

Public order policing

Key information

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Introduction

The Police and Crime Committee is investigating public order policing, in light of a number of recent protests in the capital. The Committee will look at the pressures policing protests and other large scale events have on the Met.

Investigation aims and objectives (Terms of Reference)

This investigation will seek to:

- Explore the state of public order policing in London in the wake of increased protest activity related to the Israel/Gaza conflict, as well as new legislation and powers.
- Understand how increased public order pressure impacts the Met as a whole, including local neighbourhood teams, impact on officer wellbeing, and financial impact on Met budgets and resources.
- Understand how the Met meets the challenge of national public order policing while also protecting the democratic right to protest. As well as protest, this investigation will include looking at the policing of international sporting and ceremonial events, alongside regular local operations, such as football fixtures and local protest.

[This investigation will not consider the issue of hate crime, which was explored by the Committee most recently at its [meeting on 17 July 2024](#).]

Key issues

- The Met is dealing with the “greatest period of sustained pressure since the Olympics in 2012”. It has said that this pressure has been “compounded by the chronic demand to respond to Just Stop Oil [...] as well as by significant business-as-usual events, including state events, Remembrance Day, football and other protests.” These challenges exist in the context of reduced spending levels in the Met in real terms compared to ten years ago, and reduced staffing and officer numbers.
- The 7 October 2023 attacks in Israel, and the subsequent military conflict, has led to large scale and frequent demonstrations in central London. These protests have ranged in size from 300,000 at the highest point in autumn/winter 2023, to around 5,000-10,000 in March and April 2024. Environmental protests from groups such as Just Stop Oil also pose a policing challenge, often employing tactics of direct action.
- The Met has received additional funding from the Home Office related to Operation Brocks, the operation specifically dealing with protest activity related to the conflict in Gaza. The Commissioner has stated that this additional funding from the Home Office has not kept up with the unique demand placed on the Met’s resources, and that the funding received through the National and International Capital City (NICC) grant is £240m short of what is required.
- The Met relies on abstraction from local neighbourhood teams to manage increasing demands around public order policing. Abstraction is when officers are taken away from their usual duties to assist with policing major events such as protests. Abstraction rates are continuing to rise. A New Met for London includes the commitment to “stop abstractions from neighbourhood teams, apart from in exceptional circumstances”.
- The Public Order Act 2023 created new offences related to protests which the Met has used. These include the offence of ‘locking on’ and being equipped to lock on. The 2023 Act also created new powers, including extended stop and search powers to allow police to search and seize articles connected with protest, including powers to stop and search without suspicion, and provision for Serious Disruption Prevention Orders, which allow courts to impose constraints on individuals who have committed protest-related offences on at least two occasions. In addition, the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 created the new offence of “intentionally or recklessly causing public nuisance”. Some of these new powers have received criticism for infringing on rights to expression and right to assembly.
- London’s status as an international and capital city means there is greater demands on the Met to police other public order events. As an illustrative example, during the weekend of 24 and 25 August 2024, the Met are likely to be required to police the Notting Hill Carnival, three Premier League matches and one Championship match, as well as a music festival in Victoria Park in East London, in addition to any yet unannounced protest activity.

Key questions

- How is the Met using new powers to police protest? Is adequate training provided for officers in using these powers? What do officers have to say about the efficacy of these powers and if there are any perceived gaps?

- How is the increased protest activity around the conflict in Israel/Gaza impacting the Met, both in terms of finances and resources, and officer wellbeing and morale?
- How could the Met change the way it polices protests to better serve all Londoners?
- What impact is abstraction having on the Met as a whole, as well as on specific neighbourhood teams?
- Does the Met receive enough additional funding around public order policing, given many of the national and international events it is required to police?

Public Order Policing Survey

As part of this investigation, the Committee issued a Survey.

This Survey has now closed. All responses received will be used to shape the Committee's output for this investigation.

[Read the written evidence in response.](#)

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