

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Oral evidence: Safety at major sporting events, HC 596

Tuesday 8 November 2022

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Julian Knight (Chair); Kevin Brennan; Steve Brine; Clive Efford; Julie Elliott; Simon Jupp; John Nicolson and Giles Watling.

Questions 92 - 175

Witnesses

I: Martyn Henderson OBE, Chief Executive, Sports Grounds Safety Authority; Peter Houghton, Director of Operations, Football Safety Officers Association; Mark Roberts, Chief Constable, Cheshire Constabulary and National Police Chiefs' Council lead for football policing; and Michelle Russell, Chief Executive, Security Industry Authority.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Martyn Henderson, Peter Houghton, Mark Roberts and Michelle Russell.

Q92 Chair: This is the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee and this is our hearing into safety in sports grounds. We are joined today by Mark Roberts, lead for football policing at the National Police Chiefs' Council, Martyn Henderson OBE, chief executive of the Sports Grounds Safety Authority, Michelle Russell, chief executive, Security Industry Authority and Peter Houghton, director of operations at the Football Safety Officers Association. Mark, Martyn, Michelle and Peter, thank you very much for joining us this morning.

In the interest of transparency, before we entered our public session we had a private hearing with our witnesses in which video of approximately 10 to 15 minutes' duration was presented to us, which showed, over a period of around six months, widespread violence in and around football stadiums across England and Wales. Many of the scenes were absolutely shocking. Reflecting on that, Mr Roberts, when we had the fans represented in front of us last week, the line that we were spun was effectively that this was a pandemic hangover, that there was this pent-up frustration and norms of behaviour were not followed—people did not know how they were going to behave or had forgotten how to behave in football stadia, and this was the reason for the scenes of disorder we have seen that have been brought to public notice recently. Is that a fair analysis or, frankly, are we on the cusp of something quite different?

Mark Roberts: There is probably an element of that because obviously we speak to colleagues in Europe and this is not UK-specific. We have seen a significant increase in disorder across all of Europe post the lifting of pandemic restrictions. We had started to see some deterioration in behaviour pre pandemic, but certainly the rate of increase post pandemic is quite significant. We can look at the reasons for that, and we may discuss them, whether it is younger fans growing up, not used to being in that environment, whether there have been difficulties with supply chains for, initially, stewards, or whether policing and other people engaged in the safety industry needed to get back to match fit—there are probably a whole mix of issues there. If it was purely pandemic-related, you may have seen a short blip and then a return to normality. That is not the case. We saw it throughout last season. It actually seemed to get worse the more the season went on. It is difficult to judge like for like because you tend to get more contentious fixtures at the end of the season, but at the start of this season we have certainly seen a very high level compared to what we have seen previously and, again, some really serious specific instances of disorder.

Q93 Chair: What you are saying is that the pandemic effect may have had some contributory factor. In particular, you mentioned stewarding and the implementation of best practice. Outside that, what you have seen is a steady increase in this violence over the period, and you would not



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have expected that to happen if it was just a post-pandemic phenomenon.

Mark Roberts: It probably amplified any issues to a significant degree. If it was purely post pandemic, you could have expected it to have settled down by now, but the situation is that we still have significant issues.

Chair: Would any of the other witnesses like to come in at this point?

Martyn Henderson: I agree with Mark that there are some elements of an impact from the pandemic, and it may mean that some of those behaviours have just taken hold—behaviours that we had not seen to such a great extent—but there was a rise in concern prior to the pandemic as well. I do not think it could be wholly explained by that, but I would pick up on you and Mark's point about the stewarding. There are some contributory causes of these changes in behaviour. You have an inexperienced stewarding workforce, with a lot of churn in that workforce over the course of the pandemic, probably some inexperienced policing, and probably some inexperienced people involved in the safety management side as well. The pandemic had effects both on the behaviour and on the systems and infrastructures that you have in place to protect the public.

Q94 **Chair:** I want to explore this for a moment, and then I will bring in Clive Efford. Martyn and Mark, you both referenced the fact that, prior to the pandemic, there was a worrying uptick in violence and disorder in and around stadiums. What do you attribute that to?

Mark Roberts: I have spent considerable time thinking about this, as you can imagine. We are not anywhere near where we were in the '80s. We need to keep this in context; it is worrying, but we are not back to as bad as it was. I looked at what our success factors were that took us from being in a really appalling place. I was a football fan in the '80s. I used to go to games and remember how intimidating the atmosphere could be. We had success, and there were a number of factors such as strong legislation that enabled the police to tackle the problem, the professionalisation of the policing command control and training around football, professionalisation of the security arrangements at the clubs, the introduction of all-seated stadia, football-specific legislation, the courts getting a grip and issuing proper sentences, and the introduction of the football banning order regime—that was really key. We normally have around 1,300 people on bans; that takes out the hardcore who can set the crowd off in the wrong way. There was a culmination of measures and supporters who were broadly supportive of the measures because they wanted a safe environment to go to.

These things go in cycles, and we have probably seen an erosion of some of the things that we know were success factors. There is a challenge with police resourcing—particularly post the Ipswich case—which makes it financially challenging for the police to put resources in.

Q95 **Chair:** Can you just explain that?



Mark Roberts: The settled position for police charging arrangements was settled in the case of Leeds United v. West Yorkshire police, where, in effect, the police could charge for officers deployed on land owned, leased or controlled by the club. Ipswich challenged Suffolk police over the charging arrangements. Parts of the environment around Portman Road were routinely shut to facilitate the movement of people in and out of the ground. Concessions were put there, people would queue and, as with a lot of older grounds, people will come out straight from the ground on to a public highway. Up until that stage, “controlled” was taken to mean those areas that were shut off basically to facilitate the game, even if they were in public. The Ipswich case said, “If it is in public, the police cannot charge.”

The implication of that was that the deficit between what the police can recover from the clubs and what we actually spend grew significantly. It forced the police into making choices, because we cannot denude the service we give to the rest of the community to support football clubs, particularly the wealthy ones. There are challenges around that and about the level of resource that we can put in. We did a thorough costing exercise in the ‘19/’20 season, where we costed every deployment of football policing in the year. The total cost of policing—just on the game, not your broader CID, not the domestic abuse that goes with it—was £47,854,678.02, the unrecovered cost of which was £40,003,621.43. In effect, we recovered £7 million at the same time as agents were paid £300 million that year.

Obviously, we always put safety first, but there are sometimes challenges in resourcing as we might wish. It is a balancing act that we should not have to take. There was probably a lack of focus around the courts. There was a general assumption that problems had gone away, so they did not have to have the focus that we perhaps had on it.

Q96 **Chair:** When you say, “lack of focus around the courts”, do you mean bringing it to court or sentencing?

Mark Roberts: No, we are taking it, but I think we saw, candidly from my perspective—and I would say this, as a police officer—some quite strange decisions about people not being given banning orders. Some of the sentences were not as we would have wished. CPS has worked really hard with us, and it is a natural manifestation sometimes that if something is very much in focus, the courts recognise it as a problem and will start to deal with it. We have seen a significant improvement from our perspective, that the courts are properly taking it seriously.

What we have seen, though, are moves to attack some of the things that work for us. There is now commentary about trying to rework or revoke parts of the specific football legislation, which is incredibly dangerous. We have seen the reintroduction of standing, which can be done safely—I am not anti-safe standing—but there are measures that need to go with it. I have given you my submission that we put into the SGSA. There are a series of things everyone needs to recognise are an issue, and if we do



what we have previously done, I am confident that we will get the problem under control again.

Q97 Clive Efford: Following up on what the Chair was asking about, what is driving this uptick in violence at football? Is it organised? Are these just chance meetings at a match between fans where they pile into one another? Are they using the internet to pre-arrange where they will meet to have a fight? Is it drug-related? Has that changed? Alcohol has always been there in the background—people getting tanked up before they go to matches—but is it cocaine-related? I can remember talking to people back in the '80s who were saying that violence in pubs and nightclubs was drug-related and driven by cocaine, which was exacerbating the violence in particular. Are we back there again, with cocaine being one of the contributory factors?

Mark Roberts: Cocaine is certainly a contributory factor to violence in the night-time economy, and football is a reflection of wider society. If anyone doubts the influence of alcohol and drugs on people's behaviour, go to any town, city or village on a weekend and see the impact of alcohol.

