

# **Police chief defends arrests during Operation Unicorn**

**Edinburgh's police chief has defended "heavy handed" arrests of protesters during the days leading up to Her Majesty the Queen's funeral, after a councillor said officers had "lost the trust" of large numbers of the community.**

Reports of protesters being detained on the capital's streets emerged during Operation Unicorn in September, when the capital hosted several large-scale ceremonies attended by the Royal Family following the monarch's death at Balmoral.

The police's professional standards department is investigating claims that a young woman was "followed home" by officers after she attended an anti-monarchy rally and held up a blank piece of paper.

Other incidents that sparked concern included a 22 year-old man being charged with breach of the peace after heckling Prince Andrew as he walked past on the Canongate and a female protester being moved away by officers after booing at the King's proclamation.



The Lord Lyon reads out the proclamation of King Charles III as king 11 September 2022 Photo: © 2022, Martin P. McAdam [www.martinmcadam.com](http://www.martinmcadam.com)

Labour MSP Katy Clark said in Holyrood that everyone should be alarmed at the “heavy handed use of breach of the peace powers to quell dissent by protesters”.

In a statement issued since Police Scotland’s Chief Constable, Sir Iain Livingstone, said none of the arrests made were for protesting but “low-level disorder, violence, abusive and threatening behaviour, and the illegal use of drones”.

Chief Superintendent Sean Scott, commander for the force’s Edinburgh Division, also defended the arrests this week, telling councillors they were “justified” and “not just spurious actions by officers”.

At the Policy and Sustainability Committee on Tuesday, council leader Cammy Day thanked officers for their work during Operation Unicorn and asked the police chief to address the concerns raised.

Supt Scott said: “There was one or two observations and comments made following some of the arrests during Her Majesty the Queen’s funeral – legitimate questions to be asked – but there is a difference between protest and abuse and therefore operational decisions were made on the day to make those arrests – which were justified.

“Obviously, then the prosecution and any criminal justice outcome is up to the fiscal and courts to decide but the Chief Constable has been very clear and the gold commander for operation unicorn was very clear about that distinction between the right to protest and the right not to be abused.”



Cllr Alex Staniforth, who has been critical of some of the policing during events held in the city to mark the Queen’s death, said people with “republican sympathies” have seen the response as “very one-sided”.

“We saw a young woman followed home by two police officers, both men, smirking as they did so, for holding a blank piece of paper,” said Cllr Staniforth.

“We didn’t see that for anyone holding a union flag. So frankly, you have lost the trust of the section of the community – which is a large section in Scotland – that does have republican sympathies. I want to know what you are doing to regain that trust?”

In response Supt Scott said the tactics were used to ensure public safety and “to respect the dignity of the occasion”.

He added: “All the planning and tactical deployments were underpinned by human rights and all the human rights articles that we need to adhere to.

“The tactics used to manage the crowd and to ensure the safe progression of the ceremonies and that dignity were appropriate, they’d been discussed at a strategic level by the gold commander.

“The incident you refer to, the tactics used to manage individuals are based on intelligence, they are based on actions at the time so the decision by the silver commander and gold commander to deploy that tactic is a legitimate tactic.

“All I can do to reassure you is there were not just spurious actions by officers, they were based on a legitimate need to ensure the safety of individuals in that crowd to manage the dignity of the ceremony.

“Whilst on the face of it it may appear distasteful to you and others, there was a legitimate need to do so and what I would say is the complaint about that particular incident has been referred to our professional standards department.”

By Donald Turvill

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*news sector, and used by qualifying partners. Local Democracy Reporters cover top-tier local authorities and other public service organisations.*



The coffin of HM The Queen travels from the Palace of Holyroodhouse to St Giles Cathedral, 12th September 2022 © 2022 J.L. Preece