

2026 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**BLACK
LIVES IN
MUSIC**

RACE EQUALITY IN MUSIC EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

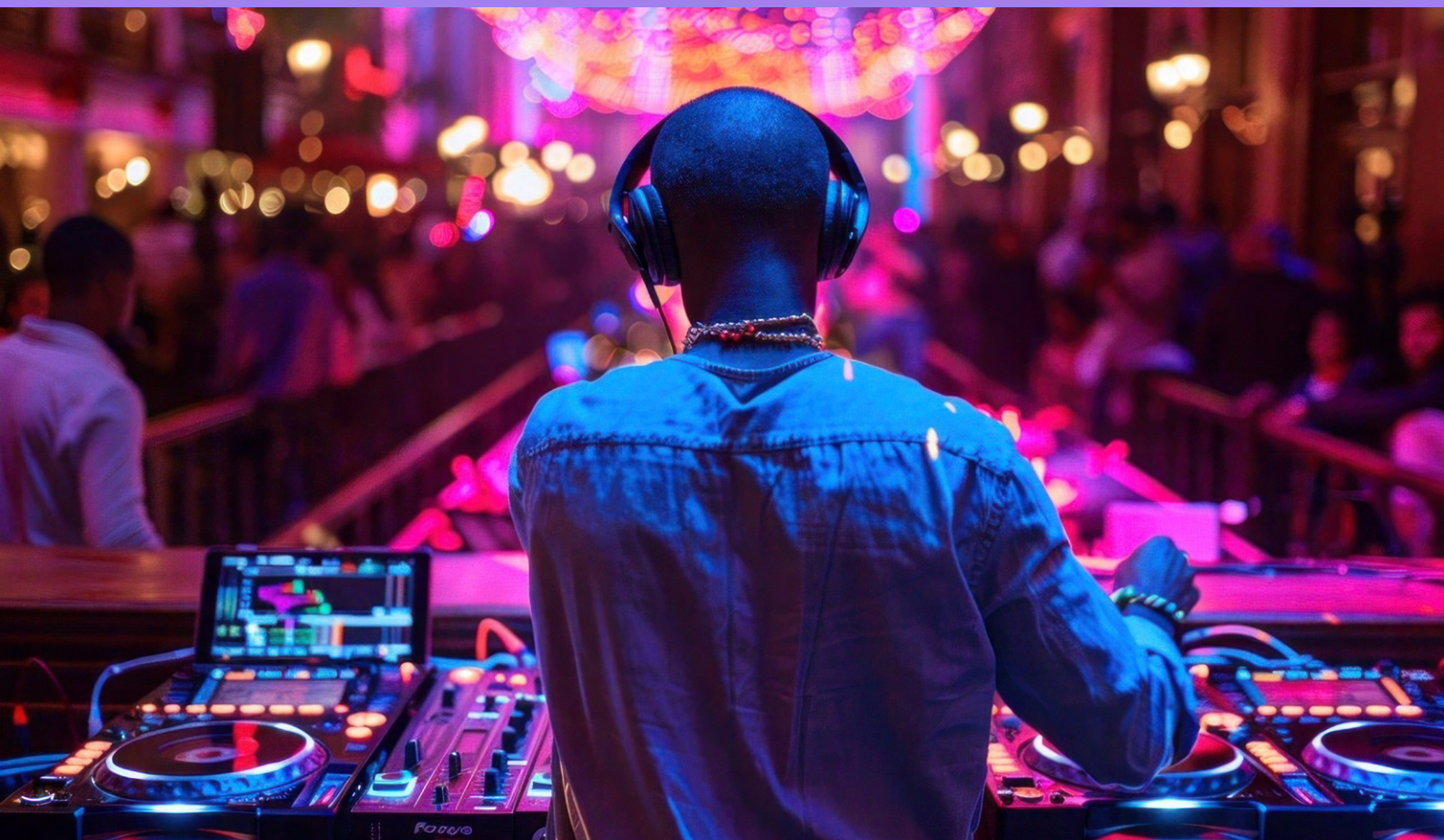


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INTRODUCTION

NO MATTER THE NUANCES AND INCONSISTENCIES IN THE LICENSING PROCESS, BLACK AND BROWN FACES WILL CONSISTENTLY GET THE SHORT END OF THE STICK.

