

# Culture, Media and Sport Committee

## Oral evidence: Major Events, HC 1339

Tuesday 24 March 2026

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 24 March 2026.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Mr Bayo Alaba (Chair); Damian Hinds; Natasha Irons; Jeff Smith; Cameron Thomas.

Questions 163 - 231

### Witnesses

[I](#): Rebecca Edser, Head of Events, VisitScotland.

[II](#): Ken Scott MBE, Deputy Chief Executive and Head of Inspectorate, Sports Grounds Safety Authority, and Anne Marie Chebib, Chair, United Kingdom Crowd Management Association.

## Examination of witness

Witness: Rebecca Edser.

Q163 **Chair:** Welcome to this morning's meeting of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee. Today we are holding an evidence session on major events. For our first panel we are joined by Rebecca Edser, who is Head of Events at VisitScotland. Rebecca, welcome. We are also grateful that the Welsh Government have offered to send us written evidence, as they are unable to attend today. Rebecca, thank you for coming along today to speak with us. We are keen to hear your insights on the Scottish approach. Could you tell us about Scotland's national events strategy?

**Rebecca Edser:** Yes, no problem at all. I might go into a bit about the history of our strategy. We are on the third edition of our strategy. EventScotland was established through a strategic paper in 2003 in recognition of the fact that Scotland had bid for and not succeeded in winning a number of events. After its formation in 2008, we developed our first national event strategy. That was updated in 2015 and then re-updated in 2024, so we are now on our third edition of that strategy.

We have two key roles. One is attracting, bidding for, and securing events for Scotland, and the second is helping existing events in Scotland to grow and develop. When we updated the strategy in 2024—there was some consultation in 2015—we did a much more extensive consultation for the latest edition. There was a 14-week online public consultation, we did regional workshops, we did stakeholder meetings with various groups such as our local authorities, Police Scotland and the trade unions, and we had over 300 consultations in the formation of that strategy. It was launched in 2024, and our ambition remains that Scotland is the perfect stage for events.

Q164 **Chair:** May I also remind members to declare any interest before they ask their questions? For myself, before working in this place I spent a number of years in the hospitality and events sector, working on national major events. We have heard from various organisations, including Warwick Business School and Manchester Council, on best practice, and Scotland was the example given to us, regarding joined-up approaches and things like that. Can you tell us about how you came to that good-practice footing?

**Rebecca Edser:** It has evolved over the three strategies, but there are some coherent pieces that have been with us since the beginning. Having our strategy does give us a unified, co-ordinated approach to our events but there are two things that I would like to draw out. First is the reflection within our strategy about how we want events that will build on the natural assets and skills that we have, whether that is our built facilities, our natural environment, maybe some of our history and culture, and—significantly for us—building on the reputation of our people and the warm welcome.



Another important element of our strategy is what we call the portfolio approach. The strategy outlines a pyramid of events, with the largest mega events at the top and community events at the bottom, together with the fact that as an industry all of those events are important to us. We cannot have those largest mega events if we do not have a strong, thriving community event sector. One of the strengths of our approach is that it shows every event that is happening in the country, where they fit and that they are an important part of that wider economy.

The other piece, which has been a strength of the latest edition, is that we are clearly aligned to our national Government strategy—the strategy for economic transformation—so that we can see how those strategies align into a wider national strategy. Since 2020 and the formation of covid, we have had an events industry advisory group. That group came together through covid to represent the industry and speak about the impact of covid, but has continued and is evolving in its formation. It now has a responsibility for the strategy, so we are engaging the industry in a much more formal way through this edition as well.

**Q165 Jeff Smith:** Who sits on the advisory group?

**Rebecca Edser:** The advisory group is a representation of different bodies. We have local authority representatives, representatives from large venues such as the SEC, concert promoters, and representatives from different elements of the delivery side of the sector and so on. It is an evolving membership, but the idea is that it can speak to different parts of the sector and give us a strong sounding board.

**Q166 Chair:** If you did not have a national event strategy, what would you miss or what would not be addressed?

**Rebecca Edser:** For us, it's 20 years of building a strong reputation of being able to host and deliver events. We potentially would not have what we have now. The awarding of the Commonwealth Games with 18 months' notice, which is building on the fact that people know that we have the facilities, which were a legacy from 2014, and that we have the people and the skills.

In the LOC at the moment there are just over 200 staff. About 30% of them are from Glasgow with previous major event experience, so we are able to draw on those resources and skills at short notice. We would not have things like the Tour de France or Grand Départ and we potentially would not have had the Cycling World Championships. It is harder to say what we do have, but it is more about what we probably would not have if we had not been working on this in a cohesive way for the last 20 years.

**Q167 Chair:** It is about that readiness and preparedness in some of the events that you have secured. What could the UK Government learn from you?

**Rebecca Edser:** Anything that is done at UK level obviously needs to respect the devolved nature of each home nation, and, I suspect, the



regions as well. One of the strengths of our strategy is that it builds on the strengths that Scotland has in terms of, let's say, its landscapes, our existing festivals and cultural reputation. Whatever is developed at a UK level needs to respect that authentic nature at a local level.

There are opportunities, particularly operationally, to provide more support to the sector. It can be quite a fragmented sector. With legislation and so on, there is probably cohesion and a point of contact there. Reading some of the other submissions, there is the potential to support wider opportunities. I always think that events are a springboard for great impacts and legacy, and I know that soft power has been a theme that has come to this Committee before, and how you help those events to be that springboard or help people to see them and to see that opportunity right across the public sector.

**Q168 Cameron Thomas:** Good morning. Following on from the last question before pushing on with mine, to what extent does VisitScotland collaborate with neighbouring groups in England and Wales?

**Rebecca Edser:** UK Sport—you have had this before—has home countries' meetings, so we regularly work with Wales and England and Northern Ireland, mainly through the Scottish Government. There was the engagement through DCMS on some of the biggest events—the UEFA Euros football, for example. We have a network through organisations such as VisitBritain as well that we engage with, so we are in quite regular engagement with the other home nations.

**Q169 Cameron Thomas:** Is there a collective appetite to draw those large international events across the UK?

**Rebecca Edser:** Yes. If you look at the international events landscape, co-hosting is becoming a more common theme. You have two great examples at the moment with the Tour de France, which Scotland had always wanted to host, but we are quite far from France, so you need the support of England and Wales for that event to be able to travel through the country. That will be an amazing thing for us to see next year. Then we have the UEFA Euros 2028, which again is a collaborative bid, as is the bid for the FIFA Women's World Cup.

**Q170 Cameron Thomas:** From an EventScotland perspective, what are the main things you would like to see covered in a UK Government major events strategy?

**Rebecca Edser:** As I mentioned before, it is how to provide that operational support to the events, whether that is legislation specific to events or even employment law. It can be quite a fragmented space and sometimes the events sector can find it challenging to demonstrate its value to the communities and the economy, so there is probably a piece on measurement and impact and supporting the sector in that space. Then accessing government to be that springboard, whether that is for soft power or reaching into other policy areas. Sports events will have



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

strong links to sport, but there are potential links to education and health and how we can help to widen those access points.

Q171 **Cameron Thomas:** How could a UK Government strategy complement the Scottish Government's approach?

**Rebecca Edser:** As I say, any UK strategy would need to respect the devolved nature of events. Each of the events that I have spoken about, the Scottish Government are asked to fund and underwrite those on a number of occasions. You also have to respect the fact that sometimes different regions and nations will want to bid for events that lean into their different strengths and different priorities. We need to make sure that that is respected and also respect the fact that there is quite often competition within the UK as well. You cannot take out competition.

If you have the national road cycling championships that can only take place within the UK, that competition will be in the UK. I know that within other sectors, such as business events, that natural competition within a nation is much more common. I do not think that it can look to control that competition, but probably encourage collaboration.

Q172 **Jeff Smith:** Just on that, if you do not mind, Chair, you are sounding a slight note of caution there. We have heard that Scotland is the leader in this field and that lots of people are saying that we need a UK strategy as well. You are talking about respecting the devolved nations, which is understandable. How do you think it could work in practice and what do you fear might happen if you have a UK strategy that overcuts your Scottish strategy?

