Phase 1 – preparing for critical incidents

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Chief officers may wish to consider current management structures to ensure that, where possible, staff are sufficiently trained and the necessary resources are available so that the overall quality of the police response reflects a competent and accountable standard of incident management.

When managing an incident that has the potential to escalate into, or which is already a critical incident (CI), other relevant advice and guidance should also be taken into account.

Leadership

Early intervention can prevent a minor problem escalating into one which could have a significant impact on the overall quality of the police response. Chief officers may wish to ensure that emphasis is placed on effective supervision and support. This includes chief officers taking **command and control** of the situation themselves. Part of this support could include access to mentoring and information sharing. Irrespective of this, all officers should expect to have their decisions and actions reviewed as part of routine supervision and quality assurance.

Learning lessons

Where issues or problems are identified during an incident, in the first instance senior managers should consider what immediate action and support is needed to address these issues and to lessen their impact. It is important, however, to understand why these issues or problems arose and the lessons that can be learned from them for the future. See **post-incident evaluation** and **joint organisational learning**, accessed via Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP).

Table-top exercises allow forces to explore any potential problems and to incorporate the lessons learned from previous incidents. In a safe environment and based on various different scenarios, including less serious incidents, such exercises allow forces to explore what may happen in a given

situation.

Policy and processes

Ineffective and/or inconsistent implementation of force protocols, policies and procedures is one of the main reasons why CIs develop.

Policy and procedures are usually developed over time and incorporate current legislation and identified good practice. Their implementation is the most efficient way of reducing the number of CIs each year.

Core and specific practice

This module is not intended to undermine or replace core or specific practice in other areas. It is an additional resource to help officers deal with CIs that require particular management to maintain or rebuild confidence in the police service.

Quality assurance

Quality assurance processes should promote a positive approach to incident management generally. They should be seen as a means of providing support to officers and police staff and should not be used to undermine their confidence or to develop a culture of blame.

Active quality assurance can be used to identify good practice. This can be disseminated through briefings, training and policy to improve the quality of future police responses and the overall performance of the police service.

Operational risk management

Making rational, effective and accountable decisions can be difficult. This is especially true in a fast-moving or complex environment like policing, which is characterised by uncertainty, multiple views of a particular problem and numerous possible intervention points and solutions.

When things go wrong or pressure rises, the risk-averse approach focuses on reducing negative outcomes, preserving reputation and limiting liability, rather than improving decision making to achieve greater benefits. The police service has developed a set of **10 risk principles** to support a positive approach to risk management.

For further information see:

- **National decision model**
- **Decisions, errors and avoiding decisions**
- **Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles**

Critical incident training

Staff should receive CI training appropriate to their role and which provides them with a clear understanding of the concepts and terminology of CI management. Thought should also be given to resilience at all levels. This may be particularly important among more senior ranks, where there are fewer officers and staff available.

Police constables, police community support officers (PCSOs) and call handlers are on the front line and usually provide the initial response to an incident. They also need to understand their role in CI management, which is to continually ask:

- what are they dealing with?
- what might develop?
- what might the impact of the incident and/or the police response be?
- whom should they tell if they believe the incident they are dealing with has the likelihood to escalate into a CI?

Personal responsibility

Staff also have a personal responsibility to ensure that they are adequately trained for their role. They need to know how to access resources, support and supervision so that they provide a professional and effective response. Where staff are faced with difficult or complex decisions, they need to be confident that they have access to support and information, and that they are 'not alone'.

Courses

Training should reflect a 'cradle to grave' approach. National courses have been designed for a range of police officer and staff roles: from those working in neighbourhood teams to senior officers. In many cases, they have been developed nationally for delivery to meet local needs.

Courses include critical incident management for sergeants and inspectors, incorporating command structures, leadership, diversity, decision logs, the use of independent advisory groups (IAGs) and media considerations. These courses, while capable of standing alone, are also mapped into the new core leadership development programme.

The College of Policing delivers a programme of **critical incident training courses**. These reflect current thinking and national good practice.

In addition, training packages such as critical incident command level 1 and level 2 are available for forces to deliver locally.

Partnership and resources

A **proactive response** to **victim support** and **community engagement** will increase trust and confidence and encourage open lines of communication. It is too late to build relationships after a CI has happened.

The community is a key resource in tackling crime and the fear of crime. Building relationships is an ongoing process developed over time. The police need to recognise and understand the diverse needs and issues of their local community, and build positive relationships with recognised representatives.

The **Mary Fox** and **Aamir Siddiqi** cases provide examples of the proactive and effective use of community networks, internal resources and IAGs.

Internal staff resources

To help build community relationships, forces may wish to make use of the diversity, skills and contacts that individual staff members have. These may include experience relating to:

- lifestyle
- specialist community knowledge
- languages
- hobbies

A force database containing this type of information would allow senior investigating officers (SIOs) and incident commanders to access specialist knowledge and experience, which may help them to

build relationships before, during and after a critical incident.

Independent advisory groups and community cohesion groups

The use of **independent advisory groups (IAGs)** or community cohesion groups is a key asset when building community relationships. In some cases these groups can identify and advise on the best ways to access hard-to-reach or hard-to-hear community groups.

It is good practice to provide IAGs or community cohesion groups with training on critical incident management.

Independent observers

It is good practice to use independent observers where there is a potential for conflict to arise between opposing community interests, especially during predictable events such as sporting fixtures, demonstrations or parades. Their observations on the planning and policing of such events can help to allay community concerns and foster positive relationships between community groups.

Multi-agency partners

Forces should consider how they work with partner agencies to provide a coordinated response to critical incident management. Early engagement with partners helps to develop proactive relationships which are enhanced by a common understanding of the challenges of critical incident management.

Multi-agency partners may wish to adopt a definition similar to that used by the police when referring to such incidents. For example:

- any incident where the effectiveness of [relevant agency name] response is likely to have a significant impact on the confidence of the [customer, client, pupil], their family and/or the community.

Management considerations aide-memoire

- Chief officers should ensure that clear leadership, efficient monitoring and quality assurance processes are implemented in their force.

- Effective and consistent implementation of force policies and procedures will help to reduce the number of critical incidents that happen each year.
- Chief officers should ensure that their staff are appropriately trained for their roles.
- Forces should adopt a proactive approach to victim care and community engagement. It is too late to build community relationships after an incident has happened.
- It is good practice to use officers and staff with specialist knowledge and experience to help build links with the local community.

Tags

Critical incidents