

# Armed deployment

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

First published 23 October 2013 Updated 24 January 2024

Written by College of Policing

37 mins read

In situations requiring the deployment of authorised firearms officers (AFOs), police decision making and response is directed by available information and the assessment of threat.

The [national decision model \(NDM\)](#) assists with this decision-making process and provides a structure for documenting decisions and their rationale.

Police officers have a positive duty to protect the public from harm – a duty of care to all involved must be the overriding consideration. The nature and urgency of police action will take account of any time imperative related to public safety as well as the skills and capability of officers available.

## National decision model

The [national decision model \(NDM\)](#) is a decision-making model used throughout the police service. It is designed to assist operational officers, planners, advisers and commanders to manage their response to a situation in a reasonable, proportionate, lawful and ethical way.

The NDM is a scalable model that can be applied before, during and after an incident requiring the [deployment of AFOs](#). It provides a framework for recording command decisions and the rationale behind them and can also be used to brief officers involved in the response.

The detail, breadth of considerations and extent to which the NDM is applied will vary depending, not only on time permitted, but also on the role of the person applying it. This guidance primarily focuses on the application of the NDM at command level and it is acknowledged that application by AFOs will be more linear.

The NDM is driven by information and intelligence. It is a continuous cycle, constantly reviewed in light of new information and assessment that will, ultimately, affect the response to the incident. The model prompts the decision maker to take action on the basis of the most up-to-date

information and intelligence available at that time.

Each element of the model may be worked through and reviewed consciously or subconsciously. Decisions and the rationale behind them, can be recorded against each element.

## NDM phases

The NDM has a number of phases or components. Each provides the user with an area for focus and consideration:

- gather information and intelligence
- assess threat and risk and develop a working strategy
- consider powers and policy
- identify options and contingencies
- take action and review what happened

In a dynamically evolving incident it will not always be possible to segregate thinking or response according to each phase of the model.

It may not be practical or possible, given the speed at which an incident may evolve, to articulate each decision and rationale when the overriding requirement is for immediate decision making and action.

In such circumstances it will be necessary and appropriate for officers undertaking both command and tactical response to use the professional knowledge, skills and experience which they have developed across their police service and life experience.

## Gather information and intelligence

In firearms related situations, information and intelligence, combined with the experience of those responsible for directing the police response, will assist in determining the most appropriate response to a given situation.

Information and intelligence must be current, relevant and incident or operation specific. This requires that those responsible for intelligence management, command and briefing related to armed operations ensure that bespoke intelligence and subject profiles are developed and maintained to ensure currency.

The assessment of information and intelligence is a dynamic and continuing process throughout the life of an incident or operation. All involved in the collection, analysis and dissemination of intelligence have a responsibility for ensuring that, as far as possible, a full, current and accurate intelligence picture is maintained and that this is conveyed as appropriate to those involved.

When gathering information, the tactical firearms commander (TFC) must also ensure that, as far as time permits, information and intelligence is appropriately probed or clarified, assessed, graded and where possible verified.

Information and intelligence should be passed to officers as necessary for the roles that they are performing, [see APP on dissemination of intelligence](#). It is essential that commanders are regularly updated on changes to information and intelligence in a timely and appropriate manner. These updates will enable the review of strategic objectives, tactical objectives and any tactical parameters set to take place.

Commanders should seek verification of intelligence and information, be aware of the potential for reported information to be wrong or based on assumption, and be aware that there may be intelligence gaps or failures.

It is important to establish and maintain an effective information gathering process at an early stage. In protracted or more complex incidents there may be a need to establish a dedicated intelligence function in support of the TFC.

The initial response to a situation requiring the deployment of AFOs will be informed by the information and intelligence available and its quality, and will depend on the resources available for deployment.

Considerations should include:

- assessment of the current situation, including any threat being posed and to whom
- persons already subjected to harm and requiring medical attention
- reported existence of weapons
- situational information including location and any associated hazards or risks
- information available about the subject
- information available about the subject's associates
- any community impact factors associated with the event or location

## Assessment of the current situation

An assessment of the situation should take account of:

- the subject's physical capacity
- the subject's emotional or mental state
- the subject's capacity to understand what is happening
- any cultural, religious and ethnic considerations relevant to the individual or group
- the locality in which the incident is taking place

The availability of such information will be subject to the circumstances, time available and level of risk. Consideration may be given to obtaining information from sources such as a friend or family member, locally based police officer, a health professional or a representative from a community group.

## Assess threat and risk and develop a working strategy

The primary purpose of the threat assessment is to assess the threat posed by the subject(s) and the potential risk to others associated with that threat. This may include a threat posed to the subject(s) by others (for example, other individuals with criminal intent), or by the subject to themselves (for example, by self-harm).

An accurate, multi-dimensional threat assessment will ultimately allow for an effective prioritised working strategy and the formulation of a proportionate response. Such a multi-dimensional assessment should include, where time allows, the level and nature of the threat along a timeline. This timeline should span from the first time when a commander considers the criteria for armed deployment, until the operation or investigation is concluded and there is no realistic anticipation of further armed deployment. Consideration should also be given to who is at risk and how that may change.

