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21st November 2025

Rt Hon Dame Karen Bradley MP
Chair of the Home Affairs Committee

Dear Dame Karen Bradley,

Thank you for your correspondence dated 4th November 2025 to the Chief Constable who has asked me to respond on his behalf as Gold Commander for the fixture.

I set out below my responses to the questions posed in your letter:

1. West Midlands Police assessed the fixture between Ajax and Maccabi Tel Aviv in Amsterdam as involving significant public disorder. Approximately 2,800 Israeli supporters travelled to the match. Intelligence indicated that, on the day preceding the fixture, between 500 and 600 Maccabi fans deliberately targeted Muslim communities, committing hate-motivated offences including serious assaults on Muslim taxi drivers, singing hate fuelled songs and tearing down Palestinian flags.

Dutch police described the Maccabi Tel Aviv risk group as highly organised and experienced in violent confrontation. On match day, there were widespread incidents of vandalism, assaults, and running street battles. The Dutch police response saw 5,000 officers deployed over a number of days and mass arrests were made from both sides. Several officers were injured during the sustained confrontation. Due to the situation, special flights were arranged by the Israeli government to return Maccabi fans back to Israel.

2. West Midlands Police considered a range of policing options in the risk assessment for the Aston Villa vs. Maccabi Tel Aviv fixture. These included:
 - Permitting attendance by all fans
 - Holding the match behind closed doors
 - Excluding Aston Villa supporters
 - Excluding Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters
 - Reducing the allocation of tickets for away fans

As part of any developing operational plan the use of containment (sometimes referred to as a 'bubble') is usually considered as a contingency and I can confirm that this was the case in this scenario.

The option to exclude Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters was decided upon, as it presented the most effective opportunity to minimise risk to the public. The restriction of away supporters was recognised as a well-established policing strategy within European football, with precedents involving clubs such as Lazio, Rangers, Eintracht Frankfurt, and Barcelona cited in support of this approach.

3. West Midlands Police identified the potential for antisemitic incidents in connection with the fixture. While the risk of antisemitic hate crime was acknowledged as a relevant concern, it was not assessed to be the predominant threat. The principal risks outlined in the force's assessment included spontaneous public disorder, anti-social behaviour, organised protest activity, and violence involving risk supporters affiliated with Maccabi Tel Aviv. The cumulative impact of these factors led to the fixture being classified as high risk, with antisemitism recognised as one of several contributing elements.
4. Informed by intelligence, West Midlands Police concluded that Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters—specifically the subgroup known as the Maccabi Fanatics—posed a credible threat to public safety. This group is known to be highly organised and has a documented history of:
 - Engaging in racist behaviour, including the use of monkey gestures and noises
 - Involvement in disorder and violence at both domestic and international fixtures
 - Utilising pyrotechnic devices in public settings
 - Demonstrating persistent non-compliance with police instructions
5. West Midlands Police did not assess that resource constraints rendered the force unable to police the fixture effectively. The organisation was confident in its ability to deliver a proportionate and robust policing response to the event. However, the scale, complexity, and sensitivity of the operation were fully considered, along with the corresponding requirement to consider the deployment of Mutual Aid resources. West Midlands Police explored the feasibility of accommodating a limited number of Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters, including consideration of associated cost implications. These options were not progressed further due to the club's decision to decline its ticket allocation.

In this instance, mutual aid was actively explored and factored into the planning process to ensure the force's ability to deliver a safe and proportionate policing response. As part of a developing operational plan, resourcing is a key consideration. The policing of football matches in the West Midlands region rarely involve the need for mutual aid requests. However, fixtures categorised as high risk will often require a larger resourcing footprint, and so mutual aid would usually be requested.

In relation to your query surrounding the wider political environment and the impact on West Midlands Police:

1. West Midlands Police received high-confidence intelligence indicating that public campaigning contributed to increased community concern and the likelihood of protest. These factors were duly considered and incorporated into the overall threat assessment. However, the assessment did not explicitly indicate that such public campaigns directly heightened the risk to Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters.

I can confirm that I am not aware of any correspondence received from the Palestine Solidarity Campaign group and the petition that they promoted played no part in the risk assessment process.

2. No formal evidence submitted by campaigning organisations was deemed to have materially influenced the risk assessment. West Midlands Police's evaluation was based primarily on intelligence sources, rather than direct representations or documentation provided by external advocacy groups.
3. Following high profile political commentary on 16th October 2025, there was an increased level of national and international interest which subsequently increased the level of risk.

As a result of this and the offer of additional support from the Home Office on 17th October 2025, we re-reviewed all our options for safely policing the event including the feasibility of allowing a limited number of Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters to attend. This included consideration of operational and financial implications.

On the 19th October 2025, the Maccabi Tel Aviv fixture in Israel was abandoned due to rioting and violent clashes between fans from Maccabi Tel Aviv and Hapoel Tel Aviv.

On the 20th October 2025, the Maccabi Tel Aviv club published its formal decision to reject any ticket allocation for the Aston Villa fixture.

West Midlands Police continually seek to ensure that its operational practices remain proportionate, effective, and responsive to emerging risks. Considering the complexities surrounding the Aston Villa vs. Maccabi Tel Aviv fixture, the Chief Constable commissioned a peer review involving the UK Football Policing Unit (UKFPU), the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), and subject matter experts. This review, conducted on 20th October 2025, fully endorsed the force's approach and decision-making.

While this peer review was specific to the fixture in question, it reflects the force's broader commitment to scrutiny, learning, and continuous improvement.

A full structured debrief will take place and the force remains engaged in an ongoing evaluation of its football policing strategy and will continue to refine its approach to ensure that future high-risk fixtures are managed safely, proportionately, and in line with national best practice.

As the Gold Commander for this fixture, I am satisfied that the policing operation conducted with communities and partners was effective, proportionate and maintained the city's reputation as a safe and welcoming place for everyone.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mike O'Hara', with a stylized, cursive script.

Mike O'Hara
Assistant Chief Constable
Gold Commander and Operations Portfolio