

REPORT: PIRC INVESTIGATION FINDINGS

DEATH OF MAN: FAILING TO UNDERTAKE NECESSARY ENQUIRIES

About 0845 hours on 27 October 2016, 72-year-old Albert Insch was found dead in his flat within supported accommodation at 22 MacEwan Court, Inverness, by his home carer.

On 28 October 2016, the Police Investigations & Review Commissioner (PIRC) was instructed by the Lord Advocate, in terms of Section 33A(b)(ii) of the Police, Public Order and Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2006 as amended, to carry out an investigation into the circumstances of the death following concerns about how Police Scotland responded to a 999 call, apparently from Mr Insch, asking for an ambulance on the day before his body was found.

The PIRC investigated and reported the circumstances to the Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) on 5 June 2017 and now following confirmation by COPFS that no proceedings will be taken, can publish this report.

About 1414 hours on Wednesday 26 October 2016, a 999 call was made to Police Scotland from Mr Insch's mobile phone. The British Telecom operator could not determine what the caller had said before he ended the call. He therefore transferred a recording of the call to Police Scotland's Area Control Room (ACR) in Inverness, however ACR staff there were also unable to make out what the caller had said. They unsuccessfully tried to call back the mobile telephone. A subsequent examination of the recording by PIRC investigators suggests that Mr Insch said: "Hi, ambulance please mate".

ACR staff then searched Police Scotland's Command and Control system and identified that two previous calls had been made from that mobile telephone, the last of which was eight months earlier. Both calls had been made by Mr Insch who provided his address as 22 MacEwan Court. During the first of these calls, ACR staff erroneously recorded the deceased's address as Flat 4, 22 MacEwan Court.

In response to the abandoned call in October 2016 officers were despatched to the 999 call. ACR staff told the officers to attend at 22 MacEwan Court, Inverness, possibly Flat 4.

When the officers arrived at MacEwan Court, they asked an employee of the home for directions to Flat 4. The employee took them to Flat 4. After receiving no reply there, the officers then spoke to another resident who told them that Flat 4 was occupied by a female who was at that time in hospital.

This resident also told the officers that, although he did not know anyone called 'Albert' who lived in the building, he was aware of a man named 'Bert' who lived at the other end of the complex. The employee states that he then took the officers to a flat at the opposite end of the complex, where he knew that someone named 'Bert' lived and left the officers there.

However, both officers deny that the employee took them to the other flat and one officer denies that resident they initially spoke to told them about a man called 'Bert' living at the other end of the complex. The other officer stated that he could not remember being given any information relating to 'Bert' by the resident.

The officers contacted the ACR and reported that Flat 4 was occupied by a female and asked for further information. ACR staff restated that two previous calls from the mobile telephone number had been made by 'Albert Insch, 22 MacEwan Court, possibly Flat 4'.

The officers spent eight minutes at the supported accommodation before leaving about 1456 hours and when contacted by the ACR around 1620 hours, said that they had not managed to trace the caller. They were subsequently sent to an unrelated call.

ACR staff continued with attempts to contact Mr Insch by telephone without success and rechecked the information regarding the address supplied in the previous two calls. At 1938 hours, ACR staff confirmed to the officers that both previous calls referred to 'the same male at Flat 4, 22 MacEwan Court'. The officers responded that as Flat 4 was occupied by a female, who was at that time in hospital, the incident could be closed. ACR staff closed the incident at 1940 hours.

At 2040 hours, one of the officers updated the police database to the effect that he and his colleague had attended and spoken with an employee who had not heard of Albert Insch; that they had spoken to a resident who had told them that the occupier of number 4 was an elderly female who at that time was in hospital and that numerous checks by ACR staff had found nothing.

At 0845 hours on Thursday 27 October 2016 the Mr Insch's home carer entered 22 MacEwan Court via its door, which was unlocked, and found him lying dead on the floor.

Findings of the PIRC investigation

- Albert Insch was last seen alive by home carers at 0945 hours on 26 October 2016. He telephoned Police Scotland at 1414 hours using the 999 emergency number asking for an ambulance.
- The call was correctly prioritised by Police Scotland and officers were sent to the call within fifteen minutes.
- Police Scotland had previously dealt with calls from Mr Insch, during which he provided his address as 22 MacEwan Court, however ACR staff had previously wrongly recorded that Mr Insch lived at Flat 4.
- On arrival at 22 MacEwan Court, officers went to Flat 4 and received no reply to knocking on the door. A resident told officers that a woman lived at Flat 4.
- Two witnesses said they told officers that a person called 'Bert' lived at another flat in the complex. One of these witnesses said he took officers to that flat.

- Both officers deny that were taken to the other flat. One of the officers denies that he was told a man by the name 'Bert' lived at that flat, while the other officer said that he could not recall being given this information.
- Notwithstanding the conflicting accounts of the witnesses and the officers, the attending officers failed to make diligent enquiries at MacEwan Court to trace Mr Inch and establish whether he was safe and well.
- The officers spent just eight minutes at MacEwan Court and failed to update the ACR with the result of their enquiries when they left,.
- Having sent officers to make enquires, ACR supervisors should have ensured that enquiries were continued until a satisfactory outcome had been achieved or all lines of enquiry had been exhausted.
- It could not be determined whether, if officers had made more diligent efforts to trace Mr Inch, there would have been an opportunity for earlier intervention to provide medical assistance which may have provided a different outcome.

Recommendations

The Commissioner recommends to Police Scotland that it:

- Reinforces to operational officers and ACR staff the need to diligently undertake enquiries into 'dropped' 999 calls.
- Ensures that calls of this nature, in respect of elderly people, are investigated thoroughly and that officers do not leave such calls without first ensuring the welfare of the person concerned.