Consideration of the possible threat and risks along this timeline ensures that a commander is able to develop appropriate contingencies, identify potential investigative or evidential thresholds or tipping points, and take mitigating action when required.

Where information or intelligence leads to a change in the threat assessment, this may ultimately affect the working strategy and the primary tactical plan.

The aim is to protect the public by the most appropriate method, balancing the risk of harm to the public in both the short and longer term. (See [sustained public protection](#)).

As an incident progresses, the regular review of available information and intelligence will ensure that the threat assessment remains relevant.

Multi-dimensional threat assessment may identify a tipping point(s) that requires a change to, or implementation of, a tactical plan. This should be briefed to those involved in the operation. A tipping point occurs when a threat and risk assessment indicates that the risk of harm is, or may be, so great that it is necessary to take decisive or mitigating action. This may occur prior to the investigative or evidential threshold being reached and may therefore affect the SIO strategy. Where practicable in the circumstances, this should be discussed with the SIO.

A tipping point may also emerge unexpectedly during an incident or operation. It may require immediate action to be taken, the implementation of a contingency or a deviation from the original plan.

## **Threat assessment – definition**

A threat assessment refers to the analysis of potential or actual harm to people, the probability of it occurring and the consequences or impact should it occur. It is based on fact, information and intelligence and will vary over time. A threat assessment is used to develop a prioritised working strategy and ultimately forms the basis on which the proportionality of the police response will be judged.

A threat assessment:

- should be based on information known at the time
- may be supported by historic information
- should take account of the nature of any threat anticipated and its proximity
- should identify to whom and under what circumstances the threat may occur
- should describe any consequences or impacts
- should take account of the impact of change
- may take the form of an analytical report or problem or subject profile

Where possible, threat assessments should be time specific so that actions can be prioritised accordingly. It is important to evaluate how police action or inaction may impact on the threat assessment.

### **Accuracy**

The more accurate and specific the analysis, the greater the likelihood of being able to reduce or mitigate the threat, although it may still not be possible to eliminate the risk of harm. A threat assessment is only as effective as the information and intelligence that is available to base it on and the capability and competency of staff to analyse it in an accurate and timely manner.

The flow of information and intelligence will constantly change and this needs to be considered in a dynamic and changing operational environment.

Threat assessments will determine the likelihood and extent of harm that may be caused through the actions of any person. It is based on the interaction of the known or suspected capability and intent of an individual, subject or group. It is a continuous process and one in which commanders, planners, intelligence officers, AFOs and those involved in operational deployments will be engaged, both consciously and subconsciously as they undertake their respective functions.

A subject's antecedent history (for example, convictions or warning markers) may provide information which is relevant to the development of a threat assessment. Such information must however be appropriately probed to ensure an understanding of the associated context and circumstances related to the information, and to properly assess its relevance to the current circumstances and potential threat.

### **Analysis**

Once the threat has been identified, it will enable a specific individual threat assessment in relation to all identified parties to be formulated. The assessment should determine whether the likelihood for harm is high, medium, low or unknown in each individual case. The identification of an unknown level of risk usually indicates a gap in information/intelligence which will need to be addressed.

Where one or more groups or individuals are identified as being at the same level of risk, evaluating their proximity and immediacy of the threat may assist to prioritise actions or reduce or mitigate that

risk.

## Working strategy

A working strategy may start to be developed once information is received and can be formalised when a threat assessment has taken place.

The working strategy and the rationale behind it, as well as any revisions or amendments, should be recorded and will form an audit trail.

The working strategy should be regularly reviewed, particularly when a change or handover of command takes place.

For further information:

- [Strategic planning](#)
- [Transfer of command](#)

## Consider powers and policy

In determining the action that should be taken, consideration should be given to which powers and policies are applicable and necessary in the circumstances to achieve the objectives set out within the tactical plan.

Considerations should include:

- under which common law or statutory provision the proposed action is being taken, (for example, stopping, searching or detaining an individual, stopping a vehicle or entering a building or structure)
- implications of any action under the [Human Rights Act 1998](#) and potential infringement of the [European Convention on Human Rights](#) (ECHR) articles – are the powers to be actioned proportionate, legal, accountable and necessary?
- whether a warrant is required
- whether the criteria for the deployment of AFOs are met
- whether the desired objective could be met in a less intrusive manner
- whether the operation involves surveillance, and what level of authority is required under the [Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act \(RIPA\) 2000](#) or the [Regulation of Investigatory](#)

### Powers (Scotland) Act (RIP(S)A 2000

- how closely the proposed action meets the strategic firearms commander's strategy
- are decisions and proposed actions consistent with the Code of Ethics?

Consideration should also be given to whether there is APP or force policies, guidance or procedure relating to the proposed actions.

## Identify options and contingencies

As soon as the first information is received, potential immediate actions and generic options to mitigate identified risks should be considered. . This may include the relocation or deployment of AFOs as a contingency, or to carry out an investigative assessment. As more information becomes available, specific tactical options should be further considered in the light of evaluated intelligence and the relevant powers and policy.

