

The Barton Moss Environmental Protest

A report by the Police and Crime Commissioner's
Independent Panel on the Policing of Protests and Demonstrations
October 2014

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Foreword



This is the first major piece of work by the Independent Panel on the Policing of Protests and Demonstrations set up by the Police and Crime Commissioner. I hope that our findings and recommendations are both useful and will prompt further debate on this important topic.

The panel comprises a diverse range of people from all walks of life, but one thing we all agree on absolutely is the right for people to protest and make their voice heard. This report aims to support that fundamental right, which goes to the heart of what it means to live in a free, democratic country.

Martin Miller
Chair of the Independent Panel on
Protests and Demonstrations



The police have a duty to ensure that people's right to protest peacefully is facilitated and respected and although Greater Manchester Police has a good record in policing protests this is a frequent challenge.

The Barton Moss protest was particularly complex and contentious and, amid the legitimate public concerns raised, it was clear that independent scrutiny of this operation was needed in order to build trust and public confidence in our police service.

I want to thank the panel members for their observations and advice and for giving up their own time to produce this report. Now I'll work with GMP and other public bodies to make sure these recommendations are put into practice.

Tony Lloyd
Greater Manchester Police
and Crime Commissioner



The policing of protests is often contentious and the Barton Moss protest put GMP between those wishing to obstruct the drilling process and a company and landowner wishing to carry out their lawful business.

It is important that police action is independently scrutinised and we welcome the first report from the Protest Panel. All the recommendations are accepted by the Force. The Panel has highlighted the difficult issues of how to ensure all agencies preplan the response to protest, how the police communicate with protesters when some don't want to engage with the police and how the police communicate information on a protest without introducing any bias.

Sir Peter Fahy
Chief Constable
of Greater Manchester Police

Introduction and executive summary

Effective policing of public protests is vital to ensure that our democratic society allows people to have a voice and make that voice heard. Police are there not to control protest, but to facilitate peaceful and lawful action.

This is not always an easy task as police also have to take into account the rights of people with competing views, as well as the rights of those not involved in an individual protest to go about their normal business. Police have to ensure that any disruption caused by protest is proportionate and that disruption is minimised.

The environmental protest at Barton Moss in Salford took place between November 2013 and March 2014 during exploratory digging at the site. It created unique issues for Greater Manchester Police (GMP) and this report examines those issues in a frank, honest and balanced way to see what learning can be applied to future contentious protests.

A number of recommendations are made at the end of this report around pre-planning, engagement and communications which the panel hopes will provide useful and constructive ideas.

This report has been written by the independent panel set up by Police and Crime Commissioner Tony Lloyd to examine the policing of protests and demonstrations. The panel members have been drawn from across Greater Manchester's diverse communities, and bring with them a vast range of experience including protest and trade union activism, politics, policing, community relations, media and youth engagement. More information about the panel is available on the Commissioner's website at:

www.gmpcc.org.uk/protest-panel.

Methodology

This report aims to use an issue of major public concern to help inform future similar incidents.

This report is not intended to be a formal inquiry into the policing of the Barton Moss protest. The panel has no statutory or inquisitory powers. This report is not about finger-pointing or blame, but aims to provide constructive feedback to police and others around the management of contentious and complex protests.

As part of the research for this paper, panellists spoke to:

- Greater Manchester Police – officers and staff involved directly and indirectly in the operation and the associated communications
- Protesters, both on-site at Barton Moss and in interviews. We spoke to both grassroots activists and a representative from Frack Free Greater Manchester
- Local businesses and residents around Barton Moss Road
- Salford Council representatives
- iGas representatives
- Media representative

We are grateful to the individuals we spoke to for giving up their time and for their candid observations.

We asked to speak to Peel Holdings, who own the land where Barton Moss is based, but they declined to speak to us – citing legal matters which were still being considered. Given the willingness of so many others to take part in these interviews, this was disappointing. This matches Peel's approach throughout the Barton Moss controversy as they have consistently remained silent – despite their key role as landowner.