**Rebecca Edser:** The actual number of events that a UK strategy would be targeting—where I assume those would be at the very top and the biggest—would be so small in comparison to letting the natural nature of the industry take place that I would worry that you would set a framework that would be good for the few, but not necessarily the many.

Q173 **Jeff Smith:** How could it cause problems for the Scottish strategy?

**Rebecca Edser:** As I say, we are aligned to our national Government priorities, so we would want to be free to bid for those events or secure those or invest in those events that delivered those for us. My background is sports events, and we have a long history in different ways, but for some sports you are looking at working with the national governing body of Scotland, sometimes you are working with the national governing body of the UK, and that is linked to that international federation structure. That is not something that we are deciding, it is something that has been decided at another level.

It is about making sure that something that comes with a blanket over the top, which, as I say, would apply for those very biggest events—our whole policy is around the fact that we have a pyramid, everything from those community events to those mega events. Whatever approach was taken, we would need to be able to support at each of those levels. We



outlined in our submission that we have our national event strategy; Wales has theirs. That is missing in England and Northern Ireland. Something that reflects those national priorities could be very beneficial to them.

**Q174 Chair:** On that point, you mentioned the framework and ensuring that large and small organisations benefit mutually. Do you have any suggestions? How would we approach that so that your small, your medium and your large organisations are addressed and supported?

**Rebecca Edser:** We did an extensive consultation, so I would encourage you to speak directly to the sector there. That would be one piece, because you want to make sure that you hear what they say. Sometimes there can be implications at a low level that perhaps are not seen through new legislation and so on. It is important to engage at all levels of that pyramid.

There are so many different stakeholders that put on those events at those different levels, whether that is private promoters who are taking the risk on the events, the local authorities that are supporting them in the delivery and through their safety advisory groups, and other third parties, the third sector or other commercial bodies. It will be important to listen to all of those different members when you come to it, to make sure that what is created is supportive from the top to the bottom.

**Q175 Damian Hinds:** Whether it is large events or smaller events, one theme that we have heard in this inquiry is the difficulty, the frustration, or the admin cost of having to deal with multiple branches of the public sector, local authorities, policing, transport, and so on. It was suggested that you have overcome that with the proverbial single front door. Is that true?

**Rebecca Edser:** To an extent, but we have not ruled it out completely. We are still independent from a local authority, so each event would still need to go through a local authority safety advisory group and so on.

**Q176 Damian Hinds:** If I am an events organiser, do I have one person in your organisation who I go through and then that person does all the—

**Rebecca Edser:** No. We have a clear role that, as I say, is in bidding for secure funding. We do not deliver. We do a lot of signposting. Once a local organising committee is established, we would be able to support it to make sure that it is connected into that local authority, but it would run and deliver that.

**Q177 Damian Hinds:** Beyond VisitScotland, is there anything else in the set-up that simplifies that process of all these different public sector bodies that I need to work with?

**Rebecca Edser:** We are a clear place for inquiries to come. We can then advise on the priorities in our national strategy and how an event may or may not align. We can advise on the funding opportunities, whether that is through us or others. We can advise on our understanding of the



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

priorities of host locations and where something may be more attractive to them.

We can also advise and engage with the Scottish Government if it is an event of a scale that requires that. We do have good networks across other public bodies in Scotland. We can also provide advice from our experience, but the delivery of the event and the operational delivery would still sit very much with that event organiser and the local structures that surround the area that it is being staged in.

**Q178 Damian Hinds:** Can I ask about the visitor levy? This is quite a big change coming to the Scottish travel and tourism sector this year, right?

**Rebecca Edser:** Yes.

**Damian Hinds:** From July, in Edinburgh, Glasgow?

**Rebecca Edser:** Each area is making its own decision. It is not coming in across the country. It is not my specialist area, so I may need to provide some further information, but, yes, I can confirm that Edinburgh is introducing a levy.

**Q179 Damian Hinds:** We know about Edinburgh, Glasgow, West Dunbartonshire, Aberdeen, Sterling, and there are some other consultations still outstanding.

**Rebecca Edser:** Yes, each different authority is in a different place on that journey, because, as you say, there is a formal consultation process that they need to go through and so on.

**Q180 Damian Hinds:** Totally understanding and respecting that this is not your specialist area, I think VisitScotland leads the visitor levy expert group, is that right?

**Rebecca Edser:** Yes, I believe my colleagues do.

**Q181 Damian Hinds:** Particularly relevant to your part of the thing, first of all is the revenue ringfenced? You are in the business of bringing great events to Scotland that generate economic activity and joy, but they require marketing and they require organisation, they require facilities and so on. Do you have a guarantee that the revenue that comes from the visitor levy goes into those things and does not go into things that would have been provided anyway for the resident population?

**Rebecca Edser:** It is probably best that I follow up with some details, but I can confirm from my understanding that each of the local authorities are making their own decisions on how that money is spent. For a number of those events it is something that they are looking at and considering. In terms of the specifics, I do not want to accidentally tell you something that is not true. I can ask my colleagues to send in some information on the levy for you.

**Chair:** Absolutely, yes, we are more than happy for you submit it in



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

writing.

**Rebecca Edser:** Perfect, yes, we will follow up with that.

Q182 **Damian Hinds:** I am not quite done, but I totally understand that. I think that the Edinburgh rate is 5%, Glasgow will be 5%, Stirling 3% and Aberdeen 7%. Without having to know the details of how all that works, let's assume that gets passed on entirely in rate. It may not be 100%, but let's assume it is. Would you expect that to have an impact on the competitiveness of those cities in bidding for major events?

**Rebecca Edser:** It potentially could. It could also potentially have an impact on the cities about investment that they are making to support their wider tourism economy as well and to support that activity in the city. But if they choose to apply that rate to events, then, yes, that would be—

Q183 **Damian Hinds:** Do they have a choice? It is just a bed tax, right? Any overnighting visitor I think would—

**Rebecca Edser:** Yes. However, as I understand it, each local authority will make a decision on how they spend that money. If they choose to spend that money on a major events portfolio, that would be an income stream and that could be a benefit to them.

Q184 **Jeff Smith:** Continuing to talk about collaboration, what is your role in liaising with the Scottish Government and bringing the various inevitably siloed bits of Scottish Government together when you are dealing with event organisers?

**Rebecca Edser:** The Scottish Government have a Major Events Department that we liaise with. It is the Major Events Department that does the liaison across Scottish Government.

Q185 **Jeff Smith:** How do you work with local authorities? Say Glasgow and Edinburgh wanted to go for the same event. What is your role in managing that?

**Rebecca Edser:** It has not happened for a while, but both cities have their own priorities, so we are able to identify those events that would be most suitable. Glasgow recently developed a major event strategy for the city, which is linked to and reflects our national event strategy, so we are able to draw a line between those.

If we have a situation where both cities would express an interest, we will play an even role in both of those and support them in terms of the feasibility, looking at that opportunity, what would be the benefits for the city, what would be the staging opportunities. They are quite different cities in terms of their priorities and their facilities. Generally, if we have multiple places within Scotland who are looking at an event, we will make sure that we were working with them each equally and supporting whoever was making that decision on where the host would be, whether that was a promoter, commercial operator, or a federation.



Q186 **Jeff Smith:** You do not have a role in deciding anything, by the sound of it. You are very supportive and it is clearly working well, but you are not an overseeing body that says, "You'll do that. You'll do that".

**Rebecca Edser:** Should there be vastly different strengths and benefits, yes, we would consider that and make a recommendation. But the beauty of Scotland is that it is quite different in its nature from north to south, so we have different opportunities for different parts of the country.

Q187 **Jeff Smith:** Presumably you have regular catchups with the local authorities. Do you sit down and plan a strategy for each city?

**Rebecca Edser:** Some cities have an event strategy. For some locations it might be ingrained and built into a tourism or a cultural strategy. Not every local authority has a strategy. We would love for that to be the case and are actively working to do that. Our ambition is that we would have an understanding on the priorities of each of those local authorities so that we could work collaboratively with them to make sure that we are making the right investments for them as well.

There is no point in us making an investment in something that is not delivering on local priorities as well, or if it is felt that it is been done to a community rather than with a community. So, yes, we want to make sure that we are working very collaboratively with the local authorities.

