



Home Office

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INQUEST INTO THE DEATH OF DAVID JOESPH CELINO: REGULATION 28 REPORT

Dear Mr McLoughlin,

Thank you for your report under Regulation 28 of the Coroner (Investigations) Regulation 2013, dated 21 August and addressed to the Home Secretary about the death of Mr David Joseph Celino. I am responding as the Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire.

Any death related to illicit drugs is a tragedy. Drugs have a devastating effect on individuals and their wider communities. The Government is committed to tackling the supply of illegal drugs through relentless police action, reducing the demand for illegal drugs through a zero-tolerance approach and building a world-class system of treatment and recovery to turn people's lives around and prevent crime.

In July 2023, the Government published the first annual report on the Drug Strategy. This set out the progress made in the first year of the delivery of the Government's 10-Year Drug Strategy, From Harm to Hope and the Government's priorities going forward. Key achievements in the first year, to March 2023, include:

- Closing over 1,300 county lines, against a three-year ambition to close 2,000 lines, with over 2,000 arrests and 3,200 safeguarding referrals.
- Increasing the drug and alcohol treatment workforce with 1,670 additional staff, including 1,255 drug and alcohol workers, 479 of whom are focused on criminal justice.
- Increasing the number of referrals from the criminal justice system by 8%.
- Expanding the use of drug testing on arrest across police forces to target recreational drug users and completing 43,333 tests.
- Establishing 106 Combating Drugs Partnerships across every area in England, overseen by Senior Responsible Owners, to drive local multi-agency delivery.

You report notes that the organisers of the festival were not aware of the number of people attending who were under the age of 18 and therefore the number of potentially vulnerable people who could be targeted by drug dealers. All organisers of large events and some medium events, including festivals are required to present to the relevant local authority before an in-principle agreement is given. Festivals will present an Event Safety Management Plan or an Event Management Plan that is reviewed by the local authority as part of the licensing process, and is scrutinised by their Safety Advisory Group (SAGs).

Run by local authorities, SAGs are non-statutory groups of multi-agency representatives formed to give advice and guidance in order to promote best practice and high levels of safety and welfare at events, and ensure events have a minimal adverse impact on the community.

All events licence applications must comply with four licensing objectives, which are the prevention of crime and disorder; public safety; the prevention of public nuisance; and the protection of children from harm. Licensing authorities may attach conditions to authorisations. These conditions can be included on a licence at time of grant (e.g. volunteered by the applicant), imposed by the licensing authority as part of an application to vary a licence, or imposed by the licensing authority as part of a licence review.

Licence reviews play an important role. Reviews give licensing authorities (and others) powers to address problems, and can be triggered by complaints from local residents or businesses – ensuring appropriate local representation in the decision making processes – or by representations from relevant authorities, such as the police or the licensing authority itself. The approval of event licences - including any additional conditions placed on event organisers - is at the discretion of Local Authorities.

Policing arrangements around festivals are an operational matter for Chief Constables in consultation with local partners. In line with the Government's approach on tackling drugs, we expect forces to relentlessly attack every phase of the drugs supply chain. If there are concerns about the way police have responded to an incident than individuals can make a complaint to the forces' professional standards unit or to the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC).

Your report suggests that further instruction or training for festival staff and volunteers is required 'as to the need to be proactive, particularly in view of the prevalence of illicit drugs and teenagers'. The Security Industry Authority (SIA) has statutory responsibility for licensing individuals working in a private security role regulated by the Private Security Industry Act 2001. Regulated roles include 'security guarding', where operatives are contracted for the purpose of supplying private security (for example, to venues and festivals), and 'door supervisors'. The legislation does not apply to stewards (who perform duties such as directing people to toilets or first-aid facilities), or unpaid volunteers. Neither stewards nor unpaid volunteers require SIA licences, or the associated mandatory qualifications.

With respect to licensed security guards and door supervisors, the SIA sets the minimum training required for each role. This includes training on drug awareness, which covers recognising the signs and symptoms of drug use and identifying drug dealing. Beyond the minimum standards set by the regulator, it is for the employer of licensed security operatives to supply any additional training required for the particular situation in which the licence holder is to be deployed. I would encourage event coordinators to consider any enhanced skills needed for the provision of robust security services and public protection during Leeds Festival, and then to communicate those needs with partners (including security contractors and, separately, volunteers and stewards who do not fall within SIA regulation).

Your report also asks for clarification on the Government's position on drug testing at festivals also known as Drug Checking Facilities (DCFs). The Government facilitates DCFs provided that the possession and supply of controlled drugs are licensed by the Home Office Drugs and Firearms Licensing Unit or, exceptionally, relevant exemptions under the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001 may apply. It has long been a requirement for anyone who wishes to possess, supply or produce controlled drugs to obtain a Home Office controlled drugs licence, including anyone wishing to run a DCF.

DCFs must not condone drug use and should only be delivered where licensed and

operated responsibly in line with Government policy to ensure that they discourage drug use and signpost potential users to treatment and support.

The Government recognises the potential harm reduction benefits of back-of-house DCFs at festivals and similar events. Back-of-house DCFs are those which test surrendered or confiscated drugs, but do not return the drugs to the individual or give individualised information on the content of the drugs. Instead, they enable localised public alerts if toxic or extremely dangerous drugs are detected to avoid sending a message that taking any illegal drug can be safe. Organisations wishing to deliver back-of-house DCFs have always been able to apply for a licence and we would encourage them to plan ahead to ensure that there is time to apply for a licence in good time for the festival season next year.

In the context of a festival, where DCFs will be aimed predominately at so called recreational users, I expect any DCFs to provide a back-of-house service to provide harm reduction information to users and use test results to inform wider harm reduction messages or alerts to festival goers and stakeholders but not provide users with the individualised result of the drugs they submit, which would constitute a front-of-house DCF.

Given the measures which I have outlined above, I consider that appropriate measures to reduce the risk of deaths like this from happening are in place. I hope that you agree with my assessment, and I would like to thank you for bringing this matter to my attention.

Yours sincerely,

Rt Hon Chris Philp MP
Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire