



Response

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Document information

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This revised advice has been produced and approved by the NABIS and the National Criminal Use of Firearms Group. It has been approved by NCOCC and VPP portfolio lead. The operational implementation of all guidance and strategy will require operational choices to be made at local level in order to achieve the appropriate police response and this document should be used in conjunction with other existing Authorised Professional Practice (APP) produced by the College of Policing. It will be updated and re-published as necessary.

Any queries relating to this document should be directed to either the author detailed above or the Head of Knowledge and Communications at NABIS on 0121 626 7114

1. Response/primary investigation

Key points

- **Gun crime disproportionality affects areas where perceptions of public safety are already low.**
- **When a gun crime occurs, it is likely that it will be followed by another in a short time and the force/surrounding forces should be alerted.**
- **Ensuring a prompt and effective response will improve public confidence, and early arrests may suppress further acts of firearm violence.**
- **Targeted deployments to address firearm criminality for a specified period of time is likely to help prevent and/or detect further gun crime.**
- **Targeted police interventions are effective methods for recovering guns.**
- **Investigations into gun crime should be undertaken by PIP 2 investigators who, where possible, deal solely with gun crime.**

1.1. Background

This advice does not replace any guidance relating to terrorist-related firearm incidents. There is existing specialist guidance for the emergency service's response to a terrorist attack, where counter terrorism units, together with strategic partners, define both the response and investigation.

The lower the public's perception of safety in a particular area, then the higher the chance there is of gun use (Jiao 2014: p 19). Which leads to which, however, is more difficult to answer. Whatever the answer, it sets out an operational imperative for police and other agencies to understand and address it.

There are environmental factors which appear to affect the type of gun crime that may occur in a particular area and the impact this may have on how quickly normality is restored. For example, in the US, research found that after a violent crime involving a gun, there was an increased risk of another such crime occurring within close proximity of the original incident during the following two week period (Ratcliffe and Rengert 2008).

Getting the response right and taking prompt action after a shooting has been shown to have a suppression benefit. Available evidence shows that when police made a firearm arrest, a violence prevention benefit, in the form of fewer firearm discharges, occurred after a short delay. During this delay, gun crime incidents remained (non-significantly) higher than

expected, but then dropped to significantly lower-than-expected levels (Wyant et al. 2012, and Wyant 2014).

Deploying dedicated officers to gun crime hotspot areas to focus solely on gun crime for a specific period of time has also been shown to have a greater effect in reducing and detecting gun crime than deploying officers in more generalised ways (Wells, Zhang and Zhao 2012). In addition, such activity has been seen to improve perceptions of safety in affected areas (Koper 2013: p 578). Such a targeted approach is likely to have other benefits given that over half of all guns recovered in the UK are as a result of targeted police interventions (Gibson 2014: p 29).

Evidence supports the use of specialist (accredited) investigators to deal with gun crime and this results in more arrests and increased solvability (Jiao 2014: p 19). While this is largely the approach undertaken across UK forces, there are still occasions where 'low level' or 'minor' gun incidents are dealt with by less experienced officers who are perhaps only qualified to PIP (Professionalising Investigation Programme) level 1. In addition to the negative impact on investigations, this approach may also hinder a force's ability to identify important precursor events, by unknowingly breaking up linked series investigations across teams or departments.

Equally, research also shows that the greater number of resources immediately dispatched, the greater the chances are of apprehending offenders (Jiao 2014: p 19).

1.2. Keeping safe

Responding to firearms incidents presents a risk to police officers, particularly unarmed officers, who may be the first to arrive at a scene.

In accordance with the [College of Policing \(2010\) Stay safe at firearms incidents](#) those despatching officers have a responsibility to consider, and to remind others to consider, the following basic principles:

- stay safe – think about your own and the public's safety
- see – what is happening and where
- tell – communicate, describe incident/type of weapon(s)
- act - stay safe, update, observe/contain.

These principles are supported by the following advice:

- use the National Decision Model (NDM)

- do not approach unnecessarily
- use cover
- consider safe approach/escape routes
- consider safety of others
- wear correct PPE .

With the above in mind, it remains imperative that any police response is prompt and effective so as to ensure the public are safeguarded, medical attention can be provided to victims and offenders can be apprehended (IPCC 2006).

'It is the responsibility of the police to safeguard the public. While there is no hierarchy of right to life, protection of the public (specifically and generally) is the priority in every spontaneous firearms incident' (IPCC 2006). Notwithstanding this, there also remains a duty of care owed to those officers and staff deployed to firearms incidents.

Those making critical response decisions have to strike a balance between officer safety and meeting the obligation to respond promptly to save life and apprehend offenders. This, potentially, means the police having to put themselves between the threat and the public.

Those managing or deploying resources to a firearms incident should take into account research into certain incident characteristics which suggests there is an increased risk to the public and/or emergency responders. While each force will have its own procedures for responding, such characteristics when used in conjunction with the National Decision Model (NDM) will provide a solid rationale for decision-making.

Research suggests that the more public an area is, the more serious any crime involving a gun is likely to be (Jiao 2014: p 20). This may be because the increased risk of getting caught raises the stakes for the offender and, therefore, they are perhaps more criminally intent or motivated. This, in itself, possibly means they pose a greater risk to the public and police responders.

The number of offenders involved in committing a violent crime where firearms are used may also have a bearing on the number of weapons that offenders are likely to have in their possession and could have an impact on the police response. In such cases, research found that in a quarter of incidents with two or more offenders working together, those involved had more than one firearm with them (Caddick and Porter 2012). This should remind officers that in multi-offender incidents they may be looking for multiple weapons, which may or may not have been discharged. In light of this, they should consider continuing any search beyond

finding a single weapon. In terms of safety, officers should be mindful that even after a suspect has been arrested and/or found in possession of a firearm, the risk to them and the public may well remain.

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