Generic options set out in very general terms the different approaches available to achieve a particular objective in a manner which minimises risk and harm. They are broad descriptions of the options the police may have available to them when dealing with an incident which requires the deployment of armed officers. Along with the primary aim of securing public safety, consideration should be given to whether it is possible to identify, locate and contain the subject and take appropriate action to neutralise the threat posed. Generic options should not be considered in isolation and once a particular approach is determined, armed policing activity should be defined as specific tactics.

Generic options to consider include:

### 1. Wait

Before selecting any other option, consideration should be given to whether it is appropriate or necessary in the circumstances to take immediate action.

It may be, for example, more appropriate to record information and allow further time to gather additional information or intelligence that will enable other options to be considered.

The key issue to be determined is whether a delay in the police response would create additional risks to the public or expose any persons to harm.



## 2. Take mitigating action

Mitigating action is designed to minimise harm and can include:

- high-visibility police presence
- provision of protection
- removing potential victims to a safe location
- action to minimise the subject's capability

## 3. Keep the subject under observation

There may be benefits to keeping the subject under observation, either overtly or covertly. Where this option is proposed, consideration should be given to the skills needed, and whether authority is required under the RIPA or RIP(S)A.

## 4. Investigative assessment

Consideration should be given to deploying AFOs to carry out an investigative assessment.

This may include AFOs taking discreet action to gather sufficient information on the nature or existence of a threat, or to gather intelligence.

The use of AFOs for this purpose would enable them to be in a position to immediately contain the situation should the need arise, and to take action to neutralise the threat if necessary.

## 5. Contain the area around the subject

Containment is an option when the subject is believed to be in a particular location. The objective of this is to isolate the subject or place limits on their permitted movement. The containment can be either static or, in some circumstances, may move with the subject. It may also allow time for more detailed planning of a police response.

In certain situations containment may require two groups of officers. These are usually referred to as:

- outer cordon
- inner cordon

Depending on the landscape of the scene, it may be possible to use unarmed officers on the outer cordon.

In containing a subject, armed officers should take into account 'arcs of fire' in the event of them having to discharge a firearm, and have defined areas of responsibility. This is important for the safety of everyone. Officers should also consider the area behind a given subject or object and the implications should any shots be discharged, including the potential for shots to ricochet.

Containment may be overt, discreet or covert and may be used at any stage during the deployment of AFOs.

## 6. Communicate with the subject

Communicating with the subject may necessitate a visual or verbal challenge. On occasions, this may lead to a subject engaging AFOs in some form of dialogue.

## Communication

Where circumstances permit, AFOs should identify themselves as armed officers and give a clear direction to the subject, allowing sufficient time for the directions to be observed unless to do so would unduly place any person at risk, or would be clearly inappropriate or pointless in the circumstances of the incident.

Oral or visual warnings should make the subject aware of the nature of the armed police intervention. These should serve as a clear warning to them and make it clear that force and/or firearms may be used. All AFOs should receive training in communicating with subjects. On first verbal contact, officers should normally:

- identify themselves as police officers and state that they are armed
- clarify who it is they are seeking to communicate with
- communicate in a clear and appropriate manner

Where weapons are fitted with torches or laser sights, officers should consider the effects of their use during any confrontation.

## Negotiation

Officers are encouraged to try to reduce the threat level or neutralise it through early negotiation. While communication skills are included in all AFO initial training, ongoing negotiations should be undertaken by a trained negotiator. This is an officer trained to negotiate with subjects to resolve an operation peacefully, and to gather information which may assist as part of the intelligence-gathering process. When necessary negotiators should be deployed as soon as practicable.

## 7. Decisive action

To take decisive action is to intervene, intercept or challenge a subject. Decisive action can be applied to a subject who is in the open, in a vehicle, or in a building or other structure. This may be undertaken in a slow and deliberate manner, or in fast time with the benefit of surprise.

Consideration of the ways in which a particular situation can be resolved with the least risk of harm allows for feasible specific tactics to be identified. There are specific firearms tactics related to this option (tactics can be described as a method of working using agreed processes to meet specific objectives).

Each tactic requires specific training, technical knowledge, skill and teamwork and may involve the use of other specialist officers and equipment. In formulating an appropriate tactical response, the TFC, with the assistance of a tactical advisor (if one is available), will identify the most appropriate specific tactics, as detailed in the National Police Firearms Training Curriculum.

Strategic and tactical firearms commanders should consider each option, having regard to:

- feasibility of success measured against the working strategy
- acceptability of consequences
- associated risks involved in taking forward a specific option or taking alternative action

## Viable specific tactics

In considering the specific tactics, the commander and should consider whether:

- a given tactic or combination of tactics will achieve all or part of the working strategy
- identified threats are likely to be reduced or eliminated
- the tactics are proportionate to the threat posed and are ECHR compliant
- the tactics are within any tactical parameters set

Commanders, tactical advisors and AFOs should consider whether an overt, discreet or covert approach or a combination of both would be most appropriate. Operational constraints may include:

- the immediacy of any threat
- the limits of the information known
- the availability of sufficient resources, people and equipment for the various options
- the training and competency of officers involved in the operation for the role they will be expected to perform
- the amount of time available
- the impact of the police action on the public and wider community
- legal constraints
- environmental considerations
- the result of any risk assessment

## Contingencies

Operational planning should identify contingencies at an early stage. These should address what are often referred to as the 'what ifs'. They need to be reviewed as the situation develops, taking account of emerging and/or changing circumstances including:

- the subject's intention, actions or behaviour (in particular the likelihood of fight, flight or compliance at the point of contact)
- information and intelligence
- the environment
- the actions of others involved

The potential for intelligence failures or gaps in the information known should also be considered.