– James Joseph, Venue Owner



The Black and South Asian music and entertainment scene in the UK is a powerful and transformative force, deeply embedded in the nation's cultural life. From underground clubs that support new talent to major arenas that showcase global stars, this vibrant community has played a key role in shaping British identity, creativity, and social connection.

However, despite its cultural influence and commercial success, this sector still faces deep systemic and institutional barriers that limit its growth. Discriminatory practices continue to hold back Black and South Asian artists, entrepreneurs, and audiences. These challenges are especially clear in the ways regulation, licensing, and policing interact with race in the night-time economy.

This report focuses on the personal reflections of Black and South Asian musicians, promoters, event organisers and others who are the most at risk stakeholders here. In this report, the terms Black and South Asian and Black and Brown may be used interchangeably, particularly within quotes, reflecting the language used by participants and within the wider cultural context.



PRINCIPLES

1 Safety and Equality Go Together

Public safety and racial equality are not competing priorities. A fair licensing system must protect people while treating every community equally.

2 Evidence, Not Assumptions

Decisions must be based on specific, current and credible evidence — never assumptions about race, music genre, artists, promoters or audiences.

3 Fairness Means Consistency

The same standards must apply to everyone. Risk, evidence and enforcement should be assessed fairly and consistently across events, communities and boroughs.

4 Decisions Must Be Transparent and Accountable

Promoters and venues should understand why action is being taken, what evidence is being used and how a decision can be challenged.

5 Culture Is Not a Risk

Music, culture and identity should never be treated as evidence of danger. Black and South Asian artists, promoters and audiences must have equal access to stages, venues and opportunities.



KEY FINDINGS

£1.1BN

Estimated 2024 London spend linked to Black and South Asian live music



£127-£141M

Estimated annual spend lost through cancellations, displacement and suppressed activity in London



46%

Share of police-affected cases in which the venue reportedly closed entirely

£650M+

Projected five-year loss to London



KEY FINDINGS

1 Restrictions and Cancellations

Black events are disproportionately cancelled, restricted, or blocked compared to white-led events.

2 Economic Impact

The economic impact of excluding Black and South Asian events is significant with an estimated £127–£141million lost in London annually in live music spend, and a projected loss of more than £650m in total spend over five years.

3 Accountability Concerns

Black promoters frequently have events shut down with little or no explanation, leaving no path for accountability or appeal.

4 The Legacy of Form 696

The legacy of Form 696 persists, with current risk assessments systematically singling out Black and South Asian live music events and imposing punitive surveillance and heavy conditions without credible evidence of increased safety risk.

5 Genre-Based Scrutiny

Afrobeats, Hip Hop, Drill, R&B, and Dancehall flagged as “high risk,” while Indie, Pop, and Rock genres face little scrutiny.

6 The “Mob” Narrative

Media fuels criminalisation with Black events framed as “mobs” or “chaos,” shifting blame from institutions onto communities.

7 Opportunity Restrictions

Temporary Event Notices (TENs) are more likely to be refused in London’s most diverse boroughs, restricting opportunities for Black and South Asian-led events

8 Unsupported Intelligence

Unverified intelligence, including superficial online searches, is routinely used to justify heightened scrutiny of Black and South Asian events, reinforcing racialised assumptions of risk.

9 Forced Closure

Many white-owned venues are supported back into business after incidents, while Black venues are forced to close.

10 Zoned Out

Black and South Asian events are being pushed out of central London by restrictive licensing, gentrification, and planning policy.

11 Compliance as a Barrier

Inflated security, insurance, and compliance demands fall hardest on Black and South Asian events.

12 Mental Health Impact

Mental health impact is relentless as cancellations, surveillance, and financial strain are driving burnout among Black and South Asian entrepreneurs.

