

SI0521

Critical Incident Management & Community Impact Assessments

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This Instruction relates to the management of Critical Incidents and the completion of a Community Impact Assessment. A Critical Incident can be internal or external to the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

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1. Introduction

This Service Instruction explains the definition of a Critical Incident for the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), and provides guidance on appropriate police responses to such incidents.

2. Definition of a Critical Incident

A Critical Incident is defined as:

'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'.

Key terms in the definition are:

- **Effectiveness** - this is a measure of the professionalism, competence and integrity evident in the police response to an incident;
- **Significant impact** - 'significant' should be interpreted as being particular to each incident but overall relates to the severity of the 'negative' impact felt by the victim, family or community; and

- **Confidence** - This is a reference to long-term confidence in policing – of victims, families and communities.

A Critical Incident can be either:

- **External** - where the victims and / or impacted community is outside of the organisation; or
- **Internal** - the principal 'stakeholders' are employed by the Police Service.

Police Response:

- **Assess** - Officers should assess if there are any key elements present that may impact on the way the police response is perceived;
- **Identify & Report** - Any concerns about the effectiveness of the police response should be identified and reported at the earliest opportunity;
- **Record** - It is imperative that the rationale behind decisions is carefully recorded for audit and review purposes;
- **Ensure** - Supervisors must ensure the Duty Officer is informed as soon as possible of any emerging *Critical Incidents*.

3. Major Incident

A 'Major Incident' is defined as:

'Any emergency that requires the implementation of special arrangements by one or more of the emergency services, and generally includes the involvement, either directly or indirectly, of large numbers of people.'

It should be recognised that 'Major' and 'Critical' are distinct issues. Major Incidents can be declared *Critical Incidents* but this is not automatic and depends on the circumstance.

4. Characteristics of Critical Incidents

Any type of incident can become critical at any stage. Often it is the context within which the incident takes place which can elevate even the most routine incident to 'Critical', for example the vulnerability of the victim.

The following are risk factors or characteristics identified in a National Review of *Critical Incidents*:

Assumptions / Stereotyping

Personal assumptions, perceptions and stereotypes can adversely influence the direction or priority of response to an incident. Assumptions made can also lead to an underestimation of the seriousness of an incident.

Procedures

Any procedural failings have the potential to adversely impact victims, their families and community, e.g. failure to:

- Follow or interpret procedures correctly or effectively;
- Keep proper records; and
- Ensure that the victim, families and other relevant bodies are kept up to date with the progress of the case and relevant decisions or directions that have been made.

Family and Community Issues

A failure to recognise and address the diverse needs of a victim, their family or the community may inadvertently alienate them or cause misunderstandings. Victim care and community engagement must recognise, and be sensitive to, individual needs and views.

Cognisance must also be given to the impact of crimes which act as a “signal” to a community that they are at risk. An incident of this nature has the potential to become critical at any point; (See [Police Service Equality, Diversity and Good Relations Strategy 2017 - 2022](#)).

5. Declaring a Critical Incident

Any Officer or member of Staff who believes an incident may be critical, must pass this information to their Supervisor. An Officer not below Inspecting rank, or Staff Officer grade, may declare a Critical Incident with sufficient information to believe the incident is, or may become, Critical. This will be subject to assessment and confirmation by a Gold Commander.

District / Departments must review occurrences at Daily Management Meetings to identify any *Critical Incidents*.

The Bronze Commander will ensure that,

- Details are provided to the Critical Incident Team - by email to zCriticalIncidents@psni.police.uk; and

- The Incident Control Room (ICC) are informed for inclusion in briefing papers to the Senior Executive Team (SET). See [Appendix A](#) for more information.

An incident should not be declared *Critical* simply because there is a risk that the police may be criticised or because a *Major Incident* has occurred. This also applies to *Internal Incidents*.

Critical Incidents is a standing agenda item at meetings of the Service Executive Team each Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

Closure of a Critical Incident

A Critical Incident will only be closed by the Gold Commander at the time of closure. The decision to close a *Critical Incident*, and the rationale, must be carefully documented and communicated to relevant parties.

