

**REMEL CASE STUDIES**

**BLACK  
LIVES IN  
MUSIC**

# **RACE EQUALITY IN MUSIC EVENT CASE STUDIES**



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                             |           |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Interviews</b>                           | <b>3</b>  |
| An Interview with Philip Kolvin KC          | 4         |
| <b>Case Studies</b>                         | <b>7</b>  |
| Jon Collins                                 | 8         |
| Makeda Bennet                               | 11        |
| Michael Kill                                | 14        |
| <b>Appendices</b>                           | <b>17</b> |
| Appendix C Case Study Notting Hill Carnival | 18        |
| Appendix D Case Study The Colour Factory    | 25        |

# INTERVIEWS

# INTERVIEW WITH PHILIP KOLVIN KC



## Introduction

For the past 25 years, I have worked almost exclusively within the field of licensing. My professional interest began in planning, where policy, place making, and community infrastructure converge. The 2003 Licensing Act provided a unique opportunity to carry that same policy-driven approach into a new area of regulation. Since that time, my work has involved both the application of legal frameworks and a persistent interrogation of their cultural consequences.

While I practise law, I have never viewed my work as confined to legal technicality. Licensing decisions affect the ways in which people experience joy, form communities and express identity. It is therefore incumbent on licensing practitioners and authorities to situate their decisions within the broader social, cultural, and political context in which nightlife and music events operate.

## Licensing as Cultural Infrastructure

Licensing policy, historically, has developed through a lens of risk aversion. From the outset, I was struck by the extent to which policies were drafted to restrict activity, particularly via cumulative impact zones and other forms of presumption against grant, rather than to promote socially or culturally beneficial uses. This observation became the core of my early writing, including 'Licensed Premises: Law, Practice and Policy', and informed my contribution to the drafting of Westminster's first licensing policy under the 2003 Act. It was also a cornerstone of my work as Chair of the Night Time Commission for London, where I authored the Mayor's 'Vision for the Night Time Economy' entitled From Good Night to Great Night.

In my view, the licensing system has too often failed to balance control with promotion. A forward-looking licensing regime must not only mitigate risk but facilitate opportunity – economic, cultural and social. The prevention of harm remains paramount, but so too is the promotion of a culturally rich and inclusive night time economy.

## On Racial Equality and the Licensing Framework

Although I do not claim comprehensive expertise on the experiences of Black and Asian stakeholders in the licensing system, I have encountered numerous cases that raise serious questions about equity in application.

One illustrative example is the now discredited Form 696, which required disclosure of musical genres and performer demographics. In practice, this became a proxy for excluding genres strongly associated with Black British youth, such as grime and drill. In my view, the measure was disproportionate, either in its conception or application, or both.

The Licensing Act 2003 confers no power to pre-emptively suppress culture. It exists to regulate risk in a proportionate and objective manner. To decline a licence or stymie an event on the basis of genre is to substitute risk with prejudice.

When the licensing system targets demographic groups through genre coding, it ceases to act in the public interest. Instead, it risks precisely the sort of indirect discrimination that the Public Sector Equality Duty under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 is designed to prevent.

## Harm Reduction and the Realities of the Night Time Economy

My representation of Fabric nightclub in 2016 provides a useful case study in harm reduction and the limits of enforcement-led licensing.

Following a series of drug related deaths, the venue faced licence revocation. I argued that instead of relying on coercive measures, such as drug dogs, which have limited efficacy and counterproductive outcomes, a proportionate harm reduction strategy should be adopted. We proposed the implementation of a suite of controls: enhanced medical services, detailed risk assessments, welfare services

and ISO-compliant management systems. The licensing authority accepted that the approach represented best practice in managing risk while preserving cultural value.

This principle is clear: the regulatory response must be proportionate to the risk. Moreover, it must be evidence-based. The presence of drugs in society is not a novel revelation. What matters is whether the venue is taking all reasonable steps to protect patrons.

If a venue closes, the culture and the risk does not disappear. It simply relocates to unsupervised and potentially unsafe environments. Licensing authorities must therefore approach harm with realism, not moralism.

## Policing, Data, and the Burden of Proof

In my view, one of the principal challenges within the licensing framework is the manner in which police data is applied. Statistical correlation is too often presented as causation. A spike in crime “near” a venue becomes, in argument, crime “caused” by the venue. This conflation of cause and association is harmful.

Licensing law requires a clear and proportionate nexus between the premises and the licensing objectives. It does not authorise licensing authorities to act on mere suspicion or societal unease. The use of licensing as a proxy to manage broader urban issues risks both procedurally and substantively impropriety.

Similarly, there must be caution in the interpretation of genre or audience risk. To suggest, for example, that Afrobeat or drill attracts inherently problematic audiences is to engage in cultural profiling. If risks exist, they should be addressed through precise, tailored measures, not blanket refusals.