To answer your question, yes, there is clearly an element of organised gangs who set out and wish to engage in violence. It is not at the levels it was in the '80s, but it is an unwelcome re-emergence. It is not something we have particularly seen. The concern is that we have younger people involved in this. For a number of years, we did not see it too often; you would occasionally see the older risk groups come out for specific occasions. It is now happening on a regular basis, and the concern is that if younger people are becoming involved, that is a problem we have for the next 30 years unless we take remedial action.

Aside from that, you do have some random stuff. Macclesfield v Congleton was probably just a confluence of people drinking, and fans from different clubs being able to mix. I would not suggest that was pre-planned. It was probably a spontaneous issue of people at the game having drunk too much.

It is a mixture of things, and each of those needs a different solution. We need the fans to work with us, because we want to create a safe environment for them in line with the national strategy, which in effect is to exclude those people who want to cause violence and commit crime. We want to empower the decent fans so they can have a pleasant Saturday afternoon, Monday night, Friday night or Thursday night.

Q98 Clive Efford: When we watched the video, we were all struck by the age of the people who were involved in a lot of that violence. They were not teenagers—they were in their 20s or 30s, and some looked as old as me. It was quite shocking to see, and the pictures were clear. If you saw those people in the street, you would be able to recognise them. How many of those people were followed up and arrested?



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Mark Roberts: Well, there were figures on that—an awful lot of them. We will work with the dedicated football units. If it is a larger event, then you might have a major incident team dealing with some of the investigations. Where there is video evidence, clearly it will be followed up and people will be prosecuted. You can probably see from some of the statistics—the increase in arrests and banning orders over the last year speaks to the proactivity of forces in tackling those people engaging in football violence.

Q99 **Clive Efford:** I have some figures here; I do not know whether they are the same ones that you have in your folder. For the '21/'22 season, there were 1,308 football banning orders. Is that a lot? Is that what we would expect? Is that enough?

Mark Roberts: Bear in mind that football banning orders drop off, as they are issued for between three to 10 years. Coming on the back of the Covid period, clearly there would not have been the number of banning orders going through that we would normally have.

Q100 **Clive Efford:** These would be the numbers issued in that season, would they not?

Mark Roberts: No, they will be the number in train or in force at that time.

Q101 **Clive Efford:** Would it be fewer issued than that figure?

Mark Roberts: Normally at any one time there are about 1,300 banning orders in place.

Q102 **Clive Efford:** Right. Should we expect to see that figure go up?

Mark Roberts: Yes. In that season there were 516 new banning orders, and arrests went up by nearly 60%.

Q103 **Clive Efford:** The arrests that we have here is 2,198, up by 384.

Mark Roberts: Up by 59%.

Q104 **Clive Efford:** The scale of what we are looking at—2,198 arrests—does not look a lot to me, but you are on the other side of the story, so you tell me.

Mark Roberts: It is starting to be where it needs to be. We have millions of people who go to football. The vast majority of football fans are thoroughly decent people. What we are seeing is an increase, and that 59% increase in arrests speaks to proactivity. One of the things with footage is that it will have to be captured and reviewed, we need to identify people, and it will end up in investigation. Normally police forces are having to go to different parts of the country to make the arrests. We are being proactive. The increase in banning orders is welcome because that will have the effect.

Q105 **Clive Efford:** You just talked about resources, and you compared how



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much the police got with how much agents get from football, particularly in the Premier League. Do they provide you with the equipment that you need to be able to perform the task at football matches, such as enough spotters or technology for facial recognition? Would that help you identify individuals and prosecute?

Mark Roberts: The Premier League would not provide us with the technology or kit; we provide that. Each force has dedicated football officers who are just part of the force establishment. The silver commander will determine the level of resource on a match-by-match basis, and we would always do it based on safety.

Secondary to that is the issue of cost recovery and what we can get from the clubs. Clearly if we were on full cost recovery, it would make it easier for us to bring people in on overtime and pay them, so that you could have additional officers at games. That is not the position. While we would always put safety first, commanders have to take prudent decisions about the number of officers that we bring in, because if you bring in 300 officers from the rest of the county or force, that has a negative effect on the rest of the county. If we have people with cancelled rest days, they have to take those days some other time.

What we are looking for is something that keeps it fair but ensures policing does not subsidise football. It cannot be right that for a whole year's policing at football, we recover, in effect, £7 million of cost when we have outlaid £47 million, because £7 million probably could not buy you a second division fullback.

Clive Efford: Okay. Could you write to us and let us know how many ongoing investigations there are for each of those incidents that you showed us in that video?

Mark Roberts: Yes.

Clive Efford: Thank you.

Q106 **Simon Jupp:** Good morning to all the panel. I want to focus on the connection between drug taking and the antisocial behaviour that we see at football matches. People perceive that the majority of the bad behaviour comes from drinking rather than drugs, but what is the evidence that links drug taking to antisocial behaviour at sporting events? Mark, I realise you have spoken a lot, so I am going to come to Peter first.

Peter Houghton: We not only have members that look after football matches, but many of our safety officers have multipurpose stadia now where you might get rugby league or rugby union. Some of them look after the local racecourse and things like that. It is coming home from all aspects of sport that there has been an increase in cocaine use. A good friend of mine at Cambridge United said that when he checked the gents toilets after the match, it looked like a laundrette—there was that much powder everywhere.



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Obviously, violence at football has always been synonymous with alcohol, but it is becoming abundantly clear that it is not just a football issue; it is widespread throughout different sports. It has become one of those things where you are not just pointing the finger at alcohol users, but you are now also able to point at drug users. If you look at some of the images that Mark showed us before, you can see it is abundantly clear that one or two of those are not just drunk; they have been using as well.

Q107 Simon Jupp: What is the difference in behaviour between someone who is violent after drug taking and violent after drinking?

Peter Houghton: That is actually quite a hard one to call.

Mark Roberts: People use both.

Peter Houghton: We are seeing it at places like concert arenas. People go to the pub—the show might start at 7 o'clock, and they do not come in until 9 o'clock, when the main artist is on, and they have had too much to drink. The next thing is they are in the toilets, doing the next level. Then when you come to challenge them, it is a higher level of abuse at stewards.

Q108 Simon Jupp: So it is a higher level if someone has had both; I can understand that. Michelle, in terms of the connection between drug taking and the antisocial behaviour we see at matches, do you concur with what Peter has been saying?

Michelle Russell: I do not disagree at all. We are the Security Industry Authority, so we are responsible for licensed security, not stewarding, and our remit is not specific to sports or football; it is much wider than that, including the night-time economy. As Mark indicated, some of these issues about the use of drugs and alcohol are not specific to the football context; they are seen in wider pieces. In terms of the training that licensed security officers have, it does include the baseline entry training, and our responsibility is to ensure that security have that before they take up roles. This includes detecting suspicious behaviour or people who are vulnerable, both in terms of drugs and alcohol.

Simon Jupp: All right, thank you. Martyn, is there anything you want to add on this point before I come to Mark?

Martyn Henderson: I am not an expert on this issue—my expertise is more around the physical infrastructure—but the reality is that it was a shock to me when I took on this role to see how widespread cocaine use was in grounds. I had this impression that it was like Fleetwood Mac in the 1970s, not Grimsby Town playing Bury at Blundell Park. It is clearly an issue. The only thing I would add is that our inspectors would say that where you have the double factor of drink and cocaine, restraining people, managing them and handling them becomes much more difficult and requires more resources than when somebody is just drunk.



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Mark Roberts: I agree with that. We have put a submission in as part of our evidence which details some of the evidence gathering we did in support of the then Government proposal to introduce class A drug use as one of the scheduled offences for banning orders. What is really clear is that there is ample evidence of pretty heavy use at most stadiums. That is through exercises where we swab toilets before, to make sure that they are clean, then swab them after and get an almost 100% hit on them. When we have passive drug dog operations, we find an awful lot of bags discarded. There is clear evidence there.

What is sometimes masking the figures when we arrest people who are under the influence of drink or drugs is that it is not always reflected in the charge. If someone has assaulted someone, they will be charged with an assault, not necessarily the fact that they are under the influence of drink or drugs. The aim of the banning order legislation being widened to include class A drugs is that we will see a lot of proactivity when that comes in, with the restart of the leagues after the World Cup. Many of the fans—even those who take part in that sort of despicable behaviour—do not want a ban, because they are still football fans, and the sanction of a banning order will far outweigh whatever sanction they will get for simple possession of cocaine.

