

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.

Stewards

It is vital that the organisers keep control throughout the entire event. This is normally achieved by using stewards who act as agents of the organisers to ensure that the participants adhere to what has been agreed. They must carry out decisions made by the organisers as the event proceeds, through a clearly defined chain of command. Their roles will also include the implementation of the event contingency plans, a set of plans and actions to cope with any likely occurrence, emergency or not, which may happen as a result of the event taking place (these plans must be compiled by an event organiser).

Number of stewards

There must be sufficient stewards to communicate the organisers' intentions and directions to all participants in the event.

A risk assessment will help to establish the number of stewards necessary to manage the crowd safely.

When preparing a risk assessment, it may be necessary to carry out a comprehensive survey to assess the various parts of the site and consider the size and profile of the crowd.

Assessing the number of stewards based on the risk assessment rather than on a precise mathematical formula will allow a full account to be taken of all relevant circumstances, including previous experience, managing the crowd and locating stewards at key points.

Examples of some of the matters to be considered for a risk assessment include:

- Previous experience of specific behaviour associated with the performers
- Uneven ground, presence of obstacles etc within or around the site affecting flow rates
- Length of perimeter fencing
- Type of stage barrier and any secondary barriers
- Provision of seating

Adequate stewards at public events should be provided by the organiser without the use of police officers.

Stewards must be briefed so that they are fully conversant with the organisers' intentions and directions, and a copy of the briefing should be recorded by the event organiser. In addition, they should be conversant with any contingency plans for the event and in particular their roles in such plans.

To enable effective organisation of stewards, a Chief Steward should be appointed (preferably someone who is a member of the organising committee and who has ideally achieved an accredited qualification in event marshalling) to deal with all matters relating to stewards, including their briefing. The chief steward may, depending on the size and nature of the event, liaise with the police officer in charge both before and during its progress.

The overall stewarding of the event should be divided into sections with supervisors being responsible for each group of stewards. Supervisors should be responsible for between 6 to 10 stewards as a guide.

Under current legislation there is no upper or lower age limits for stewarding. Though they need to be mobile and physically able to move freely around all aspects of the Event/Site they are stewarding; they need to have effective communication skills to communicate with a wide range of individuals and have the mental resilience to cope with conflict; they will need the ability to understand and carry out instructions and have an orderly and organised thought process and be able to work methodically and carry out tasks in sequence.

The selection of stewards is extremely important. They need the ability to be firm, but in a tactful, friendly and good-humoured way. Effective stewards develop sufficient rapport with the participants for whom they are responsible to enable them to identify and defuse potentially difficult situations and promote an atmosphere of goodwill. Stewards must be easily identified so that participants and others know that they are acting in an official capacity.

Experience has shown that items such as lapel badges are insufficient for this purpose. A distinctive garment should be worn. Ideally this should be a coloured tabard, with a clearly identifiable number on it and comply with Health and Safety legislation. The organiser must maintain accurate staff records.

To retain control, the organisers must be able to communicate with the stewards during the event. This may be achieved by portable telephone or radio links between the organisers, the chief steward and the supervisors of the stewards.

Communication must be a two-way process. Stewards need to report developments back to the organisers during the event, so a formal organisers' control centre needs to be established. Organisers should be aware that they cannot rely on mobile telephone communications as/if when an incident occurs then networks may become jammed preventing communication.

Stewards must immediately inform the police of any matter that requires police attention such as anything that may lead to a criminal offence or breach of the peace or an immediate risk to public safety. Stewards must monitor the crowd and not watch the event.

It must be stressed that stewards are agents of the organisers. They are NOT police officers and therefore:

Although they should take all reasonable steps to prevent disorder or breaches of the peace, they must NOT exceed the powers of the ordinary private person. They must NOT carry or have near them any weapon; carrying a weapon in public is prohibited by law, unless there is lawful authority or reasonable excuse. Appointment as a steward carries no such authority and gives no 'reasonable excuse' in law. The possession of a weapon as a deterrent is also prohibited.

Security Industry Authority (SIA)

Historically, premises have employed 'door staff' to assist with the running of Licensed Premises and to act as security officers.

In 2001 the Security Industry Act 2001 (SIA) was introduced which requires persons who work within the security industry to have undergone training to become SIA registered.

Certain licensed events will require the addition of SIA trained staff to carry out security work which includes door supervision, searching and patrols.

Generally police and local authorities work on a ratio of at least 1 SIA trained security person to every 75 participants (1:75). This ratio is for specific work carried out by persons who hold an SIA qualification (ie working in and around licensed premises). This SIA ratio requirement is separate and unique, and although they will be working alongside stewards at an event, they have a specific role. Currently there are no ratio requirements for stewards. The number of stewards required will depend on the structure, geographic and demographics of each event/venue.

Ensuring, through the work of stewards, that the event takes place according to the agreed plan will go a long way towards fulfilling the organisers' responsibility for public safety officers, and any safety manager with specific public safety duties. It is just as important that a safety officer, together with stewards, are properly selected, briefed, identified and equipped for their role. Once nominated these individuals can liaise and inform the safety advisory group on behalf of the organiser.