



STOCKPORT
METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Managing Critical Incidents

Guidance for schools

1.0 Purpose

This document is designed to provide a framework for schools to establish how they would respond to serious incidents that might happen either in school or off-site that might involve children, staff and parents. This guidance relates to emergency response and business continuity.

2.0 Introduction

The following guidance draws on the experience in Stockport and elsewhere over recent years. It uses the experience of schools that have been through a critical incident. It is not intended to be prescriptive or to attempt to cover all possible events. A major fire outside school hours or a serious accident on a school trip or major community incident will require different types and scales of response and will involve different agencies.

These guidelines are designed:

- to help schools develop plans to respond to a critical incident
- to provide practical guidance and reference during such an event
- to train and exercise key staff in preparation for such an event.

The nature and timing of a particular incident will impact on the response. This information relates to all eventualities from events affecting the school to a wider community disaster.

The information contained in this guidance is intended to enable school staff to manage and respond effectively to an emergency or critical incident at school or on an educational visit, drawing on their own resources and access to additional support advice or information from the Directorate Incident Management Team (DIMIT) and other agencies where appropriate.

Any critical incident contingency plan should be generic enough to cover a range of potential incidents that could occur. Examples include:

- Serious injury to a pupil or member of staff (e.g. transport accident)
- Significant damage to school property (e.g. fire)
- Criminal activity (e.g. bomb threat)
- Severe weather (e.g. flooding)
- Public health incidents (e.g. influenza pandemic)
- The effects of a disaster in the local community.

A school's critical incident plan should cover procedures for incidents occurring during school hours and outside school hours.

Response to these ranges of incidents can be very demanding on staff and pupils and it should be recognised that some staff will not be able to engage in this work at certain times. Support to all staff at such times is critical

3.0 What is a Critical Incident?

A Critical Incident is not necessarily an event that attracts large media attention or results in a fatality, although clearly in defining 'critical', such events are the usual ones that spring to mind. Definitions of 'critical' vary from individual to individual.

In short, a critical incident may involve the following:

- serious injury or fatality within the school
- any incident charged with profound emotion
- any incident involving serious threat
- any incident with extremely unusual circumstances which produces a high level of immediate or delayed emotional reaction, surpassing the individual's normal coping mechanisms.

4.0 Managing the response to critical incidents in schools

4.1 Thinking Ahead - Being Prepared

Preparing for critical incident is an ongoing process which involves:

- Risk assessment
- Planning
- Training
- Exercising
- Reviewing

Throughout each stage it is important to consult members of staff and governors

4.2 What must schools do to prepare?

Every school must put in place documented procedures and ensure that staff and governors are familiar with them. This document is designed to allow schools to apply control methods that work best for their individual environment.

Key elements include:

- Identify a plan owner with responsibility for reviewing the document and associated training and exercising. It would be useful if this person was also responsible for the schools Business Continuity Plan as they inter-relate.
- Establish a group of staff to study this booklet (and other literature and experience) and formulate an action plan to follow it through.
- Identify a School Incident Management Team (SIMT) who, collectively or individually, could take a lead in an emergency. Commission key roles; include Governors, administration and site staff.
- Ensure basic information, contact lists, emergency evacuation procedures and accommodation, communication and procedures etc. are in place, known to all staff and kept up to date
- Carry out a simulation exercise to explore how a critical incident might unravel. Identify and pursue, as part of the School Development and Business Continuity Plan, additional needs for planning, training, skills development and raising awareness.
- Ensure that governors and all members of the school community, including parents and pupils, are aware of the existence of a planned response including notification for any proposed rehearsals or enactments.
- Ensure timescales for review, updating and monitoring are in place

5. Critical Incident: level of severity and subsequent response

The majority of 'critical' incidents can be categorised into broadly three levels, each requiring a different input from both the school and others e.g. emergency services, Directorate Incident Management Team (DIMIT), multi-agency involvement through Safeguarding Serious Case Reviews etc.

