

Authority and discretion to use force and firearms

Authorised firearms officers (AFOs) are first and foremost police officers. In exercising the duties of the office of constable they have a personal accountability and responsibility for the protection of life and carrying out duties associated with that office.

In most situations it is the individual AFO who must assess the immediacy and proximity of the threat and make an operational decision on whether it is absolutely necessary to discharge a firearm or take other decisive action – see [deployment of AFOs](#).

Individual responsibility and accountability

Each AFO is individually responsible and accountable for their decisions and actions, nothing can absolve them from such responsibility and accountability. This includes decisions to refrain from using force as well as any decisive action taken, including the use of force, the use of a firearm and the use of a less lethal weapon.

AFOs are answerable, ultimately, to the law in the courts. They must be in a position to justify their decisions and actions based on their honestly held belief as to the circumstances that existed at the time, and their professional and legal responsibilities. See [legal framework](#).

Influencing factors

An AFO's appreciation of the critical nature of the situation may be informed by a combination of the following factors:

- their observation and assessment of the situation
- their perception of any imminent threat
- their understanding of the wider police operation
- information or intelligence that has been communicated to them
- any direction or authorisation given to them.

Considerations when the use of force is unavoidable

Law enforcement officials should:

- exercise restraint in such use and act in proportion to the seriousness of the offence and the legitimate objective to be achieved
- minimise damage and injury, and respect and preserve human life
- ensure that assistance and medical aid are rendered to any injured or affected persons at the earliest possible moment
- ensure that relatives or close friends of the injured or affected person are notified at the earliest possible moment (Article 5).

Less lethal options

ACPO has researched the issues associated with hierarchical continuums of force and has concluded that they are both operationally and legally inappropriate for adoption by