

Police Service of Northern Ireland

Policy for Public Disclosure.

HQ Ref: ACC Crime Ops/12/7004

PD 10/07

POLICY DIRECTIVE

MANAGING ACTUAL/ POTENTIAL CRITICAL INCIDENTS

1. POLICY IDENTIFICATION

POLICY TITLE: Managing Actual/Potential Critical Incidents

POLICY OWNERSHIP:

**DEPARTMENT
BRANCH**

**Crime Operations
Policy Performance and Planning**

POLICY APPROVED BY:

**CCF REF/OTHER
DATE OF APPROVAL**

IMPLEMENTATION DATE:

DATE OF ISSUE: 9 July 2007

DATE VERSION 3 ISSUED: 19 March 2009

REVIEW DATE: 20 March 2010

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2. POLICY STATEMENTS

(1) Definition of a Critical Incident

Any incident, where the **effectiveness** of the police response is likely to have a significant **impact** on the **confidence** of the victim, their family and/or the community which is beyond the capability of a District and/or has the potential to generate grave public concern at a local, regional, national, or international level.

- (a) It recognises the fundamental importance of community confidence and trust in the police response to Critical Incidents.
- (b) Declaring a Critical Incident should not be seen as an automatic response to serious incidents or investigations. Before such a declaration is made, full consideration should be given to the normal range of options for restoring confidence in the police response, for example, by the deployment and effective use of a Family Liaison Officer (FLO) or enhanced press briefings.
- (c) An apparently routine incident may have the potential to become critical due to its unique circumstances, including its impact on the community. Officers should therefore always consider the wider implications of the incident they are dealing with.
- (d) Key words in the definition are:
 - (i) **Effectiveness**: this is a measure of the professionalism, competence and integrity evident in the police response to an incident;
 - (ii) **Significant impact**: 'significant' should be interpreted as being particular to each incident but critically relates to the 'impact' on the individual, family or community;
 - (iii) **Confidence**: this is a reference to long term confidence in policing – of victims, families and communities.
- (e) It may be beneficial in considering the nature of an incident and the police response thereto to consider Appendix 'A' to this document.

- (2) (a) It is the Policy of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) to Manage Critical Incidents in order to:
 - (i) Recognise those incidents where the quality of the police response will affect trust and confidence of the community;
 - (ii) Respond appropriately to those incidents where the quality of the police response will affect trust and confidence of the community.
- (b) The approach to Critical Incidents starts with an awareness of the impact of such incidents on communities, families and victims.
- (c) To ensure effectiveness the PSNI will recognise such impacts and respond to them in a manner that demonstrates integrity, compassion, transparency, and professionalism in accordance with the PSNI Code of Ethics.
- (d) Ensure police performance in the initial stages of a Critical Incident is comprehensive and accurately recorded.
- (e) Declaring a Critical Incident will have major resource and media implications on a District, Region or Department. The decision to declare a Critical Incident will therefore rest with the relevant Regional or Departmental Chief Officer.

3. INTRODUCTION

(1) Drivers for Change

There have been a number of high profile police investigations/events in recent years where the effectiveness of the police response has the potential to significantly impact on the confidence in policing of the victim, their family, or the wider community. The review by the Metropolitan Police into the Soham murders investigation made a number of recommendations including one which identified the need for all officers to be able to identify and manage Critical Incidents to a level at which they may be called upon to command or otherwise deal with. This Policy explains how the PSNI will identify and deal with these potential Critical Incidents to ensure the police response is robust and consistent. By successful implementation of this Policy the PSNI should enhance the trust and confidence of the people of Northern Ireland.

(2) Aim

The aim of this Policy is to enable police officers to recognise potential Critical Incidents and respond effectively. In so doing they will adhere to the policing plan and ensure effective leadership and intervention to benefit the communities they serve.

(3) Application

The PSNI must continue to win that confidence and trust which is so essential to successful policing and to engage communities to help build a safe, just and tolerant society. The quality of police response to **all** incidents plays a defining role in building the necessary trust and confidence of the communities that it serves.

(a) Winning community confidence and trust means:

- (i) Winning the confidence and trust of witnesses and PSNI staff who provide the intelligence and evidence for successful prosecutions;
- (ii) Winning the confidence and trust of juries who hear the cases that are put before them;
- (iii) Winning the confidence and trust of potential police recruits;
- (iv) Winning the confidence and trust of individuals, families, communities and organisations that can work in long term partnership with the Police Service to prevent Critical Incidents from ever happening in the first place.

(b) The involvement of Independent Advisers and others from outside the Service, in the management of Critical Incidents, provides us not only with an opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to Service values but also acts as a safeguard against stereotyping and other subconscious processes that limit our chance of success. Working in partnership means just that.

(c) The guidance contained in this Policy draws upon lessons learned from a number of inquiries into incidents that would now be characterized as Critical Incidents and the subsequent reports. We have also drawn on lessons learnt from the experiences of the PSNI in dealing with Critical Incidents over the last few years. The Policy is not intended as a definitive document; every Critical Incident will be different and will require a unique response, however, the guidance contained in this document will provide officers with basic information to enable them to respond in a professional and effective way.

