



Response Date: 31/07/2026

2026/750 - Sudden death, apparent suicide and domestic abuse-context policies

In response to your recent request for information regarding;

This request is limited to current policy documents only. I am not asking for case material, audits, training records, historic versions, internal reviews or correspondence.

Please provide copies of the current policy, procedure, standard operating procedure or formal guidance used by your force that governs:

1. Sudden unexpected death / unexplained death / apparent suicide

The current force policy or procedure for sudden unexpected death, unexplained death, apparent suicide, suspected suicide, or death where no crime is initially apparent.

Please find attached.

2. Domestic abuse or coercive-control context in apparent suicide or sudden death
Any current policy or policy section that requires officers or staff to consider domestic abuse, coercive control, stalking, harassment, recent separation, recent relationship conflict, family/friend concern, prior domestic abuse call-outs, or partner/ex-partner involvement when attending or investigating a sudden death or apparent suicide.

3. Classification and provisional decision-making

Any current policy or policy section stating whether a death initially considered apparent suicide or non-suspicious should remain provisional where domestic abuse, coercive control, stalking, harassment, digital abuse, prior police contact or family concern may be relevant.

4. Evidence preservation and contemporaneous accounts

Any current policy or policy section on scene preservation, evidence preservation, decision logs, supervisory review, or taking contemporaneous accounts at the scene and at the time in sudden death or apparent suicide cases.

5. Digital evidence

Any current policy or policy section on seizure, preservation, download, retention, examination or release of digital devices or digital data in sudden death, apparent suicide or domestic abuse-context deaths, including phones, laptops, tablets, cloud accounts, messages, call logs, social media or search history.

6. Family liaison and death notification

Any current policy or policy section on family liaison, family contact, bereavement communication or death notification in sudden death or apparent suicide cases.

Please include any policy section that explains whether classification as apparent suicide affects whether a Family Liaison Officer, specialist family contact officer, or bereavement-trained officer/practitioner can be allocated.

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Glan-y-Don, Bae Colwyn LL29 8AW
www.heddlugogleddcymru.police.uk

Police Headquarters,
Glan-y-Don, Colwyn Bay LL29 8AW
www.northwales.police.uk

7. DHR / DARDR / suspected victim suicide following domestic abuse

Any current policy or policy section on referral to Domestic Homicide Review, Domestic Abuse Related Death Review, or suspected victim suicide following domestic abuse processes where a death is initially recorded as apparent suicide.

No information held.

THIS INFORMATION HAS BEEN PROVIDED IN RESPONSE TO A REQUEST
UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000, AND IS CORRECT AS AT 29/07/2026



**HEDDLU
GOGLEDD CYMRU
NORTH WALES
POLICE**

SUDDEN, UNEXPECTED & SUSPICIOUS DEATH POLICY

Governance:	Senior Leadership Team		
Document Type:	Policy		
Policy Owner:	Head of Crime Services		
Department:	Crime Services		
Policy Writer:	Detective Inspector FMIT		
Policy Number:	050	Version:	2.5
Effective Date:	01/10/2024		
Recommended Review Date:	01/10/2026		

POLICY

CHANGE HISTORY				
Version No	Date	Author	Changes	Ratification
2.0		T/DCI	Update of guidance document in line with changes outlined within accompanying SARA.	
2.1		DI	Minor amendments as recommended by the Policy Board.	
2.2		DCI	Transferred to new corporate template. Reviewed to ensure content still fit for purpose. Minor amendments to include use of BWV	
2.3		DI	Amendment to para 5.3.2	
2.4	30/01/23	D/Supt	Amendments to reflect updated best practice around response to sudden and unexpected deaths -removing the term 'unexplained'.	
2.5	05/09/24	DI	Removal of 'shaken baby' documents in para 3.2. Amendment to Para 5.9 re. information to be provided to FCC. Amendment to Para 5.11 surrounding drug deaths.	

