

2026 SUMMARY REPORT

BLACK
LIVES IN
MUSIC

RACE EQUALITY IN MUSIC EVENT SUMMARY



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Project REMEL

Foreword	5
Background and Methodology	6
Evidence Base	6
Key Findings	8
Central conclusion	9

01. Overview and review of legislative frameworks 12

The Licensing Act 2003	13
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02. Systemic Discrimination in Licensing Practices and Genre Profiling 16

Genre as Risk Proxy	17
Perceived Informal Policing Pressures	18
Required safeguard	19
When the Audience Becomes the Risk	20
Licensing Decisions Affecting South Asian Music and Cultural Programming	20
South Asian music was generally permitted but heavily conditioned	21
The central data problem	22
What the evidence shows	23
Black and South Asian Culture Powers the Night Time Economy	24

03. The Cost of Entry — Economic and Cultural Erosion 25

Economic Analysis — Calculating the value of the Black and South Asian live music scene in London	27
Licensing Bias and Disproportionate Shutdowns	29
Barriers to Growth and Platform for Rising Talent	29
Use of Intelligence	30

04. Weaponising Media Narratives Against Black Events	31
Case Study: Notting Hill Carnival and the Spectacle of Surveillance	32
Comparative Analysis: Media Framing vs. Per Capita Data	34
05. The Racialised Double Standard in UK Nightlife	36
Proportionality: City of London’s “No Promoted Events” Clause	37
Impact of MC2 on Minoritised Promoters and Genres	37
Pushed Underground and Forced Out	38
Two Tier System	39
06. Gentrification, Displacement and Access	40
Loss of Central Space and the Push to the Margins	41
Cumulative Impact Zones and the Night Time Economy	42
07. Workforce Development Gaps	44
Training and Knowledge Gaps in Policing and Licensing	45
08. The Impact of Licensing on Mental Health	47
Psychological Stress from Licensing Systems	48
Reputational Damage and Workforce Impacts	49
09. Licensing Limitations, Transparency and Accountability	50
Ethnicity and TEN Intervention Outcomes	51
Inconsistencies within Police and Licensing	53
Inconsistencies between agencies	54
Inconsistencies between Boroughs	54
Cost of Appeals	55
Need for an Independent Mechanism	56
Government Proposal for Change: The National Licensing Policy Framework	57

Black Lives in Music's position	59
Recommendations: national law, policy and guidance	60
1. Commission a full independent review	60
2. Establish a National Licensing Policy Framework	60
3. Embed equality and human rights in licensing law	60
4. Integrate cultural justice into Section 182 Guidance	60
Recommendations: evidence, data and procedural fairness	60
5. Set transparent evidence standards	60
6. Publish licensing data and monitor disparities	60
7. Guarantee a right to respond, mediation and affordable appeal	60
8. Reform Temporary Event Notices	60
Recommendations: end exclusionary practice and protect culture	61
9. Remove blanket exclusionary clauses	61
10. Reform Cumulative Impact Zones	61
11. Require Cultural Impact Assessments	61
12. Align licensing with culture, planning and economic development	61
Recommendations: accountability, oversight and affordability	61
13. Create independent oversight mechanisms	61
14. Reform cost accountability and police charging	61
15. Expand access to capital and relief funding	61
Recommendations: workforce and sector capacity	62
16. Retain and prioritise cultural liaison roles	62
17. Professionalise and support promoters	62
18. Reform representation in decision-making	62
19. Embed workforce and mental-health safeguards	62

A MESSAGE FROM CHIEF EXECUTIVE

This summary report carries the collective voices of artists, promoters, venue owners and communities who have been silenced for far too long. What you will read here is only a snapshot of the extensive body of evidence we have gathered. There is still so much more to uncover, and our work is far from over.

I am deeply grateful to the many voices that contributed to this work and have done so with remarkable courage. I thank you, and I honour you. Your testimonies are powerful. They are not simply data insights, they are lived realities. They are the stories behind every closed venue, every cancelled show, every opportunity lost.

I hope this report makes you feel heard. This report stands as evidence that what you've been saying all along is real. And more importantly, I hope it leads to lasting change because reform is overdue, and it's essential for justice, for creativity, and for the future of our culture.

Licensing doesn't just affect a few artists or a handful of events. It touches every part of the music ecosystem from the young artist trying to get their first gig, to the promoter building a platform for emerging talent, to the local venue that brings life to a community. When licensing decisions are shaped by racial bias and overpolicing, it suffocates creativity, stifles entrepreneurship, and blocks economic opportunity.

It limits who gets to perform, who gets to work and who gets to build generational wealth through culture. It denies entire communities the right to express themselves freely and to

contribute to the very heartbeat of this city's nightlife. And in doing so, it holds back not just individuals, but the growth of the entire music and night time economies that make London one of the world's greatest cultural capitals. Please take the time to read the full report. Alongside this summary, we have included several evidence reviews, each uncovering further systemic inequalities that have gone unchallenged for far too long.

I invite you to explore them, to listen to the voices behind the statistics, and to understand the true weight of what people have experienced and endured.

To music industry leaders, to those in government, in local councils, and in the Metropolitan Police Service, we now know the truth.

This is your opportunity and your responsibility to act. To create a licensing system rooted in fairness, transparency and equality. To build trust where it has been broken. And to ensure that the next generation of artists, no matter their race or background, can create, perform and thrive without fear.

Change will not come from words alone. It will come from courageous, consistent and accountable action. The time for that change is now.



Charisse Beaumont
Chief Executive,
Black Lives in Music

WHY REMEL WAS CREATED

Project REMEL (Race Equality in Music Event Licensing) is an initiative launched in July 2023. Our goal is simple, to make sure London's live music events are licensed and policed fairly, without racial bias.

There is documented evidence that Black and South Asian artists, promoters and venue owners face unfair hurdles in London's music scene. Compared to their white peers, they experience:

✦ **More frequent event cancellations**

✦ **Higher rates of license denials**

✦ **Disproportionate policing interventions**

The project was created after the Musicians' Union and Black Lives in Music (BLiM) sent a joint letter to London Mayor Sadiq Khan asking for action. REMEL brings together the Greater London Authority (GLA), Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), UK Music, LIVE, the Musicians' Union, and a diverse network of artists, promoters, venue operators and community representatives to dismantle the unfair barriers in the music licensing system. The ultimate goal is to build a London where culture, creativity, and community can thrive for everyone.

Evidence Base

This research uses a combination of mixed methods to explore how licensing, regulation and enforcement affect London's live music sector, with a particular focus on the experiences of Black and South Asian artists and event professionals.

The study included:

- **Surveys**
- **Semi-structured interviews**
- **Focus groups**
- **Industry stakeholder workshops**
- **Freedom of Information (FOI) requests**
- **Desk-based research**

While the project faced challenges, including limited access to official data and refusals to share information from some public bodies, every effort was made to ensure findings were robust through cross-checking evidence and incorporating a wide range of perspectives.



