

An accurate, multi-dimensional threat assessment will ultimately allow for an effective prioritised strategy and the formulation of a proportionate response. The aim is to protect the public by the most appropriate method, balancing the risk of harm to the public in both the short and longer term. See [sustained public protection](#).

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

Threat assessment: definition

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

A threat assessment:

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

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

Accuracy

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

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

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

Communication

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

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

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

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

Negotiation

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

7. Decisive action

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

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

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

Note: Local independent advisory groups (IAGs) may include members who are community impact assessment (CIA) trained and available to offer advice and guidance where there may be cultural factors that should be considered as part of the response. Assessments should be regularly reviewed to take account of emerging issues and may involve cross-boundary considerations.

The impact of armed police deployment on a community

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

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

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

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

Explanation and apology

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

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

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

Record keeping

Individual commanders must be prepared to account for their decisions and to explain their rationale at the time that those decisions were taken. All plans should be

documented, including options rejected or progressed, together with the reasons why such conclusions were drawn and by whom.

Further information

Information on minimum standards for command logs (document available via the firearms community documents library on POLKA, which is a RESTRICTED online tool available to [authorised users](#) who are logged on to the Police Online Knowledge Area (POLKA)

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

Dealing with people

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

Handling subjects

The close proximity of subjects to officers with firearms at the final stages of an incident presents risks. These stages are likely to be the most dangerous phase of an incident and constitute the subject's last chance to escape.

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

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

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

Hostage situations