			Addition of Para 5.16.1 for Suicide linked to Domestic Abuse.	
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1. WHY IS THIS POLICY REQUIRED?

This policy will

1.1 Ensure that all sudden, unexpected and suspicious deaths are investigated thoroughly.

1.2 Ensure that a reported death is treated as suspicious unless and until the Police Investigation has established it is not. The term 'unexplained' death is NOT be used as it may distract officers from the correct and necessary approach.

1.3 Ensure that a professional, effective and consistent service is provided to the deceased and to the deceased's family and friends.

1.4 Ensure a high standard of investigation thereby maintaining the public trust and confidence in North Wales Police and ensuring where relevant that all available evidence is presented to the Coroner and criminal courts.

2. WHO SHOULD USE THIS POLICY?

2.1 **This policy should be used by** all members of North Wales Police who are involved in the investigation of sudden death this includes:

- Control room staff and supervisors initially in receipt of a sudden death report.
- Police Officers attending the scene of such a report.
- Investigative staff tasked with subsequent inquiries into the death

2.2 This policy includes:

- The procedure to be followed by all staff involved in the investigation of sudden, unexpected and suspicious deaths.

3. WHAT SHOULD I CONSIDER WHEN USING THIS POLICY?

3.1 The policy should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- [Appendix A – Aide Memoire](#)
- [Appendix B - New Streamline Sudden Death Form](#)
- [Appendix C - Managing Non-Evidential Property Flowchart](#)

3.2 Further Relevant Information

- [The Coroner's Act 1988](#)
- [Major-Crime-Investigation-Manual-Nov-2021.pdf \(college.police.uk\)](#)
- [Practice Advice on Core Investigative Doctrine](#)
- [NPCC / HSE / CPS Protocol on Work Related Deaths](#)
- [North Wales Multi Agency Procedural Response to Unexpected Deaths in Childhood.](#)
- [Human Tissue Policy for England and Wales](#)
- [Non Accidental Head Injury Cases \(NAHI, formerly referred to as Shaken Baby Syndrome \[SBS\]\) - Prosecution Approach](#)
- [NPCC Practice Advice on FLO Deployment – Deaths of British Nationals Abroad \(college.police.uk\)](#)

4. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

4.1 FCC Staff	• Take the initial call. • Create an incident log. • Crime Recording: ○ All unexpected reports of death should be recorded on the force crime recording systems in line with Home Office Crime recording Standards. ○ An unexpected death should only be recorded as a crime (notifiable offence) if it is immediately apparent that: a) the circumstances of the incident amount to a crime as defined by law; and
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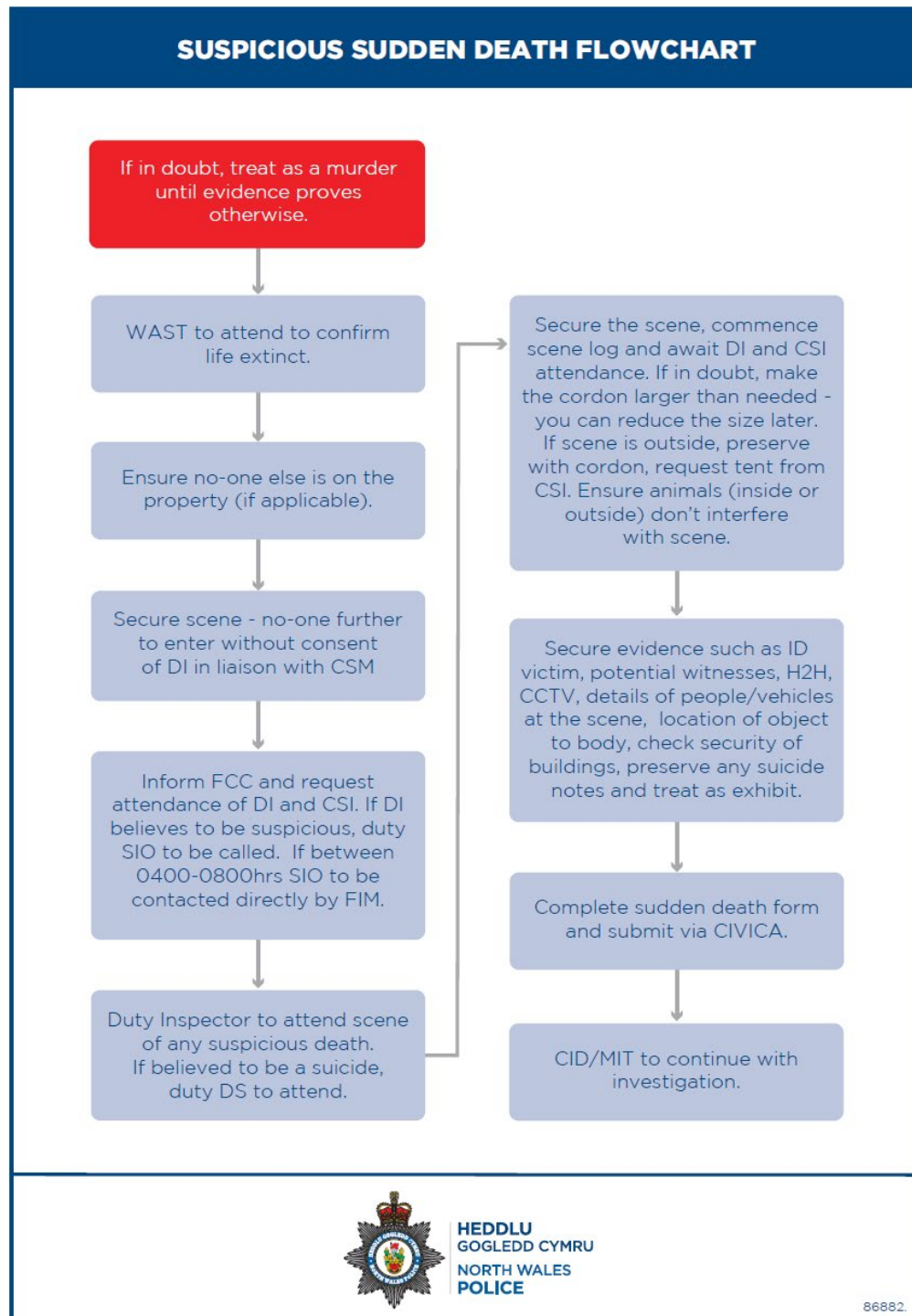
	b) there is no credible evidence to the contrary immediately available. Once an initial assessment has been made of the circumstances of a reported death, an appropriate level of resource must be allocated to respond. There are 4 classifications for death investigations: ○ Expected death. For example, where there is a medical diagnosis, and a medical practitioner is able to sign a medical certificate of cause of death. ○ Unexpected death - under investigation. Where the death was not expected, and the police investigation has not yet been able to prove or disprove there was any third party involvement and further investigation is required ○ Unexpected death - investigated and not suspicious. Where the death was not expected, and the police investigation has secured evidence to indicate there is no third party involvement ○ Homicide – Where the death was not expected and the police investigation has established in all likelihood there was third party involvement, or obvious evidence of homicide
4.2 Response Officer	• Attend the scene and establish the full circumstances. • Make an informed assessment of the situation. Death to be treated as suspicious unless or until investigations reveals otherwise • Secure and preserve evidence. • Escalate where necessary.
4.3 Response Supervisor	• Ensure supervision of the attendance. • Assess the information available and provided.