Q109 **Simon Jupp:** Would that stamp out drug taking?

Mark Roberts: I do not think it will stamp it out. It will have a positive benefit, but it would be naive to say there is anything we can do to entirely stamp it out.

Q110 **Simon Jupp:** Peter, you mentioned the idea that it is almost like going into a laundrette, with the amount of powder around a toilet after some matches. Do you think that what Mark has just outlined would reduce the risk for your members?

Peter Houghton: Yes, especially the use of FBOs, but, as Mark says, at the end of the day these people are football fans, and whether it is the right solution, I do not know. From the point of view of our safety officers, any tool of that nature that can help us will do.

Q111 **Simon Jupp:** Michelle, for your members, would the idea that Mark has outlined make a big difference in terms of banning orders and things like that?

Michelle Russell: Anything that helps to minimise the risks that relate to violent incidents will have an impact on the security measures that are there. I do not think it will be unhelpful; it would help in a general sense.

Q112 **Simon Jupp:** This is a more procedural question, and it is probably for Mark, but if anyone else would like to answer then please nod at me and I will come to you. Are there enough sniffer dogs and, for example, specifically trained specialist stewards to be able to cope with trying to crack down on drug taking in football stadiums?



Mark Roberts: We would always welcome more, but there is certainly going to be enough for us to have a really comprehensive operational phase when this is introduced, to try to make people who think they can go to football and use cocaine without sanction think again. They will realise that there is a sanction and that we will be looking for it, and you have the added sanction of a banning order. It is a positive step, but we can always do more. It is a broader societal issue. How are we going to stop people taking drugs in society at large? That is just a reflection of what football sees as well.

Q113 **Simon Jupp:** We know that there is a massive shortage of workers in various sectors, including hospitality. Having seen the footage—and I am conscious the public have not seen it—I cannot imagine that anyone would want to be a steward. Why would you do that on that salary? That must be a real recruitment challenge, is it not, Peter?

Peter Houghton: It is a recruitment challenge at the moment, certainly, because post Covid many people found other things to do. In our industry—and it is the same in Michelle's—people found longer shifts at better rates of pay. Why would you put yourself down for five hours where you are spending an hour and a half searching people who do not want to be searched, and spending another two hours sat in the segregation line, being subjected to all the things that go on there? I flagged up at a committee meeting before Covid that we were heading for a steward shortage. It was becoming clear, and statistics from the SIA were backing that up. It manifested itself once we started to reopen the stadiums and found that it was difficult to get to the numbers we wanted. When you have a football stadium, you have two levels of stewarding: there is the level of stewarding you need to get the match on, and the level of stewarding you really want in order to have all your little home comforts in place. Safety officers were struggling to get matches on and not having these little comforts in place.

Simon Jupp: Understood. Michelle, I will come to you before Martyn.

Michelle Russell: Just to be clear, my remit is in relation to licensed security, so I will leave the stewarding supply to Martyn Henderson. I have two points. First, you are right: it is a really, really difficult job that we ask licensed security to do. They are often on minimum wage and quite often dependant on the employer—the venue or the grounds—for how long the shift is; it might be four hours, six hours or 10 hours, and they have a family to feed and an employment life to hunt. I want to flag up that it is a really, really difficult job. As you know, some of them put themselves in danger in order to protect the wider public and the fans and the spectators, so all credit to the security and stewards who do that role.

Secondly, in relation to supply on the security side, our figures do not support the concerns or issues about lower numbers. We are at a record high number of licensed security on the register. There were 402,499 at the beginning of November—that is the highest it has ever been. That



said, I would echo and reflect the comments that the reality of getting people to fill the posts for deployment is still an issue. Some of that comes back to my first point, which is the terms and conditions and how much grounds are prepared to pay for security. One of my key messages is that security should not be a grudge purchase. It has to be placed front and centre, particularly when it is supporting public safety.

Martyn Henderson: In terms of your specific question about the motivations for people wanting to be a steward—as you say, that is not a terrific advert—we have just published some research on this, which I will make available to the Committee. We have done a survey of over 1,000 stewards, current and former, which is the largest survey we found anywhere in the world because it is such a transient group; it does not show up very well in most statistics. I expected to see that people were really concerned about the low pay and the very high and growing levels of responsibility, but that was not really what I saw. What I saw was that people were really motivated in general to be stewards at sports grounds because they love the sport, they love their club, and they love being part of the operation that delivers a safe event.

What is also clear in the survey evidence is that if people do not feel they can do a good job, if they feel that it is not a safe event and that people alongside them are not suitably motivated, experienced and qualified to deal with crowd problems, then that is a really demotivating factor. It is a really interesting piece of research, because it was a real question for us as well: how are we going to attract more people in? We are now working with the football bodies to develop an action plan that is specific for football. It will have some wider effects across sport and the live event sector, but essentially football needs to do more to grow its own stewarding workforce and make sure that they are trained to the level that we require within the game.

Peter Houghton: I just want to add to what Martyn said about training. One of the problems we have in the industry is that there is no central training fund. It is down to each club to fund its own training. It is an ongoing renewal process where you might recruit 50 new stewards, and three or four months down the line, you maybe only have 30 of them. Three or four months more down the line, you might only have 15 or 20, but then you have to constantly replace them and constantly pay for it. We are now getting one or two pieces of evidence in safety officer land that clubs are saying, “We won’t have in-house stewards any more. We’ll go to the suppliers and just have the stadium full of agency stewards,” which then leads to other issues. Training is a major cost and a major problem.

Simon Jupp: Especially for smaller clubs. It might be an idea that premiership clubs could help pay for smaller clubs to train their stewards. That is just a thought. Back to you, Chair.

Q114 **Chair:** Thank you very much, Simon. Mr Henderson, I will come to you,



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as you may be able to shed some light on this. We focused on drug taking in and around football stadiums. Do these stadia look at other industries—for example, the nightclub industry—and how they make their offering more drug-resistant? I am thinking about design issues: no loo seats, sloping shelves etc.

Martyn Henderson: That is a really good question. I am not aware that we have done that. The SGSA produces the green guide, and that is the Bible on stadium design and good practice in developing and delivering safe events. Its formal title is The Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds, but it is just known informally as the green guide.

Q115 **Chair:** Is that updated regularly?

Martyn Henderson: Yes, it is probably on an eight-to-10-year cycle in terms of its update. The sixth edition was published in 2018, so a little before we saw this particular issue looming large within sports grounds, but it is something else I can go away and think about.

Q116 **Chair:** To your knowledge, is there much reference in the green guide to proofing stadia effectively from mass drug taking?

Martyn Henderson: No, I do not think there is any provision specific to drug taking. A lot of the green guide is about structure and risk assessment. The risk assessment will be changing, now that we see different behaviours and different threats. The green guide will be neutral on the nature of the risk or threat in that kind of example.

Q117 **Chair:** Mr Roberts, do you think that there is enough thought put into stadia design in terms of trying to minimise drug use?

Mark Roberts: In fairness, it is growing, and we do have a good dialogue with the Premier League and football league. As focus and awareness of this problem has come to the fore, they are now applying their minds to what you can do to target-harden in the same way that nightclubs do. It is a work in progress, and we will see how it pans out, but I know that it is under active consideration by them.

Q118 **Chair:** Is that more on a club-by-club basis, not across the industry?

Mark Roberts: It will be a mix. I have worked in three different forces with football clubs ranging in size from Macclesfield to Manchester United, and the approaches are very different for obvious reasons. It will be driven by the leagues to some degree, but it is then incumbent on the clubs, who are bringing the people in and getting the revenue. The supporters are the customers of the clubs, so we would see it as their responsibility to target-harden their premises to make it a nice environment for all the supporters who want to go.

Q119 **Chair:** We had some representatives from supporters' groups in our last session, and there was a feeling in the evidence that they downplayed drug use and said it was a wider societal issue, which we all recognise. My impression was, effectively, they did not really want to tar football



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fans with that sort of brush. Do they need to wake up to what is actually going on?

Mark Roberts: I am not going to be critical of the supporters' groups because we need to work with them, and they represent the majority of people who are thoroughly decent fans, so why would they have the insight? What has been interesting in some of the surveys that have been done with fan groups is that there is clearly a large awareness of drug taking among supporters groups. People are aware that it is going on; they see the behaviours.