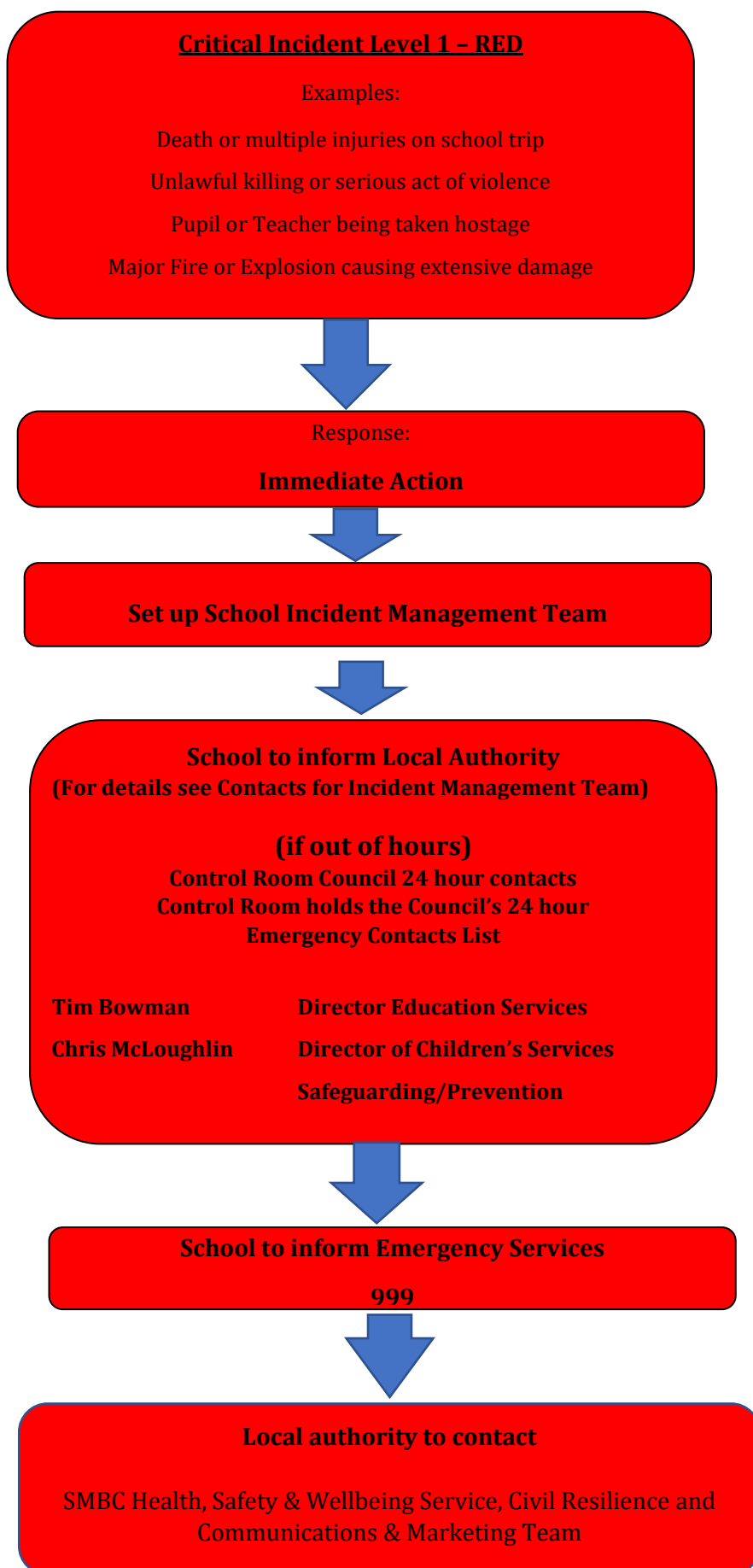
The following table gives examples of the levels of critical incident, the recommended initial response, and action typically required for each level. However, it should be noted that there may be incidents that you deem to be serious enough to merit contacting the emergency services prior to discussing the situation with the local authority. If this is the case, please make sure that you let the local authority know as part of your information sharing.

