



## News

11th June

# Avon and Somerset Police defend their handling of Bristol protest

By [Huw Mabe](#)  
Reporter



Police and Crime commissioner Sue Mountstevens and chief constable Andy Marsh. Facebook Live. Permission for use by all partners.

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**Bristol risked becoming the epicentre of a global uprising if police had tried to stop protesters pulling down the statue of a slave trader, according to Avon and Somerset's top officer.**

Chief constable Andy Marsh said there had been a lot of anger that police did not intervene before the bronze effigy of Edward Colston was thrown into the Floating Harbour, but many more people had agreed police made the right decision.

Avon and Somerset Police has also come under fire for allowing more than 10,000 protesters to take to the streets on Sunday during a lockdown.

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place and it would not have been backed by the public or politicians.

Speaking to police and crime commissioner Sue Mountstevens for their regular Facebook Live video about the moments before the statue came down, he said: “[Commanding officers] came to a very quick view that to intervene risked a violent confrontation to arrest suspects, risked drawing other people in who wouldn’t know what was happening.

“The consequences would have been public disorder, a riot we were unable to contain, that caused very serious injury to protesters, injury to people we were trying to arrest, and very serious damage to commercial property.

“The officers made a difficult decision. Had they intervened the consequences could have been incredibly serious.

“We might have become the epicentre of a new wave of protest around the whole world, never mind what might have happened in Bristol.

“Officers made the decision that, post-incident, the long arm of the law could catch up with those people and bring them to justice.”

The police have now identified 17 suspects.

Mr Marsh added: “I don’t condone any criminal activity. I don’t feel any sense of satisfaction that a crime has been committed and we weren’t able to intervene, but it was the right one.

“We will review hours of footage, identify those responsible for, interview them and present a case to the Crown Prosecution Service.”

Mr Marsh said he recognised that people were angry that so many protesters had breached the lockdown but urged everyone to comply with the Government guidance, adding: “Whether people are frustrated or feel it’s undermined, the right thing to do is carry on.

“Please understand why we didn’t intervene [when the statue was toppled] – it’s not because we’re cowards, it’s not because we’re taking a political decision, it’s because we want the best for Bristol.

“Look at what happened at the protest – over 10,000 people, a very volatile situation, no injuries, no arrests, one reported damage.


“We certainly couldn’t have prevented the protest taking place.

“The scenes people might have seen in other parts of the world where the police and military intervene to stifle protests are incredibly frowned upon in the UK.

“It’s a policing style we aren’t resourced for, equipped for nor have public or political support for.”


Ms Mountstevens said: “I understand what happened and why people feel police should have done something different.


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### News

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By Huw Mabe  
Reporter

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By [Leanne Woodruff](#)  
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By [Huw Mabe](#)  
Reporter

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1

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- [3 Met Office issues second thunderstorm warning for Gloucestershire](#)
- [4 Yate and Sodbury pubs plan their re-openings for July, 4](#)
- [5 Dandy comic strip featuring Wotton is discovered on ebay](#)
- [6 Local electrical firm aid Public Health England](#)
- [7 South Gloucestershire's first 'School Street' to launch in Frampton Cotterell](#)
- [8 Family is providing free food for the community](#)
- [9 Premier Inn, Travelodge and Holiday Inn's strict new rules for guests](#)
- [10 Thieves target outbuildings in South Gloucestershire](#)
- [11 Met Office warning as heavy rain, thunder and lightning forecast for Gloucestershire](#)
- [12 Poundland extends Yate store to offer affordable fashion range](#)
- [13 IN MEMORIAM: Death notices in the Gazette this week](#)
- [14 Aldi, Asda, Tesco, Sainsbury's and M&S update rules on face masks for shoppers](#)
- [15 Warning after burglaries are reported at building sites in Gloucestershire](#)
- [16 LETTER OF THE DAY: What if the Burnley banner had said Black Lives Matter](#)
- [17 Five jobs lost as Armstrong Hall to remain closed for 'foreseeable future'](#)
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