CENTRAL CONCLUSION

The issue identified by REMEL is not the purpose of public protection. It is the way risk can be interpreted and enforced differently depending on the music genre, artist, promoter or anticipated audience.

1 Systemic Discrimination in Licensing Practices and Genre Profiling

"It's just the illusion that because it's a Black or Asian event, it's going to be trouble. So, because there's going to be trouble, we want more security. Even if they don't know the artist, it doesn't matter about the artist. It just matters about you. It just matters about your face in front of them."

– Promoter Executive 3



Our study found that event licensing across the UK operates in ways that can result in racial discrimination, with authorities assessing events through racial stereotypes rather than their actual safety records, despite the significant commercial contribution of Black and South Asian events.

1. Genre as Risk Proxy:

Genres including Drill, Grime, Dancehall and Afrobeats are systematically labelled "high risk". Regulators routinely convert superficial Google searches into formal regulatory obstacles.

"Sometimes it's just based on a Google search."

Gareth Hughes, Licensing and Planning Barrister



2. Perceived Informal Policing Pressures:

Police frequently exercise off-the-record verbal warnings regarding gang risks or licence reviews, scaring venues into self-cancelling events without generating an official paper trail or right of appeal.

"The other thing that was really challenging was how, on many occasions, we've seen police trying to steer things so that Black music culture events just don't happen."

– Michael Kill, NTIA, London



3. Misuse of Crime Statistics:

Broad, area-wide local crime statistics are incorrectly presented as crime caused directly by specific venues.

The Colour Factory

Case study demonstrates how harsh regulatory overreaction and suspicion can devastate an independent venue despite zero evidence of wrongdoing.

Following an off-site incident after operating hours, police suspended the venue's licence, ignoring its full cooperation, rigorous safety measures and confirmation that no weapon was ever inside. This aggressive enforcement publicly stigmatised the venue, resulting in staff redundancies and over £55,000 in direct financial losses.

"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 distinction is vital."

– Philip Kolvin KC



4. South Asian events face systemic profiling:

South Asian events (e.g., historic Bhangra nights) face systemic profiling based on assumptions about target audiences. Review records (e.g., Paiwand Events, Grant View, Takaa Tak, Punjabi Desi Mela, Rangeelu Gujarat) reveal heavy operational conditions including canine units, extensive searching, noise limiters, and reduced operating hours being imposed.

"... I can't ever see the police or the council having Black, Asian promoters, club owners interests at heart. I honestly can't. That's the bottom line. I think this country, especially London, there's almost a war on nightlife.

– Creative 9, London



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Safety and Equality Go Together

Public safety and racial equality are not competing priorities. A fair licensing system must protect people while treating every community equally.

5. Central Data Problem:

South Asian music traditions remain virtually invisible within licensing records, categorised vaguely under "live music," "dance," or "community events."

2 Economic and Cultural Erosion

Historically, Black music has been a major financial driver of the UK music industry. According to the UK Music 'Black Music Means Business' Report (2026), an estimated **£24.5 billion** of the UK's **£30 billion** recorded music market over the past 30 years has come from Black music genres, representing over **80%** of the total market, with British artists contributing approximately **£11.94 billion** of this figure.

Alongside this, the UK's live music sector is itself a highly lucrative space, generating **£6.1 billion** according to the LIVE Music Report (2024).¹

Of the UK's £30 billion recorded music market

£24.5 Billion

Black music genres of total market

80%



¹ LIVE'S Annual UK Live Music Report (2024) www.livemusic.biz/news

"It's held so many incredible Black promoters, artists, and aspiring venue owners, Black people we rarely see represented, because they're simply not allowed to put on events. This hasn't just stifled individuals, it's stifled the economy... countless individuals have been denied the chance to become financially independent through music."

– Executive 9, Event/Stage Manager, London.



However, despite the clear commercial power of both Black music and the wider live music economy, structural barriers continue to limit who benefits from this success. Many Black and South Asian promoters face disproportionate challenges in securing licences and running events, with decisions often shaped by racial bias.

