

# National decision model

This page is from APP, the official source of professional practice for policing.

First published 23 October 2013 Updated 24 January 2024

Written by College of Policing

11 mins read

## Application

The national decision model (NDM) is suitable for all decisions and should be used by everyone in policing. It can be applied:

- to spontaneous incidents or planned operations
- by an individual or team of people
- to both operational and non-operational situations

Decision makers can use the NDM to structure a rationale of what they did during an incident and why.

Everyone can use the NDM to [review decisions](#) and actions, and promote learning.

In a fast-moving incident, the police service recognises that it may not always be possible to segregate thinking or response according to each phase of the model. In such cases, the main priority of decision makers is to keep in mind their overarching mission to act with integrity to protect and serve the public. This is in line with the ethical principle of 'public service'.

## The model

The NDM has six key elements.

1. Code of Ethics; [Ethical policing principles](#) and [Guidance for ethical and professional behaviour in policing](#).
2. Gather information and intelligence.
3. Assess threat and risk and develop a working strategy.
4. Consider powers and policy.

5. Identify options and contingencies.
6. Take action and review what happened.

Each element provides the user with an area for focus and consideration. The element that binds the model together is the **Code of Ethics** at the centre.



## Six key elements (CIAPOAR)

The mnemonic CIAPOAR can help decision makers to remember the six key elements of the NDM. It also acts as an aide-memoire in aspects of decision making and recording the rationale.

- Code of Ethics – **Ethical policing principles** and **Guidance for ethical and professional behaviour in policing.**
- Information – gather information and intelligence.
- Assessment – assess threat and risk and develop a working strategy.
- Powers and policy – consider powers and policy.
- Options – identify options and contingencies.
- Action and review – take action and review what happened.

CIAPOAR may also be useful when describing or reviewing a decision.

## Code of ethics

The NDM puts the Code of Ethics at the centre of all police decision making.

This distinguishes the NDM from other decision-making models and recognises the need for all police decisions to be consistent with the [Ethical policing principles](#) and the [Guidance for ethical and professional behaviour in policing](#).

## Ethical policing principles

These are a series of guiding statement that should be used to help people in policing do the right thing, in the right way, for the right reasons. These include the following.

- Courage – making, communicating and being accountable for decisions, and standing against anything that could bring our profession into disrepute.
- Respect and empathy – encouraging, listening to and understanding the views of others and seeking to recognise and respond to the physical, mental and emotional challenges that we and other people may face.
- Public service – working in the public interest, fostering public trust and confidence, and taking pride in providing an excellent service to the public.

## Guidance for ethical and professional behaviour in policing

The [Guidance for ethical and professional behaviour in policing](#) assists with building a positive workplace culture by spelling out what good policing looks like and by promoting professional conduct and decision making. Within the guidance, information is provided on:

- being a member of a policing profession
- being open, honest and candid
- fairness and respect
- decision making
- recognising the opportunity to learn
- challenging unacceptable behaviour
- when behaviour does not meet expectation

Throughout a situation, decision makers should ask themselves the following questions.

- Is what I am considering consistent with the ethical policing principles and guidance for ethical and professional behaviour in policing?
- What would the public expect of me in this situation?

- What does the police service expect of me in this situation?
- Is this action or decision likely to reflect positively on my professionalism and policing generally?  
Will it affect public trust and integrity?
- Could I explain my action or decision to the public?

## **NDM components**

### **Information – gather information and intelligence**

During this stage the decision maker defines the situation (that is, defines what is happening or has happened) and clarifies matters relating to any initial information and intelligence.

Decision makers could ask themselves the following questions.

- What is happening?
- What do I know so far?
- What do I not know?
- What further information (or intelligence) do I want/need at this moment?

### **Assessment – assess threat and risk and develop a working strategy**

This analytical stage involves assessing the situation, including any specific threat, the risk of harm and the potential for benefits. Among other things, decision makers should consider the objectives of preventing discrimination, promoting good relations and fostering equal opportunities.

Develop a working strategy to guide subsequent stages by asking yourself the following questions.

- Do I need to take action immediately?
- Do I need to seek more information?
- What could go wrong (and what could go well)?
- What is causing the situation?
- How probable is the risk of harm?
- How serious would it be?
- Is that level of risk acceptable?
- Is this a situation for the police alone to deal with?
- Am I the appropriate person to deal with this?
- What am I trying to achieve?

- Will my action resolve the situation?

## **Powers and policy – consider powers and policy**

This stage involves considering the powers, policies and legislation that could apply in this particular situation.

Decision makers could ask themselves the following questions.

- What police powers might be required?
- Is there any national guidance covering this type of situation?
- Do any local organisational policies or guidelines apply?
- What legislation might apply?
- Is there any research evidence?

It may be reasonable to act outside policy as long as there is a good rationale for doing so.

## **Options – identify options and contingencies**

This stage involves considering the different ways in which a particular decision can be made (or situation resolved) with the lowest risk of harm.

