

Strategic planning

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A strategy is a plan of action designed to achieve a series of objectives or a particular goal. It sets out the high-level overview of the police response and, as such, does not get drawn into tactical or operational detail.

The **gold (strategic) commander** must ensure that a strategy to direct police action is developed.

General principles

- Each policing operation is unique – while previous, similar incidents may provide a list of objectives that can be referred to when developing a gold strategy, each operation is unique and, as such, should have its own strategy.
- The gold strategy must be dynamic and capable of being constantly reassessed – information and intelligence may change over the course of an incident, as might the threat assessment, the powers that might be required and the options that are considered.
- The gold strategy should be an enabler for silver commanders – silver commanders should be able to make justifiable decisions and implement tactical options that meet the overall strategy. It should not prevent a silver commander's activity.
- Plain language should be used – to avoid confusion, it is essential to use plain language when writing a gold strategy as terms that are not clearly understood or explained can be misinterpreted.
- The gold commander owns and is accountable for the gold strategy – this means they are accountable for its contents and any action taken in response to a specific threat.
- The gold strategy should be based on all the information available at the time – while it is important that a gold strategy is defined and agreed as quickly as possible, it should be based on all the information available at the time. However, it is rare for a complete or perfect picture to exist. Commanders should, therefore, avoid waiting for any further information about the incident or operation, which may not, in any case, come to their attention.

- The gold strategy and revisions/amendments should be recorded as part of an audit trail – the gold strategy should be regularly reviewed, particularly where a change or handover of command occurs.
- Specialist advice may be sought by the gold commander – in certain circumstances the gold commander may wish to consult specialist advisers (for example, legal, tactical, human rights). It should be emphasised that an adviser is there to advise and not to make command decisions. The decision on whether to use an adviser, or to follow their advice, remains with the gold commander.

Legal and policy framework

Having developed the gold strategy, commanders should consider the statutory and common law powers and obligations that apply, and the policies available to help resolve any relevant threat. At all times the gold strategy must demonstrate the proportionate application of police powers.

In defining strategic objectives, powers and policy considerations should include:

- police duties and other statutory/common law obligations
- human rights obligations
- legal basis for police action
- relevant Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) policy, authorised professional practice (APP), force policy, or applicable code(s) of practice
- use of force implications
- whether the operation will require adherence to any authorisation process (for example, certain surveillance or stop and search powers)

All commanders should be fully conversant with the [Human Rights Act 1998](#), and should consider seeking the advice of specialist advisers (for example, legal, tactical) as part of the decision-making process.

Ineffective and/or inconsistent implementation of force protocols, policies and procedures is one of the main reasons why [critical incidents](#) develop.

Establishing partners and stakeholders

Modern policing increasingly operates within a multi-agency environment. Partner agencies should be involved in the planning and resolution of incidents and operations as appropriate. Where partner agencies are involved, commanders should ensure that appropriate [command protocols](#) are in place to clearly define and agree the jurisdiction, powers and procedures of each participating agency/partner. The [gold \(strategic\) commander](#) should also establish a [strategic coordinating group](#) (SCG). This will be done in line with the [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles \(JESIP\)](#).

The gold strategy should specify the role of the police in the operation, and the responsibilities and requirements of other partners and stakeholders. To achieve this, the SCG may consider:

- all relevant partners and stakeholders
- any [memorandum of understanding](#) and command protocols to aid joint partnership working
- methods of maintaining up-to-date two-way communications between partners
- communities that may be affected by the police operation, and any related matters
- the appropriate complaints body in order to work together to highlight any potential concerns
- partners that may be able to assist with relevant community engagement
- the results of any multi-agency risk assessment(s)

Chief officers (in England and Wales) should encourage borough and district councils and metropolitan authorities to establish a standing [safety advisory group](#).

Strategic objective setting

The purpose of a strategy is to establish an agreed set of objectives, relevant to the knowledge of the situation, that result from the analysis of the risks presented. The strategy should be dynamic and capable of revision in light of ongoing threat assessment and analysis.

The objectives within a strategy must be unambiguous in order to be effective. Generic objectives such as 'ensuring public safety' should be avoided unless it can be shown how public safety can be guaranteed specifically in relation to that particular incident or operation.

The [gold \(strategic\) commander](#) should, wherever possible, consult the [silver \(tactical\) commander](#) during the formulation of the strategy, and should also document the rationale behind each objective in the command log. This process requires effective communication between gold and silver.

Features of an effective strategy

An effective strategy should:

- provide clarity of purpose
- recognise public safety as a priority
- reflect the multi-dimensional threat assessment in priority order
- be achievable
- be dynamic to reflect changes in circumstances
- be specific to the operation

Tactical parameters

In developing the gold strategy, the gold commander may include tactical parameters within which the silver and bronze commanders must develop their plans.

Tactical parameters are set to give strategic direction, and not to develop or dictate tactics.

Policing style

The gold strategy may contain a clear indication of the desired policing style, which should then be reflected in the tactical plan. The factors which make up policing style have an influence on public and other stakeholder perceptions and may include, for example, dress code and the level of officer visibility.

Depending on the type of operation, there may be a requirement to keep specialist resources out of public view. If required, policing style can be escalated in response to a threat, but should then be de-escalated as soon as practicable after the threat has been reduced.

The tactical parameters set by the gold commander may dictate or have an impact on the policing style. These tactical parameters should demonstrate an understanding of the potential impacts the policing style will have on relevant communities. A [community impact assessment \(CIA\)](#) may assist in this regard.

