

pirc

Police Investigations &  
Review Commissioner

A guide for  
**families**  
on the role of the PIRC



This leaflet tells you about the Police Investigations & Review Commissioner (PIRC) and outlines the role of the PIRC Family Liaison Officers (“FLO”).

It also provides you with information on what may happen during the course of an investigation and tries to provide relevant information in the form of frequently asked questions (FAQs) on page 8.

If you need anything in this leaflet explained to you, please ask your FLO who will try to help you.

There are support groups which can offer you advice and support at this difficult time or direct you to other services which may assist you. Contact details for these organisations are on the back of this leaflet.

## Contents

- 3 ABOUT THE PIRC**
- 5 ABOUT PIRC FAMILY LIASON OFFICERS (FLOs)**
- 6 HANDLING MEDIA ATTENTION**
- 8 FAQs**
- 10 SUPPORT SERVICES**
- 12 ACCESSIBILITY AND CONTACT DETAILS**

# About the PIRC

## **WHO IS THE PIRC?**

The PIRC provides a free and impartial service and is independent of the police. The Commissioner is appointed by Scottish Ministers and it is a condition of that appointment that they are not, and have never been, a member of a police body or an elected politician.

The post of the Commissioner was first established in 2007 by the Police, Public Order and Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2006 which was amended by the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012. This is the same legislation that brought about a single police service in Scotland.

## **WHAT DOES THE PIRC DO?**

- The PIRC carries out independent investigations into certain incidents involving the police.
- The PIRC reviews how policing bodies in Scotland have handled complaints made about them by the public.
- The PIRC ensures that Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) have suitable systems in place for handling complaints.

## **WHAT POWERS DO PIRC INVESTIGATORS HAVE?**

PIRC investigators have the powers of a police officer in Scotland, but only while they are carrying out investigations.

## **WHAT TYPE OF INVESTIGATION DOES THE PIRC UNDERTAKE?**

One of our responsibilities is to investigate circumstances surrounding a person's death where there has been contact, either directly or indirectly, between the person and the police in the period leading up to, or at the time of, their death. In some circumstances the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) will instruct us to investigate. In other circumstances Police Scotland will ask us to do so.



## WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE PIRC IN AN INVESTIGATION?

Our role is to gather all the available evidence in an effort to establish what happened, it is not to apportion blame. We seek to conduct our investigations in a fair and transparent manner.

One of the ways in which we do this is by appointing specially trained PIRC Family Liaison Officers (FLOs), who work as part of the investigation team, to families who have been bereaved in these circumstances.

At the end of the investigation we report our findings to the COPFS if it instructed the investigation or to Police Scotland if it requested we investigate.



# About PIRC Family Liaison Officers (FLOs )

## **WHO ARE THE PIRC FLOs?**

PIRC FLOs are appointed to give you and your family information about the investigation. In most cases the FLO will liaise with you throughout the investigation and is your single point of contact. The FLO will ask you to nominate someone to be the contact person for you/your family.

## **WHAT IS THEIR ROLE?**

The main role of the FLO is to develop a two-way flow of information between the investigation team and you/your family. The FLO will keep you updated on the progress of the investigation; will give you as much information as possible as quickly as possible; and will endeavour to answer your questions throughout the investigation. The FLO may also have questions for you.

The role of the FLO may include the following:

- Explaining their role to you.
- Providing you with details on how you may contact them.
- Passing any information provided by you to the investigation team.
- Taking statements, from you, family members and friends to assist the investigation.
- Answering any questions which you may have about the investigation.
- Updating you on the progress of the investigation.
- Giving you information about other agencies which may provide support for you and your family.
- Liaising with other agencies.

Should you require any further information or have any concerns, you may contact the FLO.

You may find it useful to write down any questions or information you have, so that when you meet or speak to the FLO, you do not forget to mention anything important to you.





## Handling media attention

### **WHAT IF I AM CONTACTED BY THE MEDIA?**

There may be media interest surrounding the death and investigation. Questions from the media can be difficult to deal with. However, it is helpful to remember that sometimes the media can play an important role in the investigation.

You may not want to speak to the media or you may find that their level of interest is too much to cope with or is insensitive.

If you cannot cope with the attention you should speak to the FLO, who may be able to assist in reducing the level of contact you have with the media. It may be appropriate to provide a brief statement to the media to help manage the level of interest surrounding the death. The FLO, in conjunction with the PIRC's Communication team, can provide guidance and support with this.

The FLO may ask you to choose a photograph of the person who died to share with the media. This will avoid the media going to considerable lengths to find images elsewhere and gives you some control over the images used. The FLO will arrange for copies to be made and given to the media, where this has been requested and you consent.



## FAQs

### **WHAT HAPPENS TO THE POSSESSIONS OF THE PERSON WHO HAS DIED?**

Depending on the circumstances of the death, the PIRC may need to keep property belonging to the person as part of the investigation. In some cases, it may be possible for us to photograph or copy the property and then return it to you. However, where the PIRC has property that may be required as evidence as part of the investigation, it may be some time before the property can be returned to you. Please be patient. We do understand that you may want the possessions returned as soon as possible. The FLO will be able to give you guidance in relation to the return of property.