Limitations

Some of the limitations are as follows:

• **No breakdown by race:**

Licensing and policing records do not consistently track the ethnicity of the people involved.

• **Inconsistent records:**

Different London boroughs write their reports in different ways, making them very hard to compare.

• **No central financial data:**

There is no single place that tracks the economic impact of the music licensing system.

• **Limited police data:**

Rejection of requests to share information from the MPS.

Nonetheless, the findings provide valuable insight into patterns of racial disparity and highlight areas for further research and were conducted in line with the principles of informed consent, anonymisation and transparency.

Every effort was made to ensure the findings were robust through evidence, community engagement and independent scrutiny. As a result, this report provides one of the most comprehensive examinations to date of how licensing systems shape the experiences of racially diverse communities in London’s live music sector.

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

£650M+

Projected five-year loss to London

46%

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

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.

REMEL 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.



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 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 other stakeholders most affected by these issues. 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.



01

Overview and Review of Legislative Frameworks

The Licensing Act 2003

The Licensing Act 2003 is the legal foundation for regulating alcohol, live entertainment and late-night food in England and Wales. Designed to simplify the system, it moved licensing decisions from the courts to local councils so policies could better reflect community needs.

All decisions must balance growing the night-time economy against four equal objectives:

1. Preventing crime and disorder
2. Ensuring public safety
3. Preventing public nuisance
4. Protecting children.

However, because each council interprets these rules differently, the system often becomes overly restrictive, prioritising harm prevention at the expense of supporting cultural venues and diverse event operators.

New Premise Applications and TENs

For permanent venues or major updates, applicants undergo a 28 day review process.

During this window, local authorities and police conduct extensive background checks, including up to five years of police history and local risk assessments. If authorities or residents object to the application, it moves to a formal council hearing to determine whether the licence is granted, modified, or rejected, with any further legal appeals handled through the courts.

Short term events use a streamlined Temporary Event Notice (TEN), which gives authorities a fast tracked 3 working day review window.

A council cannot refuse a TEN unless the police or environmental health department object to it. can object to a TEN, and they can only do so if they believe the event directly threatens one of the four core licensing goals.

These authorities must make an objection within 3 days of receiving the TEN, and can only object if they think the event could (a) lead to crime and disorder, (b) cause a public nuisance, (c) be a threat to public safety or (d) put children at risk of harm. If an objection is made, the licensing committee will hold a hearing no later than 24 hours before the event. At a hearing, the committee will either approve, add conditions or reject the notice.

The diagram below outlines the process followed by the Metropolitan Police when considering premises licence applications, variations and Temporary Event Notices (TENs).

1 Application

New Premises/Full Variation application or TEN received. 28 day (application) 3 working Days (TEN) consultation period.

2 Log Application

Log application on connect (set calendar prompts)

3 Pros & Cons

Study application pros and cons

4 Research

Fully research application LIPs, CRIS, Crimint, Connect, IIP and PND. Remember individuals & premises minimum of 12 months, but could include up to 5 yrs if relevant.

5 PNC

Consideration to PNC check on Applicant/ Designated Premises Supervisor & PLH where an individual

6 Checks

Companies House checks
Open Source checks

7 Partnership Engagement

Partnership Engagement Responsible Authorities meeting/what do our partners think?

8 Local Events

Circulate to Local Events, LIT, NPT/Ward requesting comment

9 Advice

Take advice where appropriate on application whether CLT, DLS or both

10 Application Engagement

Application Engagement
Speak to applicant & arrange a meeting preferably at a Police station. Carry out a site visit

11 Risk Consideration

Consideration to Borough risk (cultural, community and or historic significance) Will SLT require oversight/ involvement
TTCG Pacesetters

12 Advice

Once all checks complete, decision will be made as to whether a representation is necessary. Advice may be sought from Borough Licensing Supervisor, CLT, DLS and or all

13 Mediation

If Police Object hearing held within the 20 working days (10 working days TEN) of objection. Mediation & negotiations can continue

14 Decision Made

Decision made by Licensing Sub-Committee whether to:

- Grant application
- Amend the application
- Refuse

02

Systemic Discrimination in Licensing Practices and Genre Profiling

Systemic Discrimination in Licensing Practices and Genre Profiling

Across the UK, event licensing often operates as a system of racial discrimination rather than a neutral assessment of safety.

Black and South Asian promoters, artists and venue owners face unfair hurdles, excessive security demands and intense scrutiny simply because of their background or music style. Authorities frequently judge events based on racial stereotypes rather than actual safety records, forcing organisers to defend their culture or rely on white colleagues to negotiate basic approvals.



I've definitely been involved in enough events particularly with Black artists or predominantly Black music fans, or crowds where the presence or the hoops that you have to jump through to get your event to even happen felt massively excessive compared to other events.

– B2, Venue Operator, London



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



Genre as Risk Proxy

Black cultural genres such as Drill, Grime, Dancehall and Afrobeats are routinely labelled as “high risk” by authorities. Sensationalist media headlines reinforce this stigma by linking these music styles directly to crime and disorder without factual evidence. As a result, venues face higher insurance costs, police pushback, and cancellation risks simply for booking Black cultural genres.

“Sometimes it's just based on a Google search.”

–Gareth Hughes, Licensing and Planning Barrister



Perceived Informal Policing Pressures

Police frequently use off-the-record pressure to stop events from taking place without leaving an official paper trail. Instead of issuing formal bans, officers deliver vague warnings about gang risks or threaten future licence reviews, scaring venue operators into cancelling shows themselves. This informal intimidation leaves promoters bearing heavy financial losses while allowing authorities to avoid formal legal accountability.

What the police will do is they will scare a venue into that there's going to be gang violence, there's going to be a rival gang, there's going to be an attempt on somebody who's due to be there. They will just they will scare them and they will say verbally, if this event happens and it has an issue, we are going to push to shut your venue down

– Creative 8, DJ/Promoter, London



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



Safety and the Misuse of Crime Statistics

Licensing authorities often misuse broad, area-wide crime statistics to justify closing venues or denying licences, even when a specific venue has a clean safety record. High local crime rates across an entire neighbourhood are wrongly blamed on individual music venues, turning caution into unfair punishment for independent and minority-led businesses.

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



Case Study: The Colour Factory

The Colour Factory case study shows how regulators overreacted, enforcing rules too harshly without proper evidence or real risk, driven more by suspicion than facts.

The Colour Factory case study shows how regulators overreacted, enforcing rules too harshly without proper evidence or real risk, driven more by suspicion than facts. Despite having strong safety measures in place, including ID scanners, a dedicated welfare team, and the presence of a medic at all late night events, the venue faced severe and highly public enforcement (Roman Road LDN, 2023a).

The Colour Factory faced aggressive enforcement after a tragic incident occurred outside the venue after operating hours. Despite full venue cooperation and confirmation that no weapon was ever inside, police suspended its licence and posted warning signs at the entrance, causing over £55,000 in financial losses and staff redundancies for an independent venue that had done nothing wrong.

Required safeguard



Any intelligence used to restrict an event should be relevant, current, recorded, capable of independent review and disclosed sufficiently for the organiser to respond.



