

Thank you for your Regulation 28 Prevention of Future Deaths report relating to the tragic death of David Joseph Celino. This is a response to the report provided on behalf of Leeds City Council (LCC) through its Licensing Committee.

The Matters of Concern raised by the Senior Coroner in the Regulation 28 report have been carefully considered by the Committee, which has approved this response at a meeting on 21 November 2023.

All members of the Committee offer their condolences to the family and friends of David Celino.

Background

LCC is the Licensing Authority for the Leeds Festival under the Licensing Act 2003. Its powers and functions in that capacity are defined by the 2003 Act.

LCC's Licensing Committee granted a premises licence for the Leeds Festival on 28 April 2006. That licence continues to have effect until and unless it is revoked or suspended, surrendered, or lapses due to the death, incapacity, insolvency etc of the holder.

Under the terms of the licence, each year before the festival the Licensing Committee considers and approves the licence holders' Event Management Plan (EMP). Following each year's festival, the Committee holds a de-brief meeting including consideration of improvements for the following year.

The multi-agency Safety Advisory Group (SAG) also provides advice in relation to the event. The SAG is made up of representatives from the local authority, emergency services, and other relevant bodies. They meet to review event applications and advise on public safety.

The licence holders and organisers of the Leeds Festival, Festival Republic Ltd, have worked with the Council and other stakeholders, including the Police, over the years to introduce and improve on safety and welfare provision at the event.

The Coroner's Matters of Concern

(1) Lack of accurate information about the number of attendees under the age of 18.

The Licensing Committee has been mindful of the need for information on the number of under-18 attendees for some time, and has been in discussions with Festival Republic since early-2021 over ways of accurately capturing this data. Festival Republic highlighted the difficulties in capturing this data at the point of sale, given the common occurrence of ticket resale and exchange. Consequently, a system of under-18 wristbands was implemented at the 2021 festival but proved unsuccessful and gave rise to concerns about the safeguarding implications of visibly identifying under-18s.

At the Committee's debrief meeting for the 2022 festival, held in January 2023, Festival Republic Ltd committed to implement a new and more robust system for future events to capture accurate numbers

of attendees aged 16 and 17. The Committee's expectation that this would be delivered for the 2023 festival was confirmed in a letter to Festival Republic Ltd dated 24 January 2023.

The system implemented by Festival Republic for the 2023 event was that every attendee was required to show identification documents with proof of age at the point of exchanging their tickets for wristbands. Staff at the wristband exchange counters would then check the ID and keep a count of 16- and 17-year-olds in attendance, by scanning the appropriate QR code. The data thus obtained captured the numbers of 16/17 year olds, and also differentiated between those who were accompanied by an adult and those unaccompanied.

Officers from the Council's Entertainment Licensing service attended the festival to observe the system in operation, and based on their observations were satisfied that it was implemented successfully.

During the festival itself, the numbers were shared with SAG partners at the daily on-site debrief. The data for the entire festival has been provided to the Committee for consideration at the 2023 debrief and will inform the consideration of future Event Management Plans.

(2) No national governing body with oversight of music festivals in Britain and no records of drug related casualties at festivals nationally.

The Licensing Committee draws upon available specialist expertise from the multi-agency SAG in its consideration of the EMP for the Leeds Festival. The Council agrees that guidance, oversight and data from a national governing body for music festivals would be extremely valuable in this process and would welcome such a body being introduced. The Licensing Committee chair will write to the Secretary of State to support the introduction of such a body.

(3) Without reliable numbers it is impossible to establish what proportion of drug-related casualties are under 18; national oversight would enable comparisons between festivals and aid assessment of the effectiveness of anti-drug control measures.

At the national level, the Council agrees that national data for drug-related casualties at different festivals would be a useful metric to help assess the effectiveness of anti-drug measures, and would welcome such data being made available. The Chair of the Licensing Committee will endorse this proposal in his letter to the Secretary of State.

Specifically in relation to the Leeds Festival, the Licensing Committee has been provided with a report of medical interventions at the 2023 festival which includes number of persons treated, broken down by age. The figures have been provided in Festival Republic's response to the Senior Coroner's report and are not repeated here.

(4) Need for a hydra headed campaign to deter illicit drugs being brought onto the festival site.

The Council can give an overview of steps taken on this issue in its role as Licensing Authority for the festival, but the responses from Festival Republic Ltd and West Yorkshire Police contain greater detail.

In advance of the 2023 festival, Festival Republic introduced a new drug security strategy devised by a former police Detective Superintendent, which intended to create a hostile environment for criminals targeting the festival to supply illicit drugs, and to deter the use of illegal drugs by festival goers. The strategy involved enhanced security and searches on the entry gates; high visibility patrols by Security Industry Authority (SIA) accredited security staff; covert security operations within the site; intelligence-led targeted security operations; appropriate response to reports of illegal activity via the security staff and Police; and identification and targeting of organized crime groups on site.

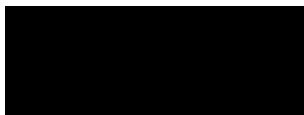
Analysis of the arrest data indicates that Festival Republic's new drug security strategy has been effective. Arrest data in respect of the 2023 festival showed an increase in the number of arrests, up from 50 to 72, in addition to an increase of drugs-related arrests as a percentage of all arrests made, up from 58% to 83%, when compared with data from the 2022 festival.

(5) Need for further training and instruction for festival staff and volunteers.

Again, the Council can give an overview of the steps taken but Festival Republic can respond in finer detail. For the 2023 event, Festival Republic enhanced the security and wellbeing provision through improved and more visible security and stewarding, particularly in campsites and egress routes; Security Industry Authority (SIA) -accreditation checks on security staff (SIA accredited security staff are trained in welfare, safeguarding and first aid); improved staff manuals; daily briefings for security, staff and volunteers; and the new provision of Assistance, Information and Response (AIR) Hubs placed at strategic points around the campsites and marked with bright LED signage. Officers of the Council's Entertainment Licensing service witnessed improved proactive security and stewarding during the 2023 festival.

(6) Need for authoritative Home Office guidance on Front of House drug testing.

The Council recognises that there are complexities around Front of House drug testing, with differing views on its effectiveness as a safety measure, and whether it conflicts with anti-drug policy and messaging. The Council would welcome clear, evidence-based Home Office guidance on this subject.



Chair of the Licensing Committee