6. Command and Control

Command and Control is the authority and capability of an organisation to direct the actions of its personnel and the use of its equipment.

The College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice (APP) - [Critical Incident Management](#) and [Command and Control](#) have been developed nationally and should be used in conjunction with the ACPO (2009) *Guidance on Command and Control* which provides a nationally recognised framework for deployment of a tiered command structure.

The appropriate response tier is determined by the officer at Gold Command level declaring the Incident.

Tier 1	District / Department Response. <i>Critical Incidents</i> within the capability of one District / Department and where Actions and Risk are limited to that Business Area.
Tier 2	Cross District/Department Response. <i>Critical Incidents</i> that impact on more than one District / Department. There is limited potential for the actions and Risk to spread further.
Tier 3	Service Response. <i>Critical Incidents</i> with a service, Inter-Service or National Dimension and where there is a significant threat to public confidence and the reputation of the Police Service(s) involved.

	Management of the <i>Critical Incident</i> will require substantial activity by a significant proportion of the lead Service's resources.
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There is a recognition that *Critical Incidents* may involve a related criminal investigation and appointment of a Senior Investigating Officer (SIO). It should be clear that the management of the *Critical Incident* remains the responsibility of the Gold Commander. However, the SIO or their representative should be involved in management meetings and key decisions, including development of the Media Strategy. Consultation between Gold Commander and the SIO may be required at an early stage when considering disclosure issues.

7. Gold Groups

A Gold Group should provide a strategic function and provide impartial support, advice and analysis to the Gold Commander. They should not be involved in tactical or operational activities.

The specific function, membership and content of a Gold Group will vary for each *Critical Incident*. Gold Group meetings

should be minuted and may be subject to disclosure:

- Under the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996, (unless Public Interest Immunity (PII) applies);
- Under civil discovery including the County Court or High Court jurisdictions;
- To Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland (OPONI);
- To Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS);
- To Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI).

A Gold Group will help to ensure co-ordination in multi-agency *Critical Incidents*, and can support links with the local community and other legitimately interested parties. Gold Groups should include communities who may not appear to be directly affected but could be indirectly affected.

The Gold Commander should convene a Gold Group within 12 hours of a *Critical Incident* being declared where appropriate.

8. Victim and Family Liaison

Family Liaison Officers (FLO)

Deployment of a FLO should be considered where a sudden, violent or unexplained death has occurred. FLO deployment can also be used with serious crime investigations, especially when a *Critical Incident* has been declared.

In all cases, the Family Liaison Co-ordinator, (C2 Serious Crime Branch), must be consulted in this process before a FLO is deployed; the use of a local police Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for the family may be considered more appropriate.

9. Community Issues

Consultation with the community should be given consideration in the management of a *Critical Incident*. This may assist by:

- Developing sensitive and effective policing;
- Challenging assumptions and mind-sets;
- Demonstrating openness and accountability;
- Providing an independent, community / non-police perspective; and
- Building family / community confidence and trust.

10. Independent Advice

Independent Advisers are able to engage in a range of policing activities, either on a case-specific basis, or as members of a recognised Advisory Group. Tasking independent advisers is for the Gold Group to consider, and the Gold Commander to decide.

It must be noted that the Police Service is not obliged to follow advice that is given (although appropriate explanations should be given where recommendations are not followed).

Crime Prevention and Early Intervention Branch can provide assistance in identifying Independent Advisory Groups (IAG's) to provide advice on a range of issues.

11. Community Impact Assessments (CIA)

A CIA is used to identify and manage any factors relevant to an incident or policing activity that may impact upon the community and help inform the investigative response when relevant.

A CIA must be completed for all *Critical Incidents*.

The responsibility for its completion lies with the Silver Commander and should be undertaken in close liaison with the SIO (where one is appointed). It is crucial that the CIA is objective, evidence / intelligence based and capable of withstanding scrutiny. Assessment by District Command should include consultation with local Neighbourhood Policing Teams where possible.

There are two CIA forms:

- Short (SCIA); and
 - Full (FCIA).
- Both of these are available electronically. Only these formats are to be used.