# On Black Music, Bias, and the Brixton Academy

When I represented the Brixton Academy, a venue long recognised as a cultural landmark in Black British music, we were required to navigate the tragic aftermath of the crowd crush that occurred during a concert by the Nigerian artist Asake. While the case understandably focused on safety and crowd management, it also raised critical questions about how risk is categorised within the licensing framework.

At the time, the operator used a scale that ranked musical genres by perceived risk, placing “Afrobeats” at the most hazardous end of the spectrum, while positioning pop music at the least. This approach, however ostensibly neutral, functioned in practice as a proxy for demographic profiling, with genre labels standing in for assumptions about audience behaviour.

In our submission, we proposed a move away from genre based risk classification towards a more rigorous and artist specific assessment, grounded in factual history rather than stereotype. The licensing sub-committee accepted this new approach, but rightly added an important and binding condition: that future assessments must take into account the Public Sector Equality Duty, as set out under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, thereby ensuring that music genres associated with Black audiences are not suppressed through indirect discrimination.

For me, this was a pivotal moment in licensing practice, a clear recognition that cultural expression must not be curtailed by administrative convenience or unconscious bias, and that public authorities have a statutory duty to approach such matters with both rigour and fairness.

The licensing system should not be a vehicle for cultural censorship, nor should it be disproportionately burdensome to small or community-based operators. Its function is preventive, not punitive. Its orientation should be inclusive, not exclusionary.

Where risk arises, we must meet it with evidence-based mitigation. Where culture flourishes, we must safeguard it, not suppress it under the guise of enforcement.

Licensing, at its best, is a discourse, a forum in which public authorities, communities, and creative actors can collaborate to find proportionate solutions. But that requires cultural understanding, statutory literacy, and a commitment to the principles of fairness, equality, and the public good.

# CASE STUDIES

# JON COLLINS CASE STUDY



## Introduction

For a quarter of a century, the fundamental challenges facing Black and Asian music events in London have remained stubbornly unchanged. This is the stark assessment of Jon Collins, Chief Executive of Live, the UK's live music industry body. Drawing on over two decades of policy experience, from leading the British Entertainment and Discotheque Association (BEDA) in the early 2000s to his current role, Collins provides a high-level perspective on a problem deeply embedded in the UK's regulatory culture. He argues that despite superficial changes like the abolition of Form 696, the live music sector has "not advanced". A licensing system that structurally "overemphasises risk management" coupled with regulatory bodies that lack the cultural understanding to assess that risk fairly, continues to create systemic barriers that disproportionately stifle Black, Asian, and racially diverse artists, promoters, and events.

## The Unchanged Landscape: A Two-decade stalemate:

The issues plaguing London's live music scene are not a recent phenomenon. Collins draws a direct and troubling parallel between the challenges he witnessed in the early 2000s and those that persist today. He recalls conversations with London nightclub operators who felt "informal and formal pressure" from police when trying to host lucrative drum and bass nights. These events were often met with vague warnings of "intelligence that perhaps there are going to be issues", followed by the implicit threat: "if there is an incident, we will be pursuing your license", according to Collins. This threat of losing one's entire livelihood acted as a "huge informal sanction", effectively pushing venues towards genres deemed "safer" by the authorities.

This dynamic, Collins asserts, has not fundamentally changed. The core issue is a biased perception of risk, where the "white boy with the guitar is not seen as carrying the same level of risk" as an event featuring Grime, Drum and Bass, or Afrobeat, states Collins. When he was approached by the Musicians' Union and Black Lives in Music to support their recent work on the issue, his reaction was one of dismay: "Wow. We just haven't advanced in 25 years. We're still talking about the same dynamic, the same problems". While sensible, the abolition of Form 696 failed to address the underlying cultural challenges, merely returning the sector to the pre-existing state of informal, subjective, and biased regulation.

## The mechanics of a flawed system

According to Collins, the problem is rooted in the fabric of the UK's licensing framework, which prioritises risk prevention over its "enabling intent" to foster cultural and economic vibrancy. When the individuals tasked with assessing risk—police and council officers—lack the training, experience, or cultural understanding of the events they are judging, they inevitably default to a more cautious, prohibitive stance. This systemic flaw is where racial bias finds fertile ground.

This bias manifests in several ways:

### • Informal Pressure and Intimidation:

The most pervasive tool is the informal "leaning on a promoter or a venue", states Collins. Rather than a formal objection, police will suggest they "have information" which they "can't share", leaving the operator in a "grey halfway nowhere zone". Trapped between proceeding with an event they believe is safe and the catastrophic risk of losing their license, many choose the path of least resistance and cancel.

### • Burdensome and Unequal Conditions:

When licenses are granted, they often come with conditions that render the event financially unviable. Collins explains that one promoter reported being expected to cover the cost of "26 officers at £56 an hour" for a single event. These disproportionate security demands are rarely placed on events perceived as "white".

### • A Lowered Threshold for Formal Action:

There is an apparent disparity in how incidents are treated. As one operator noted, a fight at a "punk or indie night might well be dealt with by just a quick call from the police", whereas "the same incident at a Rap night would be escalated" to a formal license review, states Collins.

