

Policing football

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The authorised professional practice (APP) on Policing football is aimed at those involved in planning and commanding football events. It provides a framework to ensure a consistent approach at national, regional and local levels. It should also be considered in line with the [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles \(JESIP\)](#).

Partnership, cooperation and engagement

Effective football policing is underpinned by:

- partnership and cooperation between the police service and football clubs
- police service engagement with supporters

Police service and football clubs

Whilst the partnership between the police service and football clubs is long established, the policing of football should be regarded as a specialist area. In general, the club is responsible for the overall safety of all those present at the football ground, whilst the police are responsible for supporting the club in preventing and detecting crime and disorder. In order to facilitate constructive partnerships it is vital that the links between the police and football clubs are effective. Trust, honesty, compromise and clarity of roles and expectation will do much to achieve this aim. Appropriate documentation, for example, a [statement of intent](#) and [charging agreements](#) will assist this process.

Engagement with supporters

The police service has an important role to play in the government's strategy for tackling football disorder. This strategy is based on a multi-agency approach to reducing football-related disorder by:

- excluding risk supporters
- engaging with and including non-risk supporters
- influencing those supporters who are not currently understood to be a risk but who may, under specific circumstances, become involved in anti-social behaviour and/or spontaneous disorder

A focus on community safety, as opposed to a purely risk-based approach to those engaging in violence or disorder at football, will create the opportunity to empower non-risk supporters and gather community intelligence.

Football officers can engage with supporters on match days, by attending supporter group meetings and through the use of social media (the latter should be undertaken in strict accordance with local force policies).

For further information see the [APP on Public order \(planning and deployment – communication – communicating directly with the public\)](#).

Definitions of risk and non-risk supporters

The European Union provides the following definitions for risk and non-risk supporters (see Council Resolution OJC/322).

- Risk supporter – a person, known or not, who can be regarded as posing a possible risk to public order or antisocial behaviour, whether planned or spontaneous, at or in connection with a football event.
- Non-risk supporter – a person, known or not, who can be regarded as posing no risk to the cause of or contribution to violence or disorder, whether planned or spontaneous, at or in connection with a football event.

It is essential that the risk in relation to individuals and groups is quantifiable and dynamically assessed.

The description of a group or individual as 'risk' is not sufficient on its own, there must be a specific reference to the actual risk posed by individuals or groups.

The [risk supporter checklist](#) provides three specific categories (public order, public safety and criminal activity) that are further subdivided in order to give a specific indication of the risk posed. It is important that this template is used in the compilation of pre-match intelligence reports so that

informed decisions can be made in the planning process.

Key roles

Police roles are:

- force football policing lead
- dedicated football officer (DFO)
- football spotters

Forces need to assess how these roles will be resourced.

Other roles are:

- United Kingdom Football Policing Unit (UKFPU)
- British Transport Police (BTP)
- safety officer
- stewards
- Football Association, Premier League, Football League.

Force football policing lead (police commander)

The police lead for each football club should have regard for all matters of responsibility for discharging the police duty for football events in terms of strategy and planning. The football lead should:

- assess the threats and risks for each event and set the appropriate match category. This process should be under regular review. There is greater detail on this elsewhere in the APP
- ensure that there is a signed contract in place each season between the police and football club for Special Police Services (SPS) and appropriately ensure cost recovery for the same
- ensure there is an appropriate and in date information sharing agreement (ISA) in place between the police and the football club
- agree a signed statement of intent with the football club, this should reflect the division of responsibilities, including when to take primacy, for example, during a major incident
- develop and maintain an effective working relationship with the club's safety officer

- develop and maintain an effective working relationship with the **safety advisory group** (SAG) to ensure through representing the police that issues raised by the SAG relating to football policing operations are addressed

Public order/public safety (POPS) command

The police command of a football event should be regarded in the same way as any other POPS event. The roles of gold, silver and bronze should be staffed on a risk assessed basis. The police command role requires experience of football policing and the relevant training and accreditation.

Having set the strategy and tactical plan, the role of the command team at the event is to:

- prevent and detect crime
- prevent or stop a breach of the peace
- regulate traffic (only under statutory powers relating to events)
- activate contingency plans when there is an immediate threat to life
- work with the club to coordinate emergency response activities associated with a major incident taking place at the event

The requirement for police attendance and action at a football event is based on the need for the police service to discharge its core responsibilities.

