



Metropolitan Police Service
Police Use of Firearms and Less Lethal
Weapons - Standard Operating Procedures

Firearms Policy Unit - Leman Street (HD)

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Introduction

All police officers and police staff, including the extended police family and those working voluntarily or under contract to the MOPAC must be aware of, and are required to comply with, all relevant MPS policy and associated procedures.

However, this SOP applies in particular to officers and staff, or outside agencies working with or within the MPS, who may, as part of their role come into contact with firearms or take part in firearms operations or the use of Taser in any capacity.

All use of Firearms by Police within the UK is governed by the Home Office Codes of Practice on the Police Use of Firearms and Less Lethal Weapons (2003) and is issued further to the Police Act 1996 (as amended by the Police Reform Act 2002); and, the Police Act 1997. The purpose of this code is:

- To set out the basic principles in relation to the selection, testing, acquisition and use of firearms and less lethal weapons by police;
- To set out the manner in which those principles are to be implemented within the police service;
- To provide a statement on standards of competence, accreditation and operational practice relating to police use of firearms and less lethal weapons;
- To ensure that observance of these principles, and the standards for implementation, results in a systematic programme of continuous development of police policy, practice and capability;
- To promote compatibility of operating procedures for such weapons, in order to support procedures for testing and maintaining standards of competence, and to support operations involving officers drawn from more than one force;
- To foster the identification and promulgation of good practice; and
- To encourage and support the continuing development and improvement of police responses to potentially violent situations, and police management of conflict.

This is supported by national guidance in the form of Authorised Professional Practice (APP). The full version of the APP for Armed Policing 2012 can be found on the [FPU Intranet site](#).

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The main aim of the APSTRA within the MPS is to inform the APRDG in regards to operational requirements to aid decision making, determine policy for the provision of weapons & equipment and the training and accreditation of users.

The APSTRA should be used to review the following:-

- Types and numbers of weapons available;
- Training needs in terms of the use of firearms and less lethal weapons, tactics, provision of tactical advice and command for incidents;
- Deployment arrangements.

As far as possible, it will;

- Identify future threats to the MPS in terms of the criminal use of firearms;
- Identify future demands on MPS firearms capability.

The MPS APSTRA process requires a 6 monthly APSTRA completion and submission from the SLT APSTRA Lead for each OCU identified in the MPS APSTRA. Submissions are sent to Superintendent Operations of SC&O19 who assesses information they contain and subsequently places them before the APDG. The APDG then tasks the sub-groups (Weapons & Equipment, Operations, Tactics and Training, Taser or Total Professionalism Group) as appropriate unless the APDG is able to deal with identified matters immediately. The APSTRA itself is redrafted and published every 6 months.

Items considered urgent are dealt with immediately and if necessary placed before Commander Armed Policing without waiting for the APDG to sit.

The MPS Police Use of Firearms and Less Lethal Weapons SOP is a Metropolitan Police specific document and it works in conjunction with the ACPO APP Armed Policing 2012. The ACPO APP provides generic guidance, whereas the MPS SOP gives clear MPS operating procedures. This document is directed towards AFOs and other staff associated with firearms, along with those officers who supervise or manage such assets and procedures either directly or indirectly.

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Use of Firearms and Less Lethal Weapons

- 1.0 The carriage of firearms by a police officer or the presence of an armed officer does not in itself constitute a use of force. When a police officer makes use of a firearm or less lethal weapon, for example by pointing it or by discharging the weapon that will constitute a use of force for which the officer is both legally and organisationally accountable.
- 1.1 For the purpose of this guidance, a police officer will be deemed to have used a firearm or a less lethal weapon when it is;
 - Pointed at another person;
 - Fired at another person;
 - Discharged in any other operational circumstances, including an unintentional discharge

Authority and Discretion to use Force and Firearms

- 1.2 AFOs are first and foremost police officers and in exercising the duties of the office of constable have a personal accountability and responsibility for the protection of life and carrying out duties associated with that office.
- 1.3 In all situations it is the individual AFO who must assess the immediacy and proximity of the threat and make an operational decision as to whether it is absolutely necessary to discharge a firearm or take other decisive action.
- 1.4 The ACPO Authorised Professional Practice (APP) ECHR Article 2 - Right to Life/Deaths Resulting from the States Use of Force states: (ACPO MoG - MCDAO 2011) 'Absolute Necessity' states:

"Article 2 imposes a requirement of strict proportionality between (a) the objective and (b) the force used to achieve it. Deprivation of life shall not be regarded as inflicted in contravention of Article 2 when it results from the use of force which is no more than absolutely necessary to achieve one of the permitted objectives."

