



## **REVIEW OF THE POLICING OF FIXTURES BETWEEN CHESTER AND WREXHAM (HOME AND AWAY)**

Document Status: **Version 2.0**

## BACKGROUND

Merseyside Police were requested to undertake an independent review of the policing of the football fixtures, both home and away, of Chester playing against Wrexham over the last two seasons. (Part 1 of a 2 part review as per the terms of reference). The fixtures being –

### Chester (Home)

Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2014 (2000 hrs K.O.)

Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2015 (1400 hrs K.O.)

### Wrexham (Home)

Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> March 2015 (1300 hrs K.O.)

Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> March 2016 (1400 hrs K.O.)

After establishing a small team of Merseyside Officers with the relevant experience and knowledge of football operations a review was conducted between the 3<sup>rd</sup> June and Friday 17<sup>th</sup> June 2016.

The review team consisted of –

Supt Simon Irving – Football Command cadre / Silver / Lead Officer  
CI Chris Gibson – Silver / Bronze Commander / Bronze football cadre / Force Co-ordination role  
CI Gary O'Rourke – Silver / Bronze Commander / Bronze football cadre  
Sgt Tracy McNally – Merseyside football operation  
Con Lee Lomax - Football Intelligence Officer (Liverpool FC)  
Con Steve Roberts - Football Intelligence Officer (Everton FC)  
Con Phil Devereux – Tactical Advisor (Force Co-ordination)

C/Supt Rob Carden - assisted with a review of the Gold Strategies

During the course of the review the following documentation was kindly made available to the team.

Cheshire document	Fixture date- 22/9/14	Fixture date- 3/10/15
Gold Strategies	✓	✓
Silver Tactical plans	✓	✓
Bronze deployment plans	✓	✓
Confirmation of skills / training	✓	✓
Evidence of TACAD in planning	✓	✓
Intelligence documents	✓	✓
Planning meeting notes and minutes	✓	✓
Debrief notes	x	✓
Financial costs	✓	✓
Briefing Documents	✓	✓
Control logs	✓	✓

N. Wales document	Fixture date- 7/3/15	Fixture date- 19/3/16
Gold Strategies	x	✓
Silver Tactical plans	✓	✓
Bronze deployment plans	✓	✓
Confirmation of skills / training	✓	✓
Evidence of TACAD in planning	✓	✓
Intelligence documents	✓	✓
Planning meeting notes and minutes	✓	✓
Debrief notes	x	x
Financial costs	✓	✓
Briefing Documents	✓	✓
Control logs	✓	x

In addition the team spoke to the following people –

#### Cheshire

ACC Mark Roberts	- Gold Commander / National Lead for Football Policing
Supt Beverley Raistrick	- Uniform Operations and Regional Collaborations
C/Insp Richard Rees	- Silver Commander
Sgt Carl Capewell	- Sports and Events Planning
Steve Povey	- Safety Officer at club

#### North Wales

ACC Richard Debicki	- Gold Commander
Supt Robert Kirman	- Silver Commander
Con Louise Evans	- Operational Planning
Con Paul Davies	- POTAC
Con Christopher Jones	- POTAC
Peter Jones	- Wrexham Supporter Trust
Toni Slater	- SAG Chair
Martin Bradley	- Safety Officer at club

It was unfortunate that the timing of this review clashed with the deployment of the Wrexham Dedicated Football Officer (DFO) to France for the Euro 2016 Championships.

The team were also unable, despite concerted efforts from both Cheshire Officers and ourselves, to interview John Pierce, the SAG Chair from Cheshire.

## HISTORY OF FIXTURES

Documentary evidence going as far back as the 1980's has been provided about the history involving Chester and Wrexham. Large scale violence has taken place between the two sets of supporters both outside and inside the respective stadiums and also in the city centres of both cities. Weapons have been used.

In the 2009/10 football season, the fixture at the Racecourse ground saw large scale disorder inside the stadium with metal fencing and exit gates being forced so that the risk groups could engage in disorder. PSU's in full level 2 uniform including shields had to perform a 'running line' police tactic to disperse the crowds as officers came under a constant barrage of bottles and bricks that were being thrown by the Wrexham supporters (100 – 150).