Q188 **Jeff Smith:** Do you have a long-term plan for individual authorities; do you have a long-term plan for Scotland? How do you work on a strategic approach?

**Rebecca Edser:** It is something that we are reviewing at the moment. We are looking to develop, particularly at a regional level in line with our regional economic partnerships, strategic approaches. As with the levy, local authorities are on a different pathway with that, but we are keen to understand each of those authorities' ambitions in that space and where they are looking to work and how we can work collaboratively with them. We are just starting the process of reviewing how we do that.

Q189 **Jeff Smith:** This is a similar question to what I asked before. If you had a UK event strategy, what value could add to those individual cities? Because it seems that you are doing all the strategic support and co-ordination that they need. What would be the benefit of the UK strategy?

**Rebecca Edser:** It depends what it would encompass. Showing that events are important, a recognised important sector, whether that is to our visitor economy, to sports participation or to widening access through our cultural events. Having that long-term priority and the sector being able to see that and see themselves as a priority area would be beneficial.

If the strategy went so far as to look at funding as well—that ability to secure long-term funding beyond any parliamentary period—it would also be beneficial for the biggest events where you are bidding quite far out.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

For a number of events, due to the nature of where their funding is coming from, a lot of them have had year-on-year funding, and I know that multi-year funding is something that they would also be particularly passionate about. As I said before, having somewhere for the sector to come and point to for those operational issues that arise and being able to know what door to knock on for them would be really beneficial.

**Q190 Jeff Smith:** You mentioned the Commonwealth Games. In that process, did the Commonwealth Games organisers come to you or did they go to Glasgow?

**Rebecca Edser:** Neither. They went to Commonwealth Games Scotland, who is their body in Scotland. Commonwealth Games Scotland came to the city and the country with the opportunity.

**Q191 Chair:** A quick question on some of the strategies. You spoke about the cities and the councils and their plan. What is a decent timescale for a plan to be put in place? How far out should they plan?

**Rebecca Edser:** Our strategy has always been 10 years. I previously worked in an industry that operated on a four-year cycle, and I think that you want to be looking at least a cycle and a bit beyond. Maybe at a local level, it might be five to eight years and at a national level I would suggest you are looking at least 10.

**Q192 Natasha Irons:** I want to talk about the eventsIMPACT toolkit. Can you explain what the benefits are of using that?

**Rebecca Edser:** Yes, no problem. The eventsIMPACT toolkit is a joint project that we work on with a number of other bodies around the UK. It was first developed to recognise that historically, when you were undertaking, in particular, an economic impact valuation, each contractor was using a different methodology in the way that they were looking to calculate the output.

The event impacts projects initially started as an opportunity to look at that. We now have a recognised approach and a methodology, which is embraced by the industry, of how those valuations can be calculated. It also has an online calculator tool, which is opensource and available for event organisers to use. It also looks at other areas where we are trying to bring together the sector on measurement and evaluation of the environment, community impacts and on the workforce as well.

**Q193 Natasha Irons:** Does it inform decision-making and planning programmes?

**Rebecca Edser:** For us, and for a number of other agencies, the direct economic benefit that you would receive from hosting an event can be an important part of considering its wider benefits, so that economic impact tool is quite commonly used for people to understand what that economic benefit would be. We would also want to consider the reputational impact



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

in terms of how that portrays Scotland on a national and international stage.

We would want to understand the benefits to the local community that it is being staged in, and we would also want to understand their approach to the environment and sustainability. Overall it forms part of our assessment, but we would utilise all those different areas when considering the benefits and value of an event.

**Q194 Natasha Irons:** Are you able to look at the community legacy of events?

**Rebecca Edser:** That is a more evolving space for the sector, but, yes, the sector is looking to understand more about how we not quite standardise, but achieve a consistency across that.

**Q195 Natasha Irons:** We have had evidence that the UK Government do not use the same model. They do not use eventsIMPACT as much as Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Do you think that they are missing a trick there?

**Rebecca Edser:** I cannot comment on how much they do and do not use it, but the eventsIMPACT website is hosted and co-ordinated by UK Sport, which is a UK Government body.

**Q196 Natasha Irons:** If they are not maximising that resource, should they be?

**Rebecca Edser:** It depends what outcomes they are seeking to achieve, what inputs they should be considering. As I say, we look not just at the economics, we look at a range of indicators when making our decisions.

**Q197 Natasha Irons:** I will move on to another question. Is the Scottish major event strategy important in facilitating legacy planning within the country?

**Rebecca Edser:** Absolutely. For me, legacy does not happen after an event. More commonly now we are talking about the impacts and that can be pre, during and post. That is something that I would say has shifted in the last 15 years. We are starting to look what those impacts and those opportunities are in the build up to a major event, during its staging and afterwards.

Having a series of events means that you can link them together to join some of those benefits together, whether that is in a practical sense—an example would be that the venues that were built for the Commonwealth Games in 2014 being used for individual world and European Championships, the European Sports Championships and now for the Commonwealth Games is a clear impact and legacy of that one event that has had a long-term benefit to the event staging sector, and a lot of those venues are used actively by the community, so they have delivered community benefits as well.

**Q198 Natasha Irons:** What are the top three lessons that the UK Government



can take from that when we are looking at legacy, when we are looking at not just having an event, but what it can do for communities afterwards or, as you said, in the lead up to those things?

**Rebecca Edser:** Absolutely. We are lucky to have an active pipeline of those events, so we do not start from scratch each time, whether that is in workforce and volunteering, or whether that is in the utilisation of suppliers. Since 2012, the UK has a number of very respected suppliers internationally. How do we keep that sector buoyant and how do we keep making sure that there are large-scale events coming in to support the delivery and operational side?

In terms of the communities, a positive impact from one community might be very different from another, but are there learnings from the approach or even, as I was saying before, that measurement impact and evaluation is a newer space, so how do we make sure that we are taking the learnings from one and passing it to the next?

Q199 **Natasha Irons:** There was a discussion earlier about trying not to have a strategy that is UK-wide that interrupts what you are doing and what Wales is doing, and they are clearly successful in their own right and any strategy should not undo what is working. However, if we have a clear measure and we are all looking at the same thing and we are all measuring the same success, it makes it slightly easier, doesn't it, in how those strategies interact with one another?

**Rebecca Edser:** Absolutely, and how we are working with the local authorities to make sure that it is aligning with what they are seeking to achieve through their investments as well.

Q200 **Chair:** Going back slightly, you mentioned building on natural assets and reputation in how you started the evolution of the strategy. In terms of natural assets, are we talking physical or are they intangible?

**Rebecca Edser:** Yes, we have some incredible natural scenery, which does lend itself to the staging of some events, whether that is something like mountain biking or—I was going to say cycling, but they are one and the same thing, aren't they? We have just recently secured some legs of the World Rally for our forests up in the north-east, so there are physical assets in terms of the natural environment we have and the suitability for them to be showcased in stage events.

We also had a fantastic event—we already had a number of amazing existing events when EventScotland was developed, the Edinburgh Festivals being a key example. That is an internationally renowned event. What we were doing was building on a very solid base of already exciting events that were taking place around the country and some that are intrinsically Scottish, like the Highland Games.

We wanted to create a strategy that built on the assets that we have: as I say, our natural environment, our built environment in terms of the facilities that we might have that other cities may not, in terms of our



signature events, and our people and history as well, whether that is utilising Robert Burns to enhance or create events, or our strong links to literature with our books festivals and poetry festivals.

**Q201 Jeff Smith:** You mentioned the rally event. So that we understand how you fit into that, what was the process for bidding for and then organising that event?

**Rebecca Edser:** The first edition of that event will take place in 2027, so we have not quite got to the delivery point yet. That was an opportunity that UK Motorsport were looking to seek. It developed a feasibility study, which was shared with the local community and we engaged with that and looked at that in terms of the benefits, the support that it had in the community and what the potential impacts could be, to help secure funding for that.

We also work collaboratively and I have not mentioned—it was probably an oversight—golf, which clearly has a natural link to Scotland. We are the home of golf, but we also have some of the best courses, so we are able to utilise those. They are a huge piece for us, in terms of the domestic tourism visitor and the overseas visitor. There we have an 11-year relationship with the Royal and Ancient and its products. Last week we just confirmed an extension of our funding for our two men and women's annual open events. Having that ability to have that long-term relationship and build on it has been very beneficial.