In addition, panel members conducted a number of visits to the Barton Moss site. These visits were both announced and unannounced. Panel members also observed the operation from the police control room.

Panel members reviewed social media content, video footage and print and broadcast media coverage of the Barton Moss protest.

Context

GMP has a good record on managing demonstrations. It has built expertise and capability over a number of years. Each year the service deals with many protests, both high-profile and small-scale, planned and spontaneous. Two recent examples of protests in Greater Manchester that presented different challenges are outlined below:

Example one - trade union protest during the Conservative Party Conference, September 2013

The protest against austerity during the 2013 Conservative Party conference was one of the largest demonstrations Greater Manchester has ever seen, with up to 50,000 participants. The march went through Manchester city centre, attracted a diverse range of participants, and passed off without major incident and no arrests. The march and rally was organised by the TUC who worked with GMP and the city council to agree a route, event plan and contingencies. It was a good example of partnership working in practice.

Example two - EDL protest, Manchester, March 2013

The English Defence League have carried out a number of protests in Greater Manchester. The EDL has limited support in Greater Manchester and has regularly bused in supporters from elsewhere. When they have protested in Greater Manchester, counter demonstrations by Unite Against Fascism have also taken place. In March 2013, the EDL informed police that they were planning to protest in Manchester city centre. Through negotiation with both the EDL and UAF it was agreed they could both have a protest area in Albert Square in Manchester city centre. In the run-up to the event a letter was sent to the Manchester Evening News, led by the Police and Crime Commissioner and signed by a range of civic, faith, community and business leaders urging the public to ignore the protest. Attendance at the protest was limited, disruption to the city centre was minimised and the protest passed off without major incident. There were a handful of arrests for public order offences.

Key to effective management of protests has been a willingness by GMP to engage with protest organisers and partner agencies such as the local authority.

Barton Moss - background

Hydraulic fracturing – fracking – is a relatively new technology to extract gas from shale rock. It works by drilling into the ground and then directing a high-pressure mix of water, sand and chemicals at the rock to release the gas. It has been used extensively in the USA, where it has dramatically changed the country’s energy production landscape and significantly reduced energy prices. The UK government considers fracking to be a key part of securing Britain’s energy future and is encouraging the exploitation of shale gas reserves.

There are environmental concerns over fracking which go beyond the general concern over developing a new process of exploiting fossil fuels. It uses large amounts of water and there are fears that the chemicals used can escape and contaminate ground water at a fracking site, as has happened in the USA. Fracking can also cause minor earth tremors, such as those experienced in Blackpool in 2011.

Proponents say that effective regulation will ensure that contamination will not happen. The Government points to a 2012 Royal Society study which concluded that the health and safety risks of fracking “can be managed effectively in the UK as long as operational best practices are implemented and enforced through regulation”. Those in favour of fracking recognise the risk of tremors, but say they are very minor and highly unlikely to cause any damage. The strength of the tremors has been compared to an HGV truck driving past a house.

The first area of Greater Manchester where fracking has become an issue of public concern is the Barton Moss site. However, it is important to point out that no fracking has taken place at the site, and none can take place without an appropriate application for planning permission being submitted.

The site is off Barton Moss Road, a country lane which runs between the A57 Liverpool Road and the M60. It is adjacent to City Airport (formerly known as Barton Aerodrome). Although Barton Moss Road is not a council-owned lane, there are a number of local businesses and homes on the road. There is also a young people’s secure unit.

In March 2010, Salford Council granted planning permission to a drilling company for the exploration and extraction of methane from the coal bed at Barton Moss. The exploratory work uses conventional methods of drilling and extraction. An assessment will be made by iGas, who carried out the exploratory drilling, following this work to determine if the area is suitable for fracking.

When planning permission was granted, fracking was not identified as a contentious issue in the UK. The council did not consider the granting of planning permission to be controversial, and the work itself was seen to be relatively small-scale with little impact on the local area. However, following other exploratory work in Balcombe in Sussex and the associated protest, fracking became a much more potent issue.