Measuring the Impact of Police Intervention: Cancellations and Displacement

Police interventions create substantial financial losses across London's live music ecosystem:

• Direct Cancellations:

Expert estimates indicate that 1 in 20 (5%) events are affected by police activity. Survey data shows that in 46% of these cases, the venue closes entirely, resulting in over £25 million in lost venue spend in 2024.

• Individual Financial Risk:

Three out of four promoters report direct financial losses from cancellations, with average losses of £5,000 per event. Over half had already paid event costs in full prior to cancellation.

• Wider Professional Damage:

Cancellation impacts extend beyond single event losses: 86% of affected organisers report reputational damage, 43% lost subsequent work, and 20% were forced to lay off staff or release freelancers.

• Artist Displacement:

In cases where venues stayed open by replacing performers, replacing Black and South Asian artists with white performers diverted an estimated £8.4 million away from Black and South Asian creative communities in 2024.

The Cost of Missing Events and Ecosystem Harm

Fears around policing suppress the growth of London's music economy by deterring organisers from scheduling events in the first place:

• Foregone Spending:

Survey findings reveal that 79% of organisers would host more Black and South Asian music events if police intervention risks were reduced. Modeling a conservative 10% activity growth scenario indicates London lost out on £109.4 million in additional spending in 2024.

• Total Annual Loss:

£129–£141 million in annual spend lost due to over-policing, limiting investment in London's Black and South Asian music ecosystem.

• Impact Across the Value Chain:

Single event cancellations harm an entire network of professionals. For instance, a cancelled 2,000-capacity show at £32.50 per ticket deprives the artist of £16,000, the promoter and venue of £32,500, the booking agent of £6,500, the manager of £2,900, and leaves £39,000 in unspent production costs

By inflating risk and driving up operational costs, police interventions disrupt professional incentives, forcing diverse managers, agents, and promoters out of the sector or compelling artists to work outside their authentic cultural networks.

Annual spend in London
lost due to over-policing

£129–£141 Million

Organisers would host more Black &
South Asian music events

79%

5%

1 in 20 events (5%)
are affected by
police activity

£5,000

Average losses from
cancellations

£25 Million

Lost in venue spend
in 2024

3 Weaponising Media Narratives Against Black Events

The regulation of Black cultural life extends beyond physical policing into media coverage and public discourse, where headlines, soundbites and comment sections routinely frame Black cultural gatherings through a lens of suspicion. Within this “media-securitisation complex,” these events are rarely portrayed as joyful, ordinary, or culturally significant, but are instead depicted as inherently risky and out of control.

Sensationalist coverage supports this footprint by overstating risks or attributing nearby off-site incidents directly to Carnival. Headlines like:

Daily Mail

“Chaos at Notting Hill:
Two dead, dozens injured”

Although one of the deaths occurred in a nearby restaurant, unrelated to Carnival activities (Appendix C, p. 3)

BBC
NEWS

“Facial recognition to be
used at Carnival amid knife
crime fears”

(Appendix C)

frame the celebration as a threat to public order rather than a cultural institution.

Consequently, media outlets pre-judge Black cultural events using sensationalised language to frame them as risky. This hostile narrative is then used to justify unfair police scrutiny, heavy surveillance, and strict regulatory restrictions.

We see this demonstrated through the media narrative of Notting Hill Carnival where an extraordinary level of policing and technical surveillance are used in comparison to other events. In 2025, over 7,000 police officers were deployed daily alongside dispersal zones, knife arches, and Live Facial Recognition (LFR) technology.

The use of LFR raises acute concerns around racial bias. Previous trials at Carnival in 2016 and 2017 were halted after recording 102 false identifications, disproportionately misidentifying Black and ethnic minority attendees.

“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)



Comparative Analysis: Media Framing vs. Per Capita Data

Serious offences occur at many major events, but the difference lies in how these incidents are framed. 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.