At the same time, extensive police resources were being used to escort Chester supporters back to the railway station. A number of arrests were made and a post-match investigation was set up. There was no return fixture this season as Chester FC went into administration.

Chester FC reformed and the two clubs met again in the same league in 2013/14. This season saw the introduction of the 'Safe Travel' tactic by both forces.

The matches between these two teams continue to be extremely high profile and pose a risk to attending supporters.

By way of context, this fixture is considered to be one of the 10 top 'risk' fixtures nationally.

## FINDINGS

### **The appropriateness of the collection plan and assessment of the risk for disorder and anti-social behaviour.**

Prior to the all the relevant fixtures over the last two seasons the DFO's from both forces have produced comprehensive intelligence reports that inform the overall threat assessment and allow the meaningful construction of the silver and bronze plans.

It is clear that the historic events involving disorder currently outweigh the flow of current intelligence with regard to the risk of disorder at these fixtures. There has been intelligence regarding the 'better' behaviour of fans who wanted to travel abroad for the Euro Championships and this will be considered when the intelligence picture is reviewed for the next meeting of these clubs.

There was good evidence of debriefing being used within the planning process for both forces.

## **The proportionality of the policing response.**

In order to consider the use of all Police tactics the review considered a number of general areas-

- European Convention of Human Rights 1998.
- Code of Ethics 2014 (for the principles and standards of Professional behaviours of the profession of England and Wales).
- Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary 10 Key principles governing the use of force by the Police service.
- The association of Chief Police officers National Decision making Model, the British Model of Policing, Adapting to Protest.
- Doctrine within the Authorised Professional Practice 2016 (APP).
- College of Policing, National Police Public Order Training Curriculum. Module G3 – Standards, training, equipment and Resources.
- The Joint Decision Making model within the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme.

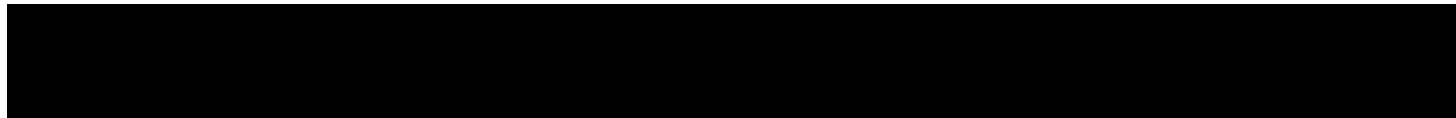
As indicated above, there has been a long history of violence and disorder both inside and outside of the stadia between the 2 sets of risk supporters stretching back to the 1984 -1985 season.

As a result, a 'Safe Transport' tactic was jointly agreed at the Safety Advisory Groups (SAG) in order to help resolve the on-going disorder between rival supporters. Club media strategies were formulated to ensure a 'no surprises' approach was adopted as a result of the implementation of this tactic.


The tactic itself involves the purchase of a voucher, obtained by the relevant away supporter from their respective home stadium ticket office on the day of the actual game. The individual then presents this voucher to a club steward situated on each designated coach within the stadium car park. Once verified the supporter is then asked to remain on the coach as part of the condition of sale. They are then subsequently transported to the away game. A Police escort from the same force then follows the convoy of coaches on a pre-determined route to the corresponding stadium, piloted by the Roads Policing Unit (RPU) from the host force.

On arrival at the ground the coaches are then parked within a loose police cordon of foot officers from the host force, in an area outside of the away turnstiles. There the visiting supporters produce their issued voucher and are granted a match day ticket and given access to the stadium subject to ground regulations.

At the conclusion of the match the away supporters simply leave the stadium via the visiting turnstiles / gates and return to their original coaches again within the loose cordon of Police officers in order to facilitate the safe return journey. This again is with a Police escort, provided from the host RPU and their own force Police Support Units (PSUs).



The Safe Transport tactic has now been used successfully by both clubs, home and away, for the past 2 seasons and the threat of disorder outside of both stadiums has decreased. This has resulted in no arrests or football related crime outside of the stadia itself.



The review team found this tactic to be extremely effective in reducing the risk to the wider communities of both Wrexham and Chester. It is part of a policing response that has been developed in conjunction with the clubs. Feedback from both the SAG and club Safety Officers was extremely positive and recognised that the impact on the City Centres and public going about their normal business was significantly reduced. The tactic meets the Gold Strategic objectives and is proportionate and justified based on the historic disorder that has occurred widely at these fixtures.

