

This page is from APP, the official source of professional practice for policing.

Written by College of Policing

During a live critical incident (CI), it should be possible to identify the reason why public confidence has been lost and to implement a management plan to recover it. Once an incident has closed, the opportunity to do so diminishes.

Restoring public confidence involves dealing with the issues raised and being seen to deal with them in a prompt, equitable and transparent manner by those people most closely affected. The police service needs to learn from its mistakes and take positive steps to prevent them from happening again. Failure to respond competently and diplomatically to complaints may compound the situation and cause another CI.

Unless post-incident quality assurance processes are in place, there may be no indication that confidence has been damaged until a complaint is received. This may be days or weeks after the incident was closed.

Forces may wish to consider the following to help restore public confidence:

- an early apology
- understanding the issues
- **operational review**
- Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) referrals (see **types of review processes**)
- **victim care**
- **community engagement**
- multi-agency complaints and referrals
- **public inquiry**

All reports should be accurately recorded and promptly notified to the most appropriate person. Police forces should have protocols in place to manage these reports.

Case study – loss of confidence

A previously unidentified loss of confidence might be, for example, where a victim has suffered a sustained campaign of harassment which has been reported to the police on several occasions, but the victim has not received the quality of service expected. As a result, they have lost confidence in the ability of the police to provide a quality service to them in the future.

When a further incident is reported, the victim then complains about the previous lack of response they received, even though these incidents were several days or weeks before. Irrespective of the quality of the police response to the latest incident, it is sometimes too late to change their opinion because of the earlier responses. The main objectives now will be to provide a quality service for the current incident, to reassure the victim and try to restore their confidence in the police.

Complaints

The force may receive a complaint in a number of ways. These include:

- letters from victims, their families, community leaders or third parties acting on their behalf
- verbal communication to frontline officers and staff expressing concerns
- articles in the media or documentaries on television or radio
- campaigns or protests by groups representing (with or without consent) the victim, their family or the community

This list is not exhaustive.

Note: some complaints will fall within the statutory complaints procedures under the Police Reform Act 2002 and the Police (Complaints and Misconduct) Regulation 2004. These are supplemented by the [IPCC Statutory Guidance to the Police Service](#) on the complaints system. Every complaint should be assessed on its own merits.

An early apology

Where a loss of confidence already exists, the police service will want to find out why this has happened and to provide a full explanation. If the police are found to be at fault, it is important that they learn from this experience and apologise to those concerned.

If it is immediately clear that the police response was inadequate, it may be appropriate to make an early apology on behalf of the force. This can include a commitment to identify and address the issues that caused the loss of confidence. This may help to reduce the impact of the original police response and demonstrates a proactive attitude to restoring confidence.

Understanding the issues

Understanding the problem can help to determine the best way to restore public confidence. Early assumptions or stereotyping should be avoided. The view of the person or group raising the concern or complaint is based on their own perception of what happened and it is important that they feel their views are being taken seriously. Their concerns need to be managed in a proactive, open, honest and realistic manner.

Victim care

If the person raising the concern is a victim or a family member of someone who has been killed or injured, they may be particularly vulnerable.

In these cases, it may be appropriate to provide an additional level of victim care through a named contact or a family liaison officer while their concerns are being addressed.

For further information, see APP on [victim and witness strategy](#).

Management considerations aide-memoire

- Where public confidence has been lost after an incident is closed, steps should be taken to identify the reasons for this and implement an action plan to restore confidence.
- Action plans should engage and involve partner agencies and independent advisory groups.
- An early apology on behalf of the force, where appropriate, and/or a commitment to address the causes may help to reduce a negative impact on public confidence. This also shows a proactive attitude on behalf of the police.
- Chief officers may wish to ensure that local force policies and procedures are implemented so that all critical incident reports are accurately recorded and monitored.
- Public inquiries do not take place without warning. When an inquiry is called, chief officers may wish to ensure that forces respond to the inquiry process in a positive, proactive and candid

manner.

Tags

Critical incidents