

Mr Kevin McLoughlin,
Senior Coroner,
Coroner's Office and Court,
71 Northgate,
Wakefield,
WF1 3BS

Dear Mr McLoughlin,

I am writing as requested, in response to the concerns expressed by the Coroner in the Regulation 28 Report dated 21 August 2023.

In two witness statements, dated 12 June 2023 and 10 August 2023, I set out many improvements which Festival Republic proposed to implement for Leeds Festival 2023. In addition, in my evidence at the Inquest, I referred to further measures that would be put in place in 2023 or, where the timescale prevented this, would be carried forward to be implemented at future festivals. I set out below the improvements made for Leeds Festival 2023 and further improvements which will be considered for Leeds Festival 2024 within the planning process for that Festival.

Licensing Authority and Safety Advisory Group (SAG)

All of our plans which together constitute the Event Management Plan for Leeds Festival 2023, were approved by the Licensing Authority, the Responsible Authorities and SAG prior to the festival commencing in August 2023. Pre-event inspections were carried out by members of the Licensing Committee and Officers of Leeds City Council.

Throughout the Festival, SAG meetings were convened daily to share information and where necessary, address issues or concerns that arose.

A Multi-Agency debrief took place on 6 October 2023. The feedback from this debrief was very positive. A number of themed areas were discussed, including 'Policing Issues', 'Security', 'Medical' and 'Safeguarding'. It was noted that the hard line taken this year was welcomed by all.

It was agreed that the event was "successful in building a hostile environment for drug dealers at the festival" by the Security at gates, search operations, presence of dogs and visible messaging. In addition, covert operations were in place, including the campsite, which resulted in arrests. The West Yorkshire Police confirmed that there had been 71 arrests, noting most were for the supply of drugs. Prosecutions have taken place which I will refer to later.

The police commented that "the increase in robust security and dealing with anti-social behaviour on site with more evictions by FR made the event feel more safer than in previous years."

It was agreed that the approach taken in 2023 should be carried forward to the 2024 festival. In addition, the SAG meeting noted improvements in security, medical provision, safeguarding and “saw lots of positives”.

Planning for Leeds Festival 2024

An internal review by Festival Republic has taken place and the drafting of an Event Improvement Plan for 2024 covering all aspects of the festival has commenced. We are in the process of carrying out debrief meetings with our contractors. The planning process has already begun with debriefs within Festival Republic and debriefs with some Responsible Authorities and Sub Groups, in addition to the Multi Agency debrief described above. A debrief meeting with the Licensing Committee is scheduled for 21 November 2023. Any recommendations for further measures that emerge from this debrief will be included in the planning process for Leeds Festival 2024.

Education and Messaging about Drug Awareness

In my earlier statements, I explained our use of social media platforms both before and during the Festival, including Facebook, Instagram and Tik Tok, messaging on our website and messaging on the main stage LED screens between performances throughout the festival. This was fully implemented for the Festival in 2023. In addition, messaging was provided to festival goers via the Leeds Festival App throughout the festival which had 88,000 active users and almost a million user sessions. Varying messages were created and developed in conjunction with FACT (Festival Advice and Campaign Team), including:

“There is no safe level of drug use. The safest way is to not to use them at all.”

“Know your limits. Tolerance levels vary - Don’t feel pressured to do anything you don’t want to do.”

“If your mates a state, keep them safe. Stick together. Don’t leave anyone behind.”

Messages were also shown on the big screens during every change over of performers throughout the weekend.

A debrief meeting was held on 28 September 2023 with FACT members and the results were shared from a post-festival survey completed by Festival Republic demonstrating that the #LookOutForEachCampaign was seen by 90% of the Leeds Festival audience with many commenting on the positive and appropriate messaging being shared across the site. Examples of this feedback from the audience we received are as follows:

“I thought it was excellent! Because of the campaign, people were genuinely looking out for each other. If someone needed to get out the crowd, people were quick to help unlike previous years”.

“I think it is a very positive message. I am happy that it wasn’t every once in a while but rather, it was on many screens, posters and staff promoting it as well as the acts themselves also did so”.

“I felt it was pushed an appropriate amount without being patronising or losing meaning. The alerts on the app were friendly and helpful too”.

Posters were also displayed in 2023 highlighting key messages from the #LookOutForEachOther campaign in high footfall areas throughout the Site and this messaging was displayed on the LED screens at the campsite Assistance, Information and Response (AIR) Hubs. The posters were printed on foamex boards and were each 1.8metres in height, by 1.2metres in width (6ft x 4ft). They were displayed on each AIR Hub (x 16 in total), at each Information Point (x 2 in total) and within the arena (a further x 10).