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

Tower Hamlets Licensing
Sub-Committee Minutes,
22 Feb 2023



Financial losses and staff redundancies

£55,000

When the Audience Becomes the Risk

For South Asian promoters, the historic barrier was often not an objection to a particular artist or genre, but the assumption that the audience itself represented a threat.

Participants described a period in which venues were reluctant to accept bookings from South Asian promoters because they anticipated disorder between different communities, religious groups or young people travelling from different parts of London. These assumptions were not always connected to current, event specific intelligence. Instead, previous incidents were used to characterise future events expected to attract a broadly similar audience.

One participant recalled a period when Bhangra nights were no longer accepted by a major London venue and stated that it took approximately seven or eight years for the scene to “clear its name. This illustrates how a single incident, or a small number of incidents, can create long-term reputational consequences for an entire cultural scene. The evidence also raises a difficult question about the apparent improvement in the treatment of South Asian events. Participants observed that explicitly South Asian nightlife has become less common as younger South Asian audiences increasingly participate in mainstream nightlife.

“... 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



PROFILED PRIMARILY THROUGH ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THEIR AUDIENCES

The comparison with Black music events is also significant. South Asian events were described as being historically profiled primarily through assumptions about their audiences. Black music events, particularly rap and hip-hop events, continued to attract scrutiny based on the artist, genre and anticipated audience. These different experiences demonstrate how racialised risk operates through distinct but interconnected stereotypes.

“I think Asian audiences have now amalgamated into like the mainstream audience. So you don’t really get that many Asian only nights or whatever, or Asian orientated nights. So there’s just been a shift in in Asian culture. So you know, whereas 20–30, years ago, you wouldn’t see many Asians in mainstream clubs... they frequent the mainstream club, so it’s less of an issue.”

– Creative 2, London

The South Asian experience therefore reinforces a central REMEL finding that licensing and safety decisions must be based on specific, current and transparent evidence not inherited assumptions about ethnicity, geography, religion, genre or audience.

South Asian music was generally permitted but heavily conditioned

Across the cases identified, South Asian music and cultural activity was not routinely refused. Grant View, Takaa Tak, Punjabi Desi Mela and Rangeelu Gujarat were all permitted to proceed. However, approval was commonly accompanied by reduced hours or extensive conditions relating to:

- Security personnel;
- Searches of attendees;
- CCTV;
- Capacity;
- Noise limiters;
- Sound monitoring;
- Dispersal;
- Event-management plans;
- Restrictions on operating and entertainment hours.

Punjabi Desi Mela received particularly intensive security requirements, including searches of attendees, significant security staffing, dog handlers, surrounding-area patrols and noise monitoring.

These conditions may have been connected to the event's size and weaknesses identified in the original event plan. The available evidence does not establish that the requirements were imposed because the event was Punjabi.

However, the scale and cost of the conditions provide a legitimate basis for comparison with similarly sized festivals and music events. A license being granted should not automatically be treated as evidence that an event experienced no licensing barrier. Conditions may increase costs substantially and can determine whether a community promoter is financially able to proceed.



The Central Data Problem

The clearest finding is that South Asian music is largely invisible within licensing records.

The reviewed decisions commonly described activity as:

- * **Live music;**
- * **Recorded music;**
- * **Dance;**
- * **Weddings;**
- * **Banqueting;**
- * **Community events;**
- * **Cultural festivals.**



These categories do not reveal what music was being programmed. As a result, public records cannot show how often particular South Asian genres are:

- * **Included in license applications;**
- * **Subject to police or responsible-authority representations;**
- * **Restricted through conditions;**
- * **Refused;**
- * **Prevented through a Temporary Event Notice counter-notice;**
- * **Affected by a license review or revocation.**

Without consistent genre and cultural-event data, it is impossible to assess the cumulative impact of licensing decisions on South Asian music.

What the Evidence Shows

The identified cases suggest that South Asian music and cultural events were often enabled to proceed through negotiation, modified hours and conditions. However:

- ✦ One Afghan community events venue lost its premises license following repeated breaches;
- ✦ Tamil and South Asian banqueting music was permitted under extensive operating conditions;
- ✦ Punjabi live music was permitted with intensive security and searching requirements;
- ✦ Gujarati cultural music was permitted after representations were resolved and entertainment hours were reduced.



**SOUTH ASIAN MUSIC
AND CULTURAL
ACTIVITY REMAIN
LARGELY INVISIBLE**

However, it does demonstrate that South Asian music and cultural activity remain largely invisible within licensing datasets. This makes it difficult to understand the overall impact of licensing decisions, identify potential disparities or carry out meaningful equality monitoring. South Asian music is also frequently regulated without being properly identified.

Most of the identified music and cultural applications were granted. However, permission was frequently dependent on reduced hours, detailed operating plans, extensive security and significant noise-management requirements.

Licensing authorities should record meaningful information about music and cultural programming, including:

- ✦ Music genres;
- ✦ Cultural event type;
- ✦ Whether the programme is live, recorded or DJ-led;
- ✦ Anticipated audience and capacity;
- ✦ Conditions specifically attached to music;
- ✦ Responsible-authority representations;
- ✦ Final and interim outcomes;
- ✦ The estimated cost of required security and mitigation.

This would allow London to determine whether Bhangra, Bollywood, Tamil music, Punjabi music, garba, dhol, qawwali and other South Asian traditions are experiencing particular barriers.

Black and South Asian Culture Powers the Night Time Economy

Black and South Asian-led music events are major economic drivers for London's night time economy. Across genres like Amapiano, Bhangra and Grime, these events attract large, highly engaged crowds that generate significant bar sales and support the broader nightlife ecosystem.

"You go to other non-Black electronic events, no one's really buying drinks like that. Then you've got this community that comes to dance, to have fun, and they're spending. It's a no brainer. Sometimes, it's just about breaking that barrier."

– Creative 7, Promoter, London



The financial impact is undeniable. Venue operators who initially resist hosting Black or South Asian led events often shift their stance once they witness the commercial returns.

As Executive 8 shared, "We smashed the bar and suddenly it was, 'What dates do you want?'" Another promoter recalled the shift in attitude following an Amapiano show at [Redacted venue] "They were fussing about the logistics, staff were stressed because everyone wanted to be on stage. It was clearly their first big Black event. You could feel the apprehension. But now [Redacted venue] keeps chasing more Amapiano bookings, and it's simple, bar spend."

Despite delivering high financial returns, Black and South Asian promoters consistently face initial hesitation and deep-seated racial biases from venue operators. Promoters often report having to partner with white counterparts just to secure venue bookings or overcome administrative hurdles.

Once these barriers are crossed, the commercial results speak for themselves. Venues that initially resist these genres frequently reverse their stance after experiencing record bar sales:

COMMERCIAL IMPACT

Promoters note that strong bar revenues quickly shift venue attitudes, turning initial skepticism into repeated booking requests.

OVERCOMING FRICTION

Even when venue management exhibits apprehension or over-indexes on logistical concerns during first-time events, the financial returns ultimately prove the viability of the market.