(d) The content of the document does not represent a prescriptive model; the response to Critical Incidents should be as unique as the incidents themselves. It is fundamentally important to ask, "What is right in this case?" and in cases of doubt or complexity to seek advice.

(e) The PSNI has distilled a range of lessons into a single framework within this document, for use by everyone taking responsibility for the professional management of Critical Incidents.

(4) **Legal Basis**

Though there is no specific legislative requirement for the Policy, it ensures police response to incidents is standardised which should ensure that the following are taken into account:

- (a) The Human Rights Act 1998;
- (b) Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998;
- (c) Race Relations (NI) Order 1997;
- (d) Part II of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 (provisions for Vulnerable and Intimidated Witnesses);
- (e) Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000;
- (f) Section 32 Police (NI) Act 2000;
- (g) Civil Contingencies Act 2004;
- (h) Full consideration should also be given to Articles 2(1), 2(2) and 3(3) of the PSNI Code of Ethics.

4. IMPLICATIONS OF THE POLICY

The proper management of Critical Incidents has the potential to cultivate good public relations with various members of the community and construct and enhance appropriate partnerships.

(1) **Financial Implications/Best Value/Continuous Improvement/Efficiency**

- (a) The occurrence of a Critical Incident is likely to place increased demands on policing resources. All activities and associated expenditure connected with a Critical Incident should be clearly identified and recorded. This will enable supplementary bids for contingency funding to be made as well as ensuring an accurate reflection of activity based costing of Districts thus ensuring no distortion in normal District running costs. (See Appendices 'F' and 'G' for costing guidance and template).
- (b) The introduction of this Policy raises financial implications for Districts in respect of training provision and the preparation of Community Impact Assessments (CIAs).
- (c) There may also be overtime implications in particular circumstances.
- (d) By fully implementing this Policy the PSNI will ensure that it deals with every Critical Incident effectively and consistently.

(2) **Human Resources/Training**

- (a) Declaring a Critical Incident will have major resource and media implications on a District, Region or Department. The decision to declare a Critical Incident will therefore rest with the relevant Regional or Departmental Chief Officer.
- (b) Training is an essential element of effective Critical Incident Management, which touches upon all aspects of policing. Training will commence at Foundation level and be included in all Specialist Courses, Career Development and Leadership Development Programmes. District trainers will deliver training for officers already in Service within Districts and Crime Investigators will receive training by Crime Training based upon a developed generic lesson plan.

(3) Partnerships

- (a) Police should consider working with Community Safety Partnerships, District Policing Partnerships, Community/Police Liaison Committees, Community Forums and other local community groups. District Commanders should seek to develop relationships with local groups as part of the everyday management of their districts and to facilitate identification of Independent Advisers who can contribute to the management of a Critical Incident.
- (b) It is within the National Intelligence Model Framework that partnership working becomes a reality, drawing on information and experience of other partnership agencies and the community in the identification of local policing priorities.

(4) Risks

The successful management of Critical Incidents assists the PSNI in achieving the investigative standards required by the Human Rights Act 1998 and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

(5) Bureaucracy

- (a) This Policy creates no further bureaucratic requirement for those delivering front-line policing. It will however provide Command Officers, Senior Investigating Officers (SIOs) and others involved with managing Critical Incidents with a duty to record and retain relevant information. This will ensure that they comply with their obligations under the Human Rights Act 1998 and Section 22 Criminal Procedures and Investigations Act 1966.
- (b) The Policy places a requirement to properly de-brief all Critical Incidents in order to accommodate a learning environment, inform policy review and identify training needs.

(6) Estates

No additional facilities should be required in addition to those that are normally required for a major investigation.

(7) Consultation

The following were consulted during the review process for this Policy:

- (a) All PSNI ACPO level officers/staff;
- (b) District Commanders in North Belfast, Londonderry, Newtownabbey and Newry;
- (c) EMPA;
- (d) GPA;
- (e) PFNI;
- (f) SANI;
- (g) CPOSA;
- (h) Equality and Diversity Unit;
- (i) OPONI;
- (j) NIPB;
- (k) NCPE;
- (l) NIPSA;
- (m) Mr Johnny Byrne, Institute of Conflict Resolution;
- (n) Mr Ryan O'Neill, Independent consultant for LGBT Community;

(o) Prof J Crego, Metropolitan Police Service.

5. HUMAN RIGHTS/EQUALITY/INTEGRITY/FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

- (1) This Policy on Critical Incidents has the potential to engage all European Convention Articles. The Policy provides a framework for police response to a wide range of incidents, which may fall within Critical Incident definition.
- (2) This Policy is deemed to be Human Rights compliant. It has been screened for Section 75 considerations and meets integrity standards. This Policy and Guidance is suitable for disclosure in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, except for Section 7 paragraphs 16 and 17.

6. MONITORING AND REVIEW

- (1) This Policy was first approved on 20 June 2005 by CCF.
- (2) Completed review and update of the Policy was approved on 26 April 2007.
- (3) The Head of Crime Operations Department will review this Policy annually.