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# CO19 Branch Specialist Firearms Command

## Review: Police visibility and recognition - Overt and Covert

<b>Protective Marking</b>	
Suitable for publication scheme Y/N	Y
Title and Version	Police visibility and recognition - Overt and Covert
Purpose	Following the IPCC report into counter terrorist operation at Forest Gate this is an examination of how officers could be more visible as police, and thereby make operations safer for the public, officers and subjects.
Relevant to	CO19, SCD7, CO6 (ARV), CO18(ARV)
Summary	Report details a number of recommendations to assist with visibility of armed police officers.
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Creating Branch	CO19
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Review Date	TBC

## **1. Introduction**

This review has been completed as a result of IPCC recommendations where concerns were raised over the identification of armed officers. This report has examined measures that can improve the visibility of officers whilst at the same time retaining the crucial element of keeping armed officers tactically sound by reducing the opportunity of early compromise and minimising areas of their body which could become aiming points for an armed suspect.

It should be noted that the identification of armed police officers relies on both visible recognition and verbal announcements and commands. This report has only considered the former but it is stressed that verbal identification will continue to be a vital element in early identification of armed police officers.

## **2. IPCC Recommendations**

2.1 In the IPCC Independent Investigations into complaints made following the Forest Gate Counter-Terrorist Operation on 2 June 2006 the following reference was made to police identification;

*“During the operation itself, officers were wearing respirators and full protective clothing, a frightening sight at any time but even more so in the early hours of the morning following a forced entry. Although the word “POLICE” is on the bullet-proof vest it is difficult to see in poor light, and the respirators muffle the sound of officers’ shouting ‘Armed Police’. We understand that research and development is being undertaken in respect of microphone and speakers being fitted to the respirators and encourage this to be pursued.*

*Recommendation 3: Consideration should be given to having “POLICE” shown much more prominently on officer clothing.”*

## **3. Current Policy**

Current MPS policy is based on the ACPO Manual of Guidance and formulated in the MPS Police Use of Firearms Policy which is reviewed annually. The ACPO Manual details the following;

**ACPO Manual – Chapter 7 – Weapons and Equipment (version April 2006)**

### **7. Clothing**

7.1 All clothing issued to AFOs must be appropriate to their role, and provide suitable protection from the weather, and any other risk-assessed hazards.

## **8. Visual Identification**

### **Armed Uniformed AFO**

8.1 Dark blue or black ski cap, beret, or ballistic helmet, with clearly identifiable Police markings. When the firearms element of an operation is not active, armed uniformed officers should normally wear ordinary uniform, including any necessary headwear.

### **Plain Clothed AFO**

8.2 Dark blue or black ski cap, or ballistic helmet, with clearly identifiable Police markings to be worn when covert stage changes to overt. In addition consideration should be given to the use of chequered wristbands, identity pins, identical ties.

### **Plain Clothed Unarmed Officers**

8.3 Saturn yellow ski cap, or ballistic helmet, chequered armbands, tabards, chequered bandoleers, pocket badges, warrant cards in pocket.

8.4 Whilst the above system should be used where possible, there may be situations where this may not be appropriate. In such occasions, it is vital that a suitable system of identification is defined, and that all officers involved are fully briefed and aware.

This ACPO Guidance is translated into the MPS Police Use of Firearms document, and the relevant section is copied below.

## **CO19 Police Use of Firearms Policy October - 2007**

### **2.13 Identification of Plain-Clothes Officers in Firearms Operations**

Officers in plain clothes employed at a firearm incident need to be clearly identifiable as police officers. For this purpose, the following identification will be used:

- Plain-clothes officers who are armed will be issued with a dark blue or black baseball cap with police markings
- Plain-clothes officers who are unarmed will be issued with a high visibility (bright yellow) baseball cap with police markings.

### **Officers entitled to be issued**

The supply of this item of clothing is at operational command unit expense and discretion. However, because of the potential security and publicity concern, only officers employed on proactive plain-clothes work may be issued with the cap.

Officers who are armed (authorised firearms officers, senior firearms officers or those employed within the Specialist Crime Group's, Flying Squad) or on armed intervention operations, will not wear the yellow cap and will continue to wear the approved dark blue or black baseball caps with police markings.

### **Directions as to wear**

The caps are issued as an aid to identification. Baseball caps must not be used unnecessarily. They should be worn only when on duty, and if it is operationally essential to do so and always with the peak facing to the front.

### **Identification**

The caps are provided primarily to enable plain-clothes officers to identify themselves to other police officers. This does not remove the need for officers to identify themselves properly to members of the public, for example, whilst exercising powers of arrest or search. The requirement to show a warrant card must still be observed.