I am pleased that the legislation regarding banning orders is coming, so that we can have a really concerted operational push. I would hate to see football grounds as a place where people can openly take drugs, because what we need is more families, mixed crowds and more female participation in the sport. Clearly the women's game is going really well, but we want that mixed crowd. We had the women's Euros, which was an absolute joy in terms of the spectator experience. We want more of that in the men's game as well. Anything that drives out families, such as open drug use, is something we have to be aggressively tackling, because we need that healthy mix in stands.

Q120 **Chair:** Mr Houghton, you worked on major events in the UK but also Germany. The Committee is going to visit Germany as part of this inquiry, to see how they deal with major sporting events. What lessons do you think we can learn from Germany?

Peter Houghton: My experience in Germany was limited to music events at arenas, but with Manchester City I have been along to a number of matches in Germany. Am I answering the question specifically on drug taking or in the wider context?

Chair: No, anything.

Peter Houghton: The most interesting experience was at Bayern Munich, where originally the police force in the away end came in NATO gear, looking like ninja turtles. After they had this show of strength, they took that away and then just integrated with the fans, which was a pretty decent way of doing it, instead of staying in an intimidatory fashion throughout the game. I did not quite understand it, but it was something to learn.

Our stewarding in England is generally better. Our stadium design is better because there are a number of grounds that you can go in. I think Hamburg is one where you go in on the corner at ground level—what we call level one here—but you have access to level two and level three from the ground level. So you had a situation where some of the fans who should have been in level two or level three just went into level one and overcrowded it, whereas a lot of our stadium designs are level-specific. I know at Manchester City, you can get to level two and level three up the same stairwells, but you cannot go in at level one and think, "I'm not



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going up 14 flights of stairs to level three. I'm going to go straight and just hang around in level one." I have looked at quite a lot of evidence from one or two academics who I know have been out in Germany, looking at lower levels of German football, and the violence increases there. Mark will back this up. If you look at Eintracht Frankfurt, they have almost brought a new wave into it.

Q121 **Chair:** Sorry, what does "brought a new wave" mean?

Peter Houghton: Increased levels of violence.

Mark Roberts: Eintracht Frankfurt are probably the worst behaved club in Europe this year.

Peter Houghton: We have seen it as well with Swiss teams who, just as the final whistle goes, pull their caps down, put the masks up and then start fighting with the police on the way out.

Martyn Henderson: In terms of the reason why you might see differences here and in Germany, I wonder if that is because Germany does not have a sports grounds safety authority like us or a green guide to which standards must conform. Generally, I hope you will find that the systems and arrangements we have in place here are seen internationally as best practice and looked at around the world as an exemplar when you visit Germany.

Q122 **Chair:** Mr Roberts, we have the coronation next year, which I believe will be a special bank holiday. The Premier League had to be cancelled for the Queen's funeral. What are the plans for the coronation? Are we going to have a similar situation because of policing issues?

Mark Roberts: No. To set the record straight, the police did not cancel the fixtures in the Premier League. The Premier League took the unilateral decision to do it. I know there was some criticism; I actually think it was a fitting mark of respect, but people have views. The initial cancellation of the programme was the decision by the Premier League. We had the Queen's funeral, and the Queen was moved from Edinburgh down to London, so there was a massive policing operation. You would have seen the roads lined with officers from all over the country. The entire football league programme went ahead. The entire women's game programme went ahead. We cancelled two Premier League games.

Q123 **Chair:** Do you anticipate similar cancellations for the coronation?

Mark Roberts: Hopefully not, because it was remarkable that there were only two games cancelled last time. We clearly have a period of planning now. It may be that there are particular fixtures in London that coincide with the coronation, but we have the time now to sensibly be flexible either on the part of football or for the police to make plans, because actually it worked really well. We had a very good dialogue with the Premier League, football league and FA last time around, and we were



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able to meet everyone's objectives of not putting an overdue burden on the police and allowing the games to go ahead.

Q124 **Chair:** It is not necessary that we will end up with cancellations, but there is the possibility in London, because of the extra policing that will be needed.

Mark Roberts: Well, that would ultimately be a decision for the Metropolitan police. Clearly there will be a massive mutual aid commitment from all around the country to support the event, as there was last time. I am hopeful it would not impact on it, but it will have to be viewed on a game-by-game basis. If there are particular risk matches, I would hope that there could be some flexibility on the fixtures, to put them on a different day.

Q125 **Chair:** I have one final question. We talk about football, but this inquiry is actually about stadium safety per se, so it is all sports and all safety. Are there any other issues that we need to be aware of in other sports outside of football? Are there ones that have similar problems, maybe to a lesser extent but exhibiting signs of stress?

Martyn Henderson: I am sure Mark will have views on some of the other sports, although he is the football policing lead, but we see some of the same trends and factors in other sports. Indeed, in some sports like cricket there has been an almost footballisation of the format of it, which makes it more of a football-like event. The SGSA advises the ECB on safety, so we have that relationship with them.

Peter, as you alluded to earlier, your members will be seeing some of the behaviours that we see in football at other events that they look after. Football has unique characteristics, which is why you have been asking so much about it, but it does not exist in a vacuum, and people who are football fans are also cricket and rugby and horse racing fans.

Mark Roberts: I would draw the link to alcohol again. We have certainly seen concerns at cricket matches about fan behaviour and all-day drinking. In certain stadiums there is now a limit, and there are family areas where people cannot drink, even in rugby union. I think I am right to say that the Millennium Stadium in Wales has introduced areas where people cannot drink because there is that correlation between people drinking to excess and antisocial behaviour. While it is not the premeditated violence that we get at some football matches, antisocial behaviour driven by alcohol consumption is a factor at other sporting events.

Chair: As you mentioned the Millennium Stadium, I will bring in Kevin Brennan.

Q126 **Kevin Brennan:** It is known as the Principality Stadium. As a Member of Parliament from Cardiff, I have publicly raised that issue of deteriorating behaviour at international rugby union matches in the Principality Stadium, particularly with late kick-offs and [alcohol being available



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during the game, at seat.] But I will not get into that, because other Members are going to ask about that particular question.

To go back to football banning orders, we have had some representation suggesting that magistrates might become more reluctant to issue these orders as they are blurring the line between being a preventative measure and a punishment. What would your response be to that, Mark?

Mark Roberts: I have done a written submission on the academic piece but, on the record, I think it is completely wrong. Banning orders are our most important tool in tackling it. We have a court system where each case is considered on its individual merit. The CPS will review the file. It will be heard by a court. The courts will make the determination about it. There is a whole process of judicial scrutiny, which is to make sure it is a proportionate legal measure. The impact it has domestically is significant, and possibly the impact it has when our teams play overseas, because of the passport surrender functions, is even more marked. When I visit foreign countries and we have a discussion about the nature of the fans who are coming, one of the most powerful things we can say is that we have 1,300 people who will not be travelling, and we know they do not travel—we are really effective on the enforcement of it.

That just makes it a safer experience for all the decent fans. The difficulty is that, in some jurisdictions, they might not be quite as discerning when it comes to using force on football fans. What we do not want is the decent fans who follow our teams abroad getting the rough end of policing because there are some yobs who have started trouble. The football banning order regime is one of our most effective tools, and I do not accept the criticisms of the system.

Q127 **Kevin Brennan:** As well as being a Committee that scrutinises sports, we are a Committee that scrutinises culture, and it has always struck me that a lot of this is to do with the culture of a sport or a particular team. There is, or has been, a very different culture between Welsh, Irish and Scottish fans and English football fans, where in the past there has been a culture of causing trouble at matches, particularly overseas. In your experience as a police officer, could the sports themselves—the football authorities and so on—do more to encourage a more positive culture around fandom than has traditionally been the case, or is that just trying to stop the tide coming in?

Mark Roberts: It is a challenge when you are talking about shifting the culture of tens of thousands of people, and I do—

Q128 **Kevin Brennan:** Let me put it to you this way. It is nothing to do with being an inherently better human if you are Welsh than if you are English. The Welsh football fans in the 1980s were a nightmare because they spent most of their time fighting each other because of club rivalries, but that culture has changed somehow or other. That is my point—is there a way that that can happen?



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Mark Roberts: One of the most effective policing operations in football is South Wales police, who worked in conjunction with Cardiff City and the Welsh FA on a whole series of measures. There is no one magic bullet. They had a very intelligent approach to standing in seats. People talk about the South Wales engagement with the fans, which was absolutely true, but at the same time they had one of the most effective banning order regimes. I think they had well over 100 people on banning orders.