At a time when venues across London face ongoing financial pressure, undervaluing or over-policing Black and South Asian events causes direct harm to the broader night time economy. Full inclusion and equal access for these creative communities are essential for the sector's long-term economic recovery.



03

The Cost of Entry – 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

"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.

While Black music underpins a substantial share of the industry's revenue, Black artists are not proportionately positioned to thrive within its most profitable segment. Live performance is now one of the primary drivers of income and long-term wealth in the music industry, yet limited access to venues and events restricts artists' ability to fully monetise their work and grow their audiences.

This issue is further intensified by the structure of the industry itself. The employment landscape within music and the wider creative sectors is highly dependent on freelance and self-employed work.

Of the UK's £30 billion recorded music market

£24.5 Billion

from Black music

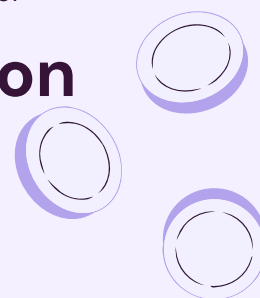
Black music genres of total market

Over 80%



UK's live music sector

£6.1 Billion



According to the House of Lords Library and Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (2025), the "Music, Performing and Visual Arts" sub-sector has one of the highest rates of self-employment in the UK economy at around **two thirds (66%)**, compared with roughly **28%** across the wider creative industries and 14% of all jobs in the UK.² When live events are cancelled or heavily restricted, the financial fallout hits artists, venue owners, freelancers and local businesses alike. Unjustified administrative and security costs actively stop diverse promoters from building sustainable businesses, eroding both long-term career growth and cultural representation in the music industry.

¹ LIVE'S Annual UK Live Music Report (2024) www.livemusic.biz/news ² House of Lords Library: Creative industries: Growth, jobs and productivity (2025) lordslibrary.parliament.uk

Economic Analysis – Calculating the Value of the Black and South Asian Live Music Scene in London

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%



Licensing Bias and Disproportionate Shutdowns

Licensing bias and uneven enforcement continue to be major barriers to fair access in the UK's live music scene for Black and South Asian organisers. In our focus groups, participants described the financial and emotional strain of having events cancelled by licensing authorities or police, often just days or even hours before they were due to take place. These cancellations usually happen without clear reasons or any way to appeal, yet the impact is severe.

Promoters spoke about investing months of unpaid work and personal funds to make their events happen, covering costs such as venue hire...and DJ fees to flyer design, advertising, and logistics. As one promoter explained:

"You can't insure yourself for something like this. You might have worked on it for three months or more, doing all the flyers, all the promo yourself and then it's just gone. No apology, no compensation, just a huge loss."

– Executive 3, Promoter, London



Barriers to Growth and Platform for Rising Talent

"With events shutting down and the night time scene shrinking, I wouldn't say things are getting any better. In fact, it's made it harder for people who might've considered becoming promoters or putting on events. It's like where do you even start now? Where do you go to do those smaller events that help you climb the ladder?"

– A1, Venue Operator, London



Heavy policing and licensing barriers stifle career momentum, preventing grassroots talent discovery and weakening the connection between artists and their fans. When early-stage events are cancelled or restricted, promising Black and South Asian artists lose essential opportunities to showcase their work and build sustainable careers.

"We're losing the opportunity to showcase some of the diverse talent across Black and South Asian music culture because of the attitudes towards policing."

– Creative 6



"The discovery of new talent isn't happening at the same pace, and you can feel that drop in audience engagement and fanbase connection. Without a doubt, we're losing something vital in that process."

– Creative 2



Even after achieving initial success, artists hit an artificial ceiling when trying to scale up. Industry bias and venue hesitation mean many popular Black and South Asian acts are repeatedly restricted to smaller venues, despite drawing enough fan demand to sell out much larger arenas.

Michael Kill from NTIA pointed to a concerning slowdown in the development of emerging talent:

“A lot of these young artists like AJ Tracey, J Hus, and others we’re starting to see a slowdown in the talent pipeline. The discovery of new talent isn’t happening at the same pace, and you can feel that drop in audience engagement and fanbase connection.”

– Michael Kill, NTIA



Use of Intelligence

Police “intelligence” has become a catch all justification for cancelling events, imposing steep extra fees, and damaging the reputations of Black and South Asian promoters. Even when organisers comply fully with all safety checks, background forms, and security protocols, they are frequently met with last-minute, non-negotiable police demands.

“The police were just saying if you’re going to do anything in there, you need to pay for our the police presence and and it was almost like you know it was just easy money for them. £3–4K is a big setback. You feel like you’re obligated to pay them the money and if there’s any little incident that happens outside, but you’ve now paid for police... because they’re going to deal with it and 9 out of 10 they let the situation escalate before even trying to do anything. So you still end up being tarnished with a bad reputation anyway.”

– Executive 7, Promoter, London



These intelligence claims operate without transparency or accountability. Promoters report being forced to pay up to £10,000 for mandatory police presence based on unspecified, last-minute security warnings. In other instances, shows are cancelled just days in advance due to vague licensing concerns linked to entirely unrelated past events, leaving organisers with heavy financial losses and no right of appeal.

Requests for additional information not expected by their white counterparts are common in the experience of our interviewees. Executive 6 described a Drill event where all artist details, including government names and birth dates, were submitted in advance as required. Yet, just ten days before the event, it was cancelled. Initially, police were believed to be responsible. Later, the explanation shifted, Executive 6 was told the venue now required a police presence, or that licensing concerns linked to an unrelated past incident meant the venue no longer felt comfortable hosting. “We’re talking two different genres, two different demographics,” they explained, “but the excuses just kept coming.”

Without clear processes, the label of “police intelligence” acts as an unfair barrier to entry. It creates an unstable environment where following every rule still offers no guarantee an event will be allowed to go ahead, ultimately driving major Black and South Asian-led cultural events out of the city.

04

Weaponising Media Narratives Against Black Events

The regulation of Black cultural life in contemporary Britain extends well beyond physical policing into the realm of media coverage and public discourse.

Headlines, radio soundbites and comment sections routinely frame Black cultural gatherings through a lens of suspicion, pre-policing events through narratives of risk and post-judging them after they occur.

Within this “media-securitisation complex,” Black cultural events are rarely portrayed as ordinary, joyful, or culturally significant. Instead, media outlets frequently present them as inherently risky, exceptional, or out of control.

This section examines how media narratives construct and reinforce racialised definitions of risk, drawing on case studies such as the annual Notting Hill Carnival to illustrate how language itself is used to justify disproportionate scrutiny and control.

Case Study: Notting Hill Carnival and the Spectacle of Surveillance

Each year, Notting Hill Carnival faces an excessive level of policing.

In 2025, over 7,000 police officers were deployed daily alongside dispersal zones, knife arches, and Live Facial Recognition (LFR) technology (Appendix C, pp. 2–3).

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.



Black cultural events are rarely portrayed as ordinary, joyful, or culturally significant.