Baseball caps should not be considered to be uniform for the purpose of police powers which may only be exercised by an officer in uniform for example requiring a breath test or making an arrest for driving whilst disqualified.

## **4. Consultation and Existing Measures**

Following the IPCC report into the Forest Gate police shooting the MPS Firearms Policy unit gave consideration to a number of the recommendations. The FPU identified that there must be a proportionate balance against the need for police officers to be clearly identifiable as a police officer, against that of officer safety. Highly visible markings could be a trigger point and used as aiming points for assailants. As a result of this potential risk, the current badges are positioned on suitable ballistic protection. i.e. on the ballistic helmet, centre-front, and on the left or right breast. It is highly likely that any increase in size, fluorescence or prominence of 'Police' markings, for armed officers, would be challenged from an officer safety / health and safety point of view.

### **4.1 Uniformed Operations**

#### **ARV**

Currently CO19 ARV officers wear a police uniform, which comprises of dark blue shirt and trousers. All of the officers wear body armour, which has the words 'Police' in blue letters on the front, and rear panels, the body armour also displays epaulettes with the officers shoulder number on. The ballistic helmets worn by officers have the words 'Police' in blue writing on a Velcro patch, which is positioned above the officer's forehead, also a similar patch is placed centrally at the rear of the helmet.

In terms of the helmet patch the only difficulty can be when the officer's goggles or the cloth pouch (which the goggles are stored in), is secured around the top of the helmet, as this would obscure the police patch at the front of the helmet. Usually the officers would be wearing their goggles during a operation which would mean that the police sign is visible, but there may be circumstances e.g. if the individual officer chooses not to wear them or has other eye protection when this patch may be covered up.

## **SFO/TST**

When engaged in uniformed operations e.g. pre-planned call outs, SFO and TST officers wear dark blue coveralls under body armour, which again has police markings on front and rear and epaulettes on shoulders. They also have the same ballistic helmets with police markings on front and rear. SFO/TST officers usually wear tactical vests to hold all their equipment over the body armour so the equipment is accessible. There is facility for these tactical vests to have a velcro 'POLICE' patch of the same size and design as on the body armour on the left or right breast pocket area.

## **4.2 Plain Clothes Operations**

### **SFO/TST**

When engaged in plain-clothes operations the primary means of identifying an armed officer at the point a covert response becomes overt, is through the use of the dark blue baseball cap. Over time, through media exposure in the news, in papers and in fictional dramas, the blue baseball cap has become synonymous with armed police officers. The baseball cap has a chequered band around it with the words 'Metropolitan Police' written on the front above the peak. Even after many years there appears nothing which will match the baseball cap as a means of identifying officers in terms of visibility, but also conceal-ability, as clearly the fact that a baseball hat is required means the officers are deploying from a covert position.

SFO/TST officers also have issued Raid Jackets. These are dark coloured blue jackets (all of same make and colour) from which police markings can be pulled out at front and rear. However, they are of limited use in surveillance operations, as their uniform nature would make them stand out. In these types of operations when the Silver commander makes the decision that an intervention or arrest is to be effected, the armed officers will often have very little time to react. They will seek to remain covert until the last possible second to maximise the element of surprise and increase the margin of safety. As a result there is usually only time for the officer to deploy with a baseball cap, and it is unlikely that without compromising the element of surprise or reducing a response time that officers could deploy with raid jackets in this type of operation.



In terms of fixed plots or when deploying from covert positions e.g. vans or covert OP's, the use of raid jackets may be more appropriate. These jackets would increase the uniformed appearance of the officers in conjunction with baseball hats, but the flexibility of the firearms team would be maintained in that if the information changed it would be possible for the jackets to be removed quickly and the officers to deploy in support of surveillance in plain clothes. This flexibility would not be possible if the officers in the covert OP or van were in uniform or coveralls.

### **SCD7(5) – Flying Squad**

Consultations with SCD7(5) returned the view that the baseball cap was believed still to be the best option for identification of armed officers at the point a plan becomes overt. Clearly the flying squad's remit for intervention comes in surveillance based operations only where the actual target venue is not yet known. In these circumstances raid jackets are less appropriate as the flying squad officers will be close to the surveillance target and having a number of people wearing the same clothing would clearly be a trigger point which would compromise the operations, as discussed above.

## **5. Recommendations**

Based on the information there are a number of measures that have been identified as best practice to improve visibility and aid the identification of officers. Most if not all of these measures are in place but they are listed here to ensure consistency.

