

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.

Processions

In the case of processions, the route will be the subject of discussion. Before the procession starts the organiser will be served with a written copy of the route to be followed. However it must be clearly understood that as the police have a duty to prevent breaches of the peace, they may on occasions have to direct a procession by another route. This can happen before the march starts or while it is in progress. Generally processions should keep to the left or nearside of the roadway unless otherwise directed by the police. One vehicle may be allowed to head the procession and one to follow at the rear, but vehicles in the body of the procession can cause danger and are not normally allowed.

While a march will not normally be allowed to stop en route, in appropriate circumstances arrangements can be made for small deputations to leave the march and hand in letters or petitions at particular premises whilst the march is progressing. Advance notice should be given of any such intention.