Again, in line with the national strategy, you engage and support the vast majority of decent fans. We make sure the police are seen as their friends. At the other end, you alienate and exclude those people who are intent on trouble. Then, in between, you blend your approach depending on what you are dealing with. Can it happen? Yes, and you have to pay testament to Cardiff City and South Wales police, who continually put on outstanding events in the Principality Stadium.

There have been various efforts at trying to moderate behaviour. The FA ran a campaign a couple of years ago called "Don't Be That Idiot", which had some legs. It resonated with the majority of decent fans who, frankly, do not want to be tarred with the same brush as some of the people who travel abroad. We need a persistent effort on that. If we persist with it, and if we enforce the banning orders, then the more England travel abroad and get a good reputation again, the more self-fulfilling it becomes.

The Northern Irish fans in France were an absolute joy. One of the best sporting experiences I have seen was the Welsh fans singing the anthem when they played Germany, even though they lost. It would be nice if all our countries had a following like that.

Q129 **Kevin Brennan:** I attended the Wales-Northern Ireland game in Paris, and it was a very joyous occasion, particularly because we won 1-0.

On the issue of drug taking, I am conscious that as a Committee we get a broad view. We did an inquiry into music festivals and the future of those sorts of events last year, and there we were discussing whether people who have drugs should be able to have them tested to see whether they are safe before taking them. Here, in our Jekyll and Hyde way as a Committee, we suddenly become the Committee that says anyone taking cocaine or caught in possession of cocaine is a menace to society and should be banned from attending football matches. Are we just hypocrites about drugs as a society, or is there a reason why we take that two-faced approach?

Mark Roberts: At my home force, Cheshire, we have a big music event, Creamfields, and we are very proactive on the drugs front. We do not have people turn up, test the drugs for them and give them back. The practice is, if you are detected with drugs, depending on whether it is dealer amounts, you might be arrested or you might be refused entry by the event organisers, who we work very closely with. When we seize



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drugs, we test them. There is a lab on-site, the drugs are tested, and then we can get the public health messages out.

I do not know how it operates anywhere else, but we certainly do not run a test service for drugs where people get given them back. It is tested on seizures, and we then get the public health messages out if we think there are potentially fatal ingredients in them. That is the approach we take, and I would find it very strange if anyone was giving anyone drugs back if they had tested them.

Q130 **John Nicolson:** Thank you all for coming in. Mr Houghton, are some countries more violent than other countries?

Peter Houghton: We have seen that a lot of the people who work with Mark and the dedicated football officers give us that intelligence. When our clubs are going away to play matches, one of the most important pieces of intelligence we get is what we are likely to encounter when we get there.

Q131 **John Nicolson:** Which are the most violent countries?

Peter Houghton: It is always difficult to put an answer to that, but the academics I have worked with are never terribly pleased about Polish teams. You usually get some challenges from German teams; we have mentioned Eintracht Frankfurt.

Q132 **John Nicolson:** Which are the least violent countries?

Peter Houghton: I do not know. It is hard to say.

Mark Roberts: It is very difficult to say, because there will be particular clubs in certain countries who are really difficult, and there might be other clubs who do not cause any problems at all. In this country there are clubs that very rarely have any problems, and there are others that are more problematic.

Q133 **John Nicolson:** What are the lessons to be learnt from the non-violent countries?

Mark Roberts: I am trying to think of a country in Europe that does not have a problem to some degree.

John Nicolson: Out of Europe, then.

Mark Roberts: I am struggling to think of countries out of Europe where there are no problems.

Q134 **John Nicolson:** For example, do you go to New Zealand and find lots of thugs rampaging through the streets and headbutting one another when you go and visit them?

Mark Roberts: I have never visited New Zealand. New Zealand does not really have the size of football league and clubs that get problems. We were recently speaking to the Qatar authorities about the fact that when



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England fans travel to the World Cup, they very rarely cause problems. The arrest figures are really low.

Our understanding from speaking to the Russians was that the team that had the most arrests at the last World Cup was Mexico. There are problems all around. There are some major issues in Argentina with people dying at football matches. There are challenges all over.

Q135 **John Nicolson:** In Qatar all the violence is directed against the poor workers who are constructing the stadiums, where there have been appalling death tolls, as this Committee has discovered. On the question of drugs, how do you think we would be able to collect, or do we collect, meaningful data on drugs, Mr Houghton?

Peter Houghton: This is something that the FSOA has been working hard at. We probably originated a central referencing agency for information sharing, which I now understand the major competition providers in the country are starting to roll out as well.

Q136 **John Nicolson:** Presumably the more information you have, the more possible it is to tackle the problem.

Peter Houghton: One, to tackle it and, two, to provide the data.

John Nicolson: And identify it.

Peter Houghton: Absolutely.

Q137 **John Nicolson:** Twenty out of the 92 Premier League and EFL clubs use in-house stewarding. Ms Russell, is that a preferable approach?

Michelle Russell: The way in which licensed security works is that either the licensed security may be directly employed by the venue, or they may be directly employed by a security company, so they have permanency of employment through the company. There are others that I would term peripatetic who move from venue to venue and from gig to gig. It is the gig economy, and it is not in the same way. The reality is that, whether or not it is in a sporting or football context or a broader security context, there is going to be a mix of what is right.

Q138 **John Nicolson:** If I was on the minimum wage as a security guard being moved from stadium to stadium and being confronted with violent thugs, I would be much more concerned about escaping without suffering any personal injury and going back home to my family, because should I really expose myself to danger in confronting these hooligans, sometimes for wealthy clubs? They are paying hundreds of millions of pounds to footballers; why should I?

Michelle Russell: I touched earlier on the fact that it is a really difficult job being a licensed security officer.

John Nicolson: A horrible job, I imagine.



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Michelle Russell: I will leave Martyn to comment on the stewarding piece, but people want to—they are motivated in different ways. Martyn referred to his research, which looked at the motivations for why people wanted to take up some of those positions. It may be for pure employment reasons—it is an opportunity for them to get into it. It may be that they have a personal motivation connected with it, whether or not it is football or events or festivals. Ultimately, there are also people who, as with other forms of public service and public safety, want to and are driven by helping other people.

Q139 **John Nicolson:** If only we paid them properly. Mr Henderson, my team spoke to a police officer about this who said that untrained stewards can be a cause of tension. They simply do not have the experience and they do not have the skills, and they can exacerbate situations. Do you agree?

Martyn Henderson: I do agree. That is the point I was making earlier to the Chair: inexperienced stewards can be a contributory factor. The reverse of that is that really experienced stewards can help to spot danger and address it before it becomes a problem.

With reference to your previous question, I agree with Michelle: it is not binary, but it makes a lot of sense that if you have a stewarding workforce which is employed by the club and works with the club, knows the ground and knows the crowd, you will probably get a better stewarding operation.

Q140 **John Nicolson:** Why is that not happening?

Martyn Henderson: It does happen. It does not happen a lot, but—

Q141 **John Nicolson:** Why is it not happening everywhere?

Martyn Henderson: It used to be the norm. Now people have moved to different approaches. We talked earlier about risk assessment. At some matches, you will need more stewards than you have, and you will rely on an agency. Some clubs have totally outsourced their stewarding operation to an agency, but that is effectively an in-house operation, because it is the same people who are stewarding every match.

Q142 **John Nicolson:** You talk about people choosing, but I presume it is not the stewards who are choosing to be badly paid and to move from club to club. They would, I imagine, prefer to have secure employment, to have sick leave, to have a pension scheme, to be employed by the clubs and to have security and proper reward for it.

Martyn Henderson: I agree with that, and that would obviously be the ideal situation.

Q143 **John Nicolson:** Why are the clubs not doing it?

Martyn Henderson: They would have taken decisions. You have seen the change over time, with the increased use of agency personnel, and



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that was driven quite a lot by the pandemic and the fact that stewards left the workforce, so there was an increased reliance on agencies.

We are probably now seeing a reducing reliance on them. More clubs are seeing the benefits of growing their own and having their own workforce. In terms of those personnel who are moving from one stadium to another, they will be moving not just from one stadium to another, but they might be working at a shopping centre or a whole range of settings, and it is a gig economy. They will be looking to see "What role is there this weekend?", and they will be making a decision on "Should I work at this rock concert, or should I work at this football match?" based on the pay and conditions that are being offered.

