

# Approaches to POPS

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

First published 23 October 2013 Updated 8 June 2023

## Use of the national decision model and joint decision model

Public order public safety (POPS) commanders and public order public safety advisers (POPSAs) should use the [national decision model \(NDM\)](#) to support their decision making when planning POPS events and operations and making dynamic operational decisions.

Commanders responsible for the planning and control of events and operations need to balance the rights of individuals and/or groups, as well as the impact that their decision making has on crowd dynamics and public perception.

## Considerations

Commanders should plan to minimise recourse to the use of force, where it is possible. Example considerations include the following.

- Setting the policing standards, style, tone and dress code. For example, Code 1 dress and shield deployment may be a justifiable level of protection for officers but may also send a message to the crowd that should be reserved for higher levels of threat. However, an effective and comprehensive threat and risk assessment by POPS commanders and POPSAs will provide a clear rationale for POPS officers' dress code.
- Any less-intrusive tactical options (for example, police liaison teams) that are available before officers are deployed into a scenario that may require them to use force.
- European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) ([Article 2 – Right to life](#) and [Article 3 – Prohibition of torture](#)).
- The consequences of placing police into direct contact with the crowd and whether this in itself may increase the need to use force.
- Physical substitutes such as barriers and fencing that do not require direct contact between the police and the crowd.

- The potential response (for example, alienation or an increase in tension), crowd dynamics (such as exit routes) and public perception when deploying officers.
- Collective use of force (for example, a line of officers with batons drawn dispersing a crowd as a result of command decisions).
- Whether staff are appropriately trained, accredited, experienced and competent for specific deployments.
- Any relevant past intelligence relating to the group or event (for example, reaction of the group to police tactics at a past event).
- Clarity of command decisions, including the foreseeable levels of force that officers may use. For example, officers directed to disperse a crowd may individually use force to do so. Although those officers would have to justify their use of force, the commander should also consider whether they foresaw the use of force, whether use of force was necessary and whether any further clarity was required regarding the level of force to be used.

POPS commanders and POPSAs should record their conversations, subsequent decisions and actions. This should include the rationale for decisions and include the options that were considered and subsequently discounted or implemented. These records will ensure that any subsequent review or assessment of actions, including scrutiny of the legitimacy and proportionality of the policing response, can be based on the information and intelligence available to the officer(s) at the time the decision was made.

In the event of multi-agency events or operations with a command structure that includes other agencies, POPS commanders and POPSAs should use the [joint decision model \(JDM\)](#) to make decisions with other emergency services and agencies.

## Risk

Decision making regarding POPS events and operations can include an element of risk. The [Risk APP](#) provides additional support and clarity relating to decision making and the level of support that officers should expect from their organisation when making decisions.

## Disorder model

The disorder model provides a structure for POPS commanders and POPSAs to understand the nature of disorder. Although this model may not be applicable to all events or operations, POPS

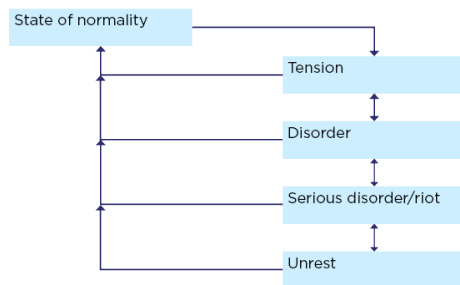
commanders and POPSAs can use it to assist their decision making when managing policing operations, events and incidents where there is a risk of disorder or its escalation. The management of tension in communities or social groups should be regarded as a continuous process rather than a one-off crisis intervention.

POPS commanders should determine the relevant stage of the disorder model for the overall operation and for specific locations in the event or operation, which may be at different stages of the disorder model.

The consideration of the disorder model should be made alongside any [community impact assessments \(CIAs\)](#) that are being developed for the relevant event or operation.

Forces should also take into account information contained in their [community tension summaries \(CTS\)](#) document, which is completed each week.

Commanders can use the different stages of the model to decide on their selection of relevant [tactical options](#).



Disorder model

## State of normality

The day-to-day state of order and policing services provided in a community can vary widely from one area to another and even by time of day.

Effective information and intelligence management provides accurate information as to the current state of order. It should be recognised that communities are complex in nature and that they may

be permanent or transient.

## Tension

This manifests as a level of increased concern or feelings within a community, group or crowd.

A trigger incident may result in movement from a state of heightening tension to disorder. Such incidents can be caused by the police, the community or a third party.

## Disorder

This represents the stage at which the mood is supplemented by action, whether isolated or sustained. It manifests itself in disruption, damage or violence.

Such disorder may occur following a single trigger incident or a series of incidents that have a cumulative effect.

At this level, unchecked or uncontrolled activity (including ineffective or incorrect police response) may deteriorate into serious disorder.

