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PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

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# NPIA

National Policing  
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PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

# PRACTICE ADVICE ON CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT

# 2007

Produced on behalf of the Association of Chief Police Officers  
by the National Policing Improvement Agency

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## **PRACTICE ADVICE ON CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT**

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# CONTENTS

<b>Foreword</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Section 1 DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT</b> .....	<b>5</b>
1.1 Background .....	6
1.2 Characteristics of Critical Incidents .....	7
1.2.1 Analysis .....	11
1.2.2 The Way Forward .....	12
<b>Section 2 PREPARING FOR CRITICAL INCIDENTS</b> .....	<b>15</b>
2.1 Strategic Management Principles .....	16
2.1.1 Leadership .....	16
2.1.2 Policy and Processes .....	16
2.1.3 People .....	17
2.1.4 Partnerships and Resources .....	18
<b>Section 3 MANAGING CRITICAL INCIDENTS</b> .....	<b>21</b>
3.1 Introduction .....	22
3.2 Situation Awareness .....	23
3.3 Criticality Factors .....	23
3.4 Notification .....	24
3.5 Declaring a Critical Incident .....	25
3.6 Command and Control .....	26
3.6.1 Gold Groups .....	27
3.6.2 Critical Incident Advisers .....	28
3.7 Incident Assessment .....	28
3.8 Management Plan .....	28
3.9 Victim, Family and Community .....	29
3.9.1 Family Liaison .....	30
3.9.2 Community Engagement .....	31
3.10 Monitoring .....	36
3.10.1 Incident Debriefing .....	37
<b>Section 4 RESTORING PUBLIC CONFIDENCE</b> .....	<b>39</b>
4.1 Loss of Public Confidence .....	40
4.2 Key Principles .....	41
4.2.1 Understanding the Issue .....	41
4.2.2 Reviews .....	41
4.2.3 Independent Police Complaints Commission Referrals .....	42
4.2.4 Victim Care .....	42
4.2.5 Community Engagement .....	42
4.2.6 Multi-Agency Complaints or Reviews .....	42

# CONTENTS

4.3	Public Inquiries .....	43
4.4	Key Principles .....	43
4.4.1	Independence .....	44
4.4.2	Cooperation .....	44
4.4.3	Knowledge .....	44
4.4.4	Victim and Witness Support .....	44
4.4.5	Media Response .....	44
4.4.6	Additional Information .....	44
	<b>Appendix 1 ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS .....</b>	<b>47</b>
	<b>Appendix 2 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING .....</b>	<b>49</b>
	<b>Summary of Figures</b>	
	Figure 1 Characteristics of Critical Incidents .....	8
	Figure 2 Phases of Critical Incident Management .....	13

# FOREWORD

There are two main facets to Critical Incident Management:

- Identifying and dealing with incidents where the effectiveness of the police response may have a significant impact on the confidence of the victim, their family or the community;
- Taking proactive steps to restore public confidence after a critical incident has been identified.

Chief officers have a responsibility, through their senior officers and Basic Command Unit (BCU) commanders, to ensure that all officers and staff understand the concept and terminology used in critical incident management. They must encourage a culture of vigilance and quality assurance so that any incident that has the potential to escalate into a critical incident is identified early and is managed effectively. A key aspect of effective critical incident management is building relationships with communities and winning their trust and confidence.

This practice advice has been written in consultation with practitioners and trainers. It provides chief officers with a range of strategies for developing protocols and procedures to help forces to prepare for, identify and manage critical incidents. It focuses on developing force capability, training and resilience, and providing a quality service to every incident first time, every time, at every level. Critical Incident Management is simply about good policing.

This document is not intended to undermine or replace existing policy and procedures such as the *ACPO (2006) Murder Investigation Manual* and *ACPO and Home Office (2005) Hate Crime: Delivering a Quality Service*. It is an additional resource to support those incidents identified as critical.

Particular thanks are extended to the Metropolitan Police Service's Critical Incident Team for their assistance, specialist expertise and advice.



Bill Griffiths BEM QPM  
Metropolitan Police Service



# Section 1

## DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT

**T**his practice advice was developed in response to concerns raised by the Police Service regarding its ability to identify and manage critical incidents. This section provides the background to the development of critical incident management. It looks at why critical incidents happen and sets out the framework for this practice advice.

### CONTENTS

1.1	Background .....	6
1.2	Characteristics of Critical Incidents .....	7
	1.2.1 Analysis .....	11
	1.2.2 The Way Forward .....	12

## 1.1 BACKGROUND

The Police Service in the UK has a tradition of policing with the consent of the communities it serves. This tradition recognises that policing is most successful when it is based on the active and voluntary participation of all members of the community. Such participation means that communities tend to be more committed to tackling social problems. It also helps to build a safe, just and tolerant society, thereby increasing feelings of security and reducing fear of crime.

The Police Service must build and maintain the trust and confidence of citizens by delivering an effective police response to all incidents if it is to gain the participation of the communities it serves.

This participation is not, however, without difficulty. The police respond to thousands of incidents every year and while many are dealt with well, others are not. The scale of this problem is illustrated in the British Crime Survey 2004–05 which found that more than two-fifths (forty-two per cent) of victims were less than ‘fairly satisfied’ with the police response they received.

The problem is particularly acute where members of a community feel that crime threatens their sense of security. As a result, people tend to view hate crimes, attacks on vulnerable members of society and attacks in a victim’s own home as a personal threat, because they can imagine themselves or people they know as victims.

Where crimes occur and they are believed to be the result of police failure to act or discrimination against particular communities, the whole basis of policing with the consent of the community is undermined. In addition, where the failings are because of police incompetence or indifference, trust and confidence within the wider community will be lost.

This situation can be illustrated by the Stephen Lawrence case. Investigative errors and the way in which the police responded to the family’s concerns about the conduct of the investigation were found to have arisen as a consequence of institutional racism.

To address this, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) developed guidance to assist police officers dealing with similar cases, which they termed Critical Incidents. This guidance defined a critical incident as:

Any incident where the **effectiveness** of the police response is likely to have a **significant impact** on the **confidence** of the victim, their family and/or the community.

ACPO has now adopted this definition of a critical incident. It is easy to remember and, more importantly, should make sense to the first responders whom the Police Service depend on to identify criticality factors (see [3.4 Notification](#)).

The MPS guidance, *Managing and Preventing Critical Incidents, Version VII*, goes on to highlight some basic principles and keywords which are applicable to the definition.

Principles:

- The definition is deliberately broad and should ensure that potential critical incidents are not missed.
- It recognises the fundamental importance of community confidence and trust in the police response to critical incidents.
- It applies equally to internal critical incidents.

Keywords:

- **Effectiveness** – this is a measure of the professionalism, competence and integrity evident in the police response to an incident.
- **Significant impact** – significant should be interpreted as being particular to each incident but critically relates to the impact on the individual, family or community.
- **Confidence** – this is a reference to long-term confidence in policing – of victims, families and communities.

**The definition is intentionally wide because although high-profile or large-scale incidents have an increased potential to escalate into critical incidents, small-scale (eg, level 1 crime such as theft, criminal damage or harassment) and internal incidents can, and do, escalate into critical incidents if they are not managed correctly.**

**In addition, large-scale critical incidents will generally have their origins in a response originally within the capability of a single BCU. It is, therefore, essential that preparation, identification and management starts early, continues throughout the life of the incident and focuses on the police response to all incidents.**

The guidance was initially designed to improve family and community liaison. It has led to the development of specialist training in critical incident management. Many forces have adopted this approach and there is now training available through the Leadership Academy for Policing at Bramshill, and at the National Centre for Applied Learning Technologies (NCALT).

## 1.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF CRITICAL INCIDENTS

To improve police understanding of what a critical incident is, a review was carried out on a number of inquiries into cases which, although not labelled as critical at the time, nevertheless had the characteristics of what would now be recognised as critical. These were:

- The Victoria Climbié Inquiry;
- The Shipman Inquiry;
- The Byford Report;
- Sir Ronnie Flanagan's report into Operation Fincham;
- The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry;
- The Damilola Taylor Review;
- The Highmoor Cross Review;
- The Deepcut Review;
- The Morris Report.

