

Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Football Policing, HC 1553

Monday 1 December 2025

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Members present: Dame Karen Bradley (Chair); Mr Paul Kohler; Robbie Moore; Margaret Mullane; Peter Prinsley; Bell Ribeiro-Addy; Jo White.

Questions 1-147

Witnesses

[I](#): Lord Mann, Independent Adviser on Antisemitism.

[II](#): Craig Guildford, Chief Constable, West Midlands Police; Mike O'Hara, Assistant Chief Constable, West Midlands Police; Simon Foster, West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner.

[III](#): Sarah Jones MP, Minister of State for Policing and Crime Prevention; Richard Clarke, Director General, Public Safety Group, Home Office.

Examination of witness

Witness: Lord Mann.

Chair: I welcome our first witness, on our first panel, in the one-off session that our Committee is holding to investigate the events surrounding the decision to ban away fans at the Aston Villa-Maccabi Tel Aviv game.

Before we start, there will be some declarations of interest. I declare that I am an officer and member of the Conservative Friends of Israel.

Jo White: I am a member of Labour Friends of Israel.¹

Mr Kohler: I have received a donation of £2,000 from the Lib Dem Friends of Israel.

Peter Prinsley: I am a Jewish Labour MP.²

Chair: We very much welcome your appearance here, Lord Mann. Would you like to introduce yourself, and then we will get into questions?

Lord Mann: I am John Mann, Lord Mann. I am the independent adviser to the Government. I am on my fifth Prime Minister.

Q1 **Peter Prinsley:** Thank you very much for coming this afternoon. What do you see as your role in this issue?

Lord Mann: My role is to advise Government on antisemitism. I am independent, so I am free to do it how I choose and the Government are free to keep appointing me or not; they have done so far. When I saw what happened in Amsterdam, I thought that there was a danger, in this country, that it would lead to various consequences, and I rather boldly say that I have been proven almost exactly correct in terms of what has happened. So I went to Amsterdam; I also went to Rotterdam and Utrecht. I met everybody involved and I talked about what had happened, in a huge amount of detail, and what they were going to do to prevent such a thing from happening again.

Q2 **Peter Prinsley:** So had you been making representations to the Government about the risk of the Israeli football fans coming here?

Lord Mann: I wrote a report when I came back. That was sent across Government; it was sent to the police. I had some discussions in relation

¹ Jo White subsequently declared as a relevant interest that she has been for 40 years the spouse of Lord Mann, the Government's independent unpaid adviser on antisemitism.

² I am a member of Labour Friends of Israel. I travelled with Labour Friends of Israel to Israel in May of last year. I also attempted to travel to Israel with the Council for the Advancement of Arab-British Understanding and was banned from entering Israel later in the year, so I have been twice but only got in once. I am also a member of the Board of Deputies of British Jews.



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to it. What I identified as the key problem in Amsterdam—first, there had been a problem, and secondly it had been greatly exaggerated, in my opinion, and the facts bear me out on that. But because it had been greatly exaggerated all round, if an Israeli team were to play a team in the UK at football, there would be problems, and I identified a range of scenarios in advance of this fixture. One of them, specifically, was Aston Villa playing an Israeli team.

Q3 Peter Prinsley: So when it was established that Maccabi Tel Aviv were coming to play in Birmingham, did you then make further representations to the Government about that?

Lord Mann: Yes. I had made representations during the year. I had sent my document—it went to Downing Street, the Home Office, DCMS and the police—suggesting what might happen in that scenario and giving some advice. I have sent a copy of that document; I believe you have that. And when—I think it was on 29 August—we got this precise fixture, which was exactly the one that I had identified as the highest risk because of the nature of the football stadium, the nature of the community, the diversity of the community and the numbers of fans who support Maccabi Tel Aviv, I tried to press buttons in order to mitigate and solve the problems that I thought would occur.

Q4 Peter Prinsley: What I am hearing is that the Government, or somebody in the Government, must have been well aware of the likely difficulties before the decision was made to ban.

Lord Mann: I met with civil servants, yes, and I should say that I made a specific proposal immediately to everybody, which was that the time of this fixture should be brought forward, and very explicitly, because I identified that one of the problems would be that Israeli fans from Tel Aviv, with the 8 o'clock fixed kick-off, would have to stay in Birmingham overnight. Whoever is causing whatever kind of problems, the conflict and the issues of dealing with it would be far worse if you had visiting fans staying overnight, whereas an earlier kick-off would allow people to come from London and get back.

Q5 Peter Prinsley: Given that what happened did happen, what do you think about the Government's response to what happened?

Lord Mann: I think Government need to have a clear plan for problems that are identifiable in advance. I think football needs to have a clearer plan, and I think policing needs to have a clearer plan. Everything that happened, in my view, was highly predictable: not the specific of banning the Israeli fans, but the public interest, because you have a group of people who very openly and democratically want to prohibit Israeli football clubs and supporters clubs playing in this country, so there is going to be a political protest—that is not just a situation in this country—and you have an Israeli club that has supporters, and they are going to want to play. The potential for this being a different kind of problem was obvious to me and, I would have thought, obvious to everyone.

Q6 Peter Prinsley: My final question, on the basis of what you have said, is



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this: is it your opinion that at some point there was political interference in the decision to ban the supporters, and was this the result of a prejudiced assessment of the advice and information?

Lord Mann: It would be a long answer to go through all of that. I was surprised at the decision to ban the fans. I do not think that that was the most appropriate decision in the circumstances, nor the most sensible decision. That has nothing to do with politics; that has to do with the practicalities of how to avoid conflict in a conflict situation.

What I would have done—and what I proposed when it was clear that the kick-off time was not changing, although I would have done it anyway—is use a traditional, much-used football policing technique: insist that the visiting fans be required to get tickets to the match and get on coaches; be searched before they go on the coaches, with a police officer on each coach; and be taken in and out of Birmingham under police escort. That is a scenario that I am very familiar with; it is a scenario that I have experienced in this country. That would have been a better solution.

Q7 **Chair:** Did you have any discussions with local government, or does your role go only to national Government?

Lord Mann: I wrote to Birmingham city council. I gave them a copy of my report. I wrote them a letter, suggesting the idea of fans coming by coach and saying that that was a tried and tested method, in advance of their decision making.

Q8 **Peter Prinsley:** Do you think that they just ignored that?

Lord Mann: Birmingham city council did. That was highly precise. I am very familiar with this area of work. I should declare an interest: I chair the football supporters group at Leeds. We run far more coaches than any other supporters group in England. I often have to deal personally with the police, and sometimes negotiate with the police, over problem football matches and getting away fans safely in and out—safely for them, for the home fans and for the local community. I was coming at this not from some intellectual or political perspective, but from a pragmatic perspective.

Birmingham city council does not have operational policing powers. As for safety advisory groups, my understanding is that they have two powers that they could use: they could say that there will be no fans, and the licence to hold the fixture will have no spectators; or they could say that there will be no event. Those are their powers. Everything else—certainly from my dealings in the past—would be an operational issue for the police. The city council can suggest things, but cannot be in a position to enforce the detail of how away fans are dealt with.

Chair: I have been an away fan at overseas fixtures. You have to provide your passport, and there are certain conditions about where you are allowed to get off the underground or whatever it might be.

Lord Mann: We also use that in this country. I could give plenty of examples of where that happens and has happened.

Q9 Chair: Exactly—it is not at all an uncommon thing.

You said that you spoke to Home Office officials. Did you have any ministerial engagement?

Lord Mann: I spoke to DCMS officials. I had no response from the Home Office.

Chair: So you did not speak to Home Office officials?

Lord Mann: I had no response. The DCMS officials said that they would convene a meeting with the Home Office. If they did, I was not invited to it.

Chair: And did you have any ministerial engagement at all?

Lord Mann: After the fixture, I spoke to Ministers as well—not before.

Q10 Chair: So the timeline is that you went to Amsterdam; you produced your report; the report went to the Government; the Home Office have never responded; DCMS did respond; then, when the fixture was announced, you identified this as a potentially difficult fixture, because of the nature of where the ground is and the stadium, with its exits, entry and things like that. Is that the issue?

Lord Mann: At Aston Villa?

Chair: Yes.

Lord Mann: No, Aston Villa is a very straightforward ground to take coaches to. It is one of the easiest, given the distance from the A38, which is dual carriageway at spaghetti junction, to the stadium. We send our coaches there, so I know. There are choices about where they are parked, if Aston Villa are co-operating.

I should say that I spoke to Aston Villa a number of times, and I spoke to Maccabi Tel Aviv a number of times. Both were incredibly co-operative. I have literally no criticisms. They handled the whole issue maturely and sensibly at every stage. Getting coaches to Aston Villa is straightforward: it is one of the easier grounds to get to, because it has sufficient parking at and around the stadium, so that was a practical possibility, not just a theoretical one.

Q11 Peter Prinsley: It seems to me that you are a uniquely placed individual in this respect: not only are you the Government's antisemitism adviser, but you have this great expertise in football and football crowds. You took a great deal of care before this episode to do everything that was expected of you. You produced some advice, which seems to have been ignored. Is that a fair summary?

Lord Mann: The role of advisers is to give advice.

Peter Prinsley: I know!

Lord Mann: I should say that I have spoken in Amsterdam at Ajax football club on hooligans, ultra groups and football culture, and with Anne



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Frank House, which has run a campaign across Europe called Changing the Chants. I have been very involved in this kind of work, including micro-discussions in Amsterdam 10 years before this fixture on football culture, the issue of hooliganism, and how that relates to the Jewish community. I could go into infinite detail about it; I think it is a bit of a distraction from what you are trying to achieve, but I do have quite a lot of knowledge on the subject, I would say.

Q12 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: Lord Mann, you talked about coaches being put on in the UK for similar scenarios. Has this ever been done specifically because of threats of racist violence and particular threats to local residents, as opposed to people involved in the match?

Lord Mann: When I have negotiated—sometimes it is negotiating; usually, it is listening and discussing—with the police over football fixtures, the interaction with the local community is absolutely an issue. How do you separate fans? How many tickets do you get? How do you get in and out? How do you get there safely? How do you avoid a clash between fans? For example, do you have away fans being encouraged to go in a city centre before or after a fixture? What is the transport from a city centre to a stadium? These are fundamental issues. The potential clashes or antagonisms could be with people who are going to a football match, but it could just as easily be with locals who, from whatever perspective, feel they have a vested interest in not welcoming you.

Q13 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: When you talk about city centres, I think about what happened in Amsterdam, and particularly where the fans congregated. I want to touch on the issue of the racist violence and the things that were being chanted. Reports from people like Kick It Out Israel have found Maccabi fans chanting things like, “Why is school out in Gaza? There are no children there,” and “Death to Arabs.” I think the West Midlands police said that one of the main reasons for the ban was that the hooliganism specifically put local residents at threat, totally unconnected to the match. I was wondering how you think there are ways to get around that, other than specifically banning them in the way that has been done?

Lord Mann: We need to differentiate. I have been with the Kick It Out Israel campaign. I have been to clubs in Israel. I have been to Arab clubs. I have been to Jewish-owned clubs. I have been with them to Maccabi Tel Aviv specifically and have looked at the situation there and the Maccabi Tel Aviv derbies. I have been with them to Beitar Jerusalem; I have been with them to Bnei Sakhnin. I am very familiar with their work, and I am very familiar with the issue of chanting—racist chanting and other aggressive chanting.

Quite a bit of the chanting in this country these days is still aggressive, horrific chanting, but it is not racist; I am not sure how much of a progression that is, but it used to be all racist. An example is the so-called Munich song in relation to Manchester United. If you want to cause problems in Manchester, you go and sing that song: it causes problems, and it will get a huge reaction. So there is the question of racist chanting



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and songs, and there is the question of racist violence or any other violence.

I have looked at the intelligence report from the West Midlands police. I struggle with some of the intelligence within it, including the intelligence about Amsterdam. It does not concur with the discussions I had in Amsterdam and the facts I saw in Amsterdam. I had the opportunity to look in great detail at who was arrested, the profile of people arrested, where the arrests took place, what the allegations were and, later, some of the convictions, and what happened when and where.

I have a copy—I believe you do too—of the statement of facts done by the chief of police from Amsterdam. What happened in Amsterdam, in what was generally a very good policing operation, not a very bad policing operation—it was almost a classical policing operation—helps inform but does not fully inform the situation in Birmingham, because there were no arrests for Maccabi Tel Aviv fans attacking local Dutch people. There were none. There is a warrant out for one person at the moment—I do not know the details, but I suspect it is for a violent attack. Whether that is on police or a local, I do not know, because the details are not out, but in terms of what happened in Amsterdam, that was not the big issue, because that did not happen.

The suggestion that Maccabi Tel Aviv fans were going around Amsterdam trying to find local people, specifically from the Muslim community, and going into “Muslim areas”—that did not happen. What happened was that they acted as ultras. The ultra culture is pretty commonplace: you go to a city, and you all go together, in your colours, to the city centre. That happened here. They mixed with Ajax so-called ultras, who were there the day before in the square, drinking all day with them. They sang songs—many of them, on both sides, hugely objectionable songs and, from the Israeli side, without question, racist songs. Some flares were let off. And that was it.

From a policing point of view, they contained those visitors. On the day of the fixture itself, there was one arrest of one Israeli going from the square, and that was clearly behaving improperly in terms of the policing. So one Israeli was arrested. I believe that one person on a Palestinian demonstration, which was kept separate, was arrested at the same time. That was it on the day, until after the fixture, so from a policing point of view, I would say—this is my observation to this day—that actually Amsterdam police, with 1,200 police officers, not 5,000, handled it extremely well.

It then went wrong after the fixture, in the evening—there are reasons it went wrong—and a number of Israelis were attacked on the street. Five were hospitalised, none seriously enough to be detained, and around 30 to 40 had minor injuries. That, in football terms, is an issue; it is not a massive, unusual event. But there is no evidence of any local people from the Netherlands having been injured—none.