## Learned behaviours and lost opportunities

This biased system has forced promoters to develop strategies to survive. They have learned to "navigate the licensing process" by altering how they present their events. On applications for Temporary Event Notices (TENs), a promoter might describe an event as celebrating "community... food, drink" with music as an afterthought, or list the genre as "R&B, Soul or Jazz rather than Drum and Bass or Afrobeat, as the former are perceived as more "acceptable" according to Collins. There is also a widely held view that "Black and Brown music events at white led venues are more likely to proceed without intervention", highlighting the complex interplay of race and establishment power.

The consequence is a significant "lost economic opportunity" for London, explains Collins, with every cancelled event and venue that shies away from a genre, representing lost revenue for artists, promoters, technical staff, and the wider local economy. More importantly, it is a "lost opportunity for a Black artist to take another step in their career, for a Black promoter to maybe move up the ladder", states Collins. This constant headwind systematically stifles the growth of diverse talent and businesses within the capital's creative ecosystem.

## A pathway to systemic reform

Collins is clear that addressing this issue requires more than tackling individual cases; it necessitates a fundamental rebalancing of the licensing system. He advocates for a series of structural reforms, some of which are already being discussed at the government level. The first step is to increase transparency and establish clear evidential benchmarks. All regulatory communication should be formal and recorded, eliminating the informal pressure tactics. If police wish to intervene, they must provide credible evidence that the operator can scrutinise.

Secondly, there is a critical need for training and education. Collins suggests focusing on the approximately 90 specialist licensing police officers across London, making them a “positive force for good” by equipping them with a genuine understanding of the music industry’s cultural and economic value.

Thirdly, Collins proposes strengthening internal advocacy within local authorities. Rather than an external industry representative on licensing panels, who may be viewed with suspicion, he suggests that a council’s own economic development and cultural strategy teams should be formally integrated into the licensing process. This would introduce an enabling voice from within the regulatory structure.

Finally, while Collins is sceptical about the feasibility of financial compensation for promoters and venues that had their events cancelled, he strongly supports using data to expose bias. He suggests that authorities should be required to record and analyse TEN applications to determine if there is a statistical difference in success rates for promoters from different ethnic backgrounds. Such data would move the conversation from the anecdotal to the undeniable, providing the leverage needed to drive meaningful and lasting change. The goal is a fair, evidence-led system where all cultural events can be considered on their merit, not on the racial biases of the regulators.

# MAKEDA BENNETT CASE STUDY



## Introduction

This case study examines the experiences of Makeda Bennett-Amparbeng, a London-based music promoter and founder of SDS Entertainment, whose journey over the past seven years reveals a systemically biased landscape. Her testimony illustrates how a combination of institutional fear, cultural misunderstanding, and a lack of accountability from the Metropolitan Police and London's borough councils creates significant economic and cultural barriers, perpetuating a cycle of exclusion that has existed for decades.

## The lingering shadow of form 696

Makeda Bennett-Amparbeng's first direct encounter with the institutional barriers facing Black music promoters occurred in 2016. She approached a local venue as a young university student attempting to launch an open mic night in her home borough of Croydon. The response was immediate and prescriptive. The venue owner stated that for an event featuring "urban music or, like, hip hop", they would be required

to hire significantly more security and that Bennett-Amparbeng would have to complete a Form 696. This form, notorious within the industry, asked for details including the specific music genre and the ethnic makeup of the target audience.

The requirement was not an isolated incident but a symptom of a wider culture where specific genres were automatically flagged as high-risk. Bennett-Amparbeng notes that Form 696 was often tied to the venue's license, meaning the venue itself faced pressure from authorities to police the music they platformed. This created a chilling effect, where venue owners, fearing for their license, would pre-emptively impose costly and prohibitive conditions on promoters of Black music. The financial implications were stark; for a new promoter working with limited funds, the unexpected cost of extra security made the event unviable. It took over a year of campaigning alongside others to get Form 696 abolished before she could realistically put on events in Croydon.

However, the form's abolition did not solve the underlying problem. Bennett-Amparbeng argues that the "culture around everything that form 696 still stood for, obviously, it still exists". The formal requirement was gone, but the informal biases remained, making the landscape for new promoters even more "confusing now, or even complicated" as the unwritten rules are harder to navigate.

the abolition of Form 696 failed to address the underlying cultural challenges, merely returning the sector to the pre-existing state of informal, subjective, and biased regulation.

## A culture of fear and systemic bias

The primary driver behind the persistent challenges, according to Bennett-Amparbeng, is fear. She asserts that event cancellations and licensing refusals stem from an institutional fear rooted in a profound “lack of understanding” of the music, the culture, and the community. This was exemplified in conversations with the Met, where, according to Bennett-Amparbeng, officials allegedly “didn’t know the difference between grime and grunge”. Such ignorance is not benign; it leads to prejudice. Music that is designed to “hype the crowd up”, such as Hip-Hop or Grime, is perceived as inherently threatening when associated with Black and Asian audiences.

