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# **“They stand there looking really bored and p\*\*\*ed off”: analysing efficient police resourcing at football matches in England and Wales**

**23<sup>rd</sup> European Society of Criminology Conference – Florence, September 2023**

**Dr Richard Hester (Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences, University of Gloucestershire)**  
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## Research background

- Worked in Thames Valley Police as a Dedicated Football Officer (DFO), wanted to explore the cost of policing football and alternative policing approaches
- This paper is from PhD research which examines how the police implement Special Police Services (SPS) for the policing of football in England and Wales
- Focused on how much it costs to police football, but also public and private approaches to football policing

# Research context



- Calls from senior police officers for the football industry to pay more to cover policing costs (Sky Sports News, 2019).
- Reported costs of policing football in England and Wales at £48m (South Yorkshire Police, 2019), however this figure is disputed (Hester & Hobson, 2022).
- Unnecessary and excessive police resourcing at football which is not commensurate to threat and risk (Stott et al., 2019; Pearson & Stott, 2022).
- Improved dialogue between police and football supporters could lead to a reduction in football related violence (Stott et al., 2012; 2018; 2019).

# Methods



- 21 interviews with DFOs, football club safety officers and other key football policing stakeholders (NPCC; SGSA; FSA)
- 9 DFOs and 8 safety officers covered football from Premier League to National League
- Interviews from November 2020 to December 2021, via MS Teams
- Thematically analysed: cost; policing; stewarding.

# Findings – ineffective resources



- There were examples of good practice. However, numerous examples of poor policing practice were identified from football clubs, stakeholders and the police:
- “The police officers go around in groups of three or four, and just like scowling at the crowd, not say ‘hi, how are you’, ‘enjoy the game’. It doesn't take much to do that.” (Safety Officer 1)
- “Are the cops on football duty briefed to talk to people? They don't, they just stand there in their little yellow jackets clustered or they stand there looking really bored and pissed off”. (Amanda Jacks – FSA)
- You'll be there wading in dragging people out, and then you'll be looking and there'll be some officer whose only there for the overtime with his thumb up his bum and brain in neutral.” (Safety Officer 4)

# Findings – police risk aversion



- Risk aversion in police resourcing was a major issue identified:
- “We seem to be afraid of disorder happening...so, we have a lot of cops to prevent things that aren't likely to happen. We're very risk averse...we had a hell of a lot of cops, and we prevented one small fight type thing.” (DFO6)
- “We've had more head in hands going: ‘we are stood here and there's far too many cops and we had an opportunity not to have as many and we haven't done the proper process here’.” (DFO8)
- “I think the problem is the police are generally too risk averse. And they're not really looking at the threat that actually exists...There are far, far too many officers on.” (SGSA Rep)

# Findings – police leadership



- Football clubs and stakeholders considered senior police leadership in football to be a barrier to reform:
- “I think that the current head of policing for football, Mark Roberts, is unfit for the role. He is transactional. He is disliked. He is mistrusted by all football authorities that he, yeah, okay. He's not the man for the job.” (Safety Officer 4)
- “I'm far more in favour of evidence led policing and security. And I think it's clear by Chief Constable Roberts' response to safe standing and drinking in view of the pitch which have been well documented in recent days. I don't think it's an unfair assessment to say that perhaps he's not a great fan of evidence led policing and crowd management and crowd safety. At least from his public pronouncements.” (Amanda Jacks - FSA)
- “Mark Roberts is, for police lead, he's very anti football fan...his idea of what an average football fan is like, a knuckle dragging, coke sniffing, 15 pint drinking person that can't be trusted.” (Safety Officer 8)

# Findings – future directions



- Being less formulaic, and using fewer police officers that are more specialised was suggested as a necessary reform:
- “If you've got an important search for a murder, you send search trained officers. If you've got a traffic incident, you send traffic officers, if you've got a football incident, why don't you send your football officers?...Why would you not choose the trained officers? Use them for every single game...they're the best officers to have on the ground...use less police officers who are better trained.” (DFO5)
- “Let's have a cadre of cops who always do football...and because we can deal with stuff and less cops means they're more effective, and they'll deal with more things, which ultimately would mean less cops overall.” (DFO8)
- A repeated theme as to why this was not happening was the insistence on public order deployments:
- “‘You must have a PSU, we can't work with anything less than a PSU.’ Well, we know they can work with anything less than a PSU because there's times when you can just have two spotters. But they were insisting in a public order situation.” (Safety Officer 7)

# Implications



- The findings are in line with existing research, which advocates for reformed policing that uses more proportionate and liaison-based resourcing (see Stott et al, 2018; 2019; Hester, 2020; Pearson & Stott, 2022).
- Also supports broader research that policing is risk averse across a range of policing activities (see Heaton, 2011)
- **Football policing needs to utilise less, but more specialised resources. Reform is long overdue.**



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