



This document has been drafted to comply with the principals of the Human Rights Act. Proportionality has been identified as the key to Human Rights compliance, this means striking a fair balance between the rights of the individuals and those of the rest of the community. There must be a reasonable relationship between the aim to be achieved and the means used.

Equality and Diversity issues have also been considered to ensure compliance with current Equality Legislation and policies.

In addition, Data Protection, GDPR, Freedom of Information and Health Safety issues have been considered. Adherence to this policy or procedure will therefore ensure compliance with all legislation and internal policies.

### 3. Procedure

This procedure has been constructed to not only cover expectations and requirements but also to act as a guide for officers on what to consider when attending scenes of sudden deaths. Officers are advised to follow the guidance below that details what to consider from the request to attend.

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### 3.1 Initial Police Action

FCR must inform a CSI (or after 2100 hours the on-call CSI) of a sudden death report where one of the following categories apply - **Death in custody, suicide, industrial accident, drug related deaths, unexplained or suspicious circumstances.** Sudden death that are not deemed suspicious OR are expected due to age, natural causes or terminal illness do not require contact with a CSI.

Complete system checks prior to attendance to inform decision making on risks associated to the address, occupants, (COVID) and any other relevant factors.

Inform Next of Kin (NOK) that you are there on behalf of HM Coroner to investigate the cause of the death. Offer your condolences to the NOK.

Assess the situation – The role of the attending officer is to investigate the cause of death to determine if there are any factors that could indicate criminal act.

Check the body - This is to see if there are any injuries or obvious causes of death.

Confirm life extinct - This can be done by a paramedic, GP, consultant, or in certain circumstances when clearly deceased for some time, by a Police Sergeant or above. If confirmed by a Police Sergeant the sergeant must ensure the incident log and occurrence report is updated with this decision. **Where police are required to declare life extinct a police sergeant or above MUST attend the scene to make the review and decision. The decision CANNOT and must not be made remotely.**

Attending officers are reminded to be forensically aware on attendance. Until the suspected cause of death has been determined as 'not suspicious', preservation of the scene and evidence should be a priority consideration.

When an assessment of the scene is made and the attending officer forms the opinion the death is as a result of suicide, drugs, is unexplained or suspicious, a supervisor must be called to attend.

COVID - any officers attending a sudden death will be required to wear full PPE irrespective of if we have been advised the person may or may not have been suffering with COVID.

There have been a couple of incidents recently where although we were told the person was not suffering with COVID, that it is subsequently discovered that they were. This has resulted in risk for attending officers and the need for them to then self-isolate.

The New guidance is for officers attending every sudden deaths to wear

- FFP2 or N95 Mask
- Disposable apron
- Gloves
- Goggles

Protective goggles protect the eyes against exposure to liquid droplets. They should be worn during any activities where close contact with the public is likely, social distancing is not available and suspected risk of infection exists.

All safety glasses, including protective goggles, must be optically clear and resistant to fogging

Protective goggles are forms of protective eyewear that usually enclose or protect the area surrounding the eye, to prevent particulates, water or chemicals from striking the eyes.

Where protective goggles are unavailable, safety glasses that have a wrap-round design or incorporate side shields may be used with local risk assessment

All of these items should be in the advanced PPE packs in the police vehicles.

**\*\*\*For all death in custody, suicide, drug or unexplained deaths, or if suspicious circumstances exist, please go to section 4 of this policy for guidance. \*\*\***

### **3.2 Crime Scene Investigator (CSI)**

A Crime Scene Investigator or Crime Scene Manager (CSM) must be contacted to inform them of the death in order that a decision can be made on CSI attendance in the following cases - **Death in custody, suicide, industrial accident, drug related deaths, unexplained or suspicious circumstances.** The decision NOT to attend in the above situations can only be made by a CSI or CSM.

***(CSI/CSM availability – Appendix A)***

### **3.3 Complete Form 41 Sudden Death Form**

This is the most important document used by the Coroner's Officers. This must be scanned to the Coroner's Office before the end of the shift.

### **3.4 Identification**

Get NOK or someone who knows deceased to identify them to you. Apply wrist identification bracelet. Complete identification statements. One from

NOK or person who knows the deceased and in what capacity identifying to an officer. The officer also needs to provide a short statement to say at time, date, place the witness identified the deceased (full name and DOB) to them and an ID bracelet was placed on wrist.

In non-suspicious deaths, the Senior Coroner will accept Identification from the hospital wristband, for example if the deceased had been admitted to hospital prior to death and have been seen there by NOK, friend etc. Alternatively, if this is not possible an identification can be completed from an image on Niche or other photographic identification at the scene, for example, driving license or passport.