Bennett-Amparbeng states, “because it’s a group of young Black people together, or Black and Asian people together, for some reason, that then creates more of a threat to them”. This perception is in stark contrast to the treatment of other genres. Rock events, which can be equally “rowdy” in terms of energy of fans dancing, do not face the same level of scrutiny or risk of last-minute cancellation. At its core, Bennett-Amparbeng identifies the root cause as “racism”, a deep-rooted historical issue within law enforcement that is amplified by media stereotypes.

The demographic makeup of the decision-making bodies compounds this bias. Licensing teams within local councils and the Metropolitan Police are often overwhelmingly “white, middle-aged to 60 and male”, according to Bennett-Amparbeng. This disconnect means that decisions are made about cultures with which they have no familiarity, leading to a reliance on inherent biases rather than informed judgment. There is no understanding that attendees have “spent their money to attend the event” and are there to enjoy themselves, not cause trouble.

## Economic and cultural ramifications

The economic consequences of these practices are severe and operate on two levels. For established promoters, last-minute cancellations based on vague “intelligence” can lead to devastating financial losses. Bennett-Amparbeng recalls being in meetings where major promoters reported losing “over 10k over 15k” on events cancelled the day before. Over the years, she estimates the cumulative losses for the scene have likely run into the millions.

For emerging promoters, the impact is one of financial unsustainability. Without clear justification, the arbitrary demand for extra security inflates costs and erodes already thin profit margins. This discourages new talent from entering the promotions industry and creates an additional barrier for Black and Asian entrepreneurs that their white counterparts do not face. This discriminatory hurdle forces them to “review things with a fine toothcomb much more” and anticipate racism as a standard business cost, a practice that eventually “becomes a norm, and it shouldn’t be a norm”, states Bennett-Amparbeng. The result is a chilling effect on grassroots creativity and a significant setback for the diversity of London’s music ecosystem.

## A path forward: A call for structural change

Bennett-Amparbeng is clear that “more talking” is not the solution, as the industry is stuck in a “repetitive cycle” where the same issues are debated every few years with no resolution. She argues that fundamental, structural change is required to break this cycle.

A primary issue is the fragmented and inconsistent nature of governance across London. With 32 boroughs and the City of London operating as 33 distinct licensing authorities, there is “no consistency” according to Bennett-Amparbeng. This allows individual officers and

councils to “bend the rules to their own advantage”, creating a system devoid of accountability. Bennett-Amparbeng advocates for a centralised body to oversee licensing with one standard procedure that all authorities must follow. Critically, this system must include ramifications for officials and boroughs who fail to adhere to the process or act on unsubstantiated bias. “Right now”, she states, “the system is using things against us, and there are no ramifications for doing that”.

Furthermore, she argues that the solution cannot be purely voluntary and likely requires legislation to create a form of “protection that just doesn’t exist right now”. This would provide promoters with a legal framework for recourse when they are unfairly targeted. In her view, the most effective change would be to create a unified space, akin to the old promoters’ forums, where all stakeholders—police, councils, grassroots promoters, and major music industry bodies—can communicate directly and hold each other accountable within a single, transparent system. Without these structural reforms, the barriers will remain, and the vibrant music of London’s Black and Asian communities will continue to be unfairly silenced.



# MICHAEL KILL CASE STUDY



## Introduction

Michael Kill, CEO of the Nighttime Industries Association, has operated at the heart of the UK's music scene for over three decades. From his early days as a UK garage and hip-hop promoter to his current role as a global advocate for nightlife, he has witnessed first-hand the systemic challenges facing London's Black and Asian music cultures. This case study, based on his experiences, argues that despite official measures like the withdrawal of Form 696, a deep-rooted "conscious bias and racial profiling situation" persists within the Metropolitan Police and local councils. This bias manifests not through overt bans but through "underhand processes" and a "lazy regulatory approach" that strategically pressures venues, manipulates data, and ultimately stifles these vibrant communities' cultural and economic growth.

## The enduring legacy of form 696

The 2017 abolition of the Metropolitan Police's Form 696 was publicly hailed as a positive step towards ending racial profiling in live music. The form, which required promoters to detail the genre of music and ethnicity of the audience, was widely seen as discriminatory. However, K contends that its removal was merely a superficial change. "696 still exists", he states unequivocally, arguing that while the label is gone, the practice remains embedded in police procedure. He points out that the form itself is still available on the websites for the City of London Police and Barnet Council. However, more importantly, the same risk-assessment questions are still being asked of promoters of Black and Asian music events across the capital.

The process has become less transparent. Police no longer explicitly cancel events; instead, they employ a strategy of pressure and intimidation. They will approach a venue licensee and highlight the "potential impact it would have on your licensee if something went wrong", effectively making it the operator's decision to pull the event. This allows the police to maintain that they "never pull events" while achieving their desired outcome. When MK publicly stated this in a Mixmag article, he was "bullied" by the Met and London's Night Czar to provide examples. Yet, they offered "no protections for people who were worried about coming forward" for fear of risking their licenses. This Catch-22 ensures the practice continues unchallenged in the shadows.

