. One senior police commander said:

“The chair of the SAG should be independent. The reason I say that is they can focus on the issues at hand and not local issues. Local authority chairs will make funding decisions as opposed to safety decisions. If you are independent, that is not your problem; safety is paramount. SAG chairs should be independent.”

We interviewed the chair of the SAG or equivalent group for each of the events we reviewed. Most of them accepted that being employed by the same local authority that issues licences or benefits from revenue was a conflict of interest. Most told us they had a process for dealing with such conflicts, which transferred the role of the chair to a neighbouring local authority SAG chair. Only two SAG chairs we spoke to provided examples of doing this in practice. The guidance to local authorities and SAG chairs needs to be clearer on managing conflicts of interest. This would make sure the advice they give is independent and credible.

The composition of SAGs is inconsistent

The UKRA guidance for SAGs separates the membership of a SAG into two categories, 'core' and 'invited' members. It states that core members should attend all meetings and include:

- the local authority;
- police;
- the event management or organiser;
- fire and rescue services;
- licensing;
- environmental health; and
- health providers.

Invited members should have specialist skills or experience relevant to a specific event, which may include:

- emergency planning;
- stewarding or security representation;
- traffic management;
- supporters' representation;
- community representation;
- official bodies (for example, SGSA); and
- the Highways Agency.

We found that the composition of SAGs varied across different police and local authority areas. Generally, they invited members from the police, fire and rescue service, ambulance services, local authority departments such as environmental health, licensing, highways, emergency planning, and building control, depending on the nature of the event.

The UKRA guidance doesn't recommend elected politicians play a role in SAGs, but it doesn't say they shouldn't either. We found a small number of SAGs that included local councillors. In one force, the local councillors on a football SAG meeting had also been involved in public campaigns to try and stop the fixture from taking place. The councillors concerned should have recognised that they had a conflict of interest, but one didn't declare it as such until after the SAG had communicated its advice to the football club. The other councillor didn't attend any further SAG meetings after the decision was made public. When their involvement became public through [media reports](#), it damaged the credibility of the SAG's advice. We believe elected political figures should be very cautious about becoming involved in SAGs, especially where there is any risk of a conflict of interest. That would include the risk, however slight, of even the mere perception of such a conflict. This issue should be addressed in an amendment to the UKRA's guidance.

Legislation and governance of SAGs is insufficient

We found examples of good practice where the SAG operated within the framework of legislation and certification for safety at sports grounds. But even in respect of football, we found numerous versions of SAGs. Some operated under different titles. Some football SAGs didn't meet as frequently when compared with other areas. Some considered most fixtures while others only met once, at the start of the season.

In some of the events we inspected, the SAG function had become a subgroup within the wider event planning process. Many people we interviewed told us that the inconsistent approach to SAGs across England and Wales was because they had no legal basis and no independent governance. This isn't a new finding.

In March 2026, a representative of the UK Crowd Management Association gave [oral evidence](#) to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport select committee on Major Events. The UK Crowd Management Association representative acknowledged that the role of SAGs in football and sports stadiums was much clearer and better defined. They referred to the governance and regulatory role of the SGSA in achieving this position. But they also highlighted the absence of any similar framework for all other types of events as one of the causes of variance in SAG arrangements across the UK.

One senior police commander we interviewed told us:

“The SAG has no teeth and would be more effective if it had powers to hold agencies or event organisers to account.”

We found that without clear legislation, consistent guidance and effective oversight for events other than football, SAGs are less effective at keeping the public safe. We were struck by the number of interviewees who told us that a disaster at a major event in the UK, such as those seen recently in other countries, was inevitable.

The success of the SGSA and the legislation governing safety at sports venues is the blueprint for how the events industry should operate. The government should consider making SAGs a statutory function. And it should consider implementing a role similar to that of the SGSA to oversee a framework of regulation.

Training for SAG chairs and members

There is no mandatory training for SAG chairs and SAG members, and many haven't had any training

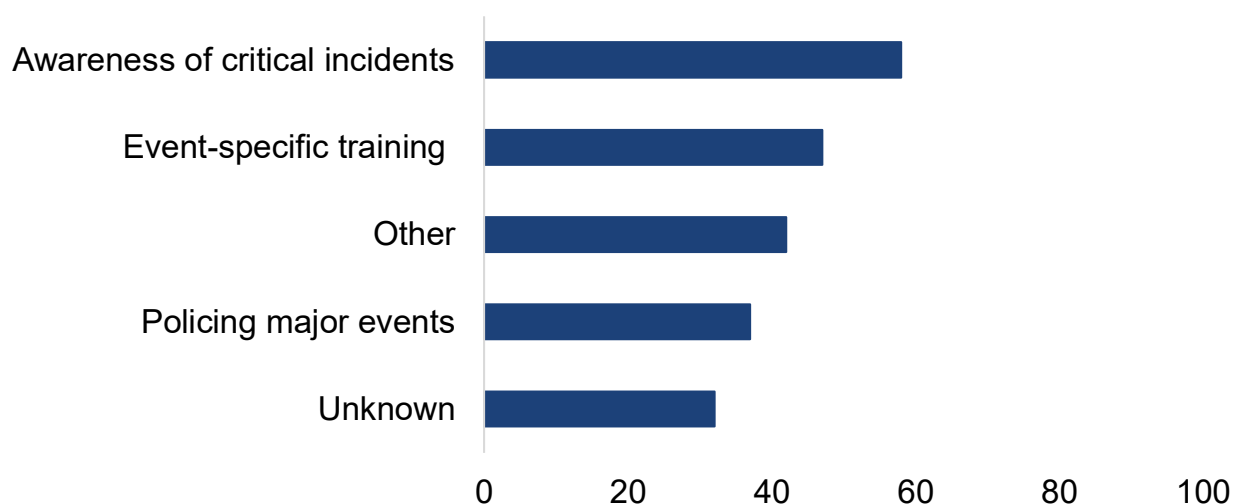
The UKRA provides training for those whose role involves chairing or being a member of a SAG, as well as those with event licensing responsibilities. UKRA offers crowd and event safety courses that provide the skills and knowledge needed by people responsible for the safety and security of publicly accessible locations and venues that attract crowds. Representatives from UKRA told us that not enough people involved in SAGs had attended relevant training.

The training local authorities offer to SAG chairs is also inconsistent. Other agencies, such as the [Institute of Licensing](#) or the UKRA, provided the training on an ad hoc basis. UKRA told us that it was offering a schedule of courses on its website for 2026. We found that some police forces offered SAG training to SAG members. It included subjects such as an awareness of [critical incidents](#), policing major events and event-specific training.

However, we found that too often, forces and local authorities didn't train SAG chairs or members. Many didn't get any specific training for their role. Interviewees told us that this was because of constraints on the local authority budget or the pressures of their primary job. This lack of training means that in some cases, group members aren't confident enough to professionally challenge proposals. One SAG chair said: "my biggest challenge is that there isn't enough challenge."

The training material for SAG chairs varies between forces that offer any training. The chart below provides details of the topics police forces told us they covered in their training.

Figure 1: Percentage of respondents who reported that training for the safety advisory group chair covers the following elements



Source: HMICFRS safety advisory group questionnaire

Note: Only 19 of 43 forces responded to this question. The percentages don't add up to 100 percent as forces could multiselect responses.

Chart description: This chart shows the percentage of respondents who reported that their training for [safety advisory group](#) chairs included awareness of critical incidents, policing major events, event-specific training and other elements. Just over half (58 percent) of respondents said training for safety advisory group chairs covered awareness of critical incidents, 47 percent said it included event-specific training, 42 percent reported that it covered other elements, and 37 percent said it covered policing major events. The elements of training covered were reported as unknown by 32 percent of respondents.

Recommendation 1

By 31 December 2026, [UK Resilience Academy](#) should publish refreshed guidance for [safety advisory group \(SAG\)](#) chairs, other SAG members and attendees. The guidance should mandate appropriate training for SAG chairs and provide greater clarity on their role and responsibilities, including how to deal with conflicts of interest and how to communicate SAG advice to local authorities and the public.

Recommendation 2

By 31 March 2027, the [Health and Safety Executive](#) should publish refreshed guidance for [safety advisory group](#) chairs that is consistent with the refreshed [UK Resilience Academy](#) guidance.

Recommendation 3

By 31 March 2027, the [UK Resilience Academy](#) should introduce a [safety advisory group](#) support network to share national best practice.

Recommendation 4

By 31 March 2027, the [UK Resilience Academy](#) should introduce a national oversight and monitoring function for [safety advisory groups](#) to benchmark and promote a consistent approach in the way safety advisory groups operate across the country.

SAG meetings and transparency

There is a lack of clarity about when to hold a SAG

We found that some local authorities held SAGs for all home football fixtures. However, others held them periodically throughout the season. Other local authorities with football clubs in the lower-tier leagues only held a SAG at the start of each season. But most SAGs told us they could meet when a fixture presented a greater level of risk.

There is also a lack of clarity about how SAGs identify or hear about events they need to consider. The guiding principle for deciding whether to hold a SAG is when an event presents a significant public safety risk. This could be in terms of the numbers or the profile of people attending, the nature of the event activity and any environmental challenges. Lower risk events, such as village fetes and funfairs, are unlikely to require a SAG.

Local authorities approach SAG engagement differently. These variations influence the level of scrutiny they apply to events, particularly smaller ones. In one area we found the local authority used bespoke SAGs for major events, such as music festivals, and a forward-planning SAG met every six weeks to consider events with expected attendance under 10,000. In another local authority area, the terms of reference stated that the SAG would only consider events with more than 10,000 people attending. They told us events below this threshold received online guidance rather than a multi-agency review.

The evidence demonstrates that many SAG arrangements don't follow the UKRA guidance. This guidance warns local authorities not to overlook the risks at small events. We believe there should be a singular, nationally recognised statutory guidance document for SAGs. It should set out in clear terms the criteria for events that a SAG should consider.

SAGs use different methods for managing and recording meetings

The model for a SAG set out in the UKRA guidance and in both the Green and Purple Guides describes an independent body that reviews event safety and provides advice. We found that the role of a SAG is different in almost every local authority area. The different models we found include:

- SAGs that meet in person and are closely aligned to the SAG model described by the UKRA;
- hybrid SAGs that meet in person and online using video conferencing;
- multi-agency planning meetings with responsibility for planning an event;
- multi-agency strategic co-ordinating groups;
- licensing operational safety planning groups in London boroughs;
- joint event forums;
- electronic SAGs that only meet online;
- safety subgroups aligned to event planning structures run by the local authority; and
- safety subgroups involving the local authority but managed by professional event companies.

In force areas that cover multiple local authorities, we found the police were working with numerous different SAG models. Many of these SAGs had adopted different criteria for working with events. We weren't, therefore, surprised to speak to some police planners and commanders who confused SAGs with other event management, or public safety, forums.

We did find some examples of good practice where the event organisers clearly recognised the importance of an independent SAG. At Silverstone and the [Women's Rugby World Cup](#), the event organisers clearly defined the planning structure and an independent SAG function.

However, these were isolated cases. In other instances, we found that event organisers controlled safety planning. They invited the local authority and other services to contribute, but they maintained all records of meetings and discussions on private company computer systems. They told us they did this to prevent sensitive commercial information being the subject of public scrutiny through [Freedom of Information](#) requests.

We spoke to two event organisers who operated this type of safety planning structure. They told us they operated that way because of the wording in the Purple Guide about the event organiser being responsible for public safety.

When the consideration of safety takes place within the event planning structure, there is a risk that event delivery takes precedence over safety. Those attending meetings may not speak freely, and the lack of transparency in what they consider risks reputational damage. We heard from senior police commanders involved in these events who felt the event management company marginalised the police. The commanders felt this was a bid by the company to reduce their financial liability for policing the event.

The guidance isn't mandatory and isn't clear enough. It is therefore too open to interpretation by event organisers.

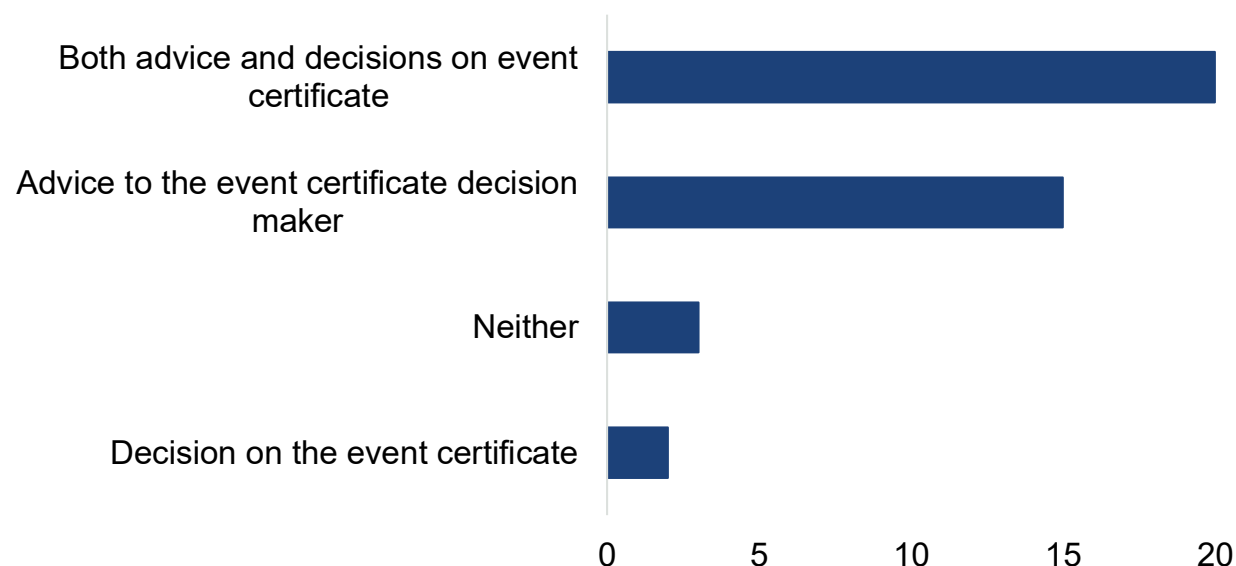
Effective communication by all agencies attending a SAG is critical to the ability of a SAG to understand the level of risk involved, the steps they need to take to mitigate risks and to inform or advise event organisers and the public.

Communication

The responsibility for communicating SAG advice is rarely shared

The UKRA guidance highlights how important effective partnership communication is. The guidance explains how clear communications about the SAG's advisory role manages expectations and fosters co-operation. Although we saw evidence that some SAGs follow this guidance, too many were integrated in the planning process for events. The responses to our questionnaire reinforced our view that a large proportion of SAGs make decisions relating to the events they consider, rather than just offer safety advice.

Figure 2: Number of forces reporting the responsibilities of their safety advisory groups



Source: HMICFRS safety advisory group questionnaire

Note: 40 of 43 forces responded to this survey question.

Chart description: Bar chart showing that half of forces (20 of 40) reported their [safety advisory groups](#) were responsible for providing both advice and decisions on event certificates. Fifteen reported they were only responsible for providing advice, 3 reported they were responsible for neither, and 2 reported they were responsible for the decisions made.

The UKRA guidance states that the SAG chair is responsible for making sure that the SAG clearly records and communicates advice, actions, and areas of concern. The SAG chair may identify when issues require escalating beyond the SAG. But advice provided through a SAG must remain clearly distinguishable from statutory requirements.

SAGs should avoid allowing an event organiser and the public to perceive advisory discussions as de facto requirements or conditions. They shouldn't make decisions. It is for the appropriate organisation or agency to use statutory powers if an event or circumstances require them. The evidence we found shows that in most forces SAGs operate contrary to this.

The refreshed guidance from UKRA should make it clear to SAG chairs and attendees that they aren't responsible for making decisions. The purpose of the SAG is to independently assess safety plans and offer advice.

Records of SAG meetings should be kept and should include advice, actions, and areas of concern. The records of meetings need to provide a transparent account of discussions without attributing liability or responsibility. These records need to be retained so the public can scrutinise them after the fact in accordance with data protection and information governance requirements.

Inaccurate communication from SAGs contributes to confusion about their role

In many forces, [officers](#) and [staff](#) involved in SAGs told us that their force had clear processes for communicating with event organisers and the public. But the SAG chairs we spoke to told us that SAGs should agree the safety advice first, and then the chair should communicate it. So we were less confident that SAGs had a coherent communications plan. And we weren't confident that attendees were communicating the same messages.

Case study 1: Communication about a football match implied the safety advisory group had decision-making powers

In one force area, a [safety advisory group \(SAG\)](#) considered safety concerns relating to a European football match. The SAG attendees unanimously agreed to advise the football club hosting the event to reduce the ticket allocation for visiting supporters. The media statement released by the football club explained that the SAG had given them a direction to reduce the ticket allocation. In a statement to the media the police force said that they supported the SAG's decision. And in subsequent email correspondence between various government departments, officials consistently referred to this being a decision made by the SAG. It is therefore unsurprising that media outlets reported that the SAG made the decision to ban fans.

Independence

SAGs should offer independent advice about safety at an event. When SAGs become involved in event planning, they run the risk of losing sight of their main function.

Event planning structures can lead to confirmation bias by SAGs

We reviewed some public events where the SAG was either part of the event planning structure or a subgroup reporting to the event management group. Some of the events that adopted this structure were historical or cultural annual events. Many of those involved in safety considerations told us there was a presumption the event would go ahead, regardless of the views of the local authority or police. Consequently, we found that SAG safety considerations were secondary to plans for the event going ahead. From the outset, the police, SAG and local authority assumed that they would manage the risks as safely as possible. Police commanders and SAG chairs told us that they had no practical powers to restrict or prevent the event.

Case study 2: A traditional community event went ahead despite police concerns about safety

The Lewes bonfire celebrations take place at the beginning of November each year in Lewes, Sussex. Lewes is a historic town where many of the structures are timber framed. Each of the six bonfire societies leads a torch-lit procession through the town's narrow streets. The participants in these processions traditionally carry large effigies through the streets. Many of these effigies are filled with fireworks before they burn them at the respective bonfire.

Although advertised as a series of ticketed events for local residents only, the celebrations attract tens of thousands of visitors. Each year in July, a series of [safety advisory group \(SAG\)](#) meetings take place to consider any overarching public safety issues and then authorities timetable a further emergency SAG meeting if the need arises for the autumn. The same chair oversees each of the SAG meetings, but after the July SAG meetings a joint event forum co-ordinates all event activity. The police commanders we interviewed all said the event was inherently unsafe but that the planning assumption was that it will go ahead regardless because of tradition.

Because of the nature of the bonfire societies, there was no easily identified event organiser. This, and the cultural and historic nature of the event, made it difficult for local police to respond to developments. One senior police commander said it was a question of keeping “fingers crossed” that there was no serious injury or fatality. Interviewees described how, often, the police had to step into stewarding and other activities because organisers didn’t have effective arrangements. Several people attending this event have received serious injuries.

Another similar cultural and historic event is the Appleby Fair in Cumbria. This event is planned through an MASCG. Interviewees we spoke to described the MASCG as fulfilling the role of a SAG. But they said there was never any overt consideration of whether the fair shouldn’t go ahead. They stated that everyone worked on the assumption that it would. Similarly, there was no advice provided about safety. Individuals involved in the event described to us serious incidents in previous years. These include the death of a 15-year-old boy in a traffic collision in 2023. They also included a series of concerns about animal welfare.

With no powers to limit or prevent events from happening, the emergency services and others must manage risks as effectively as possible. We were concerned to find many of the groups or forums assessing risk were also actively engaged in managing the event. There is a very real danger of confirmation bias playing a part in their decision-making when the primary objective is the event taking place, rather than public safety. We were concerned by the number of police commanders who described their nervousness about managing unsafe events. They took practical steps to minimise the risks, while hoping things didn’t go wrong. Many of them highlighted the likelihood of a public inquiry following a tragedy as the justification for keeping accurate records.

The inconsistency in the structure and management of SAGs results in a lack of transparency about what they do

Administrative support for SAGs varies considerably. Some forces told us that there was insufficient administrative support. We found some local authorities used Microsoft Copilot to create meeting minutes. We reviewed these minutes and found them to contain significant errors because of problems with speech recognition. Some were unintelligible. One police commander we interviewed explained:

“I always took a planner and asked them to ensure they recorded [wrote down] everything as I did not have a level of confidence that SAGs and partners were keeping records.”

Most SAGs don't have a clear communication protocol. Often the local authority and other SAG members prepare their own public messages. We found examples where the SAG or event organisers shared heavily sanitised reports with the public. Despite the UKRA guidance recommending transparency, many SAGs or equivalent groups kept their detailed discussions about safety strictly confidential. This was largely due to commercial sensitivity. Nevertheless, lack of transparency in matters of public safety isn't justifiable. SAG chairs and members need stricter guidance on this, and all SAGs should follow it.

Audits of SAGs by an external body or a [peer review](#) is an uncommon occurrence. The responses to our questionnaire to forces showed that a total of 36 of 43 forces stated that, in the last three years, SAGs in their force area had either not had, or were unaware of, any audit or review. So there can be little confidence in the consistency or operation of SAGs across the country. This is in stark contrast to the audit process that surrounds safety certification at football grounds. The SGSA carries out a structured programme of audits which grades local authorities in their compliance with the safety certification process.

Escalation of risks

Most SAGs have no formal process for escalating events beyond their local area

We asked those who attended SAG meetings if there was a process for identifying risks or political sensitivities that made the event of greater significance. Some SAG chairs told us they had a route to escalate problems or concerns but that it was only within the local authority. A limited number of SAGs considered escalating concerns to the relevant [local resilience forum](#). But this was only if there was a need to co-ordinate a multi-agency response after an event. Most SAG chairs told us they would make direct contact with the appropriate government department if they felt a matter required it. We didn't find any examples of this happening.

The template agenda provided to SAG members in the various guides doesn't prompt consideration of wider national or international implications. Consequently, all the planning for the events we reviewed focused on issues relevant to the local area. The overwhelming majority of people we spoke to could see the benefit of implementing a higher category of events, to cover events of national significance. But they also stated it would require very clear instructions to define the criteria and the responsibilities involved in such a new category.

Many of our interviewees told us that the events they were involved with were of national significance. They said that some of the large public events they manage would generate widescale media and political interest if they didn't go ahead. Most of those we interviewed were confused about which specific government department they would need to notify in such circumstances. We cover this in more detail [when discussing the role of politics in relation to SAGs](#).

The wide disparity in how SAGs are structured and managed doesn't help the police and other agencies to assess the risks of an event. There is legislation, governance and oversight for events in sports stadiums. But there is much less for events in other venues. So it is difficult for police forces to understand what they are responsible for and how to plan for an appropriate response.