Ultimately, pay and conditions need to improve for stewards, because it is a responsible role; I would definitely support that. That point is widely accepted, because there is such concern now about antisocial behaviour and disorder. As the Committee has heard this morning, everyone recognises that that is damaging their events, it is damaging their brand and there is a need for concerted action to address that, and stewarding has to be part of that.

Q144 John Nicolson: Mr Houghton, the Casey report highlighted a lot of failures that occurred at Wembley and contributed to the disorder that we all saw on our screens. The stewarding has been widely criticised. Do you think the Casey report was fair? Do you think it was accurate? To what extent do you think it was right in identifying that failures of stewarding were a cause of much of the chaos?

Peter Houghton: First of all, when you have a major event like that at Wembley, there is a high number of stewards involved, and not all of them are untrained, bad ones. When we needed to put the stewarding programme together for that match, with the notice that you have, which is effectively between the semi-final and the final, it becomes quite a massive operation, and it is dependent on Wembley's own stewards and massive support from licensed stewarding.

One of the things we always need to keep in the front of our mind is that Wembley does not have a match every week, so it does not have a core of its own stewards. It is dependent on stewards that have been trained generally elsewhere, backed up by large numbers of security company stewards, and that in itself is a challenge. It is unfair to label every steward that was working there as being incompetent.

Q145 John Nicolson: I do not think it did, did it?

Peter Houghton: No, I do not think it did either.

Q146 John Nicolson: It simply said that there was a high level of incompetence. Mr Roberts, as a police officer, your heart must sink sometimes when you look at the stewarding that you witness. Some of the stewarding will be really good, but a lot of it is not good, and that presumably makes the work of the police that much harder.



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Mark Roberts: I will come back to some of the clips you saw before. There were stewards there who were absolutely heroic. They were putting themselves in the middle of two mobs who were intent on doing violence to each other. To put themselves in the way there, we need to recognise that lots of stewards and security staff did a fantastic job.

John Nicolson: That is why I was so keen to make the point about stewards getting adequate rewards for the work they do.

Mark Roberts: There is going to be good and bad policing at games; there is going to be good and bad stewarding. The more consistent workforce you can have, the better results you will get. Certainly, when I was in charge of policing Old Trafford, we had joint police and security staff who worked together every week. They knew the way around the ground, they knew the problems, they knew each other, and they had worked together in a team, and that is when you get the best results.

John Nicolson: Consistency is good.

Mark Roberts: Absolutely.

Q147 **John Nicolson:** Would you like to see the clubs hire stewards on a permanent basis, so you get to know them, you have consistency, and you know the folk you are working with every week?

Mark Roberts: Really, it is for the clubs to hire who they see—

John Nicolson: What is your view?

Mark Roberts: My view would be, if you can get a consistent workforce working together that understands the ground, can work together and can build relationships with each other and the fans, then that is going to be the best outcome.

Q148 **Giles Watling:** Off the back of John Nicolson's questioning about stewards and employees, it occurs to me that in the recruiting of stewards, there is obviously some sort of vetting process. I imagine that there would be a large number of fans who would want to do that job. Martyn, is there not a danger that you might be bringing trouble with you—in other words, people who are part of the troublemaking might want to get on to the stewarding side of things? Does that happen?

Martyn Henderson: I could not say the extent to which it happens, but clearly there is a risk that that could happen. We have today published new policy guidance for clubs about in-house stewards. This is something that Michelle and I have been working on quite a lot over the past six to 12 months, which is that if you are an SIA licensed security operative, you have to be trained and vetted in order to get a licence.

Within football, we have always had a very strong tradition around training, but the extent to which the vetting was taking place and how robust that vetting was was unclear. The new guidance is not just policy



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guidance; it is essentially a direction to local authorities, who issue the safety certificates for grounds, that it should be a legal requirement that stewards are qualified and vetted to the same standard as the SIA does. I do not know the scale of the problem, but it was identified as a risk, and I feel that we have acted to address that.

Q149 Giles Watling: It is a problem that is recognised and is now being addressed.

Martyn Henderson: Yes.

Giles Watling: Mr Houghton, do you have anything to add to that?

Peter Houghton: The BS7858 was a yardstick that most employers were encouraged to follow in terms of vetting people. The extent to which football clubs and/or security companies use BS7858 is unclear, as far as I can see. Going back as long as I can remember, we were CRB/DBS checked regularly. In other places where I worked, I was DBS checked almost every three months. That was just one way of checking and monitoring people.

Q150 Giles Watling: Is it a problem that you recognise, though? It takes a thief to catch a thief, so in a sense, so it is probably not a bad thing.

Peter Houghton: I think so. Mark and I were talking about this earlier. Last week I had a safety officer who was unclear that BS7858 is not legislation but is effectively guidance. That particular club was concerned that one of the security companies they were using was not complying with BS7858. The safety officer was asking other safety officers what they would do in those circumstances.

Q151 Giles Watling: It is not instilled in practice; it is going by word of mouth, is it?

Peter Houghton: To an extent, but the HR departments should be complying with BS7858 across the board, not just in the stewarding industry.

Q152 Giles Watling: A good point, well made. I would like to move on. Mark, you mentioned earlier the further measures on safe standing that you would like to see. You did not elucidate what they might be.

Mark Roberts: I have submitted a detailed letter—Martyn will be familiar with it—which captures the views of policing. It is a Government pledge to reintroduce safe standing, which we support. The only element we would like to see in regulation are some of the measures where we think we can mitigate risks. It has been introduced, and it has worked really well, for example, at Old Trafford. They, in effect, have complied with what we think should be the requirements, which is that it is in a segregated area, so that you cannot have migration. You have people allocated specific tickets, so those same people can be identified. There is a stewarding plan that prevents people migrating and overcrowding



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particular rows. There should be enhanced CCTV, and there should be built-in review. There are a few others, but they are the principal ones.

My concern is that if it is done on too wide a scale, it provides the opportunity for people to migrate around the grounds and overflow particular areas. If I am stood watching the game with my daughter and three big guys with their mates want to come into the row and push in, it can start creating problems, and you can get groups of fans coalescing in an antisocial way.

We think it is fine that it can happen. It mitigates the risk of progressive crowd collapse, although we have never had an injury through progressive crowd collapse in this country. It is a theoretical risk. With those additional measures it can be done, and it removes the security issues that potentially could develop with it.

Q153 Giles Watling: You told the BBC that it is easier to hate-chant, shout racist abuse, sneak in alcohol and take cocaine while standing up. Do you think that is still the case?

Mark Roberts: Yes. It is evident if people are sat down and you can monitor them with CCTV. It is easier to spot bad behaviour and if people are throwing missiles. If the area is overcrowded, it is easier to shout abuse, and it is easier to potentially throw missiles if you have the cover of people stood up in front of you.

Q154 Giles Watling: In your opinion, is there is an argument to not reintroduce safe standing?

Mark Roberts: No, it can be done, but you need to have the measures that we have suggested, which are really rigorous stewarding plans, ensuring that if there are 15 people on a row, there are only 15 people on a row, and they are the right people. If there is a family there, they cannot get shoved out of the way because a load of people decide they to want to stand together.

Q155 Giles Watling: Thank you. I will move on, finally, to alcohol and the use thereof. We saw horrific scenes in the video you showed us, and you have to remember that these are not just punch-ups; these are obviously life-changing things that are happening—we see serious injury happening to people. There is the Zone Ex area, which I believe is the area outside the stadia up to about a mile or so from it. One example we saw on the video was a bin full of beer bottles, which provided ready ammunition for these people. It seems nuts that that should have been there. What are you doing about that sort of thing to police Zone Ex?

Mark Roberts: One of the major points that needs fleshing out is who actually owns Zone Ex, because people are hosting events—it is documented and agreed—that are private. There is this area around it. Is it the event organiser who is responsible? Is it the police? We have mentioned the fact that the police cannot charge for being on it. A bit of clarity is needed about who legally owns the responsibility around Zone



Ex. It will depend on the game. If I was a silver commander policing a big game, I would do a physical walk round the stadium before the game, or I would have one of my bronzes and attack advisers to go and look for building rubble, bins and that sort of thing. There is probably a point that the licensed premises themselves should be thinking ahead that it is a football match, so they have a responsibility to do it. For a high-risk match, as I say, I would walk the ground with the attack adviser and look for particular things like that.