## The “High-risk” narrative and cultural incompetence

At the core of this issue is the designation of Black and Asian music genres from UK garage and grime to Afrobeat and Bhangra as inherently “high risk” This perception is not based on robust, impartial data but on a long-standing institutional bias and a profound lack of cultural understanding. Kill recounts how his successful UK garage night at Time and Envy in Romford, which ran for five years, was shut down by police after a single incident, forcing the venue to replace it with a “school disco night” under threat to its license.

This cultural incompetence was starkly illustrated in the case of the Aquarium nightclub in London. Following a major Afrobeat event at the O2 Arena, an unassociated crowd gathered

outside the Aquarium for an after-party. The ensuing issues outside were blamed on the “genre of what was going on inside”, and the police openly labelled Afrobeat music a “crime generator” during the license review. This was despite the fact that crime rates at the venue were proportionately much lower than the London average. This reveals a police mindset that seeks to “remove” what it does not understand or feel it can control. This approach disregards local authorities’ duty to conduct Equality Impact Assessments and consider the cultural needs of the diverse populations they serve.

## A system of manipulated data and disproportionate scrutiny

The justification for this heightened scrutiny is often “intel” or data, which Kill argues is frequently misrepresented. The police are “very, very good at presenting data that works for their case”, he explains, noting that they will manipulate timeframes or present raw incident numbers without the context of footfall to create a perception of high risk. This “intel” is often nothing more than “a conversation between two police officers and their perceived position” rather than an evidence-based assessment.

The disparity in enforcement is telling. Kill contrasts the 18-month investigation and closure of Brixton Academy following a tragedy at an Afrobeat night with the 4-month investigation and reopening of the Manchester Arena after a bombing that claimed 23 lives. He suggests

the extended closure of Brixton was part of a “very clear agenda” to squeeze a venue associated with Black music, costing the local economy half a million pounds per week, according to Kill. This punitive approach is rarely applied to venues associated with other genres, even when serious incidents occur. This “oppressive policing” creates a system where Black and Asian events are held to an impossibly high standard, while others are given far more leeway.

## The stifling of culture and economy

The consequences of this systemic bias are profound. Economically, the “high-risk” narrative drives up costs for promoters, who are forced to pay for additional security demanded by police. This makes many grassroots events financially unviable, squeezing new promoters out of the industry. “We’re losing a lot of promoters”, Kill warns, and with them, “we lose the talent that they bring along”. This stifling of creativity at the ground level has a direct impact on the UK’s talent pipeline.

Culturally, it pushes artists and audiences into unregulated spaces. Creativity moves to “house parties” or “underground raves” when professional venues become inaccessible due to licensing pressures. This denies emerging artists the chance to perform in safe, professional environments and “refine their craft”, slowing their development. While the immediate economic cost is in the “millions per year”, Kill argues the greater damage is to the UK’s long-term reputation as a global hub for musical innovation.

## Conclusion: The path to fairness

To remedy this deeply entrenched issue, Kill proposes a multi-faceted approach centred on rebuilding trust. First, he calls for mandatory education and cultural training for police to dismantle stereotypes and foster genuine understanding. Second, he demands transparency in data, with consistent, impartial parameters that prevent manipulation.

Third, the regulatory framework must shift from being risk-based to permissive, enabling and supporting cultural expression. Finally, he advocates for more diverse representation on licensing committees to ensure that decisions are made by people who reflect the communities they impact. Without these fundamental changes, the system will remain broken, and the artists and promoters of London’s Black and Asian music scenes will continue to be unfairly penalised by a “conscious bias” they are forced to navigate every day.

# APPENDIX C NOTTING HILL CARNIVAL

# RACIALISED MEDIA NARRATIVES AND THE POLICING OF NOTTING HILL CARNIVAL



## Introduction

Notting Hill Carnival (NHC) is the largest street festival in Europe and one of the most significant expressions of Black culture in the UK. With over two million attendees annually and an estimated contribution of £396 million pounds to London's economy, its cultural and economic significance is indisputable. Yet, despite its value, NHC is consistently subjected to disproportionate policing, surveillance, and negative media framing that is rarely seen in relation to comparable white majority events. This case study examines how safety narratives, shaped through media discourse and policing practices, have been used to stigmatise Black-led cultural events, with damaging consequences for public perception, funding, and cultural development.

## Disproportionate Policing and Surveillance

Security planning for NHC has become increasingly intense, culminating in the 2025 decision to deploy live facial recognition (LFR) across the event site. The technology is intended to identify individuals wanted for serious offences, including knife crime and robbery. As reported in the Daily Mail (2025), this move follows the presence of eight stabbings in 2024, only one of which was fatal. However, the rhetoric used by political leaders and the media inflates this risk. Shadow Home Secretary Chris Philp justified the surveillance, stating that police must “use every tactic at their disposal to protect the public” (Daily Mail, 2025).