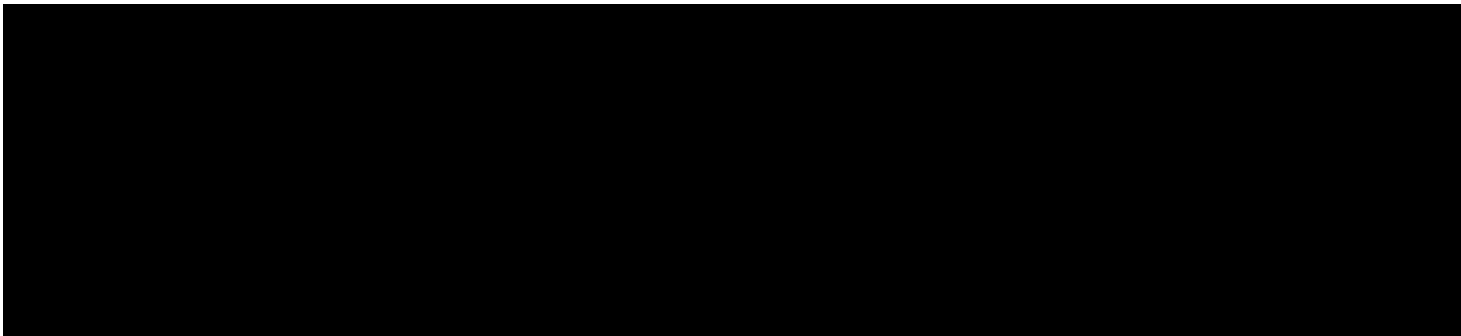
### **The proportionality of the tactics and justification against the impact on human rights and the code of ethics.**

As stated above, the 'Safer Transport' tactic is simply a general condition of entry to the football match as an away supporter. It was devised as a proportionate, necessary and justifiable response to the continuous threat of violence and disorder likely to be directed at visiting supporters and the likely disruption to the community as a whole.

The police have an obligation under Article 1 of the Human Rights Act to protect the property of the football club and local resident's living in the vicinity. The police also have a positive obligation under Article 2 to protect individuals whose lives are put at risk from the criminality of others and under Article 5 for liberty and security of all persons. Supporters and residents under Article 8, have a right to respect their private and family life. Persons attending the match have the right of peaceful assembly and freedom of association with others, provided that there is no threat to public safety, regardless of payment or not.

This particular tactic does not curtail the individual or groups ability at this social event to gather, make excess noise, chant and enjoy the event within the confines of the law.

In view of the history of disorder and rivalry between both sets of fans the tactic is proportionate. It is also effective, with the use of reduced resource levels based on previous fixtures, and clearly deters and prevents both sets of fans from engaging in disorder in near-by city centres.



The review team looked at a number of themes in relation to the policing response.

## Strategic objectives

Both forces provided evidence of clearly documented Strategic Objectives with an audit trail of review. They also provided strong evidence of effective media plans and effective use of social media as a fan based messaging service.

The Strategic Objectives were taken into account throughout the planning process with clear follow through in all the planning and operational documents.

Both Forces had quite different strategic objectives. For an operation that is so similar it is felt that there may be opportunities to ensure that there is greater consistency in the strategic aims, acknowledging that there will always be some variation based on the prevailing threat and personal style.

In order to achieve that consistency it was felt that –

- It may be better to have 'maximising the safety of officers' after objectives such as the prevention of public order.
- 'Maximise the safety of those attending' should be described in terms of 'minimising the risk'. We are seeking to maximise the safety of police officers because we apply them to risk.
- The inclusion of outcomes (preferred, acceptable and unacceptable) could be added to the strategy along with any command protocols and tactical parameters.
- The maintenance of public confidence should feature.

