

National Policing Improvement Agency Circular

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This circular is about:

**Guidance on Handling a Death of a
Serving Member of the Police
Service**

From: **Workforce Strategy**

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This circular is addressed to:

Chief Officers of Police

Copies are being sent to:

**Clerks to Police Authorities,
H R Directors, Occupational Health
Departments**

Guidance on Handling a Death of a Serving Member of the Police Service

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1. Introduction

1.1 The aim of this guidance is to provide a source of information to those called upon to manage the arrangements following the death of a serving police officer or police staff member.

1.2 It is of paramount importance that any role related to the handling of the death of an officer or member of staff should be handled with sensitivity and compassion.

1.3 An important part of managing a death in service is ensuring that the coordination of the necessary tasks takes place and is handled promptly and efficiently. As with any death, there are legal and administrative procedures which must be adhered to. Wherever possible these should not interfere with the grieving process of family and friends.

1.4 The primary tasks necessary in the event of a death in service are the responsibility of the Senior Management Team Member or Duty Officer on call until a Co-ordinator is appointed. An outline of the tasks to be considered primary tasks can be found in Annex A. The order in which these tasks are listed does not indicate priority or time sequence. It is likely that all the tasks will need to be performed as soon as possible and perhaps some conducted simultaneously.

2. Death requiring police investigation

2.1 If the circumstances surrounding the death require police investigation then the investigating officer must be consulted immediately to ensure that the primary tasks recommended in this guidance do not interfere with the investigation. In the event of a police investigation, all tasks outlined in this document should be done with the prior knowledge and consent of the Senior Investigating Officer (SIO).

2.2 The role of the SIO is covered in detail in the *ACPO Murder Investigation Manual 2006*. The guidance here highlights some of the issues an SIO will have to manage when a police officer or member of police staff is seriously injured or killed on duty. The SIO should personally take a leading role in dealing with the family and in ensuring that the Family Liaison Officer (FLO) is provided with appropriate ongoing support and supervision.

3. External notification – Home Office and HMIC

3.1 The police force is required to notify the Home Office of any police officer or police staff member who dies while on duty. They will use the information to send a letter of condolence to the Police Officer or PCSO's family. The Home Office should be notified of the following information:

- Personal details of the officer or staff member (name, age, rank, post)
- Details of the incident or circumstances surrounding the death
- A note of the deceased officer's or staff member's next of kin (name, address and relationship)
- Name(s), age(s) of any children

This information is to be sent to following contacts at the Home Office and HMIC:

The Briefing & Honours Team

Pauline Laybourne at pauline.laybourne@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk and copied to Sara Bacon at sara.bacon@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

The Staff Officer to HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary

Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

3.2 Note: It may not be appropriate for the Home Office to send letters of condolence in all circumstances. It is therefore important that police forces contact the Home Office as soon as reasonably practicable.

4. External notification – HSE

4.1 If an officer or staff member dies on duty as the result of a RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995) reportable incident then the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) should also be contacted. Telephone notifications should be made to the Incident Reporting Centre on 0845 300 9923 or online at: www.hse.gov.uk/riddor

Guidance notes on primary tasks

5. The Coordinator and/or Senior Management Team member on call

5.1 When a death occurs, the information will come from a variety of sources, and it is therefore imperative that the area or departmental commander or a member of the Senior Management Team (SMT) on call, is informed immediately.

5.2 Upon notification of a death in service, the SMT member will appoint an appropriate person to act as the Coordinator who will be responsible for ensuring that all tasks in this guide are appropriately undertaken. While considering the

appointment of a Coordinating¹ Officer, many of the primary tasks need to be undertaken immediately, and the SMT member will initiate these tasks and be responsible for their implementation until a Coordinator is identified. Upon appointment, responsibility will then pass to the Coordinator.

5.3 No training is necessary to undertake the role of Coordinator, but ideally the role should be performed by a person who is readily available to oversee arrangements, has adequate knowledge of organisational resources and a direct line to the SMT.

6. The Welfare Officer

6.1 The Welfare Officer needs to liaise with the SMT member to assess where they can assist most effectively the bereaved family and/or the deceased's colleagues. Welfare Officers will work with the Chaplaincy, Staff Association or Trade Union to ensure the most effective use of skills and resources.

6.2 If Critical Incident Debriefing is required for immediate colleagues, it is the responsibility of the Welfare Officer to liaise with the Coordinator to ensure this is arranged. The Welfare Officers have experience of handling such events and are able to assist with arrangements as required.

