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Police Investigations &
Review Commissioner

OP MACDUI
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PIRC Investigation Findings

Death of 65 Year Old Woman
Glasgow
24 February 2017

BACKGROUND

On the evening of Friday 24 February 2017, the body of a 65-year old woman was found within the bedroom of her home in Glasgow after entry had been forced by Police Scotland officers.

The woman was last seen alive on the evening of Thursday 23 February 2017 by two care workers. Care workers attended the woman's home the following morning at 0930 hours, 1030 hours and 1200 hours but were unable to gain access.

The care workers then called police at 1243 hours using the 999 system to report that they were unable to gain access to the woman's home but her mobile phone could be heard ringing inside and they were concerned for her safety.

The woman was listed as a vulnerable person on Police Scotland's vulnerable persons database and two police officers went to her address. The officers decided not to force entry to the house at that time after speaking to their supervisor. They had also spoken to the woman's daughter who had indicated that the woman occasionally left home without her phone. The officers decided to defer any decision to force entry to the woman's home until the next visit of care workers later that afternoon.

At 1700 hours that day, care workers again went to the woman's home and were unable to gain entry or contact the woman. Police Scotland were contacted by care staff and asked to attend but were told that due to all officers in the area being deployed to other priority calls, no police officers were available to assist.

Over the next four hours, care staff contacted Police Scotland on four separate occasions, asking them to attend at the woman's home. The woman's daughter also contacted police during this period to outline her increasing concern for her mother.

At 1945 hours, a police inspector informed the Area Control Room (ACR) staff that police officers who were no longer required at priority incidents could be used to attend any outstanding calls.

ACR staff did not prioritise the call to the woman's home when resources became available. Nor, in accordance with Police Scotland's policy, did they direct police officers from other policing areas in neighbouring sub-divisions or from the wider Glasgow divisional area to attend the call.

Additionally, some ACR staff appeared to confuse the fact that officers attending another incident near the woman's home, were actually attending the call at her address.

When officers eventually forced entry to the woman's home at 2248 hours they found the woman dead inside.

REFERRAL TO THE PIRC

On 27 February 2017, the Police Investigations & Review Commissioner (PIRC) was instructed by the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), 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.

PIRC INVESTIGATION

The PIRC investigation focused on the police command and control of the incident on the evening of 24 February 2017 and the prioritisation of the 999 call, in particular whether it was possible or reasonable to seek assistance from another police sub-division, given the nature of the call.

PIRC Investigators visited and examined the incident scene, obtained witness statements from police officers, police staff, family members, care providers and interviewed key witnesses.

They also obtained and examined Police Scotland documentation, including telephone transcripts, computer records, radio broadcasts and information relating to deployable resources.

PIRC FINDINGS

Following investigation the Commissioner found that:

- The woman was last seen alive at 2015 hours on Thursday 23 February 2017 by care services staff.
- The woman's body was discovered in her home at 2248 hours on Friday 24 February 2017 after entry was forced by police officers.
- Following a post mortem and toxicology analysis, the cause of death was provided as Dihydrocodeine, tramadol and amphetamine intoxication but the time of her death could not be determined.
- The woman was known to Police Scotland and care services as a vulnerable person and featured extensively on Police Scotland's Interim Vulnerable Persons Database (IVPD).
- Care staff, who visited the woman three times a day, were unable to gain access to the woman's house or make contact with her when they went to her home on three separate occasions on the morning of Friday 24 February 2017.
- Care staff contacted Police Scotland at 1243 hours on 24 February 2017 and notified them of their concerns for the woman's safety.
- The call was appropriately assessed as a Grade 2 priority call which indicates that there was a degree of urgency associated with the call and required police officers to be sent within 15 minutes of the call being accepted.

- On the basis that the woman was occasionally not at her home when care staff attended and contrary to Police Scotland's Command and Control Standard Operating Procedure, a Communications Officer in the Area Control Room, without authorisation from supervisors but following a conversation with a Sergeant, took a decision not to force entry to the woman's house until after the next scheduled care staff visit at 1700 hours that day.
- At 1700 hours, officers in the Glasgow Division east area command were dealing with other priority calls.
- Once officers were released from those other priority enquiries and despite repeated requests by care staff for police assistance, due to errors by ACR staff, no officers were sent to the woman's home until 2124 hours. The officers did not arrive there until 2239 hours and were unable to force entry until 2248 hours.
- Staff in the ACR did not follow standard procedures in dealing with the call to attend the woman's home. They did not seek or receive supervisory approval to defer the call initially nor did they follow guidance to deploy resources from outside the immediate area to assist in attending calls.
- There was lack of focus and prioritisation of the call to the woman's home by Police Scotland which resulted in it being overlooked between 1945 hours and 2124 hours.
- Police officers in other areas of Glasgow Division who were available to assist were not directed by ACR staff to attend the incident. If they had been, entry would have been gained to the woman's home earlier. However, it cannot be established that if such action had been taken, whether the woman would have been found alive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The PIRC findings were shared with Police Scotland at an early stage in the investigation and improved guidance and specific measures regarding;

- Managing 'Concern for a Person' reports and forcing entry to property';
- Concern for Person incidents which are graded as a Priority 2 response to receive specific supervision by Inspectors within the Area Control Rooms;
- Police supervisors to ensure that all deployable resources in a Division were shown as being 'on duty' at the relevant times, indicating to ACR staff that such resources were then available to be deployed as necessary;
- ACR staff using officers from neighbouring sub-divisions and areas to attend calls where all resources in that area were engaged in other priority calls, have now been put in place.