Q14 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: I suppose a lot of it is about risk. From what the



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police were saying, it seems that their actions were about preventing that risk. The reports that have come out of Amsterdam, despite the arrests, sound quite different. Obviously, we have very specific laws in this country about racism, so if there was a risk of any sort of racist or antisemitic chanting, would it not be expected that we would put certain measures in place to prevent this before it happened?

Lord Mann: Potentially, but the laws in Amsterdam and the Netherlands are not weaker than our laws. What would I have expected to happen? In my view, if you had 1,000 or 1,500 Israeli fans walking through Birmingham and staying in Birmingham, the risk of something happening increases significantly.

Who the instigators of the problems are cannot be predicted easily. But the answer to that is that you separate the potential clashing fans, or the clashing community and fans. The way you do that is simply by reaching agreement that they are going to go on coaches. It is a pretty simple solution; it is regularly used in derby matches. When my club goes to Newcastle, let me tell you what we have to do—and there is no particular antagonism there. My club is Leeds.

Chair: I guessed that bit.

Lord Mann: I am elected by the fans, for some reason, to be their fan leader. There is no particular antagonism between Newcastle and Leeds, but our coaches are required to stop at Washington service station, and we are then taken by police convoy to Newcastle. My members get very aggravated about it, because they do not see why that should happen; it means they have no contact with anyone in Newcastle, football fan or otherwise. I suspect that the policing rationale is that it may be cheaper to do it that way, and it is more efficient—it stops a problem. That happens in our country at derby matches regularly to stop those clashes. Those clashes are clashes inside communities.

Let me give you an example: with Preston versus Blackburn, both football stadiums are inside big communities, not dissimilar to Aston Villa. If you have those two clubs, which see themselves as major rivals, playing, then you want to ensure that the visiting fans from one club do not try to antagonise the whole city of Blackburn or Preston. Their aim is probably to antagonise the fans of said club, but with their songs, chants and behaviour, the risk is that they will antagonise both. That is an obvious example of where a good police solution would keep those sets of fans away, and has done. There are many examples like that.

For the lessons going forward, if you have a view that no Israeli club—or fan, therefore—should be allowed in this country, that is a political view. *[Interruption.]* I don't mean you, but if one does. There are people in Birmingham who explicitly have that view—who said before, during and after that that is what they wanted. There is going to be a protest, because some people think that there should be no match taking place. That has to be dealt with by the police, and, at a distance, by the council. My problem with how it was done was that some of the intelligence was



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not very good—some of it was not intelligence at all—and the tactics used could have been better.

Going forward, my paper makes some recommendations to Government. I suggested that should there be such a fixture anywhere in the country again, a small taskforce should be set up, mitigating the risk and negotiating. One surprising fact about negotiating with Maccabi Tel Aviv is that the ultras were not coming. The Maccabi ultras—the so-called Fanatics—were not coming. I know that because after the fixture was announced, I presumed they would be, and that was going to be the problem. I feared that they would do what they normally do, which is charter a flight, and fly into Birmingham. I did not think that would be very helpful.

I spoke to Villa and to Maccabi Tel Aviv, and I suggested to both clubs that the number of tickets be reduced, that the fans be coached in—the fans therefore had to go to London—and that they could not stay in Birmingham. Maccabi Tel Aviv told me that they had talked with their ultra groups and their ultra groups would not be going. It is very hard to stop individuals going. Ultra groups organise their own transport. That means a charter plane from Israel. They will organise their own transport over. They go as a group. Ultra culture is about the collective watching of football. There are thousands of examples across Europe; it is not particularly a thing in this country.

I can give you an example from Saturday in this country, which you perhaps will not be aware of. On Saturday, Airdrie football club played Hamilton in the Scottish Cup. Airdrie won 4-0. There were 345 people at the fixture. Between 70 and 80 of them—the ultras from the two groups—had a mass fight before the fixture. One in four of the spectators had a mass fight. That is ultra culture. It is not very helpful. They did it in a field, so probably away from—I am guessing—local communities, but that is not very helpful to anybody.

Ultra culture needs to be understood in the football context, and these ultras travel as a group. Therefore, when Maccabi Tel Aviv told me they were not coming, it meant they were not coming. It was other people coming. So the risk factor from that reduces dramatically. Just as if there was an ultra group from Aston Villa who were antagonistic towards an ultra group in, say, Israel, that is a problem. In this case there was not, because Aston Villa's so-called ultra groups are pretty small. Certainly in my experience of them they have not caused a great deal of problems. I suspect if it is Aston Villa- Birmingham City, that might be a different context.

One looks and has to mitigate risk. Early on in the intelligence report, it says: "The most recent match Maccabi played in the UK was against West Ham in the Europa Conference League on 9 November 2023. This was part of the '23-24 European campaign. It marked Maccabi Tel Aviv's last competitive appearance on UK soil to date."



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That is in the intelligence report, but that did not happen. West Ham have never played Maccabi Tel Aviv. On that day, West Ham played Olympiacos of Greece and beat them 1-0. I think Tel Aviv were playing a Ukrainian team somewhere. In the intelligence report, it says that there was a fixture that Maccabi were at in London. If that was the case, I would expect, for a proper police intelligence report, that someone would talk to the Metropolitan police about what happened two years ago when these Maccabi "hooligans", as they are called, came to London, because obviously there would have been problems.

No one could do that because the fixture did not take place, but someone could have done it if they had asked the Irish police about a fixture in Dundalk. Ireland is not the most positive country towards Israel, I think it is fair to say—certainly its Government. Maccabi Tel Aviv played in Dundalk, so there will be a report from the Irish police from not that long ago. The last fixture here was actually against Chelsea. I went to it.

There were 3,000 Maccabi fans, so there is a Met police intelligence report and a report of the fixture. Before that it was Stoke City. Stoke, I think it is reasonable to say, is not too dissimilar from Birmingham in terms of demography. Maccabi played in Stoke, so there will be an intelligence report from Stoke. Maccabi have played 103 away European fixtures. That means there are 102 policing reports on Maccabi Tel Aviv. Tickets for next week's match at Stuttgart are on sale in Israel. Maccabi fans are going. The German police have had to make an intelligence report on exactly the same issue because of the risks.

UEFA fines clubs. UEFA can give you that information. I had an online meeting with UEFA at the start of the process to ask what their procedure was, and UEFA fines clubs. I have looked at all the fines that Maccabi Tel Aviv have had in the last 25 years. They had one for what could be called violence; I think the term was "crowd disturbance", but I am calling it violence. It was in a small place called Győr in Hungary in 2013. They had a number of incidents with what UEFA call fireworks but we would call flares in this country. The risk factor with Maccabi Fanatics—their ultra group—is flares. Like many ultra groups, they like to use flares. If they bring flares, that is going to be a problem.

On the same night that Tel Aviv played, AZ Alkmaar played Crystal Palace. They did a march to the match with the police accompanying them. When they marched to Selhurst Park, they were lighting flares—in fact, they were fireworks. It was near bonfire night so you could buy fireworks in this country. I think we would call them rockets—they were not flares that you hold up; they were rockets that fired. They were fired into the local communities. They marched, accompanied by the police, to Selhurst Park. That was the same night.

Last week, Malmö played at Nottingham Forest. There was fighting by the Malmö fans with stewards and police at Nottingham Forest. Bayern played at Arsenal. There was fighting between Bayern and the stewards at Arsenal. Celtic played at Rotterdam last week. The Rotterdam fans fired rockets—real fireworks, not flares—into the stadium in live time when fans



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were in the stadium and Celtic fans were assaulted inside the stadium in significant numbers. That is last week at football. I could go on and on with other examples.

If you want to see the problem with flares, Ajax's match against Groningen last night was abandoned because the Ajax ultras, who generally do not have that bad a reputation across Europe, lit so many flares that the match had to be abandoned on safety grounds. You can see that spectacularly online.

The same thing happened in the Hapoel-Maccabi derby after this decision. When that match was cancelled, not a single flare had been fired by Maccabi Tel Aviv because they have a tiny percentage of the stadium for the derby match. They share a stadium. The flares were red—they were Hapoel flares. It was Hapoel. I cannot give a motivation—I think it was partly celebrating the fact that Maccabi had been banned in England, to be honest. They had a massive pyrotechnic display at the stadium and the police cancelled the match. That is what happened.

Maccabi—rationally, in my view—should be seen as a risk on two grounds. I am not trying to cover up problems in football. The first—you are right—is that their chants are racist. Therefore, if they wander through the streets of Birmingham with their chants, they may well get a reaction. That needs to be avoided. The second is flares. It would be useful if the Committee made a recommendation. More work needs to be done on the potential for flares in football—not just from Israelis; there are far worse than Israelis in terms of flares—because that is going to be a growing problem in football. If you look at what happened in Ajax Amsterdam last night, you will see that. I think that would be extremely helpful.

It would also be very helpful if the supporter advisory groups had a fan representative at their meetings. I think it alters the dynamics. The Aston Villa fans should have had someone at the meeting because they have a perspective on this. Let's say there was a clash between the local community and Maccabi Tel Aviv and I am an Aston Villa fan going to the football. People go to football to get away from the world, including politics, and relax. I certainly do, and so does everyone I know who goes. If I am an Aston Villa fan, I am caught up in that. They should have had a say in this at the supporter advisory group. That would be a great recommendation, because it means that the fan voice gets to be heard.

Some of the stuff in the report simply does not match the Amsterdam reports. I think the evidence has been fitted to try to get a solution—which is a solution, because if you do not have the Israeli fans, there is no conflict. However, there is an easier and better solution, which would have been simply to force the separation of the fans. I think that the Aston Villa fans, if they had been asked, would have said, "Well, that will be a better atmosphere. We'd rather have that."

A banning of fans needs to be properly intelligence-led. I will give you an example.



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Chair: I think we could do with moving on to some questions.

Lord Mann: Sorry, Chair, I've given a long answer.

Chair: That's all right—it has been very interesting, and it is really helping us with what we are doing today. We should probably make reference to the fact that last Thursday the game between Villa and Young Boys did not exactly go terribly well in terms of fan behaviour.

Lord Mann: Predictably.

Chair: Yes. But Paul Kohler has questions specifically on the West Midlands police intelligence and perhaps some follow-up questions on some of the things that you have been saying.

Q15 **Mr Kohler:** Before I go to that, I have a very basic question about your report. You submitted it to the Home Office, DCMS and Birmingham city council?

Lord Mann: Birmingham city council only in the middle of the dialogue; the others got it in advance, yes.

Q16 **Mr Kohler:** When did they get it?

Lord Mann: I think I sent it in January. They certainly had it by June, and the police had it in June. So well in advance of the fixture being—

Q17 **Mr Kohler:** You sent it to the police as well?

Lord Mann: The police as well, yes.

Q18 **Mr Kohler:** What was the reaction?

Lord Mann: The police—this is not the West Midlands police; it is the national policing unit—attempted to get a meeting, which did not happen. But that is not because they did not want it to happen; it was because holidays overlapped. DCMS asked for a meeting. I had a meeting and alerted them to what I thought would be the in this case theoretical problem or problems. They said they would convene a meeting to discuss my report. But I heard no more.

Q19 **Mr Kohler:** And the Home Office?

Lord Mann: Nothing.

Q20 **Mr Kohler:** And Birmingham city council—nothing later on?

Lord Mann: Birmingham city council—nothing.

Q21 **Mr Kohler:** Okay. Turning to the intelligence used or cited by the West Midlands police, we know from the history of the Iraq war that "intelligence" is sometimes a one-word oxymoron. What is your view of the intelligence used by the police, or cited by them?

Lord Mann: Well, it is inaccurate: it conflates different things. I will give an example. The report says, "On match day"—I am now jumping about, but still quoting from the report—"inflammatory actions included tearing down Palestinian flags." That did not happen on match day; it happened



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the day before match day. It was one flag. I actually did a full scan, spending several hours in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Utrecht, each time and each day I was there, to see how many Palestinian flags there were, and I was surprised by how few. And the few there that I saw were not hanging outside buildings; they were in windows.

There is no evidence of more than one flag. I think that pulling down a flag is highly inflammatory and will get a bad reaction, so I am not minimising the impact of pulling a flag down. But there was one flag pulled down on the Rokin; there weren't flags. And it did not happen on the Thursday, the match day; it happened on the Wednesday. But the report says that it happened on match day. That is inaccurate; there is no evidential base for that whatsoever.

The report says that there were running street battles between the two groups throughout the day. That did not happen. The so-called "battles" were after the fixture ended—after 11.30 pm. Indeed, during the day the Amsterdam police were very successful in keeping different groups apart. They particularly identified two groups: there were what I would call political protesters—pro-Palestinian protesters, anti-Israel protesters—and there were the Maccabi fans. The Amsterdam police were very successful in keeping them separate. So that did not happen on the day.

As for the several attacks on taxi drivers, there were incidents again on the Rokin—it is the same incident. It is about 45 minutes after the flag was pulled down. It was the night before. Again, that is a problem incident, if, initially, a taxi driver was attacked. I have seen the footage of it; I was shown it in Amsterdam. Then others got involved. It quickly dissipated, but nevertheless that is rightly identified as a problem.

Q22 Mr Kohler: Are you aware of the letter that Mike O'Hara has sent the Committee, justifying the police's role in this?

Lord Mann: No, I have not been sent that.

Q23 Mr Kohler: He speaks about 500 or 600 Maccabi fans deliberately targeting Muslim communities. What do you say to that?

Lord Mann: I have got all the reports from Amsterdam—the Dutch reports. That is conflating two things. What happened—it is in their reports; in fact, I can cite it from their reports—was that after the fixture, on the Thursday, the fans arrived at 11.30 pm in the town centre. Sorry—it was the night before. On the Wednesday night, the fans are on the Rokin. A flag is pulled down. The police identify a group of around 50 fans who then dissipate. One police report suggests that it ends up being around 70 fans, and that there is an altercation with taxi drivers. I have seen the footage and there certainly was an altercation. It involved a smaller number, but the maximum number there was 50 to 70.

There were 400 Israeli fans in a casino. The police got called because there was a group waiting to ambush them outside the casino at about 2.30 am. The police came and again very efficiently stopped any major confrontation. The 400 to 500 figure comes from adding the 400 to that



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smaller group. Now, the smaller group was still a problem for the police obviously—50 people is a sizeable group in football terms, but it is not 500. That is what worries me about the report: the two have been conflated, and that happens repeatedly in this report.

