REVIEW OF THE SAFETY ADVISORY GROUP PROCESS IN RELATION TO THE UK IJTIMAH EVENT HELD AT SHRUBLAND HALL ON 10TH - 12TH JULY 2026

1. Review Team

1.1. V Johnston, Health and Safety Manager/Safety Advisory Group (SAG) Chair, East Suffolk Council and chair of the national Regulating Events Safety Partnership.

1.2. Peter Langford, Emergency Planning Manager, Suffolk Joint Emergency Planning Unit (JEPU).

2. Objective

2.1. At the request of the Operation Pinehaven Recovery Group Chair, review the SAG process associated with the UK Ijtimah, held at Shrubland Hall, Barham, Ipswich IP6 0PW on 10th – 12th July 2026.

3. Scope

3.1. Did the Safety Advisory Group (SAG) follow its own Terms of Reference in relation to the event?

3.2. Did the SAG do what a SAG is expected to do in the context of national guidance on SAGs?

3.3. Did the representatives of the relevant SAG agencies attend the meetings and/or provide sufficient support if absent from the meeting?

3.4. Was there sufficient challenge within the SAG process?

3.5. Did the SAG act on any matters that were beyond the remit of SAG?

4. Sources of information

4.1. Recording of SAG meeting, via Teams, on 12th May 2026.

4.2. Documents supplied by the event organisers stored on K Hub.

4.3. BMS SAG chair supplied emails.

4.4. 1:1 meetings with SAG members.

4.5. Emails from SAG members/agencies.

4.6. The UK Good Practice Guide to Working in Safety Advisory Groups published by the Emergency Planning College in 2015 and revised in 2019.

5. Safety Advisory Groups

5.1. The concept of Safety Advisory Groups (SAGs) was proposed by Lord Justice Taylor following major incidents, particularly in relation to sports grounds. A SAG consists of representatives of Local Authorities (LAs), emergency services and other partner agencies as appropriate who have sufficient experience and/or knowledge to enable them to consider issues in relation to public safety at events.

5.2. SAGs are convened to allow the relevant regulatory agencies to gain intelligence prior to any event to allow for emergency planning and advise each other on any areas of concern. The group will also advise the event organiser of ways in which they can manage the event safely although the group as a whole does not have statutory powers and any regulation of the event will be done using primary legislation.

5.3. The SAG cannot make any decisions on behalf of a LA or partner agency.

5.4. The Local Government (Review of Decisions) Act 2015 will apply if the LA has grounds through a decision it is making to stop an event or imposes restrictions on an event on health and safety grounds, with the event organisers receiving written reasons for any decision, and having the right to request a review and refer to the Ombudsman if they believe the decision is unfair. However individual members of SAG may have statutory duties/powers in their own right in relation to various aspects of any event and can exercise those powers as and when necessary and appropriate which could potentially restrict or require changes to an event.

6. The UK Ijtimah event

6.1. The UK Ijtimah event was held at Shrubland Hall on 10th - 12th July 2026.

6.2. The UK Ijtimah event was promoted by the organisers as a peaceful festival for prayer, community celebration, and spiritual renewal.

6.3. The UK Ijtimah was last held in 2018 although other similar Ijtimah events are held across the UK each year.

6.4. The UK Ijtimah event was brought to the attention of the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Council's (BMS) SAG when it attracted attention on social media following a false report that attendance at the event might reach 100K people in March 2026 but no firm event details or organisers contacts were available at the time.

6.5. The SAG process started when the organisers of the UK Ijtimah were invited to attend an online SAG meeting on 12th May 2026.

6.6. Two SAG meetings were held via Teams and one multiagency site meeting was at Shrubland Hall. Several agencies held their own site meetings and exchanged emails, some of which were copied to the SAG chair.

6.7. The event was curtailed on the evening of the 11th July after the police determined there was a credible external terrorist threat.

7. Did the SAG follow its own Terms of Reference (ToR) in relation to the event?

7.1. The BMS SAG followed the spirit of the BMS ToR in that it was supportive rather than a meeting with objective challenge.

7.2. The SAG chair was unaware of the details of the BMS SAG's ToR and although the ToR were generally adhered to for the initial SAG meeting the record keeping could have been improved.