	• Make an informed decision on escalation or referral to CID. • In defined circumstances, supervisors can confirm death (as per 5.3.2 Preservation of life)
4.4 CID	• Attend the scene where required by response supervisor. • Assess the information available and ascertain if the death is deemed suspicious. • Escalate to duty Det Insp and / or SIO where applicable.
4.5 Det Insp	• Take on initial command and control of a death to which this policy applies.
4.6 SIO	• Take on the role of Senior Investigation Officer where it is deemed appropriate to do so given the circumstances of the individual case. The SIO will refer to the Major Crime Investigation Manual November 2021
4.7 Coroners Officer	• Carry out coronial duties as directed by the HM Coroner.
4.8 Force Crime Registrar	• Have oversight of all records that do not result in the recording of a confirmed crime and ensure that the appropriate classification code is applied

5. THE PROCESS

SECTION 1 – STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

5.1 STANDARD OPERATING PRACTICE WHEN DEALING WITH A SUSPICIOUS DEATH



REPORTS TO JCC:**5.1.1 Checklist – JCC / Call Handlers / Radio Operators / Communications Room Supervisor – Responsibilities**

- ☐ Create an 'incident log' on which to record accurate detail of all information received and transmitted.
- ☐ Make an early identification of the potential seriousness and nature of the incident.
- ☐ If English is not the caller's first language or they cannot be fully understood, consider use of appropriate interpretation facilities.
- ☐ Give priority to the preservation of life. Call emergency services if required and / or provide first – aid advice.
- ☐ Establish whether the caller is injured; if so, do they require medical assistance?
- ☐ Obtain factual, accurate, and detailed information.
- ☐ Adopt mind-set of an investigator, i.e. 'Who, What, Where, When, Why and How' principles.
- ☐ Be aware the caller may be the victim, offender, or key witness (so exact words used and information elicited may become crucial).
- ☐ Reassure the caller that police / help is on the way.
- ☐ Give advice to remove the caller and / or victim from any immediate danger.
- ☐ If suspect still present, keep caller on the line (any background noise should be recorded and could be used as evidence as well as monitoring the incident).

- ☐ Deploy resources to key points quickly and confirm their attendance.
- ☐ Make patrol supervision and duty patrol inspector aware and request their attendance immediately.
- ☐ Request detective(s) to attend.
- ☐ On confirmation from supervisory officer at the scene, inform senior duty detective and / or on call SIO
- ☐ Notify the duty CSI / CSM
- ☐ Keep all logs, tapes, and other documentary evidence relating to handling of the incident.
- ☐ Do not give out any details to the media unless authorised to do so by a senior officer and / or the duty SIO.

5.1.2 Information Gathering

Who:

- Who is making the call? (Identify the caller).
- Establish whether caller is willing and able to remain at the scene.

Initial Response

- Who is involved?
- Who is still at the scene?
- Who is the victim and what, if any, relationship are they to the caller?
- Who else knows about (witness identification)?

- Who is / are they offender(s)? Are they still at the scene or nearby? If not, which direction did they go in? Are they on foot or in a vehicle? Consider search / road checks. Circulate details.

- Who or what has been despatched (e.g. confirm ambulance en route if required).

What:

- What has happened or is happening? (Is violence being used or threatened now?).
- What is offence type (e.g. murder, rape, robbery etc.).
- What action has the caller already taken? (If practicable, request their assistance, i.e. inform them that nothing should be touched or disturbed, not to allow anyone to enter the crime scene, touch a body, tidy round, drop litter, etc.).
- What is an accurate description of offender(s), including sex, colour, age, height, build and clothing?
- What is the individual situation and the caller's vulnerability?
- What is going on in the background? (Listen to any background noise for what may be going on or where they might be).
- What vehicles are involved? (Obtain make, model, colour, and registration number).
- What weapons have been used or seen? (In the case of a firearms incident or potential shooting, inform a specialist armed response team to attend the scene and render it safe for other, unarmed personnel).
- What support ('back up') is required?

- What information needs to be circulated immediately (e.g. details or descriptions of offenders, vehicles, etc.).