"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)



"I question a lot of the things that are put down to Notting Hill Carnival... that distinction often disappears."

– Matthew Phillips, CEO, Notting Hill Carnival, Appendix C



This heavy operational footprint is routinely supported by sensationalist media coverage that overstates risks or attributes incidents in surrounding areas directly to the event itself.

Headlines like these, frame the celebration as a threat to public order rather than a cultural institution.

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)



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 ³ 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

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.

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:

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

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.

³ www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/notting-hill-carnival

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

Multi-Year Arrest Breakdown by Event

Offence	Glastonbury (2016–17, 2019)	Creamfields (2016–18)	Reading Festival (2016–18)	Royal Ascot (2016–18)
Assaults / Violence	15	18 (inc. 3 on police)	6	13 (inc. 1 on police)
Weapons & Knives	2	13	3	0
Drug Offences	129	355	52	1
Theft & Robbery	10	8	11 (7 thefts, 4 robberies)	2
Sexual Offences	0	1 (rape)	1	3
Other Serious Crimes	2 (1 burglary, 1 fraud)	0	2 (1 threat to kill, 1 wounding)	8 (6 drunk & disorderly, 2 forgery)
Total Recorded Arrests	158	395	75	27

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.

“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



Media responsibility

Reporting should distinguish incidents connected to an event from those occurring nearby, use crowd-adjusted comparisons and avoid language that criminalises whole communities.

For a detailed account see [Appendix C: Case Study – Notting Hill Carnival](#).

05

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:

"Promoted events will not be held at the premises... where the musical entertainment is provided by DJs not employed by the licence holder, and the event is promoted independently of the venue."

(City of London Corporation, 2022b)



Impact of MC2 on Minoritised Promoters and Genres

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.

"A promoted event is defined as... [one where] the musical entertainment is provided at any time by a disc jockey or disc jockeys, one, or some, of whom are not employees of the premises license holder and/or the event is... promoted to the general public."

(City of London Corporation, 2022a, para. 58)



"This is seen as restrictive, limiting opportunities for promoters and, potentially, discriminatory"

– Promoter, LIVE Roundtable



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.

Two Tier System

The result is a two-tiered system where Black music and culture are over policed, while white cultural spaces are given the benefit of context and discretion.

Industry figures point to stark visual displays of force applied uniquely to Black music gatherings, such as the deployment of armed police at trade events:

"They had police there and they had machine guns outside the door. They weren't doing that for white events or conferences... Then the next year it got cancelled."

– Executive 5, Promoter, London



Several stakeholders report that genres like indie, punk, and electronic music typically associated with white audiences are treated more leniently, even when similar incidents occur. As one promoter noted:

"A fight at an indie night? Police call, 'What happened?' End of story. A fight at a rap night? The whole event gets escalated. There's an added level of risk when you're operating in the Black or Asian music space, a risk that simply doesn't exist when you're putting on what's considered predominantly white music. And that's ridiculously unacceptable in 2025."

– Creative 5, Promoter, London



06

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.



Loss of Central Space and the Push to the Margins

Gentrification has made central locations increasingly hostile to Black led events. Longstanding venues have closed due to pressure from new residents and inflexible planning decisions. Those that remain report steep challenges extending hours or retaining licenses.

"If you look at Brixton now, you can really see the effects. And it's not just there, nighttime economies across London have been hit hard. There's been a clear decline in live music and nightlife. Has licensing played a role in that? Absolutely. The future of London's music scene has been pushed out, disproportionately. That's why places like Manchester and Birmingham are now seen as more attractive. People are saying 'why would I try to open a live music venue in London, if I know the police are just going to come down hard on me? Why would I invest or promote here anymore?'"

– C5, Licensing Officer, London



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:

• Higher Rejection Rates:

Venues and organisers offering Black and South Asian live music, late-night events, or community spaces are far more likely to have their licences turned down or renewed with heavy restrictions.

• Capped Hours and Profits:

Councils frequently restrict closing times and impose strict operating rules, making it difficult for independent venues to make enough money to stay open.

• Unfair Rules:

Forcing organisers to prove they won't cause trouble before they even start heavily favors large, established corporate venues while shutting out grassroots, multicultural events.

"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



In our interviews a Licensing Officer reflected on how these zones became a proxy tool for discouraging night time economy:

"There are lots of businesses in one area, and there's quite a lot of crime in that area. So they were trying to reduce the number of licensed premises within that area. So they would say, right, we're not giving out any more licensed premises licenses because we've got X amount of crime and disorder."

– C5, Licensing Officer, London



These policy decisions contribute to a wider displacement of culture. Neighbourhoods such as Brixton, once cultural hubs, have become sites of extraction where culture is promoted for its vibrancy but access is denied in practice.

"People move to Brixton for the music, but then complain and get the events shut down"

– Creative 2, Promoter, London



These zones heavily control which cultural events are allowed, especially in changing neighbourhoods where the tastes of newer, wealthier residents dictate local council decisions.

Ultimately, CIZs use the cover of “public safety and order” to shut out Black and South Asian cultural spaces.

Burden of proof



Authorities should be required to demonstrate why restrictions remain necessary. Communities should not carry a collective and indefinite burden to prove that they are safe.



**AUTHORITIES SHOULD
BE REQUIRED TO
DEMONSTRATE WHY
RESTRICTIONS REMAIN
NECESSARY.**



07

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.

“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



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



“It must have been... early 2000s. It was a promoters course a level two award for music promoters.”

– Creative 5, Promoter, London



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, London



A fair system supports both sides



Promoters need accessible training, advice and wellbeing support. Licensing and police teams need supervision, cultural awareness and the capability to separate evidence based risk from inherited assumptions.



08

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



Promoters detailed the mental toll of carrying out all aspects of event planning alone under uncertain licensing conditions:

“My financial loss was probably about £3,000... but yeah, I take it as it is... I’m trying to keep my relationships tight with everyone else... you’ve lost the booking. Everyone thought you was doing this... Time was a key factor in losing stuff, not doing other things, by creating flyers, doing all the promotion yourself. So yeah, financially, mentally... draining.”

— Executive 3, Promoter, London



The cumulative result is exhaustion, financial instability, and a perception that the system is stacked against them. The mental health implications of over-policing, systemic bias, and economic loss are significant, particularly where there is no accountability or support system.

“Operators too often find the system is designed to stop them rather than enable a celebration of Black/Brown culture.”