The role of the police in public events

Core responsibilities in law

Legislation and guidance provide a framework in relation to policing events

The police operate under statutory and common law (long-standing custom, based on previous legal cases) powers and duties regarding [public order public safety \(POPS\)](#) policing. POPS policing covers events where there is a reasonably foreseeable risk to public order or public safety. These include protests, festivals, sporting events, and disorder. The [National Police Chiefs' Council \(NPCC\) 'Events Guidance' document](#) contained in the [College of Policing POPS authorised professional practice \(APP\)](#) details these responsibilities. It provides specific legislative guidance tailored to individual events or operations.

College of Policing advice is available to forces via [authorised professional practice \(APP\)](#). The APP provides consistency across all forces and offers guidance on specific areas of policing.

The [College of Policing POPS events APP](#) provides guidance to forces about the overall responsibility for events. It defines the main responsibilities for policing. These are:

- preventing and detecting crime;
- preventing or stopping a breach of the peace;
- traffic regulation (only under statutory powers relating to events);
- activating contingency plans when there is an immediate threat to life; and
- co-ordinating emergency response activities associated with a major incident taking place at the event in line with the [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles \(JESIP\)](#).

A major aspect of this inspection relates to the various bodies that share responsibility for keeping the public safe at events. Police and events industry guidance acknowledges the important role the police play in preventing crime and disorder and keeping the public safe. This duty is enshrined in common law. It runs in parallel to the responsibility event organisers have under section 3(1) of the [Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974](#) in relation to the safety of people attending events.

The House of Lords summarised the common law duty on the police in the case of *Glasbrook Brothers Ltd v Glamorgan County Council* [1925]. In that case, the Lord Chancellor held that:

“...there is an absolute and unconditional obligation binding the police authorities to take all steps which appear to them to be necessary for keeping the peace, for preventing crime, or for protecting property from criminal injury.”

This and subsequent cases, and the findings from numerous public inquiries, reinforce the principle that the police can't pass the duty to protect the public onto the event organisers. It also follows that event organisers can't assume sole responsibility for public safety.

Forces intervene to keep the public safe despite the presence of private security or stewarding

We found that in most forces we inspected, the event organisers and police commanders recognised their own responsibilities. But they didn't always recognise that they shared these responsibilities. We found examples where the police had stepped in to manage public safety because the event organisers couldn't safely carry out their role. One senior [police officer](#) who commanded a large public event told us:

“We operate a contingency position as I am not confident the event organiser has the capability or capacity to deliver a safe event.”

In one case study review, we found an example of a historic event with insufficient stewarding. The event had a high risk of crowd crushing and crime and disorder. One senior police officer who commanded this event told us:

“People will forgive us for stabbings, but they will not forgive us for crushing where people are killed.”

They were referring to the public accepting of a certain level of crime and disorder at this event. But a crushing incident that resulted in injury or deaths would be unforgiveable.

In some of the large events we reviewed, event security took responsibility for the area inside the event footprint. The police remained on standby, outside the arena, to respond if needed or when event management called them to take over responsibility. In several other community cultural events where the event organiser employed private stewards and security, we heard that the police routinely had to intervene to deal with crowd control and safety matters. Interviewees told us that stewards regularly left their posts to join the celebration, leaving the police to take up this important responsibility.

We found that on many occasions, police commanders deployed a level of resources that reflected the extent to which they could trust, or rely on, private security. We found the lack of training and awareness for police officers and [staff](#) who work with SAGs leads them to take an inappropriately high level of responsibility for safety planning away from the SAG. We found that in some forces there wasn't enough clarity about what each organisation involved in the SAG was responsible for.

The legal powers to ensure safety at events aren't sufficient to mitigate risks to the public

We interviewed some individuals involved in high-profile event management. They agreed that there was a gap in legislation and powers available to the police relating to events. Many others, along with SAG chairs and government officials, suggested that the police already had powers to restrict or place conditions on events. They suggested this is in the Public Order Act legislation. But this isn't the case.

Sections 11–16 of the [Public Order Act 1986](#) provide the police with powers to manage public processions and assemblies. The Act requires organisers to notify the police in advance of any procession. The notification should include details such as the time, date, location, route and number of people organisers expect to attend. This allows forces to impose conditions to prevent serious public disorder, damage to property or serious disruption to the community. In extreme circumstances, a force can apply to the Home Secretary (via the local authority) to ban a procession. But this doesn't apply to [assemblies and processions](#) that customarily take place in a force area, such as annual cultural events. And it doesn't extend to a general public safety risk. However, the risk of terrorism, public disorder, damage or criminality at other events is very real. Examples include:

- crushing incident at [Trafalgar Square New Year's Eve](#) celebrations in 1982, resulting in two fatalities and hundreds injured;
- crushing incident at the 1988 [Monsters of Rock festival](#) in Donnington, resulting in two fatalities;
- crowd crushing and large-scale disorder at [Leeds festival](#) in 2003, where 40 people were injured;
- [Dreamspace](#) at Chester-le-Street in 2006, where an insecure inflatable structure killed two people and injured hundreds more;
- [Taunton Bonfire 2011](#), where smoke from a fireworks display caused a collision on the M5 motorway killing 7 and injuring 51 others;
- [Shoreham Airshow](#) in 2015, where a plane crash killed 11 people and left 16 people injured;
- [Manchester Arena](#) terrorist attack in 2017, killing 22 and injuring hundreds of spectators; and
- [Brixton Academy](#) crushing incident and disorder in 2022, killing two people and causing numerous injuries to others.

The learning from these and other events resulted in changes to some of the guidance for event planning. But only one, the Manchester Arena attack, resulted in a public inquiry. We cover the new legislation that followed the Manchester Arena inquiry in more detail [in our section on Martyn's Law](#). But it still doesn't provide any additional powers for the police to effectively intervene when public events pose a risk to safety. Any additional powers would need to include measures to safeguard against any chilling effect that might suppress legitimate freedom of expression. And these powers would have to balance preserving societal traditions with keeping the public safe.

Command structures, training and guidance

Clear command structures exist for POPS commanded events

The College of Policing APP outlines the [POPS command structure and role profiles](#). It states that there should be a force strategic lead ranking at least assistant chief constable or equivalent. This person should make sure POPS officers and staff fully satisfy the training, accreditation, and reaccreditation requirements of their POPS role.

We found that all the forces we inspected followed the College of Policing POPS APP by assigning trained and accredited POPS commanders to events. The College of Policing define the commanders as:

- gold (strategic) commander;
- silver (tactical) commander;
- bronze (operational) commander; and
- public order public safety advisor.

Guidance is available to forces, but training needs to improve

We found that all the forces we inspected followed the College of Policing POPS APP in relation to command training. However, we saw limited training on working with SAGs within the bronze, silver and gold POPS courses. All POPS commanders we interviewed explained to us that they had attended the College of Policing events course. While there was a requirement to attend command reaccreditation, there was no requirement to attend an event refresher course. Some commanders told us the SAG engagement in any event depended on the police commander responsible, their level of training and experience with SAGs. Many commanders told us they needed better knowledge and training for SAG meetings and in making and delivering [risk assessments](#).

The NPCC provides further advice in its [‘Events Guidance’ document](#). This complements the POPS APP. This document is helpful as it supplies links to other relevant event guidance, including the [Green Guide](#) and the [Purple Guide](#). In our inspection we found a good knowledge of both these guides within forces, local authorities, event organisers and football clubs. But we were concerned by the differing interpretations of responsibilities for those events that predominantly followed the Purple Guide. We cover this in [our chapter on the role of event organisers](#).

The responses to our questionnaire to forces showed that only 23 of 43 forces had standardised processes and policies for working with SAGs in their force area. The College of Policing representatives we spoke to accepted the syllabus was inadequate given the findings of our review of the Aston Villa versus Maccabi Tel Aviv fixture. We were reassured to hear that they had responded to those findings and were already developing new material.

Recommendation 5

By 31 August 2027, the [College of Policing](#) should refresh [public order and public safety command training](#) to include greater detail on working with [safety advisory groups](#), including police responsibilities within safety advisory group discussions/meetings. This should be included in annual refresher training.

A lack of oversight and regulation creates inconsistent safety planning

The majority of police commanders and representatives from national police bodies we interviewed told us they needed greater clarity. Many stated they would benefit from an extension of the role of [Sports Grounds Safety Authority \(SGSA\)](#) and Green Guide so that these don’t focus only on the top four tiers of domestic football. This would provide consistency across all sports. During our fieldwork, one senior police officer we interviewed said:

“In my view, the Green Guide should be adopted in all events. They are not really different. You can get disorder in rugby due to fans being together and drinking alcohol, yet it is not catered for in this guide.”

We interviewed senior police officers and representatives from the College of Policing. They said it would be better if the Purple Guide had the same level of legal standing, oversight and scrutiny for events as the Green Guide and the SGSA provide for football. In one force, we heard that they worked with event organisers who had no knowledge of the Purple Guide. So the force had to direct and guide them. The Purple Guide is only available on a subscription basis, and this may be a contributory factor. In contrast, due to the regulation of football and sporting grounds, police forces and SAGs told us that all football clubs and sporting venues were aware of the Green Guide and followed it.

A lack of guidance and training risks events not being raised in a SAG

The NPCC 'Event Guidance' document, published on 28 May 2022, includes the following statement:

"Ideally a consistent approach for the decision of whether or not to bring an event to a SAG would occur nationally and across boundaries. This should be based on issues such as the nature of the event, the levels of risk associated with that event and the numbers of people attending the event at any one time. The crowd profile, sale of alcohol, scale of the event, risk activities and complexity of the event are some of the factors that partners should use to assess if a SAG may assist regarding public safety at an event. Currently there is no nationally consistent approach."

We found this position hasn't changed since the NPCC published this document.

The training and guidance for the police in event planning and working with SAGs needs to improve. At the time of our inspection, there was no consistency in how SAGs are run and held. This could be because so many SAG attendees, including the police representatives, have had no formal SAG training.

Of the forces we inspected, none could produce a formal record to identify who had received SAG training. One gold commander who had been involved in POPS policing as a bronze, silver and gold commander said in relation to SAGs: "This has never ever been covered in any course I have done in 24 years."

We found for smaller events that didn't require a formal POPS command structure, it was likely the police officers responsible had received no training in SAGs. The training and guidance available to police commanders and planning staff doesn't set out the criteria for events that should go to a SAG. Neither does it advise on who should attend a SAG and how it should share information and [intelligence](#).

We did find some examples of good practice, where the force was clearly invested in a partnership approach to SAGs. Greater Manchester Police routinely invited SAG partners to attend the silver commanders' planning meetings. Consequently, while the planning meetings and SAG meetings were independent of each other, they were better informed. The force made sure that the appropriate ranks and roles attended SAG meetings.

The role of a silver commander is to develop and lead the tactical delivery of the gold commander's strategy. We believe silver commanders should attend SAGs for the events they lead. And they should present all police material in a SAG. Senior police leaders we interviewed agreed with this.

Recommendation 6

By 31 August 2027, the [College of Policing](#) should provide guidance that defines when forces should request a [safety advisory group](#). The new guidance should include the roles and responsibilities of silver commanders in working with safety advisory groups. And it should set clear protocols for the material they share, including [risk assessments](#), and the manner in which they share it.

Recommendation 7

By 31 August 2027, the [College of Policing](#) should develop and provide comprehensive [safety advisory group](#) guidance for [officers](#) and [staff](#) who work with safety advisory groups, but who aren't [public order public safety](#) trained.

Recommendation 8

By 31 August 2027, all chief constables should provide specific [safety advisory group](#) training for police safety advisory group attendees who aren't [public order public safety](#) trained.

Communication and unresolved risk

Forces should raise safety concerns and direct event organisers to the SAG

The College of Policing POPS events APP provides similar guidance to that found in the Purple Guide. It states that event organisers have overall responsibility for event management including responsibility for public safety. The events APP includes the following:

“Police forces should determine whether there is a need for a police presence at an event. A safety advisory group should act as the first point of reference for all those who are intending to organise a public event.”

Most of the forces we inspected explained they could refer events to a SAG. Only two forces told us they couldn't convene a SAG when they felt one was necessary. We found there wasn't a clearly defined process for managing this. We were also concerned about smaller events that don't attract a formal POPS command structure. In these circumstances, it is possible that the police officers involved haven't received relevant training and may not be aware of the role of the SAG, or even that they exist. This results in different forces co-ordinating public safety responsibilities using a variety of methods.

POPS commanders and force planners should provide event organisers with the contact details for the relevant SAG. The College of Policing POPS events APP contains a [crowd and event safety template](#) that forces can use to raise safety concerns, and to provide SAG contact information. We encourage all chief constables to make sure their force uses this template when contacting event organisers.

Recommendation 9

With immediate effect, all chief constables should satisfy themselves that their [officers](#) always use the crowd and event safety template when they engage with event organisers.

Representation at a SAG isn't mandatory and leads to inconsistent attendance

Responding to our questionnaire, 36 of 43 forces told us a force representative attended every SAG meeting in their force area. We found that for many events, forces send officers or staff to the SAG who aren't of sufficient rank to make decisions on behalf of the force. In many of the SAGs held for sporting events, the person representing the force was a police constable or equivalent grade. In some of the larger public events we found sergeants and inspectors presenting risk assessments. During our fieldwork and in relation to SAGs for football, one senior police officer we interviewed said:

"Whilst there is a benefit to having a DFO [dedicated football officer] present, the silver or gold commander should also be present to ensure the decision-making powers are present."

Some forces had clear command allocation procedures. We found that for some large events, forces allocated POPS commanders their respective roles before any SAG meeting. We found that for some of the largest and most significant events, the POPS silver commander attended the SAG or multi-agency planning meetings. Too often, we found silver commanders chairing the planning meetings and, therefore, taking too much responsibility for safety at the event.

We did find examples of good practice. Northamptonshire Police had clearly recognised the importance of keeping planning and safety matters separate. They told us that, in relation to Formula 1 events at Silverstone, they "stay in their lane". They said they take any safety concerns to the SAG rather than the police planning meetings.

We believe the consideration of safety should be independent and separate from planning structures. The role of the silver commander should be to inform and contribute at that forum on behalf of their force. And their role is to take responsibility for the reputational consequences that may follow.

Unresolved safety concerns force the police to issue warnings to the public

In some of the events we inspected, we found forces having to communicate directly with the public about safety concerns. In one such event, the force couldn't secure the agreement of all the respective parties. The force recognised that it lacked powers to meaningfully reduce or control risks. The concern related to crowd control and a risk of a crushing incident. When the force felt it had received little support from other emergency services and other parties concerned with the event it went public with its concern. One senior officer in the force told us:

“The gold commander sent a letter to the organisers to say the event was not safe. This attracted press attention and annoyed [the organisers] and other blue light partners who were unhappy that they were not consulted. However, the [force] wanted to publicly air the fact that police commanders were having to step into the arena to manage crowd safety.”

We found two other forces had taken a similar approach and communicated their concerns about public safety. They told us they released public statements to try and reduce footfall at the events.

The events in these three cases were annual ones that have attracted a high degree of public support over many years. It can't have been easy for the police forces to make public their concerns without facing a backlash. It is to their credit that they did so. Conversely, we found forces who were concerned about specific events but didn't consider making public safety warnings.

Recommendation 10

By 31 August 2027, the [College of Policing](#) should refresh its [public order public safety](#) and [events](#) training material and guidance. The refresh should encourage police commanders to take proportionate risk-based decisions about directly warning and informing the public where this would help reduce safety risks.

Demand on police commanders may expose forces to risk

The College of Policing training and guidance for POPS commanders states that forces should make sure they deploy appropriately trained and accredited POPS commanders to manage spontaneous and planned POPS events and operations. But the training and guidance isn't clear enough about the risk of commanders taking responsibility for multiple concurrent events.

In two forces we inspected, it was common practice for POPS silver and gold commanders to command multiple concurrent events. One force allowed this practice at low-risk events. But the other force allowed silver and gold POPS commanders to manage high-risk concurrent events. It was for the POPS commander to highlight concerns about managing multiple events. One POPS silver commander said: “If I was concerned I could not manage all the events, another commander would be allocated to that particular event.”

Some of the forces we inspected allocated gold command responsibility for forthcoming events based on which officer was [on-call](#) that day. This meant the gold commander was also responsible for considering and approving firearms deployments, at the same time as commanding large events.

We are concerned that forces are exposing the public to risk when they allocate multiple command responsibilities. A public inquiry would ask the question of how a commander could truly command more than one event or operation at the same time. And especially when events are high risk.

Recommendation 11

By 31 March 2027, the [College of Policing](#) should provide guidance to forces about the practice of [officers](#) commanding concurrent events or doing so while holding other critical command responsibilities. The guidance should cover:

- managing and mitigating the risk of concurrency; and
- the type of circumstances in which concurrency would be inadvisable.

Recommendation 12

By 31 March 2027, all chief constables should satisfy themselves that the demands on gold commanders are manageable and support public safety, especially where public safety events and other responsibilities happen concurrently.

Ownership of responsibility

There is inconsistency in the documented protocols for a handover of command responsibility between the police and event organisers

The College of Policing POPS guidance for police commanders advises that there should be documented command protocols between event organisers and the police. The Green and Purple guides offer similar advice. The protocols should detail the circumstances in which the event organiser can no longer control the event or elements of it. Sometimes these protocols are referred to as contingency plans.

By having such protocols, event organisers implicitly accept that they don't have sole responsibility for public safety.

We found some examples of good practice, particularly for events at sports stadiums, where there were detailed contingency arrangements. They included options to allow the police to take control over defined sections of the stadium. And there were protocols to return command to the organiser when it was safe. The large music festivals we reviewed had comprehensive and thorough event safety plans. They also included protocols for handing command responsibility to the police should they become unable to manage a risk or response to an incident. Some of the police commanders we spoke to told us they had discussed such a handover. But not all forces or events we inspected had formal written handover procedures.

During our fieldwork, we reviewed a large weekend event that attracts thousands of people. The event had a handover protocol, but this document hadn't been updated for approximately ten years. This document listed the potential circumstances that might result in handing over event responsibility to the police. The event organisers recognised that they might have to rely on the police in this way. But they hadn't agreed any formal funding for police services. Given the scale of the event and the number of attendees, we consider this to be a risk to the force. Event commanders told us they would struggle to take full responsibility for the safety of the entire event with the limited resources.

This wasn't an isolated example. Other events we reviewed included similar handover protocols. But arrangements between the force and event organisers lacked the financial support to provide appropriate resources. We were concerned at the risk forces take in operating this way. Only one of the fieldwork forces had tested its ability to manage handover protocols. We found that following the Manchester Arena terrorist attack, South Wales Police invested in training and held exercises to test its response to serious incidents, including handing over command. A senior police officer said:

"I have been part of a number of multi-agency exercises where we had a formal handover where the event organiser would state they did not have the capacity or capability to manage the event; I would then take command and manage it within JESIP [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles] protocols."

Recommendation 13

By 31 August 2027, the [College of Policing](#) should refresh the guidance and [public order public safety command training](#) to:

- reflect the importance of documenting and testing command handover protocols; and
- specify the resources required to take control of an event, should that become necessary.

Recommendation 14

By 31 August 2027, all forces should have a documented handover protocol between the police and event organisers for command responsibility for all public events. This should state that forces may need to take command, to meet the core responsibilities of the police as set out in common law (long-standing custom, based on previous legal cases).

A lack of SAG oversight transfers the ownership of safety risk to individual forces

In forces managing larger or high-risk events, there were initial SAG discussions, but the safety planning moved to multi-agency planning meeting structures. We found in most cases, forces chaired and administered these planning meetings. There does need to be effective planning, but we found some forces effectively replaced the SAG chair and took responsibility for safety planning. This exposes forces to unnecessary risk.

The inconsistency in event planning isn't just between forces. It is also within forces with more than one local authority. In one force where we reviewed two different events, the event planning meetings replaced the SAG for each event. These meeting structures had different titles. We spoke to police commanders involved in these meetings and there was confusion about what people called them and who chaired them. In another force, interviewees told us that the responsibility for safety at an event sat with the SAG. But the meeting was chaired by the stadium management team, not the local authority.

When the events weren't football related and therefore less regulated, the police role in them was more inconsistent. But even with the regulation and governance that surrounds football, we saw examples of numerous different approaches. An example of this was a high-risk football match where there was no effective SAG, other than to acknowledge the fixture was taking place. Instead, the host football club managed and chaired the partnership meeting. We found that senior police commanders didn't always understand the important role SAGs play. One silver commander told us they would try to manage football risks by deploying greater numbers of resources. They would only use a SAG if they felt they needed restrictions on the safety certificate. One fixture we reviewed went ahead with no SAG consideration.

At the time of our inspection, we were pleased to hear that the NPCC was developing an updated operational advice document in relation to public events. It is intended that, once complete, it will be included within the POPS APP.

Recommendation 15

By 31 August 2027, the [College of Policing](#) should provide guidance to forces to prevent police-led planning meetings inappropriately replacing the important role of a [safety advisory group](#). Safety advisory groups should independently assess safety risks and offer advice.

Recommendation 16

By 31 August 2027, the [College of Policing](#) should define, within relevant guidance and training material, the title of police planning meetings for events and sporting fixtures. This is in addition to the current definitions of tactical co-ordination group and strategic co-ordination group structure.

Recommendation 17

The [National Police Chiefs' Council](#) should notify force [public order public safety](#) leads once the refreshed National Police Chiefs' Council ['Events Guidance' document](#) is published.

Some historic and cultural events go ahead even when unsafe

We have already highlighted the lack of legislation and powers available to the police to intervene during the planning of events when they have concerns about safety. Some of the events we considered in this inspection were annual cultural events with a long history. They didn't have a clearly identifiable event organiser. Most of the police and local authority representatives we spoke to about these types of events told us they would take place regardless of any police or SAG views. Where there isn't an identified event organiser, it is harder for police to fully understand whether those taking part have enough competence and resources to manage the event safely. These are primary aspects the police need to consider when assessing risk and planning their operational response and resourcing.

Some forces provided examples of events that were inherently unsafe, but neither they nor SAG partners put forward any objections. The operating assumption was that the event would take place. They had no choice but to accept this foregone conclusion. Some also voiced concerns about reputational damage or accusations of political interference should any SAG partner restrict or stop the event.

Ignoring a safety concern creates a greater risk of danger and reputational damage

By simply ignoring risks and not placing on record their concerns or objections, forces may unnecessarily place members of the public in greater danger. It also exposes the SAG, local authorities and forces to reputational damage in the event of a public inquiry. We were concerned that on occasion, particularly with cultural celebrations, the SAG process appeared biased and directed towards planning and facilitating an event, as opposed to considering safety.

During our fieldwork, one senior police officer told us about an event that has taken place for many years, stating it was dangerous. They said:

“To be clear and candid, if a person came to us in 2026 presenting this as a plan now, it would almost certainly be objected to by us.”

