

Critical Incident Management POLICY & PROCEDURE

OFFICIAL

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Policy

National Context

Authorised Professional Practice (APP) is produced by the College of Policing as the official source of professional practice on policing. All officers and staff are expected to have regard to APP in discharging their responsibilities. Essentially, our “policy” is to comply with APP as it develops to cover all areas of policing.

Rationale

Merseyside Police is committed to providing a fully effective and professional response to all incidents. In doing so, we will protect and reassure the public along with our own personnel and ensure that the legitimate rights of all communities are safeguarded.

This document sets out how Merseyside Police will operate during any Critical Incident. It will help ensure that the roles of Critical Incident and Gold Groups meetings adhere to their original aims.

This is a non-statutory policy that sets out the principles to help guide decision making. It provides guidance that, on occasions, officers and staff may depart from based on the particular circumstances they encounter. On such occasions, officers and staff will be supported provided they can demonstrate a clear rationale which can be objectively justified for why they have departed from the policy.

This document has been specifically created to supplement the Critical Incident component of Authorised Professional Practice: Critical Incident Management. It will be subject to regular review

Aims

- Ensure a consistent approach to preparing for and the identification, declaration, management & evaluation of critical incidents by clearly outlining the process.
- Provide unambiguous command and control that clearly outlines the role and accountability of those involved.
- Prevent incidents becoming critical by taking appropriate intervention measures early.
- Improve public confidence and satisfaction in the way we deal with such incidents.
- Ensure our service is provided in a way that is non-discriminatory, proportionate, fair and accountable.
- Provide an open and transparent media and communication strategy, keeping in mind the particular needs of the investigation.

Objectives

The overriding objective is to ensure all personnel involved have a clear understanding of Critical Incidents.

Application and Scope

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

This policy will enable the above members of Merseyside Police to fully understand and enact the following approach, making sure;

- A consistent approach to preparing for and the identification, declaration, management & evaluation of critical incidents by clearly outlining the process.
- Provide unambiguous command and control that clearly outlines the role and accountability of those involved.
- Prevent incidents becoming critical by taking appropriate intervention measures early. Improve public confidence and satisfaction in the way we deal with such incidents.
- Ensure our service is provided in a way that is non-discriminatory, proportionate, fair and accountable.
- Provide an open and transparent media and communication strategy, keeping in mind the particular needs of the investigation.

This policy will apply to those who have called a critical incident, believe they are dealing with a critical incident or who are investigating a critical incident of all ranks and departments

Definitions

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.

Critical Incident Meeting – Declaration of a Critical incident is the method of operating to co-ordinate the police response to critical incidents or any situation that threatens serious consequences to the force or the safety of Merseyside.

Outcome Evaluation

The outcome evaluation is to ensure all personnel involved have a clear understanding of Critical Incidents.

The outcomes from this strategy and related policies will be subject of regular review, audit and Assurance Mapping processes.

The Contact and Crime Management Command Team will monitor compliance with this policy through the mapping process.

The Contact and Crime Management Command Team will ensure training records are up to date and critical incidents are recorded correctly, identified, managed and communicated correctly through an audit process.

Procedure

Version History

Version Number	Date	Detailed rational behind amending/updating policy or procedure.	Policy Owner Details	Policy Author Details
V.1.3	00/062018			
V.1.4	00/02/2022	Review / refresh previous version	Chief Superintendent R and R	Ch. Insp. Geoff Stewart R and R
V 1.5	00/02/2025	Review / refresh previous version	Chief Superintendent R and R	Chief Supt Mark Wiggins R and R
V1.6	29/03/2026	Review/refresh going into new organisational structure; formatting updates. (no change to review date).	Chief Superintendent CCM	Chief Supt Mark Wiggins CCM

1. Phase 1 - Preparation for critical incidents

- 1.1 Staff should receive training appropriate to their role to provide them with a clear understanding of the concepts of and terminology of Critical Incident management.
- 1.2 Staff have a personal responsibility to ensure they are adequately trained for their role. They need to be aware of how to access resources, support and supervision so that they can provide a professional and effective response.
- 1.3 Chief / senior officers should continue to ensure that there are sufficient resources from across strands available to respond to and deal with critical incidents whether that be from operational teams or enabling functions. This includes ensuring there is resilience at all levels and particularly at more senior ranks and all strands within the command team corridor need to be involved when necessary due to availability of colleagues.

2. Multi Agency / Community Response

- 2.1 There should be early consideration of notifying and utilising multi agency partners to provide a coordinated response to a critical incident. Merseyside Critical Incident Protocol should be followed.