In the months leading up to work starting, GMP held meetings with partner agencies and iGas to agree a joint approach to the management of the work and inevitable protests. However, police were the main, if not sole, organisation to respond to media and public inquiries over the operation. Although partnership working was good on an operational level, police told the panel they felt this was not replicated on the public-facing side of the operation.

The protest

The protest at Barton Moss began in November 2013 and lasted until the exploratory work completed in April 2014. Protest activity had different elements: a camp on Barton Moss Road, daily protests when deliveries were being made to the site, weekend rallies at the site, and a demonstration in Manchester city centre.

The contentious parts of the protest at Barton Moss concerned the camp and delivery protests. The rallies at the site and city-centre demonstration were a more traditional style of protest and both the organisers and police told the panel they were well-organised and caused no issues and there were no arrests.

Police told the panel the operation had three aims: to facilitate peaceful protest; to minimise disruption for local businesses; and to allow residents and workers to go about their lawful business.

The operation involved around 60 police officers each day, although this figure rose to more than 100 on occasion. The cost of the operation was in the region of £1.6m.

The protesters themselves, many of whom preferred to be termed “protectors”, were a diverse group who claimed to have no leadership and acted as a collective. We were told protesters could be, roughly, segmented into four general groupings: “environmental campaigners”, “concerned local people”, more “hard-line’ eco-activists” and “anti-police agitators”. There was a general consensus on these groupings from both protesters, police, and neutral observers.

The vast majority of people participating in the protests were clearly there to do so peacefully, but the panel found there were a small number who wanted to antagonise police and encourage conflict. Protesters we spoke to recognised there were some intent on trouble, but the majority were not. However, they felt police treated them all the same, and as if they were all criminals.

Flashpoints

The main flashpoints between police and protesters happened when deliveries were being made to the site. These deliveries took place regularly between November 2013 and April 2014, with deliveries being made once a week, or more frequently. Protesters would protest in front of the convoy of lorries.

Protesters told the panel that the aim would be to stop deliveries into the site, although they recognised this was unlikely to happen and therefore their aim would be to delay and disrupt deliveries as much as possible. Barton Moss Road is a small country lane. The distance between the start of the lane and the entry point to the site is less than half a mile, which at normal walking speed would take approximately 10 minutes and certainly no more than 15 minutes.

Police told the panel they believed they could facilitate the competing rights of the protesters, businesses, iGas and local residents by allowing the protesters to walk along the road at a slow pace. The time taken to complete the walk varied. Protesters told the panel that at times they would be forced along the road in 15 minutes; police told the panel that at times the walk took several hours.

The protests observed by panel members took between one hour and ten minutes, and one hour and 25 minutes. Protesters complained that changing expectations made it difficult for them to judge what pace would be deemed acceptable, and what would be deemed as too slow and disruptive, by the police. This confusion was seen by protestors as a source of tension and possible conflict.

The deliveries would travel along the lane with a walking police escort. A line of police officers at the front of the lorries would keep the convoy moving. Protesters would gather in front of the police line. The police would tell them to keep moving. It is during these deliveries when most arrests would be made, with police arresting those who they felt were being uncooperative. Police said this included protesters who were pushing back against the police line, those who were endangering themselves or others, or those being abusive. Initially arrests were made for obstructing the highway, but following a court ruling in February 2013 that said Barton Moss Road was a public footpath rather than a public highway, the police subsequently arrested protesters for aggravated trespass. More than 200 arrests were made during the operation. So far, 62% of those cases have either been discontinued or the alleged offender found not guilty.

Protesters told the panel that police officers regularly shoved them during these protests and tried to force them to walk at a quick pace. Given that some of those taking part were elderly, protesters said this was unnecessarily antagonistic on the part of police. This claim is supported by the experience of a journalist from the Manchester Evening News who attended Barton Moss “undercover”. The reporter spent a day at the Barton Moss camp and took part in the protest. He did so without speaking first to police so GMP was unaware

he was there. This journalist said he was shoved by police and accused of pushing against the cordon when he was not.

Protesters told the panel that people would be arrested for no particular reason and felt that police had a quota of arrests they needed to make each day. GMP told the panel no such quota existed.