Q24 **Peter Prinsley:** Are you trying to say that the facts have slightly changed to fit the decision?

Lord Mann: Correct.

Peter Prinsley: That would be a summary of what has gone on here?

Lord Mann: Yes.

Q25 **Mr Kohler:** And the reference to 5,000 officers—is that conceivable? It says that 5,000 officers were deployed over a number of days.

Lord Mann: I spoke with the chief of police, Mr Holla. I met the mayor and many other people there. It was not 5,000 officers. The figure I have seen cited in their reports is 1,200.

Q26 **Chair:** Could that be 1,200 multiplied by four? Was it perhaps 1,200 a day?

Lord Mann: On match day it was 1,200.

Chair: So if you multiplied it by four you might get to 5,000.

Lord Mann: You could, but that might give a different impression. Yes, you could—I see your logic.

Q27 **Mr Kohler:** What other factors apart from the Amsterdam intelligence do you think influenced the West Midlands police?

Lord Mann: I think that the West Midlands police wanted a solution to a problem, because there was a problem. My report says that there would be a problem. I do not know whether they attempted to get an earlier kick-off or not—I raised that with them. I do not know if that was attempted and ruled out. The solution of using coaches clearly was not considered. I went to the extent of identifying a potential venue for coaches to assemble in London that was discreet and very straightforward. A coach operation would have been very, very simple, from my football experience. I am simply surprised. That a football match at West Ham is put at the beginning of the report kind of sums up that there was a problem and the problem was solved, but it then had to be got through a committee.

Q28 **Mr Kohler:** To be absolutely clear, are you telling the Committee that the safety of Maccabi fans could have been guaranteed?

Lord Mann: I am absolutely certain that the safety of Maccabi fans could have been guaranteed, if they were taken—that was my advice to Maccabi Tel Aviv. I said: “In my view, you should not have your fans staying in Birmingham. You should not fly directly into Birmingham. You should get your fans to stay in London and we should bus them from London, and you should accept a low number of tickets.” As they had told me that they



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did not anticipate their ultra fans coming, I thought that was very straightforward. Even with their ultra fans coming, fully uniformed in their shirts, and so on, it is very straightforward.

To give one example, if you have people assemble in London to get their ticket, that is where they can be searched, so you have more time to search for flares, and so you can also deal with the flares issue. I thought that was very straightforward. Going forward, I would be surprised if the West Midlands police do not agree that that would be a sensible scenario should there again be such a fixture in their jurisdiction.

Q29 Chair: I just want to summarise your recommendations. You think that kick-off times need to be looked at, so that you do not have the risk of fans staying overnight in a city that might not be safe. You would use coaches and named tickets, presumably with passports and so on, being required to demonstrate that you are who you say. You would recommend more checking for flares when going in. It still astonishes me that I see flares at football matches; they have been illegal at matches for years and years, yet somehow the checking does not seem to pick up flares—I do not know where fans secrete them, but they are always there. You also think that there should be a fan representative on safety advisory groups.

Lord Mann: When football is being discussed.

Chair: Are there any other recommendations that you would make?

Lord Mann: Yes. I think that it would be very helpful if the Government were to give a little bit of resource to the Changing the Chants project, which is precisely aimed at racist chants across Europe. Anne Frank House in Amsterdam has been leading it, and the German clubs have been very involved. I happen to have 20 of the German clubs coming over tomorrow to meet their English counterparts to discuss racism in football, antisemitism in football—which is of course a part of racism—and misogyny and sexism in football. We can learn a lot from Germany.

I have suggested that there could perhaps be a partnership, which the Government might want to ratify, between German football and English football to look at these issues. In German football, they have been very effective at changing the chants and dealing with—this is probably the right word—sexism and some horrific stuff. They have also been very effective at dealing with antisemitism. That exchange would be very useful. If your Committee is powerful enough to prompt the Government, I think that would also be very helpful on an ongoing basis.

Otherwise, we will be back here again. Statistically, an Israeli team will play a British team in a UEFA fixture—the statistical likelihood of that happening is high. A lot of the problems can be avoided. I am much keener to see, as I hope the Committee is, that we solve the next problem rather than spend all our time on the last one. That is what I attempted to do by going to Amsterdam and meeting everyone. I was not successful, and I am sorry about that, but I was attempting to deal with what was, to me, obviously going to be a problem at some stage, which I think would have been relatively straightforward to solve.



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If your objective is that no Israeli club plays, which is a political objective, of course it does not do that. In fact, in many ways, it counters that because it makes it easier for an Israeli club to play, but that is a separate political issue on which you as politicians can have a view and vote how you want in Parliament.

Q30 Chair: Do you think the Home Office is sufficiently engaged on this? As someone who has served in both the DCMS and the Home Office, I am acutely aware that this responsibility falls between the two Departments, but I was struck when you said that there was no response to your report from the Home Office.

Lord Mann: Well, I was told that there would be a meeting between DCMS and the Home Office, but if there was, I am not aware of it. I think there should have been, if there was not, and it is the second time that football policing has hit into Parliament. There was obviously the Casey review, which I think was on a different scale of issue—I am not sure that the two are directly comparable.

People go to football to enjoy themselves, relax and—I include myself in this—avoid us politicians and all of that. You go to football to have a good time, and what we rightly attempt to do, if people do so, is make sure that they are not abusing players, other fans or anybody else in any way, including not least racism. Generally, we have made big improvements in this country on that, and we should continue doing so. I think that some of the lessons learned from this will help to do so, including involving the Jewish community.

Q31 Robbie Moore: Lord Mann, sticking with the impact on community relations, has the decision to exclude Maccabi Tel Aviv fans and the subsequent fallout that has happened, in your view, increased the risk of antisemitism in the Jewish community of Birmingham?

Lord Mann: The Jewish community of Birmingham feels that. Whether it actually does or doesn't, in a sense perception is reality. By the way, that would go for the Muslim community in Birmingham feeling that this is going to be a problem, because there were people telling them it was going to be a problem. Not many actually protested. We were told it would be 300,000, but it was a very tiny number. I am not surprised about that, but people's perception is their reality. Their fears are their fears.

Let me quote Game Over Israel, which is an organisation trying to stop Israel playing in any sport. Its director, Ashish Prashar, said that Game Over Israel assisted West Midlands police before issuing a ban on Maccabi Tel Aviv fans from attending a UEFA European League game versus Aston Villa earlier this month by providing reports and evidence from lawyers on the Israeli team's fans' conduct.

I don't know whether that is true. My suspicion would be that, as happened in Amsterdam, there are people trying to take credit. What happened in Amsterdam was that you had the suggestion that it was a pogrom, which is nonsense. There were five Israelis hospitalised but not kept in overnight. There were 30 to 40 with minor injuries. That is bad,



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but it is not a pogrom. There were also people saying, "This is a great victory. We have beaten the Israelis. Well done, everyone." That is also untrue, so you have people trying to use this. I do not know whether Game Over Israel did actually send stuff and have influence. I would hope not, but if it did, that has huge implications for community relations.

Q32 **Robbie Moore:** Whether it is perception or reality, in terms of the fallout, how would you expect the Government to respond to that?

Lord Mann: By ensuring that the overwhelming majority in all communities who would like football to go ahead without any hassle for the people who go to it are heard. I did not hear a single Aston Villa fan saying, "We welcome a competitive advantage of not having some away fans cheering on their team," which it actually gave them, because that is not good sport. That is not how football works. Quite the opposite: what I was hearing from Aston Villa fans was, "We don't think this is good. Why is this happening?"

Community relations are damaged if people cannot go about their everyday life without hassle. People should be able to go to football without hassle. If I am Jewish or any other ethnicity, I should be able to go to a football match without any hassle in this country.

Chair: Thank you very much, Lord Mann, for your extensive and expansive responses to our questions. It has been very helpful for us in setting the scene for our next two panels, where we will hear from law enforcement, the PCC and the Minister. I am very grateful to you for coming today. I will bring this part of the session to a close and give everyone a slight break between this panel and the next.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Chief Constable Craig Guildford, Assistant Chief Constable Mike O'Hara and Simon Foster.

Chair: I welcome our witnesses to the second part of today's session. Would you please introduce yourselves?

Simon Foster: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Simon Foster, and I am the police and crime commissioner for the west midlands.

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: Good afternoon. My name is Mike O'Hara, and I am an assistant chief constable in the west midlands. I have the operations portfolio and was gold commander for the fixture.

Chief Constable Guildford: Good afternoon, everyone. I am Chief Constable Craig Guildford.

Q33 **Chair:** Thank you. I think you wanted to make an opening statement, Chief Constable.



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Chief Constable Guildford: Thank you, Chair, for giving me this important opportunity. In terms of declarations of interests, I am not an Aston Villa fan. I am a football fan. I concur with much of what Mr Mann said. I do know him, and I have spoken to him for the duration of some of these matters. He has also helped me in the past.

I know there has been quite a lot of commentary in various quarters, and hopefully what I have constructed over the weekend will help to address a lot of the questions that I have listened to carefully. I know that commentary has been made by certain Members of Parliament and others in the media. It has caused some frustration, and it certainly caused some tension in local and national Jewish communities.

As chief constable, I regret that that happened and make it very clear that any suggestions of any invention or conspiracy on the part of West Midlands police are completely wrong and misleading. We have acted with integrity all the way through this. My officers have, at times, focused on their clear core policing responsibility—this is about safety. The command team that was appointed from the get-go are all fully accredited. They are very familiar with policing football and public order events. Mike was the gold, there was a very experienced silver commander, and there was a bronze commander too.

To do our decision making for public order and public safety events we use the national decision model. At the core of that model—in which we assess intelligence information, look at options, make decisions and so on—is the code of ethics. That is for police leaders to make sure that we act without fear or favour, that we are apolitical and that we remember our core responsibilities. We try all the time to make decisions that are proportionate, legal and necessary in the circumstances.

After the fixture was decided upon, despite all the rumours going around about whether any Israeli teams would be banned from competitions, we started our planning process as usual. To be fair, lots of what Lord Mann said about the tactics—whether you do an intercept point in London, whether you get a coach company to bring them up, whether you take them to another place and so on—was all custom and practice; it was what we were planning for.

From the get-go, we were planning to facilitate this event with both sets of supporters at Villa Park. Regardless of any of the earlier conversations and reporting that certain elements would like the match completely banned, from our perspective that was never on the agenda.

We also instigated a community impact assessment to capture the views of the local population and local interest groups—both Jewish and Muslim. As that situation progressed, we got to a gold meeting on 17 September and assessed that the risk of disorder and disruption to be high. We had learned many lessons from the Legia Warsaw match that we policed. We made 50 arrests, we had some ticket restrictions on that match, and we certainly had some tactics around the fans. That match resulted in significant disorder in the local area, despite a lot of police resources



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around it. Some officers were injured, some police animals were injured, and street furniture was disrupted. We wanted to avoid that from a command perspective. I spoke to both commanders, and I fully support their assessment and decision that it was a high risk.

On Wednesday 1 October—this is very important—I sat down with the chief inspector, our planning expert, who had spoken to the three Dutch police commanders. This is where the difference occurs between what Lord Mann said and the information provided to the chief inspector. The information provided from the Dutch was very clear. They reflected on the days before, during and after the match. As a result of clashes between the Maccabi ultras and the local Muslim community, the police in Amsterdam were very stretched, particularly the day before, because they had not assessed the match as high risk, from their perspective. They informed us very clearly—and I spoke to the chief inspector on Wednesday last week—that they deployed 2,000 riot police on the day of the match. The 5,000 comes from exactly what you said, the professional assumption of our silver commander: over the three or four days of the actual event, you would need about 5,000 police officers.

We were told that the ultras were very well organised and militaristic in the way they operated. They attacked members of the local community, including taxi drivers, and tore down flags. People were thrown into the river. They were also definitely singing—to the earlier question from one of your colleagues—“No schools in Gaza as the children were all dead.” The police in Amsterdam further stated that the group specifically targeted the local Muslim community, deliberately. Members of the local and wider Muslim community subsequently reacted, and—on the day after, mainly—deliberately attacked Maccabi fans on match day, both before and after the match, as Lord Mann referenced. That is what we were told. The Dutch commanders were unequivocal that they would never want to have Maccabi Tel Aviv playing in Amsterdam again in the future, and that is what they said to our chief inspector.

Having moved on from that position, lots of the information and intelligence were shared, and the document that Lord Mann referred to was leaked. That document was requested by the chair of the safety advisory group, which, as you know, makes the decision on the licence of the event and so on. There were three safety advisory meetings, and we participated in all of them. They are multi-agency meetings, which I think have two local councillors—they are all slightly different across the country—and our local partners on them. We give our opinions, our assessment and the intelligence. Lots of options are considered by the commanders and the people who sit on that group. In particular, there are options about playing a fixture behind closed doors, ticket restrictions, timing and so on.

One of the points quite rightly made by Lord Mann—he asked me about it specifically, and I passed on the information to the gold commander—was about changing the time. I passed on that information, and I thought it was a good suggestion. I believe, having spoken to the gold commander,



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that it was not supported by UEFA or those involved in that particular element of decision making. I also concurred with what Lord Mann was saying in particular about how some of those tactics can take place. I am also very familiar with how Leeds works because I have commanded up there. The gold commander took reasonable decisions and gave the information to the committee to the best of his ability, upon which the committee eventually made a decision.

Chair: We have quite a lot of questions, and you are covering some of the points, but it would be helpful not to have much more of the opening statement.

Chief Constable Guildford: Okay. The main thing I wanted to say in conclusion is that the decision to restrict the away fans was based on a very careful assessment. It was not taken lightly; it was taken on the basis of an assessment of the risk. When we assess the risk, we look at information and intelligence. In particular, we were swayed by the commanders of the Dutch police and their direct reference to what happened from their perspective—not my perspective or Lord Mann’s perspective—which was given to our chief inspector, who was on that meeting.

