

Safety advisory groups after the inspection

What the 37 recommendations mean for organisers: the findings, the dates, the government review and what to do now. Full report

Tactical Strategic

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Applies to	Event organisers, safety and operations leads working with SAGs in England and Wales. Scotland and Northern Ireland: see section 7
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About this report. It expands OTAS Insight LG-003 with the inspection's findings, the recommendations that matter most to organisers and their dates, what the recommended government review would look at, where it applies, actions for each level and a pre-SAG checklist. Section 11 lists what we could not confirm. To ask for this report in another format, use the contact details on the OTAS Insights page.

1 Summary

On 4 September 2026, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) published an inspection of the police's role in safety advisory groups (SAGs) and planning for major public events [1]. It found the framework for safety at non-sporting public events inconsistent, and called on the government to carry out a wide-scale review [1]. It makes 37 recommendations: 36 for the police, national bodies and guidance owners, and one for a government-led review [1].

Nothing in the law for event organisers changed on 4 September. The recommendations are not yet in force, and most have deadlines between December 2026 and December 2027 [1]. But several will reach organisers directly: refreshed SAG guidance, a national risk matrix for events, a documented handover protocol between the police and organisers, and a recommended government review that would look at safety certification, public liability insurance and the legal responsibility of organisers [1]. The government has not yet responded [7].

This report explains what the inspection found, which recommendations matter most to event organisers and when, and what to do now at each level: Operational, Tactical and Strategic. The inspection covered police forces in England and Wales. Section 7 explains how this differs in Scotland and Northern Ireland. It is general information, not legal advice.

At a glance. HMICFRS, 4 September 2026: 37 recommendations on public safety at events [1].

- SAGs have no basis in law, and most public events have no safety certification regime [1].
- The inspectorate says the Purple Guide "overstates the level of legal responsibility event organisers actually have" [1].
- The inspectorate recommends refreshed UK Resilience Academy SAG guidance by 31 December 2026, and a national police risk matrix for events by 31 March 2027 [1].
- It recommends a government review by 31 August 2027, covering certification, insurance, statutory SAGs and the legal responsibility of organisers [1]. We found no government response [7].
- Nothing changes on the day for crews. Planning teams should expect more consistent questions from SAGs and the police through 2027.

2 What the inspection was

In October 2025, the Home Secretary commissioned HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary to inspect how efficiently and effectively police forces in England and Wales contribute to SAGs and other bodies responsible for public safety and licensing for high-profile public events [2]. The inspection took place between 1 November 2025 and 5 May 2026 [1].

Inspectors reviewed 856 documents, held 113 interviews with police officers, staff and members of other organisations, and examined risk assessments, command strategies and SAG records for 28 public events. All 43 police forces in England and Wales completed a questionnaire [1]. The inspectorate also spoke to Police Scotland and the Police Service of Northern Ireland about major public events [1].

3 What it found

3.1 Four areas for improvement

The inspectorate identified four areas [1]:

- **SAGs have no basis in law.** They are non-statutory. Most local authorities have them, but some do not, and the way they operate differs vastly.
- **Police guidance and training** do not adequately prepare commanders to work with SAGs, and there is no national risk matrix for non-football public events.
- **No safety certification regime** exists for most public events, unlike certain sports stadiums and football matches.
- **The Purple Guide**, which sets out roles and responsibilities for event organisers, has no basis in law and "overstates the level of legal responsibility event organisers actually have", which the inspectorate says downplays the role of the police and other emergency services.

3.2 What a SAG is, and is not

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) describes SAGs as forums, usually co-ordinated by a local authority, for discussing and advising on public safety at an event [3]. HSE says they are non-statutory, have no legal powers or responsibilities, and cannot approve or prohibit events. Event organisers and others involved in running an event keep the principal legal duties for public safety [3]. HSE says it is the organiser's responsibility to take any appropriate action on SAG advice [3].