### **5.1 Police sign on front of helmet not to be obscured by Goggles or goggle pouch.**

This is simply to remind officers that when they are wearing alternative eye or face protection to the issued 'bolle goggles', that they remove the goggles from the top of their helmet or position them so that they are not in any way obstructing the Police marking on the front of the helmet.

### **5.2 Long and Short shields to have larger police signs on (already being implemented by purple teams)**

Until recently CO19 ballistic shields have been plain black, with the officer relying on verbal identification and the helmet sticker to identify them as police.



All CO19 long and short ballistic shields will now have a 'POLICE' sign attached by velcro in the middle of the shield. CO19 stores have purchased 100 of these signs and the ARV/SFO purple teams are completing the addition of the signs to all the ballistic long and short shields. The new shield signs are considerably bigger than those worn on the body armour or helmet. The signs are approximately 20cm by 10cm in size, with the 'POLICE' lettering being approximately 5cm high in light blue over a dark blue background. These markings are ideal in that whilst they may provide an aiming point for the suspect, this point is on the best ballistic protection available to the officers at the incident, and clearly show the words 'POLICE' to the suspects seeing the shield. Tactically this is also sound as it is usually the officer carrying the ballistic shield who would be the first into any premises during most ARV/TST operations, and SFO call out type operations.





It is accepted that the signs on the shield could go even further still, with much larger letters across the whole of one section of the ballistic shield. This is going to be researched in terms of feasibility with current shields and cost implications. The velcro backed stickers shown above are an interim measure that has been implemented immediately to mitigate any identification problem, whilst an even more visible alternative is researched.

*The work outstanding is to check that there has been compliance in all cases and also to ensure that CO6 and CO18 ARV's have the same markings available to them. (Insp Twist CO19 to ensure this is completed.)*

### **5.3 Tactical Vests to have police sign on left or right breast area**

In operations where SFO/TST officers are deployed wearing tactical vests, officers are to ensure that they have a sign 'POLICE' visible on the front of the vest as the vest itself obscures any police signs on the body armour.

### **5.4 Raid Jackets to be used where possible (fixed plot covert OP)**

In cases where SFO/TST officers in plain clothes are deploying from concealed positions the tactical advisor should give consideration as to whether the wearing of 'Raid Jackets' would be appropriate and in the circumstances increase the ease of identification of the officers.

It is clear from the rationale above that raid jackets would not be suitable for all in surveillance based operations, however consideration should be given to a small number of officers out of the team wearing them.

In terms of operations where officers are deploying from covert positions e.g. vans there should be consideration for the use of raid jackets and this consideration should be recorded as part of the tactical advice given. There may well be sound operational reasons why the use of raid jackets in these circumstances is not appropriate for the particular operation however the recommendation is that the tactical advisor would now record the reasons for this as part of the tactical advice documentation.

### **5.5 Reminder to all officers re the importance of wearing baseball hats where possible.**

In all cases every effort is made by officers to deploy with baseball caps, although this cannot always be guaranteed due to the exceptionally fast pace of some deployments. This recommendation goes no further than reminding all officers of the importance of deploying with baseball caps already in position to aid with the identification of armed officers.

### **5.6 Exceptions**

It is clear that no policy or recommendation can cater for the limitless number of variables that are specific to each operation. This policy should be seen as a guide for best practice in terms of physical identification, however there will be circumstances where the implementation of these recommendations may compromise safety. In these cases it will be for the tactical advisor to record in their tactical advice log, or decision log if officers are going to deviate from these recommended standards to aid their identification as police.

## **6. Conclusion**

Following the recommendation from the IPCC it is clear that a balance needs to be struck between the very prominent display of the words 'police' which will assist suspects identify officers, against the very real possibility of increased compromise and reduced safety for the officers concerned.

In terms of uniform deployments, placing the words 'Police' on the shields is a new and very positive step to meet the recommendation of the IPCC. Also

reminding officers re the need for the other identifying features already in place not to be obscured will also assist.

Plain-clothes deployments are more difficult, especially where the armed officers are in support of surveillance. These officers have very difficult competing demands, not to be seen or stand out thereby compromising their safety and the operation, against the need to be clearly identifiable once the arrest/intervention phase of the operation is activated. In these cases the baseball cap clearly provides the best solution to both of these competing demands. In some circumstances the use of raid jackets could improve visibility without additional risk of compromise e.g. deployment from concealed positions, however they may not be appropriate for surveillance type operations.

The current MPS policies and procedures are compliant with and go beyond what is expected by the ACPO Manual of Guidance and further thought is continually being given to measures by which the visibility of firearms officers can be increased whilst still maintaining a tactical advantage and the safety of the officers concerned. To this end further research is to be instigated to make the shield signs even more visible amongst other measures.