Below is the list the personnel involved in each of the colour coded responses.

When an incident occurs, the priority is to safeguard those on-site (i.e. pupils, staff, parents / carers, visitors) and alert the emergency services if necessary. The local authority should also be informed as appropriate

Some incidents may affect the local community but not the school directly. In such instances it might be suitable to activate certain aspects of the plan (e.g. post incident support) to help those affected.

5.1 Severity of Incident



Critical Incident Level 2 - AMBER

Examples:

Unexpected death of a pupil or member of staff
through natural causes e.g. meningitis

(Including the prompting of whole school vaccination)

Extensive vandalism to school building necessitating temporary closure

Temporary closure as a result of adverse weather conditions

Accidental deaths of pupils or colleagues out of school hours not a residential trip and
unconnected with a school event.



Response:

Immediate Action



Set up School incident Management Team



School to inform Local Authority

**For details see School Contacts
(if out of hours)**

**Control Room Council 24 hour contacts
Control Room holds the Council's 24 hour
Emergency Contacts List**

Devon Sherwood	Headteacher Support Manager
Julia Storey	Senior Adviser Safeguarding
Lynn Perry	Head of School Effectiveness



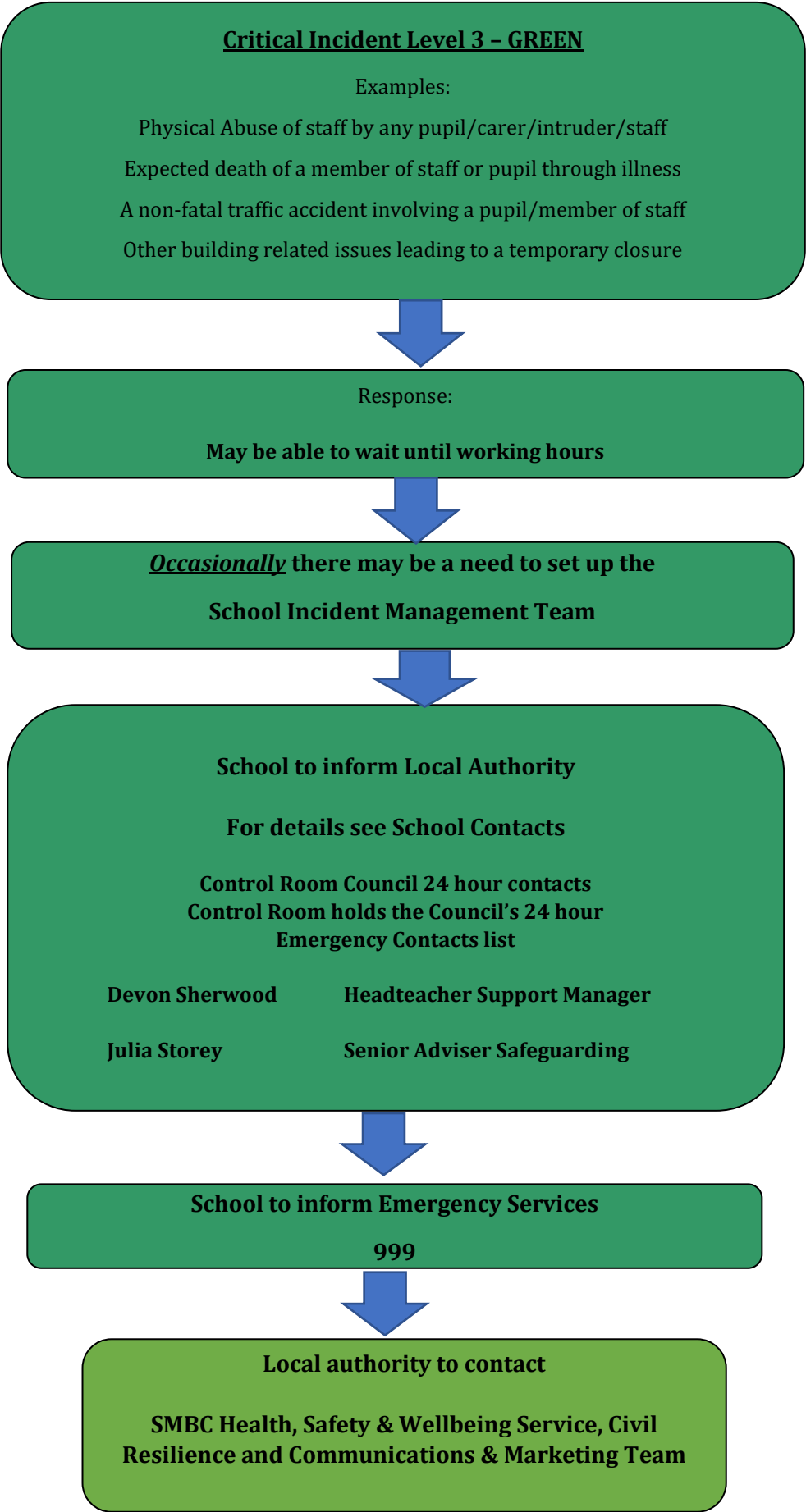
School to inform Emergency Services

999



Local authority to contact

**SMBC Health, Safety & Wellbeing Service, Civil Resilience and
Communications & Marketing Team**



5.2 Useful contacts to support the response



Emergency Contacts – Services to People Directorate Incident Management Team

(DIMT) & Other Council Contacts

CONTACTS – Directorate INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM (for out of hours see control room below)			
Contact	Office	Mobile	Contact Colours (see flow charts below)
