

OTAS INSIGHT • LG-003

Safety advisory groups after the inspection: what the 37 recommendations mean for organisers

Tactical

Strategic

By OTAS Insights • Published by OTAS Live Ltd • England and Wales

Correct as of 20 October 2026

On 4 September 2026, the policing inspectorate HMICFRS found the framework for safety at non-sporting public events inconsistent, and made 37 recommendations, including a government review [1]. Nothing in the law for organisers has changed yet [1][3]. The inspectorate recommends refreshed SAG guidance by 31 December 2026, a national police risk matrix by 31 March 2027, and a government review by 31 August 2027 that would look at certification, insurance and organisers' legal responsibility [1]. The government has not yet responded [7].

Key takeaways

- **SAGs:** still non-statutory. They advise, and cannot approve or prohibit events [1][3].
- **The Purple Guide:** the inspectorate says it overstates organisers' legal responsibility [1].
- **Responsibility:** the inspectorate says it is shared, based on who controls each area [1].
- **Recommended by 31 December 2026:** refreshed UK Resilience Academy SAG guidance, with advice on AI use [1].
- **Recommended by 31 August 2027:** a ministerially led government review of event safety [1].
- **Where:** the inspection covered police forces in England and Wales [1][2].

What the inspection was

The Home Secretary commissioned the inspection in October 2025 [2]. Between 1 November 2025 and 5 May 2026, inspectors reviewed 856 documents, held 113 interviews and examined records for 28 public events. All 43 police forces in England and Wales answered a questionnaire [1].

What it found

The inspectorate found four areas for improvement [1]:

- SAGs have no basis in law, and the way they work differs vastly.
- Police guidance and training do not prepare commanders well for SAGs, and there is no national risk matrix for non-football events.
- Most public events have no safety certification regime.

- The Purple Guide has no basis in law and "overstates the level of legal responsibility event organisers actually have" [1].

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) says SAGs are non-statutory, cannot approve or prohibit events, and that organisers keep the principal legal duties for public safety [3]. The inspectorate says an organiser's duty of care depends on the control it has: primary inside a defined boundary, shared where events extend into public space [1].



The recommendations to watch

Recommended by	What it says
Immediate	Police to use the crowd and event safety template with organisers, and to decline payment for police services outside section 25 of the Police Act 1996 [1].
31 Dec 2026	Refreshed UK Resilience Academy SAG guidance, with mandated training for chairs and advice on AI use [1].
31 Mar 2027	HSE SAG guidance, a national SAG oversight function and a national police risk matrix for events [1].
31 Aug 2027	A documented police handover protocol with organisers, an events portal on every force website, and the government review [1].

The review would look at safety certification, mandatory public liability insurance, statutory SAGs, a single regulator, statutory guidance for organisers, organisers' legal responsibility, professional qualifications, and guidance under the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025 (Martyn's Law) on the area beyond the event footprint [1]. These are questions, not decisions.

Where this applies

England and Wales. The inspection covered the 43 forces there, and the Licensing Act 2003 extends to England and Wales only [1][5]. In Scotland, public entertainment licences come under the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 [6]. Northern Ireland has its own arrangements, which we have not covered. Check with the council where the event takes place.

What to do

Operational: stewards, crew and supervisors

- Nothing changes on the day. Follow the plan, and report safety concerns, including outside the site.

Tactical: event, safety and operations leads

- Set out in your plan who is responsible for each area, based on control [1].
- Have public liability insurance evidence ready for the SAG [1].
- Check any AI-assisted safety document line by line, and be ready to say how you used AI [1].

Strategic: organisers, directors and licence holders

- Take advice on your legal position rather than relying on one guidance document [1][3].

- Plan 2027 timelines around the new guidance and the review [1].

Action box

Level	Do this
Operational	Nothing changes on the day. Follow the plan and report safety concerns, including outside the site.
Tactical	Set out responsibility by area of control, have insurance evidence ready, and check any AI-assisted document line by line.
Strategic	Take advice on your legal position, and plan 2027 timelines around the new guidance and the government review.

Frequently asked questions

What did the HMICFRS inspection of safety advisory groups find?

That the framework for safety at non-sporting public events is inconsistent, SAGs have no basis in law, and most events have no safety certification regime [1].

Are safety advisory groups now statutory?

No. They remain non-statutory and cannot approve or prohibit events. The recommended review would consider whether they should become statutory [1][3].

Does the report change what event organisers must do?

Not yet. Its recommendations are not law. Organisers keep their existing duties [1][3].

What does the report say about the Purple Guide?

That it has no basis in law and overstates the level of legal responsibility organisers actually have [1].

When will new SAG guidance be published?

The inspectorate recommends refreshed UK Resilience Academy guidance by 31 December 2026 [1].

Does this apply in Scotland?

The inspection covered forces in England and Wales. Scotland has different licensing law [1][6].

What we don't know yet

The government's response, the refreshed guidance, the review's outcome, and whether changes will reach Scotland and Northern Ireland. We found neither a response nor new guidance on GOV.UK on 20 October 2026 [7]. The full report sets these out.

This article is general information, not legal advice. It summarises an inspection report and its recommendations, which are not law. It does not comment on any particular event, force or council.

Interest: OTAS Live Ltd, which publishes EPGN, sells event operations services, including event operations planning with licensing and SAG support.

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Work with OTAS

Is your event ready for the questions safety advisory groups will ask in 2027?

[Request a call with OTAS to discuss how we can help](#)

Edited by Kris Dailly, who has worked in event operations since 2008, and internationally since 2015.

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References

All web sources were opened and checked on 20 October 2026.

1. HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), 'An inspection of the police's role in safety advisory groups: planning for major public events' (4 September 2026). <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/publication-html/inspection-of-police-role-in-safety-advisory-groups-for-public-events/>
2. HMICFRS, 'Terms of reference: inspection of police forces' contributions to safety advisory groups' (12 December 2025). <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/publications/terms-of-reference-inspection-of-police-forces-contributions-to-safety-advisory-groups/>
3. Health and Safety Executive, 'Safety Advisory Group (SAG)'. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/event-safety/safety-advisory-groups.htm>
4. UK Resilience Academy (Cabinet Office), organisation page on GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-resilience-academy>
5. Licensing Act 2003, section 201 (extent). <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/17/section/201>
6. Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982, section 41 (public entertainment licences). <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1982/45/section/41>
7. GOV.UK site search for "safety advisory groups", run on 20 October 2026. <https://www.gov.uk/api/search.json?q=%22safety+advisory+groups%22+HMICFRS+government+response>

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