**Q202 Chair:** Thank you. Those are all the questions that we have as a Committee. Rebecca, is there anything else you would like to add?

**Rebecca Edser:** No, but we will make sure that we get that information on the levy over to you and we will follow up with that.

**Q203 Damian Hinds:** I do have one more question. Is there a particular focus, or does it come under you to bid for business events, the big conventions, fairs and so on?

**Rebecca Edser:** Not me, but we have a business events team within VisitScotland, so, yes, it still falls within the remit of VisitScotland, but not within the remit of my team.

**Chair:** Rebecca, thank you for your time. We will suspend briefly while we switch over panellists.

## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Ken Scott and Anne Marie Chebib.

**Q204 Chair:** Welcome, Annie and Ken. We are looking at major events and you are here because, Annie, you are Chair of the UK Crowd Management Association, and Ken, you are Deputy Chief Executive and Head of Inspectorate at the Sports Grounds Safety Authority. Welcome.

Safety advisory groups have been in the news lately. What powers do



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

they have?

**Anne Marie Chebib:** There is probably a different answer for football, which Ken will come to talk about in terms of the powers of safety advisory groups. I speak more for major events outside the scope of the sports stadia. In those areas, they are genuinely advisory. They do not hold legislative powers. There are police, councils and other authorities within that piece that hold their own regulatory authorities, but the SAG itself is purely, as it says, a safety advisory group. That begins a debate of what they can and cannot do and what powers they need to have or not.

Q205 **Chair:** Thank you. You spoke about the difference between you and where Ken will come into this, but could you elaborate or give us any examples of how we see the SAGs?

**Anne Marie Chebib:** In terms of what the SAG is there to do, the event organisers will mostly put plans together for events. Local authorities can be event organisers, but on the whole we are talking about private event organisers who will put together plans. In the first instance, those will often go to the local authority, which will manage the process of the SAG on behalf of the different agencies. Then they will send the information out to different parties to read before they come to sit together.

The positivity about that is that those people are in the room. Even though they are advisory, they are sitting in one room talking about safety. That is an incredibly important place to be for stakeholder liaison and the work that needs to go into that. I am a practitioner as well as working as the chair at the UKCMA. That is my voluntary hat, even though it feels like my full-time hat a lot of the time.

We will submit our plans to the SAGs, and they will be up for review, and we may or may not get called in to talk about those plans. Because I work nationwide, I see quite a difference between the different SAGs and the way in which they operate. Ken and I were just talking about the north-east and we have worked closely with Durham Council, and the way that it would approach a SAG will be very different to the way Westminster might or Brighton Council might, so there are local variances between SAGs.

Q206 **Chair:** Thank you. We will be coming on to consistency in a little bit. How well do you feel the system works, Ken?

**Ken Scott:** Speaking from the football perspective, they work extremely well. They have been around for a long time. The genesis goes back to the report from Lord Justice Taylor into the Hillsborough disaster back in 1989. One of his recommendations was that local authorities need to get that cohort of people together who are involved in the safe planning and management of events, to be able to discuss, to look at the profile of the events, the risks, and hopefully to come up with plans to mitigate against what those risks might be.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

That has been established for not far short of 40 years now. As Annie says, they have no statutory power. The clue is in the title. They are advisory groups, but they do assist the local authority in making good judgments when it comes to the issue of safety certificates, in our case for sports grounds, so they are extremely valuable.

The key bit that we find within football—and the SGSA offers advice in this and guidance—is that there needs to be a structure on how they are set up. We offer a template for terms of reference on who should be attending safety advisory groups, the status and position of people who are representing organisations who are within that safety advisory group should be so that they can effectively make decisions on behalf of their respective authorities, which is very, very important. Generally, we find that it works.

One model that we promote, which falls from Lord Justice Taylor's requirement, is that there should be core members of a safety advisory group. They would be the police, the fire authority and the emergency ambulance service. That group would then be supported by people who can make value-added judgments. That might be the venue operator themselves, the FLA, which was the forerunner of the SGSA, were or still are invited guests, and anyone else, as I said, who could add value. It could be individuals who have a local experience of what the issue is that is that is discussed.

It is important that it is an open forum, and it is extremely important that all of these different elements can be considered in one place before any decision is made by the local authority under the powers vested in it around the safety certificate to proceed on that. It is listening to the important people before you make a good decision.

Q207 **Chair:** Annie, how well do you think that the system works?

**Anne Marie Chebib:** In principle it is a good thing, and we need to make sure that we protect that principle of sharing safety information in a room together. That part does work but it can be very inconsistent across different parts of the country. What we might get in one area, we will not necessarily see in another. That inconsistency needs some levelling up.

There are long-standing problems with resourcing; training and understanding around what a SAG is and what it is meant to do is quite limited at the moment. We may come to talk about the Maccabi Tel Aviv incident. Let's not throw the baby out with bath water, in essence. There were some good elements of that, and some stuff was really done right by that safety advisory group. What we do not want to do is instil fear into safety advisory groups not to continue to advocate for good safety.

Q208 **Chair:** Ken, from your perspective, do you feel reform is needed?

**Ken Scott:** No, not in the world of football. I go back to the point that Annie made there that there are many examples. There must be many thousands of safety advisory groups that have happened since that wise



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

intervention by Lord Justice Taylor back in 1989 that have resulted in sporting events, football events particularly, being held in now safe conditions.

One of the single biggest factors in that happening has been the advent of safety advisory groups and the ability for these fora to be developed where people can come along, they can express opinions, they can express views. It is very much an open forum where people are encouraged to come forward with any issues that they see, so that collaboratively they can inform that local authority in the decision-making process.

Now, I should say that, while safety advisory groups are advisory by the very nature of the title, within the world of football, that safety advisory group and their workings and their efficiency is governed by other pieces of legislation or it can be viewed via other pieces of legislation. In the case of the Safety of Sports Grounds Act, there is a requirement on a local authority to issue a general safety certificate to that sportsground.

As I explained, as part of that, they would be required to meet with and consider all of the different views of the partner organisations to make sure that the delivery or the issue of that general safety certificate was a sound decision. Sitting alongside that are the powers of the Sports Ground Safety Authority, and that is primarily to license the 93 venues where we operate designated football matches. It is all of the venues in the Premier League. It is the 72 venues in the English Football League, together with the two national stadia, the Principality in Cardiff and Wembley Stadium in London.

The second part of the SGSA's remit is to give an oversight of the way in which local authorities operate in that space around the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975. Essentially, we audit local authorities. Part of that auditing process is that they run effective safety advisory groups and that they have resilience in place so that there is not a single point of weakness or failure in that safety advisory group process. Together with that, as I said, while it is an advisory forum, it is wrapped up in legislation that surrounds it and protects the workings within that safety advisory group.

Q209 **Chair:** Annie, you referenced the Maccabi Tel Aviv situation, so we will go there now. You referenced that earlier and it is something that we want to speak about. In its November report of last year, the Home Affairs Committee suggested banning local councillors on SAGs. Would you concur? Do you have a view of the type of people who should be sitting on these advisory groups? Is there any mandatory representation that should be there?

**Anne Marie Chebib:** Ultimately, we have to concentrate on people who have responsibility for safety. Definitely the local authority, police, fire, ambulance, and licensing—all of those people should be at the table. Beyond that, there will be some local variances. For example, the



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Security Industry Authority may sit at the table as well. There are some other organisations beyond that core team, depending on where it is.

The coastguard, for example, if it is a beach event, is another good example. What we must not do—and what is important to me—is start to play politics with SAGs. They need to stay as objective and referential points of advice for event organisers, in which case we have to be quite careful about who else might be in the room. In some cases it has been seen to work, but in other cases it goes to the detriment, so there is a variability about that somewhat.

**Ken Scott:** I would add that the SGSA is not in a position to direct the composition of a safety advisory group. However, in the terms of reference document, we are quite clear on the roles of the individuals who play a part within that safety advisory group. The key bit, the key consideration here, is potential or perceived conflicts of interest, because they relate to the fact that the safety advisory group considers lots of safety issues, but it then transmits the outcomes or the deliberations of those meetings to the local authority, which will have the authority to either say yes or no or impose conditions on a general safety certificate.