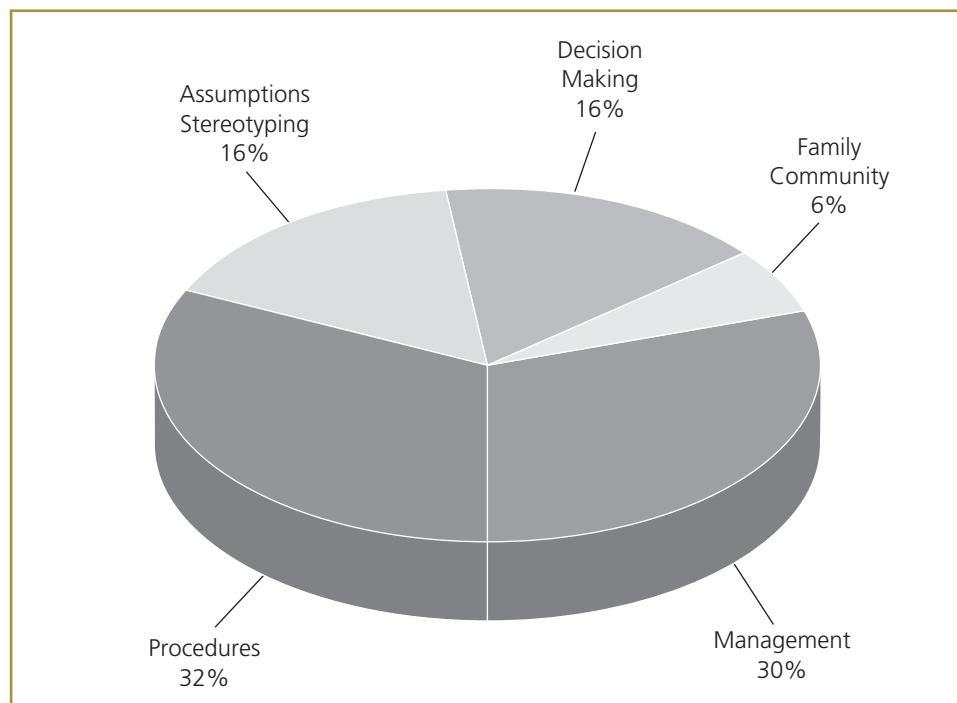
These cases demonstrate that there is no single type of incident which becomes a critical incident. They began as:

- One section 18 wounding;
- Two suspicious deaths;
- One missing from home enquiry (which was subsequently found to be a homicide);
- Three homicides;
- One firearms incident;
- One police professional standards inquiry.

It should be noted that most of the incidents listed started with a police response initially within the capability of the BCU. The cases used in this review could suggest that critical incidents are usually high profile, serious or homicide type incidents, however, this is not always the case. A pilot project undertaken by the MPS Critical Incident Advisory Team in 2006 found that many critical incidents begin and remain as level 1 crimes, for example, theft, criminal damage or harassment. In addition, the project found that many incidents did not escalate into a critical incident at the point of instigation, but it happened days, weeks or months later. It is, therefore, essential that officers attending and monitoring incidents acknowledge how cases develop into critical incidents over time, and consider what the impact on the community might be if this happens.

The issues which caused the cases used in the review to be identified as critical incidents can be divided into five broad areas. These are summarised in **Figure 1** and followed by an explanation of each area.

Figure 1 Characteristics of Critical Incidents



### Assumptions and Stereotyping

This includes allowing personal assumptions, perceptions and stereotyping to affect the investigator's mindset. Such views, unless challenged, can adversely influence the direction and/or the priority of an investigation.

- In the Stephen Lawrence investigation, initial actions taken by the police were influenced by the assumption that the victim's injuries were as a consequence of a fight in or near a local public house, and that the victim's friend had, in some way, been involved. These assumptions were considered to be evidence of institutional racism.
- In the first Shipman investigation, the investigating officer was reluctant to accept that a doctor might be murdering his patients. This influenced the way in which the investigation was conducted.

Early assumptions, formed with no real basis, can cause investigators to underestimate the seriousness of the incident.

- In the Victoria Climbié case, investigating officers failed to acknowledge the seriousness of the victim's injuries and to undertake a timely investigation. A section 18 assault against a child was not given the priority or urgency it warranted.

The incidents that officers attend are not always reported for what they actually are. For example, in a sample of forty-eight homicides investigated by the Greater Manchester Police in 1998-9, only seventeen (35 per cent) were originally reported as an incident definitely involving a death (Stelfox, P., 2006). This lack of accurate information at the outset of an incident can influence the perception, attitude and actions of the officer first attending, and any subsequent action. It is, therefore, essential that the mindsets and actions of the individuals and teams involved in an investigation are constantly challenged throughout a case by using effective quality control procedures.

### Procedures

A lack of auditable record keeping will hinder the supervision and review of cases. It may also result in important information being lost to an investigation. If a public inquiry or other review is conducted, officers will be unable to recollect the decisions and actions they took, and why.

- During the early stages of the Stephen Lawrence investigation, minimal records were made of actions and decisions. This made it difficult to accurately assess the quality of the investigation, or review decisions made during the early hours and days of the case.

A failure to follow operational procedures appropriately can undermine the progress of an incident, or impact on the admissibility of evidence in court.

- During the Highmoor Cross incident, medical assistance for the victims was excessively delayed because of the over-rigid interpretation of ACPO and force policies on firearms incidents. Officers tried to eliminate risk instead of managing it. They lost sight of the primary goal which is the protection and preservation of life.

If there are inadequate systems to manage information coming into an incident room, the investigation can be swamped.

- During Operation Fincham (the investigation into the murder of Jessica Chapman and Holly Wells), Cambridgeshire Constabulary underestimated the volume of information and assistance that would be offered in response to a media appeal. This underestimation meant that, in the early stages, there were insufficient resources and organisation committed to these aspects of the investigation.

## Family and Community Issues

A failure to address the diverse needs of a victim, their family or the community may inadvertently alienate them or cause misunderstandings. Victim care and community engagement must recognise and be sensitive to individual needs and views.

- The Lawrence family were treated inappropriately by the Police Service during the investigation into their son's death. The public inquiry attributed this treatment to the parent's ethnic origin and a lack of cultural understanding on the part of the police.
- The families of the Deepcut victims were not given access to family liaison during initial investigations into the deaths of their children. As a result of a continued lack of communication and information, they felt let down and sidelined from the investigation.

## Decision Making

Poor decision making, whether it is because of lack of time, information, experience or flawed working methods, can have a significant impact on the progress and direction of an incident.

- During Operation Fincham, the on-call senior officer failed to understand the seriousness of the incident when notified of the initial missing from home report. This resulted in a significant loss of momentum and a failure to provide adequate resources during the first forty-eight hours. Poor communication and lack of experience may have contributed to this failure.

The public inquiry into the Stephen Lawrence investigation found that the investigation was undermined by flawed decision making on several occasions – not least when, before starting the investigation, the decision was taken not to ask the victim's friend, who was a key witness, what had happened.

- Errors in decision making by senior officers during the Highmoor Cross incident led to a significant delay in providing emergency medical assistance to the victims. Witness reports indicated that the perpetrator had left the scene but decision makers were unwilling to accept or act on this information.

## Management

Failure to manage, prioritise or delegate workloads efficiently will result in officers being swamped with unnecessary work. It will also hinder the progress of incidents.

- The system of delegation used by the senior officer during the Yorkshire Ripper investigation was ineffective. As a result, the senior officer became swamped with administrative work which could have been handled more efficiently by other officers. In addition, there was no clear oversight or information management system within the incident room (this has been addressed by the introduction of MIRSAP and the HOLMES computer system).

If supervisors do not regularly review the progress of investigations or the decisions made by officers, investigative opportunities may be missed and failings in the quality of the police response overlooked.

- The first Shipman investigation was supervised by a senior officer with limited experience of criminal investigation. The investigating officer's actions and decisions were not properly challenged and the findings of the investigation not adequately assessed.

If the process of allocating investigations is not supervised effectively, it may lead to cases being assigned to officers with limited experience. This, in turn, may impact on the overall quality of the police response.

- During the Victoria Climbié investigation, there was no effective system of screening or allocation of child protection cases to the most appropriately trained and experienced officer. The officer took the case on a default basis and did not have sufficient experience to properly assess and prioritise the incident.

### 1.2.1 ANALYSIS

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The analysis of these cases shows that there is a wide range of issues which characterise critical incidents. Further, it is rarely one issue alone, or the actions or inactions of just one person, which undermines the police response. A critical incident usually develops because of several factors which separately may have little or no impact but, when compounded by other issues, can have a significant impact on the overall quality of the police response.

This build-up of factors can best be illustrated by the Victoria Climbié inquiry where several issues were identified as contributing to the overall poor quality of the investigation. The issues identified included:

- Poor management systems for allocating new cases;
- A failure on the part of the investigating officer to realise or assess the seriousness of the case;
- A failure to prioritise workloads;
- A failure to interview the victim or assess her injuries;
- Over-reliance on uncorroborated information provided by a partner agency.

This catalogue of failings was further compounded by poor management regimes which failed to properly supervise the junior officer allocated to the case. The supervisor overestimated the officer's ability to conduct the investigation and failed to monitor its quality.

Where consistent and effective monitoring and review processes are in place, failings in the quality of the police response can be prevented or identified early. The impact such failings have on public confidence can then be reduced. During Operation Fincham, the case was reviewed after three days. This resulted in Cambridgeshire Constabulary reallocating the case and introducing command and control mechanisms which helped improve the quality of the police response and rebuild public confidence in the force's ability to deal with the investigation.

In some cases, even where supervision and monitoring takes place, senior officers can be reluctant to accept that there could have been significant failings in the quality of the investigation. If any concerns are ignored, underestimated or dismissed, whether raised internally or externally, this can contribute to failings in the future and further erode public confidence in the police.

Usually, however, a case becomes critical because there is no effective quality control both during and after the incident.

### 1.2.2 THE WAY FORWARD

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It is essential that the Police Service understands why critical incidents develop. In doing so, chief officers can identify the criticality factors in their area and prepare for critical incidents by building resources and resilience into everyday policing.