Q156 Giles Watling: Thank you very much. Moving on to alcohol abuse, it has been said by some critics that prohibition incentivises binge drinking and pre-loading because people are not able to sip at a beer during the course of a match or whatever it is they are looking at in the stadium. It can lead to fans arriving late, which causes congestion. It can encourage fans to quickly consume alcohol, because I believe that the prohibition is in sight of the pitch or field. It encourages drinking in public spaces and pubs rather than the stadia, and the stadia are tightly regulated so you can control it.

You are never going to win the alcohol argument, but is there not an argument that removing the prohibition and then allowing specialist officers to integrate with the crowd might be a better way of handling alcohol misuse at stadia?

Mark Roberts: I think that was the submission of Cliff Stott and Geoff Pearson.

Giles Watling: Yes.

Mark Roberts: I have given a detailed written response on all those points. As to pricing, no, I do not accept the argument at all. The reason fans arrive late is because they would rather drink in licensed premises. They would rather socialise with their friends. The perception is that alcohol in grounds is overpriced, and it is not as nice an environment. In effect, if you removed the prohibition, people would still drink to excess outside, then arrive and carry on drinking. You would afford them 90 minutes' extra time to drink more alcohol and cause us more problems.

If the argument is that it would be financially beneficial for clubs, I do not think it would, because you would have so many problems that they would have to pay for more police in the stadiums to deal with the issues. You then have the issues of people throwing beer in the air, which you see all the time at Boxpark and the like. If you are there with your family and every time a goal goes in, you get a lager shampoo, it does not make it conducive.

You then have the problem at rugby games, where fans can drink, that every time a try is scored, someone gets a round in. You continually have people standing up, going for a drink, going to the toilet and coming back. As they come back, they are spilling beer on people. It is going to



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cause more trouble. To suggest that we should be bringing alcohol back is a really dangerous argument. The risks massively outweigh it.

Giles Watling: Are there any other views on this?

Martyn Henderson: I recognise the issues that you have set out around late arrivals, binge drinking and pre-loading. There is a safety case to be made, potentially looking at the overcrowding and getting to concourses in and around half time, when people are looking to go and drink as much as they can. I recognise that there are issues and they deserve some examination, but now is not really the time, given the film that we saw at the start and the debate we have been having today. Tracey Crouch recommended a trial at the very lower end of the football pyramid, where the prohibition kicks in, rather than at a Football League ground or a Premier League ground, but the time is not right for that.

Q157 **Giles Watling:** It is not an on/off switch?

Mark Roberts: I am sorry, but I disagree with Martyn and Tracey Crouch's view on this. You saw from the video some of the non-league grounds where there was quite serious violence. They will not have the access to the stewards. They will not be able to pay for the security staff. They certainly would not be able to pay for the levels of policing required. There is not normally CCTV. There is no segregation. You are pouring alcohol into a situation that is more difficult to manage in any case. As I say, the benefit of selling a few extra pints would be massively outweighed, because they would get disorder and then they would have a policing bill.

Giles Watling: Thank you.

Q158 **Julie Elliott:** Before I go on to what I want to ask, I want to come back to something you said on safe standing, Mark. You said they need to ensure that people are not pushing families and young kids out of the way. Do you really think that young children are going to be in safe standing areas where they will not be able to see anything?

Mark Roberts: It would be nice if they had the option. If people and families choose not to go in them, it should be because they choose not to go in them. There is a real danger if the safe standing area is only for males aged 15 to 55. That is not the sort of—

Julie Elliott: I am 5 feet 4 inches, and I would not dream of going in a safe standing area because I would not be able to see a single bit of the match.

Mark Roberts: That is absolutely your choice, but part of the deal that should come with safe standing is that in other parts of the stadium, the rule should be rigorously enforced and people should predominantly stay in the seats. I mentioned Cardiff. That was something they did particularly well. I have a concern with disabled supporters travelling away because, in effect, a lot of the away facilities end up as standing all



the time. If there is an element where people can stand in safe standing areas, it needs to be enforced that in other parts of the ground, you sit down, because if you are a younger person, disabled or elderly—

Q159 **Julie Elliott:** Should that not be enforced in any case?

Mark Roberts: Of course it should, yes.

Q160 **Julie Elliott:** I am not a huge fan of safe standing, I have to say. I was very concerned this year about the position that Liverpool fans were put in at the Champions League final. They were paying a lot of money to go and watch their team at a huge match and, quite frankly, they were treated appallingly by everyone involved in policing and supporting them at that event. What more do you think the Government or sporting bodies can do to protect UK fans who genuinely go abroad to watch their clubs?

Mark Roberts: It is a perennial challenge. When the national teams or the Champions League teams travel abroad, we always send a visiting police delegation. There was a contingent of Merseyside officers in Paris. We are there as guests; we have no power. We seek to influence; we seek to control. We try to give advice on the best way to deal with our supporters, but we are really beholden to the host country, and sometimes there is only so far you can push it.

I travelled for a Champions League game in a European country and was thrown out of the control room because I was asking questions about the way the fans were being dealt with. We try to do that lobbying behind closed doors, because we try to maintain relationships and we need to ensure that we have effective relationships with the host police. The FA, for example, puts every effort into wrapping support around their membership, the clubs and their safety advisers.

The flipside to it is that we absolutely need to ensure that the people we send abroad are the genuine fans, because I have seen too many times when a minority will initiate trouble. The policing styles in a lot of European countries differ. As you saw in Paris, once the tipping point is reached, there is a relatively indiscriminate use of CS gas and water cannon.

Julie Elliott: There was not really a tipping point in Paris.

Mark Roberts: In their perception. I am not suggesting that—

Q161 **Julie Elliott:** All the reports that have come out after that game are that the fans were pretty much genuine fans, including a lot of families, and they were treated appallingly.

Mark Roberts: Absolutely. To be clear, I am saying that a general tactic in a lot of European countries is that when a tipping point is reached, they will deploy CS gas, water cannon and tactics we would not typically use on a crowd, for the reasons that you say—because you have families



and decent supporters. We try to be more discerning in our use of force. The pictures spoke for themselves in Paris—the scenes of CS gas being randomly used on people just trying to get out of a crush. You can imagine the level of scrutiny and investigation that would have happened in this country if we had done that.

Q162 Julie Elliott: Do you think Government can do anything to try to stop that happening at a governmental level?

Mark Roberts: It is Government liaison. Before major tournaments, the Foreign Office will liaise with the relevant home department of wherever the team is visiting. It is a conversation on that level. There is a balance to be had in how far you push it, because if we break a relationship with the people who are hosting us, then we become irrelevant and have no influence whatsoever. Certainly, for the policing delegation, it is a question of trying to push things as far as we possibly can but retain some influence, and then it is for the Government to liaise with the host country.

Q163 Julie Elliott: It does not sound wonderful. We have the World Cup coming up in Qatar in the next few weeks. Have you worked with the FA and others to ensure the safety of British fans at the World Cup in Qatar?

Mark Roberts: Absolutely. We have been engaging with Qatar directly for a couple of years now. We work with the FA. We always work jointly with the FA and the FCDO whenever we travel abroad, so that we get one UK perspective. We have given training to Qatari commanders. We have given training to Cicerones, who are the people who will accompany the various visiting delegations.

I have shown videos of how fans behave in Europe to try to get across to the Qatari authorities what they might experience, because it tends to be a very ordered society. There is very little disorder, antisocial behaviour or, indeed, crime. We have really had to labour the point that football fans who are noisy, boisterous and jumping around are not necessarily a problem, to try to prepare the ground for what we will get there.

In terms of this deployment, we are sending a head of delegation for England and Wales. We are sending the spotters that we always send and—this is new for this tournament—we are sending 15 supporter engagement officers whose primary role will be to liaise with our own supporters and the local law enforcement. There is a large contingent of Turkish public order police who are going to be supporting the Qataris.

The whole aim is to deploy our officers to liaise with the fans and try to ensure they do not do anything that will draw attention to them. Equally, we will speak to the local law enforcement to reassure them that our people are not causing a problem. If there is any offence caused, whatever we might view of it, if it was going to provoke a policing response, we want to be able to intervene with our fans and warn them and try to head things off at the pass.