Yet, the policing strategy is not proportionate to the actual threat level. More than 7,000 officers are deployed each day during the three-day festival, alongside knife arches, dispersal orders, and the newly reintroduced LFR. These measures far exceed those used at other large events with similar or higher incident rates. This deployment also raises serious concerns about racial bias. Trials of LFR at NHC in 2016 and 2017 were abandoned after 102 false identifications were recorded, disproportionately affecting Black and ethnic minority individuals. Civil liberties groups have strongly criticised the 2025 rollout. Rebecca Vincent of Big Brother Watch stated:

“We know that LFR is less accurate in scanning minority faces... Using it to target attendees of this beloved cultural celebration is particularly sinister. This planned deployment is even more concerning given the continued lack of a legislative basis, leaving police to write their own rules with no accountability or oversight”

– (Vincent, 2025).



The negative framing is further reinforced by media coverage that often misattributes incidents to the carnival. In one instance, the murder of a man at a nearby restaurant, unconnected to the event, was included in media narratives to imply that Carnival was linked to the crime.

Organisers have expressed deep concern at this trend:

“I question a lot of the things that are put down to Notting Hill Carnival... whether they actually happened within the footprint. That distinction often disappears”

– (NHC Trust, 2025).



## In Comparison to Other Large Scale Events

A 2019 report by HuffPost UK sheds new light on how crime at large UK events is reported, especially when it comes to Notting Hill Carnival. While headlines often focus on arrests or knife incidents at Carnival, the bigger picture, namely, the sheer size of the event is often left out of the conversation.

Notting Hill Carnival is Europe’s largest street festival, attracting at least one million people each year. Organisers argue this is likely a conservative estimate, with actual attendance possibly doubling that. Yet despite this scale, Carnival is frequently portrayed as uniquely problematic, while other major festivals, some of which report similar or worse crime rates receive far less media scrutiny.

When you adjust for crowd size, the data tells a different story:

### NOTTING HILL CARNIVAL

3.76 arrests per 10,000 attendees

### GLASTONBURY FESTIVAL

3.1 arrests per 10,000 attendees

### CREAMFIELDS:

A striking 23.67 arrests per 10,000 attendees

Knife crime at Carnival has become a particularly dominant narrative in press coverage. Yet, as HuffPost reveals, other festivals also see incidents involving knives and weapons:

## CREAMFIELDS

13 arrests for possession of a blade or offensive weapon

## GLASTONBURY

1 arrest each for knife possession and for an offensive weapon

## READING FESTIVAL

3 arrests for offensive weapons, 1 for wounding with intent

### • Reading

Arrests from 2016–18 were for offences including:

– 6 assaults, 52 drug offences, 3 possession of an offensive weapon, 4 robbery, 1 sexual assault, 7 thefts, 1 threat to kill, 1 wounding with intent.

### • Royal Ascot

Arrests from 2016–18 were for offences including:

– 13 assaults including 1 assault on police, 1 drug offence, 6 drunk and disorderly, 2 forgery, 3 sexual assaults, 2 thefts

Serious offences occur across all these events. What differs is not the data, but the narrative. Despite being statistically safer per capita than some festivals, Notting Hill Carnival is consistently singled out, over-policed, heavily surveilled, and disproportionately scrutinised. Suggesting that the issue lies less in the numbers, and more in how they're framed and reported.

To put this in context, even though Carnival recorded more stabbings in previous years (15 in 2016, 7 in 2017, and 1 in 2018), its massive attendance dwarfs those of other festivals. Without that context, the numbers risk being misunderstood and misrepresented.

When we look more broadly at arrest types across festivals, a pattern emerges:

### • Glastonbury

Arrests from 2016–17 and 2019, were for offences including: – 15 assaults, 1 burglary, 129 drug offences, 1 conspiracy to defraud, 1 possession of a knife, 1 possession of an offensive weapon, 10 thefts.

### • Creamfields

Arrests from 2016–18 were for offences including: – 18 assaults or resisting arrest including 3 assaults on police, 355 drugs offences, 13 possession of an offensive or bladed weapon, 8 thefts, 1 rape.

## Funding, Artistic Marginalisation, and Structural Inequality

Despite its immense cultural and economic contribution, NHC remains chronically underfunded, particularly in its artistic elements. Most available funding is absorbed by security infrastructure, a requirement imposed by licensing regulations and political pressure. While NHC was recently granted an additional £1 million by Kensington and Chelsea Council and the UK Government, this was awarded in response to police warnings, and again allocated primarily to security needs.

Carnival organisers have consistently highlighted the imbalance in funding priorities. Matthew Phillips explained:

“We’ve been able to secure funding for stewards and security... but what about the arts? Unless we protect and maintain the visual and cultural spectacle of Carnival, we risk hollowing it out”

– (Phillips, 2025).



