

to do so, briefing notes or flow charts showing the structure can aid people's understanding of it.

The function of the strategic firearms commander (SFC) or tactical firearms commander (TFC) must not be undertaken by the senior investigating officer (SIO) responsible for the investigation of the offence(s) for which the firearms operation is being conducted.

The separation of SFC and SIO roles may however not be necessary during kidnap operations, prior to the safe recovery of the hostage(s) and where the operational priority is the preservation of life.

It is the responsibility of the strategic firearms commander to satisfy themselves that the tactical plan is capable of meeting the strategic aims of the operation, and that the provisions of ECHR Article 2 take precedence.

Any change of command structure should where time permits, be discussed before it is undertaken and must then be documented.

Recording and accountability

If an officer outside the command structure gives advice or a directive relating to the operational plan to a commander, then this must be recorded and this officer will be accountable for the advice or direction given.

Decision making

It is essential that objectivity and oversight are clearly demonstrated in the decision-making process. Separation of roles and clarity of responsibility is essential to the provision of effective command and tactical advice.

Tactical advice

Where tactical advice is required by a commander, this advice should be independent. The tactical advisor should be independent of the command structure and not part of the operational deployment.

Strategic firearms commander

This role:

- has overall strategic command, with responsibility and accountability for directions given
- must set, review, communicate and update the strategy based on the threat assessment and the available intelligence
- should consider consulting a [tactical advisor](#)
- should consider any [tactical parameters](#) to be placed on the police response
- must ensure that the [strategy](#) for the armed deployment is recorded, including any changes to it, to provide a clear audit trail

- must authorise the deployment of AFOs, or ratify or rescind the deployment where it has already been approved by the [tactical firearms commander](#)
- should ensure that all decisions are recorded, where practicable, in order to provide a clear audit trail
- must ensure that the firearms strategy complies with the wider strategic aims of the overall operation
- should test the tactical plan against the established strategy, where practicable and/or time allows
- is responsible for overall resourcing in respect of the deployment of AFOs
- where appropriate, will chair meetings of the [strategic coordinating group](#) (SCG) when they are held during a multi-agency or multi-discipline response
- should set [command protocols](#) where appropriate
- should consider consulting partners, stakeholders and interest groups involved (if any) when determining [strategy](#) (see also [development of strategy \(gold\)](#))
- should consider the need for a [community impact assessments](#)
- should consider declaring and managing the event as a [critical incident](#)
- should maintain a strategic overview
- must be able to be contacted by the tactical firearms commander
- is responsible for reviewing and ensuring the resilience and effectiveness of the command structure and the effectiveness of the tactical firearms commander
- should consider the appointment of more than one tactical firearms commander where there are clear demarcations geographically (ie, police boundaries), or in respect of roles, or where the management of AFOs is only one part of the operational police response.

Tactical firearms commander

Further information

[General principles of strategic planning](#)

Where a [strategic firearms commander](#) is not yet in place, the tactical firearms commander will set the working strategy, including any appropriate [tactical parameters](#). These will be reviewed and ratified by a strategic firearms commander as soon as practicable.

The tactical firearms commander:

- must assess and develop the available information and intelligence, and complete the threat assessment
- should consult a [tactical advisor](#) as soon as practicable
- is responsible for developing and coordinating the tactical plan in order to achieve the strategic aims, within any tactical parameters set
- is responsible for ensuring that officers and staff are fully briefed
- should consider the provision of medical support
- should be so located as to be able to maintain effective tactical command of the operation
- should ensure that all decisions are recorded, where practicable, in order to provide a clear audit trail

- provides the pivotal link in the command chain between strategic and operational firearms commanders
- must constantly monitor the need for the continued deployment of AFOs.
- must review and update the tactical plan and ensure that any changes are communicated to the operational firearms commanders and, where appropriate, the strategic firearms commander
- should consider and, where appropriate, conduct a community impact assessments
- should consider declaring and managing the event as a [critical incident](#)
- should consider the number, role and function of the operational firearms commanders
- should consider the wider community, public safety and evidential implications of the use of [specialist munitions](#), pyrotechnic devices or incapacitants
- should ensure that after all deployed staff are appropriately debriefed, operational and organisational learning takes place.

Operational firearms commander

This role:

- must have knowledge and clear understanding of their role and the overall aim of the operation
- must, where practicable, ensure that their staff are appropriately briefed
- should be located where they are able to maintain effective command of their area of responsibility
- ensures the implementation of the tactical firearms commander's tactical plan within their territorial or functional area of responsibility
- updates the tactical firearms commander, as appropriate, on current developments
- makes decisions within their agreed level of responsibility, including seeking approval for any variation in agreed tactics within their area of responsibility
- must ensure clear communication channels exist between themselves, the [tactical firearms commander](#) and those under their command
- should consider declaring and managing the event as a [critical incident](#)
- should be available to those under their command, however, they should allow them sufficient independence to carry out their specific role in accordance with the [strategy](#) and tactical plan
- should ensure decisions taken are recorded, where possible, to provide a clear audit trail.

Tactical advisor

This role:

- advises on the capabilities and limitations of the AFOs and other police resources being deployed
- advises the strategic or tactical firearms commander on the implication of any tactical parameters which have been set

- advises on the available tactical options for consideration by the strategic and tactical firearms commander within the existing strategy and any tactical parameters set
- advises the firearms commanders on the tactical considerations, contingencies and implications for each tactical option (see [National Decision Model](#))
- should be in a position to assist and advise the tactical firearms commander at all stages of the operation
- provides tactical advice reflecting the existing threat assessment
- ensures that advice given is recorded.

The role of a tactical advisor is to advise and not to make command decisions. The responsibility for the validity and reliability of the advice lies with the advisor, but the responsibility for the use of that advice rests with the commander.

Command support

Command support is a useful element of the command structure.

Depending on the complexity of the operation, and the availability of support staff, all firearms commanders must consider the availability and necessity for:

- intelligence liaison
- tactical advisor
- negotiator coordinator
- logistics support
- [post incident management](#)
- media support.

Where incidents become protracted, there may be a need to establish a dedicated command facility to manage the operation. This ensures that operations do not impinge on day-to-day policing activity, or vice versa. Forces should ensure that adequate training is given to staff who may be required to perform roles within such a command facility.

Initial command responsibility

It is the responsibility of the officer authorising the deployment of AFOs to ensure that an appropriate command structure is instigated as soon as practicable. Where appropriate, this officer should remain in command of the deployment until any transfer of command takes place. In planned operations a command structure must be in place prior to the officers being deployed.

Any consideration in respect of the deployment of AFOs should be recorded along with the decision and rationale for it. Where a recommendation for the deployment of AFOs has been declined, the rationale for that decision should also be documented.