But we didn’t find evidence that the force had communicated their concern to organisers or sufficiently warned the public about the risk.

We did find examples of police commanders and SAGs taking a robust stance on public safety, even when they had limited powers to intervene.

In one event, the police obtained intelligence of a specific threat. The documentation we reviewed highlighted the threat and the specialist police resources the force believed were necessary to protect the public and staff at the event. The force was aware from previous discussions that the event organiser wouldn’t be supportive of such a deployment. The force negotiated with the event management team and agreed to deploy the specialist resources discreetly. The event management company and the police didn’t tell the main event organiser about this deployment. This was to prevent them from potentially refusing the police access.

We conclude that the existing arrangements aren’t sufficient where there may be a conflict between the wishes of the event organiser and those of the police.

Previous experience of Diwali celebrations led Leicestershire Police to raise concerns at the first SAG meeting for the 2025 event. Police commanders raised their concerns, although they knew that the local community might react adversely. We were pleased to see the [chief officer](#) team supported the commanders and collectively they negotiated safety restrictions for this event.

In one of our case studies, we reviewed the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) planning arrangements for the Notting Hill Carnival in 2025. Senior commanders told us they had serious concerns about public safety. These concerns related to a risk of crushing incidents and various safety issues with vehicles in a procession. The senior commanders raised their concerns at the licensing operational safety planning group. They asked the group to consider making a joint statement to warn the public about the safety risks. The commanders told us that they couldn't agree with the group on this. They said that other partners didn't issue a statement because of reputational risks. The force issued its own public safety message, stating that the force didn't believe the event was safe.

We commend them for doing so. The MPS response to this was vindicated by the findings of an independent review of safety at Notting Hill Carnival. The review, commissioned by the event organisers, the local authority and the MPS, concluded that there were significant risks to public safety at the carnival.

But we are concerned by the number of other events where the police forces and partners kept silent, despite their apprehensions about public safety.

Information, intelligence and risk assessment

Information and intelligence should be a primary consideration in all events

The College of Policing issues guidance to police forces through the [intelligence management APP](#). This covers both information and intelligence. Information is data obtained from various sources including word of mouth, observations, surveillance technology or reports. Intelligence is information that the police have developed, evaluated and risk assessed. It can be transformed into actionable tasks that assist police decision making. The College of Policing also sets [professional standards](#) for those involved in intelligence management. This should make sure that forces properly collect, evaluate and use information and intelligence in police operations.

The POPS events APP states that forces should consider information and intelligence management when preparing for POPS deployments. Further to this, the APP specifically states that forces need information and intelligence throughout the lifecycle of an event or incident. The guidance lists the three event phases:

- pre-event;
- during the event or incident; and
- following the event or incident.

This places [intelligence requirements](#) within the planning of operations linked to events.

We found police forces used different intelligence models depending on the event and extenuating circumstances. In some of the events we considered, the police force had a dedicated intelligence function in the event command structure. This made sure that forces properly evaluated all the information and intelligence they used in risk assessments. Commanders could therefore decide whether it was reliable, important or relevant.

For most football matches, forces don't use a dedicated intelligence function. Dedicated football officers (DFOs) usually manage the flow of information between football clubs and forces and police bodies both national and international. In most cases, DFOs hadn't received any formal training or accreditation in managing intelligence. Yet we found that the silver commanders relied on this intelligence when assessing risk.

In one case we reviewed, the force was planning for a high-risk football match that involved the potential for disorder and protest within the local community. The force implemented a dedicated intelligence function to inform the silver and gold commanders' decisions. But the DFO also provided information and intelligence directly to the silver commander. The risk assessment that the silver commander then presented to the SAG contained references to material that the force hadn't properly evaluated. Some of it was inaccurate. The media scrutiny that followed the SAG decision highlighted these inaccuracies. This damaged the reputation of the force and public trust and confidence.

When forces use artificial intelligence tools to develop information and intelligence, they need to make sure the products are accurate

Many of the forces we inspected didn't use artificial intelligence (AI) tools when they prepared intelligence reports and risk assessments for events. One force told us that their senior officers encouraged officers and staff to extend the use of AI across a range of police activities. We were reassured that this force used a bespoke AI product and that they had implemented safeguards.

We found that another force had used AI, in the form of Microsoft Copilot, to research information about an event. The material these searches returned formed part of the force risk assessment and SAG briefing document. We found that some of the material was inaccurate. And we were also concerned to find that senior commanders responsible for the event didn't know that the force had used AI.

We found that forces used a variety of different intelligence models when planning for public events. On occasions, the police intelligence function worked in parallel with the intelligence structures put in place by large event management companies. The police must make sure that the information and intelligence that informs their risk assessments and operational decisions is accurate and reliable. They should only use accredited intelligence processes, and they should always comply with national guidance.

Recommendation 18

By 31 August 2027, the [College of Policing](#) should refresh its [intelligence management guidance](#) to make sure forces use accredited intelligence functions when they plan and [assess risks](#) for public events, including football. The guidance should include how forces should use artificial intelligence technology within intelligence functions.

Recommendation 19

By 31 August 2027, all chief constables should take steps to make all [intelligence](#) products and [risk assessments](#) for public events, including football fixtures, comply with the refreshed [College of Policing guidance for intelligence management](#). They should have robust quality assurance checks for processes using artificial intelligence technology.

Forces share information and intelligence more effectively at multi-agency planning meetings than they do at SAGs

We found that most forces use a range of roles to support the flow of information and intelligence at public events. These include:

- community bronze commander: responsible for engagement and information sharing;
- intelligence bronze commander: leading professional intelligence functions; and
- counter-terrorism security coordinator.

We were confident that most forces understood the importance of these roles. For some events, we found officers and staff in these roles attending the SAG or multi-agency planning meetings (MAPs). In other events, intelligence commanders hadn't attended SAG meetings. By comparison, in all the events that relied on MAPs, we saw evidence that intelligence professionals had attended. This suggests to us that the MAPs could consider intelligence that may not have been shared with SAGs. Consequently, SAGs may not have all relevant information and intelligence.

Recommendation 20

By 31 March 2027, all chief constables should make sure a force [intelligence](#) representative attends [safety advisory groups](#) for those public events where a formal intelligence command structure is in place and shares any [risk assessment](#) in line with information sharing protocols.

Forces use a national risk matrix to classify football fixtures but not for other public events

The [United Kingdom Football Policing Unit \(UKFPU\)](#) has developed a risk matrix for assessing and categorising football fixtures. All forces have adopted this matrix. So there is a consistent understanding of risk at these events across the UK. Essentially, the risk matrix attributes a numerical score for the various aspects of a fixture. In addition to fixtures that have no police presence, there are three bands: high, medium and low risk.

The consistent scoring of football events allows forces, clubs and national police support functions to tailor their response accordingly. This includes the role of the [National Police Coordination Centre \(NPoCC\)](#) that supports forces by deploying additional resources and specialist capabilities under [mutual aid](#) arrangements.

We found all the operational plans for the various events we inspected included a risk assessment of some description. For the football events, the risk assessment followed the UKFPU risk matrix, but for other public events, forces used their own risk assessment process. Unsurprisingly, they were all different. Some of the police commanders we interviewed told us that they preferred using a bespoke risk assessment process as it allowed them to reflect the unique nature of an event. However, the majority of people we interviewed told us that the absence of a national risk matrix for public events was problematic. We agree.

A national risk matrix would make sure that forces take a consistent approach to risk assessments. It would also allow national police support functions, such as NPoCC and UKFPU, to better understand and respond to strategic threats. NPoCC co-ordinates the national police response and resourcing for protest activity. It has developed a risk matrix to support forces. It told us that it could provide a blueprint for improving risk assessments for other public events. We cover this in more detail in [our section on national escalation](#).

Community impact

Inconsistency in creating and sharing community impact assessments means some forces don't always see the full picture

The College of Policing issues guidance on using [community engagement, impact assessments and communication](#) in POPS APP. When forces effectively use [community impact assessments \(CIAs\)](#), they help to inform the public about an event and identify any community tension. But CIAs can also provide access to valuable community intelligence that can enhance police risk assessments.

We found good examples where police forces used CIAs, with most events having a nominated community bronze commander. We were also pleased to find forces sharing CIAs with the SAG. And in some forces, the community bronze commander attended the SAG meeting. But this wasn't always the case.

Large public events can also affect businesses, not always positively. A business impact assessment can help forces to consider a wider range of community concerns when they plan major events. Only one force told us they carried out a business impact assessment.

For a large, historic community event, we noted that the gold strategy referred to the need to consider community impact, but there was no event-specific CIA. The force instead relied on an existing CIA and [neighbourhood policing](#) arrangements to monitor and manage community dynamics.

In another example, we found that the force used a generic CIA from a previous event. We also found an example where the force considered a CIA unnecessary. However, the silver tactical plan explicitly flagged the risk of local highway disruption and drug offending. When a force chooses not to complete a CIA, this may indicate that it doesn't fully understand the core purpose. We concluded that some forces aren't using CIAs to full effect.

While CIAs are an important aspect of event planning for police forces, so is a clear understanding of the effect their operational decisions can have on sections of the community. In November 2025, the College of Policing refreshed its guidance for police forces on how they should consider the impact of their decisions and actions on people with different [protected characteristics](#).

This process was previously known as an [equality impact assessment](#). But in the new guidance, it is called a [people impact assessment \(PIA\)](#). None of the forces we inspected used a PIA. The guidance from the College of Policing doesn't advise forces to carry out PIAs when they plan for public events or in POPS operations generally. We think it should.

In one of the events we reviewed, the force and SAG advice resulted in away fans being prohibited from attending a football match. This decision not only had a [disproportionate](#) impact on supporters from one football club, but also on a singular religious faith. We weren't confident that the force fully recognised the effect of its advice or direction. Had it carried out a PIA, this should have been more apparent. A PIA could have prompted better consultation with the affected groups and wider community before the decision became public knowledge. The media and political reaction to the advice the force and SAG gave had a damaging and lasting effect on public trust and confidence.

Recommendation 21

By 31 August 2027, the [College of Policing](#) should refresh its [public order public safety](#) and [events authorised professional practice](#) to make sure forces complete business impact assessments and [people impact assessments](#), on a proportionate basis, when they plan for public events.

Recommendation 22

By 31 August 2027, all chief constables should make sure their forces complete [community impact assessments](#), business impact assessments and [people impact assessments](#) for events on a proportionate basis, in line with [College of Policing](#) guidance.

Escalation processes

There is no clear process to escalate safety concerns other than within the POPS command structure, or police hierarchy

We found for those events, including football matches, that have a full POPS command structure, there is a clear internal escalation process. This escalates through the bronze, silver and gold commander, irrespective of who attends a SAG. But we found that due to the demands on police commanders, forces often sent police planners to represent their force at a SAG. Too many forces had no clear escalation process for their officers or staff to highlight risks that reach beyond the force boundary. For example, national or geopolitical risks.

The senior officers we spoke to from the MPS and Greater Manchester Police told us they had effective lines of communication with senior political figures, when needed. They were confident that they could escalate concerns about an event to the government when appropriate.

For example, the MPS holds a weekly event management meeting, where they discuss all public events for the coming week. The force escalates any specific risks to the 'Diamond Group' meeting, chaired by an assistant commissioner. The external relations team also attended these meetings. It supports communication between the force and external bodies, including local boroughs, the London Assembly and various government departments.

We were less confident that other forces had similar processes or clear lines of communication. We found that one force had communicated concerns about a high-risk football fixture to various national police bodies including the UKFPU and NPoCC. Some of these bodies communicated with different government departments, including the Prime Minister's Office, the Home Office and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The chief constable, while attending a meeting about an unrelated matter, updated the Home Secretary. But there was no clear understanding about which government department was responsible and needed the information.

Recommendation 23

By 31 August 2027, the [College of Policing](#) should provide guidance recommending widening the role for the [chief officer](#) lead for [public order](#) [public safety](#) in every force to include responsibility for overseeing [safety advisory groups](#).

Recommendation 24

By 31 March 2027, all chief constables should make sure the silver [public order](#) [public safety](#) commander (or their nominated deputy) attends all [safety advisory groups](#) that consider the events they command.

When the effectiveness of the police response to events has the potential to damage public trust and confidence, there is a process of internal escalation. Forces can declare a [critical incident](#). But while this makes senior officers aware of an incident, it doesn't mandate any wider communication external to the force.

There appears to be confusion about critical incidents, or a reluctance to declare them

The College of Policing provides guidance to police forces on [managing critical incidents](#). The guidance defines a critical incident as being any incident where:

“...the effectiveness of the police response is likely to have a significant impact on the confidence of the [victim](#), their family or the community.”

During our inspection, we found numerous examples of public events that met this definition. But officers and staff failed to declare them as a critical incident. Some commanders told us that they had recognised the event could be a critical incident, but that such a declaration wouldn't bring any advantage. One commander told us: “We can manage them without declaring them.”

Many commanders we interviewed appeared to inappropriately link the declaration of critical incidents in events to a requirement for additional resources through mutual aid. There was confusion between the response to critical incidents and [major incidents](#).

In one example, we reviewed a high-risk football fixture with the additional complexity of political protests. We interviewed all the operational police commanders involved. Some told us that the match was a critical incident from the outset. Some said it probably was one. Others stated that it definitely became one when the media and political response criticised the police handling of the event. All the interviewees displayed a comprehensive knowledge of the definition for a critical incident, but none of them declared it as such.

The guidance to police officers and staff sets out the process for declaring a critical incident. In simple terms, any officer or staff member can flag an incident as critical, but only a senior officer, such as a force duty inspector, can formally declare one. There is no mandatory requirement for informing a chief officer or the relevant [police and crime commissioner \(PCC\)](#) or mayoral equivalent.

This is different to the [critical incident management guidance](#) for some other law enforcement agencies, such as those responsible for immigration and borders. This guidance states that when they declare a critical incident, the agencies must inform the relevant PCC or equivalent and the Home Office. It better reflects the responsibility that PCCs and their mayoral equivalents have regarding public trust and confidence.

In the high-risk football match example, we spoke to the relevant PCC. They told us the force hadn't briefed them about the risks surrounding the fixture. They also told us that they didn't know what a critical incident was, and the force had never told them it had declared one. We were surprised to hear this from a long-standing PCC responsible for a large police force.

We believe that a PCC or mayoral equivalent has an important role to play in managing critical incidents. Not least, the support they can provide through communication with partners and politicians. By not declaring critical incidents, forces and their respective PCC or mayoral equivalent miss opportunities to improve. The College of Policing should amend the guidance and training to police forces accordingly.

Recommendation 25

By 31 August 2027, the [College of Policing](#) should refresh the training on [public order public safety command courses](#) to encourage commanders to recognise, declare and manage [critical](#) and [major incidents](#) associated with the events they command.

Recommendation 26

By 31 August 2027, the [College of Policing](#) should refresh the [critical incident management authorised professional practice](#) to encourage forces to notify the relevant [police and crime commissioner](#) or mayoral equivalent of all [critical incidents](#).

In many of the events we reviewed, the level of risk, number of attendees and the scale of the private security or stewarding available dictated the type and number of resources that police forces used. In simple terms, forces often used greater numbers of resources, along with specialist capabilities, to mitigate risks and manage crowds.

The cost of public safety

There is a long-standing principle that the public shouldn't pay additional costs for the police to carry out their core duty to protect them. It stems from the [Bill of Rights 1688](#). The police must maintain law and order in public places, but they don't usually have to do this in places that are private. When the police need to provide special police services (SPS) that go beyond their core duty, there is legislation and guidance available.

Police forces can charge for providing SPS

One of the most effective methods available to the police to manage risk at large public gatherings, is the application of greater visible and covert police resources. Therefore, the funding of additional resources has a direct effect on their ability to assess and manage risk.

[Section 25 of the Police Act 1996](#) (as amended), applies to the policing of events by way of SPS. The Act states that:

"The chief officer of a police force may provide, at the request of any person, special police services at any premises or in any locality in the police area for which the force is maintained, subject to the payment to the local policing body of charges on such scales as may be determined."

The Act doesn't explicitly define SPS, but guidance and case law clarify that:

- an individual or organisation can request the service;
- the service is in addition to the ordinary public duties of police; and
- the police can only charge for SPS and not for operational services (core policing).

This legislation and subsequent case law is relevant in police operations at many public events. Often events require additional police resources because of the large crowds they attract. But many of the police deployed will carry out core duties in public spaces. Section 25 only applies when an event organiser requests police resources carry out a role within the event footprint.

Police forces experience inconsistency in the way different event organisers approach SPS agreements

Some football clubs don't use any police resources within their stadium during matches. Instead, they rely on private stewards. In these circumstances, they don't request any SPS, and police forces deploy resources outside the stadium and in town centres or transport hubs as part of their core duty. Most football clubs have plans for handing over responsibility to the police should there be an incident or disorder. All the commanders we spoke to told us that they would use police resources deployed outside to deal with such incidents.

When a football club asks a police force to provide resources within its stadium, it needs an SPS agreement. In this case, should matters develop that require additional police resources in the stadium, the force can charge for all resources under the SPS agreement. If there isn't an SPS agreement, the force can't claim charges against the football club for the cost when officers deploy spontaneously to disorder or safety issues inside the stadium. However, if the police believe they must deploy to ensure safety, then they should call a SAG to recommend the licensing authority impose such a condition. In this inspection we didn't find any examples of forces adopting this approach.

The legal position regarding SPS was set out by the courts in the case of Ipswich Town Football Club Company Ltd v The Chief Constable of Suffolk Constabulary [2017] EWCA Civ 1484. Many of the commanders we spoke to who had experience of football events referred to the [Ipswich ruling](#) when describing the difficult balance they face when planning for public events. We heard of examples where the football club was in a strong financial position and therefore was content to pay SPS charges. The commanders told us this made it much easier to plan the resourcing needed to mitigate potential risks. The majority of the forces we spoke to said that in recent years most football clubs have used more private security stewarding, rather than relying on the police.

The court ruling in the Ipswich case endorsed the findings of a previous judicial appeal. In [West Yorkshire Police v Reading Festival Limited \[2006\] 1 WLR 2005](#), the police attempted to recover the cost of police resources used to quell disorder at the 2003 Leeds Festival. The court agreed that it was reasonable that companies or individuals that benefit from police services at their event should pay for them. But the law, as it was at that time, didn't provide for that to happen unless there was an SPS agreement. The court stated it would require Parliament to change the law and guidance. At the time of our inspection, this position hadn't changed.

[The NPCC guidelines for SPS charging](#) rely on the factors set out by Lord Dyson in [Leeds United Football Club Ltd v The Chief Constable of West Yorkshire Police \[2014\] QB168](#). One of the main factors includes police forces considering whether they can provide the necessary amount of police protection with the resources available to the chief constable, without the assistance of officers already on duty who are otherwise engaged with routine matters. When a public event doubles the population of a town or city, assessing the number of [police personnel](#) needed in all potential circumstances becomes a significant challenge.

Event organisers rely on the legal position of SPS agreements and the industry's own guidance to limit costs

In this inspection, we found that the legal position of SPS was as much a factor in music festivals and cultural celebrations as it was for football. The Purple Guide states that the responsibility for public safety rests with the event organiser. Event organisers told us they operate on the basis that the police have no responsibility within the footprint of the event with a [Public Entertainment Licence \(PEL\)](#).

One experienced organiser told us that they had taken active steps to minimise their events' reliance on the police. They quoted the court ruling in the Ipswich case as the reason why they avoided entering into any SPS agreements. In doing so they stated:

"Events that have a PEL [Public Entertainment Licence], the police have no role in managing it at all. They would have some role in managing activities that are external to the events but zero in a licensed area."

The organiser expanded on this and stated:

"A PEL is governed by PEL licensing laws and that makes the designated person responsible for all public safety. Blue light services and local authorities and others sit on SAGs to assess the plans and discuss the presented plans, and to comment on them but not to manage the plans."

One event organiser referred to the legal position of SPS charging at football events. They said that a precedent set in the High Court means that an event organiser must request police services, rather than the police imposing them. They were unequivocal in their view that there was no requirement or entitlement to apply any police costs to public entertainment events.

In such circumstances the police are in a difficult position. They balance their common law duty (long-standing custom, based on previous legal cases) to prevent crime and protect the public alongside the extent to which they can trust the event private security team. In most of these large events the crowd volume is equivalent to a medium-sized town. It is reasonable for the police to expect a degree of criminality, drug dealing, sexual offending and disorder. But we aren't confident they fully understand their responsibility to prevent or respond. The police can't absolve themselves of this core duty, and event organisers don't have the powers to carry out this role.

We were pleased to find that most of the large public events we reviewed had protocols for the police and other services to take control should it be required. But we didn't find any clarity about the resources they would need or whether these plans had been robustly tested beforehand. It seems that event organisers are happy to accept responsibility for public safety when it means they can avoid police costs. But at the same time, they rely on contingency plans that acknowledge they might not always cope with risks.

In the absence of formal SPS agreements some forces accept financial gestures of goodwill from event organisers

At some of the larger public events, we found evidence that the organiser had made a financial contribution towards the force's costs. Forces described these payments as gestures of goodwill by organisers who wanted to be seen as responsible. The forces told us that the payment was to help fund the resources deployed inside and outside the perimeter fence. We believe such arrangements present significant risks to forces that accept them and the event organisers who pay them. The power to charge, and therefore receive payment for police services, is restricted by the terms set out in section 25 of the Police Act 1996.

In 2024, the High Court considered whether a private individual could pay for police services that weren't authorised by the relevant police body. In the case of [R \(The Duke of Sussex\) v The Secretary of State for the Home Department EWHC 418](#), the court agreed with the Metropolitan Police Service and the Home Secretary that it would be inappropriate for the police to receive money for protective services. In the light of this judgment, and in the absence of the practice being thoroughly tested at court, any force that chooses to accept payment outside of a formal section 25 agreement should exercise great caution before doing so. Regardless of any good intent on behalf of the police or event organiser, the practice may be unlawful.

Under [section 93 of the Police Act 1996](#), a local policing body may accept gifts of money on such terms as appear appropriate. In these circumstances there must be no intention to create a legal obligation or contractual arrangement, an expectation that something would be done in exchange for such a gift would be inappropriate. In a recent example, the Premier League unconditionally donated £7 million to police forces to recognise the work they do in relation to safety and security at Premier League football clubs. The Court of Appeal has very recently considered section 93 in [R v Moore \[2026\] EWCA Crim 209](#) and reinforced the principle that a gift under section 93 shouldn't be closely linked with a particular police operation, service or investigation. Unlike the example of the Premier League, such a gift in relation to a specific public event is less likely to be lawful. It would also run the risk of having the appearance of bias and the avoidance of the requirements under section 25. While such a gift may be beneficial to forces, they should carefully consider the legality of payments under section 93 when they relate to specific police operations at events.