3.3 Shared responsibility, based on control

The inspection sets out its view of the law in Great Britain: an event organiser's duty of care depends on the extent of control it has over the event environment [1]. Within a defined boundary, the organiser has primary responsibility for crowd safety. Where events extend into public spaces and involve several agencies, the inspectorate says responsibility becomes shared, based on control and the nature of the risk [1]. It also says the area beyond the formal event footprint, which it calls Zone Ex, has no consistent definition of who is responsible [1].

3.4 Insurance and documents

The inspectorate found that practice on checking public liability insurance varies between SAGs, and that the UK Resilience Academy guidance makes clear there is no legal obligation for an organiser to arrange insurance [1]. It believes SAGs should be able to require it [1].

It also found that most guidance asks organisers to be cautious about using artificial intelligence (AI) tools in event safety documents. It says organisers are fully responsible for the accuracy of all safety documentation they submit to a SAG or statutory authority, however it was produced, and that the guidance strongly encourages declaring the use of AI tools [1].

4 The recommendations that matter most to organisers

No.	Recommended by	What it says
1	31 Dec 2026	UK Resilience Academy to publish refreshed guidance for SAG chairs, members and attendees, including mandated training for chairs and clearer roles [1].
35	31 Dec 2026	UK Resilience Academy guidance to include advice for organisers and SAG members on the appropriate use of AI [1].
2	31 Mar 2027	HSE to publish refreshed guidance for SAG chairs, consistent with the UK Resilience Academy guidance [1].
3 and 4	31 Mar 2027	A national SAG support network, and a national oversight and monitoring function for SAGs [1].
32 and 33	31 Mar 2027	A national police risk matrix for events, with escalation thresholds, used by every force for all public events [1].
9	Immediate	Chief constables to make sure officers always use the crowd and event safety template when they engage with organisers [1].
14	31 Aug 2027	Every force to have a documented handover protocol with event organisers for command responsibility at public events [1].
27	Immediate	Forces to decline payment for police services at events unless it complies with section 25 of the Police Act 1996 [1].
30 and 31	31 Aug 2027	An events portal on every force website, with information passed to the national police co-ordination centre [1].
36	31 Dec 2027	Further UK Resilience Academy guidance, including how SAG minutes and actions are recorded [1].
37	31 Aug 2027	A ministerially led, cross-departmental government review of event safety [1].

Table 1. Selected recommendations, in date order. Source: HMICFRS report, 4 September 2026.

4.1 What the recommended government review would look at

Recommendation 37 asks the review to address, as a minimum [1]:

- the absence of a safety certification regime for public events, including whether all organisers should hold public liability insurance
- whether SAGs should become statutory bodies
- the absence of a single regulator for non-sporting public events
- the absence of independent, statutory guidance for event organisers
- powers to place conditions or restrictions on events where there is a significant risk to public safety
- the level of responsibility the police, and event organisers, have in law
- police cost recovery and funding
- the different levels of professional qualification needed to manage public safety at different events
- the clarity of the section 27 guidance under the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025 (Martyn's Law) as it relates to Zone Ex

These are questions for the review, not decisions. The outcome could change what organisers are required to do from late 2027 onwards.

5 What it does not change yet

- **The law.** No new duties for organisers came in on 4 September 2026. Health and safety law and licensing law apply as before [1][3].
- **SAG status.** SAGs are still non-statutory and still cannot approve or prohibit events [3].
- **Your guidance.** Until the refreshed guidance appears, keep using the guidance your SAG and licensing authority currently point you to.

6 What to expect from SAGs and the police through 2027

Based on the recommendations and their dates, organisers can reasonably expect:

- more consistent SAG processes, after the refreshed UK Resilience Academy guidance, recommended by 31 December 2026 [1]
- police using a standard crowd and event safety template when they engage with you [1]
- police risk assessments using a national events risk matrix, from March 2027 if adopted [1]
- a written handover protocol for command responsibility, by August 2027 [1]
- questions about public liability insurance and about AI use in safety documents [1]
- clearer rules on paying for police services, under section 25 of the Police Act 1996 [1]

7 Where this applies

England and Wales. The inspection covered the 43 police forces in England and Wales [1][2]. The Licensing Act 2003 extends to England and Wales only [5].