The final thing I want to say is that I asked the UK Football Policing Unit to come and do an independent peer review of our decision making on the intelligence, the threat, the risk and the options that we took, and they supported the decisions made at the time. I also wanted to inform the Committee that HMICFRS, on behalf of the Home Office, are also undertaking some wider work that will hopefully pick up some of the recommendations that Lord Mann made to you just before he concluded.

Chair: Thank you. We will start our questions, and I am sure we will dig into some of the things you said in your opening statement.

Q34 **Mr Kohler:** Thank you for coming. Chief Constable Guildford, are you claiming that the intelligence you just cited is accurate? Are you still claiming that?

Chief Constable Guildford: The intelligence document was provided to the SAG. It was a culmination of the verbal information that had been given at the previous two SAGs—it was captured in the notes of the SAG, which is minuted. We did not produce an initial document; we produced the document on the third occasion, at the request of the SAG chair.

I will answer your question directly. I have had the information in the document reviewed ahead of coming today, and Lord Mann is absolutely correct. Within my narrative, which I have compiled over the weekend, the one assertion in relation to West Ham is completely wrong. I am told that is a result of some social media scraping that was done, and that is wrong. That was one element in a document that was eight or nine pages long, but we stand by the key tenets in the document.

Q35 **Mr Kohler:** Hold on—so you did an AI search, got something about West Ham and just whacked it into the—



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Chief Constable Guildford: No, not at all. We do a very comprehensive assessment. We get some of that from partners, other football clubs, the United Kingdom Football Policing Unit and our own intelligence collection, and we also search through social media to see what is trending, what the posts are, who is following the posts and so on. It was a result of that. I say very candidly that that element was wrong, but it had no material impact on that document.

Q36 **Mr Kohler:** But does it not go to your whole attitude? You were just looking for something and whacking it down. Why didn't you talk to the Met about this fictitious West Ham match?

Chief Constable Guildford: The reason that we didn't talk to the Met is, I believe, because the particular piece of information that we placed in that document, which was wrong, was irrelevant. In terms of your first question to me, we have taken a careful approach. We have not taken a cavalier approach, and we have not tried to make anything fit. We have given the information that we were asked to provide.

Q37 **Mr Kohler:** To go back to my question, are you asserting that the intelligence from the Amsterdam match is still true, or are you asserting that the intelligence was flawed?

Chief Constable Guildford: I have no reason to doubt the integrity of my chief inspector or my other commanders who were involved in this process—particularly the chief inspector, who spoke to the three Dutch commanders.

Q38 **Mr Kohler:** So why are the Dutch commanders saying something different? Why are the Dutch police saying something different? Why is the Mayor of Amsterdam saying something different? Why is Lord Mann saying something different? Are they all lying to us?

Chief Constable Guildford: I think that is a very strong statement that you have just made. I said at the beginning that I respect Lord Mann, but at the same time I am telling you very clearly what my chief inspector said as a result of that meeting. I know that information, when it was passed through to the gold commander and the silver commander, changed the assessment.

Q39 **Mr Kohler:** Are you accepting the intelligence as a correct view of the facts, or are you just saying it is the intelligence that you received? Which of those two things are you saying?

Chief Constable Guildford: I am saying, in effect, both. I believe what my chief inspector said from the Dutch commanders, which he shared with his other commanders, but I am also saying that I listened carefully to what Lord Mann articulated, and he has told me previously that there have been various reports from different elements of the media about what happened in Amsterdam.

Q40 **Chair:** Are there minutes of this conversation that the chief inspector had with the three commanders from Amsterdam?



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Chief Constable Guildford: He produced a subsequent email, which he sent into the chain of command.

Q41 **Chair:** Can we have sight of that?

Chief Constable Guildford: Yes, we will happily provide that to you.

Q42 **Mr Kohler:** There are certain suggestions that there were 500 to 600 fans involved in targeted disorder, 200 linked to the IDF, fans thrown in the river and serious assaults on Muslim taxi drivers, but they are all contradicted by the Dutch police. Who am I to believe—you saying that it happened or them saying that it didn't happen?

Chief Constable Guildford: That is why I sat down last week with the chief inspector, having received a letter from the Policing Minister, and attempted very much to talk to the horse's mouth. I have no concern about that individual's integrity, what he told me and what he documented from the Dutch police.

Q43 **Mr Kohler:** In answer to my previous question, you said that you believe what your chief inspector told you, and that you believed that it actually happened, yet the Dutch police are saying that it didn't happen. Why do you still think it happened?

Chief Constable Guildford: I still think that because I listened very carefully to what my chief inspector said last week. But of course, in this discourse and having prepared for today, I am open to listening to lots of different views. As the intelligence and information developed, that is exactly what the police did, and we discussed that at the safety advisory group.

Q44 **Mr Kohler:** Do you accept that it didn't happen, or do you just not know whether it happened or not?

Chief Constable Guildford: No, just to be very clear, I believe what my chief inspector told me.

Q45 **Mr Kohler:** But he was listening to what he was being told. I am asking you what happened. I am not asking what he was told. What else have you done, beyond just talking to your chief inspector?

Chief Constable Guildford: The other thing I have done, in addition to talking to my chief inspector, is speak to the silver and gold commanders about their assessment of the information and intelligence. That is what I have done in addition.

In terms of answering the question, of what did or did not happen on the ground on the day, in very forensic detail, I was not there and you were not there. I am taking what I have been told very seriously from a professional with good credibility who has been involved in this type of policing activity for years. I have no reason to doubt or question his integrity about what he was told.

Q46 **Mr Kohler:** Have you not pondered why the Dutch police are now contradicting all of it?



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Chief Constable Guildford: Of course. We have probably all done lots of pondering, haven't we?

Q47 **Mr Kohler:** What is your view on that?

Chief Constable Guildford: My view is that I suspect there was lots of pressure on the Dutch police locally as a result of this match. My very careful conclusion from looking at everything and listening to what people have said—and, indeed, listening to what Lord Mann said this afternoon—is that initially the Dutch probably underestimated the level of threat and risk. The day before the match, they were extremely stretched. The day of the match, they deployed an absolute abundance of riot-trained police. The whole incident left them in a position where they had not anticipated the level of disorder and, also, in terms of their one-size approach—

Q48 **Mr Kohler:** They are saying it did not happen. Are you now saying they are in denial? You are saying they did not anticipate this, it happened and now they are in denial. Is that what you are telling us?

Chief Constable Guildford: I am not saying that they are in denial. With respect, you would have to ask them for their version of events, wouldn't you? Not me. I am telling you directly what the person in the online room has told me, because I went to check the detail personally.

Q49 **Chair:** You must have known it would be a deeply controversial decision if the SAG decided to ban away fans. Did it not occur that there should be due diligence done on the intelligence that had been provided?

Chief Constable Guildford: Absolutely, and we did our due diligence on the information and intelligence we were provided. We liaised with the UK Football Policing Unit; we had a tried and tested bronze, silver and gold command structure; and we were actively seeking and developing all the intelligence that we could all the way through, from community intelligence to online intelligence and information that we receive as an organisation. You are absolutely correct in what you say.

Q50 **Chair:** You had Lord Mann's report. He had been to Amsterdam to look at what had happened after the Ajax match for himself.

Chief Constable Guildford: We did not have his report. I think he said it did not involve West Midlands police; it was sent to the Home Office and, I assume, to the UKFPU.

Q51 **Chair:** You could have had access to it, presumably.

Chief Constable Guildford: We could have had access to it, but he told me verbally that there were different versions of events as to what happened. He felt that some of the articulation in the press was different from what he had found, and he said to you this afternoon what he found.

Q52 **Chair:** What other intelligence did you have about Maccabi Tel Aviv fans? Did you go to Staffordshire police and ask what happened at Stoke, or to the Met and ask what happened at Chelsea?



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Chief Constable Guildford: No. When we are assessing all those elements of information, we go to the UKFPU and liaise with the clubs. We had spoken to Aston Villa; I believe we spoke to Maccabi as well during the process. Also, on the weekend after the decision had been made by the SAG, there was some reporting about Maccabi's derby match in Tel Aviv being abandoned due to "violent riots", which was the Israeli police description of it.

Q53 **Chair:** What we heard from Lord Mann is that it was the other fans. They share a stadium and it was the red fans, rather than Maccabi Tel Aviv fans.

Chief Constable Guildford: Yes, that is what Lord Mann said. From our perspective, that was another element of intelligence we put into our model.

Q54 **Jo White:** I find it quite presumptuous that you assumed that the Dutch police were under pressure. Was there any exploration of the assumption that they were under pressure to present to your chief inspector a picture very different from the reports we had had?

Chief Constable Guildford: Absolutely. That is why I went to speak to him.

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: Hopefully I can help a little. Our chief inspector head of policing football unit within the West Midlands police met the three Dutch commanders—the gold, silver and bronze. Within football or public order policing, you have a gold strategic, a silver tactical and a bronze operational commander. He met those three commanders in an informal, unrecorded meeting, in an effort to get candour and a view in relation to their experience of policing this particular football match. They specifically referenced the political and press pressure and interest, and provided a verbal briefing to our commander, who then documented that in an email and sent it to the command chain. That was the first part.

Since then, clearly, we have had the *Sunday Times* article and so on, whereby Sebastiaan Meijer was naysaying some of the elements within the WMP report. I have since spoken to Peter Holla, the gold commander, and Sebastiaan Meijer from the Dutch police, and they are very clear that they are under a lot of pressure, in their words, "from city hall". Their position as reported to the *Sunday Times* was, "We don't recognise this; we don't recognise that; we don't recognise this." Subsequently, I am led to believe that they have now released a further statement with more detail, and it is very clear that they seem rather apologetic to us as a force, and are trying their best to provide something that is meaningful, helpful and accurate. But I think it is probably fair to say, as a West Midlands police commander in the west mids who was not involved in Ajax, that there is definitely some interpretation about what happened in Amsterdam.

Q55 **Robbie Moore:** What intelligence did you seek from football policing security bodies in Israel?



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Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: All our liaison with Israel was through the UKFPU, and we had no response.

Q56 **Robbie Moore:** Did you seek intelligence from Europol?

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: Again, that is all done through UKFPU. Effectively, they facilitate our communication, contact and gathering of information from other sources.

Robbie Moore: So you did seek intelligence from them.

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: Personally, I did not speak to Europol, but we do liaise with UKFPU, who are very clear around the key stakeholders that we should be liaising with.

Q57 **Robbie Moore:** So you did seek intelligence from UKFPU, but received no response.

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: Yes, from the UK Football Policing Unit.

Q58 **Robbie Moore:** Did you seek intelligence from UEFA?

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: Personally, I did not, but—

Robbie Moore: Did West Midlands police seek intelligence from UEFA?

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: I can't confirm, but I believe so, yes.

Robbie Moore: You believe so.

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: Correct.

Q59 **Robbie Moore:** If it is certain that you, or West Midlands police, did, can you share that correspondence with the Committee?

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: Sure.

Q60 **Chair:** You said in your opening statement that the suggestion of changing the kick-off time was mooted, but UEFA did not agree. Did you even know at that point that there was a risk that the away fans would not be able to attend if it was an 8 pm kick-off?

Chief Constable Guildford: It was a little more along the lines of what Lord Mann said. There was a slight issue with regards to particular religious observance in relation to transport. It would make the transport arrangements easier for the Israeli fans if that kick-off time was brought further forward. I passed that on to the commander at the time.

Q61 **Chair:** Was that information given to UEFA? What information did UEFA have when it said, "No, we're going to stick with 8 pm"?

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: I don't know the answer to that question, but I can try to find out.

Chair: I would appreciate that. Let us move on to a bit more about the intelligence about the Maccabi Tel Aviv fans.



Q62 **Mr Kohler:** Did you seek direct intelligence about Stoke and Chelsea? Did you make any inquiries into that? You were able to cite fictitious matches off the internet, but you did not actually go and look for actual information from those who had had Maccabi fans previously. Is that right?

Chief Constable Guildford: When you say a fictitious match off the internet, I have been really straightforward in saying, as part of my preparation, that that was wrong, but that does not mean that that document was wrong. On speaking to those other teams, I believe that those other teams have played Maccabi some years ago, rather than in the recent past. But I will stand corrected on that.

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: In relation to the information in the document, I just want to clarify the document, if I may. You have effectively had two SAGs, which are verbal and oral updates. As a direct result of the scrutiny and the increased political pressure, or not the increased political pressure but the increased pressure, or publicity, the chair of the SAG specifically asked for something in writing. The silver commander drafted a document that contains information, intelligence and the views of the silver commander. It is not evidence; it is a combination of information and intelligence. You are right to call out that one of the elements in it is incorrect, and that is a—

Q63 **Mr Kohler:** Does it not question your due diligence for you to include a fictitious match off the internet? Does that not point to something rotten in the way you were doing it, if that could creep through?

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: I don't think it does, no. If you review any policing operation and any policing document, there is a range of diligence and checks and balances that takes place, but there are always going to be improvements that can be made in any piece of work of this scale.

Q64 **Mr Kohler:** You have described the risk of antisemitic violence as a relevant concern. Can you explain why it was a relevant concern and not a primary concern?

Chief Constable Guildford: A commander—both a silver and a gold commander—would weigh up all those things as part of the process of making the decision with, again, our code of ethics at the centre of that. Part of that is to consider the interests of all parties and to identify particular groups. It was a relevant concern, and it has been documented. We have reviewed all the documentation, and from the outset it was a relevant concern. That is why you commence community impact assessment early doors. When we were doing that process that was, very clearly, a theme coming through. It was a theme that was picked up on by the commanders and that came bottom-up from the community too.

Q65 **Mr Kohler:** Was there a primary concern?

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: It depends on when you ask the question. I took command on 17 October. I have reviewed everything and spoken to all the relevant commanders, and the threat assessment consistently changes. When we started, and our working assumption was



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that all fans would be attending, then hate crime and antisemitism was absolutely a concern. By the time it became apparent that Maccabi were not going to accept any away tickets, that concern reduced, albeit it did not totally abate, because there were some pro-Israeli protests that we also needed to account for and support.

