

## Met Police gig tactics under fire

As many as 70 London venues now required to file controversial documents. Controversial Metropolitan Police documents aimed at identifying the racial mix – and musical tastes – of London’s gig goers are now in widespread use across the capital despite condemnation from the industry and civil liberties groups.

The so-called Form 696 is used by the Met to collect personal details (real name, stage name, date of birth, telephone number) of artists and musicians performing at gigs, the style of music they play, the audience targeted and how many people are likely to attend.

Music Week, which exclusively revealed the use of Form 696 last year, now learns that as many as 70 London venues have conditions attached to their licence which require them to file these event assessment papers before staging a gig. Failure to do so will put them in breach of their licence and puts them at risk of a £20,000 fine.

Worryingly, the scale of the form’s use could substantially increase if police forces in other parts of the country follow the Met’s lead.

UK Music chief executive Feargal Sharkey, with support from the Musicians’ Union and Music Producers Guild, has been leading the fight against Form 696 and Sharkey is expected to pile more pressure on licensing authorities and police over the coming days.

It is understood Sharkey is lined up to raise the issue this week with Minister for Sport Gerry Sutcliffe, who also has responsibility for licensing and regional policy and local government, and the Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS), the local government central body responsible for overseeing local authority regulatory services. Sources also indicate that UK Music will take the matter up with the Met again before the end of the month.

Sharkey will meet with LACORS knowing that Form 696 has already been adopted by numerous London boroughs, but campaigners hope he can persuade some of them to scrap the form, whose legality has already been challenged by the MU on the grounds of contravening human rights and data protection law.

Sharkey says, “It is true that UK Music has been busy behind the scenes for some time regarding Form 696 and I have some very high level meetings over the next couple of weeks. Following those, I am positive we will have a much clearer picture on this issue and how we progress and move forward.”

The move comes as the Culture Media and Sport Select Committee, led by John Whittingdale, continues to investigate the Licensing Act 2003: that took soundings from Sharkey and MU general secretary John Smith at the end of last year and is expected to make its findings public by early April. Both Sharkey and Smith raised the subject of Form 696 at oral hearings and it is expected their evidence will form part of the select committee’s findings.

Caving into early criticism about the draconian document the Met, which claims the use of Form 696 is purely to assess crowd safety and can be used by officers to suggest appropriate searching processes and additional security where they identify high-risk events, reduced the form from eight pages to four.

However, it still requires promoters and venue owners to state the style of music that will be performed. And it includes a number of styles – including basement, R&B and garage – favoured by London’s black community, which Sharkey believes is “unacceptable”.

It also bizarrely requires licensed premises to state who the target audience is and give “details of all the promoters, DJs and artistes for the event”. Sharkey and others continue to be worried that police officers have the power to block certain kinds of music or events from taking place without any right of appeal.

They are also concerned how long the information will be kept on record and whether it is “cross checked” with other databases.

Form 696 must be completed and submitted to the local borough licensing unit and the Met’s clubs and vice unit at least 14 days before the event and then, when the event has taken place, venues are required to complete Form 696A giving an account (“event debrief”) of how the gig or function went.