- 2.2 Early interaction with community groups and independent advisory groups such as MIAG , is to be considered to ensure a proactive response to victim support and community engagement. This is before any critical incident has even occurred which will increase trust and confidence and encourage open lines of communication.
- 2.3 A Community Impact Assessment (CIA) should be considered and where appropriate commenced and completed to ensure the needs of the community are taken into consideration. This should include the national CIA toolkit. The effects of the incident on the community should be monitored. The CIA should be reviewed during the incident and prior to its closure.

3. Phase 2 - Managing the Critical Incident

3.1 Identification and understanding

- 3.1.1 Management of critical incident (CI) should start with early identification and notification. It is particularly important that small-scale CIs are identified early, as even these can have a long-term impact on community confidence if left unchecked.
- 3.1.2 Any incident or event can become a critical incident. This includes crimes, spontaneous or pre-planned operational incidents and those that are non-operational internal incidents, which may, for example, invoke business continuity procedures.
- 3.1.3 The impact the incident will have on individuals, irrespective of the police response, cannot be predicted. This will depend on the circumstances of the incident, the emotional, mental or physical impact of the incident and the general feelings of security and / or vulnerability.
- 3.1.4 Reference should be made to the Critical Thinking Matrix – [Appendix A](#).
- 3.1.5 If there are any deaths associated with the critical incident then investigations must ensure compliance with relevant policies including Merseyside Police Sudden Death Policy [Sudden Death Policy](#) to ensure effective and immediate communication with Merseyside Coroners.

3.2 Notification of a Critical Incident

- 3.2.1 When it is considered that an incident is, or has the likelihood to escalate into, a critical incident, it is essential that it is communicated immediately to an appropriately trained senior officer. This will be a duty BCU Response Inspector, Force Incident Manager, or for internal critical incidents a member of the command team for the relevant area of business.

3.2.2 Personnel should be encouraged to report these incidents to ensure organisational learning opportunities are maximised.

3.2.3 It is also necessary to ensure that the members of the Geographical BCU Command Team are informed about external critical incidents and the key local authority partners are then notified (during office hours) by local Neighbourhood Inspectors and out of hours by the duty Response Inspector.

3.3 Declaring a Critical Incident

3.3.1 To avoid unnecessary declarations an officer of Inspector (or police staff equivalent) or above, can declare an incident as critical. They must record their rationale for this decision on the Command & Control log or for an internal critical incident in their daybook, one note or policy log.

3.3.2 The decision to declare an incident critical should be based on at least one objective reason why the effectiveness of the police response is likely to have a significant impact on the confidence of the victim, their family or the community.

3.3.3 The Command & Control log relating to the incident must be correctly coded, and the Force Incident Manager informed, who should review the incident immediately.

3.3.4 Notification should not prevent the provision of an ongoing police response in line with the policy or procedure relevant to the incident

4. Command & Control

4.1 Command Structure:

Command Level	Role
Gold	Duty NPCC officer / designated duty Gold
Silver	Force Incident manager (FIM)
Bronze (s)	Response Inspector / Other Inspector as directed by Silver.

4.2 Transfer of Command

4.2.1 If a critical incident is declared, the above command structure will apply. Should the incident occur within office hours and because of demand on the FIM then if it is deemed suitable, a transfer of command can occur to the Local BCU Command Team representative (Supt or Chief Inspector) who will take ownership and co-ordinate the initial meeting and actions. The Silver Commander's must formally 'hand-over' the Critical Incident and document this on the Storm log/Command and control log.

4.2.2 The incident may be part of a wider multi-agency response and have far-reaching consequences, in which case partners will follow the Joint Emergency Service Interoperability Principles and equivalent Gold, Silver and Bronze Commanders will be identified for each agency

4.2.3 In relation to the investigation of any criminal offences / incidents that require a Senior Investigating officer (SIO), then the duty SIO who is on call will take command of this area of the response until such time as they are in a position to hand over that command to the D/Supt Crime and PPU for the relevant area, which is then agreed by both individuals

4.3 Management & Monitoring

4.3.1 Critical incidents will be managed and monitored within the agreed command structure.

Availability and movement of Force Resources to support the incident will be agreed through Gold or Silver taking into account the Threat Harm and Risk prevalent Force Wide at the given time.

4.4 Meetings

4.4.1 (Non-office hours) Initial Co-ordination Meeting (ICoM)

The FIM will determine who are 'key' to critical functions (Golden Hour) in response to the incident. It is suggested that the below stakeholders meet and the FIM chairs an Initial Co-ordination Meeting (ICoM) response to the Critical Incident. The ICoM can be a physical meet or via telephone conferencing but should consult/include as a minimum:

- Duty Detective Inspector (Bronze Investigation)
- Duty FIO (Bronze Intel)
- Response Inspector / Other specialist Inspector
- Neighbourhood Inspector or appropriate representative
- Matrix (If firearms related or applicable).
- News and comms representative where there is interest or likely to be interest from press and similar organisations.