You may need to consider:

- what options are available
- immediacy of any threat
- limits of information to hand
- amount of time available
- available resources and support
- your own knowledge, experience and skills
- impact of potential action on the situation and the public
- what action to take if things do not happen as anticipated

If you have to account for your decision, will you be able to say it was:

- proportionate, legitimate, necessary and ethical?
- reasonable in the circumstances facing them at the time?

## **Action and review – take action and review what happened**

This stage has two distinct steps. At the action step, decision makers are required to make and implement appropriate decisions.

### Action

#### Respond

- Implement the option you have selected.
- Does anyone else need to know what you have decided?

#### Record

- If you think it is appropriate, record what you did and why.

#### Monitor

- What happened as a result of your decision?
- Was it what you wanted or expected to happen?

If the incident is continuing, go through the NDM again as necessary.

### Review

If the incident is over, review your decisions, using the NDM. What lessons can you take from how things turned out and what might you do differently next time? If appropriate, evaluate the impact of the decision on outcomes. Have you liaised with individuals involved in the decision making process or affected by the decision?

See [briefing and debriefing](#) for more information.

## Recording decision making

Decision makers are accountable for their decisions and must be prepared to provide a rationale for what they did and why. In some circumstances the need to document decisions is prescribed by statute, required by organisational strategies, policies or local practices, or left to the decision maker's discretion.

Whatever the circumstances, the police service recognises that it is impossible to record every single decision and that not all decisions need to be recorded. In most instances professional judgement should guide decision makers on whether or not to record the rationale, as well as the nature and extent of any explanation.

The record should be proportionate to the seriousness of the situation or incident, particularly if this involves a risk of harm to a person.

## Reviewing decision making

The NDM can be useful for examining decisions made and action taken, whether by a supervisor or during an informal investigation or a formal inquiry.

## Code of Ethics

- How were the Ethical policing principles and Guidance for ethical and professional behaviour in policing demonstrated during the situation?

## Information

- What information or intelligence was available?

## Assessment

- What factors (potential benefits and harms) were assessed?
- What threat and risk assessment methods were used (if any)?
- Was a working strategy developed and was it appropriate?

## Powers and policy

- Were there any powers, policies and legislation that should have been considered?
- If policy was not followed, was this reasonable and proportionate in the circumstances?

## Options

- How were feasible options identified and assessed?

## Action and review

- Were decisions proportionate, legitimate, necessary and ethical?
- Were decisions reasonable in the circumstances facing the decision maker?
- Were decisions communicated effectively?
- Were decisions and the rationale for them recorded as appropriate?
- Were decisions monitored and reassessed where necessary?
- What lessons can be learnt from the outcomes and how the decisions were made?

## Questions for supervisors

In reviewing and reflecting on decisions, questions that supervisors might ask themselves include the following.

- Did you recognise and acknowledge instances of initiative or good decisions (and were they passed to managers where appropriate)?
- Did you recognise, question and challenge instances of poor decision making?
- Can you relate the decision making to the [Code of Ethics](#)?
- Are there any opportunities for organisational learning?

Even where the outcome was not as planned, if the decision was reasonable and proportionate in the circumstances, and made in accordance with the [Code of Ethics](#), the decision maker deserves the support of their supervisor and that of the organisation.

## The joint decision model

The NDM is the primary decision model for the police service. However, responding to emergencies is a multi-agency activity and the resolution of an emergency will usually involve collaboration between police, fire and rescue, and ambulance services.

The [JESIP](#) has been established to improve the ways in which the three emergency services work together at major and complex incidents.

When commanders arrive at the scene of a major incident, it is essential that they can quickly establish what is happening around them and jointly agree a plan of action. The [JDM](#) has been adapted from the NDM to enable this to happen.

The single difference between the JDM and the NDM is the wording in the central box. The NDM has the **Code of Ethics** in the centre, whereas the JDM has 'Working together, saving lives, reducing harm'.

### **According to JESIP:**

*Joint decisions must be made with reference to the overarching or primary aim of any response to an emergency: to save lives and reduce harm. This is achieved through a coordinated, multi-agency response. Decision makers should have this uppermost in their minds throughout the decision-making process.*

*The mission of policing is to prevent crime and protect the public. The objectives of saving lives and reducing harm are, therefore, entirely consistent with the police mission and the **Code of Ethics**.*

*In working towards the JESIP objectives, police personnel are expected to act in line with the **Ethical policing principles** and **Guidance for ethical and professional behaviour in policing**.*

*When involved in joint situations, the three emergency services will apply the model collectively. For example, they will consider and share information, make a shared assessment, and take any respective powers and policies into consideration.*

*Emergency situations may involve differing professional opinions on the best course of action. Reaching a joint decision that is not necessarily the same one as the police would have decided on if they were the only agency making the decision is the nature of collaboration and a feature of joint working. As long as the police representatives can agree the proposed decision is proportionate, lawful, necessary and ethical, there is no conflict with the Code of Ethics.*

### **JESIP**

## Tags

National decision model