This marginalisation contrasts sharply with government investment in white led cultural institutions. In 2024, a £270 million Arts for Everyone Fund was announced, the majority of which went to museums and legacy venues, many receiving automatic increases in funding without application. By contrast, the largest Black cultural event in Europe continues to struggle for recognition.

“If Carnival is the biggest expression of Black culture on the planet, why are we not seeing corresponding investment?”

– (Matthew Phillips, 2025).



Organisers argue that if NHC were supported year-round, it could create jobs and opportunities on a scale comparable to international mega-events such as the Olympics, yet it is largely delivered through voluntary labour and self-financing.

## Media Narratives and Cultural Stigma

A major barrier to equitable support lies in how NHC is portrayed. The media consistently frames the carnival as a site of violence and disruption, despite evidence to the contrary. Events such as Glastonbury, which have historically reported incidents of sexual assault, drug use, and theft, are not subjected to the same narrative scrutiny. Even when The Huffington Post published a comparative article in 2019 showing that NHC was among the safest large festivals in the UK, the dominant media framing did not shift meaningfully.

Organisers have voiced frustration at the media’s role in shaping public perception:

“Our biggest challenge is changing the media narrative... Police officials make unwarranted statements, like claiming there were two murders, when one occurred [the unfortunate murder of Cher Maximen], the other wasn’t Carnival-related at all. And nobody challenges them”

– (NHC Trust, 2025)



This continuous misrepresentation has long term consequences and damages sponsorship opportunities, deters investment, and forces organisers into a defensive position. As Notting Hill Carnival CEO summarised:

“Carnival doesn’t cause violence, it provides relief from it. It reminds us what joy feels like when it’s real and when it’s free”

– (Matthew Phillips, 2025).



## Carnival as a Space of Healing and Resistance

Carnival is more than a festival; it is a legacy of resistance, resilience and cultural pride, born in response to the 1958 Notting Hill race riots and rooted in Caribbean tradition. While safety is a valid concern, organisers insist that Carnival must not be scapegoated for wider structural issues that affect Black communities, such as poverty, social isolation, and racial exclusion. As organiser Matthew Phillips emphasised:

“Poverty, isolation, racial inequality, disconnection, and the access to hope, especially for young people. Carnival doesn’t cause these problems. It doesn’t create violence. In fact, it offers relief from it. It’s a space of culture, community, belonging, and healing. We must take care not to mistake a weekend of celebration for the root of much deeper societal challenges”

– (Phillips, 2025).



This vision of Carnival as a site of collective healing rather than harm challenges dominant narratives of public disorder and reframes it as a symbol of Black freedom and creative resistance.

## Conclusion

The safety discourse surrounding Notting Hill Carnival reveals a racialised double standard in how Black cultural expression is policed and represented. Disproportionate surveillance, underinvestment in artistic infrastructure, and hostile media coverage conspire to undermine the event’s legitimacy. Yet, what Carnival endures is testament to the strength of the communities that sustain it. If it is to flourish, it must be understood not as a threat to be contained, but as a cultural institution to be respected, protected, and funded accordingly.

“This was not handed to us. It was fought for and protected. Come with reverence”

– (NHC Trust, 2025).



# RECOMMENDATIONS

---

## 1 Policy and Policing Reform

---

- **End disproportionate surveillance of Black cultural events.**

LFR should not be used without a clear legal framework, oversight, and evidence of efficacy.

- **Require transparent crime data reporting**

Clearly distinguishing incidents that occur inside event boundaries from those in surrounding areas.

- **Establish a community-policing task force for Carnival planning**

Ensuring that safety approaches are co-produced with organisers and local residents.

## 2 Media Accountability and Narrative Change

---

- **Develop ethical media standards**

For reporting on cultural festivals, particularly those rooted in ethnic minority communities.

- **Fund independent monitoring bodies**

To track racial bias in press coverage of public events.

- **Support narrative-shifting campaigns**

To educate the public about Carnival's history, safety record, and cultural value.

## 3 Funding and Structural Support

---

- **Create a ring-fenced national fund**

For Black-led cultural heritage events.

- **Implement equity audits**

Across cultural funding streams to ensure fair access for racially marginalised communities.

- **Invest in year-round Carnival infrastructure**

Including arts training, costume-making, and youth development.

## 4 Community and Youth Empowerment

---

- **Require licensing consultations**

With cultural organisers to ensure safety plans reflect cultural needs and community insight.

- **Protect the independence of Carnival planning bodies**

From political interference and police overreach.

- **Provide dedicated youth grants**

For Carnival-linked creative projects that support early-career artists and community development.

# REFERENCES

---

- **Evening Standard article**

Kelleher, P. (2024) Notting Hill Carnival organisers say lack of funding risks future of cultural event. Evening Standard, 29 May. Available at: <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/notting-hill-carnival-organisers-funding-b1233688.html> (Accessed: 18 July 2025).

- **BBC article**

BBC News (2024) Notting Hill Carnival: Facial recognition cameras to be used. BBC News, 5 July. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/crrq5p7zypdo> (Accessed: 18 July 2025).

