



Chelsea Supporters' Trust



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RE: Police Operation Following Charlton AFC v Chelsea FC

Dear Chief Inspector Dearden,

I am writing on behalf of the Chelsea Supporters' Trust regarding the events that unfolded following the Charlton AFC v Chelsea FC fixture on Saturday 10 January 2026.

The unannounced holdback overshadowed what had otherwise been a largely positive matchday experience at The Valley for the majority of supporters. The treatment of Chelsea supporters on this occasion was deeply disappointing and, for some, evoked uncomfortable comparisons with policing approaches more commonly associated with past decades. This is not an experience that any of us wish to see repeated.

We recognise the complexities and challenges involved in policing large-scale sporting events. The issues outlined below, however, require careful consideration to ensure the safety, dignity and confidence of supporters in future operations.

Lack of prior communication

No advance communication was provided to supporters regarding the possibility of a post-match holdback, leaving thousands unprepared for what followed. While operational challenges are understood, clearer communication, even at short notice, such as through the PA system inside the ground or via Chelsea's matchday channels, is essential for maintaining trust and reducing frustration in high-pressure situations.

Blocked routes and confusion

As supporters exited via the red gates onto Valley Grove, a visible police block of three police vans on the right-hand side led many to assume that the correct route was to the left. This directed hundreds of supporters into a poorly lit and hazardous dead-end residential area. Freezing conditions meant muddy ground quickly turned to ice, resulting in people slipping, falling and navigating low walls in darkness. The absence of clear direction, signage or a stewarding presence in this area significantly increased confusion and unnecessary risk.

The holdback and crowd safety

Approximately 3,000 supporters were held in a confined space for around 30 minutes in freezing temperatures, with no meaningful communication from officers on site, including the absence of basic announcements such as those delivered via a megaphone. Crowding led to frustration, surging and visible distress among those present. Supporters were left without any understanding of what was happening or how long the situation would last. A scenario of this nature unfolding in 2026, without effective crowd communication, is a serious cause for concern.

Accessibility and welfare concerns

Particular concern arises from the lack of provision for supporters with disabilities, reduced mobility and elderly supporters. Individuals using wheelchairs and mobility scooters were left in poorly lit and uneven

conditions, within a tightly packed crowd, with no visible support or safeguarding measures in place. This created avoidable risks and left vulnerable supporters feeling exposed and unsupported.

The final exit and surge

When the holdback was eventually lifted, supporters were released through an opening of approximately two metres. This immediately caused a forward surge, with people being pushed towards a narrow and poorly lit path bordered by a raised ledge. Several supporters stumbled and fell, while others stepped into private gardens in an effort to avoid injury. This method of release was unsafe and should have been managed in a more controlled and proportionate manner. In addition, a further hold of approximately 15 minutes took place adjacent to Charlton station. This extended delay compounded the issues already experienced, increasing frustration and fatigue among supporters and further heightening safety concerns at a point when crowd pressure was already significant.

In preparing this correspondence, feedback has been sought from our members regarding their experiences. An appendix is attached containing their testimonies, presented verbatim for your consideration. These accounts demonstrate that the issues outlined above were not isolated incidents but were experienced by a significant number of supporters, reinforcing the need for improvement.

We respectfully request that these matters are formally reviewed and addressed. Our supporters remain deeply concerned by what occurred and expect reassurance that lessons will be learned. Constructive dialogue with the Metropolitan Police on this issue would be welcomed, and we look forward to working together to ensure that future matchday operations provide a safer and more positive experience for all attendees.

Yours sincerely,

Dominic Rosso

Chelsea Supporters' Trust, Chairman