PIRC Investigation
Findings

Death Following Police Contact
Musselburgh
9 May 2018
BACKGROUND

About 0230 hours on Wednesday 9 May 2018 the body of a 39-year-old woman was found by Police Scotland officers in her home in Musselburgh.

On 5 May 2018 a family member first contacted Police Scotland to report concern for the woman’s welfare. Local officers were sent to the woman’s home later that day and found the woman safe and well. They updated her family with this information.

About 1355 hours on 8 May 2018, the family member contacted Police Scotland again to report concern for the woman as she had not been seen or heard from since 5 May 2018. An officer went to the woman’s house around 1700 hours but received no reply. He went back at around 2100 hours that night when he gained entry to the house and carried out a search of the property but did not find the woman.

After gaining more information from the family member about the woman’s health, officers returned to the house at 0230 hours on Wednesday 9 May 2018 and found the woman lying dead in a cupboard.

The cause of death was determined as ‘Alcoholic Ketoacidosis’.

REFERRAL TO THE PIRC


PIRC INVESTIGATION

The PIRC investigation focused on the police handling of the incident, the decision making processes relating to family concerns for the woman and the subsequent action taken.

PIRC investigators visited the scene, obtained statements from police officers, police staff and civilians. They also examined Command and Control incident logs, telephone and Airwave recordings, Police Scotland Standard Operating Procedures and documents.

PIRC FINDINGS

Following investigation the Commissioner found that:

- Between 1355 hours and 2227 hours on 8 May 2018 Police Scotland treated the incident as a ‘Concern For Person’ rather than a ‘Missing Person’ enquiry. Police officers explained to the PIRC that this was because they were aware that the woman had been traced and found safe on 5 May 2018 following a similar call.

- During her initial call to police about 1355 hours on 8 May 2018, a family member reported that the woman was on Police Scotland’s interim Vulnerable Person Database (iVPD). Despite this, Police Scotland graded her initially as a Low Risk Missing Person.
Whilst the family member’s call was identified as a Grade 2 call – which requires ACR staff to make every effort to allocate resources to the call within 15 minutes of acceptance of the call by the Bilston Area Control Room - there were no available resources to deploy as they were already dealing with other priority incidents.

As no police resources had been deployed by 1700 hours a police sergeant went to the womans address on his own initiative but gained no response when he knocked on the door. As he had not been updated with any additional information by 2100 hours, and remained concerned for the woman’s safety, he returned to the address and succeeded in gaining entry by slipping the lock. He then conducted a cursory search of the property.

On his return to the police office, the sergeant learned that further information about the woman had been received from a family member and the Social Work Department. The incident was then declared as a Missing Person Enquiry. Other officers went to the womans home where they carried out a search and found her body in a cupboard within the house about 0230 hours on 9 May 2018.

It cannot be determined from the medical evidence whether the woman would have been found alive if an effective search of the property had taken place about 2100 hours on 8 May 2018.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Commissioner recommends that Police Scotland should:

- Review the resource management and non-deployment of officers to this incident and take any necessary action to address ongoing shortfalls. Despite the fact that the incident was allocated Grade 2 status – Priority which relates to a ‘Crime/Incident where there is a degree of urgency associated with police action’, no police resources were dispatched by the Area Control Room to the home address of the deceased during the entire incident. The only officers to attend, did so unactioned and on their own initiative.

- Examine its decision making process in relation to risk throughout this entire incident (between 1355 hours on 8 May 2018 and 0230 hours on 9 May 2018), giving particular cognisance to the facts that Police Scotland graded the woman as a Low Risk Missing Person despite information being provided by a family member and on police systems which indicated that she had serious health issues.

- Examine the control and deployment of other resources to attend incidents in Edinburgh and Lothians and Scottish Borders Divisions where local resources are fully committed in dealing with other priority incidents.

- Revisit its commitment to reviewing ‘resource allocation and call handling issues’ which it provided in response to a PIRC investigation in 2016.

- Report to the Commissioner within 3 months of the date of issue of this report on action taken to implement the above recommendations.