While it is impractical to identify every possible outcome to a given situation, commanders should identify appropriate contingencies based on the:

- probability of the outcome occurring
- potential impact of the outcome on the working strategy and tactical plan
- potential risks to individuals involved in the incident and the response

For further information [see APP on risk](#).

## Take action and review what happened

When a course of action has been decided on, commanders should direct resources and ensure that those involved are appropriately briefed. Before an operational deployment or activation of a tactical option takes place the actions to be taken, where time permits, include:

- briefing (including contingencies)
- operational risk assessment
- community impact assessment (where appropriate)
- ensuring appropriate level of medical assistance
- consideration of post-deployment issues

Officers need to be clear on which tactical option they are required to carry out and the tactical objective they are to accomplish. Where activation of a particular tactical option is time critical, there should, where practicable, be clearly agreed procedures for communicating any decision to defer, abort or initiate a specific tactic.

Reviewing the effect of the action taken is a distinct and crucial part of this stage of the NDM. The result of the action taken is new information which may necessitate a further application of the model.

Considerations could include such things as whether the identified threats have been reduced or eliminated and whether the action taken achieved all or any of the objectives of the working strategy.

### Operational risk assessment

A risk assessment gauging the risk to staff engaged in specific activities in a particular location or manner is a legal requirement of all employers, including the police service.

NPCC firmly acknowledges that those involved in armed deployments are required to make critical judgements in the most difficult of situations and often in life-threatening circumstances. Their contribution in helping to resolve these situations and in providing protection to the public and other police officers is highly valued by the Police Service. It is, therefore, important that the safety, welfare and rights of these officers are appropriately addressed by NPCC.

Prior to the authorisation of specific tactics, commanders must however ensure that an operational risk assessment is undertaken in respect of viable tactics or tactical options. Firearms tactics are developed over a period of time, and are assessed and reviewed when necessary as a consequence of operational learning. Such development, and the associated training, of tactics requires thorough evaluation and risk assessment to ensure that the activity is as safe as practicable and that suitable equipment and personal protective equipment is provided. These risk assessments provide the basis upon which commanders and tactical advisors can rely when considering the manner in which they will deploy armed officers.

The operational risk assessment will cover the hazards and risks associated with the location of the operation, the subject, any potential victims, the public and any hazards arising from the tactical options proposed. It is essentially a dynamic risk assessment and should be reviewed when appropriate and recorded.

The formality and complexity of the risk assessment will depend on the time and information available.

For further information see [Health and safety risk assessment](#).

## Briefing

All staff involved in situations where AFOs are deployed must be given as full a briefing as possible. The sharing of accurate and up-to-date information with those involved in armed policing deployments ensures that associated decisions and actions are informed by an appropriate threat and risk assessment. Accurate information in respect of a subject's capability and intent are of particular relevance to armed officers. Wherever practicable and lawful, all relevant information should be shared. Where incomplete information is to be shared, it may be necessary to explain the provenance of the information, in terms of whether it is:

- based on fact or assumption
- reliable
- up to date
- subject to further development

The TFC is responsible for ensuring that the briefing is accurate and includes the most current information and intelligence, which supports the threat and risk assessment and prioritised working

strategy. The information and intelligence provided must be specific, and relevant to the operation being briefed. All briefings should be appropriately recorded (see 5. keeping a record).

Where an operation has been subject to previous briefings and/or armed deployments, the TFC must ensure that the briefing material has been fully reviewed and updated and that irrelevant or out of date information is no longer included. Officers that have received previous briefings should be informed where any information is no longer relevant or current in order that it does not inappropriately influence their understanding of the circumstances.

Should the TFC or OFC identify that an officer's exposure to information or intelligence that is not current or relevant to the specific deployment may adversely influence that officer's assessment of threat and risk, they should take steps to address the particular issue or consider whether the officer should take any further part in the operation. Any action taken, and the reason for taking it, should be recorded.

The objectives, tactics and contingencies that have been approved should be clearly explained and clarified with those being briefed. The level of additional detail given will depend on the circumstances prevailing at the time and the time available.

## 1. Tools for briefing

The key headings in NDM should be used as a basis for briefing and debriefing officers. This has the advantage of providing continuity of approach during the planning and operational phases of a deployment. The use of the NDM in this way also enables any additional information to be reviewed or updated as the situation develops.

Other models such as the IIMARCH model can be used to develop the content of the briefing.

Officers providing briefings should stress the aim of any operation including, specifically, the individual responsibility of officers and the legal powers relevant to the deployment.