Police said they faced a barrage of abuse from the protesters, with cameras and smartphones being shoved in their faces as they were being shouted at. This claim is supported by online video evidence.

Claims of police brutality

Protesters claimed there was regular police brutality at Barton Moss. The panel heard how some protesters have been incredibly upset by photographs and videos that have been posted online which purport to show police using violence against protesters.

Throughout the evidence-gathering process of this report, no panel members witnessed any behaviour by police that could objectively be described as “brutality”. Significantly, none of those we spoke to witnessed behaviour by police that could be categorised as violent. No protester we spoke to witnessed police violence, no panel member witnessed police violence, nor did anyone else we spoke to including impartial media representatives who were present at Barton Moss.

Claims of police violence have not been substantiated. Specific claims of alleged injuries have been shown to be untrue. One example is an allegation which has been made repeatedly that a protester was shoved down a ditch by police and broke his leg. The video footage of this incident, from 13 December 2013, shows someone falling into a ditch, but there is no video footage of him being shoved into the ditch by police. The claim he broke his leg is untrue. The protester was back at the site in the days following the fall walking unassisted. The panel wishes to stress that the individual protester did not make the claim he had broken his leg – this was made by others commenting on social media.

Another example of an allegation was the claim that one protester was arrested, taken to a police station where she was strip searched and left naked in a cell for four hours. This was alleged to have taken place on 17 March 2014 and was widely reported on social media. This is an extremely serious claim which, if true, would be a clear abuse of police power. Such was the seriousness of the allegation, the Police and Crime Commissioner ordered

an immediate review of what had taken place. A senior and experienced independent custody visitor reviewed both the custody log and CCTV footage from the custody suite. This review determined that the reality of the incident was that the arrested woman had taken her own clothes off, urinated on them and was both violent and abusive towards custody staff. It took several hours before she had calmed down and accepted alternative clothing.

There is a public interest in the police challenging allegations which can be shown to be untrue. Such false allegations undermine confidence in policing and should be shown to be untrue. However, there is limited evidence to suggest that GMP directly challenged false claims of brutality.

Overall, GMP told the panel they were keen to ensure their operation was proportionate, and it was subject to independent review several times as it was ongoing. These reviews were carried out by: two different police forces (Lancashire and Merseyside), a human rights lawyer, an assistant Police and Crime Commissioner from another police force area, and the College of Policing. Police told the panel that none of these reviews found cause for concern about how GMP was carrying out its operation, but GMP did not provide the panel with copies of these reviews.

Crossing the line

Whereas most of the action taken by protesters at Barton Moss was peaceful, there were some isolated incidents which were of more concern. These included “lock-ons” where protesters would attach themselves to heavy items in an attempt to prevent the convoy getting through to the site. In effect, they did not stop the convoy getting through, but rather delayed the convoy and caused significant disruption on Barton Moss Lane to local residents and other businesses. In one instance, protesters attached themselves to a concrete drum. When the police team attempted to remove the protesters, it emerged that the drum was filled with barbed wire and broken glass, which caused a minor injury to a police officer. This kind of activity clearly crosses the line of peaceful, lawful protest.

Similarly, iGas told the panel that workers at the site had been subjected to violence and intimidation. iGas told the panel that one worker was followed after leaving the site and was so concerned that he returned to the site and stayed there overnight. iGas also told the panel that other workers were physically and verbally assaulted, although did not provide specific details.

Police told the panel that local residents also reported isolated incidents of intimidation, which included people in masks being seen on their property.

This kind of behaviour clearly crosses a line. Police also reported that some protesters had endangered themselves with their behaviour. One attempted to use a bicycle lock to lock himself onto an HGV truck that was going to the site. Had the protester been successful it is likely he would have killed himself, and caused significant distress to the driver of the lorry. Others, including protesters and police, would also have been endangered by this action. Given the police have a duty to ensure people's health and safety, it is understandable why the police had so many officers present at certain points during the protest.