The Police Service has a duty to respond to every incident in the right way, first time, every time and at every level. In practice, this means ensuring that officers and staff are capable of delivering a coordinated, appropriately resourced, consistent and proportionate response. See also **2.1.3 People**.

Some incidents will have a greater potential to escalate into critical incidents than others. This is because, irrespective of the quality of the police response, the incident itself has had a significant impact on the victim, their family or the community.

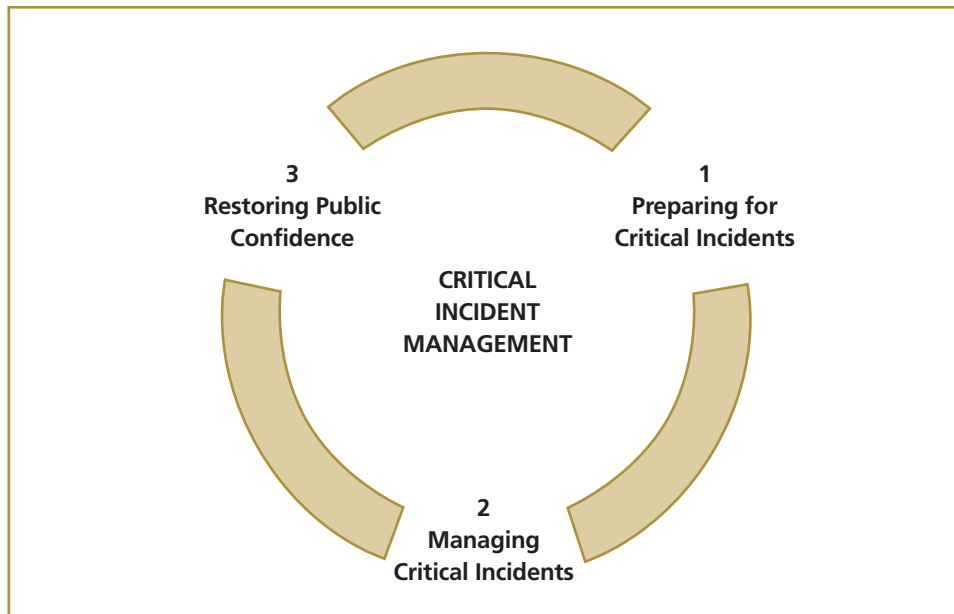
A proactive approach must be adopted to ensure that incidents with a high potential to escalate into critical incidents are identified early on. These must then be notified to the most appropriate level of management. The response to the murder of Damilola Taylor is an example of this proactive and preventive approach. Early recognition of this case as a critical incident led to several very senior officers overseeing the investigation at the outset. This timely intervention was commended in the subsequent review.

Whenever a critical incident is identified, it must be addressed promptly and efficiently. Reassuring, rebuilding and maintaining the confidence of the victim, their family and the community should be fundamental to critical incident management.

There are three phases of critical incident management reflected in this practice advice:

- Preparation;
  - Management;
  - Restoring best confidence.
- 
- Phase One (Preparation) requires chief officers to review current management structures to ensure that, where possible, staff are effectively trained and resourced, and that the overall quality of the police response reflects a competent and accountable standard of incident management.
  - Phase Two (Management) considers how to identify critical incidents early. This includes management processes which ensure that those incidents which may escalate, or have already escalated, into critical incidents are notified to the most appropriate person, and that they are effectively managed.
  - Phase Three (Restoring best confidence) considers incidents that have had a significant impact on public confidence but were not identified when the incident was live; and how confidence may be rebuilt through community engagement, resolution or a public inquiry.

Figure 2 Phases of Critical Incident Management

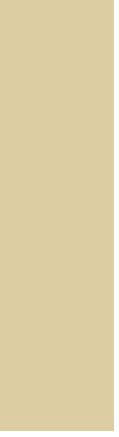


When managing an incident that may escalate into a critical incident, or is already a critical incident, this practice advice should be read in conjunction with existing relevant practice advice and guidance. This includes:

- *ACPO (2005) Guidance on Major Incident Room Standard Administrative Procedures (MIRSAP);*
- *ACPO (2006) Guidance on the Police National Mobilisation Plan;*
- *ACPO (2006) The Murder Investigation Manual;*
- *ACPO (2005) Practice Advice on Core Investigative Doctrine;*
- *ACPO (2000) Guidelines Relating to the Role of Chief Officers in Murder/Major Crime Investigations;*
- *ACPO (2005) Guidance on the National Intelligence Model;*
- *ACPO (n.d.) Manual of Guidance on Keeping the Peace;*
- *ACPO (1983) Manual of Guidance on Police Use of Firearms;*
- *ACPO (2006) Practice Advice on Professionalising the Business of Neighbourhood Policing;*
- *Neighbourhood Policing Programme (2006) Neighbourhood Policing; BCU Commander Guide.*

### MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- Any incident has the potential to escalate into a critical incident, including those incidents which are within the capability of a BCU.
- Large-scale incidents may have their origins in a level 1 incident which had a poor police response initially.
- Chief officers, through their senior officers and BCU commanders, must establish effective management regimes and quality control processes to ensure a proportionate, consistent and high-quality response for all incidents first time, every time, at every level.



# Section 2

## PREPARING FOR CRITICAL INCIDENTS

**T**he human and financial cost of managing a critical incident can have a significant impact on a force's resilience and on its reputation. This will far outweigh the cost of taking proactive steps to ensure that the police response to all incidents is competent and accountable, and makes victims, families and communities an integral part of the process.

This section provides some basic strategic management principles to help chief officers prepare for critical incident management.

### CONTENTS

2.1	Strategic Management Principles .....	16
2.1.1	Leadership .....	16
2.1.2	Policy and Processes .....	16
2.1.3	People .....	17
2.1.4	Partnerships and Resources .....	18

## 2.1 STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

A single critical incident will have a significant, and potentially long-term, impact on the confidence of the victim, their family and the community. It may undermine community engagement and neighbourhood policing. It may also generate a sense of insecurity among vulnerable members of the community and increase a general fear of crime.

Critical incidents are generally caused by an accumulation of issues, one of which may have been a poor first response, see **1.2.1 Analysis**. Poor management processes will mean that these issues are not identified and addressed, and this impacts on the overall effectiveness of the police response.

The European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) identifies themes which can be used to measure the performance of an organisation. These themes have been used to identify some strategic management principles which, if developed by chief officers, can help to increase a force's capability and resilience to prepare for, and manage, critical incidents. These principles are:

- Leadership;
- Policy and processes;
- People;
- Partnership and resources.

These principles are not new to chief officers. If, however, they are reviewed, implemented appropriately and monitored by senior officers and BCU commanders, forces can be confident that a quality service will be provided to victims and communities at all levels and for all incidents.

### 2.1.1 LEADERSHIP

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It is the responsibility of chief officers to ensure that all incidents are subject to effective supervision and management at all levels. Early intervention can prevent a minor problem escalating into one which could have a significant impact on the overall quality of the police response to an incident.

Chief officers should ensure that efficient monitoring and quality assurance is implemented for every incident. In particular, emphasis should be placed on supervision and support for inexperienced officers. Part of this support should include access to mentoring and information sharing. Irrespective of this, all officers should expect to have decisions and actions challenged as part of routine monitoring and quality assurance.

Where issues or problems are identified during an incident, senior managers should, in the first instance, consider what immediate action and support is needed to address them and lessen their impact. It is important, however, to understand why those issues or problems arose and the lessons that can be learned for the future.

### 2.1.2 POLICY AND PROCESSES

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Ineffective and/or inconsistent implementation of force protocols, policies and procedures have been identified as one of the main reasons why critical incidents develop, see **1.2 The Characteristics of Critical Incidents**.

Policy and procedures are usually developed over time and incorporate current legislation and identified good practice. Their implementation will be the most efficient way of reducing the number of critical incidents each year.

Chief officers must ensure, through quality assurance processes, that policies and procedures are implemented consistently and competently at all times.

Quality assurance processes should promote a positive approach to incident management. They should be seen as a means of providing support and should not be used to undermine confidence or develop a culture of blame.

Active quality assurance can be used to identify good practice. This can be disseminated through briefings, training and policy to improve the quality of future police responses and the overall performance of the Police Service.

One method of quality assurance is through HMIC inspections. The *HMIC (2006) Baseline Assessment Methodologies* applies, in particular, to critical incidents which:

- Are beyond the capability of a BCU; and
- Have the potential to generate grave public concern at a local, regional, national or international level.

**Note:** A critical incident, which falls within the HMIC criteria, may have originally started with a level 1 crime, but as a result of the quality of the police response it has escalated beyond the capability of the BCU. It is, therefore, essential that forces implement stringent quality assurance regimes for **all** incidents, including those that are within the capability of the BCU.

### 2.1.3 PEOPLE

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Responding to incidents involves more than just attending and ticking boxes. It means providing a proactive response which is focused, motivated, well-managed and accountable. The response should also address the diverse needs of victims and witnesses.

Chief officers must ensure that all staff receive appropriate training on critical incident management which includes a clear understanding of the concept and terminology. There should be a 'cradle to grave' approach; courses should be designed for all police officers and staff, from neighbourhood teams to senior officers.

The NPIA Leadership Academy for Policing at Bramshill delivers a comprehensive programme of critical incident training courses which reflect current thinking and national good practice. These courses are suitable for a range of roles and ranks and are delivered at NPIA sites and in force, to meet local needs. These courses include critical incident policy and practice, command structures, leadership, diversity, decision logs, the use of Independent Advisory Groups (IAGs) and media considerations.

Police constables, police community support officers and call handlers are on the front line and usually provide the initial response to an incident. These officers and staff need to understand the concept and terminology of critical incidents in order to proactively prevent them. This will help officers and staff to realise:

- What they are dealing with;
- What might develop;
- What the impact of the incident and/or the police response might be;
- Whom they should tell if they believe the incident they are dealing with has the potential to escalate into a critical incident.

### **Risk Management**

Forces are encouraged to identify, assess and manage risk as part of an effective and well-managed police response. Getting the police response right first time, every time and at every level can help to prevent incidents escalating into critical incidents, or deteriorating if already identified as critical.

All forces should ensure that officers and staff understand the general principles of risk management, and can identify, assess and manage risk based on the likelihood of impact.

If officers and staff do not have the necessary skill or experience to adequately assess a situation, they should refer the assessment to a senior officer or supervisor.

If a risk is identified, every effort should be made to remove, mitigate or manage the risk at the earliest opportunity.

Although chief officers are responsible for providing staff with appropriate training, equally, the staff themselves have a responsibility to ensure that they have been adequately trained for their role, and that they are aware of, and know how to access resources, support and supervision to provide a professional, effective and motivated police response. Where staff are faced with difficult or complex decisions, they need to be confident that they have access to support and information, and that they are 'not alone'.

Forces can undertake 'table top' exercises to explore potential problems and to incorporate the lessons learned from previous incidents. Table top exercises, in a safe environment, based on various different types of incidents, including those at level 1, will allow forces to explore what may happen in a given scenario.

For details of all critical incident courses provided by the NPJA see: <http://www.npia.police.uk>  
Alternatively, the customer support team can be contacted by telephone: 01256 602300 or email: [leadershipbramshill@npia.pnn.police.uk](mailto:leadershipbramshill@npia.pnn.police.uk)

#### **2.1.4 PARTNERSHIPS AND RESOURCES**

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Successful policing depends on building relationships with the victim, their family and the community. Developing a proactive approach to victim support and community engagement will increase the public's trust and confidence in the Police Service and encourage open lines of communication. It is too late to build relationships after an incident has happened.

The community is a key resource in tackling crime and the fear of crime. Building relationships is an ongoing process developed over time. The police must recognise and understand the diverse needs and issues of their local community, and build positive relationships with recognised representatives.

To help build community relationships the MPS have, through their Cultural and Communities Resource Unit (CCRU), used the diversity available within their own force. The CCRU maintains a database of lifeskills possessed by individual staff members including details of:

- Lifestyle;
- Specialist community knowledge;
- Languages;
- Hobbies.

The database allows SIOs and incident commanders access to specialist knowledge and experience, which may help them to build relationships before, during and after a critical incident.

The use of IAGs is also a key asset in building community relationships. In some cases IAGs can identify and advise on the best ways to access hard-to-reach or hard-to-hear community groups. For further information on independent advice and IAGs see **3.9.2 Community Engagement**.

It is good practice to provide IAGs with training on critical incident management and there is now bespoke training available for them through the Leadership Academy for Policing.

Where there is potential for conflict to arise between opposing community interests, especially during predictable events, such as sporting fixtures, demonstrations or parades, it is good practice to use independent observers. Their observations on the planning and policing of such events can help to allay community concerns and foster positive relationships with all community groups.

For further information see **3.9 Victim, Family and Community**, and *Mistry, D (2007) Community engagement: practical lessons from a pilot project*.

### MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- Clear leadership, efficient monitoring and quality assurance processes should be implemented in all forces for all incidents.
- Effective and consistent implementation of force policies and procedures will help to reduce the number of critical incidents that happen each year.
- All staff should be appropriately trained for their role.
- Forces should adopt a proactive approach to victim care and community engagement. It is too late to build community relationships after an incident has happened.
- It is good practice to use officers and staff with specialist knowledge and experience to help build links with the community.



# Section 3

## MANAGING CRITICAL INCIDENTS

**T**his section sets out a clear strategic framework for identifying and managing critical incidents. It promotes early identification and intervention, and helps forces provide a consistent, proportionate response which addresses the needs of victims, their families and the community.

### CONTENTS

3.1	Introduction .....	22
3.2	Situation Awareness .....	23
3.3	Criticality Factors .....	23
3.4	Notification .....	24
3.5	Declaring a Critical Incident .....	25
3.6	Command and Control .....	26
	3.6.1 Gold Groups .....	27
	3.6.2 Critical Incident Advisers .....	28
3.7	Incident Assessment .....	28
3.8	Management Plan .....	28
3.9	Victim, Family and Community .....	29
	3.9.1 Family Liaison .....	30
	3.9.2 Community Engagement .....	31
3.10	Monitoring .....	36
	3.10.1 Incident Debriefing .....	37

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The ACPO definition of a critical incident is:

Any incident where the effectiveness of the police response is likely to have a significant impact on the confidence of the victim, their family and/or the community.

Critical incident management must start with early identification of any incident which has the potential to escalate, or has already escalated, into a critical incident, while the incident is still ongoing. It is particularly important that this includes incidents that are within the capability of a BCU. If small critical incidents are not identified early on, they could escalate into a large-scale incident which could have a long-term impact on community confidence.

Early action should be taken to rectify issues that may affect the quality of the police response, before they have a significant impact on public confidence.

The definition is ambiguous and it **does** include any incident. If it were any narrower or any more specific, there would be a significant risk that critical incidents would be missed.

In light of the definition, it is impossible to provide forces with a fail-safe tool or risk model for identifying an incident which may escalate, or has already escalated, into a critical incident. There are two reasons for this.

- The analysis set out in **1 Development of Critical Incident Management**, identified that the quality of the police response can be undermined by one or more of a range of issues. This can be further compounded by poor quality assurance processes, poor victim care and/or poor community engagement.
- What the analysis does not take into account is the impact that the incident will have on the victim, their family or the community, **irrespective** of the police response. This aspect is entirely subjective and cannot be predicted. It is likely, however, that the greater the impact an incident has, the greater the expectations people will have about the quality of the police response. There will also be an assumption that what is important to those most closely affected will be as important to the police. The impact an incident has will be based on:
  - The circumstances of the incident;
  - The emotional, mental or physical impact of the incident;
  - General feelings of security and/or vulnerability.

A minor criminal act, for example, criminal damage, may be nothing more than a nuisance or inconvenience to some people, but for others it will have much greater significance. This may be because the victim is particularly vulnerable or because this is the latest in a catalogue of similar incidents that the victim has suffered (eg, harassment or hate crimes), and they do not think enough is being done to stop these incidents happening.

Although it is possible to take steps to ensure a consistent and professional police response, it is not possible to predict the impact that an incident will have and why.

It is possible, however, to gauge general feelings of tension and vulnerability in the community, and to predict criticality factors which are likely to have an effect on how the victim, their family or the community react to an incident, irrespective of the quality of the police response.

Forces can identify potential critical incidents through effective use of situation awareness, and by assessing incidents and their likely impact in light of this information.

### 3.2 SITUATION AWARENESS

Gauging the mood of communities and monitoring the impact that incidents and events have previously had on them will help to identify the type of incidents which, in the future may have a significantly higher likelihood of escalating into a critical incident if they are not dealt with effectively at the outset.

Situation awareness takes into account general feelings of vulnerability and insecurity, and also the economic, political and social factors which impact on the local community.

It can be developed through:

- Proactive community engagement;
- Environmental scanning;
- Collating and analysing community intelligence and information;
- Competent call handling and interrogation of computer recording systems.

Situation awareness linked to intelligence systems will provide information for business processes such as threat and risk assessments, NIM tasking and co-ordination, and officer briefing and debriefing.

### 3.3 CRITICALITY FACTORS

It is not just a specific type of incident that can have a significant impact on the victim; there can also be particular factors in **any** type of incident which will increase its impact.

Criticality factors can be divided into two broad categories: specific incidents which, by their very nature, are likely to have a higher potential to escalate into a critical incident; and generic factors which are applicable to any type of incident.

Specific incidents may include:

- Suspicious, unexplained deaths;
- Homicides;
- Incidents requiring a police firearms response;
- Vulnerable persons missing from home;
- Domestic violence;
- Serious sexual offences.

Generic factors may include:

- Hate crimes motivated by race, faith, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age or other diversity factors;
- Crimes involving particularly vulnerable or young victims;
- Linked series crime, especially where it is directed at a single victim or community (this may include level 1, 2 or 3 crime);
- Crimes involving high-profile victims or offenders;
- Crimes where a police officer is suspected of committing the offence;
- Incidents where the police may be responsible for the death or serious injury of the victim or offender;
- Incidents which attract high-profile media attention.