We spoke to senior leaders within the NPCC, and they told us that they had lobbied government to consider changing the SPS legislation. We were told that the NPCC would like to see a change in the law that would, in effect, overturn the Ipswich Ruling. It would differentiate between normal core duties, and those that stem directly from large public events. While this focuses on the resources that police use at designated football fixtures, any change would most likely apply equally to other public events.

Most senior police commanders we interviewed highlighted the difficult position police forces find themselves in when planning resources for events such as football matches. Event organisers increasingly rely on private stewarding and security, and this provides some reassurance that there is less of a role for the police. However, the police have an enduring duty in common law to protect the public. Most event safety plans include protocols for handing command responsibility over to the police. Therefore, the police must have the resources available to respond if necessary. We weren't satisfied that this was always the case. Where sufficient policing was in place, the force paid for it from their core budget.

The scope of this inspection hasn't allowed for a more detailed review of SPS arrangements. But it is clear that police forces need much greater clarity on their role in public events and how event organisers should pay for police services. Government officials told us that at the time of our inspection, consultation was underway into the problems with SPS arrangements at public events. It is beyond the scope of this inspection and therefore inappropriate for us to indicate a preferred solution. But we would urge those involved to work together to provide greater clarity as a matter of urgency. Until such time, police forces shouldn't accept payments otherwise than in accordance with section 25 of the Police Act 1996.

Recommendation 27

With immediate effect, all police forces should decline any payment from private individuals or companies for the provision of police services at public events unless it complies with [section 25 of the Police Act 1996](#).

Zone Ex

The absence of a definition of Zone Ex creates confusion for those organising and planning for public events

The responsibility for public safety outside the stadium or event arena is often referred to using different terms. In this inspection we heard from interviewees who called it "Zone Ex", others called it the "immediate vicinity", some referred to it as "the grey space". Everyone we interviewed, including event organisers and national stakeholders, voiced concerns about what we call in this report Zone Ex.

Zone Ex featured in all the guidance available to the police and event organisers. We reviewed the guidance and found that there is no clear definition of where the event perimeter ends and Zone Ex begins, or where Zone Ex becomes public space. We found negotiating Zone Ex responsibilities remains one of the most complex aspects for police forces, largely because there is no definition of it or any consistent national criteria.

Once again, we found an inconsistent approach to Zone Ex in all the events we reviewed as part of this inspection. Some event organisers left the respective police force to manage public safety once attendees had left the event space or arena. Others took a more responsible position and shared this important task with the police and local authority. This topic featured heavily in the assessment of the public inquiry that followed the terrorist attack at Manchester Arena in 2017.

One event organiser told us that they had significant concerns about the new [Terrorism \(Protection of Premises\) Act 2025](#) legislation. They believed that the new law placed responsibility for public safety within Zone Ex on to event organisers. They stated that event organisers have no legal capability to carry out these functions.

We heard that this lack of clarity leaves local authority partners and event organisers uncertain about their respective roles. So the police routinely manage risks in the public area outside event spaces. But these risks fall outside what organisers are willing to fund. An interviewee told us that the NPCC had unsuccessfully attempted to secure contributions from football authorities for Zone Ex activity.

An NPCC representative told us that without ministerial support, forces couldn't influence clubs. So clubs continue to pay only for services within the stadium. We found evidence of public funded police resources deploying in pubs, transport hubs, and areas where fan groups mix, despite these areas being integral to the safe operation of commercial events. The police resources were deploying in such numbers only in response to the event or fixture.

In March 2026, the House of Commons hosted a [Culture, Media and Sport Committee](#) to look into public events. In oral evidence at the committee, a senior representative of the events industry said Zone Ex is:

“...a space that nobody really wants to own, but everyone depends on.”

In response to recommendations from the Manchester Arena Inquiry, the government created additional requirements under the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025. The legislation, commonly referred to as Martyn's Law, will come into effect in 2027. The Act places a requirement on those responsible for premises and events within the scope of the Act to take steps to reduce the risk of harm from terrorist attacks. The government has appointed the [Security Industry Authority](#) as the regulator. The role of the regulator includes making sure that those responsible for premises and events within the scope of the Act comply with the Act's requirements. This includes the additional responsibilities in areas outside the perimeter of their events. Many of the police officers, national bodies and event organisers we spoke to told us they were anticipating some much-needed clarity.

In April 2026, the government published [statutory guidance](#) in advance of the Act coming into force. We reviewed the guidance. In the light of our inspection findings, we concluded that it doesn't provide enough clarity. This may contribute to greater inconsistency. The guidance doesn't refer to Zone Ex. Instead, it covers the area "in the immediate vicinity" of an event without defining it.

The guidance explains certain words used to define the responsibilities on event organisers. These words each have specific legal meaning. The guidance states that event organisers "must" consider public safety risks within the immediate vicinity of their event. But it goes on to say that they "should" take certain steps to negotiate and agree shared responsibilities with other organisations.

While this new legislation and the guidance is an opportunity to bring much-needed clarity and governance to those involved in public safety at events, it falls short. As it is written, the responsibility it places on event organisers and others needs to be clearer.

National police bodies

The [National Police Chiefs' Council \(NPCC\)](#) is the national policing body that brings all UK police leaders together to set direction and make progress in policing. The NPCC achieves this through co-ordination, collaboration and communication. To support the NPCC, senior [officers](#) from forces across the UK have ancillary roles as national portfolio leads in addition to their force role. Through this structure, the NPCC provides forces with valuable support when they plan for major public events.

National support functions

There is national support for forces planning and responding to public events

The [United Kingdom Football Policing Unit \(UKFPU\)](#) acts as the staff office for the NPCC lead for football policing. It provides advice, guidance and training to UK police forces and acts as the UK national information point for football-related international law enforcement. National football information points are the designated channel for exchanging police information, [intelligence](#) and [risk assessments](#) internationally. This covers all UK clubs and the national teams of the home nations, including their involvement in European – [UEFA](#) – and international – [FIFA](#) – competitions, and pre-season friendlies. The national football information point acts as the central contact point for exchanging relevant information for football matches with an international dimension, and for developing international police co-operation to improve safety and security at football fixtures.

In 2023, responsibility for the UKFPU moved from the Home Office to the [National Police Coordination Centre \(NPoCC\)](#). UKFPU makes sure that forces consistently use a standardised risk assessment matrix when they assess risk for football fixtures. This is so UKFPU can share relevant information between police forces, the NPoCC and relevant government departments.

During our inspection, we saw evidence of the valuable support UKFPU gives to local forces. For each of the football events we reviewed, including those that involved clubs or national teams from other countries, the unit had provided the local force with information to support risk assessment and operational planning.

The unit is limited in its ability to inform UK forces when other international law enforcement agencies decline to engage. In one of the events we reviewed, we found that a foreign police service had returned a blank match report. Additional requests for information were also unsuccessful in establishing even the most basic facts.

For some European and international football fixtures that involve a greater risk of disorder, the unit brings about direct contact between the relevant police forces. A representative from UKFPU told us that when this takes place, they normally ask that someone from UKFPU is also present during any meeting or conversation.

However, in one high-profile example, we found that a force arranged and held a meeting with police colleagues from another country, without involving UKFPU. The accuracy of the information and intelligence shared during this meeting became the subject of significant challenge in the media. With the benefit of hindsight, the presence of UKFPU at this meeting would have provided the corroboration that was sadly lacking.

We believe UKFPU should make sure they have a representative in all meetings between UK police forces and international law enforcement colleagues.

Recommendation 28

By 31 December 2026, the [United Kingdom Football Policing Unit](#) should make sure that it has a representative present in all relevant meetings between UK police forces and international law enforcement agencies.

UKFPU supports forces at football events, but there is only limited support for other sports or major public events

The NPCC structure includes a [chief officer](#) responsible for events. At the time of our inspection, the responsibility for events had recently changed to a newly appointed lead. We therefore interviewed both the old and the new NPCC leads. They told us that, unlike the NPCC football portfolio, the event lead didn't have resource dedicated to the police role in other public events. While they recognised the valuable work of the UKFPU and the NPoCC with football, they felt that a similar resource for other events would allow them to support forces better.

Much of the legislation and governance surrounding public events is a response to disasters and disorder that affected UK football in the late 20th century. The NPCC and national police supporting functions relating to football have developed in a similar fashion. Arguably, this model has proved to be a success when we consider the safety record at football over the last 30 years. But in the 21st century, the threats to public safety at other events have developed at a rapid pace. Recent examples around the world show that music festivals, Christmas markets, cultural celebrations and concerts have all sadly become the target of those seeking to cause harm to the public.

The support and co-ordination work of the UKFPU and NPoCC centres around football and protest policing. It would be easy to adapt this successful framework for other public events in a wider remit. This would allow the NPCC to co-ordinate activity and improve the way police forces plan for, and respond to, public events to keep the public safe.

Recommendation 29

By 31 March 2027, the [National Police Chiefs' Council](#) should specify its requirements for extending the remit of, and capacity within, the [National Police Coordination Centre](#) to include public events.

Co-ordination of intelligence and resourcing

The NPoCC supports forces that are policing events

The NPoCC provides support to police forces across the United Kingdom, crown dependencies, and British Overseas Territories. The NPoCC is separated into two teams:

- operations team; and
- strategic intelligence and briefing team (SIB).

The operations team monitors national police capacity and capability across a range of over 200 specialist skills. This team is the central point for [mobilising mutual aid](#) across forces. It supports UK police forces during planned and spontaneous events. The team gathers learning from both protest operations and major events and provides national testing and exercising.

NPoCC manages mobilisation in line with the Strategic Policing Requirement

[Mobilisation](#) is part of the police service's response to the [Strategic Policing Requirement](#). The Strategic Policing Requirement provides for three tiers of mobilisation. Tier one is local, tier two is regional, and tier three is national. All police forces use a national IT system to record certain specialist skills relevant to tiers one and two. This helps the [Regional Information and Coordination Centres](#) to co-ordinate mobilisation during regional and national deployments.

NPoCC manages the mobilisation of officers and specialist vehicles or equipment for protests. The [deployment section](#) of the [public order public safety \(POPS\) authorised professional practice \(APP\)](#) contains operational guidance for mutual aid. This document details the processes when moving police resources across force boundaries to support certain incidents or large events.

Three types of mutual aid exist. These are:

- emergency or spontaneous deployment;
- planned deployment or deployment for an event; and
- specialist staff deployments.

When police forces prepare for public events, they often assess the level of risk they are facing alongside the resources available and the legal options to manage those risks. In some of the larger events we reviewed, the respective forces relied on mutual aid because they didn't have enough appropriately trained resources. The force that requests these additional resources pays for them. For high-risk football fixtures, we found that safety certification provided the force and [safety advisory group \(SAG\)](#) with an opportunity to reduce risks. But for other large public events, the police had no similar legislative powers to influence safety. Often it was simply a case of deploying greater numbers of officers and [staff](#).

The NPoCC SIB team provides intelligence support focused on assessing strategic threats from protest. It provides a monthly 'National Events Assessment' and weekly POPS 'Horizon' intelligence report to the police service, national police bodies and the government. It also provides and mobilises officers to perform specific POPS roles, such as [forward intelligence team](#) officers.

Despite NPoCC's efforts, we heard that too many forces failed to contribute to this important intelligence process. Interviewees from NPoCC SIB told us that they had tried to include intelligence about other public events in their briefing products. NPoCC created a trial where several forces hosted a link on their public-facing website. This offered options that included a community intelligence portal for the event industry to use. At the time of our inspection, this process was 12 months old and hadn't generated a sufficient flow of intelligence. Interviewees told us that there was only a 20–30 percent compliance rate from the trial forces.

If all forces used this link, the flow of information would provide significant and meaningful intelligence about public events. The submission rate into forces from the events industry to date was disappointing, as was event reporting by forces. NPoCC SIB told us that the intelligence briefing material they produced relied on these submissions. They told us that the lack of event submissions meant that their briefing often had a very low accuracy or confidence rating. This needs to improve. The event industry and forces shouldn't overlook the importance of event intelligence. An NPoCC interviewee told us: "People die at these events. Very rarely do we have someone die at a protest."

The unit has a small team of intelligence specialists. Until recently, the events industry funded two of the staff members. The unit is now funded by the NPCC.

Communication

NPoCC provides an effective way to communicate risk to other law enforcement agencies and the government

We found that forces work with the NPoCC in relation to protest activity. But in our fieldwork, we found they don't routinely communicate with the NPoCC about other public events. This was surprising, given the absence of any clear escalation process in most of the forces we inspected.

We found that the NPoCC weekly ‘Horizon’ briefing product wasn’t as effective as it could be. This is because forces didn’t share relevant information about events or the risks they were managing. Therefore, some matters that may benefit from the support and advice available from government weren’t included in the briefing. And the NPoCC was less able to comprehensively assess the strategic implications of multiple events, co-ordinate resources and brief accordingly.

The Home Office and all chief constables should make sure every force has the NPoCC SIB single online portal available on their website. And that every force supplies all relevant information regarding events to the NPoCC using the weekly National [intelligence requirement](#) document.

Recommendation 30

By 31 August 2027, the Home Office should grant all police forces access to the event portal, so that each force can place a link to it on its public-facing website.

Recommendation 31

By 31 August 2027, all chief constables should have the events portal available on their force website. They should submit relevant information and [intelligence](#), collected via the portal, to the [National Police Coordination Centre](#) strategic intelligence and briefing team.

A lack of understanding results in inconsistent force engagement with the NPoCC

We found that forces were less likely to approach or even consider the NPoCC in relation to public events unless the force needed mutual aid, or there was a risk of protest. A representative from the NPoCC SIB told us that 90 percent of its work related to protest activity. Part of the SIB’s function is to produce a national strategic risk assessment, and this requires intelligence from partners. We heard from some police commanders who were sceptical about the event industry’s appetite to collaborate fully with the police. One of them said:

“If I’m being brutally honest to try and leverage change, industry partners don’t want to share information from events. They fear that they will be duty bound to report this to the SAG. If we are in receipt of this information, we will be duty bound to share the risk with the SAG. This includes any of those risk factors, drugs deaths etc. Organisers would say, ‘What benefit is it to us to share this sort of information as an organiser?’”

We accept this was the view of one police commander. But it does highlight the contrast between football, which is independently regulated and governed, and other events, which aren’t.

National escalation

The absence of a national event risk assessment template creates inconsistency across forces

In this inspection, we found most forces used a risk assessment to assist them in planning police operations for events. But none of them included a numeric matrix to generate a risk score. On occasions, the police presented the risk assessment at a SAG or equivalent safety meeting. But they were all different, except for football matches where we found consistent use of the UKFPU risk matrix, which has a numeric risk score.

We found [counter-terrorism security coordinators \(CT SecCos\)](#) provided gold commanders with a counter-terrorism risk assessment at some events. They also made recommendations for the POPS silver commander's tactical plan. In one example, the CT SecCo had shared their assessment and recommendation with the SAG, but the local authority SAG chair disagreed with one of the CT SecCo's recommendations. The local authority wasn't prepared to take the steps advised by the CT SecCo. This was because the authority considered that doing so would have too restrictive an effect on the city centre, and the mitigation wasn't justified. In effect, the SAG was prepared to tolerate the risk, and other partners had to respond accordingly. The event went ahead without the risk mitigation advised by the CT SecCo.

There is a national risk assessment template for protest activity that allows for consistent escalation when needed

The NPoCC has produced a national risk assessment matrix for protest activity. This allows forces to assess the risk a protest may present in a consistent format based on a matrix of numerically scored risks. The matrix identifies critical matters that require the attention of a national co-ordinator as part of the national mobilisation plan. We found the majority of police commanders and stakeholders we interviewed felt that a similar matrix for public events would be of great benefit. We agree.

Representatives from the NPoCC SIB told us that they could readily adapt the protest matrix to include all the relevant aspects of a large public event. It could also include a consideration of wider political and international sensitivities. In the same way that the protest matrix results in each protest attaining a final score, events could be scored against an agreed threshold. This could potentially align with the threshold for local, regional or national support from the NPoCC.

We have highlighted the absence of a clear escalation route for police forces or SAGs to take when they have concerns about an event. A clear scoring matrix that forces apply consistently, set against existing thresholds for escalation, could improve matters greatly.

[A 2021 review by Baroness Casey of Blackstock](#) recommended a new category of events – those that had greater significance. Many of our interviewees, who included officials from various government departments, agreed that this would be of great benefit. But they raised concerns about both the complexity of any definition of such events and how it would work in practice. We believe that a national event matrix could be a solution to this problem. An events matrix would certainly increase the volume of event information and intelligence the NPoCC receives. And it may negate the need for a definition of events of national significance.

With a matrix, the NPoCC could provide more event information in the weekly ‘Horizon’ bulletin to the Home Office and other government departments. This would increase awareness across government of major public events. We accept this additional responsibility would rely on the investment in additional NPoCC resources that we recommended earlier in [Recommendation 29](#).

Recommendation 32

By 31 March 2027, the [National Police Coordination Centre](#) should develop a national risk matrix for events, to include a threshold for escalation to a regional or national level. It should be available for all forces to use.

Recommendation 33

By 31 March 2027, all chief constables should make sure their force uses the new [National Police Coordination Centre](#) events risk matrix in operational planning for all public events.

Recommendation 34

By 31 March 2027, the [National Police Coordination Centre](#) should include information on those events that meet the national threshold in the weekly monitoring report that is shared across government.

Event organisers

Event organisers play a valuable role in the cultural life of modern society. The remit of our commission doesn't extend to an inspection of event organisers. But their role is inextricably linked to the role the police play in keeping the public safe. We were grateful to representatives of the events industry who contributed to our inspection and gave us valuable insight and evidence. In doing so, they helped us identify some areas that, if left unaddressed, present a risk to public safety. We raise them here in the hope that private event organisers accept our comments in good faith.

Legislation and governance

Many events take place outside the regulatory framework for football and sports stadiums

Events in the UK take place in a wide range of settings. And they are organised using several different models. These include commercial events, such as festivals and concerts, local authority-led cultural activities, civic celebrations, and partnership events provided jointly by public, voluntary and private sector organisations. Football stadiums and other fixed venues also increasingly host non-sporting events, including concerts and large community gatherings. These events are often held outside the regulatory frameworks that govern matchday operations.

The arrangements for public safety differ significantly between event types. Each event presents its own challenges in relation to crowd management, licensing, regulation, emergency planning and multi-agency co-ordination. Events also vary in scale, ranging from small community fairs to festivals attended by hundreds of thousands of people. These variations influence both the level of risk and the expected level of scrutiny from local authorities and partner agencies.

Differences in legal duties, licensing requirements and organisational structures contribute to inconsistencies in how agencies assess and manage risk across the country. Some local authority areas operate well-established processes, with clear communication between organisers and partners. Others rely more heavily on informal arrangements that can reduce oversight or limit visibility of event plans.

Event organiser involvement with the safety advisory group process is inconsistent

Many private event organisers actively work with a [safety advisory group \(SAG\)](#) as part of their event planning, as well as other event planning meetings run by the police. These provide a forum in which organisers can present their event management plans and receive multi-agency support on safety and resilience planning.

Local authorities encourage this involvement. Clear and accessible processes help organisers notify authorities of planned events and so they can determine whether SAG involvement is necessary. These processes usually include event notification forms, publicly available guidance and named points of contact. For larger or higher-risk events, some local authorities use specific ‘event safety advisory groups’ or similar multi-agency forums to bring organisers and partners together.

The [College of Policing](#) also provides forces with a [crowd and event safety template](#) that they can issue to organisers. This helps to make sure that organisers are aware of the SAG process. It also helps organisers understand the information partners need to review their event plans.

But some event organisers have developed comprehensive planning processes that include safety considerations. Often, they replace the role of an independent SAG and safety becomes a sub-theme within a wider planning framework.

Governance of the wider events sector lacks the structured oversight applied to regulated sports grounds

A statutory framework provides a clear legal basis for regulating and managing safety at events held in designated sports grounds. The [Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975](#) is the primary legislative basis for crowd safety principles at designated stadiums where large sporting events take place. The government published [Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds \(Green Guide\)](#) is the principal guidance used to apply the Act.

Under the Act, local authorities must make sure that designated sports grounds operate safely. They issue a general safety certificate, which sets enforceable conditions on the use of stadiums that meet the specified capacity and risk threshold. The Act provides the legal grounds to issue and enforce a safety certificate, and relevant parties use the Green Guide as the benchmark for interpreting statutory duties under the Act.

A clear governance framework exists for sports grounds regulated by the [Sports Grounds Safety Authority \(SGSA\)](#). The Green Guide supports this.

In contrast, the governance process across the wider events sector isn't as clear. Bodies such as the [Events Industry Forum](#) provide guidance through publications such as the [Purple Guide](#). The [Security Industry Authority \(SIA\)](#) regulates the licensing process for individual security operatives. Neither organisation has a role comparable to that of the SGSA for event planning and provision.

This creates a situation in which event organisers can sometimes overstate their responsibility for public safety planning. We found that often, this limits the role of the police. In these cases, regulatory scrutiny (in relation to alcohol and entertainment licensing) only occurs through local authority processes, such as SAGs, rather than through a dedicated national regulatory framework.

Guidance and responsibilities

The Purple Guide places a level of responsibility for event safety on event organisers but it is open to interpretation

The Purple Guide contains a direct reference to the [Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 \(HSWA\)](#). The guide states:

“As an employer, the event organiser whether an individual, collective or local authority has a general duty to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of their employees. They also have a similar responsibility to ensure, so far as is reasonable, that others including volunteers and spectators are not exposed to risks arising from the operation of the event.”

It also states that event organisers should be clear that they are responsible for public safety at their event.

Event organisers have clear duties, responsibilities and liabilities under legislation such as the HSWA. But the Purple Guide doesn't explicitly state that they hold sole responsibility for safety across the entire event. The event organisers we spoke to during our inspection suggested otherwise. They told us that, under their interpretation of the Purple Guide, they operate on the basis of having sole responsibility for safety. The guidance leaves scope for interpretation, particularly in relation to areas beyond the formal event footprint, including the wider periphery we refer to as Zone Ex.

Event organisers and other services share the duty of care and legal responsibility

The law in Great Britain states that an event organiser's duty of care depends on the extent of control they have over the event environment. Organisers are accountable only for risks they can meaningfully control. When an event takes place within a defined boundary, such as a stadium or other enclosed area, the organiser has primary responsibility for crowd safety. They must take reasonable steps to prevent foreseeable harm, and they can't delegate or disclaim this duty. Although the duty exists from the outset, liability is only established when an incident occurs and a civil claim is made.

The organiser's responsibility has practical limits. Their legal duties apply only to areas where they can exercise effective control. When events extend into public spaces and involve several agencies, responsibility becomes shared. Statutory duties under the HSWA and associated regulations require organisers to assess and manage risks to people affected by their activities. The Green Guide and the Purple Guide support this.