Q164 **Julie Elliott:** I have been reading some unpleasant things recently about the position of LGBT fans travelling to Qatar. Bearing in mind that Qatar criminalises homosexuality, which is very different to our country and most countries around the world, what has been done to stop the persecution of LGBT fans? They should be able to travel and watch the game in the same way as anyone else of any other sexuality. What has been done to ensure that they will be safe and not persecuted?

Mark Roberts: That really falls within the remit of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. They are liaising on a Government-to-Government level. You will be aware that Government and various entities here have made representations. Our job is, whatever the context ends up, to try to put our officers in the right place to look after all our supporters and prevent any harm coming to them.

Q165 **Julie Elliott:** Do you think there is enough being done?

Mark Roberts: Once the decision is taken to hold a World Cup in a very different culture then, certainly from a policing perspective, that is the position set. All we can do is try to get enough people out there to support the local authorities in having a peaceful tournament and to look after our supporters.

From a policing perspective, yes, we are doing everything we can. We are working with the FSA; we will work with the FA; we will work with the FCDO. We will try to influence and support the Qataris to deliver a safe event. We did it in Russia, which was a fairly challenging place to work last time around. It worked really well, and we will continue to do that. We are sending a very experienced team out and will do everything we can to prevent any trouble and look after our supporters.

Q166 **Julie Elliott:** Given the experience of football fans travelling to France this year, do you believe British fans will be safe at the upcoming rugby union World Cup and the Olympics in France?

Mark Roberts: Yes. You can only base it on previous events, and there is no real history of disorder at rugby world cups. I have watched England play a couple of times at that stadium, and there were no issues. Before it is mentioned, we lost both times. There were no issues; it was a generally relaxed environment. Clearly, there were issues with general crime around that stadium and the number of gangs that were there looking to target people.

Q167 **Julie Elliott:** It is not in the centre of Paris; it is outside of Paris, and transport links are not good.

Mark Roberts: As I said, when I went for rugby matches, there were no issues whatsoever, but dynamics change. Clearly, there were criminal gangs of locals looking to target the Liverpool and Madrid supporters on the way out of the stadium. One would assume that that threat has now been identified and there is a policing plan to mitigate against that risk.



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Julie Elliott: Thank you.

Q168 **Clive Efford:** Did what happened at the Wembley final do damage to our international representation as a country that can hold major international tournaments, Mr Henderson?

Martyn Henderson: Obviously, it would have caused some damage. I do not think it has caused any permanent damage. It was a UEFA fixture that was being hosted here, and UEFA is still planning to host further fixtures at Wembley Stadium.

There were some unique factors that led to what happened on that day. It is quite widely accepted that they were unique factors. UEFA would have been trying to organise tournaments in several different countries with several different Covid regimes, and it would have been an absolute nightmare, so it would understand that those were a very special set of circumstances.

Q169 **Clive Efford:** The issue of stewarding identified by the Casey review says specifically that Wembley were aware of the shortcomings among the stewards in terms of training and experience, that a number had been lost due to the pandemic and that they basically failed to address that. Is that a failing on the part of Wembley?

Martyn Henderson: No. It is quite difficult to think back, but when the tournament started, Wembley had very low capacities, and we eventually built up to about three quarters capacity for the final. I was working with them to get the stadium ready for the Euros, because it had been closed for almost 18 months due to the Covid pandemic. When they put on test events, they started to identify this issue and, of course, the more the capacities grew, the more stewards were needed.

In the Casey review, there was a recognition that things were improving over the course of the tournament, to the point when we got to the semi-final and there was significant improvement in the stewarding. There is no level of stewarding that could have coped with the way that event transpired. The stewards from the stadium were essentially responsible for the stadium and the immediate circulatory area around the stadium. Wembley Way was out of control that day for a number of reasons. Stewarding was an issue within the stadium, but it was not the central issue that led to the problems.

Q170 **Clive Efford:** In terms of stewarding, the Casey review is quite clear that the loss of experienced stewards left Wembley's stewarding operation vulnerable. She says that Wembley were "aware of concerns around the experience, age and training of stewards". She talks about the security industry being hard hit during the pandemic. She also, very importantly, says that "Many stewards showed courage in the face of unprecedented violence and aggression." She did identify that there was a problem with stewarding, but it was known by Wembley ahead of the event.



Martyn Henderson: It was known, and they were acting on it, but what Louise Casey was pointing to there, particularly, was the arrangements inside the stadium. In the build-up to the final—we have to think back to what an incredible summer that was, and all the hype that was associated with England's success on the pitch—we were seeing quite unprecedented scenes on the concourse.

Going back to Mark's comments about drinking, there were some serious problems in the stadium, and that is my primary concern. That concern was identified and addressed. It was improving, and there were more SIA operatives brought in and positioned in different parts of the ground. The FA—I know they are coming to speak to your next session—would absolutely accept that they knew they had a problem they needed to deal with. They did a pretty good job in getting the stewarding workforce ready for what was taking place in extraordinary circumstances.

Q171 **Chair:** You said the FA did a good job there. Our Committee's perception is, frankly, that they tried to blame everyone but themselves.

Martyn Henderson: I do not wish to comment on that, but in terms of the stadium operation—let us separate that from the FA as a corporate entity—I do not think the stadium operation blamed everybody else. Again, in Louise Casey's report you can see her analysis of what took place in the safety advisory groups and the meetings that were taking place in and around that. I was part of all of those. They were responding very dynamically to a very challenging situation.

Chair: We were lucky not to have dozens of deaths that night.

Martyn Henderson: Absolutely, but I would not link that to the stewarding operation. I do not think that was a part of the stewarding operation.

Q172 **Clive Efford:** The Casey review also said that the policing deployment was late and did not "sufficiently mitigate" foreseeable risks. Was there a failure of the police on that day?

Mark Roberts: The Metropolitan police have done their own statements on it. If you want my view of that particular event, I can give you that, but it is quite detailed. You need to start with the physical infrastructure around Wembley, which has been changed. If you look at the crowd dynamics, the flow comes in from Wembley Park tube. There is a flow of people, and it keeps coming, and if steps are not taken to manage that, it builds up a real pressure at the outer security perimeter. The outer security perimeter was not strong enough.

As Martyn has alluded to, in some regards, the task for the Met kept on getting made harder because the capacities that were planned on changed during the tournament, with communications from UEFA into Government. The capacity was increased as the tournament progressed, so it went outwith the planning assumptions that had been made.



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There were other issues such as the Covid checking. The Met and I made a proposal that the screening for Covid certification should be done at a remote site, as had been done for the previous Champions League final, where people went to a site, were checked and were issued a wristband, so that you did not have people turning up at the outer security point with a steward saying, "Show me your Covid pass. Now, show me your ticket," while all the time you have this mass of people coming down.

Q173 Clive Efford: Why was that not done?

Mark Roberts: We made the recommendation, and it was not taken up.

Clive Efford: By UEFA?

Mark Roberts: That would have been a matter for the event organisers and the DCMS, who were involved in the meetings. I will come on to the policing, but it is quite a complex thing.

Clive Efford: I am afraid I will have to go in a minute, because I have a question in the House, so please keep it brief.

Mark Roberts: In terms of the police, if you look at how the Met have now changed the operation around Wembley, where there are dedicated zones for the fans, there is a proactive approach to stopping people drinking and congregating in groups. That seems to have made a massive difference.

Q174 Clive Efford: I have one last question. I was at Wembley for the FA Cup semi-final where there was a fight between Millwall fans in the stadium. What I witnessed that day was the difficulty the police had in gaining access to the stadium to deal with the incident. Is there an issue with enforcement within the ground? Is there a flaw in the design? The police seemed to have real difficulty getting up the staircase and into the ground. Is that something that has ever been identified, because it seems to have also been a problem at the European championships?

Martyn Henderson: It is not a concern that has been raised with me. The problem with the police at the Euros final was that they could not defend the stadium because they were trying to withhold the outer perimeter. You did see quite a lot of criminality and terrible things on the concourses and in the ground, but that was because the police were deployed elsewhere and could not be deployed inside the stadium, rather than there being a problem in circulating within the stadium.

Q175 Clive Efford: So there is no problem when they need to gain access in the way that they did at that semi-final? They seemed to find it really difficult.

Martyn Henderson: I am not aware of any issue there. You will have the stadium director coming before you, presumably. He would be better placed to answer that.

Chair: That concludes our session. Michelle Russell, Mark Roberts, Peter



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Houghton and Martyn Henderson, thank you very much.