Short CIA (SCIA)

A SCIA must be completed by the Bronze Commander, preferably within 4 hours of a *Critical Incident* being declared, and be **reviewed regularly, particularly after each significant event or action**. The SCIA must be reviewed by the Silver Commander, who will make a decision

about the requirement for a Full CIA to be completed.

A short CIA **will be completed** for:

- All *Critical Incidents*, or any incident which in the opinion of the SIO or Officer in Charge has the potential to become a *Critical Incident*;
- Serious Crime Incidents where the SIO or Officer in Charge directs that it is required. Serious Crime Incidents are defined as;
“Murder, manslaughter, rape & serious sexual assault, terrorism, kidnap, robbery, and serious physical assaults”;
- Every search where a child, young person or vulnerable person is believed to be present;
- This list is not exhaustive; and

A short CIA **should be considered** for:

- Major planned policing activity – The SIO / Officer in Charge should consider completion of SCIA for any major planned policing activity where there may be a significant impact on the community; and
- A SCIA should be considered for every search conducted by police. (However remember a CIA will be completed for every search where a child, young

person or vulnerable person is believed to be present). Please see [SI1617 Police Search](#);

- Any other incident or activity where the SIO or Officer in Charge deems its completion necessary;

There are three parts to the SCIA:

Part A - Completed by the person requesting the assessment and forwarded electronically to the appropriate District Officer.

Part B - Completed by the appropriate District Officer after consultation with the requesting Officer. Part B must be authorised by the appropriate District Officer not below Chief Inspector rank.

Part C - Completed by the District and contains full details of the agreed risk management plan specific to that operation, including media / briefing information. Part C must be authorised by the appropriate District Officer not below the rank of Chief Inspector.

The following details should be provided:

- Grounds and / or reasons for the planned nature of the activity;

- Date and time of the planned activity;
- Name and address of subject (Including Niche ID if applicable);
- The person conducting the activity;
- In circumstances where it is appropriate to make reference to Intelligence, then only the Niche Intelligence Document Number may be entered;
- Of any risk to any person(s) including; members of the public, police, suspects, witnesses? (Required for every Community Impact Assessment); and
- In relation to any search for firearms or explosives, the request must record details of the Police Search Adviser (POLSA), District Silver Firearms Commander and Tactical (TAC) Adviser if consulted.

If appropriate, a Silver Commander should ensure completion of a CIA takes place in consultation with a Senior Investigating Officer (SIO).

Disclosure

The CIA may contain sensitive material and should be listed appropriately considering disclosure under the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996.

12. Media and Public Meetings

Where a *Critical Incident* has been declared, the Director of *Strategic Communications and Engagement* (SCED) will be notified by the Gold Commander confirming the declaration, and at the outset will appoint a SCED colleague to:

- Be part of the Gold Group;
- Provide strategic media advice to the Gold Group; and
- Be responsible for co-ordinating and releasing all media lines.

Primacy on internal and external corporate communications lies with SCED and the Gold Group, with the Gold Commander being the final authority. The *Communications Critical Incident Strategy* should be agreed with the Silver Commander, the SIO, and, where appropriate, Legal Services Branch.

Public Meetings

A public meeting may be considered necessary as part of the management process for community confidence. The use of a Policing & Community Safety Partnerships (PCSP) public meeting may be appropriate in this instance.

Meetings should be prepared in line with overall investigation and media strategies – and after consultation with:

- Family members and intermediaries;
- Community representatives;
- Independent Advisers;
- Gold Group members; and
- Senior Press Officer.

13. Information Sharing

There is a presumption in favour of openness, particularly in relation to victims, their families, and community representatives. However, on certain occasions, there may be reasons why it is felt necessary to maintain confidentiality, for example to protect intelligence. In such instances, a brief and simple explanation should be provided for relevant parties. The decision and rationale should be recorded in the appropriate log. SIOs and Gold Groups should seek legal advice on disclosure in complex or sensitive cases.

