



parade organiser's guide

This guide has been produced to assist parade organisers with the most important aspects of their duties and responsibilities.

It includes sections on

- The Common Principles which guide the Parades Commission's decisions.
- A chart of the process for notifying Parades and how they are dealt with.
- The responsibilities of a parade organiser.
- The assistance which can be provided by the Authorised Officers.

The Parades Commission is committed to working as closely as possible with all those who participate in or are affected by parades to ensure that rights are respected and responsibilities accepted by everyone involved.

Further copies of the Common Principles and of the Statutory Code of Conduct can be obtained from the Authorised Officers or direct from the Commission whose address and contact numbers appear on the back page of this leaflet.

annual report 2002-2003 / pull-out section

common principles

With several years of experience in dealing with parades, the Commission wants people to have a sense of what it regards as important when it considers a parade notification and how it weighs up different situations. This represents a general approach, not a specific one. Each parade will still be assessed on its own merits. Issues sometimes arise that are difficult to predict in advance. However, it can help organisers, both of parades and of protests, when they are considering how they intend to conduct themselves. These Principles, most of which are matters of common sense, are designed to pick up on some of the most commonly asked questions about how the Commission weighs different circumstances pertaining to a parade and are intended to bring greater transparency to the debate. The Principles are not listed in any order of priority.

1 Communication by Parade Organisers

Parade organisers who genuinely and meaningfully engage with representatives of local communities with a view to seeking accommodation will be much less likely to face restriction than those who do not. (This reinforces the statutory guidelines.)

2 Communication by Representatives of Local Communities

Representatives of local communities who do not respond positively to parade organisers' attempts to engage, without pre-conditions, will be less likely to argue successfully for restrictions on a parade.

3 Peaceful and Lawful Protest

Where protest has been previously organised in a peaceful and lawful way the Commission will be more sympathetic to concerns expressed.

4 Volume of Parades

The more parades there are notified through a sensitive area in one year, the greater the likelihood of some restrictions. The cumulative effect of constant parading in one location imposes strains on community relations.

5 Repeat Restrictions

In areas where there have been significant route restrictions for some years, the Commission will be more likely to allow an occasional relaxation of route restriction where the parade organiser has successfully ensured that those on parade and followers have consistently accepted the restriction peacefully and lawfully and especially where there have been some genuine and meaningful efforts to engage with the local community.

6 Timing of Parades

In contentious or sensitive locations, peaceful well-conducted parades in the morning are less likely to be restricted than evening parades. Parades that continue late into the evening, particularly after dark, often create problems and alienate local communities who may feel powerless to object. The Commission may increasingly place restrictions on these parades.

7 Quality Parading

The likelihood of restriction will be greater where the parade or its followers have been badly behaved in the past, or where paramilitary emblems or trappings have been apparent. Where there is any doubt about an emblem, form of dress or other trappings, the parade organiser should seek to disallow it, particularly if the parade passes through an interface area.

8 Public Disorder

The Commission will not automatically allow disorder or the threat of disorder to become the only factor in a decision, particularly when there has been genuine and meaningful engagement or attempts at engagement by the organisers. Occasionally, police advice to the Commission can become the main criterion (for example where there is an anticipated threat to life or property).