## 2. Effective communication of the briefing

The tactical firearms commander should ensure that AFOs and other deployed officers are briefed using the most appropriate means of communication. Commanders should confirm their lines of communication to officers (AFOs and unarmed) once they have been deployed.

### 3. Briefing content

The briefing should outline the intended course of action and incorporate a range of contingencies. These should provide officers with as much clarity as possible for the role that they may have to undertake and any tactical parameters which have been set. In some circumstances, such as MASTS deployments, it may not be known at the time of briefing whether or how an operation may be tactically concluded.

The TFC should ensure that only information and intelligence that is up to date, reliable and relevant is included in the briefing, and that it is appropriately linked to the working strategy. Anecdotal information which may be untested or based on inappropriate assumption should be excluded from briefings and officers should be reminded of the need to separate and distinguish between factually based briefing content and anecdotal information.

The National Intelligence Model provides guidance on how commanders can assess the reliability and strength of intelligence.

Where time permits, briefings should inform officers of the procedures to be followed at the conclusion of the event to which they have been deployed. This should include the procedures to adopt in respect of prisoner handling, scene preservation, evidence collection and return to a location where post-deployment procedures will be undertaken. These may range from officers making notes and completing records, through to structured debriefing, as well as attending to organisational and welfare issues. See post-deployment.

Briefing provides the basis of the recipients understanding of the operational circumstances and context. The tone and content of a briefing can influence the mind-set of the officers and staff deployed, and consequently their perceptions of risk and decision making. Those conducting briefings should be mindful that the content of the briefing may influence the response of armed officers to any subsequent perceived threat from a subject. It is therefore essential that the content, particularly where it relates to the threat posed by a subject(s), in terms of their capability or intention, is current, accurate and objectively delivered. This will help to ensure that the officers deployed are fully aware of the potential risks in possession of the information required to support appropriate, contextualised decisions in respect of use of force.



While it is legitimate to fully discuss and clarify tactical parameters and contingencies during the briefing, commanders should guard against these being perceived as pre-authorisation for the use of force or tipping points for such.

#### 4. Who should conduct the briefing

Where practicable, a briefing for an incident or operation involving the deployment of armed officers should be delivered by the TFC. TFCs should consider utilising other staff to assist with developing and/or delivering briefings where they are better placed to fully explain the relevant information and intelligence and respond to or clarify questions (eg, operational firearms commanders (OFC) and intelligence officers).

It may be appropriate to separate some of the specific elements of the tactical plan from the main operational briefing (for example, due to the sensitivity of the information or the specialist nature of the deployment).

It may be desirable for OFCs to brief their teams on specific tasks within the tactical plan, following the briefing by the TFC. The TFC must be made aware of any such briefings.

#### 5. Keeping a record

TFCs should ensure that a record of all briefings is maintained. All briefings relating to firearms operations should be audio-recorded unless this is not reasonably practicable. Where a decision is made not to audio-record a briefing because of the presence of sensitive intelligence, then it must be made clear why this could not be mitigated in other ways. Consideration may be given to recording such a decision within a sensitive policy document to fully comply with relevant legislative requirements.

Where audio recording is not reasonably practicable, the reason should be documented and the most comprehensive practicable method of providing an accurate record of the briefing should be used. This record should include the persons present and the information given. Depending on the nature of the operation, it may be necessary to use a combination of methods, which may include:

- contemporaneous notes
- formal briefing documents
- audio recording

- ICT systems
- body-worn video
- command and control logs

Where officers are being briefed while travelling, or are in a remote location, consideration should be given to using radio or telephone recording to provide a record of the briefing. The absence of secure communication may, however, place constraints on this option in situations where classified or sensitive information is being referred to.

## **Operational deployment**

AFOs must be continually updated with information relevant to their role during their deployment.

Officers should, whenever possible, confirm their arrival at the scene of an incident or at a predetermined rendezvous point. This will ensure that commanders are aware of the location of AFOs. It is also important from a personal safety perspective.

On arrival at the scene officers will undertake roles as directed. There will, however, be circumstances in which officers are required to make their own assessment of the situation and act accordingly. This may extend to identifying, locating, containing and, where possible, neutralising the threat posed.

## **Medical assistance**

When planning operations where AFOs are being deployed, TFCs should consider where and how emergency medical aid would be provided if this is required. This should be based on risk assessment and may, in addition to the availability of officers trained in relevant first aid, include placing an ambulance on standby.

Forces should ensure that agreements are in place with local emergency healthcare services to provide medical support to police operations, including those involving the deployment of AFOs.

Where an ambulance is not on standby and time permits (for example, planned operations), and where doing so would not present any issues in respect of operational safety and security, an incident log should be created within the force control room containing accurate address details of where the firearms operation will be conducted. Where it is not practicable to create a log prior to an operation, (for example, operational safety, security or a mobile operation) the TFC should

ensure that the tactical plan identifies how an ambulance will be requested. The plan should identify who will have responsibility for requesting an ambulance directly, to avoid any delay caused by requesting one via the force control room. Where it is anticipated that requesting an ambulance directly from the scene may cause an unnecessary delay (for example, where phone or radio coverage is poor), a request should be made via the force control room, ensuring that full address details are communicated at the time of making the request.