6.3 The Welfare Officer should also be involved in planning secondary tasks such as funeral planning, flowers, transport arrangements, etc. It is therefore important for the Welfare Officer to quickly establish a good working relationship with the Coordinator.

6.4 Previous experience has shown that in the event of an officer being killed in the course of police duty, the public and/or media may make or offer donations. Arrangements may need to be put in place to ensure that such donations are directed to the intended source by a secure and accountable route. It may be that a trust fund is required and if so this may require liaison with legal specialists, finance, family, etc. The bereaved family may wish to oversee this themselves and their wishes must be supported in whichever manner is appropriate given the circumstances.

6.5 Financial concerns may be raised with the Contact Person. It is advisable to direct these questions via the Welfare Officer, who in turn will liaise with Pay and Pensions, Staff Associations (Life & Accident Scheme, etc) and any appropriate welfare funds.

¹ For information about the Coordinator/ Co-ordinating Officer, please refer to the following document, 'Guidance on Handling a Death of a Serving Member of the Police Service'.

Care of the bereaved family and colleagues

7. Staff responsible for researching next of kin

7.1 Local knowledge will complement the personnel information held. If, for example, parents are separated, it must be ensured that wherever possible both are informed and kept up to date. Other significant relationships should also be taken into account e.g. children from a previous relationship living elsewhere or relationships with other members of staff.

7.2 Any special needs of next of kin should be identified, and consideration should be given to how this can be catered for e.g. the support of a carer or an interpreter may be required.

7.3 The faith or culture of the family may mean that appointment of an officer of a particular gender, race or faith is more appropriate. It should also be recognised that many people in the UK today do not practice or identify with any particular faith, and that respecting this is as important as respecting the religious views of those that do. In order to facilitate this, police forces should consider seeking advice from their diversity units as well as from senior clergy and faith communities.

7.4 In some cases it may be necessary that the family requires protection from the media. It may also be appropriate to post an officer outside the family home and, if so, the selection of this officer may require careful consideration.

8. The officer notifying next of kin

8.1 Police officers are already skilled in this area. However, it is recognised that the task of delivering a death message to the family of a colleague is particularly difficult. The officer or member of staff who delivers the death message should always be sufficiently senior and be in possession of the facts surrounding the death and any procedures which may be required by law. They should have access to transport should the family need or wish to attend the hospital/mortuary at which the deceased is located. The Welfare Officer and/or Chaplain may be of assistance at this stage. An interpreter may also be required. Police forces should be aware that Clergy, particularly if they are to conduct any subsequent funeral, tend to prefer not to deliver the news of death to family or colleagues.

8.2 The notifying officer may become aware that there are other issues which require additional action – such as there being others significant to the deceased or any special funeral arrangements. Where this is the case, the Coordinator needs to be kept up to date with this information in order that appropriate action can be taken.

8.3 Records should be kept which may include the following:

- The person(s) to have been informed and their relationship to deceased
- If it is not appropriate to contact this person(s) directly – a record of the person and contact number through which contact can be maintained
- The details of any contact point from whom advice regarding welfare and faith requirements has been obtained e.g. police diversity support groups, local faith community, etc.
- The name and contact number of the Family Contact Person (see below)

9. Family Contact Person

9.1 At this point it is also useful to identify a Family Contact Person, whose role it is to ensure that the family's need for contact, support and reassurance is balanced with their need for privacy. All future contact with the family should go through this source. They **must be accepted by the family** as well as being able and prepared to accept this role. If families are estranged, it may be necessary to appoint more than one Family Contact Person. Where this is the case, the Family Contact Persons must work closely together to ensure all parties are consulted appropriately.

9.2 The Family Contact Person may be a colleague, Welfare Officer, Chaplain or a member of Senior Management Team, and needs to be available to assist the family in the process of grieving. This can be a demanding role both emotionally and physically and other demands on this person's time should be taken into account e.g. their shift working pattern or their "day job" and whether it could temporarily be covered or partly covered by others.

9.3 Generally, in the initial stages families may be in shock and unable to begin thinking about arrangements. Although gathering information is usually a secondary task, any indications regarding special requests should be highlighted as early as possible to allow the best chance of accommodating them. The Family Contact Person will be instrumental for ensuring that the family's requests, for instance regarding the funeral arrangements, are conveyed to the police force via the Coordinator.

9.4 Consideration should be given to any faith/cultural requirements which must be observed and how compliance with these can be communicated e.g. requirements relating to footwear in mosques. They may benefit from liaising with the Chaplain and/or the Welfare Officers at this stage. It may be helpful for the family to have a Chaplain and/or Welfare Officer present when funeral arrangements are discussed. Reference may be made to local faith contacts or police diversity support groups for advice with such matters.