7.3. Areas of deviation from the ToR were:

7.3.1. An agenda was not posted on Khub at least 3 days in advance of the meeting.

7.3.2. There was no formal agenda for the meeting.

7.3.3. Administration for the meeting falls to the vice-chair of the SAG as there is no dedicated administrative support for the SAG.

7.3.4. The ToR have not been reviewed within two years of that version being published.

7.4. The BMS SAG ToR has a paragraph that states "*Babergh Mid Suffolk District Council SAG strongly recommends that an event organiser engages with residents or the communities affected by the particular event, however, we suggest that in*

general this should take place outside of the SAG." In relation to the UK Ijtimah SAG process there was mention in the SAG meeting on 12th May that the organisers wished to work with the communities, but it was not made clear at that time or in the notes that this would not be facilitated by the SAG. However the SAG chair provided contact details for both the BMS ward members and a link to a directory of parish councils when requested. The Police Community Engagement Team provided support alongside the SAG process before and during the event.

7.5. The Portfolio Holder for Public Protection held a meeting, outside of the scope of the SAG, with Ward Councillors, local parish council representative and event organiser prior to the event.

7.6. Although it is not the primary role of the SAG to review the community relationships, the SAG repeatedly advised the event organisers to engage with local residents but did not seek confirmation that this has been done and that it had been effective.

8. Did the SAG do what a SAG is expected to do in the context of national guidance on SAGs?

8.1. For the Shrubland Hall event the SAG did not appear to operate in accordance with the national guidance in place at that time.

8.2. The BMS ToR do not fully align to those used by other LAs in Suffolk and as recommended by the Suffolk Event Safety Advisory Group (SESAG) and national guidance.

8.3. The UK Good Practice Guide to Working in Safety Advisory Groups published by the Emergency Planning College in 2015 and revised in 2019 is the current national guidance. The guidance has been revised following some high-profile situations such as the restriction on away fans attending the Aston Villa v Maccabi Tel Aviv football match in October 2025 but is not yet in the public domain.

8.4. The primary function of SAG is to provide a quality assurance process for the safety related aspects for any event and venue rather than a focus on offering

advice to organisers. The BMS ToR contains an objective "*To support the economic growth and development of the events in Babergh and Mid Suffolk*." This is not referred to in the national guidance where the focus is entirely on public safety.

8.5. The BMS ToR suggest there is a focus on supporting events rather than an emphasis on challenge and review for example the national guidance states "*Where an event organiser declines to engage in safety processes, this will be challenging, but should not prevent the SAG taking reasonable steps to review the safety arrangements of the event*" whereas the BMS SAG ToR states "*If an event organiser refuses to engage with the Safety Advisory Group or does not act on the advice given, the Safety Advisory Group will remain as supportive as possible and will take reasonable steps to maintain a positive relationship whilst acting in the best interest of public safety*." This could give the impression that the BMS SAG sees itself in a supportive rather than regulatory role.

8.6. In BMS there are a few large scale events held annually which are reviewed by the SAG. Other event organisers are not proactively sought to invite them to engage with the SAG.

8.7. Events are generally notified to the Council as a result of the organiser applying for a licence under the Licensing Act 2003 or because they are using the two popular event venues at Stonham Barns and Jimmy's Farm. As the UK Ijtimah was planned for neither of these venues and it did not require a licence, it did not come to the attention of SAG until May 2026 when reports were seen of an event for 100K people to be held at Shrubland Hall.

8.8. The notes from the various SAG meetings do not make it clear whether the purpose of the SAG were explained to the event organiser i.e. that the SAG does not have any powers to restrict an event but that the agencies represented at SAG could do so using their statutory powers.

8.9. There were no introductions at the start of the meeting to explain each of the agencies' remit within the SAG context and the scope of the SAG.

8.10. The event organisers were asked to give an overview of the event, which lasted more than thirteen minutes, and then each of the SAG members were given the

opportunity to ask questions. Whilst this gave those attending a chance to cover their area of interest it did not result in a systematic review of the public safety aspects of this religious event.

8.11. The meeting appeared to be effective in obtaining information the SAG members asked for from the event organisers but there was little by way of challenge or concerns raised by SAG members and there was no further meeting scheduled at that time when all parties' availability could have been considered. At some point after this meeting it appeared that concerns were raised by third parties that could have been addressed at the meeting on 12th May 2026.