— Executive 11, Promoter, London



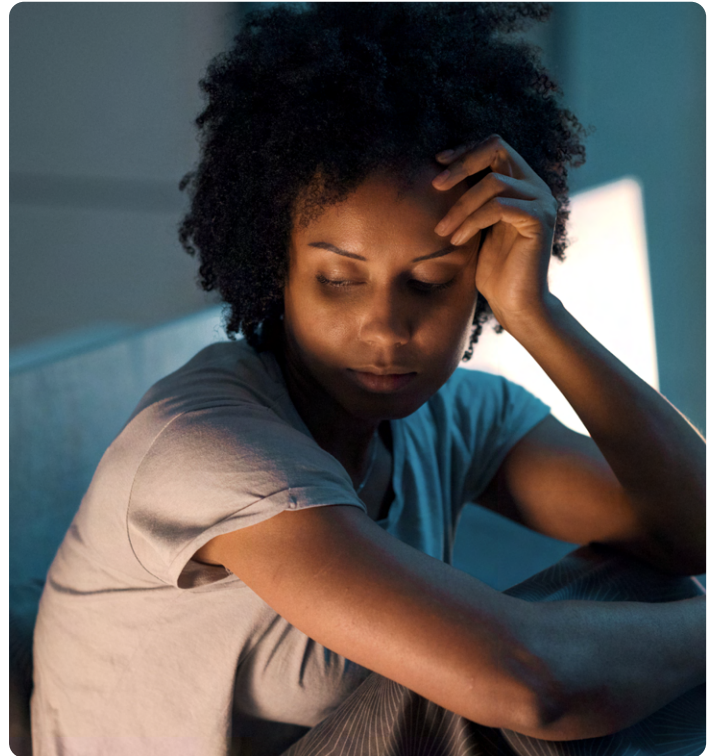
Reputational Damage and Workforce Impacts

The lack of formal support networks, grievance procedures, and consistent enforcement practices leaves promoters professionally vulnerable.

Participants described how the informal and discretionary nature of licensing not only disrupts events but also damages reputations in ways that extend far beyond individual shows.

“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



“We’ve all worked for promoters who’ve been damaged... When it’s not their fault.”

— Executive 6, Tour Manager, London



This environment creates instability and discourages continued participation in the industry, particularly for Black and South Asian promoters who are disproportionately affected. The lack of transparency in enforcement makes reputations especially vulnerable to rumour, assumption, or miscommunication.

Inconsistency in licensing enforcement does not just cancel individual events—it threatens jobs, incomes, and long-term careers across the live music sector.

These findings mirror the Casey Review (2023),⁴ which declared the Metropolitan Police institutionally racist. Rather than assessing actual risk, licensing decisions are frequently shaped by racialised bias and enforced through unmonitored discretionary powers. Allowing an institution with documented structural racism to control event licensing directly amplifies discriminatory outcomes for Black and South Asian communities.

⁴ Baroness Casey Review March 2023 – www.met.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media

09

Licensing Limitations, Transparency and Accountability

A major issue highlighted by our research is the complete lack of transparency in the licensing system.

Promoters described navigating a confusing process with no guidance, receiving vague, inconsistent reasons for event refusals, and having nowhere to turn for help.

Crucially, licensing officers themselves admitted the system is broken. Standards vary wildly from council to council and police force to police force, with no unified rules in place.

This creates an unfair lottery where decisions rely on individual bias rather than clear criteria. Without standard rules or a clear appeal process, promoters are left unable to challenge unfair decisions or grow their businesses.



Ethnicity and TEN Intervention Outcomes

A comparison of London boroughs reveals a striking link between local demographic diversity and licensing interventions.

When mapping boroughs by their minoritised ethnic populations ranging from Richmond upon Thames (20%) at the lowest end to Newham (69%) at the highest clear patterns emerge:

- **Applicant Withdrawals (Purple Trend):**

Displays a weak negative correlation. In more diverse boroughs, a slightly lower proportion of TEN applications end in voluntary withdrawal or renewal.

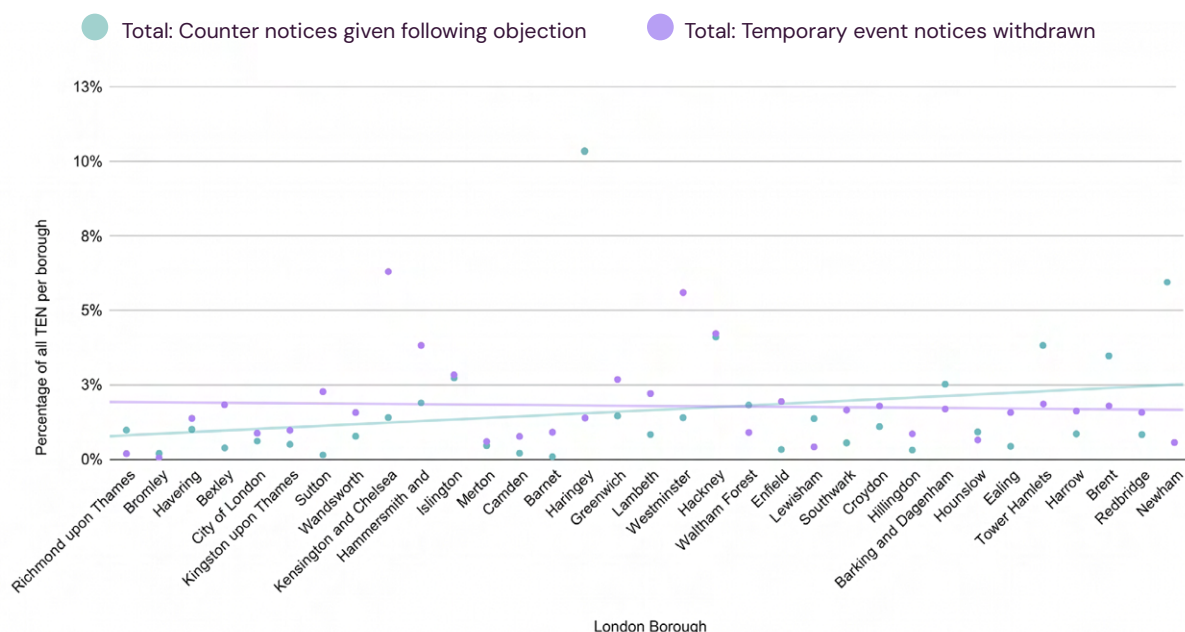
- **Official Counter Notices (Blue Trend):**

Displays a strong positive correlation. Counter notices which can only be issued by the police or Environmental Health when an event is deemed to breach licensing objectives rise directly alongside a borough's ethnic diversity.