These lists are **not** prescriptive or exhaustive. Criticality factors will change over time and between forces. They will reflect local demographics such as ethnic mix, diversity, density of population and local geography. They should also take into account local situation awareness, which will reflect the mood of the community, and the local economic, political and social climate at any given time.

Where a specific type of incident (eg, homicide) is identified, it should, in the first instance, be managed in line with the relevant policy or procedure and use the golden hour principles set out in *ACPO (2005) Practice Advice on Core Investigative Doctrine*.

### 3.4 NOTIFICATION

A key element of critical incident management is to give senior officers early notification of incidents that have escalated, or have the potential to escalate, into critical incidents.

Criticality factors will help to identify incidents that have a strong likelihood of escalating into a critical incident.

**Note:** It is the quality of the police response that will cause or prevent a critical incident. On this basis, **all** incidents must be subject to an effective regime of quality assurance. See **2.1.2 Policy and Processes**.

All officers or members of police staff dealing with an incident (which will include call handlers and first attending officers) must continually ask themselves:

- What am I dealing with?
- What might it develop into?
- What impact might this incident have?
- Whom should I tell if I think this may escalate into a critical incident?

See also **2.1.3 People**.

Where, in the officer or staff member's opinion, an incident is, or has the potential to escalate into, a critical incident, it is essential that this is communicated immediately to an appropriately trained senior officer. This may be a duty inspector, the force control room manager or other line manager. Senior officers must not discourage officers or police staff from reporting incidents because the next one may be a critical incident with significant implications for the force.

Notification should not stop or prevent the reporting officer or member of police staff from continuing to provide an ongoing police response in line with the policy or procedure relevant to the incident.

Senior officers who are notified of an incident that is, or has the potential to escalate into, a critical incident must decide:

- Whether the report is valid;
- Whether the current deployment will deliver an effective police response;
- Whether the incident should be escalated to a chief officer and/or declared a critical incident.

**The decision to declare an incident as critical should be based on at least one objective reason why the effectiveness of the police response is likely to have a significant impact on public confidence.**

Chief officers must ensure that local force policy and procedures are developed and implemented for the prompt notification and assessment of incidents which are, or have the potential to escalate into, critical incidents.

### 3.5 DECLARING A CRITICAL INCIDENT

The decision to declare a critical incident has to be made when information is sparse but there is great pressure to make the right decision quickly. To make the appropriate decision, declaring officers must ensure that they have access to **all** available sources of information, including:

- Decision logs and case files;
- Briefings;
- Family liaison officers;
- Current situation awareness.

**Each incident must be assessed on its own merits.**

The fact that an incident has been declared a critical incident must not undermine the deployment of a competent and well-managed police response in line with standard policies and procedures.

National and local policies and procedures are intended to ensure a consistent and effective police response to a wide range of incidents. They incorporate key legislation and good practice, where this has been identified.

Disregarding what is already recognised as the best way to respond to a particular type of incident is dangerous. It may lead to a lack of clarity regarding procedure and leadership.

An incident should not be declared critical simply because there is a risk that the police may be criticised. The decision to declare should be based on the effectiveness of the police response, and whether it is likely that it will have a significant impact on public confidence. Declaring a critical incident will add an additional layer of quality assurance and identify whether action is required to recover the quality of the police response or public confidence.

There is an obligation on chief officers to ensure that critical incidents are only declared when it is necessary and appropriate to do so, and that the response is proportionate to the scale of the incident.

It is important that where an incident is declared critical, the subsequent response quickly identifies the causes and a management plan is implemented to restore the quality of the police response and re-build public confidence. It is only through a prompt and well-coordinated response that the police will be able to reassure the victim, their family and the community, and restore any lost confidence in the Police Service.

## 3.6 COMMAND AND CONTROL

Where a critical incident is declared, chief officers must determine the appropriate level of response.

**It is essential that critical incidents are led through unambiguous command and control that clearly outlines the roles and accountability of the personnel involved.**

By using the acronym SAFER, critical incident commanders will be able to quickly identify the action that is required to ensure and safeguard success in what could potentially be a complex and dynamic environment.

- **S**cenés of Crime – well-defined and well-managed
- **A**ctions – fast-track and intelligence-led, to arrest offender(s)
- **F**amily – supported and supportive of investigation
- **E**vidence – comprehensive and relentless search for witnesses and evidence
- **R**ecords – Accurate and contemporaneous, clearly stating decisions and rationale

*Bill Griffiths BEM QPM  
Metropolitan Police Service*

### Tiered Response

Using a tiered response allows the command structure to be scaled up or down in the light of changing circumstances. This is important where, for example, because of heightened community tension, a level 1 crime escalates to a large-scale public order incident crossing BCU or force boundaries.

To assist chief officers to determine the appropriate command response, the following tiers are suggested. Chief officers may wish to adjust the suggested rank nominations at each level, depending on force size and structure in their area and the scale and complexity of the incident involved.

#### Tier 1 – BCU Response

This will include incidents within the capability of one BCU and where actions and risk are limited to that area.

#### Command Structure

Gold BCU Commander;  
Silver Members of the Senior Management Team (SMT) designated by Gold;  
Bronze Members of the BCU and support departments designated by Silver as strategy owners.

#### Tier 2 – Cross-BCU Response

This will include incidents that impact on more than one BCU. It will also include series of linked incidents that have occurred in more than one BCU. There is limited potential for the actions and risks to spread further.

### Command Structure

- Gold Lead senior officer of at least superintendent rank, agreed or designated by force command;
- Silver A member of the SMT from one of the BCUs involved, designated by Gold;
- Bronze Members of any BCU and support departments involved, designated by Silver as strategy owners.

### Tier 3 – Force Response

This will include incidents with a force, cross-force or national dimension and where there is a significant threat to public confidence and the reputation of the forces involved. Management of the incident will require substantial activity by a significant proportion of the lead force's BCUs.

### Command Structure

- Gold Chief officer;
- Silver Designated by chief officer;
- Bronze Members of any BCU and support departments involved, designated by Silver as strategy owners.

See also *ACPO (2006) The Police National Mobilisation Plan*.

#### 3.6.1 GOLD GROUPS

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A Gold Group can provide the gold commander with valuable consultation and decision support. It will help to ensure coordination in multi-agency type incidents, and provide links with the local community and other legitimately interested parties as appropriate. Care should be taken, however, to ensure that the views canvassed represent those of the individuals and groups affected by the critical incident. Gold Groups should include communities who may not appear to be directly affected but could be indirectly.

The principal function of a Gold Group should be strategic, ie, they provide impartial support, advice and analysis. The specific function, membership and content of a Gold Group will vary for each incident. The gold commander must ensure that a sound framework for discussion is maintained during meetings, which are likely to be complex and highly-charged. All Gold Group meetings must be documented and are subject to disclosure under the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996, unless Public Interest Immunity (PII) applies.

The gold commander is ultimately responsible for any strategic decisions affecting the police response.

For further information see **3.9.2 Community Engagement** and also the following:

*London Emergency Services Liaison Panel (LESLP) (2004) Major Incident Procedures Manual (6th Edition) pp 24-25;*  
*ACPO (n.d.) Manual of Guidance on Keeping the Peace.*

### 3.6.2 CRITICAL INCIDENT ADVISERS

The MPS have introduced critical incident advisers to assist on incidents that are within the capability of a single BCU and unlikely to require large-scale deployment of officers or resources. Critical incident advisers are experienced officers and can provide specialist advice and support to the officer in charge of the incident. They report to the BCU commander where the incident has taken place. Critical incident advisers may also provide a review function for the BCU commander to help them determine whether further escalation is required.

If critical incident advisers are used, clear terms of reference must be agreed before their deployment. These should be in line with those suggested for the deployment of a review team.

### 3.7 INCIDENT ASSESSMENT

Following the appointment of a gold commander, the reason(s) why an incident has escalated into a critical incident will need to be assessed. This will help to identify what remedial action is needed to recover the effectiveness of the police response, and to rebuild the confidence of the victim, their family and the community.

This assessment will be based on all the immediately available information, such as decision logs, briefings from officers in the case and family liaison officers.

### 3.8 MANAGEMENT PLAN

A focused and thorough review of the available information will help to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the police response, and determine a management plan for the future progress of the incident.

Not all incidents will require specific action to be taken to recover the effectiveness of the police response; it may simply be a case of ensuring that the ongoing response is managed competently.

Where it is identified that action must be taken to improve the quality of the police response and/or to restore public confidence, a management plan must be developed.

The response to individual incidents must always be as unique as the incident itself. Officers involved must continually ask themselves:

#### **What is right in this case?**

An important aspect of the review will be to consider whether the incident is currently allocated to the most appropriate officer.

If a critical incident is identified, chief officers have a responsibility to formally consider the demands on the SIO and who is best placed to meet those demands so that appropriate appointments are made.

*Sir Ronnie Flanagan's report into Operation Fincham*

Allocation to the most appropriate officer is key to ensuring an effective police response. Every incident should be assessed and allocated according to the needs of the incident. The allocation should not be based solely on rank, seniority or availability of resources.

### Record Keeping

It is easy, with the benefit of hindsight, to criticise a decision if the rationale that underpins it has not been recorded. Where a critical incident results in a case review, complaint or public inquiry, it may be several weeks, months or years before an officer is asked to recall what happened and why decisions were made.