8.12. There was no summary of action points and agreed future meeting dates at the conclusion of the meeting, although there were action points in the meeting notes which were shared. On 19th June an on-site meeting was scheduled for 25th June after information was received following the meeting on 12th May. The invitation acknowledged that the organisers were located some distance away and had met the SAG members already; the event organisers chose not to attend.

8.13. All the individuals who contributed to the meeting on 12th May 2026 appeared to talk openly and with good nature.

9. Did the representatives of the relevant SAG agencies attend the meetings and/or provide sufficient support if absent from the meeting?

9.1. The event organisers had not been asked to supply the documents by a particular date as most event organisers send them in good time. Despite the request for the documents being made in April, the event management plan and associated documents were only received by the chair on 11th May 2026. The documentation was circulated to SAG members on 12th May 2026 at 09:40 prior to a SAG meeting at 14:30. This did not give enough time for SAG members to consider them prior to the meeting and limited the challenge of the plans in the meeting.

9.2. The event management plans lacked the detail needed to review them against industry standards which may have contributed to the meeting being more fact finding than an assessment and discussion on their sufficiency.

9.3. Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS), Police, Suffolk County Council Highways and BMS Environmental Health were represented at the 12th May 2026 meeting and subsequent site visits and meetings.

9.4. The East of England Ambulance Service Trust (EEAST) representative was unable to attend and sent their apologies and comments along with a request for further information to the SAG chair in advance of the meetings.

9.5. Suffolk Police representatives held regular meetings with the event organiser in the weeks following the initial SAG meeting.

9.6. The EEAST, Suffolk CC Highways, Suffolk Police, SFRS representatives confirmed that they had good communication with the event organisers following the SAG and believed that the organisers were capable of managing a safe event.

9.7. JEPU was not represented by any JEPU officers as they had responded to an emergency at short notice and although a JEPU support officer was listed on the SAG minutes they were observing rather than contributing to the review. Reviewing emergency plans, including evacuation plans, with event organisers prior to the event gives the SAG an opportunity to gauge the event organisers' understanding of their plans, establish the trigger points for when the organisers might need to implement the plans and when they would involve the emergency services. JEPU will often consider the major incident aspect of an event including invacuation/evacuation plans to be used in the event of an emergency. The use of the standard SAG agenda could have identified that JEPU were not present and that the evacuation plans still required scrutiny. JEPU did not appear to be involved in any further SAG meetings or site visits.

9.8. There was a positive relationship between the SAG and the event organisers. In an email the event organiser gave unsolicited thanks to the SAG chair for the assistance and support that SAG was giving to the organisers.

9.9. At the time of the SAG involvement there was no known external threat.

10. Was there sufficient challenge within the SAG process?

10.1. The recording of the meeting and the minutes indicate that the initial SAG meeting appeared to function as a mechanism to obtain information but not to critically and systematically review the public safety arrangements.

10.2. Subsequent verbal updates from the event organiser were not recorded and no minutes were produced from the site meeting on 25th June.

10.3. The meeting on 12th May 2026 did not follow the standard agenda as per the countywide Suffolk Event Safety Advisory Group (SESAG) ToR which provides for a wide range of event safety topics to be reviewed.

10.4. A member of the group of event organisers was communicating from a Local Authority email with their official signature on the emails. Whilst there was no evidence this person was acting on behalf of the other local authority, this could have been formally confirmed as the involvement of another Local Authority supporting the event could have affected whether the Health and Safety Executive or the LA were the correct enforcing authority for health and safety regulation at the event.

10.5. Evacuation plans and major incident plans were not discussed or reviewed by SAG – see point 9.7.

10.6. Late submission of documentation meant SAG members couldn't study the plans prior to the SAG meeting and challenge was limited whilst the verbal information was being assimilated.

10.7. More than one agency suggested that the level of challenge may have been less during the UK Ijtimah event SAG than for other events as they did not want to be seen to be challenging the type of event, e.g. the cultural and racial elements, rather than the risks it posed.

10.8. SAG members felt that the political energy in the social media posts and the interest from senior officers and elected members put them under significant pressure.

Did the SAG act on any matters that were beyond the remit of SAG?

10.9. The SAG does not have a permissioning function and if the Council tries to impose any restrictions outside any statutory regulatory powers it would be bound by the Local Government (Review of Decisions) Act 2015.