Dedicated football officer (DFO)

It is good practice to employ an officer or officers who are dedicated to the role of policing football. The primary role of a dedicated football officer is to work to the police lead for football in fulfilling all the responsibilities listed above. Some forces may wish to cluster their DFOs into one force-wide football unit whilst others may be better suited by employing a DFO in a command unit geographically associated with a particular football club.

A DFO provides a focal point for all information and intelligence relating to the club for which they have responsibility. The activity of a DFO is generally directed at minimising the impact of anti-social behaviour and criminality at events both within the police area where they work and also the police areas that are responsible for 'away' fixtures. Wherever possible a DFO or football spotter should travel to 'away' fixtures.

A DFO should be regarded as a key element in planning any football event regardless of the match categorisation. Host operations are encouraged to deploy both home and away DFOs or football spotters at all matches regarding them as community officers for the substantial numbers of supporters present at any fixture.

A DFO should be operationally deployable.

A DFO directs, collects, evaluates, analyses and disseminates intelligence products to minimise football-related crime and disorder. These products also help to determine the strategy, tactics, resource levels and support services required for the policing of any football event.

Roles and responsibilities

- Prepare accurate and timely intelligence and information products for all fixtures (home and away) involving the clubs for which they hold responsibility.
- Act as a key link between the police, club, supporters and other stakeholders.
- Prepare the appropriate **operation order**.
- Utilise social media to good effect in line with force policy for information, intelligence and investigation.
- Attend planning meetings.
- Prepare an appropriate briefing for all staff policing the event.
- Prepare and deliver an appropriate briefing for the deployment of football spotters for the event from both the home and visiting force.
- Put in place an effective means of feedback and debrief for football events.
- Be a source of specialist advice on the policing of the club for the POPS command team.
- Ensure that the appropriate **logistical arrangements** are provided for the football policing operation.
- Contribute to the development of an appropriate strategy and tactical plan.
- Contribute to crowd safety through their experience and knowledge of the football event.
- Have a good knowledge of the club's supporters.
- Represent the police at the **safety advisory group** in the absence of or together with the policing lead.
- Be deployed at the football event to monitor and observe the safety measures provided by the club (for example, stewarding effectiveness, provision of police services).

- Update the police lead of any issues relating to changes to the infrastructure or operational systems within the stadium that are likely to have an impact on policing responsibilities.

To achieve this, the DFO will:

- have a sound understanding of the principles and methods associated with **intelligence management, information management** and covert policing
- have attended an accredited football officers course delivered by the UKFPU
- have access to the products, processes and systems used by the local/force intelligence units
- collate all evidence, information and intelligence in support of Football Banning Orders (FBOs) on conviction (**Football Spectators Act 1989 s 14A**) or on complaint (**Football Spectators Act 1989 s 14B**)
- coordinate and manage **football spotters** (home and away) and intelligence gathering teams. This includes conducting intelligence-specific briefings and debriefings
- complete and submit match summary reports, items for inclusion in the **UKFPU** national incident assessment and relevant graded intelligence reports to the UKFPU
- attend regional and/or national intelligence workshops and conferences hosted by the UKFPU. These enable DFOs to remain up-to-date on current issues and share good practice and leads to the promotion of consistency and national standards
- keep records of all correspondence relating to the partnership between the police and the club
- research football-related arrests and ascertain how each matter was disposed of by a court or other means
- ensure FBO applications are made at all appropriate court hearings
- work closely with other football officers, local/force intelligence officers and law enforcement agencies and form good working relationships with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), lead football prosecutor on case preparation and advice
- quality assure case files and attend court when possible
- develop and maintain positive working relationships with stakeholders and supporters that should enhance spectator safety and minimise the risk of crime and disorder during football policing operations
- form good working relationships with local authorities, supporters, local travel companies and **British Transport Police (BTP)**

Football spotter

Spotters should be regarded as both information/intelligence gatherers and community officers for football events. DFOs may also perform the role of a spotter at football events. A DFO will often have been an experienced spotter prior to commencing their role. Spotters should not be regarded as only having a knowledge and interest in 'risk supporters'. DFOs and spotters will have a wider knowledge of all supporters associated with the clubs they police.