Chris McLoughlin	0161 474 3921	07800 618855	Red
Tim Bowman	TBC - 0161 474 3934	TBC -07989425653	Red
Lynn Perry	0161 474 3488	07800617976	Amber
Devon Sherwood	0161 474 3895	07891949488	Amber/Green
Ann Marie McCullough	0161 474 4290	07800 618131	Amber/Green
Julia Storey	0161 474 5657	07800 618042	Amber/Green

CONTACTS – COUNCIL 24 HOUR CONTROL ROOM		
Control Room	0161 474 5555	Red/Amber
The 24 hour control room holds out-of-hours contacts for all departments and the on-call Forward Incident Officer		

CONTACTS – INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION				
Contact	Office	Mobile	Home	Contact Colours (see following flow charts)
Alison North	0161 474 3068	Office hours only		Red/Amber/Green
Paul Kendal	0161 474 3114	Office hours only		Red/Amber/Green

CONTACTS – OTHER COUNCIL BUSINESS AREAS			
Contact	Office	Mobile	Contact Colours
Totally Local Company (TLC) School Scene Cleaning Service	0161 474 5577	07800 618496	All
Martin Powell Educational Psychology Service	0161 474 3867	07800 617917	All
Ann-Marie McCullough Corporate H&S	0161 474 4290	07800 618131	All
Dr David Baxter Health Protection & Control of Infection Unit	0161 474 2440	N/A	All

6.0 Initial action

Initiating immediate action requires a School Incident Management Team (SIMT) based on the senior management team of the school and Chair of Governors or equivalent. Depending on the type of incident the SIMT may wish to seek advice and guidance from The Headteacher Management Support Service who can offer direct support on a range of health & safety issues, accident investigation, liaison with enforcement officers and risk assessments.

6.1 Establishing your School Incident Management Team (SIMT)

The headteacher will usually take overall responsibility for co-ordinating the response to an emergency. If this is not appropriate a pre-agreed nominee should be identified (and appropriately trained) to undertake this role.