Q66 **Mr Kohler:** You talked earlier about political pressure. Where was the political pressure that you received?

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: Forgive me; I probably misspoke. I was probably referring to the social media posts that took place on 16 October.

Mr Kohler: So there was no political pressure, despite what you said earlier?

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: No political pressure locally, no.

Q67 **Mr Kohler:** Would you concur with that?

Chief Constable Guildford: Absolutely, yes.

Mr Kohler: Politicians didn't talk to you about any of these things.

Chief Constable Guildford: Loads of people talked to us, and we talked to loads of people. We also talked to the local MP. Lots of people wanted the match to go ahead and lots of people wanted no Israeli team playing in Birmingham. That was raised as an issue early doors, but as you can see, and as I have tried to explain, our starting point was, "This match is being played. Both teams are coming and both sets of fans are coming, and we'll do our best to facilitate it." Our mission is to keep people safe, to try to police it in the safest possible manner, and to deliver the best service we can to all those people who are coming and to the clubs that are legitimately there to conduct their business, but also to the local residents who live in that very tight bit of geography.

Q68 **Mr Kohler:** Do you stand by the position that you could not guarantee the safety of all the fans or people unless Maccabi did not come?

Chief Constable Guildford: I heard your question to Lord Mann, actually. It is very difficult to guarantee everybody's safety 100%. We have to assess the risks, often on incomplete information, and we always try to minimise the risks wherever possible—minimise the risk to everybody we have identified as a concern—and that is what we did. It is not about eliminating 100% of risk, because I just do not think that is always possible.

Q69 **Mr Kohler:** Of course not, so why was it necessary to ban the fans?

Chief Constable Guildford: The necessity around the tactic that was used after the options had been gone through—in respect of closed doors, restricting the numbers and so on—was made following an assessment by the police, who gave that information to the safety advisory group, and the safety advisory group made that decision.



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Q70 **Mr Kohler:** How often has this happened? How often have the police, in effect, banned fans from a visiting team?

Chief Constable Guildford: In Europe, it happens—

Mr Kohler: No, in the UK.

Chief Constable Guildford: In the UK it rarely happens. It is usually, as Lord Mann correctly identified, exactly what we were doing at the start, which is to ask, “Can we consider some different tactics to mitigate the risk?”

Q71 **Mr Kohler:** Why was this so exceptional?

Chief Constable Guildford: Because we believed, or the commanders believed, that the level of risk was so very high.

Q72 **Mr Kohler:** Do you still think that was the right belief to have?

Chief Constable Guildford: When I have looked at it—obviously I have been a commander myself for a number of years—and asked, “Was it a reasonable decision to take the in line of weighing up all those options?”, I think it was a reasonable decision that the commanders took. It was a decision made without rushing into things; it was made in the best interests of the safety of everyone concerned. I do not think they made it for any other reason. It was made for a good reason, without fear or favour. Yes, we can look and can learn lessons—indeed, we will have a review, after the event. We are participating fully in the HMIC exercise and, of course, we might have some recommendations to feed in. But to answer your question specifically, I believe they made the decision by applying their professional judgment and acting properly in all the circumstances.

Q73 **Mr Kohler:** Is your view that Maccabi fans should always be banned from UK games? The issues that you say are so critical and different will always be there. Is that what you are telling us?

Chief Constable Guildford: As Lord Mann said, they are so different and they are so critical. I am not telling you that; that is what you have just suggested to me—

Mr Kohler: I am not suggesting it; I am asking you a question.

Chief Constable Guildford: I always try to operate on the basis of taking each game on its own merits. The last thing you want to do when you are weighing up options is to consider something like that. You think about all the other options to mitigate the risks beforehand—all those other measures—so I would not want to say in any way, shape or form that it should be a blanket approach. Each fixture needs looking at on its own merits, which is why we have a bronze, silver and gold structure to do just that.

Q74 **Chair:** When did you find out that the ultras were not going to attend? That surely brought the risk level down significantly.



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Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: I don't think that we ever had that information intelligence. The decision was made, or rather—forgive me—the recommendation was made by the SAG on 16 October. Clearly, the chief had some communication with the Home Office around exploring other options, which we were doing anyway. The proposal from Lord Mann was pretty much what our plan looked like, in relation to using coaches, protecting the away fans, taking them to a different venue, trying to facilitate their safe entrance, and so on. We were reviewing that plan but then Maccabi withdrew, in effect, their away ticket allocation.

Q75 **Chair:** Let me get this right. You make a recommendation to the SAG and the SAG takes the decision. How different was your recommendation for last week's Young Boys game compared with the recommendation on this game?

Chief Constable Guildford: I wasn't privy to the Young Boys SAG decision, but I imagine it was different. The main difference was the information that we had from the Dutch commanders on the concern about the Maccabi fans—the Maccabi ultras, forgive me; there is something to say about Israeli fans more broadly. We have a lot of Jewish fans who support the Villa. The risk fans in particular caused sufficient concern, and the Dutch police feedback to us, directly to our head of football unit, was that they attack community members, not rival fans. That is quite unusual for ultras, who tend to target opposition fans as opposed to community members. That is what caused such concern.

Q76 **Chair:** I am puzzled, because a very politically sensitive decision was taken. Had the decision been taken at the point when it was known that the ultras would not be coming? The due diligence does not appear to have been very thorough, in that there was a fictitious match in the advice, and it does not appear that that was even looked at. Surely, with something so politically sensitive, this should have been reviewed, and double and triple-checked, because you would not be sitting in front of us today if it had been.

Chief Constable Guildford: I agree with what you just said about it being reviewed and, as I have said, about the level of candour. The West Ham thing did not happen, but the West Ham thing was completely irrelevant to the assessment of the risk. It was alleged that that took place at a certain time, the last time they played in the UK, but there was nothing else said about any violence or problems attached to that—nothing.

To go back to your first question about the ultras, you asked when we were told they were not coming; we were not advised that the ultras were not coming. We did not have intelligence that said to us, "The ultras aren't coming," throughout that process. We did not have that actual, specific intelligence. When I listened to Lord Mann earlier, that was the first time I had heard someone say, "Oh, the ultras aren't coming, because the club told me they're not coming." That was not information that was passed—

Q77 **Chair:** Didn't you speak to the clubs?

Chief Constable Guildford: Yes, of course. We were speaking to—

Chair: If Maccabi Tel Aviv were telling Lord Mann that, why did they not say it to you?

Chief Constable Guildford: I don't know why that was not said to us. Again, I take you back to the fact that this is not just about taking what one person says alone; it is about trying to assess the risks in the round and to take the information in the round. The risks that we found were very much in relation to the safety of everyone, and in particular the risk that the ultras posed.

You have just asked me about whether we did or did not know; I have said very clearly that, to my knowledge, we were not told that the ultras were not coming. We have to take some of that at face value, and we have to challenge some of that, don't we? Because this is a group of people who are intent on some very extreme violence, and they do not normally share their plans of operations, let's say, with everybody openly and candidly.

Q78 **Jo White:** I am surprised that you were not having any discussions with Maccabi Tel Aviv immediately before you made that decision, because the understanding that the ultras were not coming would have been absolutely critical to any decision making.

Chief Constable Guildford: We had spoken to them before, to be fair.

Jo White: Okay. You identified that you felt there were threats to the Israelis from the local community; what assessments or links did you make, or communications did you have, with local community groups, and what risks were felt from those?

Chief Constable Guildford: Basically, all that information comes through the community impact assessment. One of the local neighbourhood chief inspectors from Birmingham was leading on that for us. We have a local geographic policing method—community policing—so that gets fed upwards. We also have within the West Midlands police a couple of advisers, one of whom is a Jewish inspector and one of whom is a Muslim sergeant, who were advising us on what was being picked up from a cultural perspective, but also from a very specific community perspective. That information was collated.

We regularly meet with those groups of people, and we meet with residents locally. The first gold commander met the local MP for the Aston area as well, and we met with groups who were interested. We always do that to try to gain the intelligence. That is very much a local policing responsibility.

All that information is then fed into the bronze, silver and gold command structure. That is what we do for all fixtures. This was no different in that respect. In terms of the information that we found, clearly there were some very opposing views, let's say, all the way through this event, and there was also intelligence around people's intention to protest—both local



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individuals and individuals from further afield. All that was fed in to the command team.

- Q79 **Jo White:** It is commonplace for people to protest, particularly in today's times, but isn't that merely another policing matter, as opposed to a reason to decide to stop fans attending a game?

Chief Constable Guildford: I think it is, but it is so intrinsically linked to the event and the geography of the event. The intended protest locations, and some of the intelligence that we got, were very specific around Villa Park. As Lord Mann said, although it is relatively easy to get to the front of Villa Park, the geography is very tight around those streets. At the time, I think—I might need correcting—the coach park was even having some works done on it as well, so the geography was very tight. Clearly, that all got fed into the system that informed the decision making. It was not just a case of, "This is a regular policing of a football match." This had more aspects to it as a result of the people who were originally going to be attending the football match and some of the local people who live very close to that stadium.

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: I will follow on about the community engagement first. We identify key bronze commanders who play key roles. There were 12 operational bronzes deployed for the fixture: six of them related to public order and the remaining six had different roles. One of them was a community bronze. This particular community bronze, our chief inspector from Birmingham, developed a community engagement strategy, which is documented, and commissioned a community impact assessment. That included input and feedback from a range of community reps, the CST, representatives from different synagogues and mosques, and so on. We had quite a good sense of the fear and trepidation from our communities.

The second point you raised was around protest being just another police issue. It is quite interesting to hear Lord Mann talk about how easy it is to police and manage a number of people into and out of Villa. It is in the heart of a very deprived residential area. Football policing and protest policing are never straightforward in themselves, but when you pull them together, it adds a different dynamic. On taking command on 17 October, I had four strategic threats: protest, the football match, the team and disorder. Those were my four key things that I was trying to manage. We did that with over 1,000 officers, so it was not straightforward, and that was without Maccabi Tel Aviv fans present.

- Q80 **Chair:** You said that you had had no political pressure locally, but you spoke to the local MP. Is that normal? Would you normally speak to the local MP about matches?

Chief Constable Guildford: Yes, we speak to the MPs all the time—the local police commanders do—and if we have a particular issue in a locality, we always try to speak to the local MP. That is custom and practice—nothing out of the ordinary in that at all.

- Q81 **Chair:** Did you have a conversation about the Young Boys match with the



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MP as well?

Chief Constable Guildford: I don't know if they had approached us to have a conversation about that at all.

Chair: Oh, so the MP approached you to have the conversation.

Chief Constable Guildford: I think it was the club, actually.

Chair: So the club approached the MP.

Chief Constable Guildford: Yes—sorry. The football club, Aston Villa, had been approached by the MP. Aston Villa then asked, I think, Birmingham city council for the SAG responsibility side of things and ourselves to meet the MP. From our perspective, of course we are going to meet.

Q82 **Chair:** I am still totally puzzled by the lack of due diligence. You talked about sources of information. It appears to me that you took one chief inspector—I don't doubt their integrity; I am not in any way casting aspersions about them—and that was the piece of intelligence that led you to recommend that away fans should not be allowed to attend. It was one piece of intelligence from one chief inspector, based on a conversation that he—I presume he—had had with three commanders from Amsterdam. Is that correct?

Chief Constable Guildford: Yes, that is correct. That is what changed the assessment. That certainly influenced—although I don't want to speak for Mike—the way that the assessment was heading. As I said to you at the beginning, all the planning assumptions had been that this was going to occur with both teams and both sets of fans.

Q83 **Chair:** Did you have any conversations with the police and crime commissioner? Perhaps the police and crime commissioner, who has been exempted from questioning so far, might want to contribute.

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: Can I come back very quickly on the last question, Chair? As the gold commander, I genuinely believe that the silver commander tried to do the right thing. On not running that through the intel bronze and getting it fact-checked before submission, you are absolutely right: it should have gone through the intel bronze before being submitted to the SAG. I agree on the due diligence.

However, on the content, the assertion that it was just the Dutch intelligence is not accurate. We had feedback from the community—a community impact assessment. We had online reporting. We had Dutch feedback. We had police intelligence, sensitive and otherwise. A range of factors built the risk-threat picture that allowed us to work through the options and try to work to the least risky option.

Q84 **Chair:** Was the community impact assessment submitted to the SAG?

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: No, but it informed the threat assessment that the silver commander put within the document.



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Q85 **Chair:** Why was it not submitted to the SAG?

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: It was not specifically asked for. A lot of stuff is created in every operation. To be fair, within the SAG, there is a community cohesion representative who talks on behalf of Birmingham city council and the community feedback.

Q86 **Chair:** Can we see the community impact assessment?

Chief Constable Guildford: Yes. That was started way before.

Q87 **Chair:** Understood. Who was the community representative on the SAG, just so we can be clear on that? We will have more questions on the SAG.

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: I do not know the person's name. They are employed by Birmingham city council. There is the community cohesion representative and two councillors as well.

Q88 **Chair:** On the community impact assessment, were members of the communities saying that they did not want the Maccabi fans there, and did that include any Jewish representatives?

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: Yes.

Q89 **Chair:** So there were Jewish community representatives who said that they did not want the Maccabi fans there?

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: Feedback was documented within the community impact assessment that was clear that there were a range of faiths, backgrounds and ethnicities that were very concerned about this fixture.

Chair: "A range of", but were there Jewish—

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: Yes. It was documented within the CIA from the beginning of September.

Chair: We will move on to the safety advisory group decision-making process.

Q90 **Margaret Mullane:** Given that you stated in a letter to us that you would have been able to police the fixture within your existing resource envelope, why did you not recommend that option to the SAG?

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: The challenge with policing is that you cannot guarantee everyone's safety. You get your information and intelligence, you develop a threat assessment and a working strategy and you then consider your range of options. A range of options were considered. It was felt that the best way of maximising the safety of officers and staff and protecting the public was to restrict the away fans.

Q91 **Margaret Mullane:** Have you ever recommended excluding away fans before, bearing in mind that you said you were confident of your ability to police the fixture?