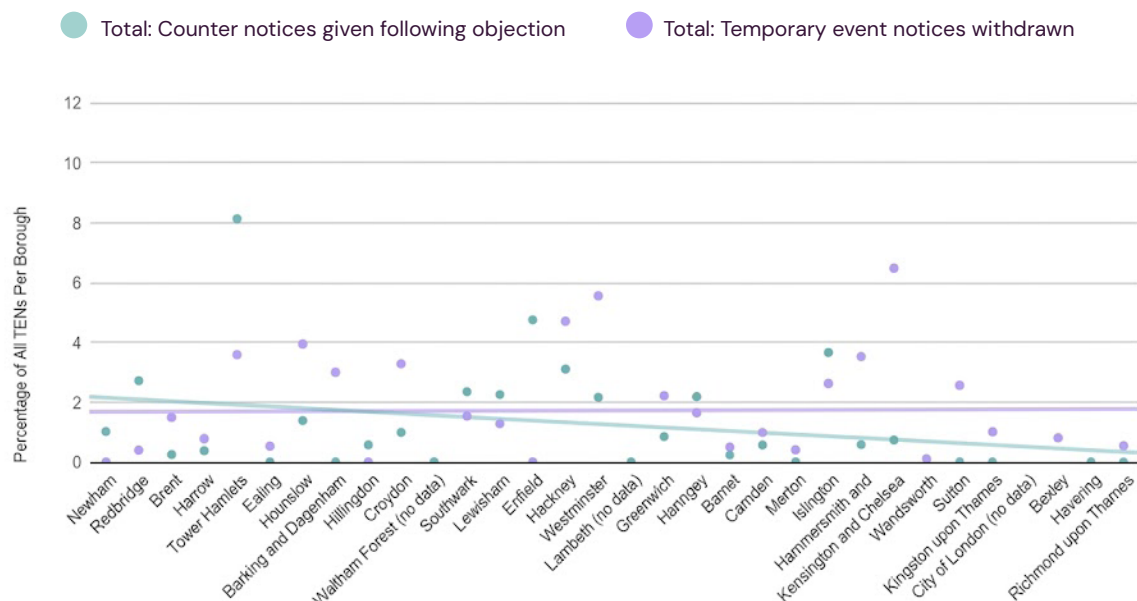
In short, the data demonstrates a clear general trend: the more diverse a London borough is, the more likely the authorities are to issue a counter notice to block an event.



Correlation between Minority Ethnic Population and the Percentage of TEN Notices either withdrawn or given a counter notice



Correlation between Ethnically Diverse Population and the Percentage of TEN notice with withdrawn or given a Counter Notice 2024



To read more about the licensing process and data captured please refer to Appendix G: Evidence Review: Alcohol and Late Night Refreshment Licensing and Enforcement

A review of licence outcomes across London boroughs shows uneven enforcement in areas with high ethnic minority populations, particularly affecting venues associated with Black and Asian ownership are referenced in Appendix A.

Inconsistencies within Police and Licensing

“MET will have one way of doing things and the licensing might have another way of doing things and the City of London will have another way of doing things and because of how they all operate they don’t actually all properly engage with each other.”

– C5, Licensing Officer, London



Although the statutory licensing framework is the same across the country, practices vary greatly between police forces and local authorities. This lack of consistency was a frequent concern raised by both industry participants and enforcement representatives. For example, the Metropolitan Police and City of London Police appear to operate under different approaches. Without a shared framework, decisions often rely on subjective interpretation rather than consistent standards that consider both safety and cultural value.

Bennett-Amparbeng continues, noting the impact of short notice decisions in situations where more notice could have resulted in conditions being met.

“The bare minimum I would want to see is... if local authorities... have an issue with you that is dealt with in a timely manner. So at least... you could turn around, you could change a date, you could manoeuvre. But... nothing has ever been transparent and I don’t think that’s coming anytime soon.”



Ultimately, what emerges is a system marked by confusion and a lack of shared accountability. Without a clear, transparent, and culturally informed framework, decisions are left to discretion and influenced by unspoken norms.



Inconsistencies between agencies

“They’re doing it a lot with festivals and they’re doing it with nightclubs. If they can’t get you on the violence aspect, then they try to take another angle which could be underage, it could be drugs, it could be the parking, it could be environmental health, complaining about food outside, noise abatement. So, they tried to take a multi-pronged approach where they sort of hassle people and like we’ve had instances of promoters being hassled based on issues to do with noise but also these issues to do with parking and that’s been an excuse to take away someone’s license or oppose the license.”

– Executive 10, Promoter, London



While many organisers enter the licensing process expecting to deal primarily with licensing authorities or the police, they often find themselves interacting with other departments such as environmental health, fire safety, building control and highways. This multi-agency involvement leaves many feeling lost, juggling last-minute requests, overlapping demands, and a growing list of expenses. Participants describe a process of development and/or escalation – where an interaction with one department leads to another becoming involved.

Noise is one of the most common objections raised. Public nuisance has become a vague, catch-all concern that can be hard to contest, especially when it’s not always clear what the expectations are in the first place.

A process that should be clear under the Licensing Act can therefore become a test of endurance. Organisers trying to deliver safe and well-managed events are left facing uncertainty about whether their events can proceed.

Inconsistencies between Boroughs

Given the inconsistencies between local authorities, police and environmental health outlined in the previous section, it is no surprise that London boroughs also operate in the same level of confusion.

Whether it was dealing with councils, police, or venue licensing, many contributors spoke about unpredictable and unclear processes that seemed to shift depending on where an event was taking place.

Local authority attitudes can be shaped by borough boundaries, rather than community needs. Venue Owner D4 recalled a conversation with a police superintendent:

“[He] said, ‘Well as long as it’s happening in Islington and it’s not happening in Hackney that’s all right by me.’”

That lack of collaboration and cohesion can have serious consequences. A promoter Creative 4 shared an experience where an under-18s concert in Wandsworth was nearly shut down, even though every precaution had been taken.

“We did all the due diligence checks... Salvation Army, standby medics... qualified adults who can deal with underage people... and they tried to cancel the event up until nearly an hour before.”

Camden Borough, in particular, was flagged by several contributors as difficult to navigate.

Agent, Executive 4 said

“Camden seems to have some sort of issue with Grime or Bashment genres... their licensing seems to be a lot more strict.”

Executive 6 stated “it’s very it’s trying to get an understanding as to what are Camden’s actual rules.”

These inconsistencies make it very difficult for Live event organisers and promoters to plan events. Executive 9 suggested a way forward:

“So what we really need to do is get to a point where the data parameters are consistent. So there is no messing around. There isn’t some play on a perspective that’s going to work towards your advantage. What we need is data provision that gives an unequivocal position that no one can argue...”

– Executive 9, Event/Stage Manager London



Cost to Appeals

For many Black and South Asian promoters and venue owners, the financial hurdle to challenge licensing decisions is insurmountable.

“What I’ve seen is that Black-owned and South Asian-owned businesses are especially underserved, not just in holding licenses, but in even being able to get them in the first place. A lot of it comes down to socioeconomic background. They don’t have £50,000 to £70,000 to spend on a barrister who can guide them through the red tape”

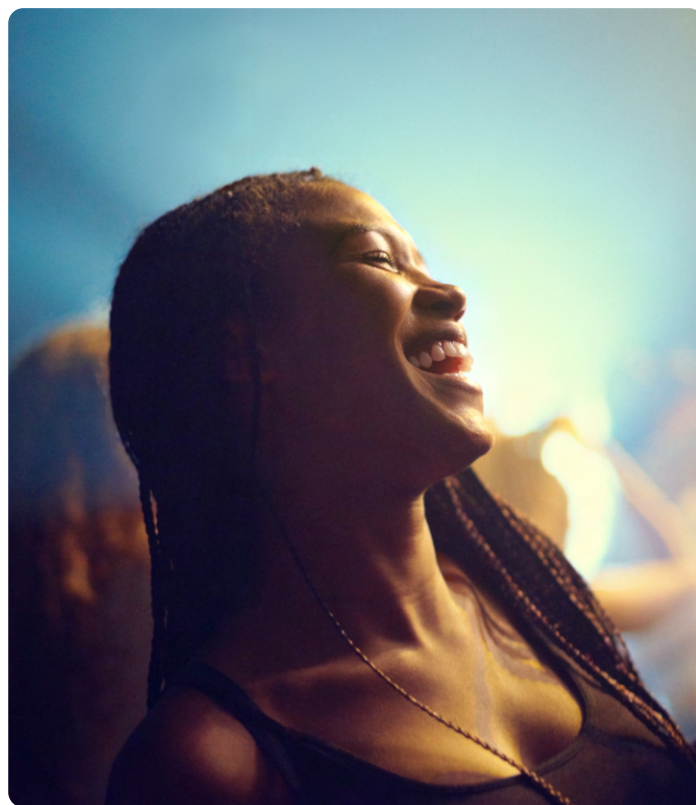
– Executive 3.