The effective deployment of both home and away team spotters during a football event is essential to it being a successful event. Their deployment provides opportunities for richer information and intelligence gathering. This will help to reduce the risk of disorder and further promote trust and confidence in the police service.

The spotter has two main roles.

1. Information and intelligence – to provide a football policing operation with live and relevant information and intelligence on supporters, ensuring appropriate resource deployments by POPS commanders. On occasions it may also be appropriate to deploy them to gather evidence in support of FBO applications.
2. Community engagement – to act as a link between the police and a club's supporter community, with a view to achieving increased trust and confidence between the football operation and supporter community.

These two roles complement each other, for example, a spotter is required to communicate to commanders both positive and negative information and intelligence associated with supporters during an operation.

In addition, spotters must:

- have experience of policing football operations
- acquire a detailed knowledge of, and develop and maintain links with, a club's supporter community
- maximise opportunities for richer information and intelligence gathering. This will help to reduce the risk of disorder and further promote trust and confidence
- possess extensive knowledge of the identities, tactics and strategies of persons who engage in violent disorder and other criminal activity associated with football, for example, risk supporters

- have a sound understanding of the principles and methods associated with **intelligence management** and covert policing
- be competent to collect, evaluate and disseminate intelligence products
- be efficient in documented and oral evidence presentation
- be competent (within local or national guidelines) to use relevant technical equipment, for example, video camera
- engage with the supporter community to improve police understanding of their identities, sensitivities and expectations and to enhance the police/supporter relationships at a club, for example, through developing and maintaining links with local supporters

Due to their knowledge and links with supporters (including risk elements), spotters should be deployed to areas where there is the potential for either spontaneous or pre-planned disorder. Although this particular type of deployment will need to be dynamically risk assessed and approved by/communicated to commanders, the spotters' knowledge and links could prevent or reduce any disorder.

Forces have the discretion to decide whether their spotters are level 2 public order trained. As a minimum, spotters should be aware of public order tactics and national standards. They may be expected to withdraw to a safe distance during outbreaks of disorder, to be replaced with officers specifically trained and equipped to deal with those situations.

Where disorder occurs, spotters should revert to their role as intelligence gatherers as this will enhance both the opportunities for obtaining future FBOs and/or assisting any post-match investigation.

All spotters are required to attend the accredited spotters training course delivered by the UKFPU.

Operational spotter deployment

The effective deployment of both home and away team spotters during a football policing operation reduces the risk of disorder, increases opportunities for intelligence and evidence gathering, helps to improve public confidence in policing, and to develop links with football supporters.

It is expected that both home and away spotters should be deployed at all matches graded from 'spotters only' to 'category C-IR' (see 'football event categories' below).

Spotters should be a uniform deployment. Spotters should be identifiable in high visibility uniform with royal blue 'yoke' on the upper half. The deployment of plain clothes spotters could be considered high risk and should be avoided – key risks are similar to other public order deployments, for example, potential of physical harm in dynamic environments, lack of visibility and potential public misinterpretation of covert police deployments.

When deployed during a football policing operation, spotters should also:

- be tasked to collect, record and disseminate intelligence
- act as a visible crime prevention tool, influencing crowd behaviour
- engage with supporters to help develop links, build trust and confidence
- help identify and report on known or suspected persons or groups involved in disorder or crime
- help identify and report on persons subject to FBOs
- provide information on the behavioural patterns of supporters
- identify and report on potential flashpoints/hot spots for disorder
- prevent the infiltration of visiting supporters into home areas of the stadium and identify those visiting supporters who gain access to such areas

United Kingdom Football Policing Unit

The UKFPU, established in 2005, is funded by the Home Office and is accountable to both the Home Office and National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC). The functions of the UKFPU are to:

1. coordinate and disseminate national intelligence
2. support the national police lead (NPCC) and develop policies
3. coordinate policing preparations for tournaments
4. coordinate and assist with national ports operations
5. coordinate intelligence abroad
6. act as the National Football Information Point (NFIP) for the United Kingdom
7. maintain the Football Banning Order Authority (FBOA)
8. provide funding and advice to secure FBOs
9. provide advice and funding for post-match disorder investigations
10. provide leadership/development and direction of football officers
11. provide training for football related officers (spotters, DFOs and football commanders)
12. engage with key stakeholders

13. provide analysis of emerging trends

The NFIP is responsible for football matches with an international dimension that affect both club and national teams for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. A dedicated international liaison officer is available to assist with guidance and advice regarding national and club matches – this includes FIFA and UEFA competitions and pre-season friendly matches or tournaments.