“Flaregate”

One single incident caused significant controversy and a serious breakdown in the relationship between police and protesters. This incident has become known as “flaregate”. In the early hours of Saturday 4 January 2014 the police helicopter was coming in to land at City Airport, which is near Barton Moss Lane. The pilot reported that a flare was fired at the helicopter and appeared to come from the vicinity of the protester camp. The camp was searched by police on 6 January, but no evidence of a flare was found.

GMP publicised this incident, calling it an “unbelievably stupid act of criminality” which had endangered lives. However, the protesters at the camp strongly refuted the allegation that the flare had come from Barton Moss. Some of those the panel spoke to said that if something had been fired on the night then it may have been a firework from a local housing estate. The panel was told that many protesters believe the police had simply made up the claim.

GMP did not produce any additional evidence to support the veracity of the incident. There was no video evidence as the helicopter was not filming as it came in to land. GMP told the panel that the helicopter pilot did give a statement shortly after the incident, which supports the existence of an incident, but this was not released to the public.

The panel does not believe that GMP has a responsibility to “prove” incidents it publicises – as a public body police have a duty not to mislead the public and it would be extraordinary if any such incident had been fabricated. However, given the levels of mistrust that existed between police and protesters at this point of the operation, supporting information would have helped demonstrate to the protesters and the wider public that this was a serious incident that actually happened. The only public evidence to support the incident was a discussion on an online forum where it seemed to suggest

that the person responsible had been ejected from the camp. However, this discussion was on an open forum which did not require any registration and there is no evidence to suggest the discussion was a real discussion between protesters. Although protesters have confirmed that one person was asked to leave the camp, they told the panel this was unrelated to “flaregate” and had to do with his behaviour.

Both police and protesters agree that the atmosphere changed around the time of “flaregate”. From a police perspective, it was felt that more ‘hard-line’ protesters had arrived in the run-up to the incident and there had been a ramping up of civil disobedience. The flare incident, therefore, was indicative of a change of atmosphere.

For the protesters, their view was that police officers treated them differently after “flaregate”. One protester told us that police had been “firm but fair” before the flare incident, but afterwards became more aggressive. The protester’s view was the relationship went “down the pan” after this point with officers believing what the protester called “police propaganda” that the camp wanted to kill their colleagues.

There was a public interest in publicising the flare incident as this was a serious criminal act which could have caused loss of life or serious injury. But, with hindsight, the panel believes more information about the incident should have been issued. This could have included media interviews with the pilot, or the pilot’s statement could have been issued to the media.

“Legal observer” arrest

Relations between the police and protesters were also strained in an incident where a “legal observer” was arrested for alleged drink driving. “Legal observers” were present throughout the Barton Moss protest, although it is unclear what the term means. There is no such a position as “legal observer”. The term gives the impression they are impartial individuals merely there to observe, but in practice those present at Barton Moss seemed to be linked to the protest itself.

On 14 January 2014, one of the “legal observers” was arrested during an incident which was filmed and broadcast on YouTube. So far this has been watched around 220,000 times and it received significant media coverage. The video shows an officer asking the observer if he has had a drink. The observer says that he has had a tea, which the officer appears to mishear as “two”. He says that the observer has admitted having a drink and the observer is then arrested on suspicion of drink driving. The observer was not in his car at the

time and the video evidence does not show whether he had been driving or not.

At the time GMP did not provide a response which could have explained the officer's actions or at least set them in context. This lack of willingness to explain is difficult to understand, given the reputational damage this incident has caused.

This case came before the courts later in January and was thrown out. Rightly or wrongly, the video does give the impression that the officer, at best, overreacted and, at worst, abused his powers. GMP's Professional Standards Branch investigated this incident and did not uphold the complaint, saying there was no case to answer. The arrested man has appealed this decision to the Independent Police Complaints Commission, who upheld the appeal and are now investigating.

Building relationships

These two vignettes give a flavour of the breakdown of trust between the protesters and the police. GMP's previous success at managing protests has been largely dependent on the building of trusted, mutually-respectful relationships between protesters and police. This was absent throughout the Barton Moss protest.

