

## 2 LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND EVENTS: THE NEED FOR STANDARDISATION

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### **Abstract**

*The rationale for undertaking this project was a perception that different local authorities interpret legislation differently, and as a result have different requirements of event organisers and security/crowd management companies. Quantitative research in the form of an on-line survey, hosted on the website of the Institute of Licensing, was conducted. Although the majority of respondents were local authority employees, the findings, nevertheless, confirmed the view that local authorities' lack of a standardised approach caused practical problems. The findings suggest that the introduction of the Licensing Act 2003 might have contributed to the lack of standardisation, and indicated that local authorities that regularly host large events are better placed to assess event plans and deal with associated issues. The findings showed support for event training, specific guidance and new/revised event legislation; there was also an indication that shared knowledge/experience might be the best way to address the problem of lack of standardisation.*

### **Introduction**

This study examined the role of local licensing authorities at events; it specifically examined the differing approaches adopted by local authority staff, whether they took account of crowd management issues and the relationship with event organisers, security/crowd management companies and similar organisations involved in events. The rationale for undertaking this research was a perception, supported by anecdotal evidence, that different local authorities interpret legislation guidance and requirements of event organisers and security/crowd management companies differently. There is also the view that this difference in approach causes practical problems for organisations undertaking events in different local authority areas, as they have to respond to differing requirements. This study examined:

- the extent to which the Safety Advisory Group (SAG) concept is successful in ensuring that effective pre-event planning takes place (Most local authorities should use a SAG or similar multi-agency forum to bring together interested parties involved with large events).
- the relationship between event organisers and local authorities to ascertain whether local authorities are generally supportive of events taking place in their area.



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- the main concerns of local authorities in addressing pre-event planning and whether these concerns are similar to those of event organisers.
- whether local authorities took sufficient account of crowd management issues when assessing event plans.
- whether local authority staff had sufficient experience and knowledge of crowd management issues.
- if there was a difference of approach by local authorities and whether that caused problems to event organisers.
- the underlying causes of problems, and to establish whether the introduction of new legislation (the Licensing Act 2003) in England and Wales has improved or worsened this situation.
- how the problems arising from differing approaches could be addressed to improve the situation.

Upton (2007) states that a number of guidance documents have been published to assist both event organisers and local authority staff in addressing issues related to event safety; that guidance is interpreted differently by different local authority personnel; and that inexperienced persons are disposed to treat the guidance as rigid instructions whereas more experienced persons treat guidance as it was intended, a process guide.

Guidance within the field of crowd safety management (CSM) is available in a number of publications. The "Event safety guide: A guide to health, safety and welfare at music and similar events" (HSE, 1999) is generally acknowledged as the primary document concerning organisation of crowd related events, and particularly events such as open-air concerts and festivals. Nevertheless, this document is now regarded as out of date. More importantly, the document does not make a detailed reference to the requirements placed upon event organisers by the Licensing Act 2003. A more current and relevant document is the "Fire safety risk assessment: Open air events and venues" (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006). This document focuses on specific elements, such as fire safety. Buildings generally benefit from more relevant and current guidance available in the "Technical standards for places of entertainment" (Association of British Theatre Technicians, District Surveyors Association and Institute of Licensing 2008) and "Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds", 5<sup>th</sup> edition (Department for Culture Media and Sport and the Football Licensing Authority, 2008). Upton (2007) believes that the sheer number of local authorities in the United Kingdom produced a situation where guidance is interpreted widely. He also pointed to the existence of a variety of different guidance documents that were specific either to a particular type of event or a particular venue.



## Method

Originally, the research design was to seek data from conducting semi-structured interviews based on pre-set open-ended questions. This method of collecting data for qualitative analysis would help achieve greater understanding (Creswell, 1994) than quantitative one. Also, a questionnaire survey, which lends itself to quantitative analysis, was not considered, as it required resources which were not available in the allocated time.

The intention was thus to interview a purposive sample from two groups: Event organisers and security companies involved in event organisation and/or crowd management; and local authority officers involved in event licensing or related regulation and compliance. Attendance at The Event Show at London Olympia on Wednesday 21 January 2009 was identified as providing an opportunity to obtain the required data.

Unfortunately a number of contacted individuals and organisations did not respond to interview requests; in total only three telephone and email interviews were conducted. Consequently, the Institute of Licensing was approached; it developed and hosted, on its web site, an on-line questionnaire based on the version intended for use at interviews.

In changing the research methodological design from interviews to an on-line survey format it was not possible to include all the originally intended questions. The on-line survey did not accommodate the question seeking options to address difference in approach to be expanded.

A summary of responses to the on-line survey was provided by the Institute of Licensing. Responses were grouped into particular categories. Data analysis comprised subjective interpretation of these responses, drawing conclusions, and making recommendations. The responses from the qualitative research supported the findings from the quantitative one, acknowledging Ryan's (1995) view that the two methods complement each other.

## Findings

Seventy-nine respondents completed the online questionnaire; not all of them answered all the questions. The majority of the respondents (85%) were from local authorities.

Most respondents (88%) felt that the Safety Advisory Group concept worked. One interviewee stated that as an advisory body, the Safety Advisory Group lacked enforcement powers but that generally organisers took heed of the advice given. Another interviewee stressed that the Group would only work if participants were honest and open.