Organisers are responsible for safety within their event boundary. But recent case law and public inquiries show that they can't be solely responsible where other agencies have a significant role in managing risk. This is therefore shared, based on the extent of control and the nature of the risk. However, this shared responsibility doesn't mean that the burden of event management should fall disproportionately on the police.

The Notting Hill Carnival illustrates this point. An independent safety review identified concerns about public safety. It also highlighted the extent to which the scale and complexity of the event had placed significant operational demands on the Metropolitan Police Service. In 2026, the [Mayor of London](#) provided £4.66 million additional funding to support implementing the review's recommendations. With this funding, the organisers could take on several functions that the police had previously carried out. So the force could focus more directly on its main policing responsibilities during the event.

A representative from the [Health and Safety Executive](#) reinforced our view that there was a lack of legal clarity in terms of responsibility. They said that there is still a requirement to share responsibilities and for those best placed to manage and discharge risks. But overall ownership should remain with the event organiser. We believe this needs to be made much clearer.

Safety rules still apply when designated sports stadiums host non-sporting events

The Green Guide and SGSA oversight support the safe management of sporting events at designated sporting grounds. However, when organisers hold non-sporting events at these grounds, the stadium still operates within a regulated safety framework. The law applies to the venue itself, not only to the sport played there.

Designated sports stadiums will normally already have a general safety certificate. This stays in force even when the stadium hosts a non-sporting event, such as a concert. However, when a concert materially changes how the stadium operates, or introduces higher risks, the local authority can require a [special safety certificate](#).

Non-sporting events often generate different risk profiles. Organisers may change how they use the pitch to accommodate spectators. The event will attract different types of audiences and change how people move through the stadium. So the authorities have to apply safety controls differently, to reflect the nature of each event.

As a result, legislation allows local authorities to issue special safety certificates for events that fall outside the stadium's normal sporting use.

Certification is limited to the safe operation of the stadium. It doesn't focus on the broader range of dynamic public safety risks that may arise in the management of events. Also, when event organisers use a stadium for a non-sporting event, the risks change. Because of this, the assumptions set out in the Green Guide don't fully apply. This includes when a stadium's playing surface or pitch becomes part of the spectator area.

As a result, organisers rely on the Purple Guide. This guidance better reflects how these events operate, but it has no statutory basis.

Events on private land are subject to limited regulatory control

Local authorities don't regulate events on private land. But they can exercise powers to control and restrict events through licensing, planning, environmental health, highways, and health and safety legislation.

The [Licensing Act 2003](#) provides control only where events involve licensable activities. Local authorities can exert some control over events through alcohol or entertainment licences, but that control must be directly linked to the licence in question, rather than general safety matters. Organisers may run events without a licence, but the exclusion of activities such as the sale of alcohol significantly reduces potential income. This directly undermines an event's financial viability and often prevents events from operating sustainably.

Local authorities also rely on health and safety legislation to influence those organising and holding events on private land. Under the HSWA, event organisers must ensure the health and safety of workers, participants, and members of the public affected by event activities. Where things go wrong, event organisers and others can become liable in subsequent court proceedings.

Local authorities and the Health and Safety Executive use health and safety powers to require organisers to have suitable and sufficient arrangements. This includes:

- [risk assessments](#);
- crowd management plans;
- emergency procedures; and
- arrangements for competent staffing.

If these agencies identify serious deficiencies or unmanaged risks, they can require organisers to make improvements. They can also impose restrictions on activities or prevent aspects of an event from going ahead until organisers address those concerns. But it is rare for any agency to carry out regulatory checks during a large public event.

Local authorities also manage the impact of events on highways and transport networks. Under the [Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984](#) and the [Traffic Management Act 2004](#), councils control road closures, temporary traffic orders, parking restrictions, and traffic management measures associated with events.

The [Environmental Protection Act 1990](#) is available to address further community impacts, particularly noise and nuisance. For example, local authorities can restrict the operating times of an event.

However, private events that don't involve licensable activities may fall entirely outside these licensing controls. Some significant events, therefore, sit outside any statutory approval process unless they require a [Temporary Event Notice](#). A Temporary Event Notice is a short-term authority that allows events to take place without a full premises licence under the Licensing Act. Organisers apply for these notices for small occasional events where they sell alcohol.

We found numerous events where local authorities took retrospective action to hold event organisers to account for breaching legislation. Examples we heard about included performances that went on beyond a set time, which resulted in stricter licence conditions for the following year. We also heard about stewarding problems that resulted in the local authority asking that future events have more event staff present. Interviewees told us that the legal framework for non-sporting events was too reactive and not preventative. We agree.

Local authorities exercise greater control over events held on council-owned land

When events take place on council-owned land, it allows the local authority to exert more influence. In these circumstances, local authorities act not only as a licensing authority, but also as landowners. This dual role gives councils direct control over whether events can take place.

On private land, organisers may seek to proceed subject to compliance with legislation. By contrast, ownership of land lets authorities determine whether to permit an event and on what terms. Councils can refuse applications or grant permission, subject to conditions that govern the layout, capacity, security arrangements, operating hours and commercial activity.

This control operates alongside the same legislative powers that apply to events on private land. However, owning the land strengthens the authority's position. Where they identify risks, councils can rely on leverage to secure compliance or potentially withdraw permission. So they don't depend solely on regulatory enforcement processes. Most local authorities we spoke to told us they didn't have enough resources to visit all events and oversee compliance. They often deal with breaches by way of retrospective enforcement.

Guidance for non-sporting events at designated sports grounds and events held on private and local authority land is non-statutory

The Purple Guide is non-statutory. It operates alongside some legislative requirements but doesn't convey any legal requirement. Unlike the Green Guide, which operates in tandem with the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975 and underpins statutory safety certification for football matches, the Purple Guide has no formal legal footing. It doesn't create enforceable duties or replace obligations imposed by legislation.

The Purple Guide states that event organisers have a general duty to keep employees, volunteers and spectators safe. However, the guidance doesn't explicitly give sole or overarching ownership of safety in the same way that statutory regimes governing sports grounds do. Although the industry treats the Purple Guide as best practice, it doesn't offer the same level of clarity or regulatory leverage as statutory guidance.

This distinction is important when authorities assess accountability, particularly following serious incidents or failures in event management. In addition to legislative changes to address the lack of statutory guidance, we believe those with responsibility for the Purple Guide should amend it so it more accurately reflects the legal interpretation of responsibilities. Event organisers share the responsibility for public safety with partners, such as the police and local authorities. They should work collaboratively within the boundaries of the law. And this should include special police services (SPS) agreements.

The police have access to a broad range of professional guidance

The [National Police Chiefs' Council 'Events Guidance' document](#) provides a specific policing framework for the planning, policing and safety management of public events across England and Wales. The guidance isn't statutory. But it sets out operational expectations for police forces and supports decision making alongside legislative frameworks. Forces use it to inform how they assess risk, deploy resources and work with partners before and during events.

Overall, the legislative landscape and respective guidance is complex. Local authorities and partner agencies need to balance public safety responsibilities with the practical realities of large numbers of events within their boundaries. We found several areas where consistency could be improved. And we found that clearer statutory guidance would support safer event planning across England and Wales.

Case study 3: organisers of an event held on private land weren't required to engage with the local safety advisory group

A local authority planned a large celebration. It expected the event would attract around 50,000 attendees. The police and local authority involved in this city-led event told us that it involved a complex series of activities. These included stage performances, public viewing areas, food concessions and a large firework display. Because of the scale and the numbers of people expected to attend, the local authority referred the plans to the [safety advisory group \(SAG\)](#) for a multi-agency review.

The police, fire and rescue service and other partners of the city-led event raised concerns about the proposed firework display. They had other safety concerns about infrastructure. They identified risks linked to crowd density, the position of viewing areas and the proximity of temporary structures. As a result of this feedback, event organisers modified their plans. We heard that these changes made the event safer. The changes also supported a more co-ordinated approach to managing the expected crowds.

Several weeks before the main celebration, partners became aware of a smaller event linked to the main celebration. The organisers of this smaller event also intended to hold a firework display in a private car park. They didn't engage with the SAG process because the smaller event didn't fall under statutory licensing controls. Partners of the city-led celebration told us the smaller event was likely to operate independently and that they didn't consider it during the overall strategic planning.

They said that their ability to intervene was limited. The event didn't require a licence. There was no statutory power to require the organisers to engage with the SAG or modify their plans. The only possible intervention would have been enforcement under health and safety legislation in relation to the firework display. But, they said, this approach would have required action during the event itself. They considered this impractical once large numbers of people had gathered.

Organisers of the city-led event had discussions with the organisers of the smaller event. They agreed to move their firework display to an earlier date. Partners of the city-led event told us that this decision reduced the risk of large crowds attending the car park site on the night of the main celebration. It also supported safer event planning.

This example shows the practical limitations of the SAG process when events fall outside statutory licensing or regulatory frameworks. The SAG supported effective planning for the city-led celebration. But partners of this celebration had limited options to influence or manage risks associated with the separate private event. They told us that, had the organisers not co-operated voluntarily, there were few practical measures to address the identified risks.

Transfer of responsibility

Stewards and security personnel have limited powers to address public safety issues at events

Stewards and private security staff play an important role in managing routine crowd safety and controlling access to events. However, their legal powers and responsibilities differ considerably from those of [police officers](#). The SIA normally trains and regulates such staff. The SIA sets the standards for relevant qualification training. Approved awarding organisations and providers carry out this training. The SIA also issues [guidance for security](#) staff. To get an SIA licence, security operatives must have successfully completed the training. The SIA then regulates the security operatives once it has issued them a licence.

The training establishes a minimum professional standard. But private security staff don't have broader statutory powers to deal with crime, public disorder or serious incidents. This limits the extent to which private security staff can respond independently when risks escalate beyond routine event management.

Some organisers intentionally limit police involvement within the event footprint. So even though the police are the only agency with full legal authority to respond to serious public safety incidents, they may not know about developing risks.

So the distinction between the responsibilities of stewards and the powers of the police is a critical consideration within event planning. During our inspection, we saw event organisations trying to limit the role of the police in large public events. The current framework doesn't prevent this. It often leaves the police having to anticipate how much they can rely on private security to determine the risks.

Without clear guidance, some event organisers take sole control for an event but have arrangements to transfer responsibility to the police if a serious incident occurs

Event organisers we spoke to told us that primary responsibility for event management inside the perimeter or event footprint sits with the organiser. We were told that the police have no role to play in managing public safety at events that have a [premises licence](#). One event organiser said the police would have some role in managing activities that are external to the event, but no role in a licensed area.

But the same organiser had a protocol allowing them to transfer command responsibility to the police during a major incident within the footprint. Such an arrangement places the operational burden on the police. And the event organiser expects to hand over the same responsibilities they gave themselves to justify not having the police involved in the first place. This is an unacceptable state of affairs.

Police commanders for this event told us that there was a lack of clarity about who ultimately had responsibility if things went wrong. Some told us that they didn't have a clear understanding of the different roles and responsibilities. We can't overstate the importance of each organisation having legal clarity about who is responsible for public safety at an event. Our inspection has revealed widespread confusion and disparate operating models. We feel the government needs to address this as a matter of urgency.

Unclear ownership of responsibilities at events restricts effective contingency planning and resourcing

As we have previously stated, the police retain an enduring common law duty (long-standing custom, based on previous legal cases) to protect the public. So police forces have to plan for contingencies should a serious incident occur within the footprint of an event. Forces must, therefore, make reasonable provision for foreseeable risks arising from public events and the sometimes-vast crowds they attract. But they aren't primarily responsible for event security. It seems reasonable to us that when organisations agree handover protocols, they would expect that appropriate resources will be available to respond.

Our inspection identified that there was lack of clarity of ownership and arrangements for managing such contingencies. The plans for some privately organised events were underdeveloped and inconsistent in their approach to public safety planning.

One force described having to close a major event as an important scenario to include in planning. But they and their partners hadn't planned or exercised such a closure. Some force commanders told us they hadn't tested plans to deploy resources into an event. A public inquiry would be highly critical of such arrangements. This is another area where we concluded that all parties involved in event management need greater clarity.

Zone Ex

The absence of any legal definition of what constitutes Zone Ex (external areas surrounding events) leads to confusion and inconsistent responses

The Purple Guide describes [Zone Ex](#) as the public areas surrounding a venue used by spectators travelling to and from an event. It includes transport routes and public highways. These are areas which fall outside the venue's or organiser's direct control but require co-ordinated multi-agency planning for safety and security.

The Purple Guide and the Green Guide both refer to managing external areas. The guidance suggests that organisers, landowners, local authorities and police share responsibility for Zone Ex. However, because these areas include a mixture of public and private land, no single organisation has the legal powers to exert control, except the police.

Police commanders and SAG chairs in one focus group told us that there is a lack of legal clarity about SAG responsibilities, specifically in relation to Zone Ex. One stated: “We need that clarity; the legal basis is really important”.

For events at sports stadiums, particularly modern ones, the delineation between the stadium curtilage and the public realm gives greater clarity on operational boundaries. However, for open-air or non-permanent venues, the extent of the Zone Ex area requires greater consideration by those involved in event planning. It is unlikely this situation will change when Martyn’s Law comes into effect in 2027 because its guidance doesn’t define Zone Ex or the responsibilities.

Introducing Martyn’s Law provides a standardised approach to terrorism preparedness based on capacity and risk

The [Terrorism \(Protection of Premises\) Act 2025](#), or Martyn’s Law, places a statutory obligation on event organisers and venue operators to actively manage terrorism-related risks into standard event planning. The legislation applies to locations and events based on the crowd size and risk profile rather than the event type. The SIA will act as the regulator for Martyn’s Law.

This new legislation hadn’t come into effect at the time of our inspection. But the government has published guidance to event organisers and other stakeholders. There are two tiers of responsibility which the guidance describes as:

“Standard – Smaller premises where 200 to 799 individuals may be present will be in the ‘standard tier’. The requirements in this tier are centred on simple, low-cost activities designed to ensure those working at premises or events are better able to reduce harm, and save lives, in the event of an attack. Those responsible for premises in scope of the Act must notify the SIA and provide certain information about the premises.

Enhanced – Larger premises – and qualifying public events – where 800 or more individuals may be present will be in the ‘enhanced tier’. Those responsible for these premises and events must notify the SIA, that they are responsible for their premises. And have in place, so far as is reasonably practicable, appropriate public protection procedures that could be reasonably expected to reduce the risk of physical harm being caused to individuals if an attack was to occur there or nearby.”

Most of the events we reviewed in our inspection would fall into the enhanced tier due to the large volume of attendees. Some of the large community events we reviewed didn't operate within a defined boundary or have entry restrictions. Interviewees told us that in the future, such events may involve some of these features as they assist in managing safety issues.

Using attendance volumes to categorise different events will add another layer of complexity to an already complicated framework of legislation and shared responsibility. Both the Green and Purple Guides warn event organisers, the police and SAGs to not use attendance numbers as a binary indicator of risk. Before the new legislation takes effect in 2027, the broad framework of regulation and guidance needs to be considered in its totality, and the legal responsibilities should be made clear for all parties involved. We cover this in [Recommendation 37](#).

Competence and training for event organisers differs between sports events and other public events

Sports grounds safety officers must have a [professional qualification](#). They must hold, or be working towards, a Level 4 qualification in safety management. This makes sure that they meet a recognised standard for managing large crowds and complex events.

There is no equivalent requirement for private event organisers or for organisers of temporary events. Some organisers have substantial experience over many years, but others have a limited background in public safety. This leads to differences in the quality of risk assessments and planning, particularly for events outside structured sports stadiums.

Unless there is a change to the legislative framework for non-sporting public events, we believe the guidance available to event organisers should set a minimum standard of professional qualification for event organisers.

Public Liability Insurance

Inconsistent practice means not all SAGs check public liability insurance

The Purple Guide advises event organisers to obtain public liability insurance for all public events. Event organisers should make sure that appropriate public liability insurance is in place to cover injury or damage to property. This protects members of the public and covers compensation and legal costs that may otherwise fall to the event organiser.

The [UK Resilience Academy](#) guidance on working with SAGs offers similar advice. But it makes it clear that there is no legal obligation for an event organiser to arrange appropriate insurance cover. SAGs may ask organisers to submit evidence of insurance as part of their event management plan. Some of the SAG chairs we interviewed told us that there was a stringent process to do this. However, we found that practice varies across the UK. One SAG routinely checked insurance for events on council land. But another SAG never reviewed insurance and didn't consider it their responsibility. One SAG chair told us: "This is down to the event organiser. It isn't something that is specifically my responsibility on behalf of the SAG."

SAGS have limitations when checking public liability insurance for events on private land

SAGs have greater influence on events held on public land. They can request insurance from the event organiser. Or it may be that the local authority's own insurance covers some of the activities. A SAG chair told us that SAGs don't have the power to make sure that public liability insurance is in place for events on private land. They can advise organisers that insurance is expected but can't prevent an event from going ahead. Neither do they have assurance processes to check whether insurance policies or cover includes any safety measures they advise upon.

At one event, there had previously been a fatality while organisers were setting up the electrical infrastructure in 2023. The subsequent inquest raised questions about whether either the SAG or the local authority had checked the insurance. The authority said that checking insurance could create a perception that the SAG had approved safety arrangements, potentially exposing it to liability.

We believe that SAGs should be able to require event organisers to hold appropriate public liability insurance. The UK Resilience Academy guidance needs to clarify the role SAGs play in making sure that insurance is in place. But also in making sure it reflects the safety measures they have advised. Having insurance as a requirement on an event safety certificate would make sure organisers have appropriate cover for the public attending. But there isn't a regime for safety certification at most public events.

Funding arrangements

The absence of formal funding arrangements can lead some event organisers to make inappropriate payments for police services

We spoke to one organiser who made a discretionary goodwill payment to the police to support policing around their event perimeter. However, such payments don't offer the same legal clarity or accountability as a formal SPS agreement. Without a contractual arrangement, the scope of police responsibility is ambiguous. This highlights the lack of clear ownership in areas such as Zone Ex, where responsibilities for public safety, access control, and incident response have no consistent definition or formal agreement.

We found examples of clear and transparent funding arrangements. Event organisers at Silverstone have developed a comprehensive planning framework for the British Formula 1 Grand Prix weekend. They had agreed a resourcing plan with Northamptonshire Police. Pre-authorised SPS agreements under [section 25 of the Police Act 1996](#) covered all the police resources outlined in the plan. The [police and crime commissioner](#)'s approval for the SPS agreement was a matter of public record on their website.

The police commanders for this event told us they were absolutely clear about what was expected of them, and how many officers and staff they needed. They could differentiate between event resources and those that performed core duties away from the event site. This was an example of good practice other forces should replicate.

We believe the various sources of guidance on event management need to encourage appropriate resourcing for the emergency services at events. They should also warn organisers and forces that offering or accepting payment for police services otherwise than in accordance with SPS rules is inappropriate and may be unlawful.

Technology and transparency

Using artificial intelligence tools can lead to inaccurate communication and a lack of transparency in record keeping

Most of the guidance states that event organisers should exercise caution when using artificial intelligence (AI) or automated tools in preparing event safety documentation. This includes risk assessments, event safety management plans and supporting schedules. While AI tools may assist with drafting or structuring information, they can't replace competent professional judgment, site-specific knowledge or operational experience. Event organisers are fully responsible for the accuracy, relevance and suitability of all safety documentation submitted to a SAG or statutory authority, regardless of how they produce it.

The guidance strongly encourages organisers or SAG partners to declare use of AI tools in event safety plans or related documentation. This declaration should include the extent and purpose of the use of AI. SAGs should treat all documentation as requiring human verification. They shouldn't assume that AI-generated material is complete, current or tailored to the specific event context.

Recommendation 35

By 31 December 2026, the [UK Resilience Academy](#) should publish revised guidance to those involved in [safety advisory groups](#). It should include advice for event organisers and safety advisory group members on the appropriate use of artificial intelligence technology.

Planning portals can reduce information sharing

Some of the large private event organisers we interviewed use secure planning portals to store operational documents and intelligence products. Organisers often give the relevant police forces access to intelligence that they generate through their own processes. We were impressed by the sophisticated and comprehensive planning structures these private companies had developed.

These systems can help co-ordinate planning. However, because organisers may restrict access to protect commercial interests, important information may not be available to all relevant partners. We also heard that information stored on private portals may not be subject to [Freedom of Information legislation](#). One force told us that we needed permission from the event organiser before they could access the material we requested for this inspection.

Operating in this way runs the risk of fragmented intelligence sharing and operational planning. And it reduces transparency with the public. We feel that event organisers should have information sharing protocols that allow statutory partners timely access to relevant information and intelligence.

Recommendation 36

By 31 December 2027, the [UK Resilience Academy](#) should refresh the guidance to those involved in [safety advisory groups](#). It should include advice for safety advisory group chairs on the recording of minutes and actions that is compliant with [Freedom of Information](#) requirements.

Escalation of risk

Escalation of public safety concerns beyond SAGs depends on the presence of a clearly identified event organiser

An escalation process operates most effectively where there is a clearly identified event organiser or responsible body. In these circumstances, and where powers to intervene are available, regulatory authorities can impose conditions, review licences or take enforcement action.

Events arising from long-standing tradition or informal gatherings where there is no formally recognised organiser present particular challenges. In such cases, there may be no individual or organisation accountable for compliance with regulatory requirements. So the SAG and partner agencies have limited ability to require specific safety measures or to secure compliance through normal regulatory pathways.

When there is limited legislative leverage, agencies may have little option other than to prepare collectively to manage the event and reduce risk. Some of the events we reviewed had no clearly identified event organiser.

In one event, we found that partners accepted that the event would take place even though there was no formal governance. They tried to mitigate potential risks through a multi-agency strategic co-ordinating group. This operates in a similar format to a SAG. A senior police commander for the event described it as being “more important than Christmas” for the community. They added that any attempts to prevent it would be unsuccessful.

A police public order commander said the multi-agency group could make it difficult for the attendees to hold the event, but the attendees would find a way around it.

National issues

Most public events across England and Wales take place without any involvement of local or central government. But a small number of these events have the potential to lead to national and international consequences. There isn't a defined category of events that have greater national significance, or a process to escalate such events to central government. This isn't a new finding.

Events of greater significance

A national risk assessment matrix for all public events would negate the need to define events of national significance

Following the disorder that surrounded the [UEFA](#) Euro 2020 final between England and Italy at Wembley Stadium, [a review by Baroness Casey of Blackstock](#) made some recommendations. These included creating a new category for football matches of national significance. Another recommendation was the steps that the [Sports Grounds Safety Authority \(SGSA\)](#), police and other partners should take for such events.