Assessing risk and impact

The results of relevant impact assessments, such as community impact assessment, should assist the silver commander in considering the impact the tactical plan is likely to have on communities.

Where an incident requires a multi-agency response under the [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles](#), shared situational awareness and joint understanding of risk should be sought after the completion of individual dynamic risk assessments.

A risk assessment should be carried out for each tactical option. Commanders should consider each option having regard to:

- feasibility of success measured against the strategy
- acceptability of consequences
- risks involved in taking forward a specific option or taking alternative action

[Operational constraints](#) should be considered.

The tactical adviser and the commander should consider whether:

- a given tactic or combination of tactics will achieve all or part of the working strategy
- identified threats are reduced or eliminated
- the tactics are proportionate to the potential threat posed
- the tactics are within any tactical parameters set

When planning police operations, consideration should be given to the need for medical assistance to be available, including:

- notifying hospitals and the ambulance service for major events
- ensuring sufficient numbers of readily available first-aid trained and operationally competent officers are deployed, should the need for medical assistance arise

Community impact assessments

Community is used to describe groups comprising individuals, families, community/other groups and businesses that may be affected by a police response.

A CIA is used to identify how an issue or incident impacts on a community or group within a community. This information is used in strategic and tactical planning and decision making.

The extent and detail that the CIA covers is determined by the gold commander. Issues which may comprise a CIA include:

- history which may be relevant to the operation or community
- unique and current nature of the communities being assessed (for example, vulnerabilities)
- police and inter-agency factors (for example, partnership arrangements, resources, media involvement)
- future issues, including how or when the incident may evolve and what the community impacts and perceptions may be

The CIA is a dynamic document that should be reviewed and updated regularly, taking account of emerging issues. It should be completed in liaison with the relevant commander for the local [tasking and coordination](#) process. Liaison with safer neighbourhood teams or specialist community engagement personnel (for example, faith officers, Prevent engagement staff) may also assist.

For further information see the [APP on critical incident management](#).

Operational constraints

These may include the:

- immediacy of any threat
- limits of the information known
- lack of policing powers to address the threat (for example, where there is no power to act or where authorisation has not yet been granted)
- availability of sufficient resources, people and equipment for the various options
- training and competency of those involved in the operation and the role they will be expected to perform
- amount of time available
- impact of the police action on the public
- environmental considerations
- result of any health and safety risk assessment

Health and safety risk assessment

Under the [Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 s 2](#), employers are required to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety at work of all employees. The Act treats constables as employees. Their employer is generally the chief constable (or equivalent).

Section 3 of the Act also requires the employer to conduct their undertakings in such a way as to ensure 'so far as reasonably practicable that persons not in his employment who may be affected thereby are not exposed to risks to their health and safety'. [HSE \(2009\) Striking the Balance between Operational and Health and Safety Duties in the Police Service](#) identifies ways in which forces are able to demonstrate good health and safety management systems. Commanders should also refer to force policy for guidance.

An employee also owes a duty – under section 7 of the Act – to take reasonable care for the health and safety of him/herself and others.

Health and safety risk assessments should be seen as distinct from the multi-dimensional threat assessment of the overall police operation. The gold commander has overall responsibility for ensuring health and safety assessments are undertaken.

Staff support

The provision of welfare support to personnel during an incident or operation ranges from the daily routine needs of individuals to carry out tasks and procedures, to identifying and dealing with emotional stress which may be triggered by the nature of the incident or operation.

Welfare needs should be identified as soon as possible. Procedures should be put in place to meet the requirements of reducing the potential damage to an individual, in line with the health and safety risk assessment. These procedures should apply to all incidents and operations regardless of their complexity. If any potential short or long-term welfare issues are identified, support, advice and guidance from the force welfare department should be requested at the earliest opportunity.

Certain incidents or operations can be traumatic events for personnel directly or indirectly involved. Basic needs of personnel should not be neglected as this may affect the response. Gold and silver commanders should ensure that appropriate arrangements exist and that identified individuals are nominated to deliver these arrangements.

Chief officers are responsible for providing personnel with appropriate training and support. Individual officers and staff also have a responsibility to ensure that they have been adequately trained for their role, and that they are aware of, and know how to access, [resources](#), support and supervision to provide a professional, effective and motivated police response. Where personnel 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.

Communications plan

The gold strategy may include a communications plan to assist in coordinating police activity. This may include:

- an outline of phased activity
- which internal and external stakeholders need to be considered
- who has responsibility for communicating with which groups
- how various groups with diverse needs will be communicated with
- what range/role of media is being considered
- consideration of a [memorandum of understanding](#), when working with partners

Commanders must decide early on when formulating the gold strategy, whether they will talk directly to the media or if it is appropriate for another individual to present police information, thereby enabling the commander to focus on the police operation.

Developing effective plans to communicate with the public directly or indirectly is an essential element of modern policing. Forces should have community engagement plans that are tailored to suit the diverse nature of their communities.

Response to spontaneous incidents

There may be occasions where an [incident requiring immediate operational deployment](#) comes to the attention of the police.

A working strategy may start to be developed as information and intelligence is received. Once appointed, the dedicated gold commander takes overall responsibility for the strategy, its assessment, review and delivery based on any new and emerging information.

Where an incident involves a multi-agency response, the [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles \(JESIP\)](#) should be followed with overall command falling to the most appropriate service.

Tags

Operations