- **Scotland.** The inspection did not cover Police Scotland's SAG work, although inspectors spoke to Police Scotland commanders [1]. Licensing differs: the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 provides for public entertainment licences [6]. Check with the council where the event takes place.
- **Northern Ireland.** The inspection did not cover the Police Service of Northern Ireland, although inspectors spoke to its commanders [1]. Licensing and safety arrangements differ. We have not covered them here.
- **The UK-wide parts.** The UK Resilience Academy is part of the Cabinet Office [4]. We could not confirm whether its refreshed SAG guidance will apply outside England and Wales.

8 What to do

Operational

- Nothing changes on the day. Follow the event plan and your briefing.
- Report safety concerns, including outside the event boundary, to your supervisor or event control.

Tactical

- Check your safety documents say who is responsible for what, inside the site and beyond it, based on who controls each area [1].
- Be ready to show your public liability insurance to the SAG, whether or not it asks [1].
- If you use AI tools to draft safety documents, check every line yourself, and be ready to say how you used them [1].
- Agree with the police, in writing, how command responsibility would hand over if it had to [1].

Strategic

- Do not rely on any single guidance document for your legal position. Take advice on your duties, based on control [1][3].
- Plan for the refreshed SAG guidance in 2027 event timelines, and for the recommended government review by August 2027 [1].
- Make sure any payment for police services follows section 25 of the Police Act 1996 [1].
- If the government accepts the review, consider responding when it asks for views.

Action box

Level	Do this
Operational	Nothing changes on the day. Follow the plan and your briefing, and report safety concerns, including outside the site.
Tactical	Set out responsibility by area of control, have insurance evidence ready, check any AI-assisted document line by line, and agree a written handover protocol with the police.
Strategic	Take advice on your legal position, plan 2027 timelines around the new guidance and the review, and make sure police payments follow section 25.

9 Tools

9.1 Pre-SAG checklist

- ☐ Event management plan sets out who is responsible for each area, based on control
- ☐ The area beyond the event boundary is described, with who manages what
- ☐ Public liability insurance evidence ready to share
- ☐ Any AI-assisted document checked line by line, with a short note of how AI was used
- ☐ Police contact agreed, and a written handover protocol discussed
- ☐ Any payment for police services agreed in line with section 25 of the Police Act 1996
- ☐ Date set to recheck for the refreshed UK Resilience Academy guidance

10 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, there is no national police risk matrix for non-football events, 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 [3]. The inspectorate asks the government review to consider whether they should become statutory [1].

Does the report change what event organisers must do?

Not yet. It makes recommendations, mostly due between December 2026 and December 2027. Organisers keep their existing legal 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 event organisers actually have, which downplays the role of the police and other emergency services [1].

When will new SAG guidance be published?

The inspectorate recommends that the UK Resilience Academy publishes refreshed guidance by 31 December 2026, with further guidance by 31 December 2027 [1].

Does this apply in Scotland?

The inspection covered police forces in England and Wales. Scotland has different licensing law, so check with the council where the event takes place [1][6].

11 What we don't know yet

- **The government's response.** We found no published government response on GOV.UK when we checked on 20 October 2026 [7].
- **The refreshed guidance.** We found no refreshed UK Resilience Academy SAG guidance on GOV.UK on 20 October 2026 [7].
- **Whether the review goes ahead, and its outcome.** The inspectorate recommends it by 31 August 2027. We found no government response [1][7].
- **The position outside England and Wales.** We could not confirm whether the guidance changes will apply in Scotland or Northern Ireland.

12 Sources

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.justiceinspectors.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>

13 About this report

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

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