Even when operators mount a successful appeal, the financial fallout is often devastating:

“We’ve lost about £40,000 in revenue. We also spent about £20,000 in solicitor fees just to go to a sub-licensing committee.”

– D4, Venue Operator



D4 Venue Operator lost revenue

£40,000 lost

D4 Venue Operator solicitor fees

£20,000 fee

The Systemic Cost

The appeals system favours large corporations over independent and grassroots operators. An estimated 412 licensing reviews in 2024 cost venues approximately £40,000 each in legal fees, totaling £16.4 million (Licensing Taskforce Report).⁵

Most of these disputes could be resolved far earlier through structured mediation. To protect minority cultural spaces, the appeals process must be simplified and made affordable, shifting from hostile legal battles to constructive dialogue.

Estimated number of licensing reviews 2024

412

Estimated total collective cost spent by venues on legal fees for licensing reviews in 2024.

£16.4 million

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



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.

While better cultural training is vital, real change requires structural reform: a completely independent team that stands apart from police and council interests, bringing fairness, openness, and trust back to event licensing.

⁵ Licensing policy sprint: joint industry and HM government taskforce report www.gov.uk/government/publications

Government Proposal for Change: The National Licensing Policy Framework

The government's endorsement of a National Licensing Policy Framework ⁶ could be a major step forward. Designed to cut red tape and boost the night-time economy, it also addresses the deep-rooted barriers facing Black and South Asian promoters.

Key elements of the proposed framework include:

Stricter Rules for Objections:

Authorities must prove objections are 'necessary and proportionate' using clear evidence, preventing vague or biased claims from shutting down events.

Valuing Culture and Community:

Licensing boards will be asked to consider an event's social and cultural value alongside standard safety objectives.

Protecting Established Venues:

Applying the 'Agent of Change' principle will stop new property developments from forcing long-standing local venues to close.

Simpler, Standardised Processes:

Streamlining TEN applications and removing biased genre profiling will make it easier for independent operators to put on events.



The Need for Enforcement

For this framework to work, it cannot be optional. Without clear legal backing and an independent oversight body (such as a licensing ombudsman) to handle complaints and enforce consistency, local councils and police may simply revert to old habits.

Properly enforced, this national framework offers a real chance to build a fairer, more transparent licensing system for everyone.



⁶ www.gov.uk/government/publications/licensing-taskforce-report

END MATTER

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.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

National law, policy and guidance

1 **Commission a full independent review**

Examine racial fairness, police influence, borough consistency and the cumulative impact of licensing practice, with baseline data and a published action plan.

2 **Establish a National Licensing Policy Framework**

Create a binding national standard for risk, evidence, conditions, timeliness and local exceptions, balancing safety with equality, culture and economic growth.

3 **Embed equality and human rights in licensing law**

Make the Public Sector Equality Duty and human rights principles explicit within licensing decisions; prohibit racial and genre profiling; require recorded consideration of less restrictive options.

4 **Integrate cultural justice into Section 182 Guidance**

Require decision-makers to recognise cultural, social, employment and economic value alongside legitimate safety concerns.

Evidence, data and procedural fairness

5 **Set transparent evidence standards**

Replace vague “high-risk” labels with specific, current and verifiable concerns. Evidence should be relevant, recorded and open to fair challenge, with appropriate protection for sensitive intelligence.

6 **Publish licensing data and monitor disparities**

Introduce a common annual dataset covering applications, objections, conditions, refusals, reviews, withdrawals, counter notices and appeals, including voluntary anonymised demographic and genre information.

7 **Guarantee a right to respond, mediation and affordable appeal**

Require early engagement, give applicants a clear opportunity to answer concerns and create an independent, accessible route to challenge disproportionate decisions.

8 **Reform Temporary Event Notices**

Extend the effective planning window, require clear evidence for objections and permit proportionate conditions where they can safely resolve a concern.

End exclusionary practice and protect culture

9 Remove blanket exclusionary clauses

Repeal conditions such as Model Condition 2 where they prohibit promoted events without event-specific evidence. Restrictions should target demonstrated risk, not external promotion, genre or audience.

10 Reform Cumulative Impact Zones

Review CIZ boundaries, evidence and outcomes; include cultural and equality impact; and ensure responsible new operators can rebut the presumption against additional licenses.

11 Require Cultural Impact Assessments

Assess the likely effect of major licensing decisions, reviews and restrictions on cultural heritage, access, representation, jobs, venues and the talent pipeline.

12 Align licensing with culture, planning and economic development

Create shared objectives and accountability across licensing, planning, culture, regeneration and economic teams; use Agent of Change protections for established venues.

Accountability, oversight and affordability

13 Create independent oversight mechanisms

Establish a Licensing Equality Panel or ombudsman with legal, licensing, equality and cultural expertise to audit decisions, investigate systemic discrimination and track corrective action.

14 Reform cost accountability and police charging

Allow recovery of reasonable legal and operational costs where objections are overturned; publish capped, tiered or subsidised police cost frameworks for compliant cultural events.

15 Expand access to capital and relief funding

Create micro-grants, targeted loans and a Cultural Events Relief Fund for licensing, security, venue development and late-night infrastructure, with explicit access for historically excluded entrepreneurs.

Workforce and sector capacity

16 Retain and prioritise cultural liaison roles

Embed trained liaison officers within licensing and policing teams to mediate early, test assumptions, co-design safety plans and build sustained relationships with promoters and communities.

17 Professionalise and support promoters

Co-design affordable accreditation, toolkits, continuing professional development and mentoring in licensing, safeguarding, security, equality, finance and event management.

18 Reform representation in decision-making

Include cultural experts, equality officers and community knowledge within panels and advisory structures; require assessed cultural competence training.

19 Embed workforce and mental-health safeguards

Provide annual role-specific anti-racism, bias and cultural competence training alongside supervision, reflective practice and wellbeing support for officers, councillors and licensing staff.

2026 SUMMARY REPORT

ReedSmith



**BLACK
LIVES IN
MUSIC**