Where:

- Where exactly did it happen? (Identify exact location of incident, crime scene(s), or any other location which may be linked, e.g. vehicle, offender's address).
- Where is the caller now? (Advise they stay at that location and await police response).
- Where is the rendezvous point (RVP) for staff, emergency services, e.g. ambulance?

When, How and Why:

- When exactly did it happen? Obtain precise details of timing of the incident
- How did it happen?
- How many offenders?
- Why has incident occurred, e.g. any precursor incidents?

5.2 REPORTS TO PATROLLING OFFICERS OR STAFF AT ENQUIRY OFFICES IN POLICE STATIONS

Occasionally reports are made of an incident to officers on patrol or at a police station enquiry desk. These officers and staff are then placed in a position similar to that of a call handler and should adopt the same principles and method of eliciting factual information, carefully noting the time and recording full circumstances. The person making the report should wherever possible remain with the officer and not be allowed to disappear. This is in order to allow sufficient time to determine the full extent of what they have seen or heard and arrange for a fuller interview.

5.2.1 Initial Response

If an individual refuses to provide personal details, the officer must record all they can about them and ensure their BWV is switched on – full description, clothing worn, who they are in the company of, vehicles, etc. This may assist later to establish their full identity and conduct a follow – up interview. It must be stressed that the person could well be involved in the incidents or even be the perpetrator.

5.2.2 Key Points

- The first officer at the scene, irrespective of rank, takes control of the incident (as incident officer) until a formal command structure is established.
- Ensure officers deployed to the scene have BWV which is switched on and recording
- If more than one officer attends a scene, it does not need everyone to go in to make an assessment – Preservation of the scene may be crucial so the less contamination the better.
- Although protection and preservation is a responsibility of the first officer(s) to attend at the crime scene, all subsequent personnel responding to and arriving at the scene carry an equal responsibility in this important duty.
- What these officers see, hear, record, touch, and do may later prove vital to an investigation.
- In some cases there may be more than one scene that requires identifying and securing quickly.

5.3 FIRST OFFICERS ATTENDING

The golden rule is to always identify, secure, and protect crime scenes.

Body worn video cameras should be utilised to ensure that best evidence and an understanding of the scene is captured and available for dissemination.

It is important to ensure all areas relating to the scene are cordoned off and a crime scene log commenced. The duty of the first officer(s) attending is to prevent any disturbance and stop all unauthorised persons entering the scene. This includes supervisory and senior officers unless there is an urgent operational need to gain entry. It is easier to reduce the size of a cordon at a later date, than risk losing evidence by needing to increase the cordon size later on.

In order to do this there must be a rapid and objective assessment based on information known at the time, the location of any body, the presence of any physical evidence, and / or any useful natural boundaries. This entails a thorough yet cautious initial visual check of the surroundings. This may be used in the first instance when resources are limited or finding the object or person is time-critical. Consideration must be given to the potential risk of damaging forensic opportunities. This technique would not negate the need for a more detailed search later should the circumstances warrant it.

Any item at a scene can be of evidential value, therefore it is vital that nothing is touched or moved. If, however, a need arises because something of a physical nature is in immediate danger of being lost, destroyed, or contaminated, then steps should be taken to protect or recover the item in order to secure evidence. In such instances, the officer should remove the item with minimum disturbance, carefully recording the exact position and location of the exhibit. Prior to doing so Body Worn Video should be utilised to capture the scene, the item and its sterile recovery. Exhibits may include such things as footprints or tyre impressions in mud or soil that may get washed away in the rain or blood traces that need covering up to protect them from inclement weather.

