| Police Scotland logo | Freedom of Information Response Our reference: FOI 25-2313  Responded to: 08 September 2025 |
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Your recent request for information is replicated below, together with our response.

## 1. Use of Lethal Force Policy

## Please provide:

## The current operational policy or guidance issued to specialist firearms officers (including Authorised Firearms Officers and Specialist Firearms Officers) regarding the circumstances under which lethal force, including the use of sniper rifles, may be authorised and discharged.

The information sought is not held and section 17 of the Act therefore applies.

To explain, Police Scotland has no ‘lethal force’ policy.

Authorised Firearms Officers are for the carriage of firearms and less lethal weapons.

The decision to discharge them is the responsibility of the individual AFO who use legislation in their decision making.

Further information is available online:

[Deployment of authorised firearms officers (AFOs) | College of Policing](https://www.college.police.uk/app/armed-policing/deployment-authorised-firearms-officers-afos)

[Armed Policing Operations SOP](https://www.scotland.police.uk/spa-media/rn5ee3xw/armed-policing-operations-sop.docx)

## Any standard operating procedures (SOPs), internal manuals, tactical guidance, or training materials that describe the decision-making process and authorisation for the use of lethal force, especially by sniper/marksman-qualified officers.

Again, the information sought is not held and section 17 of the Act therefore applies.

To explain, Police Scotland has no ‘lethal force’ policy.

I can however advise you that Police officers use the National Decision Model as their decision-making process when managing their response to incidents.

Further information is available online:

[Armed deployment | College of Policing](https://www.college.police.uk/app/armed-policing/armed-deployment)

[Armed Policing Operations SOP](https://www.scotland.police.uk/spa-media/rn5ee3xw/armed-policing-operations-sop.docx)

## 2. Legal and Ethical Framework

## Please provide:

## Any documentation or internal guidance on how UK law (including Article 2 of the ECHR) and the principles of necessity and proportionality are applied in practice when determining whether a firearms officer may open fire.

The information sought is publicly available in Appendix A of the [Armed Policing Operations SOP](https://www.scotland.police.uk/spa-media/rn5ee3xw/armed-policing-operations-sop.docx).

The information is therefore held by Police Scotland, but I am refusing to provide it in terms of section 16(1) of the Act on the basis that the section 25(1) exemption applies:

“Information which the applicant can reasonably obtain other than by requesting it […] is exempt information”.

## Copies of any legal briefings or guidance notes given to armed officers relating to the use of force in protection operations, such as those guarding VIPs or during counter-terrorism deployments.

The information sought is not held and section 17 of the Act therefore applies.

There are no legal briefings or guidance specifically given to Authorised Firearms Officers in protection operations. Common and Statutory law along with Police Scotland policies relate to all AFOs, whether the firearms operation is spontaneous or a pre-planned protection operation.

## 3. Rules of Engagement in Protection Details Specifically in relation to public protection operations (such as the Balmedie Beach deployment), please provide:

## Any operational orders that explain the authorisation thresholds, chain of command, and engagement rules during high-profile visits by public figures.

The information sought is not held and section 17 of the Act therefore applies.

There is no authorisation threshold in a protection operation. The Executive Committee for the Protection of Royalty and Public Figures (RAVEC) decide which persons receive armed protection in the UK. The Metropolitan Police are responsible for providing this protection in the UK. When a Protected Person travels to Scotland, Police Service of Scotland may provide support to their operation.

All PSoS armed protection operations like the recent deployment to Balmedie, have a chain of command. This comprises of a Strategic Firearms Commander, a Tactical Firearms Commander and Operational Firearms Commander(s). During the recent deployment to Balmedie, there were multiple Commanders deployed due to there being numerous AFOs doing multitude of specialist roles over a period of many days.

I would refer you again to our [Armed Policing Operations SOP](https://www.scotland.police.uk/spa-media/rn5ee3xw/armed-policing-operations-sop.docx) for further information.

## The role and discretion of officers deployed as snipers or marksmen in such contexts i.e., what operational triggers or intelligence may permit them to use their weapon.

The information sought is not held and section 17 of the Act therefore applies.

Operational trigger is not a term recognised by Police Scotland.

If there is any intelligence about a threat, it is still the responsibility and decision of the individual Firearms Officer to use force.

**4. Post-Incident Protocol**

**Please provide:**

**• Any documentation outlining the review, accountability, or oversight processes that follow the discharge of a firearm by a Police Scotland officer (e.g., referral to PIRC, internal review procedures).**

The information sought is publicly available:

[Post Incident Procedures National Guidance](https://www.scotland.police.uk/spa-media/zqxbrr3p/post-incident-procedures-national-guidance.docx)

[Post-deployment | College of Policing](https://www.college.police.uk/app/armed-policing/post-deployment)

[We are the Police Investigations & Review Commissioner | Police Investigation & Review Commissioner](https://pirc.scot/)

The information is therefore held by Police Scotland, but I am refusing to provide it in terms of section 16(1) of the Act on the basis that the section 25(1) exemption applies:

“Information which the applicant can reasonably obtain other than by requesting it […] is exempt information”.

If you require any further assistance, please contact us quoting the reference above.

You can request a review of this response within the next 40 working days by [email](mailto:foi@scotland.police.uk) or by letter (Information Management - FOI, Police Scotland, Clyde Gateway, 2 French Street, Dalmarnock, G40 4EH). Requests must include the reason for your dissatisfaction.

If you remain dissatisfied following our review response, you can appeal to the Office of the Scottish Information Commissioner (OSIC) within 6 months - [online](http://www.itspublicknowledge.info/Appeal), by [email](mailto:enquiries@itspublicknowledge.info) or by letter (OSIC, Kinburn Castle, Doubledykes Road, St Andrews, KY16 9DS).

Following an OSIC appeal, you can appeal to the Court of Session on a point of law only.

This response will be added to our [Disclosure Log](http://www.scotland.police.uk/access-to-information/freedom-of-information/disclosure-log) in seven days' time.

Every effort has been taken to ensure our response is as accessible as possible. If you require this response to be provided in an alternative format, please let us know.