Baroness Casey also recognised that the existing framework of statutory powers was complex. In her report she stated:

“The prospect of new legislation is welcome and timely as it gives the government the opportunity to update the legal framework that governs spectator safety which has not been significantly reviewed since the Hillsborough tragedy.”

In this inspection, we asked all those we interviewed whether there should be a new category of events of national significance. Most of those we spoke to agreed that the government should have acted on the recommendation. But, they said, it needed expanding to encompass other public events, not just football matches.

While most were in favour of this proposal, many felt it needed clear criteria for differentiating between events that are significant, and those that aren't. Many of our interviewees, including senior police commanders, the SGSA, [United Kingdom Football Policing Unit](#) and government officials, were less clear on the purpose of such a categorisation. And they were unclear on the role of government in these events.

It is easy to understand that the government needs to be aware of risks that may restrict or prevent certain events. Cancelling a major music festival or a cultural celebration may result in national, public or media criticism. Equally, if an event involves the attendance of performers, participants or spectators from across the world, decisions taken locally by the police or others can have far-reaching geopolitical consequences.

When talking about the challenges of public safety at one particular large cultural celebration, a senior police commander told us:

“But there is no interest to support the event with central government funding. If the special category came with a financial benefit, then there would be mileage in it.”

Police commanders told us the criteria for allocating central government funding support wasn't clear enough. Other senior [officers](#) also had this view. They gave us examples of the government providing co-ordination and funding support to some events but not to others. Examples of events that get government funding include international football, other sporting tournaments, Trooping the Colour and New Year's Eve celebrations. Neither were they clear on which government department would take a lead on different types of events. Government officials we spoke to confirmed that some events benefit from central government co-ordination and support. But they couldn't describe any clear criteria for selecting events they support.

During our inspection and in the events we reviewed, we found multiple government departments taking an interest in the plans and safe provision of some events. We spoke to officials from various government departments who told us that, depending on the event, it would be possible for the Home Office, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to have some level of involvement or interest at the same time.

In our review of the decision-making process for the Aston Villa versus Maccabi Tel Aviv fixture, we received copies of email communications between various government departments. In these emails, government officials highlighted the absence of any process for central government involvement in the planning for events or the role of the [safety advisory group \(SAG\)](#). A senior police officer we interviewed told us:

“This potential shortfall was identified within the Casey Review. Changes to the designation authorities for ‘national significant’ events could potentially cement and formalise the position central government were seeking.”

The majority of our interviewees told us that it would be difficult to agree an effective definition of a “significant” event. Some told us they thought it was the role of the SAG to decide whether an event was significant. Others thought it should fall to a national body or that it was a national police function.

But most of them said it was the responsibility of the respective police force and that a national risk matrix for events would help in consistently identifying the few events that need escalating. We agree.

In our inspection, we asked the people involved in events where they would go to escalate matters to the government. We heard differing opinions. Some of those we spoke to told us that they had already raised concerns about the lack of a single point of government contact for public events.

Communication structures

Police forces and local authorities have no single point of contact for escalating risks to, or asking for support from, the government

The Home Office has a small team, the major events directorate, that is responsible for co-ordinating government departments that may have a role in events. The involvement of the major events directorate typically arises where an event:

- has some national significance;
- involves government funding;
- needs departmental oversight; or
- carries diplomatic, political or community sensitivities.

This includes events that the DCMS oversees. These are typically aligned to government funding or policy interests, including state, royal or military ceremonies. The government may also become involved if there are international delegations or diplomatic considerations, or when event scheduling interacts with other major national events. Some of these are large sporting events. Examples also include major international sporting events organised by private commercial enterprises, such as the [Tour de France](#), [Women's Rugby World Cup](#), [Commonwealth Games](#) and the [UEFA European Championship](#).

In these circumstances, the Home Office works closely with police partners including the [National Police Coordination Centre \(NPoCC\)](#) to monitor, plan and co-ordinate national-level considerations. The police can recover some of the additional costs associated with government-sponsored events. But the various officials we spoke to told us that the government hadn't defined the attributes of an event that warrants government funding or the co-ordinated support of the government through the major events directorate.

We also heard from senior police commanders and SAG chairs who were confused about which government department was responsible for certain events and who they should notify. One interviewee said: "Golds won't know who to call."

A [College of Policing](#) representative told us that there used to be a Home Office module on the [public order public safety](#) gold commander course covering this topic. But recently that module has been stopped due to workloads. Gold commanders therefore don't benefit from this insight into the national context or appropriate government involvement.

In a high-profile football fixture we reviewed, we found evidence that the force, NPoCC, [United Kingdom Football Policing Unit](#) and various government departments shared escalating risk between them. In correspondence we reviewed, we found evidence of the Home Office, DCMS, Cabinet Office, the Prime Minister's Office and MHCLG all taking interest in the same event. But there was no clarity or consensus about who was responsible for notifying the government or which department should be taking the lead. The lack of clarity extended to confusion about where any additional financial support would come from.

Funding support

In addition to their core budgets, police forces have limited options to secure funding for police operations at events

Most public events don't need any specific police response, but those with larger crowds usually do. The line that divides those events that forces can manage as part of core duties and others that demand a greater level of police involvement isn't clear enough. The additional demand some larger events place on forces isn't a consideration for the funding that defines police budgets, particularly when they take place infrequently. Often, forces can ill afford the costs of police operations, and the [abstraction](#) of resources from normal duties.

Over the past three decades, the festival industry has grown exponentially. This has been driven, in part, by changes across the music industry, such as music streaming, which have resulted in larger revenue from live artist performances.

Police forces should include within their policing and budget plans reasonable contingencies for unexpected events within their areas. However, the government recognises that there will be unexpected and exceptional events that could threaten the financial stability of one or more police forces. In these cases, [police and crime commissioners \(PCCs\)](#) or mayoral equivalents can apply to the Home Office for special grant funding to meet additional costs that they would incur from policing such events.

For single events, the Home Office expects forces to meet the additional costs of the event up to 1 percent of the force's budget. The application for a special grant can only include additional costs. In general, these would include those necessary to pay [staff](#) overtime, [mutual aid](#) and rest day working costs. But it may also include premises, vehicle or equipment hire costs. Special grant funding doesn't cover opportunity costs. For example, the cost of an officer policing the event as part of their normal duty shouldn't be included in the application.

As a hypothetical example, in 2024/25, the budget allocated to Avon and Somerset Constabulary was £391 million. If the force applied for a special grant to cover costs associated with any large police operation, they would need to cover at least £3.91 million of the cost before they could receive any additional support.

Most forces we spoke to told us that special grant funding wasn't a viable option for most public events. Avon and Somerset Constabulary didn't apply for a special grant or any other funding for the police operation at Glastonbury in 2025.

Senior officers in the Metropolitan Police Service told us that they can apply, once a year, for National and International Capital City funding. They do this to cover some of the costs associated with the Notting Hill Carnival because they know it takes place every year. Some of the officers we spoke to in the Metropolitan Police Service questioned why certain events attracted financial support from the government but not others. They told us that it would help them if there was a clear rationale for these decisions. They gave the example of the New Year's Eve celebrations that benefit from some government funding while Notting Hill Carnival doesn't.

None of the other forces we spoke to said they had a similar opportunity to apply for financial support for police operations at public events. They recognised that on many occasions, they manage single events that don't fall within the scope of any alternative funding available to them.

Despite the lack of clarity about which events the government will financially support, there are occasions when it makes money available

During our inspection, it became clear to us that the government was willing to provide additional financial support to forces for certain events. In the example of Aston Villa versus Maccabi Tel Aviv, the police advised the SAG to reduce the ticket allocation to travelling fans as a way of reducing risk. Despite this, the force still planned to deploy 700 officers and staff at the match. Such a deployment relied on support from NPoCC to secure officers on mutual aid from other forces. Without travelling supporters, deployment on this scale at a football fixture was extraordinary.

In the immediate aftermath of this decision, government officials contacted the police force and indicated that they would make additional funds available. This was an attempt to find a way to allow travelling fans from Maccabi Tel Aviv to attend the match. Once the force became aware that additional funds may allow for extra police resources to be included in their plans, they agreed to reconsider the operational risk. The correspondence we were able to review showed that the government was willing to allocate up to £10 million from reserves for the police operation.

It seems reasonable to assume that, had the force known that this funding was available, it might have presented a different [risk assessment](#) to the SAG and the outcome could have been different. By making funding available to forces before risk assessment or operational decisions, the government could keep informed of developing risks and consider financial support when it deems it appropriate. Such a formal funding process isn't available to forces. We think it should be.

The role of politics

The government and senior politicians have an important role to play in some major public events

Some government departments play an important role in major public events. The MHCLG provides a link between central government and [local resilience forums](#) and, to some degree, SAGs. But MHCLG doesn't oversee or govern the work of SAGs. In one event we inspected, we saw communication between officials in MHCLG and other departments acknowledging that the government had no powers to influence a SAG decision or advice.

Many of the larger events we considered fall within the scope of the DCMS. But often these events involved the police and other agencies or services. Therefore, the Home Office also had a role to play in them. On occasion, the Cabinet Office and the Prime Minister's Office took an active interest in events.

The [UK Resilience Academy](#), which works on behalf of the Cabinet Office, publishes the guidance for SAGs. Police forces report direct to the public safety group within the Home Office. Within the Home Office there is also a major events directorate.

The government officials we interviewed acknowledged that some large events that DCMS sponsors or that involve a clear role for the government, benefit from the support of the major events directorate. But they couldn't provide a clear rationale for including certain private events or tournaments they helped with, or why they weren't involved with others. The framework of government support is complicated. Police forces and local authorities would benefit from the clarity of a single point of contact.

Elected officials should share their concerns about operational decisions in advance, but they should tread carefully

MPs and councillors are entitled to ask chief constables what they intend to do to prepare for events, and to give their views. These politicians represent their communities and society in general, so their collaboration in policing and public safety is essential. But MPs and councillors should share their views in private, so they don't jeopardise the appearance of police impartiality.

Public statements about events by senior politicians can increase the risk that local authorities and the police are managing. In the example of Aston Villa versus Maccabi Tel Aviv, the force reviewed the risk matrix score after comments from senior politicians aired in the media. The prospect of disorder and protest had increased.

In [our report on 'Activism and impartiality in policing'](#) we said:

“In all but the most extreme and unusual of circumstances, MPs and councillors should be very mindful not to publicly criticise, interfere with or otherwise try to influence any decisions in advance of the police implementing them.”

This is because they could be seen to undermine the operational decisions of police officers. It could also raise questions about whether the police are acting within the law. Nevertheless, it is quite right that elected officials hold the police to account for their performance and decisions, but that should be after an event or incident.

Involvement of elected officials or senior politicians doesn't necessarily infringe upon operational independence

There are some occasions where the significance of the event, or the role of a police force or SAG in the event, make it legitimate for those with clear concerns, including those holding political office, to raise them directly with the force. However, they should do so privately, and before the SAG has confirmed plans or made them public. This would allow those with concerns to understand how far either the force or SAG were properly accounting for the full range of potential impacts on public trust and confidence.

The case of Aston Villa versus Maccabi Tel Aviv may well be an example of such extreme and unusual circumstances. In these circumstances, the government should offer advice and support privately. Police forces and local authorities need greater powers to allow them to manage public safety at events. They also need a single point of contact to help them inform the government about risks. This would also give the government the opportunity to appropriately influence and support operational planning.

Future considerations

A coherent framework of regulation, governance and guidance could provide much needed clarity and improve public safety

In this inspection, we concluded that the police's role in football and other sporting events at sports stadiums was much clearer, to everyone involved. We found that the role of SAGs in relation to sporting events and safety certification worked well. This is largely due to the clear framework of regulation and the governance and guidance provided by the SGSA. But even when we considered this specific category of public events, we still found a high level of inconsistency.

The absence of a coherent framework of regulation, governance and guidance for those planning for other, non-sporting public events, is more problematic. We found event organisers, local authorities and other services struggling to interpret fragmented legislation and guidance. This created the opportunity for different parties to interpret, misinterpret and potentially overstate their level of responsibility or absolve themselves of it.

In parallel, we found that the police were balancing their common law duty (long-standing custom, based on previous legal cases) to protect the public and prevent crime, with the extent to which they could rely on other parties. Too often, the way in which forces assessed risks, planned their response and worked with SAGs, reflected the inconsistent framework they operated in.

People we interviewed raised their concerns about the additional pressure this framework and police forces will face over the coming years. They stated that improvements were needed urgently. The additional pressures include:

- the [Terrorism \(Protection of Premises\) Act 2025](#) coming into effect;
- UEFA European Championship 2028 (Great Britain and Ireland hosting);
- G7 summit;
- 179 planned events with greater than 10,000 attendees expected; and
- increased protest activity (up 600 percent between 2023–25 according to the [National Police Chiefs' Council](#)).

At the beginning of this report, we said that, rather than make a large number of discrete recommendations, each addressing a single point, we would include a single recommendation to the government. Our final recommendation (Recommendation 37) covers a broad range of topics with a singular outcome in mind. We recommend the government carries out a review to harmonise the disparate and incomplete framework of powers and guidance. This would allow the police, local authorities and event organisers to work more effectively to keep the public safe at events.

Recommendation 37

By 31 August 2027, the government should complete a ministerially-led cross-departmental review to secure improvements in event safety. As a minimum, the review should address the following matters:

- the absence of a safety certification regime for public events similar to that for sports stadiums and football matches; this should include the consideration of mandating all event organisers hold appropriate public liability insurance;
- whether [safety advisory groups](#) should become a statutory body rather than voluntary;

- the absence of a single agency or body with regulatory responsibility for oversight and guidance in relation to non-sporting public events and those sporting events that aren't covered by the [Sports Grounds Safety Authority](#);
- the absence of independent, statutory guidance for event organisers;
- consideration of legislation to confer similar powers to those conferred by the [Public Order Act 1986](#) to place conditions or restrictions on events where there is a significant risk to public safety;
- the lack of clarity about the level of responsibility the police have in relation to public events; this should include the consideration of a more contemporary interpretation of archaic common law duties (long-standing custom, based on previous legal cases) to protect the public and prevent crime at all times;
- the lack of clarity about the level of responsibility in law that event organisers have in relation to public safety and crime prevention;
- the inability of forces to reclaim the costs associated with deploying resources at public events through [section 25 of the Police Act 1996](#);
- the absence of an effective funding stream and application process for forces to use when additional resources, and the associated costs, become a factor in [risk assessments](#) and operational decisions;
- the disparity in the level of professional qualification required to manage public safety at different types of public events;
- the lack of clarity in section 27 guidance for the [Terrorism \(Protection of Premises\) Act 2025](#) insofar as it relates to Zone Ex; this should include a consideration of the opportunity to align the attributes of premises or qualifying events and attendee volumes, with other aspects of the wider framework for public events;
- the lack of a single point of contact within the government for public events that police forces, national police bodies and local authorities can engage with for support; and
- the absence of a clear definition for events that attract co-ordination and financial support from the government, and those that don't.

Annex A: our preliminary assessment

In [a letter to the Home Secretary published in January 2026](#), the then HM Chief Inspector Sir Andy Cooke provided a preliminary assessment of the handling and communication of information and [intelligence](#) gathered by West Midlands Police in advance of the fixture. He wrote:

Preliminary views: the Aston Villa versus Maccabi Tel Aviv fixture

I am now able to offer my preliminary views in respect of the match assessment and categorisation that WMP provided to Birmingham City Council's SAG. I do so in the context of widespread media reporting, some of which continues to – sometimes inaccurately – conflate elements of the evidence. In my assessment of the facts, I seek to provide as complete a picture as possible, separating out events clearly. I have confined my assessment to the specific matters under consideration, rather than straying into other territory. For example, I recognise there are significant concerns about elected officials attending the SAG. Additionally, questions have been raised about the nature and frequency of contact between the force and local politicians when it was preparing for the fixture. However, these concerns are outside the terms of reference for this part of our inspection. I will address them, and other similar matters, in more detail in my final report.

In offering these preliminary views, I wish to clarify that my role is that of an inspector concerned with police efficiency and effectiveness, not an investigator examining the conduct of individual officers. My inspections aren't carried out under the police conduct regime, or with all the checks, balances and protections the relevant regulations are designed to provide.

I emphasise that a considerable amount of new information has recently emerged, including over the Christmas period. It is highly probable that WMP and other bodies will continue to give me information that will be relevant to my inspection. My views may therefore develop or change.

On 16 October 2025, WMP provided its preferred tactical option to members of the SAG. Later that day, the Chair of the SAG wrote to the Chief Operating Officer of Aston Villa FC, advising that the club should reduce to zero the ticket allocation to Maccabi Tel Aviv fans.

Based on what I have seen so far, I am satisfied that WMP recognised that this was a high-risk fixture, the policing of which would involve added complexity because of national and international events. From the outset, the force clearly knew the fixture would attract wide-ranging protests.

The fixture's significance was further heightened by the 2 October 2025 terrorist attack on Manchester's Heaton Park Hebrew Congregation.

However, I am concerned that in some respects, the force either didn't fully appreciate – or its response didn't demonstrate that it appreciated – the extent to which national and international context would lead to far-reaching consequences if the fixture and wider associated events were not policed effectively. I am not convinced that the force fully considered the consequences of its preferred tactical option. It focused on reducing the risk of short-term disorder and long-term damage to local community relations due to the presence of Maccabi Tel Aviv fans. It lacked the necessary foresight to recognise the long-term, global consequences.

The force's gold strategy and silver operational plans initially reflected a genuine desire to accommodate Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters. As is usual practice for international fixtures, WMP approached counterparts with experience of policing the fans of the club involved. In this case, they spoke to police in the Netherlands to gain their perspective on policing the November 2024 Ajax versus Maccabi Tel Aviv fixture. Following this meeting, and having reviewed a number of official Dutch reports, the force changed its position in respect of accommodating away supporters.

On 1 October 2025, WMP and Dutch police commanders held an online video meeting, which was carried out in English. We haven't been able to establish exactly what the Dutch police said or how the WMP attendee interpreted it. This is because:

- the meeting wasn't recorded;
- relevant documentation and interviewees' accounts vary; and
- the WMP attendee told us he made a handwritten record of the meeting, then converted it into an email (which we have reviewed), and then disposed of the handwritten record.

It is clear that there was a significant level of disorder in respect of the Ajax versus Maccabi Tel Aviv fixture in Amsterdam. It is also clear that WMP sought and obtained additional information about other Maccabi Tel Aviv fixtures. But I note that WMP spoke only to Dutch police. It appears that the force didn't speak to policing counterparts in other jurisdictions where Maccabi Tel Aviv had more recently played European fixtures.

Assessment, information and intelligence WMP provided to the SAG

On 7 October 2025, the WMP silver commander provided an oral briefing to the SAG. This briefing included a broader range of information and intelligence than that which the Dutch police are reported to have given WMP. Apart from one discrepancy introduced by another WMP attendee (about the number of Palestinian flags being burned at the Ajax fixture), I am satisfied that the silver commander's initial oral briefing to the SAG wasn't materially inaccurate.

However, on 10 October 2025, the WMP gold commander at that time wrote a letter to the Chair of the SAG. That letter contains some statements that are inaccurate. It also contains a lack of balance regarding the behaviour of different groups in Amsterdam. It appears that on 24 October 2025, the silver commander – with approval from the most senior level of the force – repeated these inaccurate statements in a written report to the SAG. That report also contains further inaccuracies.

[Later in] this letter, I have detailed some of these inaccuracies.

On 16 October 2025, other representatives of WMP gave the SAG another oral briefing. At that meeting, the SAG confirmed its advice to reduce to zero the ticket allocation to away fans. The force's 16 October 2025 oral briefing didn't repeat the inaccuracies of the 10 October 2025 letter, and it didn't include the same lack of balance. It also didn't introduce the further inaccuracies that appeared in the 24 October 2025 report. But those inaccuracies would of course have been in the gold and silver commanders' minds when they decided to recommend the force's preferred tactical option.

We have reviewed recordings of the oral briefings that WMP gave to the SAG on 7 and 16 October 2025. We have also reviewed the WMP's written communications of 10 October and 24 October 2025. Based on this evidence, it is clear that the force based its assessment of threat and risk, and its preferred tactical options, on the potential for wide-ranging protests relating to national and international events, as well as on the risk from football-related violence.

To be clear, I have found no evidence to support a view that antisemitism played any part in WMP stating that its preferred tactical option was to reduce to zero the ticket allocation to Maccabi Tel Aviv fans.

In this letter, I conclude that there was an imbalance in the weight of evidence that WMP presented to the SAG in respect of the previous behaviour of Maccabi Tel Aviv fans. I have formed the view that confirmation bias, in relation to the anticipated behaviour of Maccabi Tel Aviv fans and the potential disorder their presence might cause, influenced both the content and strength of assessments WMP gave to the SAG.

Furthermore, the cumulative effect of several of the force's actions shouldn't be underestimated. I will return to these topics in the wider inspection. They include:

- the way the silver commander and others asserted the force's risk assessment and preferred tactical option, and the terms they used to make those assertions;
- the details the WMP gold commander provided to the Chair of the SAG on 10 October 2025; and
- the unusually high number of WMP representatives at the SAG meetings, and their seniority.

After the 16 October 2025 oral briefing, and in preparation for an additional SAG meeting requested by the gold commander to be held on 24 October 2025, the Chair of the SAG asked WMP to provide a written report that set out the information and intelligence on which WMP based its risk assessment. This was arranged in the wake of significant public criticism about the outcome of the previous SAG discussion on 16 October 2025. The WMP silver commander prepared that report in time for the meeting with the SAG on 24 October 2025. That report contained substantially more material than the force had previously given the SAG in its oral briefings.

At its meeting on 16 October 2025, the SAG decided to reduce to zero the ticket allocation to away fans. However, I am concerned about the accuracy of the written report that WMP gave the Chair of the SAG for the meeting on 24 October 2025. The Chair stated that the SAG would rely on that report as "a wholly fresh consideration of the issue". It contained several inaccuracies (some of which had appeared earlier, in the 10 October 2025 letter from the WMP gold commander). These inaccuracies included the following:

- 1. "The most recent match Maccabi Tel Aviv played in the UK was against West Ham United in the UEFA Europa Conference League group stage on 9th November 2023"**

As has been widely reported, there was no such fixture. When we spoke to the Chief Constable of WMP, he told us that the force didn't use artificial intelligence (AI) tools in the preparation of the SAG report. During his appearance at the Home Affairs Committee on 6 January 2026, he confirmed this point. However, we heard contradictory evidence from a different WMP interviewee. This interviewee told us in clear terms that the erroneous statement was the result of a search the force carried out using Microsoft Copilot. This search tool uses AI. The interviewee described the error as "an AI hallucination".

