

MPS Summary – 14/03/21:

Advance planning

The Met has been shocked and saddened by Sarah Everard's disappearance and death. On Friday PC [REDACTED] was charged with kidnap and murder. The Met investigation continues, drawing on expertise from hundreds of colleagues across the Met, and also supported by Kent Police. Met colleagues have shared Londoners' anguish, shock and sadness. Women and allies across London have wanted to express their strength of feeling in relation to Sarah and on violence against women.

London remains in a pandemic and the current Covid restrictions voted in by Parliament remain in place. On Friday, the High Court ruling confirmed that the Met may conclude that attendance at a large gathering could be unlawful, the MPS encouraged those looking to attend vigils in London this weekend, including at Clapham Common, to find lawful and safer ways to express the strength of feeling in relation to Sarah Everard's death. This was in line with the difficult decisions the Met has had to make to enforce the Covid regulations during a range of gatherings on issues about which people have felt very strongly, as well as in relation to funerals and memorials, in order to support public health measures to reduce transmission of Covid.

The Met continued to speak with the organisers of the vigil in Clapham and other gatherings to explain the rules.

During the day

The organisers of the vigil in Clapham cancelled the gathering and the Met acknowledged that this was difficult for the organisers and all those hoping to join. The Met encouraged people to find other ways to mourn Sarah in a safe way. The organisers of the vigil encouraged people to light a candle where they were at 21h30 in memory of Sarah.

The Met put in place a proportionate policing plan for the day. Following the cancellation of the ReclaimTheseStreets vigil the MPS policing operation began at 10am. With local neighbourhood officers deployed from midday. Local officers were deployed in pairs supported by local neighbourhood's leadership.

For approximately 6 hours between midday and 6pm there was a flow of people in small groups, family units and pairs approaching the bandstand which had become the focal point. This all happened in a dignified way with people moving away after paying their respects. This included a well-publicised visit from the Duchess of Cambridge. Throughout this period there was a low key policing presence.

From 6pm

From approximately 6pm the numbers around the bandstand swelled to over 1000. At this point individuals took over the bandstand area, believed to be linked to the protest group 'Sisters Uncut'. It was at this point that the event moved from a vigil to a rally where a large number of people were pushing closer to the bandstand to hear speeches which were being made by members of this group and others. It became a densely packed crowd and presented a clear risk to COVID transmission as well as being clearly in breach of the Health Protection (Coronavirus) Regulations.

At this point officers in normal beat uniforms moved into the crowd to engage those present and ask them to disperse. The risks presented by COVID-19 were largely ignored at this point in a dense crowd, as was the clear breach of the Health Protection (Coronavirus) Regulations. Officers sought to explain that they were breaching the regulations, and encourage them to leave. The majority of people did so and a small minority remained. This phase lasted for around an hour.

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This resulted in ongoing verbal encouragement of those that remained to leave and an attempt to issue some fixed penalty notices, in particular to those who were seeking to incite the crowd from the bandstand. Four people refused to provide their details and were arrested for either breaches of the Health Protection (Coronavirus) Regulations or for Public Order offences. During this period six officers were injured when a small minority of people threw plastic bottles and began pushing and shoving. At the same time, there was significant anti-police chanting. After speaking with officers, the majority of the crowd complied and dispersed quickly.

By 8pm the area was back to normal, with small groups, once again laying flowers at the bandstand with a neighbourhood policing presence.

Resources:

From 6pm the neighbourhood policing teams were supported by additional officers to manage the size of the crowd. Initially [REDACTED] were deployed and this was gradually increased as it became clear more officers were needed to engage the crowd. This resulted in [REDACTED] being deployed to the area of the bandstand to manage and engage the crowd of between 1000 and 2000. [REDACTED]