A protester the panel spoke to had been involved in the previous campaign against a second runway at Manchester Airport. He said that at that protest there was a named senior police officer who took the time to get to know the protesters and build rapport and relationship with them. He said it was noticeable that this was lacking at Barton Moss.

GMP had "protest liaison officers" present at Barton Moss throughout the protest. These officers worked to build relationships with those at the camp, and the panel observed them behave in a compassionate and respectful way, for example escorting an elderly protester, who had arrived late, to the front of the protest. However some of the protesters told the panel that they believed these officers were the "bottom of the pecking order" and others thought that they were there to gather intelligence rather than build rapport.

GMP were keen to stress to the panel that they made significant efforts to engage with the protesters, but they were thwarted at every point. To illustrate this point, GMP told the panel that towards the start of the protest a chief inspector attempted to negotiate with the protesters on a range of issues, including the pace of the convoy and general conduct from both police and

protesters. GMP said the response of the protesters was to verbally abuse the chief inspector in person and then subsequently mock him on social media. Despite this, GMP believed they had negotiated some basic principles with the protesters. For example, GMP said they agreed not to send vehicles down Barton Moss Road at the request of the protesters as it would disturb their sleep. However, GMP said this provided the protesters with the opportunity to leave a wind turbine outside the gates of the site. GMP felt some protesters acted in a cynical way and had no real desire to negotiate with police.

A senior named officer with the specific and sole role of protester engagement would have been a sensible step as it would have built credibility of the liaison officers and potentially could have helped defuse the atmosphere when things got tense. Given the breakdown in the relationship it may have been beneficial for the police to look outside its own service and engage independent mediation to try and restore some of that trust. However, protesters have acknowledged that this may not have worked as they claim to act as a collective rather than an organised group. This does not mean that it could not have been tried as it may have been possible to build a general consensus.

Communicating effectively

Overall, communication between the protesters and police was poor throughout the operation. Protesters complained that they did not have any clear idea of what tactics police would use, as one day they would facilitate a slow walk, while on other days the impression was given that they wanted to get the deliveries in as quickly as possible. This helped foster the idea that GMP was the “iGas private army”. This is an unfair categorisation, as iGas admit that the way in which GMP chose to balance the competing rights did put them at a commercial disadvantage as deliveries that should have taken 15 minutes took significantly longer, at considerable cost to iGas. GMP also on occasion took action against lorries making deliveries to the site when deemed necessary. However, this was generally at the off-site muster point for the lorry convoy and so unknown to the protesters. This contributed to the sense that only the protesters were subject to the actions of the police.

However, as outlined above, GMP believe their attempts at negotiation were thwarted by on every occasion by an unwillingness to engage.

One area of perceived contention that has arisen is the presence of iGas representatives in the police control room during the operation. To set in context, a range of partner agencies were present in the control room during the operation, including Salford Council, emergency planning officers and

other blue light agencies. Police told the panel this is standard procedure during major operations, and stressed iGas was there in an advisory capacity and had no role in directing police operations. Police said that a professional, appropriate distance is always kept between third parties and police with operational decision-making responsibilities in such circumstances, and this was the case with iGas. There is also a literal distance between those making command decisions as those officers are in a partitioned area separate to third parties. Police said the role of iGas was to provide an effective and efficient communication channel to monitor the movement of iGas vehicles and take account of any last minute changes. Without this presence in the control room, alternative, robust and effective links would need to be developed to ensure effective communication is maintained. Having an advisory presence therefore seems to be a practical and pragmatic decision. But the panel recognises this does cause a perception issue that should be addressed. One way this could be addressed in future protest operations is by inviting a representative of the protesters into the control room to view the operation to provide reassurance of the advisory role of other agencies during protests.

