



PROTOCOL BETWEEN THE CHIEF CONSTABLE AND THE POLICE AUTHORITY ON CRITICAL INCIDENTS

The nationally accepted definition of a critical incident is:-

“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.”

For the purposes of this protocol the definition should include those incidents likely to generate significant national press interest or serious internal incidents involving staff if not covered by the above definition.

When the on call ACPO officer becomes aware of a critical incident, the Chief Constable or in his absence the Deputy Chief Constable will be informed and he will in turn discuss the matter with the Chief Executive to the Police Authority (or in his absence the Deputy Chief Executive). They will discuss whether and how other Members of the Authority are to be informed taking into account that a Member local to a particular incident will have a special interest and may have become aware by other means. The matter of whether other key figures such as local MPs need to be informed will also be considered.

The command and management of such incidents will follow the procedures laid down in national manuals and codes of practice. Procedures for ensuring that HMIC are aware of those incidents likely to be of interest to Ministers will be followed. Partner agencies and GONW will be involved as the incident and procedures require.

Where a particular incident raises questions about the conduct of the force or individual members of staff the Deputy Chief Constable will consider whether a mandatory or voluntary referral to the IPCC is required. If there is a question over the involvement of a chief officer in any alleged failing it must be referred to the Chief Executive immediately it becomes known, who will determine the action to be taken. The Chief Executive may seek advice from HMIC or others.

With prolonged incidents, regular updates and where necessary confidential briefings, will be provided to the Police Authority at agreed intervals and opportunities offered to Members to visit control rooms, incident scenes, etc. The Chief Executive will consider whether dependent on the nature of the incident further oversight is required such as extraordinary meetings or sub groups.

Where a Gold Group is formed to oversee a particular critical incident then the Chief Constable and Chief Executive will discuss whether the Authority will provide a Member for that Gold Group. The role of such a Member is in relation to the oversight and public consultation duties of the Authority and they should be mindful of the potential accountability issues should the Gold Group be subject to public scrutiny. If any Member feels that they have a conflict of interest, they should declare it and withdraw. Police Authority Members local to an incident will be consulted when community impact assessments are being considered.

The Independent Advisory Group (IAG) has a particular role in relation to critical incidents as laid down in national guidance but this does not replace the statutory role of the Police Authority including oversight and public consultation. Briefings to the Police Authority on critical incidents will include details of IAG involvement.

MEDIA PROCEDURE FOR INCIDENTS WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AUTHORITY

If required the Chief Executive and the Chief Constable will agree a media strategy for the Authority, in order to:-

- provide community reassurance that the Constabulary and Authority had plans in place to deal with such an incident and that the plans were in accordance with national guidelines;
- maintain public confidence in the police;
- provide accountability to the public; and
- preserve the reputation of the Constabulary and Authority.

The media strategy will be developed by the Constabulary and Authority and may include:-

- a press release;
- a holding statement to respond to media enquiries;
- key messages;
- Q&A and 'if asked' media lines;
- nominated spokespersons;
- whether to publish relevant and appropriate material on website;
- notify key stakeholders (staff, MPs, partner agencies, councils) and
- a method of logging media response.

Any Member who is contacted by the media should inform the Engagement Manager of the name of the media, journalist contact details and questions posed. The details will be forwarded to Corporate Communications, the Gold Group (if established) and the Chief Executive to formulate an agreed response.

Evaluation of the media coverage will be conducted by the Engagement Manager and reported to the Chief Executive.

INCIDENTS OF ALLEGED MISCONDUCT

If there is a question over the involvement of an ACPO officer in any alleged failing it must be referred to the Chief Executive immediately it becomes known.

Where a particular incident raises questions about the conduct of chief officers, the Chief Executive will consider whether a mandatory or voluntary referral to the IPCC is required.

In extreme circumstances, actions may include temporary suspension of officers, temporary replacements and possible resignation or dismissal. External communications would, in these instances, be managed as appropriate by the Chief Executive in consultation with Corporate Communications.

Mark Sellwood
Chief Executive

Dave Whatton
Chief Constable

Dated: 29 January 2009