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: No, we have not. However, for the game against Legia Warsaw in 2023, we restricted the ticket allocation for



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that group and that turned into one of the most challenging disorders that we have ever dealt with.

Q92 **Margaret Mullane:** Did the SAG put pressure on you to exclude them? Would you say that is a fair question?

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: I was not present in any of the SAGs. However, from reviewing the minutes and from knowing the chair of the SAG, who is quite a strong individual, I would suggest that he did not give us any pressure, and likewise the other way.

Q93 **Margaret Mullane:** The Chair just alluded to, and you answered the question about, who was there—councillors; MPs—who you would speak to, and that kind of thing. How would you know that there was not pressure?

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: Based on conversation with the people who attended and the minutes of the meeting.

Q94 **Margaret Mullane:** Okay. Simon Foster, as an outsider to the SAG, do you have confidence after listening to this today that SAGs are free of political influence?

Simon Foster: As police and crime commissioner, I have no involvement with SAGs, as you have quite rightly alluded to. I am not a member of the SAG; I do not attend the SAG; I am not a consultee of the SAG. Indeed, before this most recent set of events, I think a safety advisory group had crossed my radar only once during the entirety of my term, and that was in relation to a community event. I have very little interaction with SAGs, so I am a little reluctant to express a view on how effective and efficient they are, based on that limited experience.

However, in broad terms, I think they perform a useful function. As far I am aware, they have been around since the recommendations following Hillsborough. That is quite a long period of time. Perhaps members of the Committee will know otherwise, but I am not aware of there having been expressions of a lack of trust and confidence in the way that SAGs operate on other occasions or in other parts of the country. You may know better. I am certainly not aware of that myself, so I would be reluctant to draw that sort of conclusion based on my limited personal experience and my lack of knowledge as to how they operate in other circumstances across the country.

Q95 **Mr Kohler:** I am still struggling with the decision to ban the fans. You said it was the best way to minimise the risk, but that would always be the case to minimise the risk with ultras, would it not?

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: No. Again, the challenge here is that operational plans consider a range of tactics and issues. We have talked about the Young Boys. The issue with the Young Boys was their behaviour inside the ground. The challenge for us here was the concern communicated via the Dutch to our head of football unit that the Maccabi risk fans—not the broader fans, I hasten to add—were very organised and



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targeted community members. That was our greatest fear, combined with the disproportionately escalatory effect that they have in the community.

As you know, we have a very deprived but also a very diverse community in the west midlands. The sense was that with some risk fans who were potentially looking for trouble, and then a community who are unhappy about that situation, there was a real risk of escalation. Having spoken to the chief on the way down here, I would say that had we allowed the fans and had it gone wrong, I feel like I would be sitting here again anyway. My genuine view, albeit that the decision was made before I took command, is that from my review, I felt that this was a good decision. This was reviewed by UKFPU and subject matter experts nationally, who said, "That is a sound decision."

Q96 **Mr Kohler:** To be clear, do you agree with the chief constable that the intelligence was as it has been said to us and that was an accurate view of what happened? Do you agree with both of those aspects?

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: My position is that the situation in Amsterdam is definitely open to interpretation, but broadly, the Maccabi Tel Aviv risk fans clashed with local communities and created huge challenges around safety, policing and keeping the calm. My view, broadly, is that when we looked at that risk, plus what was being fed online—we had online reporting about Maccabi Tel Aviv fans posting the Amsterdam footage on 3 October—we could see an escalation and rising tensions, and we were trying to mitigate that threat. The assertion that we have made this decision with any purpose other than public safety is incorrect.

Q97 **Peter Prinsley:** Hello. I am Peter Prinsley, the MP for Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket, where there is no football club, by the way. Can I ask a little bit about the SAG? What does the SAG consist of? Who are the members of the SAG? How are they appointed?

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: This is not my area of expertise—forgive me. Others tend to attend the safety advisory group, but my understanding is that it is usually hosted by a local authority, and the chair of the SAG makes a recommendation to the local authority around safety certificates and licences. It usually contains what we would refer to as blue-light partners—police, ambulance, fire. In this particular scenario they were all present, as well as Transport for West Midlands, community cohesion, councillors and so on.

Q98 **Peter Prinsley:** So there are elected councillors sitting on the SAG, from Birmingham city council and the district?

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: In Birmingham SAG, yes, there are.

Q99 **Peter Prinsley:** And there was also input from the local MP?

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: Not in the SAG, no.

Q100 **Peter Prinsley:** The idea that there could have been no political input into the decision that was made is a little bit difficult for us to grasp if there were political figures—elected officials—right at the heart of the decision



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making. They will no doubt have been influenced by the advice that was coming from the police service, albeit that it itself was based on intelligence that now seems to be a little bit questionable, to say the least. We now have a situation in which we have questionable intelligence informing a SAG that has elected political figures in its make-up. We also hear stories of the input of the local MP. Can we be completely confident that there was no political interference in the decision of the SAG that was the result of a prejudiced assessment of the advice and information?

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: I think that that is a question for Birmingham city council and the SAG chair. Again, forgive me, but this is not my area of expertise. My understanding is that each SAG operates within some key principles, but their make-up and how they operate is slightly different, depending on the area. The point that there are elected members—councillors—on the SAG in Birmingham is absolutely a point that I think Birmingham should consider, but I could not possibly comment in relation to whether the chair felt like he was influenced politically or not.

Q101 **Peter Prinsley:** But you do understand that this was a politically charged decision, which then led to questions in the House of Commons and input from the Prime Minister, so it must have been obvious to the members of the SAG that this would have a political consequence.

Chief Constable Guildford: I think it was probably obvious that there would be political consequences, but my assurance to you as a panel is that we were not influenced in any way, shape or form by anybody politically. We did our service to the best of our ability, and the officers acted in line with their training and professionalism. The answer to your question can really only come from the chair of the SAG.

Peter Prinsley: They are the people who made the decision for the fans not to attend. Is that correct?

Chief Constable Guildford indicated assent.

Q102 **Jo White:** I have two questions. First, most SAGs in other areas do not have political representatives. Do you think that is an appropriate way to go forward? Secondly, Young Boys fans do have a history of violence outside football grounds, such as in September and February, so surely different policing responses should be considered towards them as well.

Chief Constable Guildford: Yes. That question just underlines what I was saying before: you treat each game on its own merits. Your first question was in relation to SAGs. Yes, I am aware that they are slightly different in their composition across the country. I think it should be underlined by clear terms of reference and so on, but any decision as to who sits on a particular body would probably merit wider debate. Even though there may be no interference whatsoever, I think the concept of any appearance of such is potentially one for you as a Committee to consider in the future.

That would be my direct answer. It would not be right for a police chief to be saying how a SAG should or should not be complemented by politicians.



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That is really for lawmakers to decide, in my view. From our perspective, whatever the mechanism is, we will, without fear or favour, produce our information, intelligence and opinions. We are a participant in that process, and our partners around that table are free and open to express their views too. They know the local area as well.

Chair: Mr Foster, do you want to come in on that?

Simon Foster: Yes, thank you, Chair. As you will probably appreciate, I take a declaration of office when I become police and crime commissioner. There is a very clear requirement in that declaration of office that I will not interfere with operational, day-to-day policing. Indeed, the policing protocol is very clear about the separation of operational, day-to-day policing and my role as police and crime commissioner around accountability, governance, oversight and scrutiny. I take those requirements extremely seriously indeed. I would certainly not ever seek to provide any level of political interference around a decision such as this or, indeed, any other decision.

As far as the position regarding SAGs and the presence of elected representatives on SAGs is concerned, plainly SAGS are often dealing with decisions that relate to wider public interest. In those circumstances, one might make an argument that there would be a reason for elected representatives to be involved. Equally—it was a good point made by the Chair—this is not just a question of ensuring that right is done. It is also about ensuring the appearance of right being done. My personal preference would be, on balance, that elected representatives would be best not attending safety advisory groups.

Q103 **Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** We have heard Ministers publicly express their opinions on this decision. Do you think it was appropriate for the Government to comment on operational decisions made by an independent police force? Do you think that standard safety decisions were being politicised?

Chief Constable Guildford: That is a good question; I think you should ask the relevant individual who made such comments. From my perspective, the police operate in the public interests for the public good. We elect politicians, and politicians should be able to express their views freely.

From an operational policing perspective, when views are expressed quite publicly, particularly if views are given when all the facts have not been briefed in detail, it can sometimes increase reporting, tension and the level of threat and risk. On the contrary side, however, my answer would be that it can also serve to decrease reporting and the level of threat and risk. It is very much a question that should be answered by an individual, rather than a chief constable. We work in a 24/7 online environment, and we police in that way. We have to be able to respond accordingly.

Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara: I think that decision making and risk taking are very tricky. Retrospective views, without a full understanding of the information and intelligence, can cause tensions. I know that the NPCC



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football lead has previously written to the Home Secretary and suggested that, if the Government feel there is a role for Ministers or Government, particularly in events where there is some national significance, it would need to be legislated for.

Simon Foster: I might just usefully read out the concluding remarks of the report published by the Dutch Inspectorate of Justice and Security—I think its concluding words are quite pertinent to this particular issue. I will not read the entire conclusion, but the relevant paragraphs of the section state:

“What’s striking is the speed with which strong words were used in the aftermath of the events. Politicians, administrators, and the media jumped to conclusions, without a clear understanding of what had actually happened. They spoke of failed action, negligence, or, conversely, of an incomprehensible tolerance. Such judgments, delivered before the facts are complete, influence public sentiment and directly affect the police officers who were on the streets. Many of them worked long shifts, sometimes exceeding fifteen hours, in a dynamic that defies a single narrative.”

“These events demonstrate the challenges of maintaining order in a society where local tensions are fuelled by global conflicts. Digital appeals can mobilize groups with lightning speed, and expectations about police action vary. Balancing enforcement and freedom remains a difficult task, especially when reality unfolds faster than preconceived scenarios. This requires a sharp assessment of the facts, a flexible approach in the moment, and careful reflection afterward—not only on police action but also on the speed with which judgments are made.”

Chair: I am very conscious that we have just gone over our time, and the Minister has arrived. We have a few more questions, if it is okay for you to stay a bit longer.

Q104 **Robbie Moore:** Just to follow up, Mr Foster, are you including the Prime Minister in that? The Prime Minister said that the decision to ban Israeli supporters was wrong, and he suggested that it was caused by antisemitism on our streets.

Simon Foster: I am not sure I can put it better than the Policing Minister herself during the urgent question on Monday last week. In answer to a question asked by the Chair of this Committee, the Policing Minister said, “There were a series of different interactions and communications between the different groups in that period, as Members would expect. There is a balance to be struck with the operational independence question, and we need to get that right; it is not”—in the instance referred to here— “for the Home Secretary to march in and demand that the police say a certain thing or act a certain way.”

Robbie Moore: But I am asking for your view.

Simon Foster: I think that applies equally to the Prime Minister as it applies to any of us as elected representatives.



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Q105 Robbie Moore: Given the political sensitivity around this issue—hence why we are all here today—the role of the police and crime commissioner is to hold the chief constable to account and make sure that they are acting in the best interests of the public. Do you have full faith in the chief constable and the decisions that have been made around this operational procedure?

Simon Foster: Since the decision of the SAG on 16 October, I have made it very clear that I asked for an immediate review of that decision. I wrote to the chief constable, the SAG and the Prime Minister about how we could work to collaborate and ensure that we have considered all possible options. Since that initial process took place, I have corresponded with the chief constable about a variety of different matters. I have obtained relevant background documentation in connection with this matter. I have also had an opportunity to consider that documentation and have had conversations with the chief constable. I have confidence in the way that the chief constable has dealt with this matter.

Since a week last Sunday, when some doubt was cast on the credibility and veracity of the intelligence relied upon, I have written to the chief constable in similar terms to that of the Policing Minister, to ask him to account for the credibility, reliability and provenance of the intelligence from the Dutch police. I have received a reply to the effect that the chief constable is satisfied with that evidence. To date, I am satisfied with that. I am also in correspondence with the MPs who were particularly concerned about this issue, along with the MP who laid the urgent question and the shadow Home Secretary. I am in correspondence with them with a view to securing exactly what evidence it is that they wish to rely on in terms of their allegations. We are in the process of exchanging correspondence about that.

Once I have all that information, I will then review the position further in the light of that additional information. I will also be having regard to the outcome of this Committee and the outcome of the HMIC investigation commissioned by the Home Secretary. I will also be convening a meeting of my accountability and governance board on 27 January, with a specific agenda item dealing with this particular issue. The matter has not yet concluded, but to date, I am confident in, and satisfied with, the response that the chief constable has provided so far.

Q106 Robbie Moore: I am keen to understand the flow of information with the Home Office. Chief Constable, what information was given by you and your officers or staff to officials and Ministers at the Home Office, DCMS and No. 10, and when was it delivered?

Chief Constable Guildford: The information usually flows via the UKFPU. The group of individuals who work on behalf of the National Police Chiefs' Council under Chief Constable Roberts regularly liaise with Home Office colleagues. I know from having spoken to the commanders that that conversation took place right at the outset and communications continued throughout the process. That communication of information is tried and tested; it is a briefing method of communication. I don't know exactly—

Robbie Moore: Do you know when?

Chief Constable Guildford: I know some of the dates on which that correspondence took place, but we can certainly come back to you with some finer details on that if you require it.

Q107 **Robbie Moore:** That would be kind. Did your officers send notice of the decision to recommend the ban of the supporters to the Home Office before it went to the safety advisory group?

Chief Constable Guildford: I am not sure whether they did before the safety advisory group, but we certainly updated the Home Office of our concerns and the risk assessment that we were undertaking.

Q108 **Robbie Moore:** It would be helpful for the Committee to understand if that went to the Home Office before or after. Did you receive a response from the Home Office to ratify or give any view about the decision to recommend the ban?

Chief Constable Guildford: We were in correspondence with the Home Office—indeed, the commanders spoke to the Home Office—but with regard to ratification, that is not something they would do. Home Office officials do not ratify the police operational decision. We would—*[Interruption.]*

Chair: The sitting in the Chamber is suspended for some reason; it's not a vote. I think these are the longest bells we've ever had. Maybe there is a fault with them.