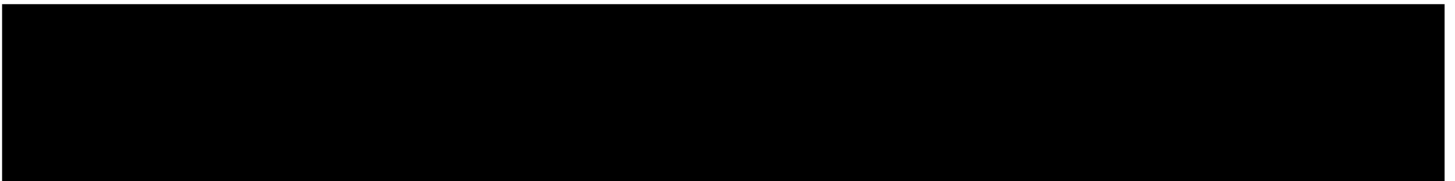
## Recommendation

3. Both forces to consider greater consistency in the overarching strategic objectives for these fixtures.

## Command

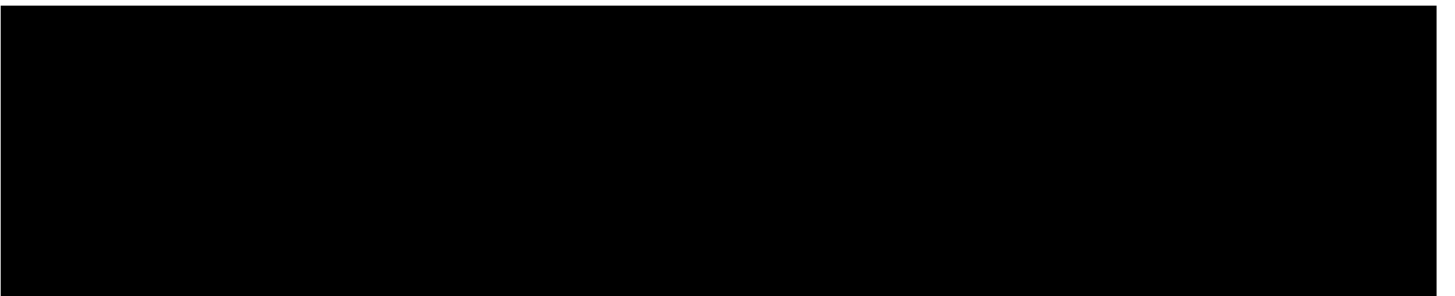
Having reviewed both operation Command structures across the four fixtures it is apparent that they are consistent and that key roles and responsibilities have been identified as per APP guidance.

There are clear command protocols and effective joint operational working between the forces. For example a PSU Inspector from Cheshire, on the day of the Chester v Wrexham match, attends at the North Wales R.V. point and gives a full briefing to the North Wales PSU.



## Plans

The operational, deployment and tactical plans along with the presentations used for briefing staff were reviewed. They were comprehensive in relation to the overall intent, style and tone of the policing operation and they covered use of force considerations, powers and procedures.




The team found the operations are tactically sound.



**Opportunities for the police to mitigate the risk of disorder, violence and anti-social behaviour.**

**Rail Network operation**

There is evidence that both forces receive proactive support from BTP pre / post match on the rail network.