The UKFPU can provide access to information, intelligence and guidance that can be used to support all aspects of football policing operations, for example:

- a database of football-related legislation
- policy advice and guidance originating from the Home Office, NPCC and College of Policing relating to football
- football policing-related news articles
- incident assessments/reports

The UKFPU can facilitate quality assurance and peer review activities of football policing events.

While incidents of large scale football disorder are comparatively rare, any investigations can cause additional burdens on local policing resources. The UKFPU is able to provide guidance and advice regarding the police response to such incidents and early contact with the unit can help to minimise the burden and enhance the efficiency of any investigation.

British Transport Police

BTP is responsible for policing football supporters who use the rail network across England, Wales and Scotland. Its capability includes staff who are experienced in policing football supporters, for example, **dedicated football officers** and spotters.

Forces should consider inviting BTP to be part of the planning and resourcing process. This is particularly important for football policing operations that involve supporters entering, leaving and/or travelling around a force area by rail. If forces are planning to use powers under **Anti Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 s 35** as part of a football policing operation (for example, giving directions to individuals to leave a locality), consultation with BTP is required if it is anticipated that the convergence of a crowd at a railway or underground station could occur.

BTP will consult with forces if they or train operators are intending to refuse travel to groups of supporters or use the powers under [s 35](#) to direct these groups to leave stations. BTP must be consulted as soon as possible if consideration is being given to use the rail network as a tactical option to transport football supporters to or from venues.

BTP focuses on monitoring and engaging with supporters who are using the rail network during football policing operations. They are also actively engaged in tackling any crime and anti-social behaviour (for example, involving alcohol) especially on late trains. Forces should also be aware that BTP liaises with train operators on football-related issues and should be the conduit for contact with these companies.

Safety officer

A football club is responsible for appointing an occupationally competent safety officer, who is responsible for safety management. The club's safety officer:

- holds overall control of operational safety management during an event
- is easily identifiable and contactable throughout the event
- has the authority to make safety-related decisions without having to refer to senior management or a board member
- possesses detailed knowledge of stadium regulations and contingency plans

During an operation, the safety officer will be in command of a control point (sometimes referred to as the stadium control room or ground operations centre). The control point acts as a hub for communications and monitoring (for example, to monitor safety and public order, and to coordinate responses to incidents and emergencies). This is, therefore, where the police representative may be located during an operation. This close proximity of the commander to the safety officer facilitates communication and, if required, any decision making regarding variation of responsibilities and primacy as outlined in the [statement of intent](#).

For further information see [Football Safety Officers Association \(FSOA\)](#).

Stewards

Duties include:

- ensuring crowd safety during a football operation, thereby fulfilling the club's responsibilities as outlined in the [statement of intent](#)
- assisting with the circulation of spectators
- preventing overcrowding
- reducing the likelihood and incidence of disorder, for example, by searching spectators (with police support if necessary)
- providing the means to investigate, report and take early action in an emergency (for example, in accordance with a stadium evacuation plan)
- ensuring supporters comply with ground regulations

Football Association (FA), Premier League and Football League

The [FA](#) is the governing body responsible for all regulatory aspects of the game of football in England. Its activities include promoting the development of the game, sanctioning all matches, leagues and competitions played in England and overseeing the administration of the game's disciplinary system. The disciplinary system applies to all participants in the game – each club, player, competition, match official and any other person involved in the game in England is bound by the FA Rules. The FA organises the FA Cup, FA Trophy competitions and all international matches played by England's national representative teams, most notably the men's senior team in the FIFA World Championships, the UEFA European Championships and friendly fixtures.

The [Premier League](#) and the [Football League](#) are the two senior leagues and, as such, have an important role to play in the management of football in England and Wales. Both leagues have a number of representatives who sit on the Board of the FA. Both leagues are responsible for managing their respective league football competitions and acting in the best interests of their member clubs. They have their own rules and regulations that their member clubs have to follow.