4.4.2 (Office Hours) Critical Incident / Gold Meeting

4.4.3 The Chair has responsibility for setting an attendance list dependant on the seriousness of the incident. Cognisance must be taken of [2.2](#) above when determining attendance.

4.4.4 The FIM may wish to call a wider meeting should the seriousness of the incident dictate or if directed by Gold.

4.4.5 All actions resulting from the ICoM will be recorded on the Pursue, Prevent, Protect and Prepare template and circulated to duty NPCC and relevant Department Command Team members.

4.5 Strategic coordinating Group (SCG)

4.5.1 The Gold Commander should consider the formulation of the Strategic Coordinating Group.

4.5.2 The Gold Commander is ultimately responsible for any strategic decision affecting the police; however, a Strategic Coordinating Group can provide the Gold Commander with valuable consultation and decision support. It will help ensure the co-ordination in multi-agency type incidents and provide links with local community and other legitimately interested parties as appropriate.

4.5.3 The principal function of the Strategic Coordinating Group should be strategic, i.e. namely that it provides support, advice and analysis to ensure high standards of service delivery. However, the specific functions and membership of the group will vary with each operation or incident. There is a core membership, and other members are included at the discretion of the chair. All Strategic Coordinating Group meetings **MUST** be documented and are subject to disclosure, unless public interest immunity applies. The attached agenda templates should be used and meetings minuted in the usual manner.

4.5.4 Potential Gold Group membership could include:

- Chief officers
- Senior officers/staff leading the handling of the incident
- Trade unions and Staff Associations
- Emergency services (North-West ambulance service /Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service / Coast Guard)
- Key community members
- Local Authority officers (Emergency planners/Highways/Housing etc)
- Military
- Mersey Travel (including Merseyside Road Safety Partnership when required)
- Highways agency
- Force Legal Department
- CJ Stakeholders including Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), HM courts (HMCTS) and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS)
- Press Office representative
- Finance
- Professional Standards Department (PSD)
- Force Operations
- Occupational Health Unit (OHU)
- Office of the police and crime commissioner (OPCC)
- Force Health and Safety Manager

(Not exhaustive list)

4.6 Tactical Coordinating Group (TCG)

4.6.1 Where established, the Tactical Coordinating Group (TCG) determines the coordinated response at the tactical level.

4.6.2 When relevant during operations, emergencies or major incidents, it is likely that other emergency services will appoint Silver Commanders to act as tactical commanders for their organisations. The police Silver Commander should bring all these tactical commanders and coordinators together and form a TCG as soon as is practicable. This should also include a member of the news and comms (press) office.