There is no longer a need to follow the body to the mortuary for continuity for normal sudden deaths but this should be done in suspected unlawful killings.

### **3.5 Search and Seize**

Search for and seize any drugs, medication, suicide notes or anything else of relevance. If there is a lot of medication which are full then make a note of the details of the medication and amounts. If there are empty medication packets near the body then seize the packets and note the details and place into Detained Property. Include the details of all items seized in your statement. It will be the attending/investigating police officer's responsibility to arrange return of any property to NOK at a later date as appropriate.

Keys, cash and other valuables - if there are NOK present and it is appropriate to do so then all of the latter can be left with them. If there is no responsible person present then take any valuable items and place into the detained property valuables safe as the NOK may wish to have these as soon as possible, for example, to make arrangements at the deceased person's property.

### **3.6 Recovery and Removal of body**

It is the responsibility of the police, or where access and situation necessitates Fire and Rescue, the body of a deceased found hanging will be removed to the ground by officers. It is not the responsibility of the undertakers who should only remove a recovered body from the location.

Attending CSI's will attend and photograph the body during the recovery phase and will place a numbered seal on the outer body bag, which will assist with body continuity to the mortuary.

Arrange via the Force Control Room and inform NOK that the undertakers are the Coroner's undertakers but they can instruct their own funeral directors once the body is released after Coroners process. Please email the Coroner's Office if there are any issues regarding the service provided by the Coroner's Removals Contractors and this will be addressed by Northamptonshire County Council who operate the Contract.

Inform NOK that a Coroner's Officer should be in contact with them within 1-2 working days. Please shape public expectations and do not make false assurances to NOK or families. Please remind them that the Coroner's Office is closed at weekends.

### **3.7 Notification of Next of Kin**

**It is the responsibility of the attending officer to notify NOK of the death and the circumstances.**

Please be open and honest with the NOK in relation to the circumstances of the death. If NOK details are not readily apparent then reasonable enquiries need to be made to establish these details. If the NOK live out of county or in another country it is still your responsibility to do this - this is not the duty of the Coroner's Office to complete. It is advised that you do this via the Force Control Room so that if you are off duty once the message has been passed by another force or authority then the NOK have someone to contact.

Please think about support and continuity for NOK and maybe provide the name of the supervisor on the next shift or occurrence number so that someone can help them if they call the force when you have finished duty. The Coroner's office is closed over the weekend so NOK may call you back over the weekend especially when an ID is needed or they require further details about the death. Families/NOK can decide whether a burial or cremation is to be held and can begin to consider which Funeral Directors they wish to use. They should not make any funeral arrangements until contacted by the Coroner's Office as there may be delays if a post mortem or further tests are needed.

### **3.8 Notification of death of the Coroner**

The Coroner's Office function is now entirely owned by Northamptonshire County Council. As such they no longer have access to our force systems, including Niche. Before going off duty, the Coroner's Office must be sent via email, the Sudden Death Form, a copy of the OEL which details the circumstances of the death and any decisions taken, as well as the ID statements, finder's statement and any other key statements.

The email address these must be sent to is;

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The Coroner's Office phone number for any queries is;

██████████ (between 0830-1630 Monday-Friday).

All original paperwork must be sent to crime admin for storage. The Coroner does not require the original Sudden Death Form or the ECG printout.

Please ensure that the Sudden Death Form is scanned and emailed. A scene shot of the document is not acceptable as the quality is poor. Please also ensure that all statements emailed over contain the rear with the witness details included.

### **3.9 Expected – Age Related – Natural (i.e. in care or nursing home setting)**

In normal circumstances if a death is expected due to age or terminal illness then there should be no reason to contact the police to attend unless there are other circumstances, for example suspected criminal offences i.e. assault or medical negligence etc.

Life extinct could be declared by a nurse, paramedic or out of hours GP. The care home should contact the family and notify them of the death and arrange for the body to be removed by the Funeral Directors appointed by the family. The care home can then notify the deceased persons GP and arrange for them to issue a Medical Certificate for the Cause of death (MCCD) which states the cause of death and this can be discussed with the family who can then Register the death. This function will be completed by the Registration service who will issue a Death Certificate to the family.

If the GP cannot give a cause of death and issue an MCCD then he/she can complete a GP referral form and refer the death for consideration by the Coroner.

### **3.10 Supervisor Attendance**

Supervisors are not required to routinely attend all reported sudden deaths.

A CSI must be contacted by the attending officer at the scene of the Sudden Death. The CSI (or CSM) will determine if forensic attendance is required.