Any officer with responsibility for managing a critical incident must ensure that all actions and decisions are recorded in a clear and auditable manner. This includes ensuring that first attending officers and call takers have recorded their actions and decisions appropriately. This should be standard procedure.

In addition, as soon as a critical incident is formally declared, the incident commander should start a decision log or policy file to record all actions, strategies and decisions, along with their rationale.

## 3.9 VICTIM, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

One of the most important considerations throughout any investigation is the relationship between the family and the police. Families must be treated appropriately, professionally, with respect and in accordance with their diverse needs.

*The Office of Criminal Justice Reform (2005) The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime* provides that all victims of crime have a statutory right to expect a minimum standard of care, irrespective of whether their allegations are substantiated. All victims are entitled to be treated with consideration, whatever their individual needs.

The importance of positive relationships and effective communication with victims, families and wider communities cannot be overstated. The benefits are likely to include:

- Open and honest dialogue between the police, and victims, families and communities;
- Increased understanding of family and community needs;
- Confidence in the investigative process;
- Improved community intelligence;
- Increased investigative opportunities;
- Improved policing outcomes.

It may not be appropriate in every case to deploy Family Liaison Officers (FLOs) to the victim and/or their family, but in all cases the basic principles of victim care should be followed.

### 3.9.1 FAMILY LIAISON

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Where a victim has died as a result of criminal conduct or suspected criminal conduct, a FLO must be assigned to any relatives that the police consider may need this support. It may also be appropriate to assign FLOs to incidents involving missing persons, hate crime or any other incident identified as a critical incident.

Critical incident commanders should involve FLOs early in the response to a critical incident. The *ACPO (2003) Family Liaison Strategy Manual* provides guidance to forces on the provision of family liaison. It ensures that any deployment has clear terms of reference, that FLOs are appropriately tasked and regularly briefed and debriefed. Officers appointed to family liaison roles may find themselves in difficult or complex situations, but they have a duty to develop and maintain positive relationships and open lines of communication with families. The main objectives for family liaison should include:

- Providing a documented two-way channel for communication between the family and the police;
- Gathering evidence and information from the family in a sensitive manner that contributes to and preserves the integrity of the police investigation;
- Providing timely information and practical support to the family;
- Contributing to a coordinated response that addresses the needs of families, involving Victim Support Services and other appropriate support agencies as required;
- Ensuring appropriate support for staff who are involved in delivering effective family liaison.

#### **Family Representatives**

Some families or victims will not want to deal directly with the police and will appoint a solicitor or other intermediary to represent their interests. They are entitled to take this stance and the police should respect their wishes. Every effort must be made to build and maintain a positive working relationship with the family representative. The police should:

- Try and anticipate, but not make assumptions about the needs of the family or their representative (eg, for information regarding the incident);
- Respond promptly, through pre-agreed communication methods, to all requests received from the family and their representative;
- React quickly to changes in the nature and context of the incident and communicate these to the family and their representative in clear and unambiguous language or terms;
- Recognise that the needs of the family and their representative may vary over time or in changing circumstances (for example, case reviews, memorial services, anniversaries).

Where an incident develops a significant public or media profile, strategies should be implemented to safeguard the welfare of the family. These should be reviewed regularly to take account of any emerging issues.

A complete log of contacts, meetings and conversations should always be kept by the FLO and FLO coordinator.

Families have a right to challenge the way in which an investigation is dealt with and the Police Service must always try to address any such concerns in an open, honest and constructive way.

### **Family Meetings**

Family meetings are likely to be used as an integral element of the family liaison strategy. They may include:

- Family members (with family being given its widest interpretation);
- The family solicitor;
- Other family advocates or representatives;
- The SIO and appropriate members of the investigative team;
- The BCU commander and/or an ACPO representative.

The following points should be considered when arranging a family meeting:

- They should be planned in advance;
- They should be held at a venue agreed by the family;
- They must be open and accountable with the minutes recorded and circulated to named individuals;
- They may form part of a series of regular meetings;
- They should be followed by a debrief of police personnel and appropriate analysis;
- Where police action has been called into question, participants should consider a positive action plan and contingencies to address the concerns raised.

For further information see:

*ACPO (2003) Family Liaison Strategy Manual;*  
*Office for Criminal Justice Reform (2005) The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime;*  
*ACPO (2005) Hate Crime: Delivering a Quality Service.*

## **3.9.2 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

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Involving the community in the management of a critical incident can help to reduce the impact of any problems and provide a bridge between the police, and the victim and the wider community.

### **Independent Involvement**

The principle of independent involvement is fundamental to:

- Developing sensitive and effective policing;
- Challenging assumptions and mindsets;
- Demonstrating openness and accountability;
- Providing an independent, community, non-police perspective;
- Building confidence and trust with families and communities.

The MPS have considerable experience in developing and using independent advisers and advisory groups. They have identified the following points as being of particular importance:

- The process of developing independent involvement may at times be uncomfortable, but it has overwhelming benefit in the achievement of positive outcomes.
- Independent involvement begins at the point of initiation – and does not simply mean the validation of existing police actions.
- Independent involvement must mean consultation, collaboration and coordination at every stage of activity.
- Independent involvement must also have an element of post-event review.
- Independent persons must not be used as
  - Covert Human Intelligence Sources (CHIS);
  - Investigators;
  - Interpreters;
  - Family Liaison Officers.
- Independent involvement is not a ‘tick in the box’ performance indicator.
- The provision of initial written briefings for independent persons is likely to be of benefit.
- The maintenance of written records, signed by all parties, is likely to enhance positive relations.

Where the involvement of independent persons is sought, the following issues should be addressed in every instance:

- Written terms of reference;
- Selection;
- Training;
- Resourcing and payment;
- Briefing and debriefing;
- Disclosure;
- Welfare;
- Review and closure.

When considering the principle of independent involvement, there is an important distinction to be drawn between ‘Independent Advice’ and ‘Mediation’.

### **Independent Advice**

Independent advisers are able to engage in a range of policing activities, either on a case-specific basis or as a member of a recognised IAG. The use of IAGs, especially in Gold Groups, is becoming widely recognised by the Police Service as a successful means of accessing the local community. This is particularly helpful in developing and maintaining contact with hard-to-reach or hard-to-hear groups.

The following key principles should, however, be noted:

- Advisers must remain entirely independent of the Police Service;
- The purpose of engaging an adviser is to critically appraise organisational policies, practice and procedures;
- Advisers can make a significant contribution in relation to both strategic and tactical considerations;
- Advisers are free to make observations both within the Police Service and to the wider community;
- Advisers are not liable for the outcome of police decision making;
- Advisers are not answerable to the police;
- The police are not responsible for advisers' actions;
- The police are not obliged to follow the advice given (although appropriate explanations should be provided where recommendations are not followed);
- Independent advisers should maintain advice logs which are similar to decision logs.

Forces should, where possible, set up dialogue and consultation with every interest group in the community as part of the business of policing. IAGs are complementary to this process and should not be a replacement for it. Their role may, in fact, include advising on how best to consult. A range of formally constituted advisory groups already exists and includes:

- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Advisory Groups;
- Gypsy and Traveller Advisory Groups;
- Youth Groups;
- Disability Advisory Groups.

Chief officers should consider establishing a community contact database which has ready access to a wide range of individuals within local communities. SIOs should always consider seeking the support of locally-based advisers during an incident, where possible. They are more likely to be representative of, and have close ties with, a particular community. 'Parachuting' an individual in from outside can sometimes cause resentment.

To be truly effective, independent advisers must maintain:

- Their independence;
- The ability to criticise;
- Their credibility;
- The ability to communicate effectively with communities.

For further information on the role and function of independent advisers and IAGs, including good practice, see **3.6.1 Gold Groups** and the following:

***ACPO (2005) Independent Advisory Groups: A Guide;***  
***ACPO (n.d.) Community Disorder, A Tactical Police Guide;***  
***ACPO (2005) Hate Crime: Delivering a Quality Service.***

## Mediation

A non-police mediator or advocate is a person who carries out a negotiating, enabling or bridge-building role (eg, with a family or community group) in support of the management or investigation of a crime, incident or event.

Mediation involves participation. Mediators are part of a process; they are not independent of it.

This has two principal effects:

- Mediators become agents of the police and have liabilities and responsibilities that they did not have before;
- Any observations or advice they give can no longer be regarded as coming from an independent perspective.

The decision to engage a mediator, and the rationale for doing so, must be fully documented.

Mediators must be advised of:

- The terms of reference for their role;
- Their legal obligations as an agent of the police;
- The need to complete and retain records of contacts with other parties;
- The rules of disclosure;
- The risks of evidence contamination in connection with significant family witnesses;
- The constraints of sub judice;
- The need to maintain regular contact with the police to provide updates on the mediation process;
- Fair trial issues and the adverse consequences of coaching allegations;
- The need for an appropriate exit strategy.

Mediators should not be engaged without a full risk assessment.

## Public Meetings

It may be necessary to hold a public meeting either during or after a critical incident. This is to:

- Address public concerns about a case;
- Appeal for witnesses;
- Develop community intelligence – particularly with regard to community concerns and tensions;
- Provide information regarding police intentions and actions.