In 2023 our messaging was more widely communicated than before, and in addition to the above, broadcasts were made on BBC Radio.

The FACT Team will reconvene on 20 February 2024 to review the messaging and discuss further improvements for 2024. In addition, we are currently liaising with the police and focus groups regarding education in schools and colleges with the intent of bringing our messaging and campaigns into these environments.

Campsite Welfare

At Leeds Festival in 2023, we had 2 fully equipped Welfare Tents serving the campsites which provided additional resources and facilities to the smaller Hubs which had been provided in 2022. Each Welfare Tent was operational 24 hours each day and staffed by a trained welfare team and supplemented by an HICD medical technician with the ability to assess, triage and provide life-saving treatment. In addition, the AIR Hubs in the campsite operated 24 hours each day of the festival.

The feedback received via the SAG, Safeguarding Sub-Group, and welfare teams on the ground is that these worked well. In total, there were 816 people seen at the Campsite Welfare points.

In 2024, we plan to keep the two fully equipped Campsite Welfare tents and look to review the medical presence to offer more than preliminary triage and assistance. This will need further discussion with our welfare and medical providers.

Medical Provision

As in previous years, in 2023, the Medical Plan was prepared by Senior Emergency Department or Intensive Care Unit Consultants and Tactical and Operational Commanders experienced in working in the NHS and at events on Greenfield sites with experience of accident and emergency conditions and treating illness associated with drugs overdoses.

In the Arena we had 3 medical facilities and in addition to this, the main medical centre (a Field Hospital) in the Village/campsite area. The main Medical Centre was well equipped with advance diagnostic equipment available; point of care blood gas testing; saliva drug testing; point of care CRP (blood infection markers); point of care D-Dimer (blood test); point of care high sensitive Troponin; urinalysis and ultrasound.

New for 2023 was an on site x-ray facility which enabled diagnosis on site so that appropriate treatment could be provided on site and referrals to hospital for x-rays and treatments could be reduced to minimise the impact of the event on the wider healthcare system. An exercise was carried out with the Senior medical staff to ensure roles and responsibilities were clear.

As before, local hospitals were contacted and emergency numbers and protocols agreed. We also had 7 dedicated ambulances on site operational 24 hours a day. The medical provision for 2023 was discussed and approved by Yorkshire Ambulance Service and NHS England.

The main Medical Centre had the ability to manage, and as a priority, stabilise a critically unwell patient prior to transport to hospital, including the ability to deliver an emergency anaesthetic on site, ventilatory support such as CPAP or BIPA. As part of the main medical centre there was an extensive medication stock to appropriately manage and treat patients as required.

The Medical staffing on site consisted of:

Days

- 1 X Emergency Department Consultant
- 1 X Emergency Department Registrar
- 1 X General Practitioner
- 2 X Advanced Care Practitioner
- 1 X Radiographer
- 2 X Emergency Department NMC Registered Nurses
- 7 X HCPC Registered Paramedics
- 14 X Ambulance Technicians
- 15 X Emergency Care Assistants
- 14 X First Responders

Night

- 1 X Emergency Department Consultant
- 2 X Emergency Department Registrar
- 1 X Advanced Care Practitioner
- 1 X Radiographer
- 2 X Emergency Department NMC Registered Nurses
- 5 X HCPC Registered Paramedics
- 7 X Ambulance Technicians
- 9 X Emergency Care Assistants
- 6 X First Responders

The medical provision was commended by members of the SAG, and feedback from an assurance visit carried out on the Sunday of the festival observed the operation working well and staff being appropriately engaged. A debrief/planning meeting will take place between my team and the

medical providers before the end of the year. It was commented by YAS that the early engagement of a Care Quality Commission (CQC) registered company was welcomed and we plan to take this forward to 2024.

Medical data was collected as follows:

With regard to the drugs-related cases this year (2023), there were 83 presentations in total, 42% (35) of these were 16/17 year olds (22 x 17 year olds, 13 x 16 year olds). In 2022, there were 72 drugs-related presentations in under 18s. The figures show a significant reduction of the presentations in under 18s in 2023 compared to the figures in 2022.

For 2024, as mentioned earlier, we will review the medical resource support in the Campsite Welfare Tents.

