

G20 / Public Order Tactics

Driver – Social

Related Drivers – Equality, Diversity & Human Rights, Increasing Accountability, Neighbourhood Policing, Incident Management, Information Sharing, Public Confidence in Policing, 2012 Olympics

Background

Protests were held in the City of London on the 1st and 2nd of April 2009 to coincide with the G20 Summit. On the 1st of April, violent confrontations between protesters and police occurred at the Bank of England and Bishopsgate. Police were, at points, required to react to serious violence, as witnessed in video footage of an attack on the Royal Bank of Scotland. Public confidence in policing was shaken by the death of Ian Tomlinson, a newspaper vendor, after an encounter with officers as well as mobile phone footage of a woman protester being struck by an officer.¹ Seventy-eight complaints (among 276), made to the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC), were lodged by witnesses as well as alleged victims relating to the use of force and police tactics.²

The tragic events on the day led to a focus on the police approach to protest, notably the use of containment and the manner in which force was used by the police. The death of Ian Tomlinson and other complaints are being investigated by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC). HMIC was asked to conduct a review on the policing methods used that day by the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS)

Prior to the publication of the HMIC review, the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee conducted their own review of the policing of protests at the G20. The Committee recommended:

- The use of containment (detaining people in a confined area for a sustained period of time) and distraction tactics (the controlled use of force against those who appear hostile) should be reviewed to determine their use in future policing of public protests.
- Police communication with the media and protesters must also improve. Funding should be made available specifically for training in the softer issues of communication and speaking to crowds. At the very least each unit involved in the policing of large protests should contain one officer trained and able to communicate with crowds of protesters.
- There are no circumstances in which it is acceptable for officers to not wear identification numbers.
- Never again must untrained officers be placed in the front-line of public protests. At the very least each unit should contain a core of fully trained, experienced officers. While greater funding must be made available, the police must also allocate their resources better to ensure that all officers on the front-line of public protest are trained adequately.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of the Constabulary, Denis O'Connor recently conducted a review of policing tactics at the G20 Summit. The review supports the view of senior MPS officers that training in both tactics and use of force needs to be adjusted to meet the challenges of 21st Century protest. In particular the Chief Inspector recommends a review of current public order training to ensure it reflects the full spectrum of public order activity including:

- Peaceful protest
- Consistently incorporates relevant human rights principles and standards (as demonstrated with Officer Safety Training)
- Considers individual's use of force during collective action such as public order operations.

Alongside the recommendation to review public order training, the ACPO Public Order Manual is being revised to include areas such as confinement and the release of peaceful protest. The Chief Inspector found the treatment of the spectrum of protest activity in the current ACPO manual to be insufficient.³

Both the HMIC and Select Committee reviews touch on the topic of a breakdown in communication between the police and the media. Police commanders revealed frustrations about the media coverage of the challenge the police faced on the 1st and 2nd April to HMIC. Initial coverage of the event was positive but by the 5th April was becoming more critical.

This intensified following the emergence of images relating to the death of Ian Tomlinson. Journalists and broadcasters provided views as to how communication between police and the media could be strengthened. Ideas suggested include:

- An improved police event website
- Embedding journalists with frontline police
- Police briefing at the scene (to provide information that is contextualised by what is happening on the ground)
- Making frontline officer's experience available after the event(s).

The Chief Inspector makes the recommendation that the police should develop a strategy to improve communication with the media before, during and after protests to convey a policing perspective of events.

Potential Skills Needs

Communication skills –communicate effectively with crowds and protesters

Equality and diversity skills – to treat people appropriately and sensitively in line with human rights legislations.

Media management skills – improve communication with the media before during and after protests to convey policing perspectives of the events

Public order policing skills – to deliver public order policing tactics in line with recommendations from HMIC in regards to review of G20 policing tactics.

'Soft' skills – personal qualities and interpersonal skills necessary to effectively deal with the public

¹ [House of Commons Home Affairs Committee \(2009\) *Policing of the G20 Protests*. Eight Report of the 2008-09 Session. HC 418, London: The Stationery Office Ltd.](#)

² [Police Oracle Online, 11 June 2009, 'G20: 276 Complaints So Far'.](#)

³ [O'Conner, Denis \(2009\) *Adapting to Protest*. London: HMIC.](#)