14. Critical Incident Team (co-ordination)

Operational Support Department (OSD) has responsibility for *Critical Incidents*. Chief Superintendent OSD has been appointed as the Police Service Lead with responsibility for strategic policy management.

The *Critical Incident* Team consists of:

- The Police Service Lead;
- Head of Crime Training;
- Debrief Co-ordinator; and
- Others as appropriate.

The Critical Incident Team (CIT) will:

- Maintain a Register of *Critical Incidents*;
- Maintain and support a network of Single Points of Contact (SPOC) at District / Departmental level;
- Manage Critical Incidents Service Instruction review;
- Facilitate / co-ordinate debrief of all *Critical Incidents*;
- Maintain a Register of Structured Debrief Officers and staff for *Critical Incidents*;
- Co-ordinate / plan annual conference and workshops for Service / District

Command / Departments as appropriate;

- Review incidents for organisational learning, ensuring that lessons learnt are incorporated into training as appropriate; and
- Devise 'Terms of Reference' for the Critical Incident Team, including the role(s) of CIT members.

15. Single Point of Contact (SPOC) Network

District Commanders/Heads of Branch will appoint a *Critical Incident* SPOC as a matter of course. They will not ordinarily be below the rank of Chief Inspector or analogous staff grade.

Through District / Departmental management processes the SPOC will:

- Act as a liaison officer in their respective areas / department;
- Regularly review incidents dealt with in the District / Department;
- Assist in the identification of *Critical Incidents* that may have been missed;
- Be responsible for liaison between the Critical Incident Team and the District / Department;

- In consultation with the Gold Commander co-ordinate and / or facilitate the completion of the District / Departmental *Critical Incident* debrief (for all *Critical Incidents*).

16. Incident Debriefing

All *Critical Incidents* will be subject of a formal Debrief. The Critical Incident Team will advise the Debrief Co-ordinator of requests for debrief who will in turn discuss with the Gold Commander the Terms of Reference (TORs) and timing of a debrief.

Where there is a concurrent investigation ongoing, agreement will be reached on TORs with interested parties which could include; Criminal Investigation Branch SIO, Professional Standards Department (PSD), OPONI, Public Prosecution Service (PPS), Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland (HSENI).

Gold Commanders must utilise a formal debrief process for everyone involved in all *Critical Incidents* both internal and external to the Police Service. The Gold Commander will consider the debrief report and consider how Organisational learning can be captured.

Critical Incident Debrief Reports will be submitted to:

- Gold Commander;
- District Commander / Head of Branch; and
- Critical Incident Team.

Further assistance and guidance on the completion of the Critical Incident debrief,

including contacting the Debrief Co-ordinator, can be obtained through the Critical Incident Team.

Further and more detailed information can be found in the documents listed below. This is not an exhaustive list.

