

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.

Organisers' responsibilities

The organisation of a public event is a considerable responsibility. Organisers have civil, common and criminal law responsibilities for which they may have to answer to the courts. Organisers may be liable for the consequences when things go wrong, particularly if there are defects in the planning or control of the event. This is more likely to happen if other interested parties are not consulted or if their advice is ignored.

One of the main responsibilities of the organiser is to have concern for the safety of the public attending the event, as well as those, who may, in any way be affected by it. This includes avoiding damage to property, fear or alarm to the public, disruption to the local community and ensuring that the human rights of persons are not infringed. Ensuring public safety at a public event is not the primary role of the police. The police are responsible for preventing breaches of the law, taking action against persons who break the law and maintaining the peace.

The organisers' responsibility for maintaining public safety can best be accomplished if there is no crime or disorder at the event. Equally, the police role of preventing lawlessness and disorder can best be accomplished when public safety is assured. Since these roles are clearly interdependent, it is in the interest of all stakeholders and strategic partners to co-operate to deliver a safe, lawful and crime free event. The principles of partnership with event organisers are already applied at Sporting Events and Stadia. These events are the subjects of written agreement, Statement of Intent, between the club and the police. Although Statements of Intent are not legally binding contracts, they provide a constructive focus for the police and the clubs, to

ensure that all the important issues are addressed. The parties sign the document, which can also be known as a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to record their agreement and, though there is no compulsion to do so, it then becomes a matter of accepted professional good practice.

Organisers of other public events may be asked to sign similar Statements of Intent which reflect an understanding of roles, responsibilities and agreement on how they will be met.

In all cases, accurate, early predictions of the type and number of participants are needed in order that the arrangements can be scaled accordingly. Early advice and regular contact thereafter with the emergency services and other partners usually through a safety advisory group (SAG) will enable the organiser to make informed, appropriate and agreed arrangements in relation to traffic management, medical cover, stewarding arrangements and contingency plans.

The organiser should notify the local authority, fire, police and ambulance service or safety advisory group about the event and earnestly consider any recommendations made by these services during the planning of the event. Regular meetings should be arranged as necessary by the organiser or by the safety advisory group.

The organiser (or his/her designated deputy) should be contactable throughout the event and available to liaise with the police, planning partners or safety advisory group when necessary.

When organisers are planning a demonstration or march they should be aware of all the above guidelines but in addition should be aware of the provisions of the Public Order Act 1986. Failure to give the police written advance notice (six clear days) of the date, time and venue/route of the procession; variation of such details from those previously notified; or failure to comply with changes, conditions or prohibitions imposed by the police on processions or assemblies may constitute criminal offences.

The use of certain locations for assembly or dispersal requires permission from the relevant authority and this must be obtained well in advance by the organiser from the authority. A copy of this permission must then be sent, by the organisers, to the police as soon as possible.

Whilst sporting events have many features which can be predicted on the basis of past experience and familiar, purpose-built venues, this is not the case for many other public events. Marches, in particular, present a moving venue, which is far more unpredictable. Therefore, it is very important that planning for such events starts as early as possible.

Under the Licensing Act 2003 some events may require a licence or a Temporary Event Notice (TEN) which is obtained from the local authority. The licence or notices are issued under strict guidelines and in some circumstances can have conditions applied.