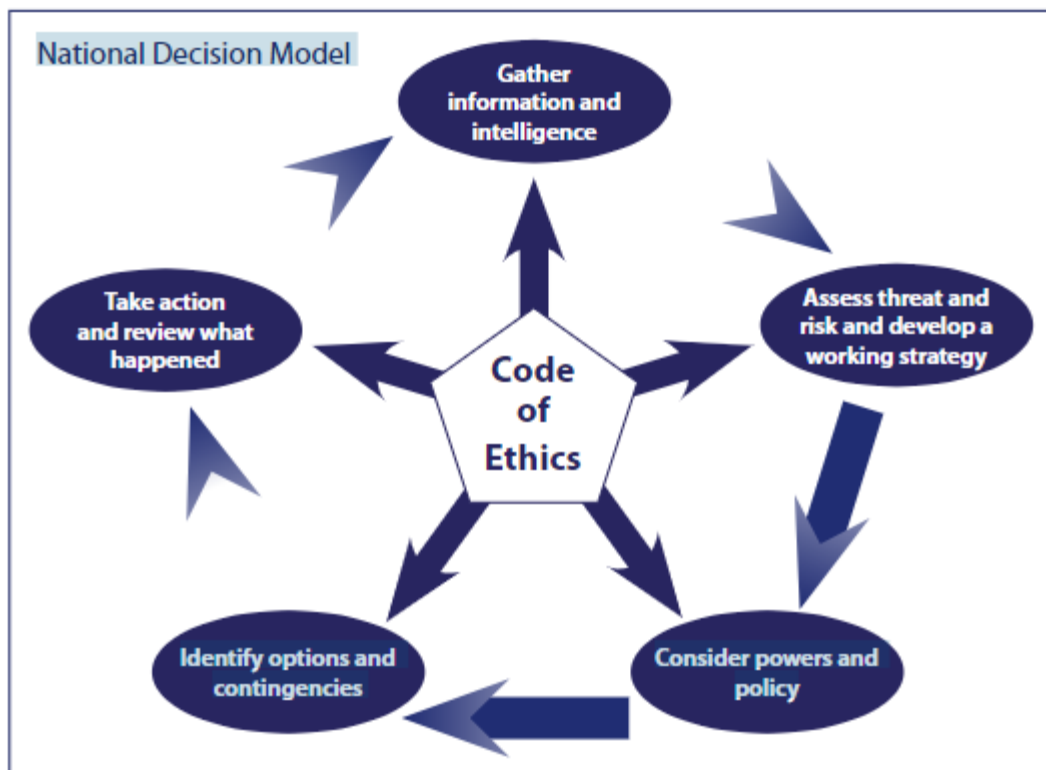
4.7 Agenda

4.7.1 The agenda templates within [Appendix B](#) are to be used for all critical incident meetings.

4.7.2 To capture an accurate record of all critical incident activities by stakeholders a folder is created by the Force Incident Manager within the OSU Team Drive (OSU\GARD\Critical Incidents). A process map is also available to assist.

4.8 National Decision Model (NDM)

4.8.1 The use of the NDM will ensure the effectiveness of the police response is proportionate to the communities affected or potentially affected by the critical incident.



4.9 Media and Communications

- 4.9.1 During a CI, the officer in charge is responsible for the initial formulation of a media strategy, in partnership with the force media department. The strategy should be based on openness and transparency, keeping in mind the particular needs of the investigation or operation. The whole aim is to ensure trust and confidence in line with the force strategy of putting the community first. The force incident manager or on call Silver Commander may be required to approve a holding media statement until such time as the Gold Commander is in a suitable position to take command of the response to the CI
- 4.9.2 The Gold Commander's role, in most cases, is one of quality assurance. Where a CI is declared, it may be necessary for the chief officer to take responsibility for the media response or to be the 'face' of the force.
- 4.9.3 It is equally important during a complex or high-profile incident to have an internal communications strategy, keeping officers and staff up to date with progress and key messages. They may be directly affected or live in the communities affected by the incident. This is also to ensure a 'single source of truth' so that officers and staff receive updates first hand from the force, which will in turn support key messages as part of the community engagement by frontline employees
- 4.9.4 Consideration should be given to a stakeholder briefing being given as well. This may take the form of a written briefing or a specific meeting to ensure situational awareness

5. Closure and Exit Strategies

- 5.1 It may be possible to conclude or scale down a critical incident when it has been assessed that the risk of significant loss of confidence has been averted, or management plans are in place to prevent further loss and restore confidence.
- 5.2 It is the responsibility of the critical incident lead commander to rationalise their decision to conclude or scale down a critical incident. This may be conducted at either Gold or Silver level.
- 5.3 This will be recorded on the relevant Command & Control log and within the meeting minutes.

6. De-brief / Review & Organisational Learning

6.1 De-brief

- 6.1.1 The Silver Commander (FIM) is responsible for ensuring that all officers and staff deployed to a critical incident are debriefed.

6.1.2 The Silver Commander (FIM) must consider an operational debrief post incident, to capture any organisational learning. Consideration should always be given to extending any debrief to include external stakeholders.

6.1.3 Following declaration of a critical incident the Silver Commander must consider whether the Post Incident Procedure (PIP) is to be instigated in line with the PIP Policy guidelines.

6.2 Review & Organisational Learning

6.2.1 A process to review critical incidents exists and learning or good practice is to be communicated to relevant parties.

6.2.2 Any organisational learning points will be shared through the Critical Incident Governance Group. This is a quarterly meeting chaired by the ACC with the Protective Services portfolio. It reviews the Forces capabilities in dealing with critical Incidents.

6.2.3 Chief Officers may direct a full review of a critical incident at any time.

7. Phase 3 - Restoring Public Confidence

7.1 During a live critical incident, community reassurance and engagement is vital to maintain public confidence

7.2 If public confidence has been lost then it should be possible to identify the reason for this and to implement a management action plan to recover it.

7.3 Restoring public confidence involves dealing with the issues raised and being seen to deal with them in a prompt, equitable and transparent manner by those people most closely affected.

Appendices

Appendix A – Critical Thinking Matrix

Critical Thinking Matrix

Does your incident have any of the following features?

Death	Media Interest	Failure to Follow Standard Operating Procedures/Policy	Wider Community Issues
Serious Injury	Significant Damage	Local Interest	Regional Interest
National Interest	Vulnerable Victim	Prominent Victim	Repeat Victim
Repeat Location	Repeat Offender	Prominent Offender	Large Numbers of Victims
Policing Error	Minority Community Issues	Prominent Location	Police Misconduct
Failure within the Criminal Justice System	Victim from within the Police Service	Offender from within the Police Service	Political Interest

Likely significant impact on the:

The Victim	Their Family	The Community
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Appendix B – Initial coordination Meeting Template



Initial Coordination Meeting - template.docx

Appendix C - Guidance



Appendix C.docx