
To: **Police and Fire & Rescue Scrutiny Sub-Committee**

On: **26 October 2021**

Report by: **Director of Communities and Housing Services**

Heading: **COP26 – Policing the Protest**

1. Summary

- 1.1. On Thursday 9 September 2021, the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) and Police Scotland convened a roundtable discussion to bring together key partners and academics to consider the policing of protests connected with COP26 in Glasgow.
- 1.2. The event aimed to demonstrate Police Scotland's commitment to protecting people's right to protest or counter-protest, balanced against the rights of the wider community. The event highlighted practical ways in which Police Scotland will protect those rights while ensuring individual and community safety and wellbeing.
- 1.3. The three main discussion sessions were as follows:
 - **Crowd psychology, collective protest and crowd-police interactions** – led by the Wardlaw Professor of Psychology at the University of St. Andrews, with response from Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS).
 - **Human Rights and the sound of democracy** - led by John Scott QC, with response from the Children and Young People's Commissioner.
 - **Policing Glasgow for all citizens over COP26** – led by Police Scotland's COP26 Gold Commander, with response from the planning team from Glasgow City Council for COP26.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Police and Fire & Rescue Scrutiny Sub-Committee Board note the content of this report.
-

3. Policing the protest – main points raised

3.1 The event was moderated by the Director of the John Smith Centre for Public Service, with the SPA Chair, the Oversight Group Chair, and the Chief Constable all contributing to the opening and closing sections of the event.

3.2 The main points raised during the three sessions are detailed below.

3.3 Crowd psychology, collective protest and crowd-police interactions

- Crowds are generally seen in negative terms, with pejorative language such as “mobs” used to describe them. Whilst in reality, the overwhelming members of protests are there for peaceful purposes and they should be seen from a positive position. Language is central to control crowds and they should be considered, not as “mobs”, but as communities with a common interest and the policing of them should be viewed as community policing.
- It was highlighted that the principle of producing a co-production plan with protestors was important and the use of “the 4 E’s” would be critical for COP26 and Scotland’s approach during COP26 could be used as a model elsewhere in future.
- It was stated that policing in Scotland has a good track record in managing large and complex events and a review by HMICS concluded that Police Scotland has robust arrangements in place and that the tone of language used strategically by senior officers in relation to protestors was a positive and inclusive one.
- The need for police to respond to spontaneous events, was discussed. Over the last few months these have included the protests in Kenmure Street in Govanhill to prevent an immigration enforcement van detaining two people and the gathering of large numbers of football supporters in Govan and George Square. It was important to recognise that police adapted their approach as these spontaneous events unfolded and took a pragmatic approach to managing these events given events on the ground.
- It was reiterated that Police Scotland will take a human rights based approach to protests with much pre-planning having taken place between Police Liaison Officers and participants/ organisations who will protest and who wish to engage in advance with Police Scotland.

3.4 Human Rights and the sound of democracy

- The discussion began with the statement that “noisy demos” are the sound of democracy and the right to peaceful assembly – for individuals to participate as a collective to help shape society – and is enshrined in all manner of human rights legislation, and that Glasgow in particular has a long history of such protests. The human rights approach from Police Scotland was described as a “mature approach”.

- There is the recognition that the right to peaceful protest may include “unlawful” acts, such as sitting down and blocking roads, and for protests the limits are what is peaceful as opposed to what is lawful and police may well let things occur during protests which they otherwise would not. However, it may well be the case that police take note of incidents and deal with them at a later date.
- Children and Young People have played a major part in recent campaigns to speak “Truth to power” on issues that affect them and that the COVID-19 pandemic is not a reason to ignore other issues. Children have additional human rights when it comes to protests, as they do not have other means for protesting which are available to adults (such as financial sanctions on organisations or companies).
- Also when children do protest, the priority should be to enable them to do so, and if there is any perceived risk to their welfare, the priority should be to remove the risk, as opposed to removing the children from the situation.
- A question was asked in relation to what effect the introduction of vaccine certification, as proposed by the Scottish Government, would mean in terms of groups ability to congregate in numbers and protest. Police Scotland stated that they would adopt the same approach as they have over the last 18 months where many protests over this period would not, in principle, be allowed under COVID-19 restrictions but a pragmatic approach was adopted.

3.5 Policing Glasgow for all citizens over COP26

- Policing of COP26 has the operational name “Urram” which is Gaelic for respect, which is what Police Scotland are aiming to achieve during the conference. This will involve, policing by consent with peaceful protests allowed, even if they include some unlawfulness, ensuring the conference is able to take place effectively and for communities in Glasgow and across Scotland to be able to go about their business as much is practicable during the period of COP26.
- There will be officers under the command of Police Scotland from forces across the UK. These officers will receive training and will be required to perform their duties using the human rights based approach of Police Scotland and any officers not adopting this approach will be sent back to their parent force.
- There are a number of contingency plans in place for eventualities which may occur during COP26 – such as protests at oil or gas businesses in Aberdeen, and there is a parallel planning team which is looking specifically about how to ensure “Business as Usual” policing across Glasgow and the wider area, This may potentially include measures such as annual leave being cancelled and longer shifts for officers.

- The experience Glasgow has at major events, such as the Commonwealth Games, will be used to support people's right to peaceful protest and allow communities to go about their daily business as normally as possible, while recognising there will be disruption especially around the North and South Campus of COP26 venues and Glasgow city centre.
 - As part of the communications workstream, and to ensure a "single source of truth", Glasgow City Council are using the "Get Ready Glasgow" website to provide information to individuals and communities in relation to COP26. It provides key information including what appropriate COVID-19 measures are being put in place to protect citizens and the participants in COP26, transport and travel options and advice on how to get local businesses ready.
 - The point was made that a conference on this scale, as well as a Papal visit, the presence of the President of the United States along with many other national leaders and the potential presence of members of the Royal family at civic events, not to mention the potential of having 50,000 protestors on the streets of Glasgow, would, each in their own right, result in a major strategic police operation. Having them all taking place at the same time simply reinforces the scale of the planning and resources required to have a successful outcome.
- 3.6 As part of the closing comments, the Chair of the Scottish Police Authority stated that he had confidence in the open and honest approach being taken by Police Scotland, and the Chief Constable of Police Scotland reiterated that successful policing is based on the consent of the people and that policing is broader than simply law enforcement.

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – none
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – none
3. **Community/Council Planning** – none
4. **Legal** – none
5. **Property/Assets** – none
6. **Information Technology** – none.
7. **Equality & Human Rights** - The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.

- 8. **Health & Safety** – none
 - 9. **Procurement** – none.
 - 10. **Risk** – none
 - 11. **Privacy Impact** - none
 - 12. **COSLA Policy Position** – none.
 - 13. **Climate Risk** - none
-

List of Background Papers: None

Author Douglas Morrison, Service Planning & Policy Development Manager,
Email: douglas.morrison@renfrewshire.gov.uk