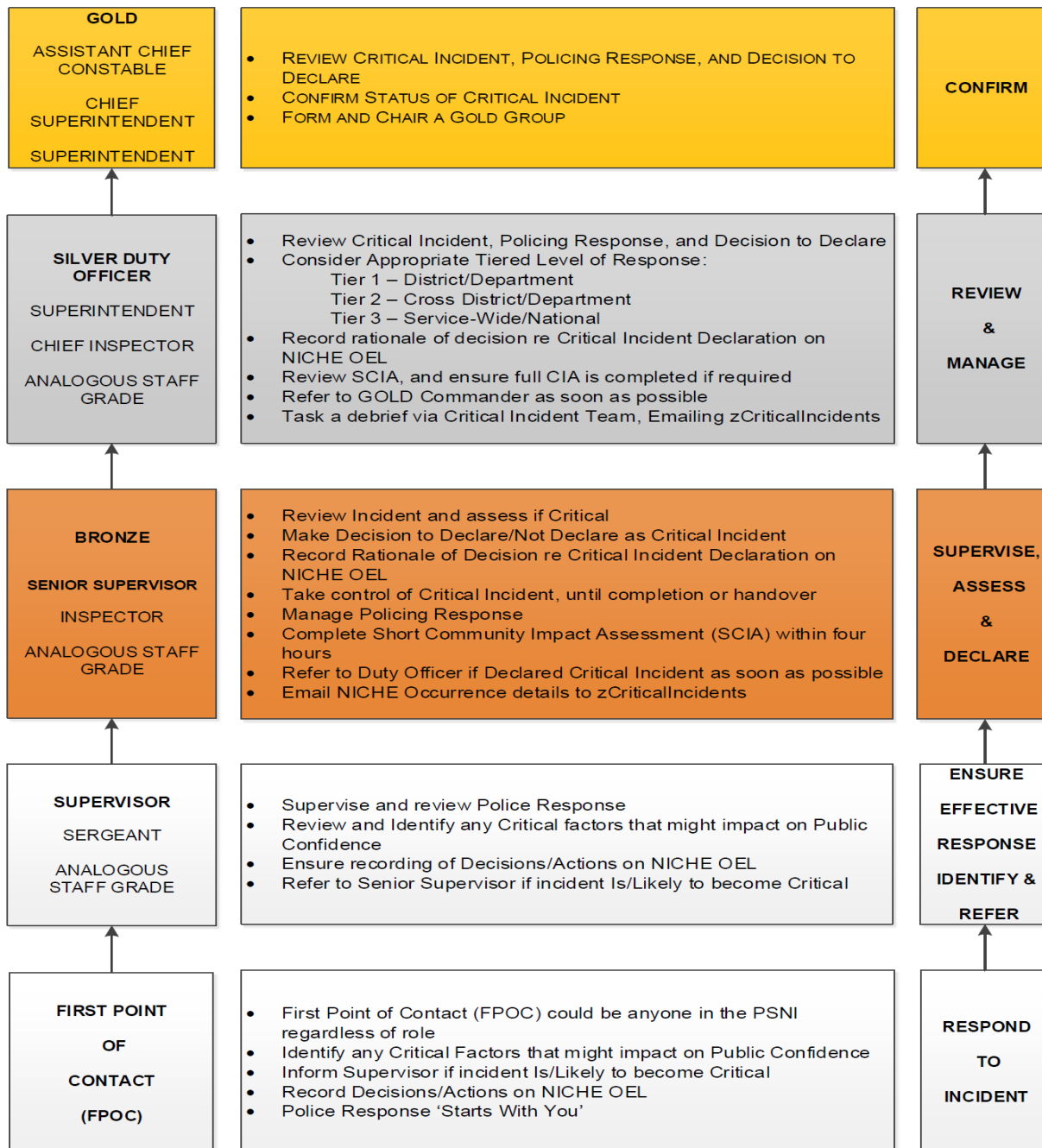
<u>A Guide to Emergency Planning Arrangements in Northern Ireland</u>	<u>Authorised Professional Practice (APP) – Critical Incident Management</u>	<u>Authorised Professional Practice - Family Liaison</u> <u>Family Liaison - Further information</u>	<u>Police Service Manual of Policy, Procedure and Guidance on Conflict Management</u>
<u>Police Service Code of Policing Ethics</u>	<u>HMIC report on Critical Incident Management, 2009</u>	<u>HMIC Leading from the Frontline, 2008</u>	<u>Northern Ireland Civil Contingencies Framework Document 2021</u>
<u>Service Instruction SI0616 – ‘Serious Crime Scenes</u>	Post Incident Procedures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Post-Deployment</u> • <u>Following Death or Serious Injury</u> 	<u>PSNI Equality, Diversity and Good Relations Strategy 2017 - 2022</u>	<u>SI0517 – ‘Public Complaints and the Role of the Police Ombudsman’</u>
<u>SI1317 Supporting Victims and Witnesses</u>			

17. Critical Incident Training

Crime Faculty will retain responsibility for delivering training and continuous professional development in relation to *Critical Incidents*, particularly in the case of senior officers who will perform Gold and Silver functions.

The Police College's annual business plan will include details in terms of how *Critical Incident* training will be reviewed and delivered on a year by year basis.

Appendix A Critical Incident Flowchart Process



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

Appendix B Contact Us

Service Instruction Author

Email

zCriticalIncidents@psni.police.uk