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

Event	Attendance approx.	Arrests per 10,000 attendees
Notting Hill Carnival	2,000,000 +	3.76
Glastonbury Festival	210,000	3.1
Creamfields	280,000	23.67

Event	Possession of Blade / Offensive Weapon	Other Violent Offences	Total Key Incidents
Notting Hill Carnival	13	0	13
Reading Festival	3	1 (wounding with intent)	4
Glastonbury Festival	2	0	2

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.



REMEL PRINCIPLE

Evidence, Not Assumptions

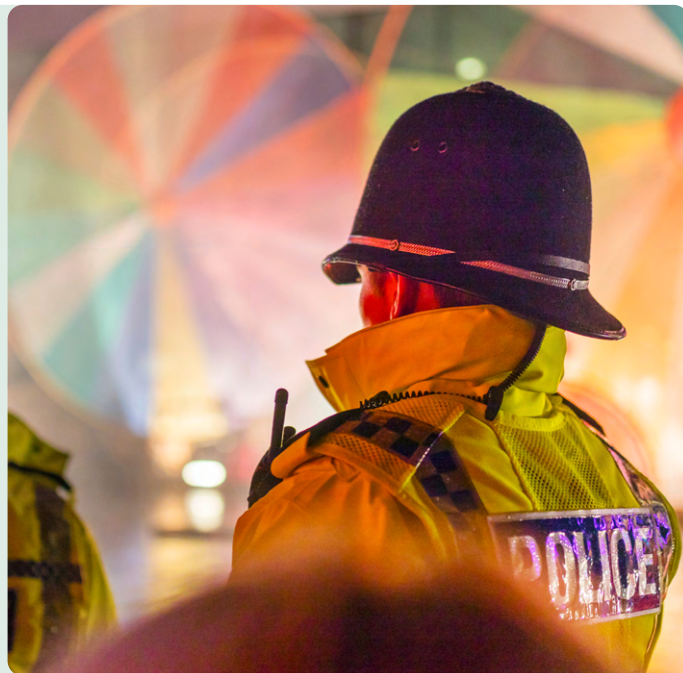
Decisions must be based on specific, current and credible evidence — never assumptions about race, music genre, artists, promoters or audiences.

2 www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/notting-hill-carnival

4 The Racialised Double Standard in UK Nightlife

Across the UK's night-time economy, events featuring Black and South Asian music, culture and audiences face disproportionate scrutiny.

This creates a two-tier cultural system: white-associated events are granted trust, flexibility, and grace, while Black and South Asian events are met with suspicion, intense surveillance, and aggressive control measures.



Proportionality: City of London's "No Promoted Events" Clause

While licensing regulations are framed as neutral safety measures, policies like the City of London Corporation's "No Promoted Events" clause create insurmountable structural barriers for independent, freelance, and Black and South Asian promoters.

Under Model Condition 2 (MC2), venues are strictly prohibited from hosting events run by external promoters or featuring freelance DJs not directly employed by the licence holder.

MC2 disproportionately harms Black and South Asian creatives who rely on independent, freelance, or collective-led routes to enter the industry:

- **Preemptive Exclusion:**

Authorities frequently impose MC2 as a precautionary measure during licensing hearings without citing past safety incidents, using vague notions of "risk" to restrict programming.

- **Targeting Specific Genres:**

The clause discourages venues from booking genres such as Afrobeats, Dancehall, or Grime due to the added legal, administrative, and reputational burdens involved in hosting external promoters.

- **Discriminatory Gatekeeping:**

Industry figures note that the policy effectively serves to keep minoritised promoters out of major financial and cultural districts.

"The meeting heard of a relatively new policy by City of London Police to seek a condition on licences that would prohibit external promoters from being employed by a venue. This seems designed to block Black/Brown promoters from working in the City."

– LIVE Roundtable Participant





REMEL PRINCIPLE

Fairness Means Consistency

The same standards must apply to everyone. Risk, evidence and enforcement should be assessed fairly and consistently across events, communities and boroughs.

Pushed Underground and Forced Out

The unequal application of licensing rules and safety concerns forces Black and South Asian promoters and artists to take extreme measures simply to operate, or to abandon their native genres entirely.