Chief Constable Guildford: Assistant Chief Constable O'Hara has just told me that there was some correspondence by the UKFPU on 8 October.

Robbie Moore: Just to answer the question about the Home Office, did they respond with a view on the ban? You commented that they did not.

Chief Constable Guildford: No, I am not aware of any response to that.

Chair: I am very conscious of time. As I say, we have the Minister here. We have a number of other points, but could we write to you with the remaining points that we still have outstanding? We would also appreciate minutes of the SAG meetings and any of the advice that was given—community impact assessments and so on—so that we have full visibility and transparency of what was said to whom by when. We would really appreciate that. Thank you for your time today, and for coming and being witnesses.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Sarah Jones and Richard Clarke.

Chair: We now come to panel three of today's session on the decision to ban away fans from the Aston Villa-Maccabi Tel Aviv game. I thank the Minister for coming, and I welcome her to her first appearance in front of the Home Affairs Committee as a Home Office Minister. I welcome Mr Clarke as well. Perhaps you would like to introduce yourselves, and then we will get into questions.

Sarah Jones: I am Sarah Jones, the Minister for Policing. I used to be on the Home Affairs Committee.

Chair: You did.

Sarah Jones: It is much nicer on that side of the table.

Richard Clarke: I am Richard Clarke, the director general for public safety at the Home Office.

Q109 **Mr Kohler:** Welcome. I will return to something that I quizzed you about in the House last week, Minister. According to the policing unit, the Home Office was made aware in the week beginning 6 October that banning the fans was a possibility that was being considered. What was the Home Office's reaction to that news?

Sarah Jones: The Home Office was aware. As was discussed in the previous panel, its relationship with what was happening, in terms of the West Midlands police, the SAG and the decisions, was via this body called the United Kingdom Football Policing Unit, or UKFPU, which was the interaction that the Home Office had.

The Home Office had asked a series of questions of that body and had been told that a range of options were being considered, in terms of what that decision would be. I suspect that we will come back to this more, but I think one of the issues is that the Home Office had no formal role in the SAG or in the decision. We were asking for information—Richard can talk more about what we asked for when—but we were asking to be kept up to date, rather than having a view, or a position or a role in making that decision. I think that is quite an interesting thing to talk through a bit more.

Q110 **Mr Kohler:** Given that something as politically sensitive as a ban was being considered, why did the Home Office not say at that point that resources might be available if that was the issue? According to what we have heard from the police and crime commissioner, no objection was raised at all and no offer was made either.

Sarah Jones: Again, I will bring in Richard in a minute on the timings of what happened when, but I think the fundamental point was that the Home Office position was to be a receiver of information. We were asking for information—DCMS was the same—and were part of the flow of



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information across Government. We did not have a role, so we did not get involved when a decision was a potential decision.

We also did not know when exactly the committee—the SAG—was meeting. We did not know which of its meetings was going to be a decision-making one. There were a range of meetings that we were hearing about; we did not know which one was going to make a decision. We did not have a function in that process.

Q111 Mr Kohler: Weren't alarm bells ringing at something as sensitive as this being on the cards? What was the liaison between you and DCMS?

Sarah Jones: Do you want to talk through the detail, Richard, and then I can come back?

Richard Clarke: Yes, sure. My team were in regular contact with the UK Football Policing Unit to understand what was happening. As the Minister says, our role is primarily to understand the arrangements potentially being put in place. We were aware in that week of 6 and 8 October that one option being considered was the possibility of away fans not being allowed to come to the match, but that was one option being considered and no decisions had been made at that point.

You asked about resources. The standard process—the usual process—is that forces come to the Home Office if they think they are facing the likelihood of having to make an application to what is called the special grant process. If a force faces a significant pressure that it does not think it can absorb within its own funding and that is unexpected, it can put in an application to the Home Office. Forces are all well aware of how they would do that; we have a tried and tested approach to doing so. At that point, we did not explicitly go to the force and say, "Would you like to make a special grant application?" But that was a standard process that was open and available to them.

Q112 Mr Kohler: Even though that might influence their decision, given that it was so politically sensitive? I am not quite sure why you were being told about it, unless you were going to have some input. Is it just interesting to be told this? What is your role?

Richard Clarke: Our role is to ensure that we understand the context that is operating out in different matches, to be ready to respond if a request is made by a force for specific support, and to ensure that we have a good understanding of the matches and events likely to come up.

Q113 Mr Kohler: So it is actually passive. You do not see your role as saying, "Look, this is clearly politically sensitive. Can we offer resource if that will help solve the issue and help you to address the problem?"

Richard Clarke: That was absolutely what we were saying to the force over the weekend after the decision was made—

Mr Kohler: It was late then, wasn't it?

Richard Clarke: And prior to that point, no decision had been made.

Mr Kohler: You knew it was on the cards.

Richard Clarke: But we were told that all options are on the table, right up until the—indeed, on 15 October we were told by the UK Football Policing Unit that all options were being considered.

Q114 **Mr Kohler:** But I go back to my point: you knew it was on the cards. The fact that you could have offered resources might have helped make it a different decision. Given that it was so politically sensitive, why be so passive? Why not take a proactive role and say, “Look, we see this is politically sensitive. We see the issues here. We could offer resource.” Why would that not be done?

Richard Clarke: I think our assessment was that the force knew that that option was available to them, and would have come to us—

Q115 **Mr Kohler:** They could request?

Richard Clarke: They could absolutely request, yes.

Mr Kohler: But they could not be guaranteed that they would get it.

Sarah Jones: If I can come in here, when police forces want mutual aid—support for matches—the request does not normally come via us; it would come into the wider policing system, so we would not necessarily be part of that process. As Richard says, I asked for information on the 15th. We got information back that said that there was possibly a meeting on the 20th; it was possibly going to be the following day. It was still very unclear quite what was happening and whether decisions were going to be made at that point.

The actions that we took subsequently should help us navigate a way through this. That is, first, by asking HMICFRS to do a review, which the Home Secretary has asked it to, both to look at the intelligence gathered and report on that by 31st December, and to look at the wider point of how policing intelligence feeds into this SAG process and how that works. As we said in the House, the SAG committees were set up after Hillsborough, and there is a legitimate question about, when matches are of deep significance nationally for wider issues—as this one very much was—is there a different way that we should navigate these things? When Louise Casey did her review for the Football Association in 2021, she said that you should designate some football matches as events of national significance, and you should have a different structure.

At the heart of this is the argument about police operational independence and about Government involvement. We are grappling with this in the reform agenda that we are working on now with the Home Secretary. You do not ever want to be in a situation where you are telling the police what they should be reporting in terms of safety. That way is wrong, but when you have events that are so nationally significant—globally significant—is it right that the Government have no formal role in those decisions? That is what HMICFRS is going to look at, and we are going to have a look at what Louise Casey suggested.

Q116 **Mr Kohler:** Were you liaising with DCMS? Were you talking about this together? What were those conversations?

Richard Clarke: We were, yes. That team liaises with DCMS regularly, and there was contact during that week with DCMS colleagues. It is important to say that we manage the primary contact point with the UKFPU in the Home Office, but we were keeping DCMS colleagues in the loop.

Q117 **Mr Kohler:** What was the result of that discussion?

Richard Clarke: The importance of making sure that we understood what the plans were that were being developed by West Midlands police and being considered by the safety advisory group. As I say, right up until the decision was announced, we believed all options to be on the table.

Q118 **Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** I want to ask the same question I asked the officers. A number of Cabinet members expressed their opinions on this particular decision. Do you think it is appropriate for the Government to comment on operational decisions made by independent police forces? Did that in any way affect the standard safety decisions?

Sarah Jones: There is a big difference between commenting after a decision has been made and before. No comment was made in the run-up to the decision. It would not have been right, nor did we try or even think about trying, to influence what the police may have to say about the safety of a match.

Once the decision had been made, the Prime Minister was very clear in what he said. The view to the world at that point, rightly or wrongly, was that Jews were not welcome in this country, and the Prime Minister did not want to let that be the view of the Government. He wanted to be clear that we should not have a situation where Jewish fans are not able to come to this country. Once that decision had been made and the Prime Minister had responded, that triggered a weekend of activity in which DCMS—as the lead across Government on this—chaired multiple meetings across Government and in which Richard held conversations with the police. That activity basically asked, “What would it take for this match to go ahead? Let us talk about this. Let us talk about all your concerns, all the information, and money, if that is what we need to talk about.” We were in that mode, trying to come to a solution, when the Maccabi team said that the fans would not be coming. The process changed again at that point.

Q119 **Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** What was the evidential basis on which the Government said that the decision should be overturned? Was there any political element to that?

Sarah Jones: As I said, the Prime Minister was expressing a view. Rightly or wrongly, people thought that Jewish people were not being welcomed into our country to watch a football match. Of course, the decision—and this speaks to the challenge that we have in looking at these issues—was not made in a vacuum. The police chiefs know that they did not make the decision in a vacuum. There is a wider context of rising antisemitism, of



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conflict, and of people having very strong positions on Israel and Gaza. This decision was made in the context of all those things.

That was why the Prime Minister intervened in that way, and that is why we then said to the police, "Okay, you've made this decision. Let's look at it. Let's try to work together and see if there is something that we could do to make this work." The outcome that people wanted over that weekend was to find out what we can do to make it possible for the fans to come. There were still other options being looked at, such as whether a smaller number of fans could come—all those issues could be looked at. MHCLG, the Treasury, DCMS, the Home Office and us had conversations with the chief constable to say, "Tell us what it would take to make us able to do this safely."

Q120 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: Were there any discussions on the communications surrounding this? Rather than it being that "Jewish fans" were not welcome at the football match, were there any discussions about it being that "these particular fans" were not welcome at the football match? Were there any discussions about putting that view across?

Sarah Jones: Do you mean that in terms of whether it was the hooligan element?

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: Yes.

Sarah Jones: One of the struggles that we had with this process was that we did not actually have the information on why decisions had been made within the SAG. With the previous panel the Committee talked about what the SAG does and how it operates. We were not in the SAG process; we did not hear what the reasons were. We did not have access to all the information that the SAG had access to. There is the hooligan element, the community cohesion element, and the wider context into which all this lands. All of that is important, but we did not know that detail. Over the weekend there were lots of intensive conversations—Richard can speak to them more. I was involved on the Friday: there was a call with the Home Secretary, officials and advisors, and then there was that weekend of two or three meetings a day to try to work through a process to get to an end point. But that became irrelevant because the Israeli team said that they were not going to bring their fans anyway.

Q121 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: Did the Government have any access to intelligence that contradicted what West Midlands police had in its risk assessment?

Sarah Jones: We had neither the risk assessment nor any intelligence.

Q122 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: So what was the basis for saying that what they had decided was wrong?

Sarah Jones: Because, as I said, the decision sent a message that the Prime Minister could not accept, which was that Jewish people would not be welcome to come to this match. He was very clear that we needed to look again at that. The police and crime commissioner, on that decision, then also wrote to the SAG to ask that it meet again. There was a statement the following Monday from Lisa Nandy, the Secretary of State,



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in which she said the same, so we were all in the same place. I think it was on Monday evening that the decision was made for the fans not to come anyway.

Q123 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: Fans have previously been banned in the UK. Most notably, Celtic and Rangers fans were banned from visiting each other's grounds between 2023 and 2025. For consistency, on what basis would you say that was right or wrong?

Sarah Jones: The wider context in this is very important. There are some contested facts and figures that we don't have answers to at the moment. More widely, policing football matches is really hard, and policing protest is really hard, and the police pretty much do a really good job in difficult circumstances.

I was involved in conversations as the shadow Policing Minister about protests for a long time, and the West Midlands police is often held up as an example of managing these things well in terms of the work that it does to get us to a point where conditions are put in place and community engagement is done so that you can navigate your way through protest. In the main, the police do a very good job policing football matches in very difficult circumstances.

There are several issues that we need to unpick. One is the particular issue about intelligence—what was the right intelligence and what was the wrong intelligence—to which we don't have an answer. The second issue is whether this system is set up to fail and whether we need to look at a different system. We have asked HMICFRS to look at that for us to see whether we are putting local bodies in an impossible position when they are having to make a decision that has a much wider impact.

Q124 Peter Prinsley: What I am picking up here is that the Government were put in the position of having to deal with a problem after a decision had been made. The SAG in Birmingham decided that fans from Israel should not come to the football match. By the time you were alerted to it, we had a political catastrophe because we had a situation in which, as you say, the Prime Minister had to come forward and say, "We can't have a situation in this country where Jews are not welcome at football matches", in the wider context of what was going on with antisemitism all over the country. It seems to me that a political link was missing here.

You alluded to the way in which the SAG works for an event such as this. Do you think that there should have been deeper political thinking going on in Birmingham and in the SAG, perhaps because some of the members of the SAG are politically elected individuals? Do you not think it would have been appropriate for some of them to have realised what the consequences of this decision were, and that there should have been contact with people in Government before this announcement was made?

Q125 Sarah Jones: To put it in context, the SAG has its terms of reference and does what it does. Part of its role is not that it needs to alert central Government when a problem is coming. Equally, we knew in the Home Office that this was happening and there were several options being



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looked at, one of which was not allowing fans to come. We had no role, and it was a very important decision. That says to me that, going forward, we need to look at whether this structure is the right structure.

Q126 Jo White: Following the announcements that Maccabi Tel Aviv fans would be banned, what contact did you have with West Midlands police?

Sarah Jones: Richard was the one having the contact over the weekend. I should be clear that we heard the decision when Aston Villa tweeted about it first, because it was their decision. They tweeted at about quarter-past 5, and that is when we first knew about it. There was an initial taking in of that information, and then this weekend of very active engagement with the police and other Government Departments. I do not know if Richard would like to speak on his engagement.

Richard Clarke: Yes, I spoke to the chief constable several times over that weekend, as did members of my team. We were also discussing at a more operational level; in addition to the small team that I have that liaises directly with the UK Football Policing Unit, we have a team that specialises in liaising with police forces during particularly important moments. They were brought in to support as well, so they were talking individually to their counterparts in West Midlands police.