- **Yahoo News article**

(syndicated from PA Media)

PA Media (2024) Notting Hill Carnival could be cancelled due to lack of funding, organisers warn. Yahoo News Australia, 29 May. Available at: <https://au.news.yahoo.com/notting-hill-carnival-could-cancelled-182238248.html> (Accessed: 18 July 2025).

- **Yahoo News article**

PA Media (2024) Notting Hill Carnival could be cancelled due to lack of funding, organisers warn. Yahoo News Australia, 29 May. Available at: <https://au.news.yahoo.com/notting-hill-carnival-could-cancelled-182238248.html> (Accessed: 18 July 2025).

- **Big Brother Watch**

Big Brother Watch (2018) Facial Recognition and the Risk of Racial Bias. Available at: <https://bigbrotherwatch.org.uk>

- **Daily Mail**

Daily Mail (2025) Police to use Facial Recognition at Notting Hill Carnival to Combat Knife Crime. Available at: <https://dailymail.co.uk>

- **Huffington Post**

Huffington Post (2019) Notting Hill Carnival: Safer Than You Think. Available at: <https://huffingtonpost.co.uk>

- Notting Hill Carnival Trust (2025) Internal Interviews and Strategy Briefings.
- Phillips, M. (2025) Remarks at Carnival Stakeholder Forum.
- Phillips, M. (2025) Public Address at Carnival Launch Event.
- Vincent, R. (2025) Statement via Big Brother Watch on LFR Technology.

# APPENDIX D

# THE COLOUR

# FACTORY

# THE COLOUR FACTORY - DISPROPORTIONATE ENFORCEMENT AND RACIALISED PERCEPTIONS



The case of the Colour Factory offers a clear example of disproportionate regulatory response, where licensing enforcement appears untethered from context, evidence, or risk profile, and instead shaped by broader narratives of suspicion. Despite extensive safety infrastructure, including ID scanners, a dedicated welfare team, and the presence of a medic at all late-night events, the venue was subject to punitive and highly visible enforcement actions (Roman Road LDN, 2023a). Following a fatal stabbing that occurred outside the premises and after event hours, the Metropolitan Police pursued a full licence suspension under Section 53A of the Licensing Act 2003. This was initiated despite police confirmation that the weapon used in the incident had never entered the venue, and that Colour Factory management had fully cooperated with investigations (Tower Hamlets Licensing Sub-Committee Minutes, 2023).

“They did not believe the weapon used in the fatal incident had been inside the premises.”

– Metropolitan Police, Licensing  
Sub-Committee Minutes, 22 Feb 2023



In the days following the incident, police affixed a large blue sign to the venue’s entrance, publicly stating that a murder investigation was underway. Although technically accurate in its reference to an active inquiry, the sign generated a misleading impression that the fatality had occurred within the venue itself. This amplified media portrayals of culpability and generated significant public alarm (Roman Road LDN, 2023a).

“There is no suggestion that the weapon was within the premises at any point.”

– Tower Hamlets Licensing  
Sub-Committee Minutes, 22 Feb 2023



The venue's licence was ultimately retained with additional conditions. Nevertheless, the impact of this enforcement approach was severe. Colour Factory experienced approximately £40,000 in lost revenue, incurred £15,000 in personal legal fees, and was forced to implement staff redundancies. Meanwhile, police legal costs estimated at £46,000, were covered by public funds. These figures underscore the asymmetrical burden borne by independent, minority owned venues in the face of aggressive regulatory action.

The severity of this intervention becomes more troubling when viewed in light of the comparative leniency extended to non-Black-owned venues under similar or worse circumstances. As Williams and his team noted, the emotional toll of the ordeal was compounded by the perceived targeting of a Black-owned cultural space, a space already engaged in proactive harm reduction and community based safety practices. Though ultimately vindicated, the Colour Factory case illustrates the enduring reputational, emotional, and financial consequences of enforcement mechanisms unanchored to context.

**It also highlights a broader systemic issue:** the over-policing of minority-owned venues, and a public funding structure that shields institutional actors from the consequences of misjudged action, while placing the financial risk squarely on those least resourced to bear it. If licensing is to serve its intended purpose ensuring public safety it must be applied proportionately and without prejudice. When actions are driven by perception rather than evidence, the result is not only injustice, but the erosion of trust, sustainability, and participation in the cultural life of our cities.

*Lost in Revenue*

**£40,000**

*On legal fees*

**£15,000**

# REFERENCES

---

- **Evening Standard article**

Roman Road LDN. (2023a). Police request full licence suspension following fatal incident near Colour Factory. [online] Available at: <https://romanroadlondon.com> [Accessed 10 July 2025].

- **Tower Hamlets Licensing Sub-Committee.**

(2023). Minutes of meeting held on 22 February 2023. London: Tower Hamlets Council.

# REMEL CASE STUDIES

ReedSmith



**BLACK  
LIVES IN  
MUSIC**