2. “The police response saw 5,000 officers deployed over a number of days”

We have found no evidence to substantiate this statement, which was about the number of officers deployed in the Netherlands at the November 2024 Ajax versus Maccabi Tel Aviv fixture. According to WMP records, Dutch police commanders briefed the force that approximately 2,000 officers had been deployed at that fixture. The same Dutch police commanders told our inspectors that they had deployed 1,200 officers. They also told us that, in their briefing to WMP, they said they understood that 5,000 officers had been deployed in Paris for an Israeli national team fixture.

3. “Over 200 [of the 2,800 Israeli fans who travelled to the November 2024 Ajax fixture] were linked to the Israeli Defence Forces”

This is a conflation of multiple sources of information and is incorrectly stated as fact.

4. “The day before the [Ajax] fixture saw approximately 500–600 Maccabi fans apparently intentionally targeting Muslim communities”

There is evidence that Maccabi Tel Aviv fans targeted Muslims and pro-Palestinians, but they targeted individuals rather than residential communities. The Dutch police told us that Amsterdam’s Muslim residential communities are generally outside the city centre and that there was no significant disorder outside the city centre.

5. “[The 500–600 Maccabi fans] tearing down Palestine flags”

This exaggerates the information the Dutch police told us they provided to WMP and the evidence available from official reports. The Dutch police told us one Palestinian flag had been pulled down. In official Dutch reports, there are three recorded incidents involving flags. I believe it would have been more appropriate to have accurately specified these three incidents, given their inflammatory nature.

6. “[The 500–600 Maccabi fans] committing... serious assaults on Muslim taxi drivers”

This overstates the evidence. One of the official Dutch reports contains a reference to a single report of an assault on one taxi driver. Other taxi cars and motor scooters were attacked and damaged, but it is unclear if they were occupied at the time.

7. “[The 500–600 Maccabi fans] throwing innocent members of the public into the river”

This is inaccurate. The Dutch police told us that one Maccabi Tel Aviv supporter was thrown into a canal, apparently by members of a pro-Palestinian group. The official Dutch reports, which were assessed by WMP, confirm this.

8. “Several [Dutch police] officers were injured during the sustained confrontation”

This also overstates the evidence. The Dutch police told us that one officer had sustained hearing loss during the disorder. This is supported by the official Dutch reports that we were told WMP assessed in its planning.

Also, the 10 October 2025 letter from the WMP gold commander to the Chair of the SAG refers to Maccabi Tel Aviv fans at the Ajax fixture “setting fire to Palestinian flags”. From our interview with the Dutch police, and from a letter from the Mayor of Amsterdam to the city’s municipal authority, we understand that there was only one report of a person attempting to set fire to a single Palestinian flag.

I do not seek to downplay the level of disorder that the Dutch police experienced at the Ajax fixture. However, I am of the opinion that in its written communication, WMP portrayed the level of disorder at that fixture, and the part played by Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters, as greater than it really was. My conclusion is similar to that of Lord Mann, who in his evidence to the Home Affairs Committee on 1 December 2025 said that the problem in Amsterdam had been “greatly exaggerated”.

Regardless of any misunderstanding about what the Dutch police said, I have concluded that WMP overstated the extent to which the disorder at that fixture was attributable to the Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters.

All of this leads me to conclude that confirmation bias, in relation to the behaviour of the Maccabi Tel Aviv fans, played a part in the way WMP reached its preferred tactical option, and the strength with which it presented it to the SAG. In effect, the emphasis with which the force made the case gave the SAG members little or no option but to accept that reducing to zero the ticket allocation for away fans was the only viable course of action to protect the public. In these circumstances, banning away supporters was a wholly exceptional decision. The recommendation to the SAG should have been subject to greater challenge and consideration within WMP.

I have further concerns about the way WMP handled intelligence material. In respect of the written report that WMP gave the SAG on 24 October 2025, I have found that:

- not all the information and intelligence in the report had passed through the force’s dedicated intelligence structure; and
- the intelligence bronze commander wasn’t involved in the report’s preparation.

As a result, the force didn’t properly validate all the material it subsequently relied on. This is of significant concern, given that the SAG intended to use it for a wholly new consideration of the risk. The Chair of the SAG had asked that information made available to the SAG be “robust and capable of carrying the weight which may be placed on it”.

I am especially concerned about the way WMP handled sensitive intelligence when it created and disseminated the 24 October 2025 report. The report contained material that the force should have redacted before presenting it to the SAG. This error is significant. The recordings of discussions at the SAG meeting of 16 October 2025 clearly show that some SAG members believed that information about the SAG's impending decision had been leaked to the media. The report was then leaked to the media.

Media reporting in relation to information provided by the Dutch police

On 23 November 2025, an article in 'The Sunday Times' raised questions about the accuracy of the information and intelligence WMP had presented at SAG meetings. According to the article, 'The Sunday Times' had received a copy of a document prepared by the WMP silver commander, and the newspaper had spoken to the Dutch police about some of the details the document contained. As far as I have been able to determine, the article is referring to the silver commander's written report of 24 October 2025, rather than the oral briefings WMP gave the SAG on 7 and 16 October 2025. The original decision to restrict to zero the ticket allocation for away fans was made during those oral briefings.

The article in 'The Sunday Times' stated that the Dutch police told the newspaper that it didn't recognise elements of the information and intelligence as presented in WMP's report. This is unsurprising. The silver commander's report is more than merely a record of what the force said it was told by the Dutch police. It contains a summary of information and intelligence from a number of sources, which the force had collated throughout the planning stages. Notwithstanding the inaccuracies set out above, only some of the material in the silver commander's written report came from the meeting on 1 October 2025 with the Dutch police.

Further concerns

I have also found that there were further shortcomings in WMP's approach to planning for and responding to the Aston Villa versus Maccabi Tel Aviv fixture. These shortcomings are in four fundamental areas:

1. Lack of effective local community engagement

Well before WMP prepared its written report to the SAG, it consulted regional and national representatives of the Jewish community through the Community Security Trust (CST). But the force failed to consult representatives of the local Jewish community early enough, despite being warned by a CST representative that he did not speak on behalf of the local community. In fact, by the time the force did consult locally, it had already recommended to the SAG that the ticket allocation for away fans be reduced to zero. This was due to a combination of the SAG meeting being brought forward to 16 October 2025 at the request of Aston Villa FC, and the apparent delay in scheduling these community engagement meetings. As such, the views of the local Jewish community weren't reflected by WMP in its recommendation to the SAG.

Before the SAG provided its advice on 16 October 2025, the force's [community impact assessment](#) included a record of comments from a representative of the regional CST. The record says:

"He believes if Maccabi fans were banned that it would not go down well. As anticipated it would feel [like] an attack on the Jewish community whether they support Maccabi or not, [and] in light of recent events in Manchester it would appear insensitive to single out a community for this."

WMP told us that its contact with members of the local Jewish community was limited out of respect for a number of High Holy Days in the weeks prior to 16 October 2025. I don't accept this; I believe that the force missed opportunities, both before and during these religiously significant periods, to effectively engage with members of the local Jewish community.

Because of the make-up of the local population and WMP's stated inability to engage effectively with the local Jewish community, the force encountered a lack of balance in the range and strength of views it was hearing. It appears to me that the force didn't recognise this imbalance or satisfactorily take steps to redress it.

2. Imbalance in communications

The recording of the 16 October 2025 SAG meeting makes clear that the advice to reduce the ticket allocation to zero was based on a range of factors. Although the previous and potential behaviour of Maccabi fans was a significant consideration, it wasn't the only one. I am concerned that WMP didn't accurately reflect this in subsequent communications. I haven't identified any good reason for the omission, which resulted in the force presenting an imbalanced picture to officers and the public about the basis for the decision.

For example, in media interviews after the SAG decision, WMP personnel focused on Maccabi Tel Aviv fans' behaviour as the basis for the restriction on away fans, rather than focusing on the silver commander's and SAG's wider concerns about public safety and protest. One WMP officer we spoke to told us that the force had formulated its key media messages from the information and intelligence in the silver commander's SAG report. This is another example in which the force's failure to identify inaccuracies in the information and intelligence resulted in misleading public statements.

Also, a WMP press release dated 16 October 2025 highlighted the force's "support for all affected communities" and reaffirmed the force's "zero-tolerance stance on hate crime in all its forms". But the release also stated: "This decision is based on current intelligence and previous incidents, including violent clashes and hate crime offences that occurred during the 2024 UEFA Europa League match between Ajax and Maccabi Tel-Aviv in Amsterdam." In this release, the force made no mention of other relevant factors it knew about, such as the potential risk to Maccabi fans or the likelihood of wider protest, counter-protest or disorder. The force told us it decided to take this approach in an effort to avoid increasing local community tension.

My concern goes further than public statements. We have also reviewed a video-recorded briefing that the WMP silver commander prepared for officers policing the fixture. Although this briefing referred to a wide range of operational detail, in his opening statements, the silver commander said: "The decisions were made solely in the interest of public safety and were [made] specifically regarding the behaviour of travelling Maccabi fans."

Based on the evidence I have seen, I consider that these aspects of the force's communication, both internal and external, amount to carelessness rather than any deliberate distortion. But that doesn't mean the imbalance WMP presented was any less problematic, including for public confidence in the force's policing response, particularly as a more nuanced picture became available, which has since happened.

3. Poor record keeping and retention

I have already commented on WMP disposing of the original record of the meeting with the Dutch police. I also have a general concern about the force's record keeping and retention of important information.

We weren't provided with any evidence that WMP officers had made contemporaneous notes in relation to a number of key documents. Instead, they made records a considerable time after the event to which they related. This practice creates the risk of records being unavailable promptly enough, and/or becoming inaccurate, incomplete or otherwise unreliable. The importance of record keeping is explained in several parts of the [College of Policing's authorised professional practice](#).

4. Shortcomings in the command structure, including a failure to declare a critical incident

Given the wider context in which the fixture took place, and the additional complexities that WMP was evidently aware of, I am concerned that the force didn't set up a sufficiently robust command structure during the planning phase. As I have set out, the consequences of not doing this led to shortcomings in intelligence handling, ineffective engagement with the local Jewish community, poor record keeping, and an imbalance in the force's communications.

The shortcomings in the command structure were also apparent in the force's decision not to declare a [critical incident](#), even after public concerns mounted. This is contrary to authorised professional practice.

Declaring a critical incident should have brought about a more rigorous and informed approach, including closer involvement of the Police and Crime Commissioner. The absence of proactive briefings by the force to the Police and Crime Commissioner limited his ability to respond appropriately when it became clear that public trust and confidence were at risk.

Declaring a critical incident may also have prompted the force to explore special grant funding at an early stage. It is clear that WMP initially considered a range of tactical options to mitigate the risks associated with travelling Maccabi supporters, many of which were included in a report by Lord Mann. However, during the planning stage, certainty of such funding may have prevented the force from discounting the widest range of tactical options and allowed it to more fully explore the range of mitigations.

The evidence I have seen so far suggests that these shortcomings are symptomatic of a force not applying the necessary strategic oversight and not paying enough attention to important matters of detail, including at the most senior levels. These things are surprising. Senior officers told us that they had recognised the fixture's wider significance. However, I am concerned about an apparent lack of foresight in respect of the predictable repercussions of a number of their decisions, including, but not limited to, the force's recommendation to reduce the ticket allocation to zero. In this respect and others, my view is that the force could and should have prepared more effectively.

I have already raised a point about confirmation bias. However, in respect of any individual officers, the evidence I have seen doesn't point to their actions having been influenced by political interference, antisemitism, any other lack of impartiality, or malign intent.

Wider observation

The Chief Constable of WMP told us that he made you aware that the force had recommended that the Maccabi Tel Aviv ticket allocation should be reduced to zero, but that it was ultimately a decision for the SAG when it next met. This was at the end of a meeting on another topic on 8 October 2025. The record of the conversation in the minutes of that meeting states that banning away fans was being considered.

There is, of course, a fine line for officials and politicians to tread when deciding what to say, to whom and when. It is a topic on which I have commented in previous reports, most recently in [our inspection of activism and impartiality in policing](#). In that report, I said:

“In all but the most extreme and unusual of circumstances, MPs and councillors should be very mindful not to publicly criticise, interfere with or otherwise try to influence any decisions in advance of the police implementing them.”

In circumstances where the implications of a decision extend far beyond a force boundary, the important issue of operational independence needs to be carefully considered. I intend to cover this in more detail in my final report.

Next steps

As I have already set out, we have more to do. We have further interviews to carry out with WMP personnel, mainly bronze commanders and community inspectors. We also wish to speak to other local community representatives.

In respect of the broader inspection, we will then move on to fieldwork in six other police forces (Avon and Somerset Constabulary, Cumbria Constabulary, Leicestershire Police, Greater Manchester Police, South Wales Police and Sussex Police).

I intend to offer you a further briefing before I leave office at the end of March 2026. In the interim, if you would like me to elaborate on any of the points in this letter, I would be happy to provide you with an oral briefing.

Yours sincerely,



Sir Andy Cooke QPM DL

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Annex B: technical annex

As part of this [thematic inspection](#), we surveyed all 43 police forces in England and Wales. The survey was completed by one respondent from each force who was deemed best placed to provide insight into how their force works with [safety advisory groups \(SAGs\)](#).

Methodology

We carried out a single survey with police forces, which gathered both quantitative and qualitative data on their work with SAGs. The survey included a mixture of closed and open-ended questions to understand both the extent of activity (for example, participation rates, governance arrangements) and the nature of practice (for example, how forces interact with SAGs and perceived challenges).

All 43 police forces completed the survey, providing full coverage across England and Wales, between 9 February and 3 March 2026.

Survey questions

Within the survey there was a mixture of open and closed text questions. This approach supported a clearer understanding of SAG arrangements around the country. The survey included 22 closed text questions, assessing areas of the SAG process, including:

- the number and types of SAGs operating in each force area;
- levels of police participation across different event types;
- governance arrangements, accountability structures and oversight;
- SAG auditing processes;
- membership and chairing arrangements, including tenure length for chairs;
- SAG training arrangements;
- processes for engagement, communication and escalation;
- experiences of working with SAGs, including examples where advice was not followed; and
- risk escalation.

Closed text questions featured multiple scales, including Yes/No questions, category questions (for example, all of the time, most of the time, some of the time) and questions where respondents could select multiple outcomes, such as participation across different event types. This was to account for different practices within the force across multiple SAGs. Some of the closed questions also provided space for respondents to give more detailed information on their answer.

In addition, we asked respondents to provide seven open-text answers describing how their force works with SAGs in practice. These responses offered detailed contextual insights into:

- overall reflections on working with SAGs;
- where responsibilities for SAG engagement sit within the force;
- the role of elected officials in SAG groups;
- examples of occasions where SAG groups haven't followed police advice;
- examples of occasions where event organisers haven't followed SAG advice; and
- examples of forces escalating issues to central government.

Survey analysis

To understand overall views, we carried out descriptive analysis on responses to the closed questions to identify common practices across forces. We assessed both raw numbers and percentage frequencies of responses. This allowed us to understand any patterns and variations between SAG arrangements, highlighting inconsistencies in practice.

We reviewed quantitative data and free text responses alongside inspection evidence to draw out themes and conclusions against the terms of reference.

Considerations

While all forces were represented, responses describe local arrangements. These vary significantly across different local authority areas. As such, findings highlight patterns and themes rather than providing a fully standardised picture of practice.

[More information about the survey is available in our data annex.](#)

Annex C: our review of public events

The different types of public events we reviewed

To understand how [safety advisory groups \(SAGs\)](#) operate in England and Wales, we deliberately chose a selection of forces to review major sporting, cultural or religious events as well as various concert venues. We chose them to give us the widest range of public event types to consider. We also wanted to review SAG procedures in the different geographical areas of England and Wales to fully understand any differences in approach. This annex contains a brief overview of each of these events, together with the main aspects of the way police and partners managed public safety issues.

We asked forces to provide information about several specific events. We also asked each force we inspected to give us information about other events in their areas that were either significant in their policing calendar or presented operational challenges. Therefore, the descriptions below include events we chose as well as those that forces suggested we evaluate.

Football: domestic, European and international matches

Cardiff: Cardiff City versus Bristol City, February 2025

On 15 February 2025, Cardiff City played a match against local rivals, Bristol City for the first time in two years. This fixture has a history of significant violence between the two sets of supporters who refer to the game as the “Severn-side” derby. Very early in the planning process, the force assessed the fixture as high risk.

South Wales Police planners reviewed the football fixtures Cardiff City played at their home ground at the start of the season. Once applied, the risk ratings remained unchanged throughout the season. Despite the high-risk rating of this match, the authorities didn’t request a SAG meeting to assess safety issues. The force estimated around 25,000 home fans and 3,000 away supporters would be travelling by coach and train to Cardiff. A previous fixture had resulted in 11 arrests, a higher number than at any other home fixture, and intelligence reports indicated a growing risk of disorder from a group of younger Cardiff City supporters.

The football club, in conjunction with the police, was responsible for planning the safety arrangements. They held three planning meetings before the game. While some involved in these arrangements referred to the meeting as a SAG, the football club organised and chaired these meetings without the safeguards associated with a SAG. Police commanders felt there was no specific need to arrange for a SAG and managed any problems as they occurred by deploying officers. The club had an agreed protocol for handing over control of the stadium to the police in the event of an emergency. Police resourcing included 200 officers, with 50 deployed inside the ground. Cardiff City paid for 100 officers on special police services (SPS) charging rates.

Birmingham: England versus Andorra, September 2025

On 6 September 2025, the European qualifier match for the [FIFA](#) 2026 World Cup between England and Andorra took place at the ground of Aston Villa Football Club in Birmingham. This was the first game involving the England national side played at the stadium for 20 years.

The SAG in Birmingham meets quarterly and considers all upcoming matches. It had already considered this fixture and determined that this was a low-risk event. As such, the chair decided that the SAG didn't need to have a specific meeting to examine any emerging public safety issues.

West Midlands Police sent a police constable from their football planning unit to the quarterly SAG meeting in line with the usual force practice. The silver commander appointed to directly oversee the policing of the game didn't attend this SAG meeting. Neither the police gold commander nor the silver commander briefed the constable before they attended the SAG. At football-related SAGs, the planning unit approach was that the police don't give a presentation on public safety for the event but simply responded to specific questions from the chair or SAG members.

There was no [community impact assessment \(CIA\)](#) prepared for the match. The force only assesses community impact for matches that it considers to be high risk.

Not long before the day of the match, the English Football Association raised several serious concerns about the numbers of fans travelling to the match and increased pressures on local transport links. The match had completely sold out. Approximately 40,000 fans were due to attend Villa Park Stadium. Due to the issues the English Football Association raised, the council convened an emergency SAG. Agencies and partners attending this SAG didn't review general safety issues. They limited themselves to transport issues.

Manchester: Manchester City FC versus Galatasaray SK, January 2026

On 28 January 2026, Manchester City FC played the Turkish side Galatasaray SK at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester as part of the league phase of the [UEFA Champions League](#) competition. Following the usual process, Greater Manchester Police (GMP) relied on the football club's assessment of the match. This determined that it was a high-risk fixture, scoring 76 on the [United Kingdom Football Policing Unit \(UKFPU\)](#) matrix.

GMP sends dedicated football [intelligence officers](#) to football-related SAG meetings. There was little intelligence or information available about the nature of this fixture. GMP placed much reliance on contact from Manchester City FC about any risk. As such, this information wasn't subject to the usual processes for assessing intelligence the force routinely uses in other areas of policing.

In addition, there were significant intelligence gaps and challenges in establishing effective liaison with the Turkish Authorities throughout the planning stages. As a result of these gaps and concerns about the risk this fixture posed, with assistance from UKFPU, GMP held meetings with the British Embassy in Ankara, the Turkish Consulate in Manchester and counter-terrorism policing. This was to better understand the risks and try to mitigate them.

The local authorities in Manchester held quarterly SAG meetings, chaired by the local authority lead. The SAG chair was also the events planning lead for the council. Consequently, football SAG meetings weren't fixture or event specific. Instead, they considered all the safety and security operations for all activities and events covered by the general safety certificate for the stadium.

This approach meant that there hadn't been a SAG meeting specifically called for any international football fixture or a high-profile domestic fixture in recent years. Because of this, there wasn't a bespoke SAG meeting for this fixture, despite it being high risk. It fell to GMP to respond to this fixture's unique safety and policing challenges.

The silver commander's policing considerations highlighted risks surrounding planned and spontaneous protests and the potential for fans to use pyrotechnics. But the absence of information caused them clear frustration. The UKFPU made unsuccessful efforts to improve this situation by seeking additional information. The silver commander documented that the Turkish police hadn't provided them with enough information to fully assess the Galatasaray SK fan base.

Initially a bronze community inspector took responsibility for creating a CIA. But due to the potential community impact issues surrounding a high-risk match, the force appointed a silver commander to support this work.

Other sporting events

Cardiff: Wales versus Ireland Rugby International, February 2025

On Saturday 22 February 2025, the Welsh national team played Ireland in an International Rugby Union test match at the Principality Stadium, Cardiff. This fixture was part of the Six Nations Rugby Tournament.

South Wales Police's [risk assessment](#) was that any disorder in the crowd or stadium was unlikely, but they were aware of recent trends of drunkenness at international matches.

No specific SAG meeting took place to review safety matters concerning the event, and the police carried out almost all their operational planning in their own meetings. Partners involved in the arrangements for the fixture attended a meeting of the stadium's strategic events liaison group just four days before the match. There are frequent events at the stadium, so there is a close working relationship between police planners and the security management at the stadium. Police commanders expressed no concerns that there wasn't a SAG meeting. Some of those involved in the strategic events liaison group meeting referred to it as a SAG meeting, but it didn't carry out an independent safety review. The Cardiff City SAG meeting briefly discussed the event but without making any form of safety evaluation. The SAG formally passed oversight of the fixture to the stadium's strategic events liaison group.

The stadium managers provided SPS payments for 30 police officers involved in the direct policing of the event and used around 900 stewards to manage the crowd and the seven separate entrance gates. There is a written protocol between the police and the stadium. This outlines the method for handing over control in the event of an emergency.

The local police command team had responsibility for assessing both the impact on local communities and businesses. British Transport Police helped with crowd management over the short distance between the train station and the stadium. The local authority was responsible for managing road closures during the match. There was no discussion of Zone Ex within the strategic events liaison group as there are well established protocols for the local authority to oversee this element alongside the road closures.

Bristol: Women's Rugby World Cup, August–September 2025

Bristol City was one of eight venues selected to host matches in the United Kingdom during the [Women's Rugby World Cup](#). The competition took place 22 August to 27 September 2025.

Ashton Gate Stadium, the home ground of Bristol City Football Club, hosted two of the quarter-finals, and both semi-final fixtures. The appearance of two home-nation sides at the quarter final stages significantly added to interest in the tournament and the numbers of supporters visiting the city to watch the games.

