



Overview of Meeting on Fairhurst Inquiry and Policing Operation

02 December 2025.

Attendees

Celtic FC: Michael Nicholson (CEO), Mark Hargreaves (Head of Security), George Campbell (Head of Legal & Governance)

Police Scotland: Chief Superintendent Emma Croft, Superintendent Derrick Johnston, Stevie (Commander on Matchday, surname not gathered).

Supporters: Paul Quigley (Celtic Fans Collective)

Disclaimer

Given that the Celtic Fans Collective were notified the night before the meeting that only one fan representative would be allowed, it meant that our representative had to engage in discussion whilst taking notes as accurately as possible. The following is a fully accurate reflection of the discussions that took place, however at some points, the order of discussion may be slightly out of sync, as the meeting verged away from the intended format at points, making it difficult to provide an overview that completely reflects the chronological order of the full meeting.

Opening

The meeting was convened to discuss the Fairhurst Independent Review into the policing of supporters on London Road on 16 March 2025 and to address ongoing concerns about the use of Section 60 powers, supporter treatment, and club–police engagement.

Michael Nicholson opened by acknowledging complaints raised by supporters and the volume of feedback received, which led the club to commission the Fairhurst Inquiry. He stressed:

- Celtic 'had some concerns' and wanted to understand what happened.

- They wished to address key questions arising from the Fairhurst report.
- The club was keen to explore how processes could be improved, stating that “supporters need to feel that they are being treated fairly.”

Mark Hargreaves summarised the report and outlined 10 key questions, focusing discussion around four key themes:

1. The use of containment (kettling)
2. Differentiation – particularly the treatment of women, children and vulnerable supporters.
3. Welfare provision during the operation.
4. Wider community impact, including disruption to supporters travelling to the match.

MN asked if the fan representative had anything to add at this stage. PQ noted his disappointment that Celtic Football Club had refused to allow the Celtic Fans Collective to have two representatives present. He added that the fact that the club had received a request for two representatives on the 17th of November, but rejected it the night before the meeting, was reflective of the wider bad faith demonstrated by the club towards its own supporters of late, however, the Collective still wished to have someone attend to represent supporter views.

Police Scotland’s Explanation of Section 60 and Containment

MN and MH began working through questions, firstly by asking why Section 60 powers were sought ahead of the fixture, and then why they were enacted on the day.

Police Scotland stated that their priority was the “safe movement of supporters” and that they were working on the basis of “intelligence” and contingency planning.

Key points from Police Scotland representatives:

- When asked why these additional powers were sought, the police representatives said that they were acting on intelligence and had analysed ‘patterns of behaviour’. When pushed, they explicitly cited disorder in Glasgow city centre prior to the match between Celtic and Rangers on the 15th of December 2024 at Hampden as the main driver for applying for Section 60 powers.
- Security preparations for Glasgow derbies usually begin around six weeks out. Police representatives explained that evidence must be submitted for Section 60 powers to be granted, and the proposal was only granted a few days before the game.
- On the 2nd of March 2025, Section 60 powers had been granted ahead of the Edinburgh derby between Hibs and Hearts, two weeks prior to this incident. When pressed, police representatives could not recall when Section 60 had last been used

in relation to football beyond these Hibs–Hearts and Celtic–Rangers fixtures.

- EC said that former Celtic security head Ronnie Hawthorne would have been informally alerted to a potential application for Section 60 ahead of the fixture. When asked by PQ, she did suggest that if Celtic had opposed the application, this would have been taken into account. It was made clear that there was no formal consultation however and this was likely mentioned to RH in passing.
- Police argued that they did not want to use the Section 60 powers but felt compelled to, based on their assessment of risk to public safety on the day.

Challenge from Celtic Fans Collective

Paul Quigley challenged the police rationale on several fronts:

- Reliance on “intelligence”: PQ argued that citing unspecified intelligence was not an adequate explanation to supporters.
- When police suggested their analysis was based on patterns of behaviour, it became clear that the decision was largely influenced by the disorder prior to the Celtic-Rangers match at Hampden in December. PQ argued that matches at Celtic Park occur in an entirely different context and asked when there had last been comparable disorder at Celtic Park. Nobody present at the meeting could recall an example in the modern era, which PQ suggested then demonstrated why the Hampden incident was not sufficient evidence to suggest additional police powers were necessary.
- PQ raised that Section 60 had also been used at Hibs v Hearts and asked what the evidence was for applying for this. Police responded that this was due to intelligence they had of an organised fight.

A member of the Celtic Fans Collective has since discussed this with the Hibs Ultras, who categorically deny that there was any organised fight planned between supporters.

- PQ further pointed out that Section 60 powers had been in place for two games but were invoked in some capacity against three sets of fans out of four, which contradicts the idea that these powers were a last resort.

Video Evidence and Basis for Targeting Green Brigade

Police Scotland argued they were forced to use their emergency stop and search powers against the Green Brigade based on helicopter footage which they believed showed:

- Fans in possession of offensive weapons (knives).
- Fans in possession of pyrotechnics and potentially attempting to conceal them.