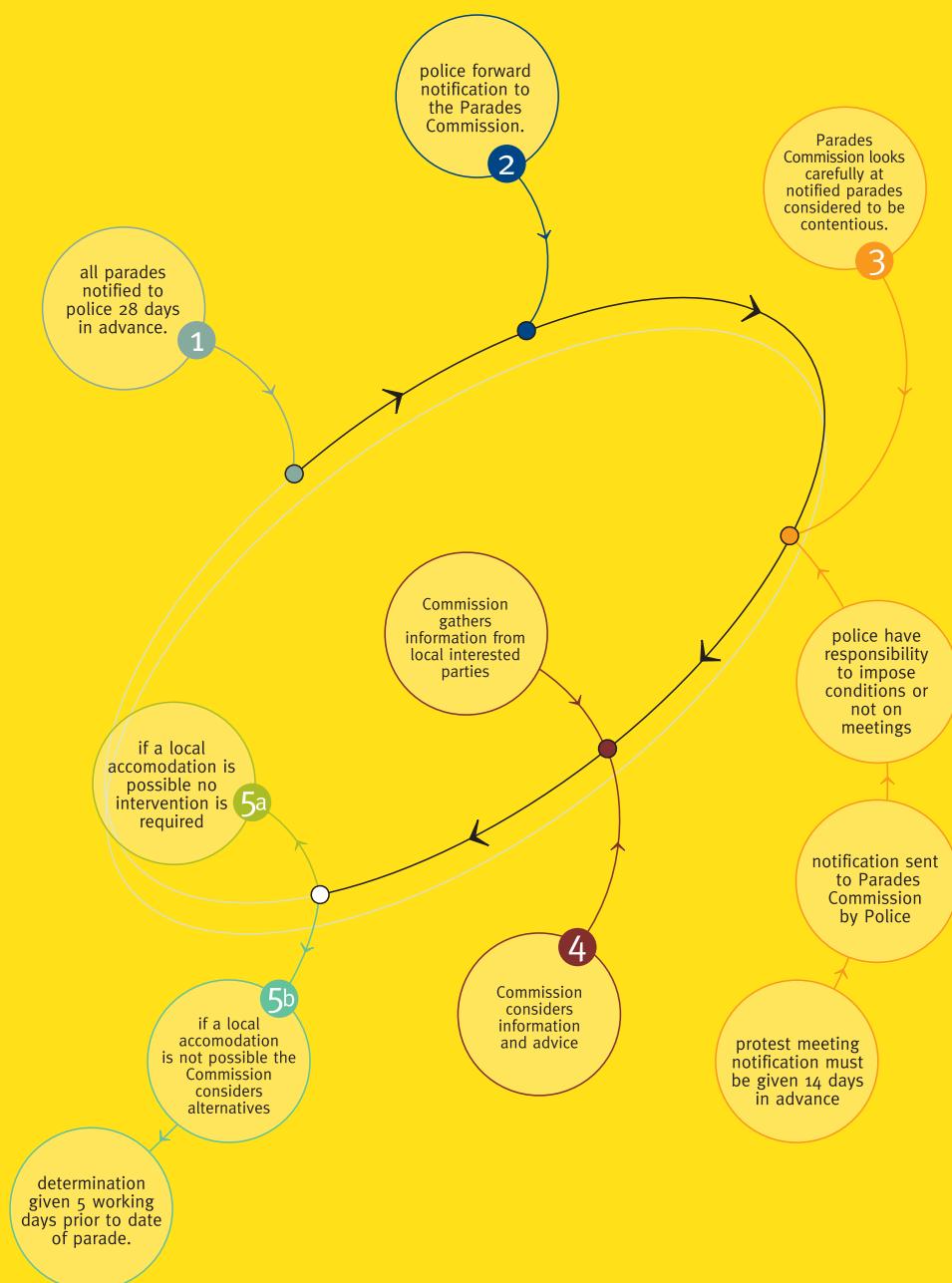
9 Responsibility for a Parade

Responsibility for a parade and its participants lies first and foremost with the parade organiser. The parade organiser is responsible for ensuring a pre-planned, well-organised and peaceful event that has little or no negative impact on the local community. A determination is primarily written for the attention of the parade organiser and it is the responsibility of the parade organiser to comply with it. The police have a critical role in upholding the law in and around the parade, particularly in ensuring that those who break the law are apprehended and brought to justice.

These Principles neither replace nor overrule the Code of Conduct or our Guidelines, both of which are available at every PSNI location where organisers hand in their parade or protest notifications. The Code of Conduct in particular needs to be carefully studied for the guidance it provides, not only on the conduct of parades, but also for the advice it gives to organisers on the preliminary steps they should take in communicating their plans to local communities in advance of a parade.

The context of the Principles we set out here will, we believe, increase transparency and enable organising bodies to review their plans and to consider whether they are more or less likely to meet with the approval of the Commission and of the local community. Nevertheless we remain anxious to increase transparency and will continue in that regard to build upon our experience.