However, relevant supervisors must be informed of sudden deaths attended by officers under their command at the earliest opportunity, before undertakers are requested. Supervisors will view the relevant incident log and make contact with the officer attending to:

- Ensure they are satisfied with the reported circumstances where there are no suspicious circumstances
- Offer support and advice where necessary
- Ensure that all appropriate actions have been taken as below.

The FCR will not request an undertaker without the name of the sergeant who has been consulted.

A supervisor **will** always attend a sudden death where:

- There are suspicious circumstances
- Apparent suicide
- Death in custody (police, prison, secure unit, mental health secure hospital).
- The officer requires additional support or advice, or
- The circumstances are not immediately clear, or
- The scene relates to an industrial accident or a death relating to a transport system [e.g. plane crash, train crash]

The supervisor will be responsible for oversight of the enquiry and will endorse the log prior to closure.

None of the above affects the requirement for a Detective Sergeant to attend a sudden death where there are suspicious circumstances.

#### **4 Death in custody, suicide, industrial accident, drug related deaths, unexplained or suspicious circumstances**

It is paramount where death is believed to fall into one of the above categories that a supervisor is called to the scene. A CSI or CSM must be contacted at the earliest opportunity to discuss the circumstances for a decision on attendance. The requirement for a CSI/CSM not to attend in the above circumstance can **only** be made by a CSI or CSM, not by the attending officer or supervisor.

##### **4.1 Suicide / Suspected Suicide**

If the death is reported as, or is suspected to be suicide, a Supervisory Officer **WILL** attend the scene and direct the enquiry. A CSI will also attend the scene.

- Assess circumstances.
- Preserve the scene.
- Liaise direct with the Crime Scene Investigators – if out of hours this should be done via the FCR Inspector.
- Secure any evidence for HM Coroner [notes, ligature, tablets etc.] with advice from Crime Scene Investigators.
- Confirm rationale for suicide.
- Identified OIC takes responsibility for scene and Fast Track actions.
- Inform the Coroners Officer - if out of hours by email.
- Confirm identification and continuity of body to police.
- Ensure appropriate consideration and service to family of deceased.
- Officer to provide full statement of circumstances of death and scene investigation.
- Officer to secure a statement from the person finding.

##### **4.2 Suicide Notes**

- Seize any suicide note.
- Show to recipient (if appropriate/possible in the circumstances).
- Scan original onto NICHE.
- Book original note into Detained Property and send original note via internal mail to Coroner's Officer. The Coroner likes the original note to be available at inquest court and we will usually return this to NOK at the conclusion of the inquest.
- Obtain a statement from the NOK or witness about the note, identifying the writing to be that of the deceased person.
- Originals can be returned to NOK upon completion of the case.
- Mention any suicide note in the circumstances section of the Sudden Death Form.

#### **4.3 Unexplained / Suspicious / Drug / Fatal Fire / Fatality due to an Industrial Incident or Accident**

- Where a death is 'unexplained', suspicious, drugs related, fatal fire, or involves a fatality due to an industrial incident/accident, a CID Supervisor **WILL** attend the scene, ensure the scene is preserved, and direct the initial enquiries.
- Consideration must be given at all times to securing the scene for a forensic examination and arrange for Crime Scene Investigators to attend. The CID supervisor must inform the duty Detective Inspector at the earliest opportunity who in turn will either brief the duty Senior Investigating Officer [SIO], or will be nominated as SIO themselves.
- A CSI will attend the scene of a drugs death even if not suspected to be suspicious. Attending officers should be cognisant of future coronial procedures regarding drug related deaths. Scene photos of drugs in situ, paraphernalia, position of the deceased will all assist later coronial procedures.
- In the case of an industrial incident / accident involving fatalities, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) will also be informed.
- Preserve and secure evidence.
- Agree appropriate investigation objectives.
- Inform the Coroner's Office - if out of hours by email.
- Confirm identification and continuity of the body to the police.
- Assess the need for a Forensic Post Mortem in consultation with the SIO/HM Coroner.
- Consider deployment of a Family Liaison Officer (FLO).
- Inform Health and Safety Executive (HSE) or Air Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) if appropriate.

#### **4.4 Death in Police Custody, Mental Health Institutions, Prisons, Hospitals, death after recent contact with Police and Police pursuit involving fatality**

Where the death is of a person following immediate or recent contact with the Police, the Professional Standards Department (PSD) and Crime Scene Manager **MUST** be informed. A supervisor must also be informed so as to make decisions on how the death should be most appropriately managed.