As well as managing the Championship, League One and League Two competitions, the Football League is also responsible for the end-of-season play-off matches, the League Cup and the Football League Trophy competitions.

Key documents

Four documents provide the framework which dictates both strategic and tactical planning for football policing operations.

1. Statement of intent.
2. Public order command structure.
3. Charging agreement.
4. Information sharing agreement.

Developing and agreeing the content of these documents requires the force and club to work together. The DFO must be available to assist with preparing these documents, even if they do not ultimately sign them off on behalf of the force.

Statement of intent

This document outlines the division of safety-related responsibilities and functions between the police and the club. The content must therefore be discussed and agreed by the local force and club. Although the content will need to be tailored to meet local requirements, the statement of intent should cover:

- a section stating that it is not a legally binding contract or agreement
- the club's responsibilities for overall safety of the event, for example, stewarding and adherence to conditions identified in the safety certificate
- the local force's responsibilities for supporting the club in dealing with crime and disorder at the stadium, for example, prevention and detection of crime
- primacy issues, for example, the circumstances in which the police will move from a supporting role to taking primacy for decision making/intervention during an incident at the event
- Variation, for example, how any amendments to the statement of intent will be agreed and recorded

Once agreed, a written version of the statement of intent must be signed by relevant representatives from both the club and the force, for example, the club's safety officer and the local police lead for football. The document should be reviewed, updated (if necessary) and signed by the club and the force on an annual basis.

Charging arrangements for special police services at football matches

Charging arrangements for special police services are laid out in the Police Act 1996 s 25. It should be noted that each case will have its particular nuances, often depending on the geography and land ownership around a stadium and force solicitors should be engaged to advise at the earliest suggestion of any dispute.

Key issues

- Basis for police to charge for policing football – special police services.
- The extent to which the police can charge for their provision of services – the 'footprint'.
- The need for a signed agreement before supplying resources.
- Managing disputes.

Special police services

Section 25(1) of the Police Act 1996 states:

The Chief Officer of police of a police force may provide, at the request of any person, special police services at any premises or in any locality in the police area for which the force is maintained, subject to the payment to the local policing body of charges as may be determined by that body...

The footprint

The most contested area of charging agreements is the extent for which resources allocated to police football can be charged. This hinges on their actual physical placement as part of the operation. There is no basis to charge for resources removed from the stadium, for example, to police town centres or railway stations.

Current legal opinion is that the police can charge for officers deployed on land 'owned, leased or controlled' by the club. Relevant stated cases are maintained by the UKFPU on Minerva. Any agreement on charging for policing football must be based on absolute clarity as to the land owned, leased or controlled by the club.

Signed agreements

It is essential that forces, before supplying services, have signed agreements with clubs explicitly documenting the charging 'footprint', the resources to be deployed, the length of time deployments are to be charged for and the arrangements for foreseeable contingencies, for example, extra time, supporters being contained (held back) in the ground.

Disputes

Experience has shown that disputes between forces and football clubs are not uncommon when it comes to agreeing charging arrangements. As highlighted above, forces put themselves at a disadvantage if they chose to supply special police services in the absence of a signed agreement with the club or in the face of clear disagreement. Every effort should be made to resolve disputes through discussions between the relevant parties as resorting to legal action has financial and other risks. However it should be noted that the Police Act states 'The Chief Officer of police of a police force may provide, at the request of any person, special police services'.

Due to the dynamic nature of legal issues pertaining to police charges the current guidance regarding latest police options is retained for reference by the UKFPU.

Force football resource considerations

Factors that need to be assessed for impact on resourcing include:

- number and status (for example, Premier League, Football League, non-league) of clubs in their force area
- police responsibilities as outlined in each club's [statement of intent](#)
- history and reputation of club(s) with regards to actual and/or risk of disorder

Following assessment of these factors, forces must consider and decide:

- configuration of roles, for example:
 - establishing a dedicated force football policing unit
 - assigning an individual as full-time dedicated football officer(s) for each club
 - assigning some or all of these roles for each club on a part-time basis (addressing any risks associated with this option)
 - combining roles, for example, a full-time DFO who takes on the role of police football spotter during football policing operations in other force areas