For absolute transparency, I believe that elected members have an important role to play as an invited guest, because they could be coming forward with important information about local communities and local community engagement, or they have that on-the-ground involvement with the area or the nature of the event that might be happening within that particular sportsground. But there is a need to guard against either real or perceived conflict of interest.

**Chair:** Thank you. I strayed into an area earlier that is Natasha's domain, so I will come to Natasha first.

**Q210 Natasha Irons:** To pick up on some of these points on the makeup of safety advisory groups and who gets to sit on them, our predecessor Committee made a recommendation that there should be a wider variety of people that sit on SAGs, including community groups or people with local knowledge. Have you seen evidence of that happening?

**Ken Scott:** I go back to what I said at the beginning, that the safety advisory group should include people who can give added value to that decision-making process. If that involves people from local community groups, then absolutely. We have a drive to involve spectators or representatives of the fans in these groups as well, because clearly the decisions affect the fans and we all know that football without fans is not necessarily what we want to see. It is important.

I get the difficulty that some clubs and some local authorities have in identifying who is the voice of the fan. Many football clubs have a number of groups who purport to be the voice of that particular club. The other bit is that there are issues that could be discussed in the safety advisory group that are quite confidential in nature, and being aware of an



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

unexpected headline is a concern, but I am not saying that that would be the reason why you would exclude those people, because you can do them as a part 2 agenda behind closed doors.

In answer to your question, yes, if they can add a material value to the comments that are happening that enable an even better decision to be made, I would fully support that.

**Anne Marie Chebib:** What is important is that the safety advisory groups have professionals in them who can advise and consider topics that require some understanding of the legislation. Similarly to Ken, I would not say no, but in terms of core safety advisory groups, having time for local authority police, fire, and ambulance to sit together and discuss these issues without other influence is incredibly important. Maybe a part-staged piece, as Ken suggested, might be the way to navigate that.

Q211 **Natasha Irons:** Should there be more prescription as to who should be on the boards? Should there be stronger guidance or direction of who should be on them?

**Ken Scott:** I can answer that in the world of football we do that through the terms of reference document that we have and we share with local authorities, getting back to that principle of having the core members. They are the absolute people that need to be there. Then that invited list could be dependent upon the event.

If you are looking at maybe the hosting of the Euros, that will include a much wider cast of people because clearly there is a need to speak to all of the different groups that could add value to making that a better and more successful event. It is about managing those people who would be there as invitees as opposed to being the core members of the group.

**Anne Marie Chebib:** We are not as lucky as Ken is in terms of being surrounded by legislation or having a buffer zone in the world of major events, so there is definitely a question around a national framework, whether that sits under resilience through the Cabinet Office or whether it sits through DCMS. It is an important question.

I know that a lot of work is being done by the Emergency Planning College on putting together national guidance, but that needs government support so that we can talk in clear terms of reference not just about who should be in the room, but about what training they should receive and the competencies required for that, through to how they publish the notes and the transparency around that. There is a whole gamut of considerations that the guidance that is being written currently is addressing. Early adopting of some of that good practice is incredibly important—so, we are not seeing that framework that Ken is lucky enough to have.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Ken Scott:** If I could add to that, Annie referred to the work of the UK Resilience Academy in pulling together this national framework of safety advisory groups. Because of its experience in football, the SGSA is feeding into that.

One of our remits is that we have the licensing requirement, we have the oversight of local authorities, but also, since the advent of the SGSA in 2011, where they changed from football to the Sports Ground Safety Authority, part of that change was to allow the SGSA to help to promote the good practice that it has picked up over the years. We do this within the UK, and we do it in many parts of the world to learn from the experience that we have had. If there is a good way of doing it, we are more than happy to share it. We are doing that with the UK Resilience Academy to helpfully put together a good document that will help the events industry too.

**Q212 Jeff Smith:** Ken, you have a very clear remit. Annie, you said that you are sometimes in the room at these events as an organiser. Can you give us an idea of the scope of the events that come under SAGs, aside from football and sports matches?

**Anne Marie Chebib:** What comes under the scope of SAG will be variable depending on where you go. Westminster SAG may have a different level of baseline for needing an LOSPG in the case of Westminster or a SAG. Every council will normally set its baseline on that.

Giving different examples of big events that we might work in, the London Marathon would have a SAG, Pride London would have a SAG, or the Notting Hill Carnival would. There are also the middle level of events, which are often like your EDM dance music events that may also come under SAG. It depends really where you are in the country as to where that level sits.

**Q213 Jeff Smith:** We have to talk a little bit about consistency in how they operate now, which you have both mentioned. First, with the culture, Ken, you said that this is an open forum where people are encouraged to come along and contribute. Is that culture consistent across the country? Is that the general practice where everybody is encouraged to come along and contribute?

**Ken Scott:** Apologies for my constant reference to football, but in football, in the world of the SGSA's oversight of local authorities, we are fortunate that we are able to dip into all of these safety advisory groups so that we can see and look for more inconsistencies and maybe any weaknesses that we could perceive in how a local authority is discharging the responsibilities under the 1975 Safety of Sports Grounds Act.

I have to say that one of the issues that is being picked up is local authority resourcing. This is the ability for them to expend the time that is needed to make sure that these safety advisory groups happen with



the correct levels of frequency. That is on our monitor and on our radar. We do have the power to intervene and on a number of occasions we may raise it with the local authority chief executive to make sure that the “complacency” word that was coined by Lord Justice Taylor in football does not creep in.

We fully understand the issues that local authorities are having in resourcing, and we need to work with them to make sure that, notwithstanding that issue, the necessary level of safety that they need to apply to events that are happening within their jurisdiction is still of the highest order.

**Q214 Jeff Smith:** You are nodding, Annie. Local government cost pressures must have an impact. How are they impacting the consistency of approach and the effectiveness of SAGs? Is it about frequency of meeting or other things? You are shaking your head, Annie. What are the other impacts on those cost pressures?

**Anne Marie Chebib:** A lot of it is about the time that officers have to be able to uptake the information that they are being asked to do. They are under exceeding pressure. Working closely with a lot of local authorities, I see that it is often a personality-led thing, that people who care deeply about safety are involved in the process, which carries it by personality, maybe, rather than by resourcing or by the requirements of the national framework.

In our case, a lot of it is about keeping some of that consistency and making sure that the right people are at the table consistently, so that it is the same voices speaking, but they are not getting entrenched in some complacency, as Ken was saying. There is a balance in there somewhere, but we feel for local authorities and policing at the moment with their lack of budget. We are asking a lot of them to then sit at that table.

**Q215 Jeff Smith:** The people and the amount of time and commitment that they are able to give to it is one issue. What other issues are there with inconsistency across the country?

**Ken Scott:** One thing that we are keen to tease out is the single points of failure. When some experienced members of staff who may have been in post for a long time come to the natural retirement age or whatever, one thing that we do look at in the auditing of local authorities is the resilience to protect against that single point of failure so that a high-performing local authority, when one individual leaves, doesn't fall from green through amber into red.

We see—and it may well be because of the legal protection within the world of football that we do not have within the events industry—that if the resource is limited, it might get put towards the legal obligation of looking after the football side of things, maybe, at the expense of the events industry. I guess from our end we are well served, but we are well served because we have good vigilance and we are operating within, as I



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

said, that legislative framework that looks inward towards that advisory group.

Q216 **Jeff Smith:** Annie, anything to add on the problems that that inconsistency causes?

**Anne Marie Chebib:** Yes. I guess it causes soft targets, potentially, if we do not have the legislative requirement to have a SAG around major events in the same way that we do. There is a bit of picking and choosing in terms of that stuff, as Ken said, maybe to the detriment of major events over football. I have tons of examples of the differences between SAGs and the recommendations and outcomes of those, everything from when the event might start and whether they are responsible for the night before if there is activity, through to the next day. At what point does responsibility start and end? That one example where it might be seen differently between different SAGs.

There is the level of risk assessment. Areas that have lots of events and are busy will probably have a different approach, because they are used to events. They will have a different approach to areas that do not necessarily get a lot of events. That might change the perception of the SAG members and their levels of experience. Lots of things impact on it.

At the same time, we have to have some local nuance within that. It has to have some flexibility. The framework needs to remain just that, rather than a prescriptive method or process.