If there is a death in police custody, this must be managed as if the death were suspicious and the investigation overseen by an SIO. Steps must be taken to preserve all available evidence with CSI attendance arranged. PSD must be made aware as soon as possible.

When a person is detained under the Mental Health Act, for example if the death occurs in St Andrews Hospital, Berrywood or St Mary's Hospital, the police should attend and conduct a proportionate investigation. All the usual Sudden Death procedures should be followed including identification statements.

If the death occurs in a prison, it should be investigated under the 'Protocol for Police Investigations – Prison, Probation and Immigration Deaths in Custody'. All deaths should be treated as potential homicides with a high standard of investigation adopted from the outset. The police have a duty to inquire into the circumstances surrounding the death and must be given primacy for their investigation. The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) also has a duty to investigate all death to which this protocol applies. A detective of at least the rank of Sergeant, as well as a CSI officer will attend every death and make an initial assessment of the circumstances surrounding the death. Custodians will ensure that the scene of the death is secured and at an early state the prison Governor will meet with the senior police officer present to identify and review actions and formulate an initial strategy.

The Force Control Room holds a list of response protocols for deaths that occur in hospital emergency departments. Police may be contacted if the NOK is not known, the death is from a trauma or the deceased is unknown and in other circumstances detailed in the protocols.

#### **4.5 Child Deaths**

All deaths involving children, (a person under the age of 18 years), will be dealt with as per the Force Guidelines. In normal office hours a Detective Sergeant from the Child Protection Team will be notified and attend and out of hours the Night Crime Car DS will attend. The Child Bereavement Investigation Workbook should be referred to and completed. There are flowcharts in this booklet as to what actions to complete. All Sudden Death forms must still be submitted to the Coroner's Office in the normal way and emailed through by the end of duty.

For more information on Child Death Investigations please click on the attached links.



## 4.6 Practical Guidance

Every sudden death, however simple or routine it may seem should be treated seriously and a proportionate investigation carried out by the attending officer. Below is a list of considerations officers should consider when attending a Sudden Death, this list is not exhaustive:

- In most cases Ambulance staff will be on scene at a Sudden Death; however this is not always the case. If you are in any doubt on attending a Sudden Death call an Ambulance immediately. Preservation of life is key and therefore if in doubt, commence lifesaving actions until the Ambulance arrives. Sergeants are only authorised to confirm life extinct in certain situations; however these are limited to fairly obvious circumstances.
- Be forensically aware, a Sudden Death can quickly turn into a criminal investigation which will involve CSI attendance. If you are in any doubt that a Sudden Death may be suspicious limit your contact with the deceased and the scene. Ensure your sergeant and a DS is contacted immediately and do not allow any witnesses or persons of interest to leave. Commence scene preservation actions.
- If a decision is made that the death is not suspicious, a cursory search of the deceased should be carried out to check for injuries. This should be completed prior to calling for undertakers. The extent of the search will be determined by the circumstances and necessity.

Consideration should be given to the following:

- The state of the property, was it insecure? Are there signs of a struggle? Are there valuable items still present or does it appear some may have been removed?
- Are there signs of alcohol or drugs use, consider seizing if located.
- Conduct a search for a suicide note? This may include written or on digital devices.
- Has there been police contact with the deceased recently? If so contact a Sergeant immediately for them to review.
- Speak with neighbors, if appropriate, in order to narrow timescales and expand our knowledge of the circumstances leading up to and post death.
- Always consider medical history, which will assist in the decision making process.
- If a NOK cannot be located in the first instance, attending officers should make a concerted effort to locate a NOK and ensure a death message is passed. If this cannot be completed, this should be handed over to the next shift. Unless there is a good reason not to, be as open and honest as possible with NOK around the circumstances of the death.

Student Officers within their first 10 weeks of tutorship will attend sudden deaths with their tutors. After this 10 weeks and when they have been declared competent for independent patrol, they are authorised to attend sudden deaths on their own.

## **5. Monitoring and Review**

The senior owner will review the content of this guidance annually to ensure that this is relevant and up to date. The author has agreed that this document will be reviewed within 12 months of the effective date.

## **6. Related Documents**

### **Child Death Investigations**



## **7. Appendices**

### Crime Scene Investigators

Crime Scene Investigators work 7 days a week between 8am and 10pm. Between 10pm and 8am an on-call rota is operated. The on-call CSI/CSM will provide advice or guidance to officers at the scene of the sudden death and where circumstances require it, a CSI/CSM will attend between 10pm and 8am.

#### CSI CONTACT DETAILS

0800 hours to 1600 hours – [REDACTED]

1600 hours to 0800 hours – On call CSI (via FIM - FCR)