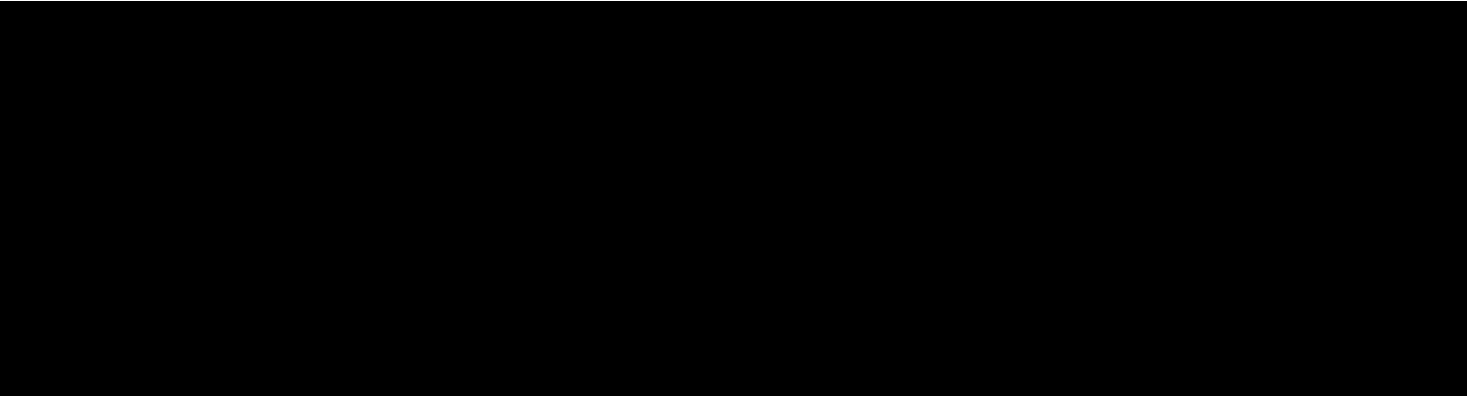




### **Kick off times**

Both forces explained that they had previously successfully negotiated with the league around kick off days / times. It was accepted that this becomes more challenging for televised games. Both forces do submit a separate letter to the league pre-season requesting early kick off times for this fixture and both clubs and forces expressed a willingness to work towards a 3pm Saturday kick off time if fan behaviour improved.

### Recommendation

10. Both forces to submit a joint letter to the league, endorsed by a Chief Officer, requesting consideration to the timing of this fixture and clashes with other events and operations that are planned in the Force areas. Fan groups to be liaised with during the planning phase to offer a rationale.
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## **Opportunities for other stakeholders to mitigate the risk of disorder, violence and anti-social behaviour.**

### **Football Supporters groups**

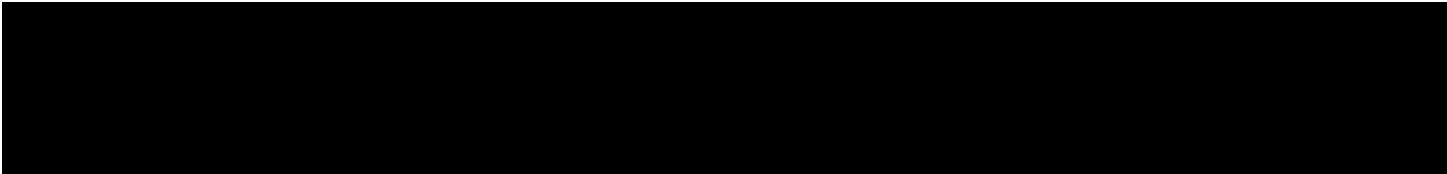
As part of the review we spoke with Mr Peter Jones who is part of the supporter trust who own Wrexham Football Club. Mr Jones provided feedback that the 'Safe Transport' tactic both to and from the Wrexham and Chester football matches works well. He did indicate that he receives complaints from supporters of Wrexham who state that the safe travel removes freedom of choice and can be an inconvenience for the supporters. It is clear that there is divided opinion between those who support the idea and those who are against it.

Like all we have spoken to, he would like to see a move away from having to utilise 'Safe Transport' but again, in common with the club officials and SAG members we have spoken to, accepts it may not be possible in the short term. Positively he did state that he is happy with the style of policing of the home supporters at Wrexham and has seen an improvement of the policing style when Wrexham visit Chester. Mr Jones does have meetings with the police and is obviously engaged in the planning process.

Chester do not have an active supporters group.