## Community impact assessment

The strategic firearms commander should consider the need for a community impact assessment, the extent and formality of which will depend on the nature of the situations in which the police are involved and the time available. On some occasions the community impact assessment will be a dynamic process undertaken simultaneously by AFOs, local officers and all those in command roles.

Whenever time permits, however, a comprehensive community impact assessment should be completed in order to:

- identify community, diversity and human rights issues which may be affected
- consider action to retain or promote community confidence and reassurance in the police action

Note: Local independent advisory groups (IAGs) may include members who are community impact assessment (CIA) trained and available to offer advice and guidance where there may be cultural factors that should be considered as part of the response.

Assessments should be regularly reviewed to take account of emerging issues and may involve cross-boundary considerations.

For further information see APP on [community impact assessments](#).

### The impact of armed police deployment on a community

The visible deployment of AFOs may have an impact on the community. Where police officers have discharged a firearm and an individual is killed or injured as a result, this may have a significant impact on the community in which the incident occurs as well as on communities to which the individual has affiliation.

Effective management of the situation should enhance the trust and confidence of the community. The consistency, robustness and management of situations involving the deployment of AFOs has the potential to cultivate good public relations with the community.

The manner in which the police service approaches these situations can also have a significant effect on any follow-up investigation.

In these circumstances, community impact assessments must be carried out and consideration should be given to consulting the relevant independent advisory group or the independent investigative authority. See post-deployment.

## **Explanation and apology**

There will be occasions when the reason for police action may not be apparent to the public. This may cause concern or anxiety, for example, to onlookers, relatives, neighbours and subjects innocent of any wrongdoing.

In such circumstances commanders should consider providing a suitable explanation for the actions taken. This may include visiting the people particularly affected (ideally by a supervisor directly involved in the incident, so long as this does not cause a conflict of interest), or distributing an information leaflet setting out the circumstances of the police action. Some form of apology may be required on occasions.

Depending on the effectiveness of the operation, forces may wish to ensure that the people affected are aware of all the support available to them. In appropriate circumstances they should be made aware of their options for seeking redress (for example, the police complaints process).

## **Record keeping**

Commanders have a responsibility to record their decisions, actions and supporting rationale as accurately and fully as is practicable, using the NDM as the structure. This should be done contemporaneously if possible, commencing at the point at which they begin to consider any incident that may require the deployment of armed officers. The extent to which this can be achieved will depend on the circumstances and the nature of the incident or operation. Where it has not been possible to make a record contemporaneously, or soon after the event, the record should reflect this, the reason why and when it was made.

Individual commanders must be prepared to account for their decisions and to explain their rationale at the time that those decisions were taken. All plans should be documented, including options rejected or progressed, together with the reasons why such conclusions were drawn and by whom.

Incidents involving police officers' use of force or firearms may be the subject of scrutiny in a number of forums. Forces must ensure that the records kept are sufficient to meet these needs. Records and logs maintained by or on behalf of commanders and tactical advisors will be reviewed during operations as well as during post-deployment audits. A comprehensive record of key actions and decisions made by commanders, and the advice given by tactical advisors, in situations where AFOs may be or have been deployed should be maintained in accordance with common national standards.

For further information, information on national command logs is available via the armed policing management and command group community on Knowledge Hub, (an OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE online tool available to authorised users).

## Dealing with people

Police officers at or surrounding the scene of an incident involving the deployment of AFOs will encounter people in a number of different circumstances and contexts. The following guidance outlines some general considerations for all those involved.

## Handling subjects

The close proximity of subjects to officers with firearms at the final stages of an incident presents risks, particularly where a subject chooses not to comply with instructions, physically resists or attempts to escape.

Officers with weapons are at risk of being disarmed by subjects unless care is taken. Every effort should be made to have sufficient officers present to provide a suitable response. The use of **less lethal options**, including police dogs and negotiators, should be considered, wherever possible, in order to enable the police officers at the scene to deal with any emerging situation.

Consideration should be given to providing immediate medical assistance and early support, which may include the services provided by family liaison officers.

All officers should, as far as practicable, remain forensically aware when handling subjects. Operational commanders should ensure that forensic issues, such as the risk of cross-contamination, are taken into account in the planning of operations and the briefing and deployment of officers.

## Hostage situations

In situations where an armed subject has taken hostages or become closely involved with members of the public, it may be difficult to distinguish hostages and other persons from the perpetrators.

In these circumstances it may be necessary for officers to regard all persons as a potential threat, until everyone can be isolated and their identity checked.

Hostages should be treated with consideration. Officers should bear in mind that they may have been subjected to life-threatening, degrading or humiliating treatment, and may have experienced a range of emotions. Police action should be designed to minimise the risks to all those involved and avoid unnecessarily raising the level of anxiety or confusion of hostages who have been released or rescued. Hostages sometimes, as a result of a shared ordeal, form an affinity with the hostage taker or their cause, and may, voluntarily or under coercion, become involved in action designed to assist their captors. The police response should, therefore, take account of these factors.