**Jeff Smith:** Yes. Are you saying that the flexibility in the way they operate can be a benefit?

**Anne Marie Chebib:** Absolutely.

Q217 **Jeff Smith:** Where do we draw the line? We are trying to tease out, I guess, whether there should be some intervention or some new legislation from the Government that would create a greater level of consistency. Is it better to leave it to the local authorities to judge on their own?

**Chair:** Can I come in there quickly before you answer that question? Prior to my coming to Parliament, that was my industry: major events, consultancy, and being an operator as well. I am not going to mention any local councils, but I have had certain constructive relationships with certain local authorities whereas, where I live, there was a large-scale event that was looking to do some planning but wanted to programme. I could see the problems before it happened. The event did not happen, but it caused quite a lot of concern in the community, rightly so, but it could have been managed.

My point, to feed into Jeff's issue, is about training. Some councils and some local authorities understand. They are skilled, they have experience, they can see these things. Some local authorities do not. In the case of where I live, I could see that the local authority could not see



what was coming down the road so, with that caveat, perhaps you could answer that point.

**Anne Marie Chebib:** You are being a lot less diplomatic than I was. For me, definitely, an oversight body of some sort within the world of SAGs has a point for major events in particular. Where that oversight exists for football, it does not exist. It is not only training, but it is also peer review. It is having the right people at the table. We can do lots of things in terms of that, not just training and not just the experience of individuals but, as Ken already mentioned, passing that on to people so that that has a comprehensive plan of continuation and sustainability.

For me, a national framework would offer a lot more than that. The ability for peer review is a prime example of that in terms of different councils working together, learning lessons and forging relationships and community as well within that.

Q218 **Jeff Smith:** Are you talking about some body that is, I suppose, a major events equivalent of the SGSA for the stuff that is not sport?

**Anne Marie Chebib:** Yes. As another example, hundreds of thousands of staff go out to work as stewards every week of the year, and they are charged with the safety of millions of people in this country. The SIA regulates the security staff, but we have no regulation for the stewards. It is another example of where we sit outside of a framework, and we do not have a home for those things at the moment. We see how the oversight committee for the SGSA works and how it gives a structure that we currently do not have for events. Hopefully, speaking certainly from a crowd safety point of view, this is what we are missing.

Q219 **Jeff Smith:** Have you had conversations with the Government or anybody else about putting something like that in place and what the framework would be?

**Anne Marie Chebib:** Yes, we have, but they are early conversations. We would welcome the opportunity to do that. Even putting together an APPG for crowds has been a difficult call. We need to find a home for that, and we need to decide where in the Government it sits in terms of the work that we do.

**Chair:** Sorry, Ken, I interrupted you. Would you like—

**Ken Scott:** Sorry, I was going to come back and say that we should not lose sight of the good work that has been done by the UK Resilience Academy on putting together that national framework for safety advisory groups. Annie is referring to what good looks like, but the intervening step is to get this structure in place first so that we can see who should be attending an event safety advisory group and what the frequency should be. That group has lots of similarities, probably primarily because of the influence and the involvement with the SGSA. Why look for a new model when the model that we are displaying and using within football is working well?



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

On the other bit on the efficiency of local authorities, I would add that we do notice that when local authorities that have a designated football ground and deal with safety advisory groups week in and week out come to host a major event, they are generally better at doing it because they have the experience of how the safety advisory group works within a football environment. Where you get some local authorities perhaps—Annie will know better than me on this—where they operate outside the world of football and are uniquely dealing with events, maybe it is a little bit more difficult.

Getting back to the final point about training, the SGSA has a lot of training elements that we do—sometimes online, sometimes in person—around training local authorities about safety certification, how the safety advisory group works, and all these things. Lots of training is out there now. I have to say that I am pleased that they are well attended by those people who are out there in need of this training, but it is all about building up this resilience.

**Q220 Jeff Smith:** I have one more to Annie. Talking again about consistency, if we had this body and the regulations, would you want it to say, for example, “This is the level of event that needs to go to a SAG”? Taking your example, should all EDM events over a certain capacity—500 or whatever—go to a SAG? Would you want that level of prescription in there?

**Anne Marie Chebib:** Five hundred might be a bit low for what we are we are talking about—

**Jeff Smith:** Yes, or 1,000.

**Anne Marie Chebib:** Yes. We do not want to overwhelm those local authorities that have an awful lot of events. Some guidance around that, what that looks like, and what that baseline is would be useful. Then we need to allow some local variance within that as well. We cannot be too prescriptive with things, but we also need to give a framework within that. Yes, have some examples of where that might sit. Over 5,000 for EDM events would be an example of that.

**Chair:** Brilliant, thank you. Can I come to you, Cameron?

**Q221 Cameron Thomas:** Thanks, Chair. If I can start by drawing attention to my entry in the register of interests, it will show that I have received hospitality from both the Premier League and the Jockey Club in the context of these questions.

In July 2025, Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Mark Rowley stated that it costs the police £70 million a year to police football matches across the UK. When I visited Tottenham Hotspur Stadium earlier this year, I observed traffic management measures by the police a mile down Tottenham High Street as well as within the stadium itself. In that context—to Annie, but to either of you who might be able to bring anything to this—can you update the Committee on the current status of



discussions about special police service costs?

**Ken Scott:** The position of the SGSA is that, clearly, it promotes safe and secure events. In some cases, it will be private security and stewarding together with the club only. In some cases, it will involve police under special policing services. That is a decision that is made throughout the statements of intent based upon the risk of the event and the likelihood of the need for policing to help to make that safe, secure environment, both within the stadium and in that outer area—that is, transport interchanges, city centres or whatever.

The SGSA has no role in the level of cost for that and deliberately keeps outside of that, instead promoting that our position is that we need to keep promoting that safe and secure environment. That private discussion is happening with football governing bodies and the police themselves.

**Cameron Thomas:** Thank you. Annie.

**Anne Marie Chebib:** I am sure you are aware of the Home Office work being done at the moment in terms of SPS and the consultation going through on charging on private land. We are part of that consultation process and we have some insight into it. At the moment, it is much focused towards football but, as we know, what happens for football probably will then go on to major events. We do see a bit of a slippery slope with this piece in terms of charging.

To give an idea, the cost of police for an event is probably about three or four times the cost of stewards or security staff. There is a finite budget with this stuff and that needs to be considered. The role of policing is crime and disorder and we cannot change that, but the chargeable footprint when it goes outside of a fenced or ticketed area suddenly becomes within the Zone Ex or the grey space area that I know we will come to talk about.

For me, one concern we have is about the police as a regulator, essentially, or the police as a body then dictating terms to events. They have a legislative responsibility and then they almost become a supplier to the event. There is a difficult balance between the core role of policing and the core function of policing in terms of public safety.

Most times, with SPS, we get there eventually. We will have some lively debates and discussions with police about what SPS is needed for an event. I am singling out Sussex Police here because I work with them frequently. They are open to those discussions, and we are able to have good conversations with them as stakeholders in that piece. This is based on good, sensible decision making between an event organiser and police.

We need to think carefully about what a change to the chargeable footprint might look like both for football and for events. It is a difficult



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

area because it is under consultation at the moment and there is a gamut of reasons why I can see that the police purse strings are tight, but also, as events, we bring billions into the economy, and as part of that taxation goes towards policing. We are already paying a substantial amount through generation of revenue for events, and that also needs to be considered in that piece.

**Q222 Cameron Thomas:** Yes, that is totally valid. I might push back gently with the point that my residents' council tax also pays for the policing. That is the other side of that coin.

You answered one of my other questions about the potential for this to move from football and on to other events. If I can go to my last point, then, I mentioned that I visited Cheltenham Racecourse, too. Probably the largest event in Gloucestershire is Cheltenham Festival, which is the horseracing. While the Metropolitan Police's budget may be up here, the Gloucestershire Constabulary's budget is somewhere down here, comparatively. Do you have any concerns about the inconsistency of charges across the country in that context?

**Ken Scott:** I would go back to the point I made on the original question. We have no influence and no involvement in this. We are primarily looking at that level of safety to make sure that it is set at that correct level.

**Anne Marie Chebib:** For me, prices differ greatly between police forces, and we do not see consistency. There already is some guidance around that for police within that piece.