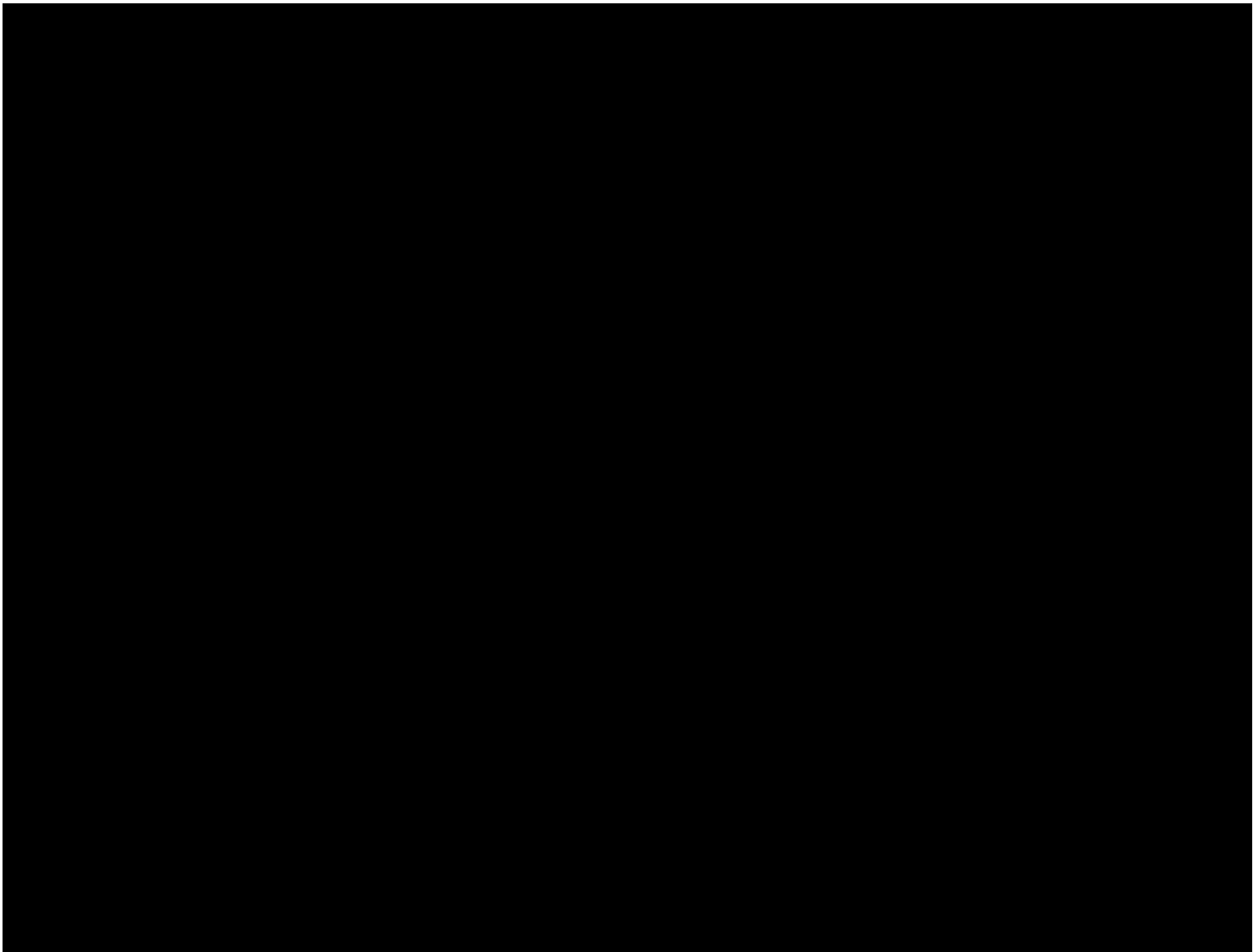
The Football Supporters Federation (FSF) will be able to offer advice to the club / police on the establishment of a supporter group and will also provide feedback from a fans perspective on the club / policing operation. To the best of our knowledge, the FSF have never attended any pre or post match briefings or taken in any Chester / Wrexham, Wrexham / Chester football matches.

### [Recommendation](#)

12. Cheshire Police to work with Chester FC and see if there is any feasibility in the club setting up a supporters club.
  13. Both clubs to communicate with the Football Supporters Federation and consider involving them in the planning and de-brief process.
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The Ground Safety Officers (GSO) from both clubs were very complimentary about the police operation. In both cases the Match Commander (Inspector) is co-located in the control room with the GSO which ensures good communication. It is clear that the GSOs understand the wider impact on the city centre and indicated that the 'Safer Transport' tactic has little impact once the fans are inside the stadium.

It was clear that both GSOs want to be fully involved in the planning process for this fixture but do have full time jobs alongside this role. It is noted that some thought and flexibility needs to be applied when arranging planning meetings involving these crucial stakeholders.



### **Licensing support**

There was good evidence of proactive licensing officer involvement in both forces and strong links to both 'pub watch' schemes. The licencing community are very strongly supportive of the 'Safer Transport' tactic and follow the advice of the police as to action they need to take willingly. There has been positive feedback in relation to the reduced necessity for additional door staff to be brought on during match days for these fixtures.