The local authority quickly put in place structures and meetings with event organisers to plan for the competition and to maximise public safety. The SAG chair referred to the [Green](#) and [Purple Guides](#) when making decisions and setting out responsibilities. The local authority chair emphasised the potential conflicts of interest between facilitating an event that served as a significant boost to the local economy and the need to make sure all arrangements complied with public safety requirements.

The organisers and the council introduced a fan zone, set up on the harbourside of the city, to accommodate the many visitors who stayed for extended periods to watch successive matches. This included a purpose-built amphitheatre with large television screens and rugby themed activities for fans. With a focus on safety, the council implemented an event SAG to run alongside the stadium SAG. This was the first time two SAG functions operated collectively to ensure the safety of those in the fan zone and those in the stadium. Organisers took care to minimise the disruption to some local businesses caused by the pressure on transport links.

Avon and Somerset Constabulary recognised the potential for protest at the competition linked to sponsorship and factored these risks into its assessment and resourcing. The force carried out a comprehensive debrief to promote continuous learning. The positive feedback resulted in the Football Association identifying the ground as a potential host site for the Women's Football World Cup in 2035.

Carnivals

Manchester: Manchester Caribbean Carnival, August 2025

Since May 1971, people in the Greater Manchester area with Caribbean heritage have come together with other local communities to celebrate their culture in the Caribbean Carnival. It took place between 9–10 August 2025 in the Moss Side and Whalley Range areas of central Manchester.

The primary organisers of this event were Manchester Carnival Together but recognising its contribution to the cultural life of the city, Manchester City Council (MCC) and other sponsors contributed to the management of the event. MCC also recognised that they were primarily responsible for public safety during the Carnival, not the event organisers.

The Manchester Carnival Together organisers stated that 58,000 people attended the celebration in 2025. The event comprised three main elements – the early morning J’ouvert parade, the main carnival parade in the early afternoon and then a carnival in the park. This later element was a licensed event with a capacity of 20,000. The carnival has witnessed difficulties in the past with serious incidents, including a fatal stabbing in 2022.

As is routine practice for this SAG, it checked that the organisers had public liability insurance cover and had safety arrangements. GMP and SAG members described themselves as working well together, evidenced by a jointly owned CIA used to address [antisocial behaviour](#) and other problems. The police provided a presentation to help the SAG in producing its advice, and SAG members also attended relevant police planning meetings.

To minimise community disruption, the organisers re-housed or re-located some residents living close to the event. All partners involved in the carnival contributed to a multi-media communications strategy about the event.

Religious festivals

Leicester: Vaisakhi, April 2025

The Sikh community in Leicester City has celebrated the festival of Vaisakhi for many years. Historically Vaisakhi celebrations in Leicester have involved the Guru Tegh Bahadur Gurdwara (GTB) and Guru Nanak Gurdwara (GNG). In previous years there have been organised processions from GNG to GTB that attracted up to 15,000 people. In 2025, GNG and GTB decided to hold separate events but on the same day. GNG held a procession around the city centre. While the gurdwara was the event organiser, Leicester City Council had a role. The council contracted a traffic management company to make sure the procession progressed safely through Leicester.

GTB decided to hold a Mela, a traditional fair or festival, in a nearby park in Leicester. GTB also successfully applied for temporary traffic orders for a procession taking their Holy Scriptures to the Mela.

Leicester City Council didn’t convene a SAG to oversee these events but relied on a multi-agency planning group (MAP) to oversee the arrangements and determine safety issues regarding both events. This group had representatives from the gurdwaras as the event organisers, the city council and Leicestershire Police. Other emergency services didn’t attend the meetings or contribute to advice or decision making. There were many MAP meetings in advance of the celebrations, which the police chaired. The police recorded all meetings and prepared and circulated a transcript.

The GNG event followed a traditional format that was well known to the police. But the GTB procession and Mela involved a significant number of changes to the event plan. Organisers even presented a proposed change to the police on the night before the event. Challenges for the police included inadequate resourcing by a traffic management company and a lack of effective stewarding. One of the processions didn't start on time, and organisers failed to keep people taking part together in one group.

Leicester: Diwali, October 2025

Diwali is the Hindu Festival of Light, which, for some also marks the start of the Hindu New Year. Leicester's Diwali celebration is one of the largest outside India. In 2024, it attracted around 50,000 people. It takes place on council owned parkland and the surrounding streets.

In 2023 and 2024, there were significant rapid movements of the crowd at certain points in the celebration. This led to fears of crushing injuries and potential fatalities. A firework display, staged entertainments and street stalls all contributed to these unexpected crowd dynamics.

So, when it came to planning for the event in 2025, these fears were prominent in the minds of emergency services, including Leicestershire Police, and the local authority. Diwali is one of just a small number of events that the local authority convenes a SAG for. In March 2025, the first in a series of SAG meetings took place to review proposed plans. An employee of the city council chaired this. The Leicester City Council Events Team, as the event organiser, the private security company and representatives from all the emergency services raised concerns from their risk assessments to the SAG. They said that the event, as proposed, was unsafe and needed changes. The SAG advised several conditions that would have to be implemented for the event to be safe. These conditions included banning the firework display, staged entertainments and street stalls.

The City Council Events Team took responsibility for announcing this advice. It prompted criticism from many in local communities across the city and particularly those living in or running businesses around the traditional celebration location known as the Golden Mile. The criticism included letters from local MPs to the city council and chief constable. There were requests to meet with the SAG members to explain how important the full celebrations were.

The council convened further SAG meetings. But this time they requested an independent chair from a neighbouring local authority. An assistant chief constable represented the police. Local councillors and a business association presented options for the celebrations, but these all contained elements that conflicted with the SAG advice on arrangements. The independently chaired SAG reiterated the previous concerns and successfully negotiated a range of safety measures.

As the date drew closer, the SAG became aware of another Diwali celebration that was to take place on private land. This event had the potential to draw large crowds as the plans included a firework display. The police requested a separate emergency SAG to advise on that event. Despite having no powers to intervene, the SAG reached an agreement with organisers. The main celebrations went ahead as planned without any serious public safety issues or injuries.

At the debrief following both events the police and the council are now considering whether a SAG should oversee these events in 2026 to improve engagement with some of the organisers.

Celebrations and Pride events

Birmingham: Birmingham Pride, May 2025

Since 1997, Birmingham Pride has become a well-established part of Birmingham's cultural calendar. It is a weekend event held annually as a celebration of the LGBTQ+ communities in Birmingham and the wider area. It took place between 23 and 25 May 2025 and organisers estimated 75,000 people attended the city over the weekend.

One of the features of the celebration is a parade through the city. It attracted an estimated 2,000–4,000 participants. The organiser for the event is Birmingham Pride UK Ltd. Pride is a community event but access into the Gay Village entertainment areas and street party was by payment. Therefore, this was a private event marshalled by [Security Industry Authority](#) accredited contractors.

A SAG took place for this event and an experienced constable from West Midlands Police operations planning department attended, along with two other police representatives. The silver commander in direct control of the event didn't attend the SAG. This was in line with the force policy regarding police representation at SAG meetings.

Local officers compiled a CIA before the parade to assess disruption to the local communities. But police didn't share this with the SAG on the basis that it contained sensitive intelligence about potential protests.

Brighton: Brighton and Hove Pride, August 2025

Since the first event in 1973, Brighton and Hove Pride has developed into an event that some believe to be the UK's most popular international Pride Festival. It attracts up to 300,000 visitors from around the world and boosts the local economy by an estimated £20 million.

The event took place between 2–3 August 2025 and comprised three main parts – the Pride Parade, the Pride Street Party, and Pride in the Park. The street party took place in the afternoons and evenings across the weekend and consisted of a fenced event area that could accommodate up to 20,000 attendees. Pride in the Park was a fully fenced festival-style music event with multiple performers. Well known headline acts attracted a large audience, with 57,000 people attending on the Saturday and 30,000 on the Sunday.

Approximately 240,000 people visit Brighton during the event, the majority of which visit the city outside the three organised events. Responsibility for the safety of those not at the organised events falls to Sussex Police.

Due to the size of the event, Pride has its own specific SAG arrangements. The police silver commander and force events planner attended three meetings in April and June 2025. The silver commander, who had specific training on responsibilities at a SAG, provided verbal updates to the meeting.

The Pride SAG chair was an employee of the local authority responsible for the event. In addition, they carried out the role of local authority Pride silver commander. The local authority appoints the chair from its workforce on a rolling 12-month basis. They have plans to request an independent person from a neighbouring local authority to chair future Pride SAG meetings.

Two months before the Pride Event, decision making passed to a MAP. This was chaired by the police. During the event, a co-ordinating group convened daily to respond to issues emerging in the city.

Organisers held a debrief after the event. An independent facilitator made sure they involved all parties, including SAG and partnership meeting chairs, in the review of practice.

Manchester: Manchester Pride, August 2025

Manchester Pride has been held annually for over 40 years. It has become a prominent celebration of LGBTQ+ equality, often attracting thousands to Manchester city centre.

Elements of the festival took place across the city centre with a central focus on the Gay Village in Canal Street. It took place over the summer bank holiday between 22 and 25 August 2025. The main elements of the event include a parade, a candle-lit vigil and a concert in the village.

The organiser for the 2025 event was Manchester Pride Events Ltd. The local authority convened the SAG and the GMP silver commanders for both the Parade and Village events attended. The police gave a PowerPoint presentation about the proposed operation. The SAG closely reviewed the public liability insurance taken out by the event organisers. It recorded details of discussions and shared transcripts with attendees. Attendees described the SAG process as more of a multi-agency co-ordinating group format than an independent review of safety.

The various events in the festival took place over a wide geographic area. An important area for discussion in the SAG was the policing and public safety issues in areas between venues. The Zone Ex issue was particularly important as people moved between the village area and the concert venue, a distance of 800 metres. Attendees only needed tickets for the Mardi Gras and Village Party events, and the organisers expressed concern at the lack of clarity regarding responsibility for the safety of the public in the space between events. Those involved held tabletop planning meetings to test contingencies and a full debrief took place to help with planning for 2026.

Music festivals and concerts

Somerset: Glastonbury Festival of Performing Arts, June 2025

The Glastonbury Festival of Performing Arts is the world's largest open-air music festival.

Around 250,000 visitors and staff attend the site each year.

Avon and Somerset Constabulary works with Glastonbury Festival Events Ltd (GFEL), which is the official event organiser, to address public safety issues during the five-day festival. Directors of GFEL include members of the Eavis family and the managing director of Festival Republic. Festival Republic provides much of the event management infrastructure for the festival. GFEL co-ordinated a MAP, which included 12 working groups for various aspects of planning for the 2025 festival. The chair of the MAP was an executive director of Somerset Council. All agencies helping to plan for the event had access to GFELs digital file sharing portal, which is an electronic store of all relevant documentation and plans.

The MAP chair reviewed licensing for the festival with local licensing officers outside the MAP meeting. While subject to an annual safety review, a perpetual licence has been in force for Glastonbury since 2018, similar to many venues and music concerts. The festival generates a significant amount of income in the Somerset area. And GFEL has made numerous charity donations and provided local amenities.

GFEL works constantly to review and learn from each festival. It tries to reduce the resources the local police dedicate to the area by extending its use of private stewarding and other security arrangements. This has prompted questions about the ability of the force to respond to a critical emergency within the large event site. A command protocol covers this eventuality. But police and organisers have never tested these arrangements. In 2025, the protocol included a handover of the whole event, rather than defining specific areas of responsibility.

Manchester: series of five Oasis concerts, July 2025

In July 2025, Heaton Park in Manchester was the venue for a series of concerts forming part of the Oasis tour in 2025. The band hadn't played a live concert in the UK for 16 years and as a result, the tickets for the event rapidly sold out contributing to an estimated attendance of 370,000 people over five days.

The promotion company SJM concerts was the event organiser, while MCC licensed the performances. The organiser had responsibility for public safety within the boundaries of the concert site. It erected a fenced perimeter within the park to control entry. It also oversaw the surrounding queuing and car park areas and some additional locations on exit routes.

MCC organised a SAG meeting in accordance with its event planning process. This states it will convene a SAG for all large-scale events. In total, there were three SAG meetings, and the police silver commander was present at all three. Support from MCC made sure there were full records of these meetings. Because of local authority licensing conditions, the SAG advised reducing ticket availability, so the organiser offered fewer tickets for the Wednesday concert.

GMP used the force model risk management tool to assess its policing of the events. It appointed a bronze community commander to gather intelligence and information on local, national and international factors which could affect the policing response. Officers drew on this resource to make sure information presented to the SAG was accurate. Some of those involved told us that as the concerts drew closer, there were several relevant communications on safety matters. These took place outside the SAG, as it couldn't keep pace with the fast-moving developments.

A particular challenge for the authorities was the realisation that many un-ticketed fans could both see and hear the concerts from a nearby hill, and this could become a serious public safety issue. This threat prompted rapid action from the police and partners outside the SAG meetings to fence off the area. The series of concerts also highlighted the issues connected with Zone Ex about who was responsible for public safety. Parties agreed this outside the SAG process.

As an example, the police gold commander had to act quickly to respond to the organiser's plans to create an unofficial fan zone in some fields near the event on the penultimate night of the concerts. The organisers hadn't sought approval for these arrangements, which would affect local residents. Swift consultation between partners overnight about the lack of prior approval led to the organisers cancelling their plans.

Cardiff: Stereophonics concert, July 2025

On 11 and 12 July 2025, the Stereophonics played concerts at the Cardiff Principality Stadium in South Wales. Both events sold out, with around 55,000 attendees on each night.

In line with the policy of South Wales Police, planners identified the officers who would oversee the operation six months in advance. This gave them time to arrange resources and plan the details of the policing operation. The silver commander's tactical plan included both the possibility of a major incident or a [critical incident](#) during the concerts.

Police commanders appeared to have taken responsibility for most of the operational and safety planning. There was no SAG meeting to review the plans in any detail. Instead, the police contributed to a detailed presentation by the stadium management team to a meeting of the Stadium Event Liaison Group. This was just two days before the concerts. Many of the participants we spoke to referred to this meeting as a SAG. But it didn't fulfil the usual functions of a SAG and there were no minutes of these meetings.

The silver commander compiled an extensive threat assessment in advance of the concerts, including close liaison with British Transport Police about travel arrangements for fans. Due to exceptionally hot weather on the day, the train companies had to cancel numerous trains, providing buses instead. Similarly, the silver and gold commanders became aware of an unrelated protest nearby by Pro-Palestinian activists. They decided to take responsibility for that event while also overseeing the concerts. South Wales Police uses senior commanders to oversee multiple events at the same time.

Cumbria: Kendal Calling, July–August 2025

Kendal Calling is an annual music festival which takes place in Lowther Deer Park near Kendal in Cumbria. The event took place between 31 July and 3 August 2025. Superstruct UK were the event organisers, supported by Engine No 4, a company based in Manchester, as the event managers.

People attending the festival stay on site during the four days in a considerable tented encampment. In 2025, organisers sold around 40,000 tickets for the event, which is licensed by Westmorland and Furness Council.

The event organisers were directly involved in the planning process and used a file sharing portal for partners and emergency services to access documents. The organisers employed independent professionals to produce the event safety management plan. This set out how the festival should take place.

In the lead-up to the festival, organisers and Cumbria Constabulary took part in three separate SAG meetings. There was a separate tabletop exercise to practise co-operation between event organisers and emergency services in the event of various emergency scenarios. The event safety plan outlined police responsibilities for assuming control of the festival in an emergency. In 2025, there was considerable discussion between the various partners on the level of police resources the organisers should pay for.

The event organisers tried to reduce the numbers of officers assigned to the festival. They preferred to use their own stewards for both searching and drug seizures. This became the subject of some detailed negotiation before both parties achieved an agreement. The police provided a 24-hour command presence on the site under a formal SPS agreement.

Cultural and historic events

Cumbria: Appleby Horse Fair, June 2025

The annual horse fair takes place in the Cumbrian town of Appleby and lasts for a week. It took place between 4 and 9 June 2025. Estimates are that around 10,000 travellers and gypsies attended the fair. They stayed in temporary sites around the town and surrounding villages. In addition to the travelling communities, visitors to the area increased to approximately 50,000 each day. Over the years there have been fatalities involving people and animals attending the fair.

The fair doesn't have a recognised organiser, and fairgoers talk of it as a gathering rather than an organised event. The local unitary authority convened a multi-agency strategic co-ordinating group (MASCG). This organised the activities of the emergency services, including Cumbria Constabulary, and other partners in planning for the event. The MASCG met during the period of the fair to respond to any emerging issues or developments. The fair took place mostly on public land in the town, but there are also associated private events.

In the last two years, the MASCG had commissioned an assessment of the risks identified at previous fairs. This was to mitigate the many risks to the public, local authority workers, and emergency service personnel during the fair. The build-up to the fair and the event itself made significant demands on force resources. The local authority was also developing methods to seek the views of residents in Appleby. Many of them feel the influx of visitors and activities at the fair adversely affect their lives. The RSPCA sent staff to this event alongside the other emergency services.

East Sussex: Lewes Bonfire, November 2025

Lewes Bonfire is described locally as one of the nation's largest 5 November celebrations. The event takes place each year in Lewes, East Sussex.

There were six local bonfire societies organising this event. The celebrations start at 5pm, with the societies embarking on a series of torch-lit processions through the town's narrow streets. The participants in these processions traditionally carry large effigies of individuals through the streets before they burn these at each of the society's bonfires. The attendees light the bonfires around 9.45pm with the celebrations concluding at the end of their firework display, usually around 11pm.

Although advertised as a series of ticketed events for local residents only, these celebrations attract tens of thousands of visitors, which is almost double the number of the town's resident population. In July 2025, a series of SAG meetings considered any overarching public safety issues and authorities timetabled a further "emergency" SAG meeting if the need arose in the autumn. The same chair, the local authority emergency preparedness manager, oversaw each of the SAG meetings. After the July SAG meetings, a joint event forum co-ordinated all the event activity.

Because of the nature of the bonfire societies, there is no one single identified event organiser. This, together with the cultural and historical nature of the event, makes it difficult for Sussex Police to respond to developments. The police described the event as being inherently unsafe. The police regularly stepped into stewarding and other activities in the absence of effective arrangements by organisers. In 2025, Sussex Police advised the public not to travel to the event because of their concerns about safety.

On the day of the event, many of the local businesses and amenities closed in response to the sudden influx of people to the town. The authorities arranged significant road closures and parking restrictions. The event disrupted train travel with the suspension of all trains in and out of the town as a way of limiting footfall.

It isn't unusual for people attending the event to receive injuries. In 2025, paramedics treated 82 people, with seven of those being hospitalised. After the event, the joint event forum organises a debrief and invites all blue light services and partners to attend.

National event case studies

Northamptonshire: Silverstone Grand Prix, July 2025

The Formula 1 British Grand Prix is an annual motor racing and entertainment event held at the Silverstone Circuit in Northamptonshire. The event commenced on 3 July 2025 and ended with the Formula 1 Grand Prix on 6 July. Silverstone Circuits Ltd was the organiser of the event and worked closely with the Northamptonshire Police's command and control structures. The company also stated clearly that it had the primary responsibility for public safety associated with this event.

In addition to the track activity, there were live music concerts by prominent international acts. These attracted large crowds to designated event stages. Many visitors used campsites in the immediate area provided by Silverstone. Approximately 450,000 people attended the event.

Planning for the event starts immediately after the previous Grand Prix through an Inter-Agency Group (IAG), which has five subgroups reporting to it. One of these is a SAG. The IAG operates a shared file database to allow all partners to view relevant documents. The chair of the IAG was also the acting chair of a local authority. They maintained accurate records of all meetings and decisions. The IAG invited police commanders at gold and silver level to attend, but on most occasions bronze level commanders represented the police. Police representatives didn't give a formal presentation of police views but responded verbally to points raised by the group.

Police commanders described their engagement with organisers as extremely professional and well-practiced. Police referred any safety issues to the SAG rather than address these in police planning meetings. The SAG escalates any unresolved safety matters to the IAG. The SAG only dealt with the Sports Grounds Safety Certification arrangements for the regulated spectator stands to prevent any conflict of interest.

The silver commander produced a detailed risk assessment, used to determine the policing style and approach. SCL and the force agreed the SPS payment for all police resources at the event. Any disputes would be escalated to the IAG. Given the significance of this national event, there were clear escalation processes in place. There was an agreement that police and organisers would take any decision not to go ahead with the race to the government.

Assessment of the impact of the Grand Prix on the locality was a priority for both police and organisers. The community bronze commander produced a CIA and the IAG had a subgroup dedicated to local liaison, with five parish councils, two local authorities and a neighbouring police force in attendance.

A 'Schedules of Responsibility' documented how the organisers and police would work together in an emergency. This included a phased handover of responsibility according to scale and location of the emerging situation. Similarly, organisers were involved in public safety issues outside the racetrack area by deploying stewards to guide the public across nearby roads using footbridges.

London: Notting Hill Carnival, August 2025

The Notting Hill Carnival is Europe's largest street party held annually in West London during the August bank holiday weekend. This took place on Sunday 24 and Monday 25 August 2025. The organiser, Notting Hill Carnival Ltd, intends the carnival to celebrate Caribbean culture, music and food. Given the size of the event, the organiser worked with a strategic partners group, made up of several statutory bodies. These included the Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority as well as the local councils of The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, and Westminster City Council. Transport for London also took part as each year around two million people attend the free event.

Alongside its vibrant reputation, the Carnival has become the subject of controversy due to frequent violence, organised crime and disorder. In 2024, two people died in separate attacks. There were a further seven people stabbed, and three people left with life-threatening conditions. In total the police arrested 349 people; 72 of these were for possession of an offensive weapon, including one for possession of a firearm.

The authorities evaluated public safety concerns and escalation processes through the licensing operational safety planning group, which also performed the role of a SAG. There were other meeting structures including a crowd visitor management group, the strategic partners group and the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Command Diamond Group. The MPS's culture, diversity and inclusion team produced an extensive CIA with effective communication strategies. The police commanders declared the carnival as a critical incident from the early planning stage, recognising that it cost £15 million to police and involved 7,000 police officers. Notting Hill Carnival Ltd was unable to secure the funding for an effective stewarding operation. This would have required approximately 9,000 stewards.

In 2025, the MPS publicly expressed concern about the event being unsafe. The MPS remained concerned that a future carnival could involve a mass casualty event through crushing. The force used live facial recognition, metal detectors and [stop and search powers](#) at the event. These tactics, along with public messages about safety, reduced crime. The police commanders felt the event in 2025 was less busy than previous years. Consequently, the MPS, with other partners, took part in an independent review of the carnival and public safety considerations. The authors have already issued parts 1 and 2 of this report. The planning for 2026 will consider the report's recommendations.

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 00.01 ON FRIDAY 4 SEPTEMBER 2026

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