5.3.1 Checklist – First Officers Attending – Responsibilities

Ten main actions for first officer(s) responding (as per 'golden hour(s)' principle), remember the priority is always safety:

- ☐ Records exact time of arrival and provide situation report to control room.
- ☐ Identify primary scene and enter / exit using only one point of entry for an initial assessment.
- ☐ Request additional resources as required.
- ☐ Attend any victims, casualties, or bodies. With bodies, check for signs of life. Administer first aid and summon emergency services if required (e.g. paramedics). If deceased, cause as little disturbance as possible and ensure life pronounced extinct.
- ☐ Protect the scene and safeguard evidence. Isolate perimeter with barrier tape and a cordon. A log is to be started. Do not touch, disturb, or remove anything unless absolutely necessary and note any changes made. Prevent unauthorised access. Once death is certified, no-one is to enter the scene without the permission of the SIO and duty CSM.
- ☐ Establish victim's identity and next of kin. If family, relatives, and friends present, deal sensitively, giving preliminary support and advice.
- ☐ Identify and separate witnesses and prevent from leaving.
- ☐ Make assessment of information available and identify urgent enquiries, taking whatever action is immediately necessary.
- ☐ Identify and arrest any suspect(s) if present (ideally by person who has not visited crime scene to reduce risk of cross contamination).
- ☐ Commence scene log and record details of all persons present.

5.3.2 Preservation of Life

With the rapid response to any major crime scene, the first priority must be to preserve life and ensure the welfare of any victim(s). If in any doubt whatsoever as to death or possible signs of life and it is not obvious, first aid and resuscitation techniques should be attempted and medical assistance summoned immediately. There have been significant advances in medical science and resuscitation techniques and people who have suffered serious trauma can often be kept alive for a longer period of time, and hopefully make a full recovery.

In certain exceptional and clearly defined circumstances where it is obvious that there is no possibility of life, and there are NO suspicious circumstances, a supervisory Police Officer at least of the rank of Sergeant may confirm death. These circumstances are:

- Decapitation
- Dismemberment to the point where life is clearly extinct
- Decomposition to the point where life is clearly extinct
- Incineration to the point where life is clearly extinct
- Where the body is a skeleton
- In cases of drowning where a person has been submerged for a significant period, supported by discolouration, decomposition, bloating, and in the absence of breathing and absence of pulse.
- Where the body is in a state of rigor mortis, accompanied by significant discolouration (including pooling of blood by gravity) and there is absence of breathing and absence of pulse. The prevailing circumstances and history should also be conducive with the fact that the person has died.

In these prescribed scenarios, there is no requirement for an ambulance or medical professional to be called. Clearly if in any doubt then an Ambulance **MUST** be called to preserve life.

This authority cannot be delegated nor given remotely. The supervisor MUST attend the scene. A statement must be completed by the relevant Sergeant to describe the scene, provide rationale and document the date/time/place death was confirmed.

Worthy of note is that if a victim of assault is critically ill and likely to die; the incident should still be treated as a full murder investigation. There should be no reliance on the possibility that the incident may not progress to a full-scale investigation, as valuable time may be lost in establishing the correct procedures and safeguarding potential evidence and valuable lines of enquiry.

The protection of life extends not only to that of the victim but also to others at the scene, including members of the public, other officers, and the suspect. A further point is that no attempt should be made to search any victim for identification at this early stage as this could destroy vital evidence.

5.3.3 Emergency Services

Personnel such as paramedics require debriefing quickly at the scene as they have a habit of redeploying to deal with other emergencies. Quite often they will have arrived at the scene prior to any police attendance, particularly if despatched first, or separately by the public, or their own control room. They keep their own records of the circumstances and injuries, and may even obtain or hear accounts from victims and / witnesses. In some instances, consideration may need to be given to treating them as key and significant witnesses dependent on what they have seen or heard.

Ambulance crew are not trained investigators and must be completely debriefed as to how they gained entry to the scene (indoors or outdoors) and where they have been and what they have moved. They should be asked questions such as: Who was present? What did they see? What did the victim say? Contact details should be recorded for other emergency services present.