## Serious disorder or riot

This is an escalation into widespread violent behaviour. This may take the form of violent protest, rioting, criminal damage or looting, and may include the use of weapons.

## Unrest

This is the (sometimes prolonged) period when the rebuilding of relationships takes place. Sensitivity and trust are key factors in this process.

Police and partners should focus on a structured return to a state of normality and should be aware that it is possible to cause a return to disorder or serious disorder through excessive or inappropriate action.

Progression through all stages is not necessary. Depending on the circumstances, it may be possible to return to the state of normality from any level. The stages from state of normality through to serious disorder or riot can be viewed in terms of an escalation in tension and conflict. A return to the state of normality from any stage can be viewed as a de-escalation.

## Disorder model considerations

- The desired outcome should be the return to a state of normality (which may differ before and after an incident of disorder or serious disorder).
- The police, other emergency services, statutory partners and community, group or crowd may have different perceptions of the level of tension, conflict or disorder. Effective community liaison may assist in reducing any disparity.
- Information and intelligence to identify potential or existing conflicts or tensions within communities, groups or crowds can facilitate appropriate interventions.
- Rumours and misinformation relating to a POPS event or operation may circulate. These may include comments on the actions and responses of the police. If appropriate, this misinformation should be corrected as quickly as possible. Prior investment in building relationships and liaising with communities, together with an effective engagement strategy that uses social media, are key factors in being able to dismiss unfounded rumours.
- During periods of disorder, normal policing services (both to the affected community and the wider policing area) should be maintained wherever possible.
- Where force is used, this must be the minimum required to achieve the lawful objective. Any **police use of force** could be perceived as unnecessary and may result in escalation. POPS commanders should plan to reduce the need for force where possible.
- Active partnership and stakeholder working involving the police, community and other agencies can help prevent disorder and reduce tension. Forces should consider using strategic coordinating groups, tactical coordinating groups, community networks, local partnerships and Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP) when working in partnership.
- A trigger incident is any incident, however minor, that leads to an escalation in the level of tension or disorder.

## Further information

The police, in conjunction with partners, have a key role in contributing to the following.

- Building and keeping the peace in the community.
- Restoring peace through local negotiation and appropriate interventions, to minimise the effects of criminal activity and local tensions or conflict.

- Holding early neighbourhood-level partnership interventions designed to mitigate the risk of escalation into disorder or serious disorder during the tension and unrest stages. For example:
  - using CIAs and CTSs to assess community tensions and to build information and intelligence
  - using the weekly CTS reporting process to assess community tensions in the relevant force area and current national tensions
  - developing a communication and engagement plan, incorporating key messages
  - deploying and tasking local resources (for example, neighbourhood policing teams and response officers)
  - facilitating strategic coordination groups (SCGs) and/or tactical coordination groups (TCGs) to assist with inter-agency and multi-party working
  - implementing JESIP so that relevant agencies fulfil their statutory responsibilities, where applicable, when planning for and responding to POPS events and operations

Chief officer leads for POPS and civil contingencies should work with POPS commanders and POPSAs to prepare and test contingencies to ensure that the force is capable of dealing with any reasonably foreseeable contingencies associated with the POPS event or operation, including the ability to respond to disorder. These contingencies should include the capability to provide a sudden increase in the level of any police response and the development of a systematic and structured approach to community engagement through local policing teams.

If disorder occurs, the objective of any police response should be to secure an early resolution. The response should be sophisticated and sensitive to reduce the likelihood of further escalation.

Used in conjunction with the NDM, the disorder model may also assist in the threat assessment process and the recording of decisions made, as well as their supporting rationale.

## Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles

The [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles \(JESIP\) doctrine](#) supports the development of a multi-agency response to incidents or POPS events and operations.

In the event of a major incident being declared in relation to a POPS event or operation, forces should adopt and implement the JESIP. A major incident is defined as 'an event or situation which

requires special arrangements to be implemented by one or more emergency responder agency'.

Forces should use the JESIP to support the planning and response to both planned and spontaneous POPS events and operations of any scale whenever two or more emergency services and/or category 1 or 2 responders are involved. It is recommended good practice that the JESIP and supporting information are contained within operational orders and/or briefings for POPS events and operations.

The [JESIP doctrine](#) is based around five main principles. These are:

- co-location
- communication
- coordination
- joint understanding of risk
- shared situational awareness

Where these principles are adopted, a jointly agreed working strategy between all invested parties can be formed. Each component part and agency should know their role, function and purpose as part of a multi-agency response to an incident.

Forces may wish to consider having the JESIP app and associated content installed on force-issued devices, so that first responders can easily access critical information to support the initial response to major incidents.

In the event of a civil emergency, specific information and guidance is contained in the [Civil emergencies APP](#).

## Tags

Public order   Public safety