Notifying parades and protests



The Responsibilities of a Parade Organiser

A parade organiser is responsible in law for every aspect of a parade, from the initial notification, through the planning process, and of course for the conduct of the parade on the day.

These responsibilities are covered in the Code of Conduct, the statutory document which is a part of the Act of Parliament. The Code of Conduct booklet is available from all police stations or from the Parades Commission. Some of the most important parts of it are shown here, but it is recommended that all those who take on the responsibility of organising a parade or procession are fully familiar with the complete document.

Procedures

The parade notification form (form 11/1) must be fully completed and handed in to a local police station at least 28 days before the date of the parade. Late or incomplete forms may be refused.

The organiser must consider the parade route. If it is through a commercial area at a normally busy time, business people should be advised. If it passes churches, it is important to consult the clergy, right up to the date of the parade, for advice on any services, including funerals which might coincide. If it passes through a residential area, local people should be advised and if through an area of a different tradition, it would be important to establish communications with the residents and to make efforts to meet their reasonable concerns.

Managing the Parade

The timings, either those notified, or imposed, are definitive, not guides and must be adhered to.

All participants should be fully briefed, including bands and stewards, on all aspects of the parade including the route and timings, as well as any restrictions which have been placed on the organiser.

An adequate number of stewards, preferably trained, should be provided and their duties explained.

All participants should:

- **Behave with regard for the rights, traditions and feelings of others in the area of the parade.**
- **Refrain from using words or behaviour considered sectarian, abusive, insulting or lewd.**
- **Comply with the directions of the organiser, the stewards and the police at all times.**
- **Behave with dignity and respect in the vicinity of churches, war memorials, and cemeteries, in interface areas and where the majority population of an area are of a different tradition.**



Respect



Bands

The standards of bands have a major impact on the public's perception of the parading organisation, and therefore of the organiser. It is the organiser's responsibility to ensure that the dress, performance, conduct and behaviour of bands conform with the Code of Conduct.

- **No dress, flags or emblems of a paramilitary style, or relating to a proscribed organisation are permitted.**
- **No alcohol should be consumed immediately prior to, or during a parade.**
- **Only hymn tunes should be played in the vicinity of any place of worship, war memorials and cemeteries (when church services are taking place, no music should be played)**

In interface areas and where the majority population are of a different tradition, behaviour should be respectful; there should be no excessively loud drumming and marching should be dignified.

Bands are also bound by the same conduct requirements as all other participants (shown above)



Rights

Those who parade, those who live in the area of a parade and those who object to parades, have rights. Recognising and taking into account all of these rights, not just one's own rights, and being prepared to listen to the reasonable and legitimate concerns of the other - addressing them where possible – remains the most likely route to acceptable, quality parading in areas which remain contentious. Where parade organisers have pursued this route and where there has been reciprocation from those through whose areas they wish to parade, real progress has been achieved.

The Authorised Officers

There are 12 Authorised Officers (AOs) of the Commission, working in pairs around Northern Ireland. They are in contact with a great variety of people from parade organisers, to community representatives, from local church leaders and business representatives to the police and local politicians.

The AOs are not employees of the Parades Commission, though they are funded by them. Their task is to gain an in depth understanding of all the arguments and opinions, the concerns and worries of as many people as possible in those areas where a parade is due to take place. There may be conflict between the wishes of those in whose area the parade will take place. They will explore with all sides the prospects for reaching agreement, if necessary facilitating mediated engagement or dialogue in some form between the parties.

The AOs have built up considerable contacts. They have been able to gain the confidence of parade organisers and residents' representatives through their painstaking approach and transparent even-handedness. They provide the Parades Commission with invaluable insights into the tensions and problems in the areas for which they are responsible, but, as importantly, with their views on the prospects for progress and how it can best be achieved, as well as the bona fides of those most closely involved. Their contribution to easing concerns has paid real dividends in many different places.

The AOs can and do make a difference and contribute enormously to reducing the chances of future crises around parading. The Parades Commission hopes that the impartial way in which they go about their business, scrupulously observing confidences when required, will encourage others to make the best use of their services. The Commission will readily respond to any request and arrange for the AOs to set up meetings where other attempts to broker resolutions may have failed.

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