GMP was in a very difficult situation over the Barton Moss protest. The service's desire from the outset was to take a back seat in terms of the public communications. GMP said it should have had support from other agencies and organisations as the Barton Moss situation was not one of its making. Most notable for their silence is Peel Holdings. Peel owns the land which iGas is drilling on – but have been silent throughout this process. Peel even declined to engage with the panel in the production of this report. iGas were more proactive, but according to journalists the panel spoke to, they only became proactive towards the end of the process. Salford Council and the Mayor of Salford's office had a consistent reactive media line on fracking, but did not offer anyone for media interviews or proactively outline the rationale for the granting of planning permission. GMP was the only body, public or private, that was speaking out on this issue throughout the exploratory drilling process.

Conclusions, observations and recommendations

The panel has considered the issues around the Barton Moss protest and proposes a number of recommendations which are outlined below.

Pre-planning

Recommendation 1 – for planning authorities

The panel recommends that when planning applications are submitted for this kind of controversial activity, public safety and potential protests should be considered carefully. If it is likely for there to be protests, then the appropriateness of any site should be considered. Barton Moss Lane is not an appropriate area to facilitate the movement of heavy machinery with a protest camp and daily delivery protest. In retrospect, iGas recognised that it may have made more sense to have a separate entry and egress point for the equipment. This would have entirely mitigated much of the complexity of the Barton Moss policing operation. Consideration should also be taken during the planning process of creating an area where protesters can go to exercise their lawful right to make their voice heard.

Recommendation 2 – for all agencies

The panel recommends a partnership approach to communications and engagement should be developed and a joint strategy for both should be developed ahead of controversial activity such as the Barton Moss operation. GMP's complaint about being the only partner organisation speaking publicly about this issue for the bulk of the operation is legitimate. For future, similar, operations a strategy should, at the very least, be developed by the relevant local authority or authorities and police. It should also include other agencies which are involved and other relevant organisations such as land owners and companies carrying out the work – whilst recognising that public bodies should have appropriate professional distance from interested parties, such as landowners, to ensure they maintain independence. It should be agreed in advance who the spokespeople should be and who should say what, where and when.

During an operation - engagement

Recommendation 3 – for Greater Manchester Police

The panel recommends that police should do more to engage with protest groups in the run-up to, and during, a policing operation which has generated significant public concern. A senior officer should be assigned with the specific and sole role of engaging with protesters in complex protests similar to Barton Moss. This should, where possible, include clearly stated expectations from the police to protesters of how the operation will unfold. This is particularly important where an operation covers multiple days and operational requirements will vary day to day; it would help to dispel confusion arising from operational variance.

Recommendation 4 – for Greater Manchester Police

If there is a complete breakdown in trust, the panel recommends that all other alternatives should be explored to reach agreement. This could potentially include engaging independent mediation services to help build relationships. The panel recognises that it may be difficult to gain a consensus amongst a diverse group of protesters, but working towards a general consensus with people, the majority of whom are reasonable people who care passionately about an issue, is an effort worth making.

Recommendation 5 – for protesters and protest organisers

Protesters should do more to recognise their responsibilities during protests. Whilst the majority of protesters at Barton Moss behaved lawfully, there were isolated incidents that were unacceptable. The vilification of police officers and others, including social workers who were there to ensure the welfare of children during the Barton Moss protest, was not acceptable. Protesters at similar protests in the future should consider developing a set of principles for their protest – outlining what they will do, what behaviour is acceptable and what behaviour is not. This should include ensuring they have definite individuals with whom the police can liaise effectively (even if these change from day to day in line with their “collective” principles) – see Recommendation 6 below.

Recommendation 6 – for Greater Manchester Police

During major protest operations, GMP should consider inviting a nominated representative agreed by police and protesters into the police control room, on the same advisory status as other third party bodies. Doing this could provide reassurance to all organisations that third parties

are present in a solely advisory capacity and have no role in directing police operations. It could also help build trust and confidence that GMP's publicly-stated aims match the execution of the police operation.

Recommendation 7 – for Greater Manchester Police

Police should do more to recognise the diverse nature of those who take part in protests such as Barton Moss. When the panel spoke to protesters, one of the themes which they regularly came back to was how they were made to feel like criminals. Many of the protesters at Barton Moss made the point they were not “troublemakers” – they merely cared passionately about an issue of public concern. Police should engage better with those participating in contentious protests to ensure the reasons for the police being there are understood. Protesters who are willing to engage constructively with police should be invited to the morning police briefing so they can see the approach the police take to the operation.