Provision of Voluntary Testing of Drugs On Site

At the Festival in 2023, we continued to have a Back of House testing service available, facilitated by West Yorkshire Police, which enabled us to feed harm reduction messaging to festival goers via social media platforms, the Leeds Festival App and the main stage screens. There were no known drugs of a particular high strength in circulation that needed alerting to the audience. In the on-site SAG meeting held on Sunday 27th August it was observed that there had been no concerns regarding the potency of drugs in circulation at the festival and therefore it was not necessary for any tailored public health messaging to be communicated. Front of house testing was not carried out because it is not permitted.

Recording Age of Attendees

Prior to the Inquest, I committed to putting in place a system for recording the number of 16 and 17 year olds on site, each day of the Festival in 2023. I was able at very short notice, to put this in place prior to the festival in 2023. We introduced a system for checking and recording these festival goers by requiring all young persons to bring ID with them to show proof of age at the point of exchanging their ticket for a wristband. An electronic system, using scanners and different QR codes was implemented to record this information accurately. This system worked well but can be improved and streamlined. We were able to record the exact number of both accompanied and unaccompanied 16 and 17 year olds entering the site, however we did not then scan persons upon exit.

We also collected data about the number of under 18 persons who presented for medical treatment including their conditions. All data was reported to SAG on a daily basis throughout the Festival. The data relating to drugs related cases is shown above.

CCTV

Prior to the Festival in 2023, we increased the number of CCTV monitor observers in Event Control from 3 to 5 at peak times. In addition to their normal duties, we briefed observers to emphasise

observing for suspected illegal drug issues, including but not limited to, spotting for suspicious activity, drug dealing and persons (especially younger persons) who appeared to be under the influence of drugs. The protocol was for the CCTV monitor observers to report all such activity to Event Control to enable it to action the appropriate response.

One observer was tasked with specifically monitoring drug incidents and supporting drugs operations. It was recognised by the Police that this helped to secure more drug arrests in 2023.

The CCTV plan will continue to be under constant review.

Additional Briefing for Security and Staff

In my statements I set out the proactive surveillance for the wellbeing of festival goers, but during the Inquest, I recognised that this could be improved. Therefore, in addition to the messages in the Staff Handbook and the normal briefings, I put in place for the 2023 Festival, additional briefings for staff and contractors (especially security, stewards and volunteers) that observation of the wellbeing of festival goers was a primary task together with a duty to act where festival goers (and especially young festival goers) seemed unwell. The protocol required, depending upon the condition of the festival goer, that the festival goer should be helped to either a medical or welfare provision as appropriate. Also, new for 2023, on Tuesday 22 August 2023, I sent a Newsletter to all of my staff and all workers on site, prior to opening the Festival reinforcing my message. These measures were in place for the 2023 Festival but I am aware that it requires a change in culture. Therefore, I still regard it to be a work in progress and I am committed to promote this culture at Leeds Festival and all of our Festivals in the future.

Drugs and Safety Operation

For Leeds Festival 2023 I committed, with the full cooperation and support of West Yorkshire Police, that we would provide a "hostile environment" on site for criminals attending the Festival with intent to supply and distribution illegal drugs.

The strategy was set out in paragraph 49 -51 of my second statement and in the Campsite Strategy Document dated 26 July 2023 prepared by a former senior officer with West Yorkshire Police. This former West Yorkshire Police Officer was appointed as the Crime Reduction and Police Liaison Officer at the Festival in 2023. The strategy contained 5 limbs :

- The covert response
- Overt patrol and reassurance
- Intelligence led security initiatives
- The response to reported criminal activity
- The response to the presence of Organised Crime Groups

All of the 5 limbs of the strategy were fully and successfully implemented during the Festival. Liaison with West Yorkshire Police was improved with a West Yorkshire Police Officer stationed permanently in Event Control. Additional resources were provided, double the number of drugs dogs, additional security, additional Police, additional CCTV operators, specifically to support drugs operations and greater sharing of intelligence. The enforcement process was clearer, with liaison between security and the Police in evidence gathering and handover of suspects. Press reports of the arrests have recounted successful challenges by Security to suspected drug dealers, their apprehension and handover to Police for further action.

In 2023 there were 71 arrests made in total, 83% (59) for drugs-related offences (4 for possession, 55 for possession with intent to supply, largely involving semi-organised drug groups from other areas of the country). In 2022, there were 50 arrests made in total, 58% (29) of these were drugs related.

In addition to arrests, so far there have been 4 successful prosecutions of drugs dealers with lengthy custodial sentences being imposed. When passing sentences on two dealers, the Judge publicly warned drug dealers that “others caught selling [drugs] can expect long sentences”. This warning was reported in the media.