## Environmental and behavioural influencers

Environmental and behavioural influencers can affect a subject's behaviour and their response to any contact with police officers. These influencers (sometimes referred to as moderators) can include issues such as:

- crowd dynamics and peer group pressure
- environments where communication is difficult
- sensory impairment or communication difficulties, for example, hearing impairment or where the subject may have difficulty in understanding or communicating in English
- the effects of drugs or alcohol
- subjects whose movements are impaired or exaggerated by reason of a medical condition
- subjects who have learning difficulties

## Communication issues

Where there are known environmental and behavioural influencers involved in a situation, the following may assist in improving communication with the subject:

- prior intelligence gathering
- early use of interpreters for language or communication difficulties
- early use of trained negotiators, either directly or to advise others

When, during the planning phase of an operation, there is intelligence to suggest that communication may be difficult due to language, sensory impairment or a subject with learning disabilities, ways to address this should be included in the plan. Considerations may extend to involving someone with the required language skills, or the use of prepared phrases or written signs.

Officers should also consider how cultural differences may result in persons responding differently when verbally challenged, and be aware of how their language and tactics could be interpreted.

## **Children and young people**

The potential for children or young persons to be involved in gun related or other violent crimes, both as victims and perpetrators, should be recognised by forces within their threat and risk assessments, and subsequently, their training.

Special consideration should be given to situations where the use of force places children at risk, particularly where they are in the same location, or close proximity to a subject.

It should be recognised that a child may not react the same way as an adult might be expected to in the same situation, possibly because they are afraid or distressed by the circumstances. Children and young people may also act unexpectedly as a result of peer pressure or a learning disability that may prevent them from understanding an instruction.

## **Intelligence relating to subject behaviour and/or condition**

Where appropriate, early contact should be made with healthcare professionals and/or social workers for information, intelligence and advice concerning a subject's behaviour and condition.

If information and intelligence reveals the presence of a factor which can influence behaviour and alter response, police should take this into account when considering their approach.

Officers must be aware of how their presence and tactics might be interpreted by the subject. It is important, however, that the basic principles of tactics are complied with in order to reduce the potential threat by and/or to the subject as soon as practicable.

## **De-escalating the situation (see evidence-based guidelines on conflict management)**

The following actions can help create opportunities for the subject and officers to have more time and space to de-escalate the situation.

- Be prepared to back off (if safe).
- Use of effective cover.
- Give time and space if possible.
- Early negotiation or negotiation advice.
- Evacuation of immediate area.
- Less lethal options if appropriate.

This may enable:

- tension to be diffused
- officers to have more time to assess the person's vulnerability
- the effects of alcohol or drugs to wear off
- positive communication and contact to be established
- the level of mental or emotional distress to decrease

This may result in more positive and constructive communication with the subject, allowing the situation to be dealt with in a controlled manner.

## **Dealing with individuals who are emotionally or mentally distressed**

The term emotionally or mentally distressed is used to describe individuals who may behave in an unexpected, extreme or challenging manner as a result of a mental health issue or emotional distress (either permanent or temporary).

Commanders and AFOs are not expected to diagnose the medical reasons, where they exist, which may be causing an individual's behaviour. It is however important to consider the potential for such



emotional or mental distress within any tactical plan or interaction with the individual. This should not be confused with dealing with an individual who may be suffering from acute behavioural disturbance (ABD).

The fact that the subject is emotionally or mentally distressed does not in any way reduce the harm they may cause to themselves or others if the incident is not resolved. However, officers must be aware that an inappropriate or disproportionate response to someone experiencing emotional or mental distress could, itself, escalate the situation, causing greater harm to the subject or to others.

Individuals who are emotionally or mentally distressed may respond to the arrival of armed officers, and officers equipped with a CED (Taser), in an unexpected or unpredictable manner. This can be caused by a range of factors, for example, mental ill health or extreme distress, which may on occasions be aggravated or caused by drugs or alcohol, or the absence of prescribed medication. Failure to recognise and understand why someone may not be complying with instructions or communication could increase the tension of a situation.

Negotiators, AFOs and officers equipped with a CED (Taser) must have an understanding of how emotionally or mentally distressed individuals may respond to their presence and any visual or verbal contact made with them. It may be necessary to consider different language and tactics to those that would normally be used in such circumstances. – see guidance on [identifying options and contingencies \(Armed Policing APP\)](#) and [Assess threat and risk, and develop a working strategy \(Mental Health APP\)](#).

Officers should also consider how their language and tactics could be interpreted. When dealing with emotionally or mentally distressed individuals, it can be difficult to predict potential behaviour or responses to any given visual or verbal stimuli.

While in some circumstances the creation of time and space may be most likely to achieve the safest resolution (see de-escalating the situation), the information and intelligence related to the subject may indicate that this is unlikely to be the case. The identified potential for an extremely unpredictable and/or volatile reaction of a subject, when approached or confronted by the police, may make it safer to take swift action to remove the subjects' capability before they have an opportunity to react. Such action must be a lawful, proportionate and justifiable response to information and intelligence (for example, close quarter containment, approach and physical control, which may include the use of proportionate pre-emptive force).

