

On occasions, the initial tactical firearms commander may be in a better position to continue in the tactical firearms command role until a dedicated tactical firearms commander is in a position to take command.

Documentation

The transfer of roles at any level in the command structure should be documented and include:

- time and date of transfer
- confirmation and relevant intelligence and information has been reviewed
- confirmation that the new commander understands the situation and decisions taken.

Officers involved in the incident should be made aware of any changes in command, in so far as is practicable and where relevant to their role.

Strategy

Further information

[Development of strategy \(gold\)](#)

[Develop a working strategy](#)

Commanders must, at the earliest opportunity, develop an effective strategy to direct police action. A working strategy may start to be developed once information is received. It can be formalised once a threat assessment has taken place.

A strategy may contain a number of objectives. Information and intelligence can change, as may the threat assessment, therefore, the strategy must remain dynamic and capable of being reviewed.

While it is important that a strategy is defined and agreed as quickly as possible, it must be based on all the information available at the time. It is rare for a complete or perfect picture to exist. Public safety should always be the priority and at times this may require immediate action to protect life, which, of necessity, may be based on limited information.

The strategy and the rationale behind it should be recorded as part of an audit trail, along with any revisions or amendments. Similarly, the strategy should be regularly reviewed, particularly where a change or handover of command occurs.

Effective strategy

An effective strategy should:

- provide clarity of purpose

- recognise public safety as a priority
- reflect the multidimensional threat assessment in priority order
- be achievable
- be dynamic to reflect changes in circumstances
- be specific to the operation.

When formulating a working strategy, firearms commanders are required to consider the role of the police in protecting the public alongside the wider duty to investigate crime and bring offenders to justice. Sustained public protection may be characterised as an acknowledgement that an extended duty of care to the public exists in some more complex operations.

Sustained public protection

The objective of any police investigation must be to protect the public through the detection and prevention of crime. This includes obtaining sufficient evidence to bring arrested persons to justice. While this objective legitimately includes an attempt to secure sufficient evidence to demonstrate the full extent of the planned and criminal intention, this must be balanced against any associated risk to the public.

Action taken to mitigate risk in the short term may only serve to displace or delay that risk and may not address the longer-term public safety considerations. It may only be possible to effectively eliminate risk to the public through the detention, successful prosecution and subsequent lengthy imprisonment of the subjects, particularly where they are committed or recidivist offenders. It may not, however, always be possible to develop a plan capable of securing sufficient evidence to do so without risk.

In a covert armed policing operation, the decision to activate a tactical arrest plan and move to an overt phase may have to take account of competing considerations in terms of evidential sufficiency and the safety of those potentially exposed to risk. Where the policing operation relates to more than one subject, evidential sufficiency may have to be considered in the wider context.

It is appropriate to assess the level of risk to the public in both the short and longer term. This may include consideration of whether the means by which more imminent risk is mitigated may increase risk in the longer term as a result of reduced police control and intelligence opportunities.

In deciding when to authorise the activation of the tactical arrest plan, a commander is, therefore, entitled to take into account the strength of the evidence against the subject(s) and to consider whether:

- there is sufficient evidence to warrant the detention and prosecution of the subjects
- overt police action at an early stage will reduce the likelihood of a successful prosecution

It is often necessary for AFOs to operate outside their assigned policing boundary. This may be as a result of a pursuit, provision of mutual aid to a neighbouring force or policing area, or as part of an operation which transcends territorial policing boundaries.

This may include armed support to surveillance operations, protection or escort duties, see [mobile armed support to surveillance \(MASTS\)](#).

AFOs may also be involved in [multi-agency operations](#). In these circumstances it is important that there is as much clarity as possible in respect of:

- command
- jurisdiction
- standard operating procedures and interoperability
- capability of those involved in the incident
- powers and roles of respective agencies.

All commanders and AFOs are trained to agreed national standards, thereby enabling interoperability across policing boundaries.

Cross-boundary operations

The operational carriage of firearms across policing boundaries is a regular occurrence and police forces should adopt a pragmatic and effective approach to managing such situations. Where it can be planned for in advance, deployments of armed officers across boundaries should be catered for by way of local protocols and memoranda of understanding.

Unplanned deployment across force boundaries

Where AFOs deploy across a policing boundary in circumstances that are not expected or planned for, the original authorisation, deployment and command structure will remain in place.

The appropriate [strategic firearms commander](#) in the force or command area in which the deployment is taking place, however, must be notified at the earliest opportunity so that they can review the deployment and command structure. This will allow that officer to consider:

- authorising the deployment of AFOs from the originating force or command area, together with their command structure, to continue running the operation
- assuming responsibility for the operation, including command and the provision of AFOs
- reviewing the deployment of AFOs and assuming the responsibility of strategic firearms commander (or appointing a new strategic firearms commander from within the force area) and dealing with the incident using the armed officers from the originating force
- assuming responsibility and curtailing the operation.