5.3.4 Key Points

- General rule is that medical personnel (e.g. paramedics) have primacy at a scene until death is established. If a death is suspicious, the preservation of evidence takes precedence and a victim's body must **not** be transported to hospital or further disturbed.
- Medical staff that arrive at scenes tend to disturb and / or contaminate potential evidence. This is mostly unavoidable and should be borne in mind when interpreting the crime scene. There is every possibility the body will have been moved to administer medical aid. Use of emergency resuscitation devices such as defibrillators may even cause slight injuries to the body, which together with any discarded medical equipment need to be accounted for.

5.3.5 Initial Response

- Sensible judgement should apply to the recovery of trace evidence from emergency services' personnel, clothing, footwear, or vehicles, e.g. ambulances. Local agreements between the police and health authorities should provide guidance on what should / should not be retained or impounded for forensic examination. Usually samples can be taken without the need to disrupt the ability of the emergency resources to continue providing a normal service. If ambulances' and / or rapid response type vehicles are within a cordon, a path can be cleared for their release and tyre impressions can be taken or photographed prior to their release or at some later stage for elimination purposes. Normally if victims are placed within ambulances, the only items that should be considered for seizing are blankets. It is not a good idea to seize equipment needed for other patients such as defibrillators. The SIO may need to refer to the crime scene manager to discuss and agree how best to deal with such circumstances.

5.4 SUPERVISORY ACTIONS AND DUTIES

Command and control normally passes to a Sergeant / Inspector (or equivalent) when they attend the scene. In the case of a death that is

deemed to be suspicious from the outset, or where it is not possible to determine from the outset whether it is suspicious or not, the duty patrol Inspector will attend the scene to act as Bronze Commander. They must attend quickly to provide assistance and support. Good communications should be maintained with the control room supervisor and an assessment as to the nature of the incident made or confirmed as soon as possible. The main actions of the supervisor are as follows:

5.4.1 Checklist – Supervisory Officer – Responsibilities

- ☐ Debrief those in attendance and determine scale and nature of incident.
- ☐ Check all responsibilities of first officer attending have been accomplished.
- ☐ Establish what alterations may have been made to the crime scene, e.g. door / windows locked / open, light on / off, body moved or cut down, fire on / off, etc.
- ☐ Establish command and control at the scene.
- ☐ Decide whether to declare a critical or major incident.
- ☐ Check what actions have already been done and review them.
- ☐ Check integrity of scene preserved and secured.
- ☐ Check whether appropriate people are being or have been contacted, e.g. senior detective and / or SIO.
- ☐ Ensure basic crime scene kits are available and being used where required.
- ☐ Identify health and safety risks associated with circumstances and location and check / monitor staff welfare.

- ☐ Assess what equipment and contingencies is / are required e.g. emergency light, scene tent, mobile police station, catering, etc.
- ☐ Formulate initial plan for dealing with management of scene and arrest of offenders e.g. organise searches, road blocks, circulation of persons, description of vehicle, arrest teams, etc.
- ☐ Allocate duties, tasks, responsibility and prioritise. Ensure all persons involved are briefed as to their role.
- ☐ Ensure action taken on any urgent lines of enquiry.
- ☐ Decide upon and arrange any specialist resources as required e.g. firearms officers, public order response teams / tactical advisors, back up staff, dog handlers, road policing units, media liaison officer, crime scene investigator (s), detective officers, etc.
- ☐ Liaise with other emergency services which may be in attendance.
- ☐ Make assessment and survey of areas for correct scene parameters and ensure adequate inner / outer cordons in place that are staffed and secure.
- ☐ Establish RV point and / or forward command post.
- ☐ Appoint scene loggist positioned at RV point, fully briefed and equipped with appropriate forms and documentation.
- ☐ Assess most suitable entry / exit point into scene, i.e. least likely / likeliest route taken by offender(s).
- ☐ Check whether there are any other crime scenes and ensure adequate preservation.