Unless the incident is minor, it will be impossible for the headteacher to implement all the actions required on behalf of the school. A School Incident Management Team (SIMT) should be established at the onset of an incident which can assist the headteacher in managing the response.

The following roles could be covered by the SIMT (please see Appendix 4)

- Co-ordination (i.e. headteacher or pre-agreed nominee)
- Business continuity
- Communications
- Log-keeping
- Media management
- Resources
- Welfare.

Nominees for the SIMT should be identified prior to an emergency and are likely to comprise a variety of school employees:

- Site managers / caretakers
- Business managers / bursars
- Teachers
- Office staff.

The size of an SIMT will vary depending on the size of your school and the nature of the emergency. In some cases, more than one member of staff will need to be assigned to a role (such as 'welfare' which can prove especially labour intensive).

In smaller schools the majority of responsibilities may be assigned to the headteacher with the support of office staff and the site manager / caretaker. In these circumstances it is particularly useful to call for additional support (e.g. from the local authority) as soon as possible.

When assigning staff to SIMT consider the strengths of your staff and what they would be most suited to doing. If an employee updates the school website and contacts parents / carers on a regular basis, this person may be appropriate to undertake the 'communications' role.

Employees who have other roles in an emergency (such as those trained in first aid) may not be appropriate to nominate as part of the SIMT as this could prevent them fulfilling their other responsibilities.

Please use Appendix 5 to record your SIMT.

NB. If an incident involves the Police, they will take control of certain management issues

6.2 Gather Information (please refer to Appendix 1)

Ensure you identify

- What has happened
- Where and when
- Name and contact number of an adult at the incident site.
- Extent of injured, name and contact number of adult present.
- Is help required from the school (if the incident has happened off-site)

SIMT also needs to know

- Who has been informed
- What has been said

NB. If an incident involves the Police, they will take control of certain management issues.

6.3 Brief School Incident Management Team (SIMT)

- Whilst it might seem dramatic to have a school incident management team (SIMT) prepared, it does ensure that action is effective and efficient. Key people then know what to do and check the necessary steps are taken. A major incident can be shocking and disorientating so prepared procedures are essential.
- There needs to be a strategy meeting at the earliest opportunity where people can be gathered to plan and co-ordinate the school response.
- A SIMT may include the leadership team, administration and site staff, along with appropriate adults not necessarily from the school community.
- Competence, reliability and availability should determine membership of the SIMT rather more than school structure or status.
- Where there is a need for continued supervision of children and young people, adults other than staff (e.g. governors, parents/carers or minister) are invaluable. Please note the necessity for Disclosure and Barring Services (DBS) checking of individuals asked to supervise children/young people.
- It is suggested that the SIMT meets at least annually to update names, contact numbers checklist and procedures.

6.4 Consider dedicated communication routes

There is the possibility of the school line/emails being inundated with incoming calls from anxious parents. Schools may need to establish a designated route for these communications and make this known to the community via the website or other usual communication channels. The communications that are sent from school should provide an agreed factual statement, having sought appropriate guidance from LA contacts, along with reassurance of action being taken at the incident site. It is important to avoid speculation and not to make statements about further information or developments unless confident that it will be achieved. Efforts should be made to restrict the use of personal mobiles - uncontrolled use of mobile phones, even if well intentioned can cause major problems - duplication, misinformation or confusion. On trips this will also help to preserve battery life; providing greater resilience through continuity of communications. Schools may wish to also consider using local radio and the councils corporate communications team to disseminate information.

Governors can be kept informed through a previously agreed cascade initiated by the SIMT member.

