

Guidance to event organisers

These guidelines are intended to provide assistance to organisers who are planning to hold a public event.

Public events

In general the public perception is that the police are the lead agency for approving all public events, including those which take place on the public highway. In reality the police have no authority to either approve or ban such events and, in fact, police powers to regulate traffic for planned events are extremely limited. Furthermore, the police have no general duty to preserve public safety at any public event, except where there are imminent or likely threats to life.

Legal opinion suggests that the responsibility for public safety rests with the organisers of an event, the owners of the land on which it takes place and the local authority if the event takes place on a road. However, other persons or agencies who undertake actions regarding public safety at an event may assume a duty of care and, therefore, also become responsible.

In the past the police service has taken the lead and undertaken actions to facilitate public events, acting for what they believed to be the public good. However, with the emerging spectre of civil litigation, a more focused approach, confining police action to those issues which are part of our core responsibilities and where there is legal authority, has been adopted.

This guide is aimed at standardising the police approach to all organised events staged in a public place and on all public highways. It creates an environment where, through consultation and partnership, public events will continue to take place. A greater awareness of the individual responsibility of the organisers and those of the other agencies involved should emerge, which will ensure a more focused approach by all concerned resulting in a better planned, safer and more resilient event.

Additional guidance for organisers

Vehicles or animals should not be used in processions. The use of motor vehicles often increases the risk of injury to participants and animals can often become overawed by large crowds and panic.

Individuals should be discouraged from leaving a procession to distribute leaflets. This should be done independently of the event.

When it is intended to present a petition either, during, or at the completion of a protest march, prior notice must be given to the police because special arrangements may have to be made.

If banners are to be used, it is essential that they be designed in such a way as to reduce the risk of danger when they are used in high winds and cannot be adapted for use as weapons.

The use of public address systems should be controlled to ensure that the local community is not disturbed.

Organisers should ensure that children under the age of 16 are accompanied by a responsible adult and that they are kept away from any edge of a procession which is near to moving traffic.

Organisers must consider making provisions for first aid and should discuss their arrangements with the Ambulance Service.

In the event of a major emergency or criminal activity the police will implement its predetermined coordination role with the other emergency services. This must be reflected in the organisers' plans for the event.

Similarly, where there is serious concern for public safety at an event the police Ground Commander will assume a lead role in co-ordinating the response of the

emergency services and the onsite support services. In either case, any such assumption of command by the police will be recorded, as will the reasons for the action taken and to which organisers' representative the decision was communicated. A subsequent return of authority to event organisers will similarly be documented. The manner of notification will be such that there must be no doubt to all parties who have a responsibility for the event or an involvement in the management of the event, that a handover has taken place.