Discharge of Firearms

- 1.5 The primary intention of the police is to prevent an immediate threat to life by shooting to stop the subject from carrying out their intended or threatened course of action. In most circumstances this is achieved by aiming to strike the central body mass (i.e. the torso).
- 1.6 Research indicates that the accuracy of shots fired under training conditions is generally greater than in operational circumstances. Police officers are normally

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trained to discharge conventional firearms at the largest part of the target they can see, which in most cases will be the central body mass.

- 1.7 The physical response of a person to having been shot is unpredictable; there are a range of physical and psychological moderators, which can contribute to the nature and extent of any response. Only shots striking the central nervous system (which is largely located in the brain and spinal cord) and the major organs, which are constrained in the upper body, are likely to result in rapid incapacitation.
- 1.8 There will be circumstances when aiming directly for the head will be necessary, where aiming to strike another part of the body would;
 - Be impractical in the circumstances;
 - Present increased risk to life;
 - Be unlikely to achieve immediate incapacitation.
- 1.9 A 'critical shot' is a shot or shots intended to immediately incapacitate the subject. A critical shot should only be fired when absolutely necessary in defence of a person when there is an imminent and extreme risk to life from unlawful violence. A critical shot is a shot or shots to the head, if possible, or otherwise to the central nervous system or major organs.
- 1.10 Alternative points of aim will be appropriate for approved less lethal weapons in accordance with weapon specific guidelines. Where alternative points of aim and intended points of impact are referenced in guidance, the purpose is normally to minimise the risk of unintentional effects or potentially lethal injuries, and to maximise the effectiveness of the weapon system.
- 1.11 When it is considered necessary to discharge a firearm at a subject, police officers need to shoot to stop an imminent threat to life. The imminence of any threat should be judged, in respect to the potential for loss of life, with due regard to legislation and consideration of necessity, reasonableness and proportionality.
- 1.12 When an AFO decides to discharge a firearm, the number and sequencing of rounds fired will depend on the circumstances that exist at the time. Officers must constantly assess the threat posed by the subject and the continuance of the threat. Officers must be able to demonstrate that the degree of force used was absolutely necessary and relative to the threat posed. The use of excessive force is strictly prohibited.
- 1.13 The discharge of firearms by police will not necessarily result in the death of a subject and where a subject is injured, every effort must be taken by police to provide medical assistance.

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Accountability for all Rounds Fired

- 1.14 AFOs are accountable for all rounds they discharge and they should be aimed so as to minimise risk (either directly or by ricochet) to any person other than the subject. Where in exceptional circumstances a round is discharged in a direction where it is not intended to strike a person or defined area, officers must take account of potential unintentional harm being caused as a consequence. This could also include death or serious injury of a person not in the immediate proximity.
- 1.15 Officers should be aware that any discharge of a firearm may lead a subject or other officer to believe that they are under fire.
- 1.16 When an AFO decides to discharge a firearm, the number and sequencing of rounds fired will depend on the circumstances that exist at the time. Officers must constantly assess the threat posed by the subject and the continuance of the threat. Officers must be able to demonstrate that the degree of force used was absolutely necessary and relative to the threat posed. The use of excessive force is strictly prohibited.

Accountability for Use of Force Decisions

- 1.17 Each AFO is individually responsible and accountable for their decisions and actions and nothing can absolve them from such a responsibility and accountability. This includes decisions to refrain from using force as well as any decisive action taken, including the use of force or a firearm.
- 1.18 AFOs are answerable, ultimately to the law in the courts and 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.

Command Decisions

- 1.19 Firearms commanders and AFOs are trained to analyse and determine appropriate courses of action in the course of armed deployments. See National Decision Model in Chapter 7 at paragraph 7.7.
- 1.20 Firearms commanders and those involved in the assessment of intelligence, provision of tactical advice and relaying of communications will be legally and professionally responsible for decisions that they make and any advice or directions or authorisations that they give. Any advice or directions or authorisations and subsequent action must be 'reasonable in the circumstances' and where appropriate the test of absolute necessity' as required by Article 2 ECHR must be met.