It is not necessarily the cost but how that cost is applied. How the risk assessment breaks down is also incredibly important. What can cost zero pounds in one area can cost tens of thousands in another. That, for me, strikes a problem for event organisers.

We have to understand both views here. It is important to understand that the police are under pressure, and we are not going to get away from that fact, but we also want to support culture and so, within that, we need to make sure that we are not pricing out the work that we do. Also, with only one budget and only so much going on policing, so much less will probably go on security and stewards, which will have a major impact on what we do, yes.

**Cameron Thomas:** I welcome that last point about there being a balance, ultimately. I absolutely recognise—as would my constituents—the cultural and economic value of Cheltenham Racecourse and the national cultural contribution of Tottenham Hotspur.

**Chair:** That is a matter of debate. Did I say that out loud?

I will come to Jeff next.

**Q223 Jeff Smith:** Thanks, Chair. Can we talk briefly about what has been



called Zone Ex? That is broadly generally understood to be the external zone immediately around the outside perimeter of an event, but we have heard that Zone Ex is defined by different bodies in different ways. What challenges does that lack of a single definition cause for both of you?

**Ken Scott:** I do not mind going first on that. As a staunch advocate of the need to understand safety, security, and service not just within the venue but in that important external environment, I am delighted that we have people talking about it.

I am aware of different definitions, but it is basically a different form of word saying the same thing. That is that we need to understand the movement of people to the venue, around the venue and then, importantly, on leaving the venue at the end of the event. The development of that term Zone Ex, which I coined in 2018, is in the current version of the "Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds", the Green Guide. It pleases me when I am speaking in various parts of the world that I hear people talking now about Zone Ex. I am extremely pleased that it is out there now and it is no longer the case that, once people have left the premises, the doors are closed and it is over to you, local authority—or to the police or whoever.

That said, the people who need to be involved in the discussion around how to make those Zone Ex places safe can be wide. Adult conversations are sometimes had between the various groups, but it is important that all of the groups that have a responsibility within that area, whether through legal powers or whether because they have a vested interest, maybe a landowner, get together to create a grid or a map of the risks in those areas and who has responsibility to do it, and then map that out to see where the gaps are in between. Then, hopefully, we can come up with a plan that would cover to make sure that Zone Ex environment is as safe as we can possibly make it.

Q224 **Jeff Smith:** Annie, anything about the challenges it causes?

**Anne Marie Chebib:** Yes. We definitely have different challenges for events across to football. Where you have a stadium and you have a transport hub and a defined zone, that is different to what we do. Someone described it the other day as the space that no one wants to own but everybody depends on, because we are looking at multiple landowners and we are looking at different routes and spaces within that.

As a case study, take Notting Hill Carnival. That has a big Zone Ex. Take New Year's Eve in London. Again, it has a big Zone Ex. Take Pride. These are complex routes and they are complex challenges with multiple transport hubs and multiple areas that could become soft targets. That is where we will get the vehicle crushes, where we will get vehicle movement within those spaces, and where we will get confusion and so direction is needed. For me, Zone Ex is probably at the riskier end of working in events and making sure that we have identified those.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Ken has the work in the Green Guide, as he has already said. We have the Purple Guide, which is not legislation. It is just guidance. Within the Purple Guide, we have written a chapter for Zone Ex to try to define it, but control is fragmented in a lot of those areas. The accountability is unclear about who owns those areas most of the time.

One point to make is that Martyn's Law—the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act—does not impact on that Zone Ex area. It does not take that into account because it almost falls in the too difficult category. Even though it is difficult, that does not mean we should not try to fix it.

**Q225 Jeff Smith:** I was going to ask both of you about your respective guides. While we are on the Purple Guide, Annie, can you just tell us a little bit about that and what you have said in it?

**Anne Marie Chebib:** Yes. Within the Purple Guide is a chapter on crowd management, also known as the Pop Code for many years. What we see with the Green Guide is different. It is wrapped in legislation, but these days the Purple Guide is literally the industry writing for the industry. We do not have the Government support for that. If we were going to start somewhere, the Purple Guide is a good starting point. How can the Government support the events industry? Look to support the Purple Guide because we feel much on our own with that piece at the moment. Definitely, some support there would be lovely.

**Q226 Jeff Smith:** Who should ultimately be the lead on that responsibility for Zone Ex? Who should be the person we look to? Is it the police or is it somebody else?

**Anne Marie Chebib:** In my experience, who takes the ownership over it depends on where you are. We do a few large Zone Ex plans that require the council to stump up the money for that Zone Ex plan. We have lots of examples where we work in that space and the council will take the responsibility and meet the cost of that. However, that is not always the case. It will depend on the event organiser and what responsibility they will take on, and the value that they put on customer experience from the point someone leaves their home to the point at which they return safely. Again, often it is dropped and, because it does not have a structure around it, often we see the same consistencies with SAGs that we see with all the other things we have been talking about.

**Q227 Jeff Smith:** Yes, and we will have the same resource issues with different local councils, I guess, as well.

I suppose people might want to come to a council and want to put on a big event, and those people might have varying experience and quality. How do we hold them responsible and give them the tools that they need to be able to run an event in co-ordination with the local authority?

**Anne Marie Chebib:** It starts with communication and it starts with the conversations that people need to have. I come back to the national framework and the importance of that with all this stuff. If we have no



guidance beyond industry-written guidance, we stand a chance of that being misinterpreted. We stand a chance of it being misunderstood.

SAGs create a good space to allow agencies to talk to one another and talk to the event organisers. There needs to be the space to communicate in the first place and some guidance around what that might look like.

We will never solve it because each area will be different. However, for example, we could fund some pilot schemes about open space event safety and then that could lead to recommendations that could go into DCMS and go into the Cabinet Office in terms of what we might then take on. It will never be simple with Zone Ex, but we need to define them, and we need to have some structure of knowing where this footprint is.

**Ken Scott:** It is probably a little bit more simple in the world of football. We view the responsibility for Zone Ex to be with the event organiser. In doing that, in making that judgment, we go down that route for lots of reasons. Green Guide 6 came out in 2018. Green Guide 7 will expand on that Zone Ex information piece and will come out around about 2029.

We also expanded on Green Guide 6 with the production of supplementary guidance to the Green Guide for event safety planning and event management. That points to the need for event operators to develop an operations manual and, in that manual, there should be a Zone Ex co-ordination plan. They have to demonstrate, as part of their running of a safe event, how they will operate that external space, notwithstanding the fact that in most cases or many cases they will not have any legal authority to operate in that space. That is where the complication comes in.

Also, on top of that, through the guide that we issued to local authorities around safety certification, we refer to external factors. In the grant of a safety certificate by a local authority, while it would normally be looking at the key elements, which would be the safe capacity of the venue itself, in our advice to the local authority, we also say that it is no good having a venue that you consider to have a safe capacity of 50,000 people if 50,000 people cannot arrive safely and 50,000 people cannot leave safely. This is the external fact of it.

While it is not possible to condition a certificate placed upon the event organiser or the stadium that gives conditions that are outside of the gift of the person in receipt of the certificate, you can reflect those external conditions in reducing capacities, for instance. That is one way of doing it.

However, in practice, all the venues that we license will have these adult conversations. It might be traffic regulation orders outside to close streets and roads to allow people to arrive safely without the mixing of pedestrians and vehicular movement. A whole range of things fall into that that basket of Zone Ex considerations that a local authority can take into account.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

I guess we are demonstrating this morning how football works and how the legislation helps to do things that, in Annie's world of event safety, they do not have the benefit of being able to fall back on.

**Jeff Smith:** Sorry, Chair. I realise I started to trail into your questions.

Q228 **Chair:** No, that was absolutely fine. I want to ask Ken a question. We have used the scenario of football. There is every chance that a number of Championship clubs will visit Tottenham Hotspur next season. Where does the Zone Ex responsibility stop and begin if away fans are commuting down to a football stadium?

**Ken Scott:** That is a good question. When I put together that piece in the current edition of the Green Guide, I did not define the end of it. When I am asked that question, the answer I always give is that it is when you have left the venue and we are walking down the road together. For a part of that movement, we will be part of the crowd. We will reach a point within that public realm space where we then become part of the general public again. The planning needs to happen up to that point.