“That’s what pushed a lot of promoters to start doing events without disclosing the venue address until the night of the dance, just to keep the police off their backs. It felt like we’d gone right back to the 90s, doing warehouse parties all over again. By the mid 2000s, we were back to operating underground, not because we wanted to, but because we had to.”

– Executive 1, Promoter, London



“I know a DJ who was so blackballed, he had to shift into the House scene just to keep working. And funny enough... no problems there. So clearly, he wasn’t the issue. It’s just that he’d once played a Black music event where something happened. Meanwhile, events like Glastonbury where we know there are issues like drug use and overdoses are still given grace. That grace is not extended to Black music events. And that’s what’s so bizarre and unfair.”

– A3, Promoter, London



Events featuring genres like Grime, R&B, UK Garage, and Drill continue to face last-minute cancellations under the pretense of “safety,” revealing how safety mechanisms are routinely weaponised to exclude specific audiences and cultural expressions from the formal night-time economy.



REMEL PRINCIPLE

Culture Is Not a Risk

Music, culture and identity should never be treated as evidence of danger. Black and South Asian artists, promoters and audiences must have equal access to stages, venues and opportunities.

5 Gentrification, Displacement and Access

A key consequence of barriers in the licensing process is that it shapes where culture is allowed to thrive.

Many Black and South Asian promoters have been pushed out of central, well connected areas and into venues on the outskirts of cities. This cultural displacement mirrors wider patterns of urban gentrification.



Participants described repeated last minute venue changes, driven not by organisers' disorganisation but by authorities pulling licenses without notice.

"They were changing venues every other week... eventually we realised it wasn't them it was the authorities forcing them to move."

– A3, Promoter, London



Promoters also described the rigidity of planning boundaries and how seemingly neutral zoning or noise restrictions often fell along racialised and classed lines. Events in wealthy postcodes could go ahead with ease, while those in working-class areas faced heightened resistance, regardless of incident history or community support.

Cumulative Impact Zones and the Night Time Economy

Introduced under the Licensing Act 2003, Cumulative Impact Zones (CIZs) were created to stop nightlife districts from becoming overcrowded.

In these zones, the default rule is to reject any new licence unless the applicant can prove their venue or event won't add to local crime, noise, or crowd issues.

In practice, this policy creates a massive hurdle for independent, non-traditional cultural spaces especially those serving Black and South Asian communities:

"When they started introducing these cumulative impact zones, you know, the police wanted to reduce crime in areas, and I saw that, probably in the last couple of years, which was having a real impact on those businesses. Because actually, far more applications are getting denied."

– C5 Licensing Officer, London



"They wanted to reduce footfall on Friday nights... so now they're telling people to run restaurants instead of clubs. But that's not what we do."

– Creative 3, Promoter, London



6 Workforce development gaps

The research uncovered multiple areas for workforce development, both in live music and in policing and licensing.

Promoters, particularly those working within Black and South Asian music scenes consistently highlighted the absence of structured training, industry standards, and accreditation. This lack of professional infrastructure contributes to inconsistency, safety concerns, and reputational vulnerability across the sector. In policing and licensing, there is room to improve cultural awareness, address biases.

There have been past efforts to standardise promoter training, but they were inconsistently implemented:

"City of London tried to bring in legislation... you had to get this certification... they made people pay to do these courses... and then didn't enact it."

– Executive 10, Promoter, London



"You're able to be part of this industry with no professional experience and no level of professionalism... something about real lack of professionalism that impacts us all."

– Executive 9, Event/Stage Manager, London



7 The Impact of Licensing on Mental Health

Promoters working in cultural spaces consistently reported mental exhaustion

Promoters working in Black and South Asian cultural spaces consistently reported mental exhaustion, financial pressure and a sense of systemic exclusion. These impacts are not theoretical; they are lived experiences that participants expressed repeatedly.



“What do you think it’s going to do if the damage is done? It’s a psychological damage on you as patrons and promoters. It has a lingering stigma.”