During an operation – communication with the media and the public

Recommendation 8 – for public bodies

The panel recommends that all public bodies consider the public interest when assessing what information is appropriate to issue to counteract exaggerated or false claims which could affect confidence in public services. GMP expressed frustration at being unable to gain traction in the media during the protest, to the extent that they felt that the media were not interested in what the service had to say. However, information given out by GMP was, at times, sparse. In future, police should consider issuing more information in a clear and concise way, including, where it is available, video, audio and photographs.

GMP has a huge following on social media and this channel could have been used more effectively to get messages out. GMP told the panel that it could not give out information or footage as this could prejudice subsequent prosecutions. However, not enough consideration was given to the reputational damage that unchallenged claims and allegations caused the service, particularly claims levelled at the police of partiality on behalf of iGas. Individual cases must be balanced with the wider public interest of keeping the public accurately informed. This recommendation is not about encouraging “tit-for-tat” between police and protesters in mainstream or social media, but rather is about emphasising the importance of keeping the public accurately informed.

Recommendation 9 – for Greater Manchester Police

The panel recommends that when police publicise a controversial incident during a protest operation, the service provides supporting information to provide additional assurance to the public. The panel's view is that "flaregate" could have been handled better by GMP. While it is not the case that GMP should have to prove incidents have taken place, it would have been helpful for GMP, and it would have been in the public interest to provide supporting information. As with Recommendation 7, this recommendation is about ensuring the public is kept accurately informed on matters of significant public interest, and not about either protesters or the police engaging in propaganda dissemination.

Conclusion

It is clear that Barton Moss was a difficult operation. Frontline police officers faced daily verbal abuse as they sought to go about their job. Communications professionals within the service were frustrated that they did not get their message out to the public as their attempts to explain their operation were often ignored by the media and drowned out by the emotive language and sometimes inaccurate claims used by protesters. Protesters felt they were treated badly by the police, with clear evidence of many people being shoved as they exercised their democratic right to protest (although more serious allegations of police brutality have not been substantiated). Trust was lost in the police during the Barton Moss protest, despite the evidence showing that GMP was committed to balancing, as best it could, the competing rights of the protesters, local businesses and local residents.

The panel is of the view that many of the issues arising from the protest at Barton Moss could have been mitigated, or even resolved, by better pre-planning and more constructive communications and engagement during the operation. Our recommendations are based on that view. We are also clear that this should apply to other public bodies and commercial agencies involved, as well as the police. Moreover, we would expect similar active engagement from protesters themselves in order to facilitate the exercise of their democratic right to peacefully protest.

It is likely that environmental protests such as those seen at Barton Moss will become more common as the government encourages the development of shale gas extraction. The panel hopes this report gives some valuable, constructive feedback to police and others which will help inform the management of future operations involving contentious protests.

Panel members

Members of the **Independent Panel on the Policing of Protests and Demonstrations** have been drawn from across Greater Manchester's diverse communities, and bring with them a vast range of experience including protest and trade union activism, politics, policing, community relations, media and youth engagement.

The panel is chaired by **Martin Miller, Chief Executive of the Diocese of Manchester**. Martin also had a leading role in the Hope Not Hate campaign, which takes a stand against extremist organisations like the British National Party and English Defence League.

The other panellists are:

- Atiha Chaudry, an equalities and diversity specialist and magistrate
- Matthew Colledge, former leader of Trafford Council and Vice Chair of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority
- Diane Curry OBE, Partners of Prisoners Chief Executive and independent member of the Greater Manchester Police and Crime Panel
- Davine Forde, a youth and community organisation manager who is currently Project Coordinator at Manchester charity Reclaim
- Alan Manning, former TUC Regional Secretary
- Mohammed Sultan, a retired police inspector with more than 30 years' policing experience
- Janine Watson, who has 30 years' experience in communications and community engagement in Greater Manchester local authorities and media organisations

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GREATER MANCHESTER