Meetings should be carefully planned in line with the overall investigative and media strategies, and after close consultation with:

- Family members and representatives;
- Community representatives;
- Independent advisers;
- Gold Group members.

## Community Impact Assessments

The purpose of a community impact assessment is to identify factors that may have an effect on community tranquillity. A comprehensive community impact assessment will also provide:

- Enhanced investigative assessment;
- Protection of vulnerable individuals and groups;
- Promotion and retention of community confidence;
- Development of community intelligence;
- An understanding of all aspects of the incident being dealt with.

Chief officers should ensure that impact assessments are carried out efficiently and provide an accurate interpretation of the effect the incident has had on the community. This should include assessing the quality of the police response and whether it is proportionate, given the circumstances of the incident.

Assessments should be regularly reviewed and recorded, taking into account emerging issues. These may involve cross-border considerations (eg, where an incident takes place in one BCU and the family lives in another). It should also be remembered that some communities have both national and international links.

Although prompt action can recover a poor police response, community issues and concerns can often demand the involvement of the police and other agencies over a longer period of time. Forces should, therefore, be prepared to allocate the necessary long-term resources to rebuild community confidence.

For further information see:

*ACPO (2006) Murder Investigation Manual;*  
*ACPO (1999) Guidelines for the Completion of Impact Assessment Document by Senior Investigating Officers in Homicide and Other Major Investigations;*  
*ACPO (n.d.) Community Disorder, A Tactical Police Guide.*

Additional information is available from the National Community Tensions Team, telephone: 020 7084 8776.

## Media

During a critical incident the officer in charge is responsible for the initial formulation of a media strategy; this should be based on truth, not spin. The gold commander's role, in most cases, will be one of quality assurance. Where a critical incident is identified, it may be necessary for the chief officer to take responsibility for the media response or to be the face of the force. It is vital for the Police Service to understand the relationship and interaction between the following:

- The experience of the families and communities;
- Media interpretation, analysis and subsequent reporting;
- The consequent impact on an investigation.

When developing a media strategy for a critical incident, the following principles should be considered:

- The media must not be used to negotiate with the family;
- The media strategy must be consistent with all other strategies;
- The type and tone of language used in media statements must be tactful and take account of past experience;
- There must be clarity about timing and content of any acknowledgement regarding previous mistakes or gaps in an investigation;
- A range of investigative tools can be used, eg, Crimestoppers, Crimewatch, reward offers, appeals for mobile phone images;
- The strategy must recognise the fundamental role of the family and their representatives in liaising with the media;
- Consideration should be given to shared media statements with the family and their representatives – a united approach helps to build community trust and undermine the confidence of perpetrators;
- The strategy should also consider the perspectives of others involved in the response to the incident, eg, advisory groups, police authorities;
- Key messages should be decided on to ensure clarity of objectives and consistency in future releases;
- Consideration should be given to the type of media to target;
- Force websites can be used to inform and advise the local community;
- Advice should be sought on the effectiveness of types of messages for particular communities.

For further information see:

***ACPO (2006) Media Advisory Group, Guidance Notes;***  
***ACPO (2000) Guidelines Relating to the Role of Chief Officers in Murder/Major Crime Investigations;***  
***ACPO (2006) Murder Investigation Manual.***

The Leadership Academy for Policing at Bramshill offers courses on Media Skills and producing an Effective Media Strategy. For further information see: <http://www.npia.police.uk>

### 3.10 MONITORING

A critical incident may affect some families for life. Chief officers should, therefore, ensure that effective and appropriate support is offered to all families for as long as it is required. This should include key events such as case reviews, memorial services and anniversaries.

A force may have more than one critical incident running at any given time. Some may run for several days or months. From the outset of any critical incident response, it is important to recognise the distinction between:

- Short-term investigative or inquiry issues; and
- Medium to long-term community issues.

There is a clear link between investigative priorities and community policing imperatives. Access to community intelligence (and evidence) in the short term is inextricably linked to the development of community confidence in the police in the medium and long term.

The ability of an enquiry team to access witness evidence, for example, will depend, in no small measure, on the confidence of witnesses to come forward.

Chief officers should implement a system to log and monitor incidents. This will ensure that each critical incident continues to be managed and progressed in a timely and efficient manner.

A suggested monitoring process may include the following.

- The development of a register which will be centrally maintained by the BCU or force.
- The addition of regular agenda items to BCU or force SMT meetings to oversee and monitor progress. (These meetings can be used to facilitate the provision of further reviews, community impact assessments or resources, if required.)
- A formal closure procedure.

It may be difficult to state exactly when a critical incident is over, but, in order to ensure that the police response remains proportionate, it should be scaled down as soon as circumstances allow. The decision to scale down a response will help to facilitate exit strategies in other areas such as family liaison.

The decision when to conclude or scale down an investigation or operation, and the reasons for doing so, should always be recorded and fully explained to the victim, their family or the community. This is particularly important where there is a clear operational reason for concluding the police response to an incident, but there has been no arrest or other form of closure for the victim and/or their family.

### 3.10.1 INCIDENT DEBRIEFING

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All police officers and staff involved in a critical incident must be debriefed on operational and welfare issues. This is so that both good and bad practice can be identified and included in future training, planning and risk management. In addition, officers and staff can be referred to appropriate staff associations or occupational health representatives for support and advice.

For operational debriefs the 10,000 Volts debrief system can be used. It provides a non-attributable method of information gathering from key individuals involved in an incident. This allows all participants to speak and be heard, thereby allowing the frank and candid expression of views.

For further information on 10,000 Volt debriefs, contact the Hydra Operations Team at the Directorate for Leadership Development, NCALT, telephone: 020 8358 1370.

For further information see:

***ACPO (2006) Guidance on the National Briefing Model;***  
***ACPO (n.d.) Manual of Guidance on Keeping the Peace;***  
***ACPO (2001) Guidelines on the Management of Stress in the Workplace.***

## MANAGEMENT ISSUES

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- Critical incident management must start with early identification. A level 1 incident can escalate into a large-scale critical incident if not properly managed in the early stages.
- Local force policies and procedures should provide clear and unambiguous reporting and assessment systems for critical incidents at BCU and force level.
- Chief officers must ensure that critical incidents are only declared when it is necessary to do so, and that the response is proportionate to the scale of the incident.
- Critical incident management must take into account the needs of the victim, their family and the local community.
- All critical incidents should be subject to ongoing review and monitoring to ensure they are being progressed and managed in an efficient and timely manner.
- Chief officers should be prepared to allocate long-term resources to rebuilding public confidence as necessary after a critical incident.

# Section 4

## RESTORING PUBLIC CONFIDENCE

**T**his section sets out the key principles that forces can use to restore public confidence. It also includes how to manage the public inquiry process after an incident has caused public concern.

### CONTENTS

4.1	Loss of Public Confidence .....	40
4.2	Key Principles .....	41
	4.2.1 Understanding the Issue .....	41
	4.2.2 Reviews .....	41
	4.2.3 Independent Police Complaints Commission Referrals .....	42
	4.2.4 Victim Care .....	42
	4.2.5 Community Engagement .....	42
	4.2.6 Multi-Agency Complaints or Reviews .....	42
4.3	Public Inquiries .....	43
4.4	Key Principles .....	43
	4.4.1 Independence .....	44
	4.4.2 Cooperation .....	44
	4.4.3 Knowledge .....	44
	4.4.4 Victim and Witness Support .....	44
	4.4.5 Media Response .....	44
	4.4.6 Additional Information .....	44

## 4.1 LOSS OF PUBLIC CONFIDENCE

Public confidence in the police can be influenced by a range of issues. This could be, for example, because the police response to an incident was inadequate and this has had a significant impact on the confidence of the victim, their family and/or the community.

During an incident there should be an opportunity to identify why confidence has been lost, and to implement a management plan to recover the situation. Once the incident has been closed, the opportunity is diminished. Action must, therefore, be taken quickly to identify why confidence has been lost and how it can be restored.

Unless quality assurance processes are in place prior to the closure of an incident, for example, an effective and consistent post-incident review, there may be no indication that public confidence has been damaged until the matter is brought to the attention of the force by the victim or other interested party. This may be days or even weeks after the end of the incident itself.

An example of this might be 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 they expected. As a result, they have lost confidence in the ability of the police to provide a quality service in the future. When a further incident is reported, the victim then complains about the previous responses they have received, even though these were several days or weeks ago. Irrespective of the quality of the police response to the current incident, it is too late to change the perceived poor response to the earlier incidents. The main objectives now will be to provide a quality service for the current incident, to reassure the victim and restore best confidence.

Where a loss of public confidence already exists, the Police Service must find out why this happened and provide a full explanation. If the police are found to be at fault, they must learn from the experience and, importantly, apologise to the victim, their family and/or the community.

If it is immediately clear that the police response was inadequate, it may be appropriate, at the earliest opportunity, to make an apology on behalf of the force and 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 public confidence.

A loss of public confidence in the police can be notified to a force in a number of ways. This includes:

- Letters from victims, their families, community leaders or third parties acting on behalf of the victim or their families;
- Verbal communication to front line officers and staff expressing general concerns;
- Articles appearing 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.