10.10. SAG has no statutory powers and any restrictions must be imposed by agencies using their own statutory powers. Event organisers usually welcome feedback from SAG members and therefore there is rarely any need for formal enforcement action. SAG members reported that they felt they were being pressurised to find a reason to restrict the event e.g. planning consent, noise, water quality, escalating social media allegations, emergency vehicle access.

10.11. Following meetings, correspondence and site visits the event was deemed safe, did not compromise public safety and there was no reason for individual organisations to use statutory powers to restrict the event. Despite this the SAG representatives felt they were expected to take responsibility for "allowing" the event to happen against public opinion.

10.12. Potential Town and Country Planning restrictions that could have affected whether the event could take place, and later, emergency vehicle access, created a distraction for SAG when the matters were raised in the SAG process rather than by the department involved.

11. Conclusions

11.1. All agencies stated that the UK Ijtimah event was well managed and, in the absence of an external threat, would not have had a significant impact on the Local Authorities, emergency services or the community.

11.2. There was a negative impact on the local authority and the community when the event was curtailed following intelligence of a credible threat to life but the operation of the SAG did not adversely affect the safety of individuals attending the event or in the surrounding area.

11.3. The external threat was not made known to SAG members at a time when the event could have been cancelled or mitigation put in place to reduce the level of threat i.e. before the event.

11.4. The event organisers had previously run successful UK Ijtimah events but the organisers' assurances on attendance numbers and the volume of vehicles proved to be inaccurate and resulted in greater congestion than had been anticipated especially when the event was curtailed at short notice. However SAG members had no evidence prior to the event to suggest that the organisers' information could not be relied upon.

11.5. BMS SAG process did not follow all local or national guidance, and the process was therefore not as robust a review of public safety as could have been delivered by a SAG.

11.5.1. If the purpose and limitations of the SAG had been made clearer in the correspondence at the initial SAG meeting, this may have reduced the likelihood of the SAG being used by others as a tool by those wishing to prevent or restrict the event.

11.5.2. Better knowledge of the Local Government (Review of Decisions) Act 2015, within the Council and the wider public, may have helped people to understand that using non-statutory powers to restrict an event would leave BMS and other partner organisations subject to challenge and would have been unlikely to have prevented the event from going ahead.

11.5.3. If an agenda, such as the one contained in the SESAG Terms of Reference had been used to systematically review the event plans the lack of major incident and site evacuation plans may have been identified. Effective evacuation and major incident plans could have reduced the burden on the Local Authorities and emergency services when the event was curtailed as the implementation of a plan is easier than trying to formulate a plan in a hurry and is a primary reason why SAGs were introduced.

11.5.4. A more robust review of the event management plans may have reduced the uncertainties and amount of time spent by the LA trying to establish whether the event could be managed safely.

12. Recommendations

12.1. The BMS SAG ToR should be reviewed and revised in conjunction with the Suffolk Event Safety Advisory Group as and when the 2026 version of the national guidance is released by the UK Resilience Academy (formerly the Emergency Planning College).

12.2. SAG meetings should include clear explanation of scope, require event management plans to be supplied with sufficient time to circulate them before the meeting, introductions to explain each attendee's role, an appropriate agenda to ensure all relevant parts of an event, including major incident and evacuation plans, are reviewed and effective challenge where insufficient information is provided or the there is a deficiency in the event plans.

12.3. The SAG chair should prioritise the chairing role over any technical input so that they can absorb and evaluate the detailed arrangements for events while maintaining an objectivity of approach, taking into account the views of the group members.

12.4. The SAG should be supported to perform more effectively by ensuring that inperson meetings can be held where possible and that there is sufficient administrative support to allow the SAG members with a critical role, especially the chair, to focus on that role during the SAG meetings.

12.5. The function, and limitations of SAGs is promoted to all relevant agencies, officers and Councillors in Suffolk to ensure that the SAG is not expected to perform a function outside its remit. This should include clear arrangements for community engagement, member briefings and responses to concerns that sit outside the SAG process, with identified organisational ownership and escalation routes.

12.6. Core agencies who make up the SAGs in Suffolk should nominate suitably experienced representatives who can attend meetings, review documents and provide advice to the SAG within agreed timescales. Where a core agency cannot attend, written advice should be provided to the chair and any significant gaps in assurance should be recorded and escalated by the chair.