

# Humanitarian assistance and police documentation teams

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First published 23 October 2013 Updated 3 April 2024

6 mins read

The police service has a vital role in the initial provision of humanitarian assistance, which must be balanced against their responsibilities of investigation and identification. It should follow the principles outlined in the [Charter for families bereaved through public tragedy](#).

The humanitarian response to any emergency or major incident is a package of care, with a range of agencies working together.

The exact focus depends on the scale and nature of the incident and the impact on people and their needs.

It is likely to include:

- basic shelter
- information about what has happened
- financial and legal support
- emotional support
- advice and direction on how to get further assistance
- communication facilitation, allowing people to meet or talk to each other
- a point of contact for ongoing support and advice

The strategic commander should recognise the importance of humanitarian assistance and support to people directly and indirectly affected by an emergency or major incident. This support should be provided through a series of emergency reception centres.

There are four types of emergency reception centre:

1. survivor reception centres
2. rest centres

3. family and friends' reception centres
4. humanitarian assistance centres

Further guidance on humanitarian assistance is contained in the [Human aspects in emergency management guidance](#) (Cabinet Office, 2011) on supporting individuals affected by emergencies.

## Types of emergency reception centres

### Survivor reception centre (SuRC)

The police service is the lead agency for the SuRC, supported by the local authority.

A SuRC is a secure place, located outside the inner cordon but generally close to the scene. It is a place of safety for survivors not requiring acute medical treatment, away from the immediate consequences of the incident. Documentation of survivors can be completed for input into the Casualty Bureau and Major Incident Public Portal (MIPP). Immediate humanitarian assistance can be provided by the local authority at this location.

### Rest centre

The local authority is the lead agency for rest centres.

This location is a building pre-designated in emergency plans or used by a local authority as temporary accommodation, including overnight, for people evacuated or homeless because of an emergency or major incident. It offers safety and shelter for those who may have been asked to leave their home, work or elsewhere and not to return. These shelters are designed for people that were not part of the incident and have no injuries from it.

Until evacuees can go home or find alternative accommodation, they should receive practical and wellbeing support from the local authority and supporting agencies.

Police may attend rest centres to gather information from evacuees.

### Family and friends' reception centre (FFRC)

The police is the lead agency for FFRCs, supported by the local authority.

A FFRC is usually located away from the scene of an emergency or major incident. It provides a secure place for the family and friends of people directly involved in that incident, where they can access information and humanitarian assistance. They can also complete relevant documentation processes.

## Humanitarian assistance centre

Humanitarian assistance centres offer medium to long-term support to people directly or indirectly affected by the emergency or major incident.

Humanitarian assistance is provision to meet the psychological and social welfare needs of people affected by emergencies (Eyre, 2008). This assistance is required in the short, medium and long term. People's needs will vary considerably over the timeframe, as will the form of assistance they require. This requires a multi-agency, flexible approach.

## Hospitals

As part of the initial investigation, commanders should consider sending police documentation teams to any receiving hospital to collate all relevant information.

## Police documentation teams

Collecting personal information is an important activity within reception centres. The principles of the Data Protection Act 2018 apply to all personal information collected during an emergency or major incident, even though this may be challenging under the circumstances.

A police documentation team should consist of a team leader familiar with the Major Incident Public Portal (MIPP) and recognised documentation procedures. The team leader will report to the tactical commander until or unless a senior identification manager (SIM) is appointed, when they will report to the SIM as part of the overall identification and investigation process.

Local force policy should stipulate which supervisory and responder roles should complete the national training package for police documentation teams.

## Evacuation

The purpose of evacuation is to move people and other living creatures away from an actual or potential danger to a place of safety via a safe route (see [Evaluation and shelter guidance](#), HM Government 2013).

Any decision to evacuate should be taken based on the safety of the public and emergency responders. An alternative to evacuation is to require people to shelter inside a place of safety, such as a building.

A decision to evacuate or shelter should be taken by the tactical coordinating group, based upon assessments made by the fire and rescue service and other specialist advisers. The scientific and technical advice cells (STAC), if convened, may also provide advice.

The final decision may rest with the police tactical commander on occasions where a prompt decision is required. Where a large-scale evacuation is being considered, the SCG may be required to make a policy decision on the scale and nature of an evacuation.

## Family liaison

The purpose of police family liaison is to ensure the most effective investigation possible into the death of an individual in a mass fatality incident and potential support to survivors. This will be assisted in an emergency or major incident by the early implementation of a family liaison strategy. The SIM will determine the family liaison strategy in consultation with the senior investigating officer (SIO), to ensure a coordinated approach to the families of any deceased.

The strategy should include the criteria for sending family liaison officers (FLOs) to families believed to have lost a relative in the incident. To ensure fair and consistent use according to need, the SIM may appoint a family liaison coordinator (FLC). The FLC will be responsible for the use of FLOs in line with the policy determined by the SIM or SIO.

## Victims of terrorism unit (VTU)

The VTU within the Home Office has been established to coordinate responses to and learning from terror attacks at a government level. The VTU ensures government departments work together to provide coordinated and effective support to victims.

As part of this, British citizens affected by terrorist attacks at home or overseas can obtain support from GOV.UK. See [Helpline and support: victims of terrorism](#). This includes information on:

- where to seek advice and assistance following a terrorist attack
- official helplines and support services available to victims, survivors, witnesses, family members and all those affected

First responders can also obtain support and advice from GOV.UK if they have been affected by a terrorist attack. See [Support and advice for first responders: victims of terrorism](#).

Where the VTU responds to an incident, they can communicate with local resilience forums (LRFs). Their work is closely coordinated with the work of the Humanitarian Assistance Steering Group (HASG), in line with the [Human aspects in emergency management guidance](#).

## Tags

Civil emergencies