### **Media**

Both forces, as stated above, have effective media (including social media) strategies. It is clear that the local papers from both force areas have been negative in their view of the 'Safer Transport' tactic.

North Wales police have involved their local paper, the 'Wrexham Leader', in their match day operation and this has reduced some of the negativity surrounding the fixture. This was seen as a positive step and should be a future consideration by Cheshire with the 'Chester Chronicle'.

**Any continuous professional development and learning for those involved in planning and policing football matches in both Forces.**

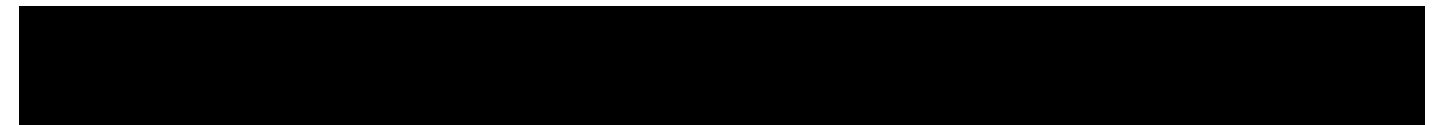
#### **Silver and Bronze Command**

Both forces operate in line with NPCC and APP Guidelines in that all commanders are trained to Silver or Bronze command level and are Policing Events accredited.

It is evident that the Silver Commanders are experienced in policing football matches with a small cadre being utilised for the fixtures.

At Bronze level Commanders must attend their annual CPD event and maintain their personal portfolios, however there is no formal accreditation process in relation to performing the Bronze Command role for football.

#### **Recommendation**

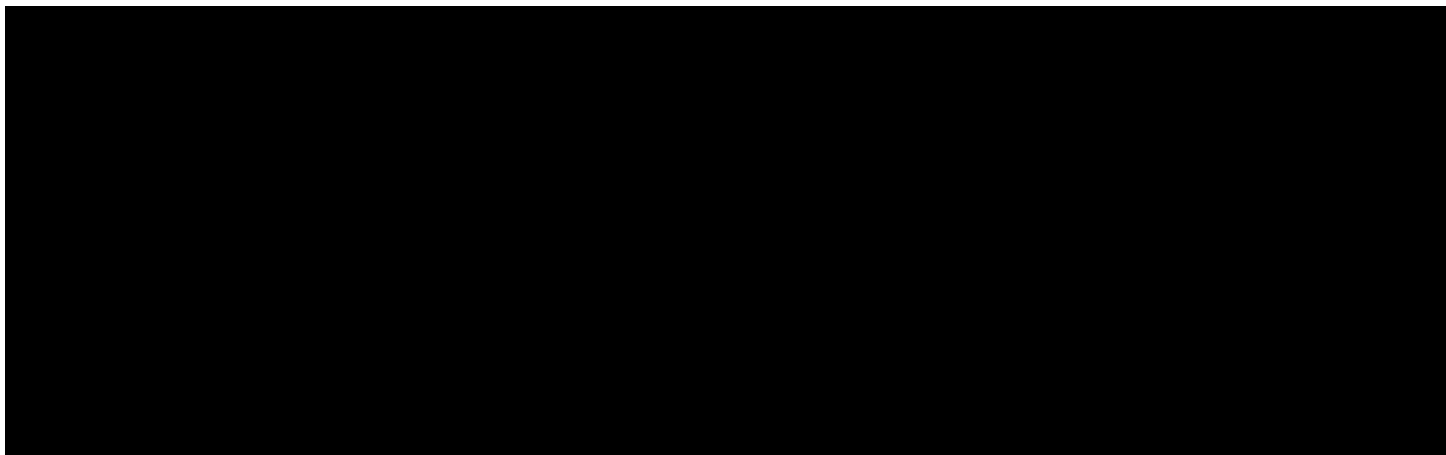


#### **Dedicated Football Officers (DFOs)**

The DFO's from both forces are trained and qualified by the UK Football Policing Unit and clearly have a good working relationship for these fixtures sharing information and intelligence and support throughout.

#### **Planners**

Unfortunately Con. Heidi Goldsack, the DFO and planner from North Wales was deployed in France so the review team were unable to meet with her. It is evident from the range of documentation provided by both forces and speaking with Sgt. Carl Capewell from Cheshire that both have a vast amount of knowledge and experience with planning for such fixtures.