Throughout that entire weekend, my and other involved civil servants' No. 1 priority was to achieve the Government's objective, which was that the match should go ahead with fans able to be present from both teams. The conversations we were having with police were about understanding the sequence of work they were doing to think about alternative options, the likely timings of SAG meetings—which continued to be a source of some discussion right up until the Monday evening—and exactly when those SAG meetings were going to take place. Importantly, I emphasised to the police that it was the Government's position—and I was mandated to say this—that there should be no element of self-censoring in relation to resources. We wanted to know what it would take for the match to be able to go ahead.

The operational planning and the options being considered had to be developed by the police themselves; we took no part in operational planning in that sense. Our job was to ensure that we understood what the options were that were being considered, that we were ready to respond quickly to any requests for resources, and that we had made very clear to police and partners that we would consider those options if they were to come to us.

Q127 Jo White: There are a whole series of processes—you talked about future SAG meetings—so was there a timeframe for that decision to be made?

Richard Clarke: We did not set a timeframe because that decision ultimately had to be made by the SAG. I remember very clearly saying over that weekend that we would want the decision to be made as quickly as possible, but on the other hand, we completely recognised that the police and partners needed to work through the options to come up with potential alternative policing plans.



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We were available and working throughout that weekend and were ready to respond immediately if requests came in or alternative options were being considered. As the Minister said, we were doing that right up to the point at which the decision was made by Maccabi Tel Aviv not to draw down on the allocations.

Q128 Jo White: Everything else, we could say, is entirely trying to talk about events that never actually happened. But what would have happened if the SAG had still said no? How could we overcome a SAG decision?

Richard Clarke: We were fully focused on making sure that the match was able to go ahead with fans present. That was our absolute focus over that weekend.

Sarah Jones: The process of the SAG is that, ultimately, you must have a safety certificate for the match to go ahead, so that is what we were working towards: how do we manage to get that safety certificate? I did not mention before, and should have done, that the Cabinet Office is doing work looking at the terms of reference of the SAG, alongside the review that the inspector is doing about the police's input into the SAG. The Cabinet Office is also doing a bit of work—that is probably underplaying it—through its resilience team to look at the guidance on how SAGs should operate.

Q129 Jo White: I asked the police, and the police and crime commissioner, this question earlier: do you think the SAGs should be politically independent and not have political representatives on them?

Sarah Jones: It is a difficult one to answer. We obviously need to look at their role. We are looking, through the inspectorate, at the bit that we have oversight of, which is the police's involvement in the SAG. Looking at the wider SAG is a wider question.

Sometimes we talk about political input, and different people mean different things. I guess we are saying that what we do not want is a decision of safety and security to be made incorrectly because of involvement from one organisation or another. That could be political, or it could be other things: it could be other people having a view about other things. Hillsborough, as we know, was an absolute tragedy and so we needed to make sure football matches were safe. The principle after Hillsborough was that you bring together all the bodies—the emergency services, the local community organisations—to have that conversation. That is a good principle. On this occasion, because it had such a bigger national and international dimension, do we need something like what Louise Casey or Lord Mann has suggested, bringing together a slightly different group of people to also feed into the decision?

Q130 Mr Kohler: I am struggling with the logic. Before the decision is made, you are kept fully informed, but you take a sort of vow of silence that you will not actually get involved. The moment the decision is made, when it is far more difficult, you then, rightly, have the right to facilitate a change of decision. If you can offer that facilitation after the decision is made, why can you not offer it beforehand, when it is far less difficult to get to the

preferred outcome?

Sarah Jones: There are a number of things there. First, we were not sure when the SAG was meeting, who was on it, or on what basis it was making its decision. We are just not in that conversation. Should we have seen the political implication earlier? Quite possibly. We have already looked at our processes for raising issues within the Home Office, but the reason that that did not happen is that there was not a role for the Home Office. It was not that people did not realise that it was a significant match; it was that we had no role in the decision-making process.

Q131 **Mr Kohler:** You had no role afterwards, but you inserted yourself in because it was so political. You do not have a role at any point, but you inserted yourself because it was so political. Isn't the reality that you either took your eye off the ball or were complacent about what was happening?

Sarah Jones: I do not think that we were complacent at all. The reality of our role is one that is now being looked at through HMICFRS. It is looking at the role of police in this system. We are also looking at what the role of the Home Office is in policing decisions. The whole police reform agenda is an interesting one. As we know, back in 2012, when police and crime commissioners were set up, the role of the Home Office was to step back from a lot of the issues and not to be hands-on in the way we were before. We are looking through the reform agenda: is that balance right, or do we need to shift it?

You make a reasonable point: what is our role and when should we be stepping in? But I cannot overstate how hard it is for a decision like this, because the operational independence of the police is so important. If we were charging in and telling them before they had made a decision, before they had a position, and then something catastrophic happened, clearly that is not something we would want. We have to get this balance right.

Q132 **Mr Kohler:** I see that completely. From what you said earlier, though, do you accept that perhaps the political implications were not fully considered?

Sarah Jones: Information flows within the civil service, within the Department and within the private offices. We were acting in our role, which was to ask for and receive information. It was being passed around to DCMS and others. I do not think that publicly we could have had a role at that point, because the decision had not been made. I do not think that that would have been right.

Q133 **Robbie Moore:** It all seems a bit of a mess. We have a scenario where a decision is being made by West Midlands police; the Home Office is notified about the decision, or the direction of the decision, yet it has a feeling that it cannot step in; but ultimately the Prime Minister comes out to say that that the decision to ban Israeli supporters was completely wrong. I would say that an element of the Home Office role is that it should be politically sensitive to the social cohesion implications of decisions that are being made.



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Sarah Jones: Just to be clear, no decision was made before the decision was made. The police put the advice into the SAG; the SAG makes a decision; and then the local authority is the ultimate body responsible for giving the safety certificate. It was then the decision of Aston Villa to say that there would be no away fan tickets. That was an Aston Villa decision. We did not know that decision until 5.17 pm on the day itself, when the decision had been made and Aston Villa tweeted about it. No decision had been made up to that point.

We knew that there were options on the table, and that it was likely that there would be a ban on the fans, but there were also other options being considered: a smaller number of fans being allocated, the match being held behind closed doors with no fans, or the match being held somewhere else. All those things were in the mix.

Q134 **Robbie Moore:** At what point were any concerns raised by the Home Office? Were any concerns raised by the Home Office when there was an understanding that the ban would follow through?

Richard Clarke: We contacted the UK Football Policing Unit on a number of occasions, particularly in that week of the 6th, 8th and 15th. On 15 October, we contacted the UKFPU, expressly following the Policing Minister asking us to check what the latest was. At that point, we were told that all options were still on the table. It was not confirmed yet, at that point when we spoke to UKFPU, exactly when the next SAG meeting was going to be or whether that next SAG meeting would take a decision.

We were in contact with the UKFPU in order to understand the options being considered. We were expressly not seeking to interfere in that decision, but we did want to understand it in order to be able to properly brief Ministers. We were told on the 15th that all options were still being considered.

Q135 **Robbie Moore:** Was there any line of communication directly with the West Midlands police and crime commissioner on this?

Richard Clarke: Not that I am aware of—certainly not from my team.

Sarah Jones: Not from me.

Q136 **Robbie Moore:** I will ask the same question of the Policing Minister that I asked of the police and crime commissioner: do you have full faith in the chief constable, in terms of the operational decisions that he was making and ultimately the conclusion that was reached?

Sarah Jones: First, as I said before, West Midlands police have been held up as an example of good practice over the years in terms of how they handle protest, community cohesion and all of those—

Robbie Moore: But in relation to this.

Sarah Jones: There is a contested issue around the intelligence, which obviously you spoke to him about at length and which we are waiting on, but that is the only contested point at this time.

Q137 **Robbie Moore:** So you are reserving judgment—is that the conclusion?

Sarah Jones: Yes. I have only been the Policing Minister for a few weeks, but I have met with him and met with the police and crime commissioner on different issues, on which we work very well together, and they do a very good job. There is a contested issue that we are waiting for, which is why we have asked HMICFRS to look at this at pace and come back to us before the end of December.

Q138 **Chair:** Just to be absolutely clear on the timeline: when were you first alerted that there were concerns around this match?

Richard Clarke: The first time we were aware of potential concerns was in early September.

Chair: So the match was announced in August—I think that is when UEFA said when the fixtures would be—and in early September there was a notification that there were concerns around this match.

Richard Clarke: Potential concerns, yes.

Chair: Right. How much of that was based on Lord Mann's previous report to you on what had happened at the Ajax game?

Richard Clarke: Some of that concern in early September was based on Lord Mann's concerns about what had happened in the Ajax game.

Chair: When was it made clear to you what West Midlands police were going to recommend? My understanding is that their recommendation to the SAG was that the match could go ahead if no away fans were there. When were you aware that that was West Midlands police's recommendation?

Sarah Jones: We never knew that for sure.

Richard Clarke: We never knew, until after the announcement that the decision had been made, that that was the definitive answer. We heard about that on the 16th, along with everyone else. On the 15th, my team spoke to the UK Football Policing Unit, which said that all options were still being considered.

Q139 **Chair:** Did you say, at any point, that it would be incredibly bad politically if the fans were not able to attend?

Richard Clarke: No. We were focused on ensuring that we understood the options being considered.

Q140 **Chair:** Was No. 10 alerted to any of this prior to the 16th?

Richard Clarke: Yes, we were in touch with No. 10 at points throughout that.

Q141 **Chair:** And No. 10 was aware that there was a possibility that away fans would be banned from this match?



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Richard Clarke: I would have to check the exact point at which we were speaking to No. 10.

Chair: If you could, we would appreciate that.

Richard Clarke: I will.

Sarah Jones: There was also a point at the start of October. There had been a question that UEFA might vote to exclude, which I think people were waiting for. On 2 October, it became apparent that that was not going to be the case, so that was also a date of significance.

Q142 **Mr Kohler:** You had Lord Mann's report, but he tells us that he did not get much from you. West Midlands police tell us that they did not see Lord Mann's report. Given that what it covered was clearly critical or relevant to the decision, why did you not inform West Midlands police about the report? Would that not have been a useful thing to do?

Richard Clarke: Our understanding at the time was that the UK Football Policing Unit had access to Lord Mann's report. We believed they did.

Sarah Jones: He met with my predecessor as Policing Minister. We were not there, but the action from that was that the UKFPU was to work with Lord Mann, as we understand it. Lord Mann will know whether that happened or not.

Chair: We are coming on to our final set of questions, so we will get you out by half past, which I know is your hard stop.

Q143 **Peter Prinsley:** I want to ask you a question that I asked the previous two panels before you came in, which I think goes to the heart of the matter and the thing that most concerns the Jewish community. Do you believe that there is any reason to suppose that there was political interference in the decision to ban the supporters, and this was the result of a prejudiced assessment of the advice and information that was received?

Sarah Jones: I do not think I can comment on that, because I do not know. I have not seen any evidence to suggest that there was prejudice, but nor have I seen all the information. That is why we are asking HMICFRS to look at the intelligence. There were lots of different views as to what happened in that Amsterdam match and different bits of information, so we need to get to the bottom of that. The point at which the Prime Minister intervened—whether there was or there was not, that is the perception, and we cannot have that.

The backdrop of this is rising antisemitism. On 2 October we had had the Manchester attack, and the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister were both very clear that we need to do absolutely everything we can to stamp out antisemitism wherever it is. That is a guiding principle that sits behind a lot of what we are doing: it is why we are providing more funding for synagogues and why we are working so closely with colleagues from the



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Jewish community. But I cannot literally answer the question that you asked, because I do not have the information.

Q144 Peter Prinsley: Thank you for that very candid response. I understand that a brief has been given to a chief inspector to review football policing. What are you hoping to achieve with the review? We have just spoken about this, but we think that the SAG process is probably not working right, and you have said that you are also looking at that. What specifically do you think this review of football policing will achieve?

Sarah Jones: This inspection is specifically on the input that police forces make into the safety advisory groups. It is looking at their risk appetite in terms of advice and assessment; the degree to which they look at community impacts as part of these decisions, beyond a narrow community safety element; whether the balance is correct in what they are looking at; and how forces then communicate their decisions.

Subsequent to the Home Secretary commissioning this work on 31 October and providing £200,000 for the inspector to do it, she has written asking that he also consider the information and intelligence that informed the match assessment. That follows the contested space that we have of what the intelligence was or was not. He is going to report on that by 31 December, and on the wider issue by March.

Q145 Chair: To summarise what the Committee has found out today, a decision was taken, which the Home Office was aware might be taken. It was offering support and said that resources would be available, but that does not appear to have been taken into account in the final decision. But it was all based on this contested assessment of the intelligence from what happened at the Ajax game, where we have Lord Mann's report saying one thing, the intelligence report from the chief constable of West Midlands police saying something else, and other things now coming through from the Dutch police. Did it cross anyone's mind at the Home Office to challenge the intelligence assessment? Given the sensitivity of this matter, was there anyone in the Home Office who asked whether it could double-check that this intelligence was right?

Sarah Jones: At that time, I did not have Lord Mann's report, I did not have access to any intelligence, and I did not know what the SAG was making its decision based on, other than that its terms of reference mean that it looks at several things. I did not have access to that information. Whether I should have done, within the confines of operational independence—that is a question. That is why the Home Secretary has asked us to look at the recommendation from Louise Casey that when there are matches of such significant interest, we have a slightly different model. That will be very difficult to work through, but we need to look at that, because it is a valid question to ask what we should have had access to.

Q146 Chair: So you did not have sight, before this decision, of the document that cited the West Ham game that never happened?

Sarah Jones: No. We saw that when it was published.



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Richard Clarke: We did not see it prior to the 16th. Our focus on that weekend was about making sure that the Government could facilitate, in any way we could, the match going ahead with fans being present from both teams.

Q147 **Chair:** Is there anything you want to add before we conclude?

Sarah Jones: I don't think so.

Chair: Thank you very much for coming. I appreciate that you came at short notice to assist us in our deliberations.