

Advisory Panel on Policing Protests

2016 Summary Report

Background

The Advisory Panel on Policing Protests is an independent body established by the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), following a review into the engagement of South Yorkshire Police with Rotherham communities in connection with the 5 September 2015 protests in the town.

The Panel offers support and challenge to the Police in the planning and learning stages of managing protests and marches taking place in South Yorkshire.

Members offer comment on proposals for handling protest events, and work with the Police in advance of any protest, as well as being in attendance to observe police activity and interactions with protestors on the day. They assist the Force to learn lessons, and, where appropriate, make recommendations for managing future protests. The Panel has no operational policing responsibilities, but it offers a channel for consultation with those affected by protests, and has an educational role.

Panel Membership

Members of the Panel have been drawn from the PCC's existing Independent Ethics Panel and the Minority Communities Independent Advisory Group, to represent a cross-section of communities from across South Yorkshire.

Mr Andrew Lockley – Chair
Mr Abdul Khayum – Vice Chair
Mrs Linda Christon
Mr Michael Lewis
Miss Sahir Ali
Mr Saghir Alam OBE

The Panel is supported by the OPCC Communications and Engagement Manager and Business Support Officer and is attended by the Assistant Chief Constable for Local Policing and other Police officers, as appropriate.

Activities during the year

The Panel is convened when the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner is advised by Operational Support that a march or protest is being held in South Yorkshire and is likely to require policing presence.

During 2016 the Panel has been convened to assist and advise in the planning of marches/protests on four occasions.

Below is a brief summary of the Panel's involvement in the four operations:

Event Outline

The protest was organised by the English Defence League (EDL) to take place in Rotherham town centre on Easter Saturday.

Due to a number of family events taking place in All Saints Square on the same day South Yorkshire Police (SYP) and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC) had concerns about a march through the town centre and negotiations with the EDL led to a static protest taking place on a site adjacent to the Bridge Inn, close to Rotherham train station. A limit of 200 protestors was also agreed.

Although the protest was organised by EDL, it was supported by a number of other smaller groups, some with regional identities. SYP was concerned that some individuals might not abide by the agreement reached between SYP and EDL. In the event, tension within the groups of far right demonstrators was successfully managed.

A counter-demonstration by UAF (United Against Fascism) also took place in the town centre on the same day.

Four members of the Advisory Panel on Protests (APP) were invited to observe the working of the Gold Command activities.

In total there were seven arrests of individuals associated with the EDL on the day – most of these by the British Transport Police on railway premises. Two individuals were arrested on arrival at Rotherham Station after a search revealed them to be carrying knives.

The EDL protest was successfully dispersed by 3pm.

Feedback from APP Observers

The APP were fully supportive of the protest being a static event, rather than a march, and after the event it was felt that this approach successfully reduced the risk of confrontation between opponents and kept them away from Rotherham's commercial centre.

Feedback from Panel members praised the role of SYP's Police Liaison Teams and the clarity of purpose set out in the planning documents and consistency between the planning and how the policing operation took shape on the day. The role of the Force solicitor to ensure that tactics were planned and executed according to the legal framework, and the collaborative approach between partner agencies (SY Fire and Rescue, SY Ambulance Service and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council) was also highlighted as being "well-coordinated", whilst acknowledging that this was not tested in a crisis situation.

Issues for future consideration included:

1. The scaling down of the level of policing if intelligence indicates a lower risk of disorder than first envisaged.
2. The role of observers at protests and the ability for them to be based with Silver Command and on the ground with officers at the location.
3. The scope of the Observer role and the limits to their duties.
4. The level of consultation that the Panel should be involved in before and after protests with groups beyond the statutory agencies.

Operation Quake - 4 June 2016

Event Outline

A planned demonstration in Rotherham was scheduled to take place on 4 June by Pegida (a right-wing European Group, with particular support in Germany) and opposing groups.

Pegida's usual tactics involve silent walks in townships. The Rotherham demonstration was described by Pegida as a protest against a perceived "Islamification" of the West. The group's stated intention was to distribute leaflets, partake in a silent walk, then assemble for speeches, before dispersing.

