

West Midlands

🕒 This article is more than **3 months old**

Government's response to Maccabi Tel Aviv fan ban was 'clumsy', say MPs

Select committee says 'late' decision to overturn exclusion of fans 'did little more than inflame tensions'



Support the Guardian



Continue →

Maybe later

The government's response to West Midlands police's ban on [Maccabi Tel Aviv](#) fans was "clumsy", "late" and "did little more than inflame tensions", a group of MPs has found.

A report by the home affairs select committee, published on Sunday, analysed the original decision to ban away fans from a Europa League fixture with [Aston Villa](#) in November, as well as the advice that led to it.

The report concluded [West Midlands](#) police (WMP) relied on "inaccurate information" and "failed to do even basic due diligence" on its intelligence.

The committee also criticised the Home Office, which it said "failed to recognise the significance of the decision and escalate properly", despite being informed more than a week before the ban was announced that it was likely.

"By intervening only after the decision to ban away fans was taken, the government increased tension around the fixture but was ineffectual in enabling Maccabi Tel Aviv fans to attend the fixture, which reflects unfavourably on the culture of the Home Office," the report stated.

The ban on the Israeli club's fans, which was made by the council-led safety advisory group (SAG), caused widespread outrage at the time. Keir Starmer said it was "wrong" and suggested it amounted to antisemitism.

The chair of the committee, Dame Karen Bradley, said the profile of this fixture "should have been obvious" to the government before the ban was announced.

"Government intervention was clumsy and came too late, and we reject the government's argument that it could only intervene once the decision was taken," the Conservative MP said. "Their intervention when it came did little more than inflame tensions."

The committee also heavily criticised WMP for being "overly reliant on inaccurate and unverified information about the Maccabi Tel Aviv fans". In

Support the Guardian



Continue →

Maybe later

The actions by the police had caused “serious damage to trust ... particularly among the local Jewish community, as well as to public confidence”, the inquiry found.

An interim report by Sir Andy Cooke, His Majesty’s Chief Inspector of the Constabulary, was published in January and found police had been subject to a “confirmation bias” in their assessments.

The force’s chief constable, Craig Guildford, was forced to step down and retire with immediate effect after the report’s publication and the home secretary’s withdrawal of confidence. Two investigations by the police watchdog are still under way into the force and Guildford over potential misconduct.

“There appears to have been a ‘that’ll do’ attitude,” Bradley said. “Banning Maccabi Tel Aviv fans would make policing the match much easier. To justify this step, information that showed the Maccabi fans to be a high risk was trusted without proper scrutiny.

“While Maccabi Tel Aviv fans were falsely characterised as unusually violent, the threat posed by local communities was downplayed and too little care was given to the impact on the Jewish community in Birmingham.”

The committee found no evidence that antisemitism was a motivating factor, but clarified the failure to consult the community had “damaged relations”. It also said it found no evidence of a “conspiracy” but it “cannot rule out the suggestion that political pressure played a part in the decision”.

In particular, it cites the attendance of councillors with a “stated political aim” that had a “disproportionate opportunity to influence safety advisory group decision-making in a deeply divisive political issue”.

The committee made several recommendations to the government and police force, including banning elected politicians from sitting on SAGs, to rebuild trust with the Jewish community.

A WMP spokesperson said: “We remain fully committed to learning from

Support the Guardian



Continue →

Maybe later

chief constable to make that clear. I am encouraged by the initial steps he is taking to rebuild trust and confidence.”

The Home Office has been contacted for comment.

Congratulations on being one of our top readers globally - you've read 52 articles in the last year

Article count on

... we have a small favour to ask. Tens of millions have placed their trust in the Guardian's fearless journalism since we started publishing more than 200 years ago, turning to us in moments of crisis, uncertainty, solidarity and hope. More than 1.5 million supporters, from 180 countries, now power us financially - keeping us open to all, and fiercely independent. [Will you make a difference and support us too?](#)

Unlike many others, the Guardian has no shareholders and no billionaire owner. Just the determination and passion to deliver high-impact global reporting, always free from commercial or political influence. Reporting like this is vital for democracy, for fairness and to demand better from the powerful.

And we provide all this for free, for everyone to read. We do this because we believe in information equality. Greater numbers of people can keep track of the global events shaping our world, understand their impact on people and communities, and become inspired to take meaningful action. Millions can benefit from open access to quality, truthful news, regardless of their ability to pay for it.

Whether you give a little or a lot, your funding will power our reporting for the years to come.

If you can, please support us on a monthly basis. It takes less than a minute to set up, and you can rest assured that you're making a big impact every single month in support of open, independent journalism. Thank you.

Support £4/monthly

Support the Guardian



Continue →

Maybe later

Recommended

Support £12/monthly

Unlock **All-access digital** benefits:

- ✔ Far fewer asks for support
- ✔ Ad-free reading
- ✔ Unlimited access to the Guardian app
- ✔ Exclusive newsletter for supporters
- ✔ Unlimited access to the Feast App

Support with another amount

Continue →

Remind me in July



Support the Guardian



Continue →

Maybe later

Most viewed

Support the Guardian



Continue →

Maybe later