Further information:

- APP on [Mental health](#)
- APP on [Suicide and bereavement response](#)

## Indicators of emotional or mental distress

Awareness of the factors that may indicate whether an individual is experiencing emotional or mental distress can improve the identification, management and monitoring of any potential risk posed either to or by the subject. For further information see [Mental vulnerability and illness APP – Behaviour](#), [Gather information and intelligence](#) and [Signs of mental ill health or learning disabilities](#).

Factors may include:

- previous history, for example, violence, self-harm, suicide attempts
- alcohol or drugs consumed or present
- recent negative life event, for example, divorce, separation, bereavement
- diagnosis of schizophrenia
- depression
- experiencing a psychotic episode or crisis, including hearing voices, or auditory, visual or sensory hallucinations
- experiencing delusions or feelings of paranoia or of being
- controlled by others
- preoccupation with violence and/or violent fantasies
- extreme agitation and excitement, particularly if escalating
- apparent difficulty understanding and cooperating with instructions
- impulsive or unpredictable emotions or behaviour
- repetitive threats, especially if specific or focused
- apparent lack of awareness of severity of the situation and potential risks
- statements of intent to self-harm or die by suicide

These factors may be indicative or symptomatic of more than one cause. They are purely a guide and cannot be guaranteed to establish, either by their presence or absence, to what extent an individual is experiencing emotional or mental distress and exactly how an armed officer should respond.

Assessment of the threat, posed both by the subject and to the subject, within any given crisis situation is a continuous dynamic process.

## Indicators of a severe medical condition

Someone with a severe medical condition may exhibit one or more than one of the following symptoms and behaviours.

- apparently inexplicable and/or aggressive behaviour
- apparently confused thinking
- disorientation
- hallucinations
- acute feelings of paranoia
- panic
- shouting
- violence towards others
- unexpected physical strength
- apparent ineffectiveness of irritant sprays
- significantly diminished sense of pain
- sweating, fever, heat intolerance
- sudden tranquillity after frenzied activity

The method of restraint and transport should ensure that their windpipe does not become blocked and that they are not transported in a face down position as this can cause positional asphyxia. Where a subject has been arrested and is exhibiting these characteristics, early medical advice must be sought and the subject must be kept under visual observation. This is particularly important in respect of restrained subjects who are under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or who are extremely obese or very small.

For further information:

- [Mental health](#)
- [Acute behavioural disturbance](#)
- [Positional asphyxia](#)

## Provoked shootings

The term provoked shooting refers to a situation in which a subject engages in life-threatening behaviour or criminal activity in an attempt to create a situation where a police officer will shoot them.

However, it should not be assumed that every person who points a weapon at the police or makes statements about being armed, fully appreciates or intends the consequences of their actions or words.

Where a person appears to be engaging in life-threatening behaviour or criminal activity with the intention of creating a situation where a police officer will shoot them, officers should consider how their communication with the person and their actions may be perceived. (See [First response to people who are considering or threatening suicide](#) and [Specific communication tools](#).)

Officers should consider the full range of tactical options, including the use of [less lethal weapons](#).

## Other persons involved

Other persons involved may be able to provide information which could be of value in tactical planning, and also provide evidence in subsequent investigations.

If it is inappropriate to take full statements from witnesses (including police officers) during the initial stages of the investigation, then a record should be made of their first accounts in accordance with normal evidential procedures.

The safety and welfare of witnesses should always be a prime consideration.

## Police responders

The initial police responders to arrive at the scene of an incident will, in many cases, be unarmed. Where it becomes apparent that the incident requires the deployment of AFOs, the safety of unarmed officers and police staff, and the impact that they may have on the situation needs to be considered. The extent of the impact will be dependent on the circumstances and nature of the threat.

Subject to risk assessment, unarmed responders may undertake tasks such as:

- providing a physical or visible deterrent, or reassurance

- directing potential victims or other vulnerable persons from locations where harm may occur
- dealing with casualties and, where possible, providing immediate first aid
- gathering information and reporting back
- implementing cordons

Those directing the use of unarmed responders should provide them with clear instructions regarding what they should and should not attempt to do.

Although negotiating principles are included in all initial training of AFOs, this is unlikely to be the case for unarmed responders attending the scene. Initial, unarmed responders may be confronted by a subject attempting to engage them in some form of communication. This should not be ignored and responders may try to reduce the threat level or neutralise it by early communication with the subject. Unarmed responders should not try to communicate, however, if by doing so they would place themselves or members of the public in danger.

The deployment of unarmed responders should be coordinated with that of AFO's, and subject to appropriate risk assessment. Consideration should be given to the balance of competing priorities, such as saving life and the duty of care to those deployed, while taking steps to mitigate the threat.

For further information see College of Policing Stay Safe – Keeping the public and unarmed responders safe at incidents involving the use, or suspected use, of firearms or potentially lethal weapons, (available via [College Learn](#) and the armed policing management and command community on knowledge hub, which is an OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE online tool.)

## Tags

Armed policing