10. Care of colleagues

10.1 When a death has occurred on duty it may be appropriate for neighbouring stations/forces to provide cover in order to allow colleagues to be withdrawn from duty. The Welfare Officer and/or Chaplaincy Team may assist with this task.

10.2 If colleagues need to be notified of the death, this should be done in a private location free from interruption. Staff may need time to overcome the initial shock of hearing of the death. They should be afforded access to telephones whereby they can speak to their own families. Before colleagues leave for home it is important that an officer or member of staff with responsibility for their welfare speaks to them to ensure they are capable of getting home safely. Where necessary, transport should be provided.

10.3 They should have sources of support available to them. Contact numbers should be obtained in order that follow-up calls to check on their welfare can be undertaken as necessary. Colleagues on maternity, annual or sick leave, courses, etc. need to be included in any welfare support arrangements.

11. Staff Association/Trade Union representatives and Diversity Support Groups

11.1 All Staff Associations are particularly important in offering support to immediate colleagues, particularly if any investigation/inquiry process is necessary. The appropriate representatives of the Superintendents' Association of England and Wales, the Police Federation of England and Wales, UNISON, the GMB and PCS need to be made aware of any fatality. Police forces should also recognise the value of including any other support group, such as police diversity support groups.

11.2 Staff Association representatives need to consider who will attend any funeral service and may make arrangements for different aspects of the service, such as appropriate floral displays.

11.3 Joint Branch Board also need to be informed to ensure Group Life Scheme members are identified and arrangements can be put in place to ensure families can make appropriate claims.

11.4 It is important to seek to develop a good working dialogue between force officials and Staff Association representatives to minimise the disruption to relatives' grieving process.

Post-incident Communication

12. Post-incident considerations

12.1 Even at an early stage it is helpful if the following are considered after the event:

- Pocket book entries/statements: If circumstances warrant the appointment of an SIO then they will instruct staff in this regard
- Staff need to know how they will be updated with further information e.g. health and welfare of other colleagues, funeral arrangements or any investigation process
- The Welfare Officer may arrange for the team to be brought together one or two days later with appropriate welfare support, perhaps for a Critical Incident Debrief
- Aftercare for colleagues and assistance to return them to work safely

13. Senior Officer on call

13.1 The Duty Senior Officer will normally act as the media spokesperson in the initial stages when a death has occurred on duty and they will manage, in conjunction with the press office, the release of timely and appropriate information. The Press Officer will assist in this regard.

13.2 Any investigation process will be overseen by the SIO and legal advice may be required in order for the SIO to decide what response is appropriate in relation to legal demands around disclosure, coroner's inquests and public enquiry.

13.3 Consideration may need to be given as to whether any internal investigation is appropriate.

13.4 The Chief Constable will be responsible for liaising with the Chairperson and members of the Police Authority. Funeral, memorial and/or remembrance service arrangements will be overseen by a Senior Officer and a member of the Senior Officer Team will attend any service (subject to any family requests for privacy).

14. Press Officer

14.1 The Duty Press Officer will work closely with the Executive Officer to ensure timely and appropriate release of information to the media. It will be of benefit if the Press Officer ensures copies of all press releases are collated by the Coordinator to ensure a complete source of information is available as required.

14.2 Any media enquiry relating to the death/funeral of a member of a police force should be referred to a designated press officer in the first instant.

14.3 In the case of the murder of a serving member, media interest will be high. The police force's press officer must be kept aware of the details of the funeral plans. If there is a request by the media to attend or to enter the church for the purpose of recording or taking pictures, the press officer will consult with the person conducting the service and the family (via the family contact) before agreeing to the media entering the venue. **The wishes of the family are paramount.**

14.4 Outside the venue it may be advisable to set aside some form of enclosed area for the press. When positioning this enclosed area, thought must be given to it not causing any interference to the processions or any undue distress to the next of kin. Remember that in some cases there may be some mourners whose identity must be protected and they should be advised of the site of the press area so that they are able to avoid it should they wish. Press passes should also be used for this area and persons checked on arrival.

15. Communications Room Inspector

15.1 On receipt of notification of a death in service, the Communications Room Inspectors will, in conjunction with the Senior Management Team member or Superintendent on call, consider the following:

15.2 If the deceased normally worked in one area but the death occurred in a different area the Communication Room Inspectors will decide who is best placed to address the following considerations.