The strategy of creating the hostile environment for drug dealers will be implemented in 2024.

Safeguarding

The Safeguarding Operation Plan was reviewed and revised in conjunction with our safety partners for the 2023 Festival. It provided a wide ranging review, covering not only safeguarding but also medical, welfare and security provisions. Our plan provided for an increase in safeguarding management which was more robust over 24/7 throughout the whole Festival.

The Plan also identified that specific messaging was required for minors, visits to schools to get basic drug harm advice was recommended, messaging about drug harm should be sent out early, emphasis should be placed on safeguarding minors in possession of drugs and better illumination of signage in the campsite, welfare areas and medical areas was required. All of these recommendations were carried out with school visits undertaken by the Police. Again, for 2024, we are liaising with the Police to get drug awareness messaging into schools and sixth form colleges well in advance of the 2024 Festival.

Governing Body with Oversight of Festivals

The Report raises, as a matter of concern, that there is no Governing Body with oversight of festivals.

The Licensing Regime introduced by the Licensing Act 2003 places the authorisation of festivals and other events with Licensable Activities within the remit of the local Licensing Committees. A Premises Licence is the main authorisation required. It was deliberate to place the responsibility with local Licensing Committees because they were considered to be best informed, with the aid of

representations from the Responsible Authorities and the advice of SAG, on local matters and issues which might need to be addressed to promote the four Licensing Objectives :

- Prevention of Crime and Disorder
- Public Safety
- Prevention of Public Nuisance
- Protection of Children from Harm

Local Authorities, issue Licensing Policy which amongst other things, advises upon issues (including special local issues) that Premises Licence Holders must address to promote the Licensing Objectives. There is also a robust enforcement regime where a Review of a Premises Licence can be called for and the Licensing Committee may impose further conditions or revoke a Licence.

Licensing Officers, other Council Officers (for example, concerning safety, environmental health, trading standards etc) and Police Licensing Officers all attend festivals to ensure the relevant laws, regulations and Premises Licence Conditions are being complied with.

At Government level, I believe that licensing falls under the remit of the DCMS. In addition to the Licensing Act 2003, there is statutory guidance pursuant to the Act, (Section 182 Guidance), which elaborates on the requirements for the promotion of the four Licensing Objectives. This guidance is updated from time to time.

It is also within my knowledge that certain issues, for example security issues, terrorism etc., are addressed in meetings with DCMS Officials, other Government Departments such as the Home Office and industry representatives. I have attended such meetings.

In addition, there are number of industry bodies which discuss issues that arise and issue advice. For example, The Purple Guide, which is regularly updated, provides industry guidance for festivals and other events. Best Practice is constantly under review and evolving.

I believe that a robust structure is already in place to provide safe festivals, concerts and events which are attended in Great Britain by several million festival goers each year. I struggle to see what further oversight a Governing Body could provide.

Collection of National Statistics

In my experience, from the festivals, concerts and events that we organise throughout Great Britain each year, data relating to criminal activity, drugs casualties and medical referrals is recorded by us and is presented during post-event debriefs with the Licensing Authorities and Responsible Authorities. This data and experience is then fed into planning for events in future years. Therefore, drug related casualties, their number and trends are all taken into account on a local basis which is in line with the local structure of the Licensing Regime. In the case of Leeds Festival, we have access to data from Reading Festival, which is the most comparable Festival to Leeds Festival, which can be shared with the Leeds Licensing Authority and Responsible Authorities when requested. We also

have experience and data from all of our other festivals and events spread across Great Britain to inform us.

In addition to this data, our close liaison and intelligent sharing arrangements with West Yorkshire Police (and other police forces) enable us to be warned of current trends in criminality and organised crime so that appropriate operations can be put in place.

In the London Metropolitan area, a meeting takes place in Spring each year between the Metropolitan Police Service and event organisers which reviews major events and discusses challenges for the forthcoming year. This intelligence is then fed into the planning for those events.

I do not object to supplying data to a National Database (subject to Data Protection Regulations) but doubt that this will assist in fighting drug related casualties at festivals, concerts or other events. I consider the fight against drugs and the peddling of drugs at festivals is best addressed at a local level.

Whilst I have reservations about Front of House drug testing, the creation of a Governing Body with oversight of festivals and the collection of National Statistics for Festivals, my mind is not closed and I would be prepared to engage further on these proposals.

Finally, as I mention above, the debrief with Leeds Licensing Committee has not yet taken place and should further matters relevant to the concerns expressed in your Report arise from this meeting, I will write to you again to comment upon these.

Yours sincerely

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