The footage took a long time to load during the meeting. When viewed:

- The only visible potential offensive weapon was a knife being used to cut holes in a flag. PQ noted this appeared to be normal use and, in all likelihood, the knife was returned to a car or the nearby pub and that there was no evidence to suggest it was taken to the match. Police argued that they had to intervene for public safety.
- Fans were also seen placing items under their shirts within the helicopter footage. PQ suggested these looked like they could be banners, while police suggested that they could have been pyrotechnics. There was other footage of supporters potentially in possession of pyrotechnics.
- PQ noted that before almost every match between Celtic and Rangers at Celtic Park in recent years, a crowd has left the same vicinity travelling towards the stadium, often letting off pyrotechnics. He argued that the police in previous occasions appeared to have taken a pragmatic approach to crowd management, focusing on ensuring the crowd made their way into the stadium. He did not believe this set of circumstances was different to these previous matches.
- Emma Croft argued that pyrotechnics are never safe, and they had a duty to intervene. She also suggested that she and the fan representative had very different views on what constituted a threat to public order, which the fan representative agreed.
- Police said that from the footage, they sought to stop and search between 20-30 people from the helicopter video, but wider use of the Section 60 powers justified targeting the group as “art and part” – i.e., treating the whole group as collectively responsible because they were acting as a unit.
- Police noted that fans refused to comply and the crowd refused to engage with officers on the ground.
- Police stated those not with the Green Brigade were told they were allowed to leave the containment. PQ noted that fans were typically wary about leaving any group of supporters isolated around the police given the lack of trust that exists.
- Around 150–200 supporters were eventually searched.
- PQ asked how many offensive weapons were found as part of these searches, Police Scotland responded that none were found.
- Police showed a further clip of fans burning material after the kettle formed, which they argued demonstrated how difficult things were for officers managing the situation. EC asked PQ to condemn supporter behaviour. PQ declined, stating that this was not the purpose of the meeting, but rather to examine policing decisions and processes.

Club–Police Relationship and Pre-Planning

Michael Nicholson attempted to move the discussion from why Section 60 was used toward wider themes and the questions raised by Fairhurst.

- MN asked directly whether Celtic had colluded with Police Scotland in pre-planning the operation.
- Police Scotland stated Celtic did not collude and were not informed that fans would be detained in this way.
- Police accepted that communication with the club should have been better, especially so that Celtic could inform supporters of likely disruption.

Communication Failures and Impact on Supporters

It was acknowledged that traffic disruption and the closure of London Road had primarily been communicated via the Celtic SLO's Twitter account. All parties accepted this was insufficient, and there was agreement that official club channels must be used for any future alert with significant impact on supporters' travel.

Treatment of Supporters Within Kettle

- Police said they wanted to release containment as soon as possible, and that this depended on completing Section 60 searches, however fans were largely non-compliant.
- PQ cited data gathered by fans prior to the meeting: 184 supporters were searched, but only 34 were issued receipts, despite receipts being a legal requirement of stop and search under Section 60.
- 39 people had everyday items confiscated – including hats, sunglasses, scarves and keffiyehs. Most had no receipt, no reference number, and no way of getting items back. Eight months on, no person has had their items returned.
- Police acknowledged receipts should have been provided but suggested this was a logistical issue, saying receipts were issued retrospectively based on names and addresses taken at the time.
- PQ asked how receipts could be issued retrospectively, to which an officer replied that they were sent out to people's home addresses. PQ asked how police obtained this information, and police responded that they were provided during the searches.
- PQ pointed out that providing a name and address is not a legal requirement under Section 60 and questioned why it appeared that officers demanded this information.
- Police denied doing so, suggesting this information was provided voluntarily,

although PQ stressed that multiple testimonies state otherwise.

- PQ argued that these inconsistencies and failures explain why supporters were reluctant to comply with police orders to begin with. He also noted that this incident has further eroded trust between fans and Police Scotland.

Conduct of Officers and Allegations of Antagonism

On the question of police behaviour:

- Police representatives argued that officers faced significant challenges on the day. The present officer stated he had “never been more proud” of his colleagues, regarding how they conducted themselves on the day in question.
- PQ contrasted this with the 73 qualitative accounts in the Fairhurst Inquiry describing officers as aggressive, provocative, escalating tensions, and intimidating supporters.
- PQ also shared his own experience of leaving the match at half-time to observe the kettle, where he says an officer poured a beer over his foot and then tried to grab him when he reacted.
- Police Scotland maintained that while some supporters disliked the policing approach, that did not mean it was overly aggressive, and they did not accept this characterisation of events.

Differential Treatment of Home and Away Fans

- Police insisted that away supporters were not treated differently, arguing they complied with searches and so were not contained.
- If the Green Brigade containment was apparently justified by the helicopter footage, it was asked why Rangers supporters were kettled, given no similar footage was cited for them.
- Police said Rangers fans were contained because of face coverings. PQ argued that wearing face coverings alone does not justify being kettled, and that as a point of principle, football supporters should not be subjected to this treatment.

Closing

- PQ noted that the Celtic Fans Collective would like to see the SLO being involved more in pre-match security discussions to represent the views of supporters.
- PQ indicated that Police Scotland should apologise for their treatment of supporters. No such apology was offered.

- PQ requested that confiscated items be returned to fans, accompanied by a letter of apology. Police Scotland representatives agreed to this.
- PQ asked MN and Celtic representatives whether they felt Police Scotland's actions were lawful and proportionate. MN replied that this was an ongoing conversation and indicated he was not willing to answer that at this stage.
- PQ noted that the Celtic Fans Collective expect the club to take a position on the treatment of its own supporters.
- PQ highlighted the contrast between the club's swift willingness to act against its own supporters in other matters, versus its reluctance to criticise Police Scotland even in the face of substantial evidence. MN did not commit to a change of stance at the meeting.
- PQ concluded by stating given Police Scotland's admission that the club can have input when Section 60 powers are sought, Celtic should adopt a default position of opposing Section 60 applications related to Celtic matches unless provided with specific, overwhelming evidence that such powers are necessary.