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Confirmation bias influenced West Midlands Police's recommendation to ban Maccabi Tel Aviv fans

Confirmation bias influenced the way West Midlands Police reached its recommendation to reduce ticket allocation for away fans to zero, the police inspectorate has said.

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary, Sir Andy Cooke, has provided his [preliminary assessment of the handling and communication of information and intelligence gathered by West Midlands Police](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspection-of-police-forces-contributions-to-safety-advisory-groups-west-midlands-police)  (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspection-of-police-forces-contributions-to-safety-advisory-groups-west-midlands-police>) in advance of the Aston Villa v Maccabi Tel Aviv fixture on 6 November 2025. This follows an urgent commission by the Home Secretary.

The preliminary review found that:

- the decision to restrict ticket allocation to zero was based on oral briefings to the safety advisory group on 7 and 16 October. Apart from one discrepancy, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is satisfied that the oral briefings were not materially inaccurate;
- however, a letter and report that the force provided to the safety advisory group on 10 and 24 October did contain inaccurate statements;
- this included exaggerated statements about the behaviour of Maccabi Tel Aviv fans at the November 2024 Ajax v Maccabi Tel Aviv fixture in Amsterdam;
- these inaccuracies would have been in the minds of West Midlands Police commanders when they reached and communicated their preferred option; and
- this has led His Majesty's Chief Inspector to conclude that confirmation bias influenced the way the force reached and communicated its recommendation to restrict ticket allocation for away fans to zero.

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary, Sir Andy Cooke, said:

"My preliminary review found that confirmation bias influenced the way West Midlands Police reached and communicated its recommendation to reduce the ticket allocation for away fans to zero.

"I have several other concerns including, but not limited to, inaccurate information in written communication, a failure to engage with the local Jewish community early enough and poor record keeping and retention of important information.

"This assessment forms part of our ongoing, wider inspection of police forces' contributions to safety advisory groups."

Other concerns raised in the review include:

- the force failed to engage with representatives of the local Jewish community early enough;
- in its communications, West Midlands Police placed too much emphasis on the potential and previous behaviour of Maccabi Tel Aviv fans and didn't reflect wider concerns around public disorder and protest;
- the force didn't set up an effective command structure during the planning phase, or declare a critical incident, even after public concerns mounted; and
- the force demonstrated poor record keeping and retention of important information.

Notes

- **Confirmation bias** is a tendency to interpret new information as confirmation of one's existing beliefs or theories. In policing, this can mean seeking out evidence that supports a predisposed view.
- The one discrepancy referenced in oral briefings relates to the number of flags burned in Amsterdam.
- The preliminary assessment provided to the Home Secretary on 14 Jan 2026 forms part of [HMICFRS' wider inspection of police forces' contributions to safety advisory groups](#) ([/publications/terms-of-reference-inspection-of-police-forces-contributions-to-safety-advisory-groups/](#)) that will conclude during the early part of 2026 and will be published later this year.
- A considerable amount of new information continues to emerge, including some over the Christmas period. It is highly probable that West Midlands Police and other bodies will continue to provide information that will be relevant to the wider HMICFRS inspection.
- For further information, the HMICFRS Press Office can be contacted at 0300 071 6781 or [✉ HMICPressOffice@hmicfrs.gov.uk](mailto:HMICPressOffice@hmicfrs.gov.uk) (<mailto:HMICPressOffice@hmicfrs.gov.uk>)

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