Failure to respond competently and diplomatically to these reports will compound the situation and can lead to another critical incident.

Irrespective of the way in which a loss of public confidence is notified to the police, chief officers (through their senior officers and BCU commanders) must ensure that these reports are accurately recorded and promptly notified to the most appropriate person. The majority of police forces will already have protocols in place to manage these reports competently.

## 4.2 KEY PRINCIPLES

Where a loss of public confidence has occurred, the initial objective must be to restore confidence in the ability of the police to provide an effective and quality police response.

In addition, the chief officers must also consider the longer-term impact that a loss of public confidence will have on community engagement. It may be appropriate to consider whether additional resources for neighbourhood policing are necessary, and to involve IAGs in rebuilding relationships with community groups.

To help achieve the best possible outcome for all parties concerned there are a number of key principles that chief officers should consider when trying to restore public confidence.

### 4.2.1 UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUE

Understanding the problem can help determine how to restore public confidence. As with any incident, every effort must be made to avoid early assumptions or stereotyping. The view of the person or group raising the concern or complaint is based on their own perception of what happened; it is important that they feel their views are being taken seriously. Their concerns must be managed in a proactive, open, honest and realistic manner.

### 4.2.2 REVIEWS

A review is particularly useful when a concern is raised about a past incident. A review, however, may take place several weeks or months after the closure of the incident and recollection may be difficult. This, therefore, demonstrates the importance of keeping full records of actions and decisions during an incident.

A review will evaluate the police response to the incident and determine whether:

- It conformed to nationally approved standards;
- It was thorough;
- It was conducted with integrity and objectivity;
- Investigative or other opportunities were overlooked;
- Good and bad practice was identified.

In some cases, a review of the original police response will show that everything that could have been done, was done.

For further information on reviews see:

- *ACPO (2000) Guidelines Relating to the Role of Chief Officers in Murder/Major Crime Investigations;*
- *ACPO (1998) Revised Guidelines for Major Crime Reviews;*
- *ACPO (2006) Murder Investigation Manual.*

### 4.2.3 INDEPENDENT POLICE COMPLAINTS COMMISSION REFERRALS

More serious issues, including specific allegations of serious misconduct and those where a member of the public has been injured or killed while in contact with the police, may need to be referred to the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) for formal investigation.

Referrals should be made in line with current protocols and agreements between the IPCC and the police.

For further information see:

*IPCC (2005) Making the New Complaints System Work Better: Statutory Guidance from the IPCC;*

*IPCC and ACPO (2004) Protocol Agreement between the Independent Police Complaints Commission and the Police Service (29th July 2004): Memorandum of Understanding;*

*ACPO (1983) Manual of Guidance on the Police Use of Firearms, Chapter 6 Annex 6C.*

### 4.2.4 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 some level of victim care through a named contact or a FLO while their concerns are being addressed. See also **3.9 Victim, Family and Community**.

### 4.2.5 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The involvement of community representatives and IAGs may help victims, their families and the community to understand why the police response was not effective or, where it was found to have been effective, why communication broke down. They may also be able to facilitate community meetings or mediate between the police and those raising the concern. This approach may assist in obtaining the best possible resolution and in rebuilding positive relationships. For further information see **3.9.2 Community Engagement**.

### 4.2.6 MULTI-AGENCY COMPLAINTS OR REVIEWS

In some cases, the police will have worked in partnership with other agencies during an incident. Those agencies may also be involved in trying to identify why public confidence has been lost. When working with other agencies in these circumstances, the issues may centre on accountability and information sharing.

Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) have been developed with most partner agencies to facilitate the free flow of information in these situations. Any liaison should, however, be carried out through a single point of contact (SPOC); and, where meetings take place, the officers involved must have the authority to act on behalf of their force.

Where more than one agency is involved, it must be established who will have primacy during any review and which agency will be responsible for liaising with the individual(s) raising the concern or complaint.

For further information see the MoU between the Police Service and the relevant partner agency, if one has been developed. Where an MoU has not previously been agreed, a chief officer will need to negotiate terms of reference.

Restoring public confidence involves dealing with issues raised and being seen to deal with them in an equitable and transparent manner by including the people most closely affected. The Police Service must learn from its mistakes and take positive steps to prevent them from happening again.

### 4.3 PUBLIC INQUIRIES

Public inquiries do not take place without warning. There will be a history of dissatisfaction which could have extended over several years. The matter will probably have generated wide public interest with comprehensive, and often critical, press coverage. During the intervening years the police may have been required to respond to a range of requests including:

- Complaints from the victim, their family and the community;
- Letters from MPs;
- Questions asked in Parliament.

In spite of this, interested parties still feel that the only way to resolve outstanding questions and issues is by a full independent inquiry open to public scrutiny.

A public inquiry can only be called by a government minister; such a decision will not be taken lightly. A minister will only call a public inquiry where:

Particular events have caused, or are capable of causing, public concern or there is public concern that particular events may have occurred.

*The Inquiries Act 2005*

Where an inquiry is called, it is usually several years after the incident which led to it. This time delay will place additional pressure on the force concerned because police officers or other members of police staff involved in the original incident may no longer work for the force; they may have retired or even died. Irrespective of this, the force concerned is still accountable for the decisions and actions of those officers present at the time.

The chief officer tasked with managing the force response to a public inquiry may not have been in post or even in force at the time of the incident. They must, therefore, approach the process and the management of the incident with an open mind. They must not blindly defend the decisions of their predecessors without first reviewing those decisions and how the incident was managed as a whole.

### 4.4 KEY PRINCIPLES

Public inquiries are rare and so the development of good practice is difficult in this area. The MPS Directorate of Legal Services has produced guidance entitled *Responding to Public Inquiries, A Generic Guide*. It incorporates experience gained from a number of high-profile public inquiries held in the Metropolitan Police area. It has been drafted to assist both lawyers and police officers who may find themselves tasked with representing the Police Service at a public inquiry. The guide provides a suggested framework to help achieve a consistent, professional, corporate response.

The basic principles for dealing with public inquiries are the same as those for restoring public confidence, but the following additional principles from the guidance are also applicable.

#### 4.4.1 INDEPENDENCE

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The chief officer assigned to manage the public inquiry process should not have been directly or indirectly involved in the original incident. Involvement in the incident may influence their approach to the inquiry process.

#### 4.4.2 COOPERATION

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The local police authority will have a significant interest in the proceedings and outcome of a public inquiry. In some circumstances, where there is agreement, it may be possible to consider joint legal counsel for the inquiry process. In all cases there should be close liaison and communication between the chief officer representing the force and the police authority. This will ensure a consistent and coordinated response.

#### 4.4.3 KNOWLEDGE

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The force response should be informed, consistent and coordinated. Chief officers should assign a dedicated inquiry team to review and, where necessary, investigate the police response to the original incident. This team should include officers with experience relevant to the incident but who, ideally, were not directly involved. They should be committed to managing the process through to the conclusion of the inquiry.

#### 4.4.4 VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT

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As part of the police response to the inquiry process, it may be necessary to provide additional victim care to the victim of the incident and their family. It will also be necessary to provide support to witnesses and to those police officers and police staff called as witnesses to the inquiry because of their involvement in the incident.

#### 4.4.5 MEDIA RESPONSE

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The incident which triggered the public inquiry will already have a high media profile. To ensure that a coordinated and consistent message is conveyed to the media, it is essential to have a clear media strategy agreed between the lead chief officer, the legal services department and the police inquiry team.

#### 4.4.6 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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Further advice and information on managing the public inquiry process is available in the MPS guidance, *Responding to Public Inquiries, A Generic Guide*. A copy of this is available on the Genesis website see: <http://www.genesis.pnn.police.uk/genesis>

The guidance is a continually developing document and will be revised and amended should additional good practice be identified during future public inquiries.

### MANAGEMENT ISSUES

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



# APPENDIX 1

## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

### ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<b>ACPO</b> . . . . .	Association of Chief Police Officers
<b>BCU</b> . . . . .	Basic Command Unit
<b>CHIS</b> . . . . .	Covert Human Intelligence Source
<b>HMIC</b> . . . . .	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary
<b>HOLMES</b> . . . . .	Home Office Large Major Enquiry System
<b>IAG</b> . . . . .	Independent Advisory Group
<b>IPCC</b> . . . . .	Independent Police Complaints Commission
<b>LESLP</b> . . . . .	London Emergency Services Liaison Panel
<b>MIRSAP</b> . . . . .	Major Incident Room Standardised Administrative Procedures
<b>MoU</b> . . . . .	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>MP</b> . . . . .	Member of Parliament
<b>MPS</b> . . . . .	Metropolitan Police Service
<b>NCALT</b> . . . . .	National Centre for Applied Learning Technologies
<b>NCPE</b> . . . . .	National Centre for Policing Excellence
<b>OPSI</b> . . . . .	Office of Public Sector Information
<b>PCSO</b> . . . . .	Police Community Support Officer
<b>SIO</b> . . . . .	Senior Investigating Officer
<b>SMT</b> . . . . .	Senior Management Team



# APPENDIX 2

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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