

Ten Key Principles Governing the Use of Force by the Police Service

1. Police officers owe a general duty to protect persons and property, to preserve order, to prevent the commission of offences and, where an offence has been committed, to take measures to bring the offender to justice;
2. Police officers may, consistent with this duty, use force in the exercise of particular statutory powers, for the prevention of crime or in effecting a lawful arrest. They may also do so in self defence or the defence of others, to stop or prevent an imminent breach of the peace, and to protect property;
3. Police officers shall, as far as possible, apply non-violent methods before resorting to any use of force. They should use force only when other methods have proved ineffective, or when it is honestly and reasonably judged that there is no realistic prospect of achieving the lawful objective identified without force;
4. When force is used it shall be exercised with restraint. It shall be the minimum honestly and reasonably judged to be necessary to attain the lawful objective;
5. Lethal or potentially lethal force should only be used when absolutely necessary in self-defence, or in the defence of others against the threat of death or serious injury;
6. Any decision relating to the use of force which may affect children, or other vulnerable persons, must take into account the implications of such status including, in particular, the potentially greater impact of force on them;
7. Police officers should plan and control operations to minimise, to the greatest extent possible, recourse to lethal force, and to provide for the adoption of a consistent approach to the use of force by all officers. Such planning and control will include the provision to officers of a sufficient range of non-lethal equipment and the availability of adequate medical expertise to respond to harm caused by the use of force;
8. Individual officers are accountable and responsible for any use of force, and must be able to justify their actions in law;
9. In order to promote accountability and best practice all decisions relating to the use of force, and all instances of the use of force, should be reported and recorded either contemporaneously, or as soon as reasonably practicable;
10. Any decision relating to the use of force by police officers must have regard to the duty of care owed by the relevant police service to each individual police officer in the discharge of his duties. Deployment of police officers in a public order context where force may be used can carry grave risks to their own safety, and so must be the subject of rigorous control for that reason also.

Source: **HMIC (2011) *The rules of engagement: A review of the August 2011 disorders***, © Crown copyright.