Members of UAF (an established group who oppose the views and values expressed by Pegida) made representations objecting to the presence of Pegida and wanting them to be restricted to the outskirts of the town centre. UAF expressed a desire to assemble in All Saints' Square and had stated that if Pegida were permitted the right to march, then they would also intend to march along the same route.

A third group, British Muslim Youth (BMY) stated that whilst their members would not be attending to counter protest as an identified group, some of their members would attend to protest under the banner of the 'Support Rotherham 12 Defence Campaign'.

The overall aim of the policing operation was to maintain the peace and prevent any outbreak of disorder that might take place.

Involvement of the APP

The APP met and was briefed in the planning stages for Operation Quake and was kept well informed of developments by SYP and RMBC. They provided advice, guidance and an independent perspective regarding the engagement of SYP with the local communities and partner agencies in the planning process.

Members of the APP attended the Gold and Silver Command Suites on the day and a member was present on the ground. The Observers had no recommendations to make on this occasion.

The APP was involved in the SYP debrief following the event where their input was recorded as having provided effective reflection within the operation.

Operation Heeley – 3 October 2016

Event Outline

SYP had been notified by the Rotherham 12 defence campaign of a planned static assembly on Monday 3 October 2016.

The protest had been arranged as a consequence of 12 arrests associated with disorder following the protest on 5 September 2015 in Rotherham. The trial was due to commence

on 3 October at Sheffield Crown Court. A support group had been established for the 12 individuals and a planned protest was due to take place outside Sheffield Crown Court. Information also identified support from other groups, including: Sheffield Black Lives Matter, Hillsborough victims' families and local trade unions.

The Panel discussed the implications of a possible counter demonstration, concern over potential numbers, contingency plans, and scale of resources dependent on threat, harm and risk at the time.

Involvement of the APP

The APP was convened once SYP received notification of the planned demonstration.

Observers from the Panel arranged to attend the planned demonstration. However, this was moved at short notice to take place on 6 October. As a consequence, no members of the APP were able to attend on the morning of the demonstration.

It was agreed that the Silver Commander would be in contact by telephone with the Chair of the APP, who would be able to attend from 12noon if the demonstration was still in progress. At midday the protest was coming to an end and the Observer did not attend.

Operation Hydrogen

Event Outline

SYP had been notified of a planned protest by a child sexual exploitation (CSE) survivor in Rotherham town centre against her former youth worker and the publication of a book which she claimed included inaccuracies.

The planned protest was to take place at the same time as a meeting of RMBC's Full Council at the Town Hall and a counter protest was expected.

Involvement of the APP

Upon notification of a protest the APP was convened and discussions took place with SYP about how the policing of the protest would take place.

As part of the planning process the Panel suggested that police liaison officers or social workers (who have already formed strong relationships with the victims) should be present to provide emotional support to both parties.

Two members of the APP undertook the Observer role on the day of the protest. One of these was in the Silver Command suite and the other was on the ground with the Police Liaison Team (PLT).

Feedback from APP Observers

There had been close liaison between SYP and the protest leader, which enabled assurances to be received about the running of the event and the involvement of other organisations.

The APP noted the emphasis that was placed on the sensitivity of the issues which had given rise to the protest and the actions of SYP to respond accordingly.

"Throughout, there was a sense of order, compassion for her circumstances and a genuine desire to demonstrate a low key unobtrusive presence - the use of and adherence to the

memorandum by the police and the protest group was a key element in the success of this approach.”

Quote from Observer

Particular praise was given to the role of the PLT who worked very closely with all those involved.

The protest passed peacefully and those involved dispersed without incident. The organiser thanked individual officers before leaving.

Recommendations:

The quality of SYP work in the area of PLTs has been nationally recognised as an area of excellence. It was recommended that the APP invites a representative of the Police Liaison Teams to a future meeting to explain its role in greater detail.

Plans & Proposals for the year ahead

From 1 January 2017 the APP will produce quarterly reports on its work. These will be published on the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner website (www.southyorkshire-pcc.gov.uk) under the Advisory Panel for Policing Protest pages.

Andrew Lockley
Chair
Advisory Panel for Policing Protests
Office of the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner

3 February 2017