### **WHO WILL BE IN CHARGE OF THE PIRC INVESTIGATION?**

The PIRC will appoint a Lead Investigator who will lead the investigation and will instruct the investigation team to carry out any necessary enquiries. Our role is not to apportion blame but rather to gather all the available evidence to establish what happened.

We seek to conduct our investigations in a fair and transparent manner.

### **WHAT IS MEANT BY THE GATHERING OF EVIDENCE?**

It is very important that all necessary forensic evidence is quickly gathered. Photographs may be taken at scenes and materials, objects and personal items may be taken away to assist with the investigation. Where items gathered by our office are the property of the deceased person or your family, we will endeavour to return them to you as soon as possible. CCTV evidence may be obtained and police officers and civilian witnesses interviewed as part of the investigation into the circumstances of the death.

### **HOW LONG WILL THE PIRC INVESTIGATION TAKE?**

There is no set time limit for the investigation. The Lead Investigator is responsible for managing the investigation and will endeavour to ensure that the FLO is updated, who will in turn keep you informed of progress. The investigation will be carried out in as timely and thorough a manner as possible. As part of the investigation, we may need to interview family members and obtain statements.

### **HOW OFTEN WILL THE PIRC FAMILY LIAISON OFFICER CONTACT THE FAMILY?**

The frequency of family contact will be discussed between the FLO and the family contact. It will be at a time and day that is convenient to the family and consistent with the investigation.

### **WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE INVESTIGATION IS COMPLETED?**

At the end of an investigation, the PIRC will do one of two things:

If the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) instructed the investigation, the PIRC will submit a report directly to the COPFS. The PIRC Family Liaison Officer will then hand over responsibility for liaising with you to the Victim Information Agency (VIA) which is part of the COPFS. VIA will maintain contact with you regarding what happens next.

If Police Scotland requested that the PIRC carry out the investigation, the PIRC will provide the police with a report and may also publish the report on the PIRC website. The FLO will also meet you to discuss the findings of the investigation and will let you know whether the PIRC will be publishing a report and, if so, when.



## Support services

Some people find it helpful to talk to someone from one of the many organisations, charities and self-help groups that support bereaved families. You may prefer to locate these services yourself or alternatively, you can speak to your FLO who may be able to assist you in obtaining details of support services in your area.

### **YOU MAY FIND THE FOLLOWING SERVICES USEFUL:**

People Experiencing Trauma and Loss (PETAL)

8 Barrack Street, Hamilton, ML3 0DG

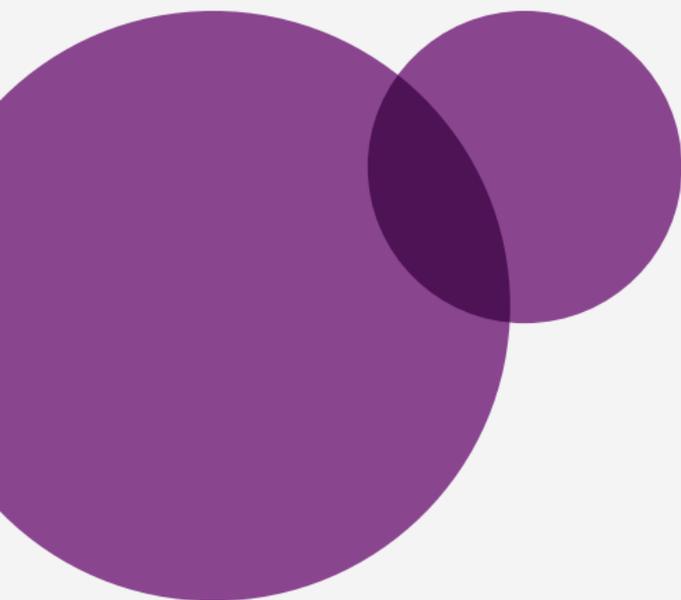
T: 01698 324502 [www.petalsupport.com](http://www.petalsupport.com)

Citizens Advice Scotland

T: 0808 800 9060 [www.cas.org.uk](http://www.cas.org.uk)

Victim Support Scotland (VSS)

T: 0800 160 1985 [www.victimsupportsco.org.uk](http://www.victimsupportsco.org.uk)





# Accessibility

This leaflet and other materials may be available in other formats. Please contact the PIRC to discuss your requirements.

This leaflet is also available from **pirc.scot**, where you can also find more information on the role of the Police Investigations & Review Commissioner.

pirc

Police Investigations &  
Review Commissioner

---

Hamilton House, Hamilton Business Park,  
Caird Park, Hamilton ML3 0QA  
T: 01698 542 900 E: [enquiries@pirc.gov.scot](mailto:enquiries@pirc.gov.scot)

 |  @PIRCNews | [pirc.scot](http://pirc.scot)

April 2019 © Police Investigations & Review Commissioner