That will vary from venue to venue. That is why I do not want and will not be putting in the future guidance for Green Guide 7 more restrictions because it has to be flexible, not just from venue to venue but also from event to event within a venue. That could be quite different if you have maybe a women's football game happening at the same stadium as you host men's football or maybe a concert with Taylor Swift. You need to look at all these things in that context.

That is why there will never be that hard line around the extent. We would expect that through the Zone Ex co-ordination plan that would need to be reviewed before every event, due consideration would be given to the plan for this event based on the profile of the artist or the profile of the event and the risks attached to it.

Q229 **Cameron Thomas:** Can I jump in on that? You made a point about how people going to and from this event need to be considered as they are until the point that they are some distance from that event. In the case of Tottenham Hotspur, it has the largest stadium in North London and you have over 60,000 people moving between Tottenham Hotspur Stadium and Seven Sisters Underground Station over a mile away. Are you suggesting then that, up until that point at Seven Sisters, that all needs to be considered within the Zone Ex?

**Ken Scott:** There will be parts. As I said, it comes back to the specific, bespoke planning for, in the case you referred to, Tottenham Hotspur. I do not know the percentage of the numbers of people who leave with their desired route to leave the stadium to head to Seven Sisters Station. They have robust plans in place all the way down to how people are received at the station. They have police officers positioned there. I have



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

used that route several times myself so I know the plans they put in place.

For me, that is a demonstration of Zone Ex working. It is not a case of Tottenham Hotspur discharging all those 60,000 people onto the streets and then it is left for everyone to battle their way to wherever they want to go. It is about good foresight. It is about good planning. It is about considering the risks, and it is about identifying all the challenges. It could be one mile in that direction but maybe, going in an opposite direction, it could be 300 yards, depending on people's desire routes as they leave the venue.

The important bit in all of this—and why I am absolutely delighted that we are hearing different definitions of Zone Ex—is that at least now people are talking about that space as being a space. It is a soft target now. We have stadiums now that are built like fortresses. Sadly, a lot of people out there want to hurt us when we go into events like this, so we need to be aware of giving the best level of security and safety we can in the planning of that movement on that spectator journey from wherever it might be to the venue and, crucially, on the return visit, too.

It is an extremely difficult task when you look at the risks that are going around the world at the minute, but we all have to be mindful of that and avoid them. I keep coming back to Lord Justice Taylor's words about not being complacent. He coined the phrase, "Complacency is the enemy of safety", and there is not a truer phrase in the world in which we operate.

**Q230 Chair:** Thank you for that. I suppose I understand that certainly every event is different. You are talking about different audiences, the journey, the actual experience, depending on how the event is designed. However, I am keen to get to a point where we can try to find—or as close to—an agreement with regards to responsibility

Things around engagement and planning I totally understand. Ken, you touched on the security but also the cost as well. For example, if you have shifting definitions in terms of responsibility, are there scenarios where smaller organisations take on more cost and more security than they should because of their experience or bargaining power with the venue or with the authorities? It is about that definition of the agreement. How close can we get to that?

**Ken Scott:** It is extremely difficult. One thing that we promote in the Green Guide is that there is no such thing as absolute safety. It is about what is reasonable in terms of the risk levels and the profile of the event. That proportionality and that reasonableness is extremely important, particularly getting to the point that you said.

The last thing that we want to do is to make events unviable. That would be counterproductive to everything that we are trying to do. However, equally, there is a responsibility now that we have established the need to plan in that Zone Ex space, and not to do planning and certainly not to



do it on the grounds of cost would not necessarily be a good look in the event of something going wrong. Cost should never be put before absolute safety or whatever levels we can put in place that are reasonable in terms of safety of the visiting spectators.

It is an issue and some venues are better resourced to tackle it than others, but it all comes back to a point Annie has mentioned a few times and that is about sitting down and talking. It is about communication. It is about engagement with local communities. If you look at places like Wembley or the London Stadium, they have a multitude of different users and different owners within that near vicinity of the stadium. They sit down, they talk, and they have partnership meetings. I guess it is about being a good neighbour.

Business as usual is important. While these events are happening, we might be all wrapped up in the excitement of the event, but people will live, work, maybe want to shop or maybe pass through that Zone Ex space. It is about trying to do all these things for all people, but at the same time deliver that safe event.

**Q231 Chair:** Thank you. We have gone through most of the questions. Would you like to add anything else? I will start with Annie first.

**Anne Marie Chebib:** Yes. I hope there are some takeaways from today in terms of consistency and collaboration and recognition of those things in what we do.

For me, it is about the understanding of crowd management as a piece of work sits under safety, security and service, and the Saint-Denis convention does well to identify that as a piece and an understanding that it is a profession and a discipline in its own right. It is not security. It is not public order. It sits separately. For me, we need to design in safety from the start. We need to make sure we are protecting lives and protecting trust in the existing systems that work but, also, we need more oversight in what we do. A cross-sector crowd safety forum would be an excellent start in terms of that. A lot of these questions around SPS and Zone Ex and the work that we have been talking about today matter to that piece—the Purple Guide, and the importance of that.

Also, on the use of language in communication, our best friend can be the media. The BBC article that came out on Sunday about Show Stop is definitely worth a read. Mark Savage has done an excellent job of identifying that it is without a lack of fuss, but then we also have the use of the words “crush”, “stampede” and “panic” in so many of the media reports that we read and the use of the term “bouncer” to describe security. These are awful terms and they are archaic. Basically, I feel like we need some understanding of all that in terms of crowd safety. At UKCMA I know we would be happy to help the Government to bring about some of those changes that need to be made.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

If I may tell a quick story, two or three weeks ago we had our Safer Crowd Safer Venues conference in Middlesbrough. We invited to the stage Brian Dubiski, whose daughter Madison died at Astroworld in the United States. We had Figen Murray, whom you will all know as Martyn's mother. We had Ken Johnson, whose son Scott died in Canada in a rigging accident. He was British. All those examples spoke to me. You could hear a pin drop in the room. There were 500 crowd safety professionals were reminded of the human impact of what we do and how, when it can go wrong, it can go wrong.

You will not see, 99% of the time, all the good work that has gone on. We have done our job properly if it is unseen and people go home safely thinking about the joy of their experience. When it does go wrong—Hillsborough, Brixton Academy, Manchester Arena—for a wealth of different reasons, suddenly it becomes incredibly important. For me, I want to get ahead of that before we have the next Manchester, and before we have the next Brixton Academy.

The Government could do with getting ahead with this piece and having a place for it where it is understood and discussed. That would give a good touch point for the Government that does not currently exist. From that, the national frameworks we talked about and all the other stuff we have discussed today has a home. Thank you.

**Ken Scott:** I echo some of Annie's points there. One thing that we all strive to do in the safety game is to not apply legislation that has been brought to bear because of disaster tombstone legislation. The recent change in the law to allow fans to stand in seated areas is probably the first time we have changed the law in this country without having that push and drive because of disaster, serious injury and so on.

You will not be surprised to hear me say—you have heard me say it many times—that in the world of football we are in a fairly good place. We are there because of failures of the past. We owe it, as a legacy of what happened at Hillsborough, that we do not let that happen again. That is why complacency is a word that is always in my mind. We operate within a patchwork quilt of legislation. It is quite difficult to navigate it sometimes, but pieces of legislation are being brought in at a particular time to tackle a particular issue, whether it be pyrotechnics, drinking in view of the pitch or whatever.

For me, I go back to a point that Annie made at the beginning. We have a safety committee within the world of football. We host that safety committee at the SGSA. We meet twice a year. All the respective partners within football are at that event. We have the Premier League, all the governing bodies, representatives from the WSL, the women's game, and we have fan groups represented. That is a good forum for people to sit and discuss all the issues.

Maybe Annie and the events industry would benefit from having a similar format for people. It would involve the police. We have representatives



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

from the UKFPU. It is an open area where all these big-ticket issues that you do not often get time day to day to talk about can be looked at and can be considered together with maybe current issues. I do not want to do your job and tell you your recommendations, but that works for us and maybe it could work for the events industry.

**Chair:** Thank you. Ken Scott MBE, thank you. Anne Marie Chebib, thank you very much for your time. That concludes today's hearing.