— Creative 10, DJ/Promoter, London



The informal and discretionary nature of licensing severely damages professional reputations and career longevity across the live music sector. As one promoter highlighted:

“I think one of the damages that is overlooked is your reputation... that goes on... not tomorrow, that’s the day after, and the day after, and it goes on for years.”

— Executive 5, Promoter, London



A tour manager echoed this sentiment, stating: “We’ve all worked for promoters who’ve been damaged... When it’s not their fault.” Mirroring the findings of the 2023 Casey Review regarding institutional racism within the Metropolitan Police, these unmonitored discretionary decisions rely on racialised bias rather than actual risk, threatening jobs, incomes, and long-term participation for minoritised organisers

Training and Knowledge Gaps in Policing and Licensing

Promoters and industry experts agree that police, council members, and licensing officials urgently need better training. A deep lack of cultural understanding, combined with unconscious bias and poor communication, creates an unfair and hostile working environment for Black and South Asian event organisers.

Many in the industry feel that licensing rules are regularly weaponised to shut down Black cultural events. To fix this, stakeholders are pushing for mandatory, standardised training to address the gap in officials’ cultural knowledge.

"There are people out there... who do not have a racist bone in their body. They're uneducated. They're uneducated to understand the impact that it has on people's lives and the feelings and how deep rooted some of this stuff is."

– A3, Promoter, London



"Education is at the root of all of this. To stop the unconscious biasness of seeing something and believing it is like everything else."

– Creative 8, Promoter,



Need for an Independent Mechanism

Across stakeholder interviews, a central recommendation emerged: the creation of an independent oversight body or tribunal to guarantee fairness, consistency and accountability in licensing decisions. Participants stressed that removing sole decision-making power from individual police forces or local authorities is crucial to breaking entrenched bias.

"There should be a task force or a unit... any high-risk events that are deemed to be worthwhile cancelling should fall on the desk of this unit. That unit has people from the community... working alongside licensing... with the objective of 'how can we make this event happen?'"

– Executive 9,
Event/Stage Manager, London



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Decisions Must Be Transparent and Accountable

Promoters and venues should understand why action is being taken, what evidence is being used and how a decision can be challenged.



Key Proposals for Reform

• An Independent Review Tribunal:

A central team brought in whenever last-minute objections or disputes happen. Police would have to give proper notice before cancelling an event, and their evidence would be checked by an independent person rather than accepted without question.

• Sector Advisors:

Appointing music and nightlife experts to work inside police forces and local councils. These advisors would offer practical guidance on running events and help train enforcement staff.

• Clear Explanations for Denials:

A dedicated team to review licence applications and publish written reasons for any rejection. This ensures decisions are based on real safety risks rather than racial bias.

BLACK LIVES IN MUSIC'S POSITION

Black Lives in Music is not arguing for weaker safety standards.

We recognise the importance of licensing, policing and public safety in protecting artists, audiences, workers, venues and communities. Everyone has the right to enjoy live music in spaces that are safe, professionally managed and properly regulated.

What this report makes clear is that safety must never be used as a cover for racial bias, cultural misunderstanding or disproportionate restriction.

BLiM is calling for fair, transparent, evidence-based and culturally competent safety standards. Standards that protect people without profiling them. Standards that assess risk through facts, not assumptions. Standards that recognise the value of Black and South Asian music, audiences, promoters and venues as part of London's cultural and economic life.

A fair licensing system should be robust, but it must also be accountable. It should support good operators, challenge poor practice consistently, and ensure that decisions are based on credible evidence, clear reasoning and equal treatment.

Safety matters deeply. The issue is whether safety is being applied fairly.

This report calls for a licensing framework that protects the public while also protecting cultural expression, economic opportunity and racial justice. London cannot be a truly global music city if some communities are treated as a risk before they are treated as contributors.



**BLIM IS CALLING FOR
FAIR, TRANSPARENT,
EVIDENCE-BASED AND
CULTURALLY COMPETENT
SAFETY STANDARDS.**

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ReedSmith



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