- location of roles, for example:
 - in a dedicated football policing unit, ensuring appropriate links and accessibility to other departments
 - amalgamated into other departments (for example, events/operational planning teams, local/force intelligence departments), ensuring that mechanisms exist or are developed to allow effective liaison and working between different roles
- supervision arrangements for each role (noting that each role is not rank specific)
- training and accreditation requirements for each role
- application of cadre principles, for example, identifying a small number of commanders to perform the police commander role thus contributing to a consistent working relationship with the club's safety officer

Football event categories

A standardised set of categories is used by the police to highlight the risk of disorder associated with individual football events. Categories should take account of the potential for disorder throughout the whole event area, for example, inside, outside and away from the stadium.

Only the following categories are applicable.

- PF – Police Free – no risks identified that require police officers to be deployed to the event (for example, 999 or 101 response only).
- SO – Spotters Only – no specific risks identified but police spotters deployed in a club and supporter engagement role.
- A – low risk of disorder.
- B – medium risk of disorder.
- C – high risk of disorder.
- CIR – increased risk of disorder due to specific concerns.

Forces should use these categories as a planning tool to ensure that the appropriate number of policing resources are deployed to minimise the risk of disorder at individual football events. The police and club should meet during the pre-season to:

- understand the policing resources that are required to minimise the risk of disorder associated with each football event category

- agree the initial football event category allocation for all known fixtures for the forthcoming season

These categories may prove useful when negotiating the number of resources to be deployed under special police service (SPS) arrangements, but should not be seen by clubs or planners as a template for such financial arrangements.

Police should be flexible with regard to the numbers of officers to be deployed, for example, not using Serials or police support units (or multiples thereof) as the sole means of measurement.

The deployment of officers under SPS should be considered on a case by case basis and will be dependant on the scale and location of potential threats. In certain circumstances it is possible that a Cat A and Cat C match may require the same numbers of police resources to be deployed inside a stadium, regardless of the varying levels of resources required across the wider event area.

Briefing

For further information see the [APP on Operations \(briefing and debriefing\)](#).

Initial, interim and final assessments

The DFO is responsible for developing these assessments. They are required to prepare intelligence assessments for each fixture involving their team for both home and away fixtures.

These should be prepared in a standard format with each part having a specific heading. Examples can be found on Minerva – Home Assessment and Away Assessment. These assessments allow for continuing review of each fixture on a threat and risk basis. The assessments will form the basis of the match category and resourcing of each fixture set by the command team.

Traditionally these have been prepared in three stages:

- initial
- interim
- final

For fixtures with a low risk assessment there may only be a need for a single assessment or an initial assessment followed by a final assessment just prior to the fixture should the circumstances change. For fixtures of higher risk there may be a need to prepare an initial, interim and final.

It is suggested broadly that the timescales for these to be prepared and disseminated is Initial – 4 weeks, Interim – 2 weeks, Final – 2 days prior to the fixture. For fixtures of increased risk or where planning starts well in advance of the fixture there may be a requirement to prepare in excess of three products. There should only ever be one initial and one final. Due to the nature of intelligence there will be occasions where command teams need to be updated of developments following the final assessment being published. Forces need to develop a means of this intelligence flow, ensuring that all relevant parties are included.

Debriefing and review

Once the football policing operation has ended, a [debriefing](#) should be conducted to identify opportunities for organisational and operational learning (for example, an assessment of whether the level of police resources used was appropriate, effective and efficient).

Debriefing also helps to support intelligence and evidence gathering, for example to secure FBOs, and identify/address any welfare, partner and community issues that may require action. For these reasons, a debrief with the club [safety officer](#) should be part of the process for debriefing the football policing operation. The outcomes of debriefing should link into reviews of the gold strategy and tactical planning that are conducted during and at the close of the season (for example, reviewing the policing resource requirements against the [match categories](#)).

The debriefing and review process should capture good practice and highlight areas for improvement.

The implementation of any recommendations should be monitored as these can be used as the basis for future planning and may be of use to the UKFPU with regard to effecting changes to national policies and legislation.

See the Knowledge Hub [Specialist Operations National Structured Debrief community](#) for identified good practice and areas of learning. Note: the reader must already be logged into the [Knowledge Hub](#) to access the link.

Tags

Public order