6.5 Contact families whose children are directly involved

- Regularly review and maintain update contact lists at all times.
- Contact the families quickly and with sensitivity. The names and contacts of any excursion party or individuals involved to be centrally available. Consistency of information is vital so it is best to avoid using a chain of communication. If a parent/carer cannot be contacted by telephone/parent text it may be necessary to use either a reliable neighbour (or another parent/carer) or a note through the door asking them to get in touch via specific communication routes. Any message should relay known information and assurances of appropriate action being taken and should indicate if further information will be made available.
- It may be appropriate for parents to come into school to be ready for further information. Some people are likely to need immediate emotional support. The School's Incident Management Team in conjunction with LA colleagues will endeavour to provide appropriate support

6. Make arrangements for informing other parents

- If there is any possibility of legal liability, Police action, or a health and safety issue, the Directorate Incident Management Team should be contacted before the school issues information to parents or the wider community.
- It may be sufficient to inform parents by sending a letter with children/young people. In some cases it will be appropriate to call a meeting at school, especially if the incident is one which will generate concern about some aspect of the school's organisation (e.g. injury following violence at school). The School's Incident Management Team should provide a letter to home as soon as possible.
- A prepared statement should give necessary facts, expression of sympathy/concern and possibly a message for the community. It is important to remember that a prepared statement is likely to be accessible to the

media and to seek guidance from the School Support Service/Council Communications & Marketing Team where necessary.

Heads may wish to contact the Headteacher Management Support team to check the content of any such letters or statements.

6.7 Inform staff

It is vital that all adults in contact with pupils are kept well informed and feel secure in handling questions and comments. A schedule for updating needs to be arranged e.g. during breaks, at the end of the day or first thing the next morning. Such meetings ensure that relevant knowledge is shared and questions are answered. Staff and Governors should be instructed not to talk to the media or respond to questions from reporters or place any information on social network sites.

6.8 Inform pupils

This is best done in classes or small groups with particular care being taken to protect and support both children close to someone involved with the incident and staff who are unable to handle the emotions or distress confidently. Children should receive a consistent and open account of the incident as possible/deemed appropriate.

6.9 Facilitating the media – initially and in the longer term

- Schools are urged to seek advice from the Directorate Incident Management Team on responding to enquiries about the incident and particularly before agreeing to be interviewed or releasing names of children, young people and staff.
- School communities will still need to deal with the attentions of the media and should consider a prepared statement and the most appropriate person to respond. Pupils, parents/carers, governors, teaching and other staff may be approached directly by press, radio or TV reporters in the earliest stages of an incident. In an incident the media might learn of it before the school via mobiles and social media and may have information at odds with that of the school. In the most difficult circumstances, the Police will usually assist with media matters.
- In some instances, media interest might persist over a period of days and possibly be re-triggered by a funeral, court action or anniversary.
- Seek the assistance and advice from the Council's Communications & Marketing Team.
- Prepare an agreed text for release to the media and/or a script from which anyone confronted by the media can speak. If possible, ensure that a designated spokesperson, briefed and prepared, makes the direct response for the school.

7.0 Further actions

- Develop a plan for handling the feelings and reactions of people. The educational psychology team may be able to support here.
- Encourage people involved to talk about the incident
In some instances, people involved (children, young people and staff) should be able to talk about the incident before going home and venues/support should be made available. Advice and support should be sought from the Educational Psychology Service.
- Provide further information to parents not directly involved
 - Prepare general information releases via school and SMBC websites etc.
 - Ensure parents of children connected with the school e.g. children in other classes, relatives at the school, but not directly affected are informed of the incident and other relevant details.
 - Inform the wider school and local community.

- Inform school partners e.g. 'feeder' schools/nurseries, service providers.

8.0 Stand-down and recovery (see Appendix 10)

When the emergency services have left the school, or in the case of an incident on a school trip, when pupils and staff have returned home and media interest has subsided, the school can begin the recovery process. Head teachers should work with their Governing Body and School Support Services to develop a recovery plan for the school.

A range of support to aid recovery will be available from across the Local Authority. There may be enforcing officers, some formal inquiries and/or Police investigations into the incident, which may continue for some time and require the cooperation and support of school staff, pupils, parents/carers and third parties.