#### **Opportunities to develop a consistent approach to cost recovery.**

Both forces adhere to the National Policing Guidelines on charging for Police Services within the footprint of the stadium.

Resource levels and costings are agreed in the early planning stages with Special Police Services (SPS) agreements drawn up and signed by both parties.

## SUMMARY / CONCLUSIONS

The review team were very impressed with the football operation that is put into place by both forces with regard to this fixture. Both forces provided strong evidence of an auditable planning process. Tactical / deployment plans were detailed and evidenced contingency plans against identified risk.

It is clear that this is a very high risk fixture. As stated earlier in the document, it is one of the top 10 risk fixtures nationally. The historic disorder that has occurred has been significantly reduced through the use of the 'Safer Transport' tactic.

It is recognised that this tactic is a high end tactic that fans either love or hate. Feedback has come from several sources during this review to indicate that some fans would not attend this fixture without this tactic being implemented, whilst some fans think it is too restrictive.

The tactic is a club initiative and a condition of entry for away fans into the ground. Both police forces provide a *supporting* role in order to prevent crime and disorder whilst on route to the ground and during the ingress into the stadium. There is evidence of both clubs exercising discretion / common sense with a number of away fans who do not pose a threat.

The view of all the officers on the review team was that this tactic has prevented the significant problems that have occurred in the past. From the strategic objectives and throughout the operation in both forces the main consideration we have found is for the communities of both Chester and Wrexham. The overriding ambition of both forces is to keep the public safe. This includes the risk groups from both clubs.

Interviews with the Safety Officers and SAG chair were very positive about both policing operations which in effect mirror each other. We found strong links had been established and meeting structures were in place for Police from both forces, Safety Officers and the SAGs both pre and post the fixtures to ensure the operations were reviewed and feedback acted upon.

The 'Safe Transport' tactic was reviewed by the SAG in July 2015 and it was agreed by all parties, that in the continued interests of safety, both games will remain all ticket, with away supporters travelling to the matches on officially organised coaches.


Throughout the review it was clear that all involved are seeking to move towards a normalised kick-off time for both fixtures of 3pm on a Saturday. This is a positive step for the fans and one that we feel is possible in the short term with the 'Safer Transport' tactic in place.

There is an overarching aim to try and move away from having to use this tactic but, maintaining public safety at the heart of the plan, this should be part of a staged approach developed over a few seasons, as part of a de-escalation plan.

### Recommendation

18. Key stakeholders (to include - SAGs, club, police from both forces, supporters groups and reps from the FSF) to formally review and develop a plan to normalise the kick-off time in the first instance and develop a staged approach to scale back the 'Safer Transport' tactic.

This should be done in line with ECHR Article 5 Right to liberty and security -

- Be utilised to prevent serious disorder and should be proportionate to the threat
  - The Strategic and Tactical objectives should reflect the above
  - The tactic should be used in good faith
  - Be linked to current intelligence
- 

There should be acknowledgement from all parties that the ultimate desired outcome of a normalised fixture, with no 'Safer Transport', may not be realistically achievable based on Intelligence or the behaviour of fans from both clubs. It is also recognised that Chester rail station is some distance from the ground, unlike Wrexham's that is nearer. This will require further consideration by the stakeholders as to transport options.

In the context of what we have found is a very good policing operation with strong partnerships and public safety in mind the recommendations made are relatively minor in nature to the overall event. A summary of the recommendations can be found at the end of this report.

We have found numerous examples of good practice from both forces that we intend to weave into our own football planning in Merseyside. The individuals we have spoken to, without exception, have been passionate about making these fixtures as safe as possible for both those attending and the wider communities within Cheshire and Wrexham. We thank these individuals for the time they have given us.


Supt. Simon Irving  
Merseyside Police.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

3. Both to forces consider greater consistency in overarching strategic objectives for these fixtures.

10. Both forces to submit a joint letter to the league, endorsed by a Chief Officer, requesting consideration to the timing of this fixture and clashes with other events and operations that are planned in the Force areas. Fan Groups to be liaised with during the planning phase to offer a rationale.

12. Cheshire Police to work with Chester FC and see if there is any feasibility in the club setting up a supporters club.
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