The great majority of respondents (92%) considered the relationship between local authorities and event organisers a good one.

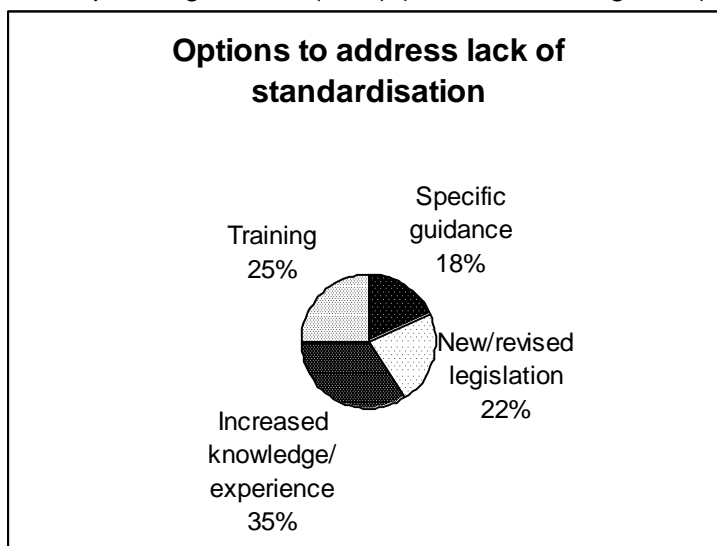
75% of the respondents agreed that local authorities take sufficient account of crowd management issues in assessing event plans. However, in exploring this issue further, only 62% felt that local



authorities had sufficient experience and/or knowledge. One of the interviewees, an Event Safety Officer, commented that the police often claim to have knowledge of crowd management issues but in so doing they are actually referring to crowd control rather than crowd management. The comment was made that police officers with knowledge and experience of events will be aware of reputable crowd management providers. Another interviewee stated that local authorities quite possibly do not have sufficient knowledge or experience.

Comments from the interviewees and the majority (90%) of the respondents to the online survey show that there were differences of approach by local authorities in dealing with event organisers, significantly supporting the central claim of this study by pointing to the absence of standardisation. One interviewee contended that licence conditions for the annual Glastonbury festival had been copied by other authorities, irrespective of whether they were appropriate; while another interviewee indicated that many authorities had produced their own interpretation which clearly differed from other local authorities. Most respondents (64%) felt that this difference caused problems. Experience has again been highlighted as an issue; 87% of the respondents stated that local authorities that regularly host large events were better placed to assess event plans and address associated issues. 67% of respondents further believed that the introduction of the Licensing Act 2003 had contributed to local authorities taking different approaches. This view was also held by the interviewees; they stated that the Act “was an ill conceived piece of legislation”, it “has worsened the situation as events were not considered” and that the legislation is entirely inappropriate for events, as “it does not have the flavour of enabling entertainment”.

Addressing the problem of different approaches by local authorities, the largest number of respondents (35%) suggested the need for increased knowledge and experience. The next most cited option was training (25%) followed by new or revised legislation (22%), and event specific guidance (18%) (see the following chart).



These findings were supported by those interviewed; one interviewee felt that legislation was the main problem and guidance would not have alleviated the problem. Another interviewee stated that whilst relevant training was important it was not a substitute for experience. These interviewees were aware of the increasing number of Event Safety Officers holding a recognised health and safety qualification; they felt that although these officers might be suitable to undertake the role of event safety, however, they had no event experience. Addressing further the matter of training one interviewee, whilst supporting the Foundation Degree in Crowd and Safety Management, suggested that local authority staff would not necessarily require a full Foundation Degree, that a tailored course focussing upon issues of direct relevance to local authorities would be more appropriate. All interviewees expressed the view that publication of a revised version of The event safety guide (HSE, 1999), commonly known as the “purple guide”, was long overdue, and would assist both event organisers and local authorities. They also indicated that there would be occasions when the advice contained within the guide may not be appropriate.

### Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that: there are differences of approach by local authorities in dealing with event organisers; the relationship between local authorities and event organisers is, in general, good and any differences are largely due to differences in expectations; local authority staff takes account of crowd management issues in assessing event plans but not in all cases; they may not always be competent to address crowd management issues; the introduction of the Licensing Act 2003 has partly caused the situation where event organisers are faced with different approaches by local authorities; and that possible remedies to the problems caused by the different approaches of local authorities might reside in increased knowledge and experience of events, training, event specific guidance and legislation.

The findings point to a degree of satisfaction with current arrangements, where the majority of respondents felt that the Safety Advisory Group concept was both prevalent and effective. The findings, nevertheless, indicate that the lack of standardisation is a concern for both local authorities and event organisers. It is suggested that remedying this situation might require a joint approach by all appropriate parties and involve establishing an appropriate multi-agency forum, to include local authorities, event organisers, and others. Further research is required into the role of this forum, which may focus on: a) producing an event safety guide which includes reference to staff competencies, training, the role of local authorities and crowd management; particularly, as it is widely known that the Health and Safety Executive are aware of this need; b) reviewing the Licensing Act 2003 to incorporate specific reference to crowd related events and/or legislation; c) developing



an event planning and training programme; d) developing a mentoring scheme that would enable those with minimal experience of events to obtain and build knowledge and experience.

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