- How can the area be assisted to allow colleagues locally to be withdrawn from operational duty?
- How will any resources, which need to be withdrawn from operational use, be replaced/covered e.g. vehicles, emergency equipment?
- Outside office hours, the Welfare Officers may need to be put on standby.
- Arrangements should be made to lower the flag at Force HQ and at main stations as appropriate.

16. Preparation of force wide notification

16.1 In the early stages, sufficient information needs to be circulated to help prevent rumours and inaccurate information from being circulated. The level of information disclosed will be authorised by the Senior Duty Officer. It may be helpful to add details of the Coordinator to enable queries to be handled efficiently. It may also be necessary to inform another police force e.g. where the member of

staff is a transferee. It should be noted that an additional circulation will be made later to include funeral arrangements etc.

17. Ongoing contact with relatives of the deceased

17.1 Wherever possible, police forces should not interfere with the grieving process of family and friends and it is of paramount importance that any further contact with the relatives of the deceased should be handled with sensitivity and compassion.

17.2 Similarly, the level of engagement should reflect the needs and wishes of the next of kin and forces should remain aware that further engagement by the force may be not be welcome or appropriate.

17.3 Police forces should, however, give consideration to whether further support for relatives may be required and also be clear as to the level and type of support and advice they are able to provide if requested. The immediate impact of a death may render it difficult for the next of kin to successfully articulate their wishes. It may therefore be advisable for police forces to maintain an appropriate channel of communication to enable relatives to approach the force to obtain support if necessary (further support organisations for relatives can be found at Annex B).

17.4 It may also be appropriate for police forces to engage with relatives of the deceased in the event of any force event relating to the deceased officer or staff member such as the National Police Memorial Day. The National Police Memorial Day is a UK-registered charity which provides a dignified annual service to honour the courage and commitment of fallen police officers.

www.nationalpolicememorialday.org

Annex A

Primary Task Checklist

TASK	Allocated to (Including telephone number)	Completion confirmed by
Appoint a Co-ordinator		
Inform on call Executive Officer		
Ensure Force Communications Room Inspector is aware		
Research next of kin details		
Inform next of kin		
Identify a Family Contact Person		
Inform immediate colleagues		
Inform Press Office		
Inform Welfare Officer		
Inform Chaplaincy Team		
Inform Staff Association and relevant Diversity Support Group		
Undertake force-wide e-mail notification		
Inform Home Office/HMIC		

Annex B

Support Contact Numbers

The National Association of Chaplains to the Police

Website: www.police-chaplains.org.uk

Chaplains provide a range of confidential support services to members of the police service.

Care of Police Survivors (COPS) 0870 744 2586

Website: <http://www.ukcops.org/>

Registered UK charity dedicated to helping the families of police officers who have lost their lives in the line of duty, rebuild their lives.

National Association of Retired Police Officers (NARPO) 01924 362166

Website: www.narpo.org

A member organisation representing retired police officers of all ranks and police widows from police forces throughout England and Wales. They offer a range of services to members including those relating to welfare.

Samaritans 08457 90 90 90

Website: www.samaritans.org.uk

A confidential emotional support for anyone in crisis

Depression Alliance Cymru 0845 123 2320

A UK charity offering information to people with depression

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy 0870 443 5252

Website: www.bacp.co.uk

Access to a list of qualified counsellors available in your area

National Association of Widows 0845 838 2261

Website: www.nawidows.org.uk/

Charity for widows, run by widows

Road Peace 0845 4500 355

Website: www.roadpeace.org

A specialist charity who support road traffic victims and their families. They provide practical and emotional support and information.

The Child Bereavement Trust 0845 357 1000

Website www.childbereavement.org.uk

Information for young people who have lost someone close to them

Support Line 020 8554 9004

Website www.supportline.org.uk

Provides confidential emotional support to children, young people and adults on any issue, referring you to sources of help in your area

Winston's Wish 01242 515157 / 0845 20 30 40 5

Website www.winstonswish.org.uk

Support for bereaved children, parents and carers

Childhood Bereavement Network 020 7843 6309 - Wrexham branch 01978 316 800

Website www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/

National Resource for bereaved children and young people, their parents and care givers

The Compassionate Friends 08451 23 23 04

Website www.tcf.org.uk

Offering bereaved parents and their families understanding and support after the death of a child

The Child Death Helpline 0800 282 986

Website www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk

Offers help and support to anyone affected by the death of a child. The helpline is staffed by parent volunteers who are supported by a professional team.