



Scottish Green Party
17b Graham Street
Edinburgh
EH6 5QN

patrick.harvie@scottishgreens.org.uk

Chief Superintendent Hazel Hendren
Divisional Commander, Greater Glasgow
Police Scotland

25 June 2020

Dear Chief Superintendent,

We are writing to raise a range of concerns regarding the policing of recent protests in Glasgow City Centre, and in particular the anti-racism protest on Saturday 20th June.

We recognise the particular challenges created by the current context of a public health crisis and emergency legislation. As a party we have deliberately not chosen to actively encourage people to attend mass gatherings at this time, even when the subject matter is clearly of such great importance. If anything however, this context reinforces the need for careful and sensitive policing. We draw to your attention the very strong perception that this has not been the case.

There appear to have been very different approaches taken to protests at different times in recent weeks. There is a strong impression that a lower-key approach has been taken to the protests by far right and loyalist groups than was taken in relation to Saturday's anti-racism demonstration. While Police Scotland must of course make operational decisions based on the information available, the perception that right wing groups have not been curtailed in the same way as anti-racist and anti-fascist protestors is most troubling. Glasgow has a long track record of peaceful anti-racist protest expressing values that our whole society, including Police Scotland, should share. This could hardly be less true of the far right.

On Wednesday 17th June a planned protest by a group of asylum seekers against their living conditions, which had already been re-scheduled from Sat 13th due to an assembly of people whose stated aim was to oppose Black Lives Matter protests, was disrupted by members of the far-right National Defence League. It is our understanding that Police Scotland did not curtail the space taken by the far-right group or attempt to disband their protest. When the End Hotel Detention demonstration arrived at the square however, they were contained by Police Scotland into a smaller space, too small for physical distancing, which left the rest of the square for the right wing demonstrators. The asylum-seeking demonstrators chose to



leave the square due to continued safety concerns and were escorted away; it is not clear whether the far-right protestors were similarly asked to leave or contained as they left the square. We therefore request clarity on the rationale for the differing approaches taken.

The reports of harassment and intimidation by those attending the far right and loyalist events, some of which was very clearly of a racist and misogynistic nature, has been well documented through personal testimonies and online videos. We ask for an update on the action being taken to identify the individuals responsible and to take action.

Turning to the 20th June, In advance of Saturday's demonstration, Police Scotland announced that an order under Section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act had been imposed, applying to the whole of the Greater Glasgow area:

<https://twitter.com/policescotland/status/1274280786762641410>

We are not aware that this action was taken in relation to the far right and loyalist events, and we ask for confirmation and explanation of this. We also ask why it was felt necessary to impose such a sweeping order across the whole region, when the protest itself was limited to one small area of the city centre. We also ask for information on the use of this power on the day; the number and locations of searches, the reasons for the searches, and the subsequent action taken in each case.

It has also been reported that media restrictions were in place, preventing reporting of the protest by news sources. We ask whether this is accurate, and if so what the nature of the restrictions was, the reasons for them, and whether they were applied to all recent demonstrations or only to the anti-racism protest on the 20th.

On 20th June, we note that the large majority of attendees were making reasonable efforts to comply with social distancing for reasons of public safety, but that this was made impossible by the decision by Police Scotland to use the practice known as kettling. This practice is generally perceived as provocative and hostile at the best of times, but given that it forced people into close proximity during a pandemic, we are astonished that it was used at this time. We ask for a rationale for the use of this technique, and for information about what safety assessment Police Scotland has undertaken of its use in relation to COVID-19.

We have heard from a number of people who were caught inside the 'kettle', including one who was concerned for the welfare of a child who was present, whose age was estimated at 9 or 10. After raising these welfare concerns with officers, she states that she was initially threatened with arrest "if we didn't keep our voices down". She was then assured by another officer that the child would be removed from the 'kettle', only to see that he was still there some 20-30 minutes later. Finally she tried raising her concerns with a third officer who told her that the child should "get used to it for the football".



This is only one of a number of examples of the behaviour our constituents have complained of. From all those who have described their experience, it's not clear that there was effort by officers present to liaise with organisers and work toward a mutually agreeable timescale on which the demonstration could disperse naturally.

We ask for an honest reappraisal of the approaches taken over recent days, and a reflection on the changes which are necessary in future.

We hope that you will agree that Police Scotland has a responsibility to build trust with the public, even more so at this difficult time when extraordinary measures have been taken. There is ample evidence from elsewhere in the UK and other countries that a heavy-handed or uneven approach to policing peaceful protest, especially where the motivation for that protest is something as necessary as anti-racism, is counterproductive and could exacerbate the risk of conflict.

Sincerely,

Patrick Harvie MSP
Cllr Kim Long