- ☐ Ensure collection of details of all those who are / were present (if large crowds, consider use of evidence gathers and / or video photography – remember offender or key witnesses may still be present).
- ☐ Attend to victim welfare and / or next of kin and immediate family and friends' support; if homicide, the SIO will speak with the Family Liaison Coordinator (FLC) to decide on the most suitable Family Liaison Officer (FLO) to appoint and deploy.
- ☐ Ensure unauthorised person removed from crime scene cordon.
- ☐ Notify and brief senior CID supervision.
- ☐ Supervise, manage, and control preliminary investigations.
- ☐ Ensure all potential witnesses are identified.
- ☐ Ensure any exhibits recovered are forensically preserved and confirm appropriate continuity relating to finding and seizure.
- ☐ If victim conveyed to hospital, despatch officer to accompany them to note anything said and ensure evidence recovery (clothing, etc.).
- ☐ If suspect(s) in custody, confirm arrangements for custody reception, avoidance of cross – contamination, and collection of clothing and samples.
- ☐ Make arrangements for community impact assessment.
- ☐ Monitor and control media intrusion and interest, ensure no statements given by staff (utilise media liaison staff at earliest opportunity).

- ☐ Arrange 'hot debrief' of all staff and collect all notes made before they retire from duty.
- ☐ Brief and inform senior detective and / or SIO as to what actions taken and information obtained.
- ☐ Document all actions taken with accompanying rationale.
- ☐ Implement post-incident procedures, e.g. limit disruption caused to any innocent parties and return to normality.
- ☐ Ensure Completion of the Sudden Death Report via Civica.

5.5 DETECTIVE OFFICER RESPONSIBILITIES

At an early stage a detective(s) should be at the scene, to assist with the commencement of the investigation. For serious crime a Detective Inspector should be summoned who will assume the role of SIO and take command until such time a more senior 'on – call' SIO takes over. This is important, particularly if it is going to be some time before the SIO can arrive at the scene, and it should be made quite clear who is in charge until then.

5.5.1 Checklist – Detective Officer - Responsibilities

- ☐ Record exact time of arrival.
- ☐ Establish full circumstances of the incident and details of victim(s) and their family, relatives, and friends.
- ☐ Ensure all possible scenes and evidence properly identified and secured.
- ☐ Ensure urgent lines of enquiry being determined and progressed.

- ☐ Establish whether any witnesses and if first account obtained. Arrange 'hot witness interviews' if necessary and assess whether any need treating as 'key and significant'.
- ☐ Canvass the area, noting surroundings, and speak to and obtain details of all those around as either possible witnesses or sources of information.
- ☐ Record weather conditions and lighting / visibility conditions.
- ☐ Obtain details of all police staff and others, e.g. police surgeon, who are or have been present.
- ☐ Obtain a complete description of the scene and surrounding area.
- ☐ If emergency services in attendance, e.g. paramedics, fire service, establish full details and actions taken for all those who attended the scene.
- ☐ Speak to supervisor and / or first officer(s) in attendance to establish sequence of events, full circumstances, and current information available.
- ☐ Establish and log what exhibits may have been seized or protected, and determine what type of recovery is required (e.g. a weapon or item of clothing found nearby that requires careful forensic recovery by a CSI).
- ☐ Take steps and give advice to avoid any issues of cross contamination of scenes and exhibits
- ☐ Arrange and / or commence early intelligence research on victim(s) and possible suspect(s).

- ☐ If suspects / prisoners in custody, ensure correct processes and procedures carried out (e.g. early examination for injuries and samples taken, collection of clothing, no cross – contamination, separate custody offices, etc.). Determine what useful evidence or exhibits they have in their possession.
- ☐ Gather any useful intelligence and information, geographic data, e.g. local maps, useful community intelligence, and any other possible sources of information.
- ☐ Ensure exhibits officer appointed and correct procedures are adopted following the basic MIRSAP model.
- ☐ Check for linked or precursor incidents.
- ☐ Arrange early house – to – house enquires in the vicinity of the scene and formulate questionnaire.
- ☐ Arrange early capture of passive data systems (e.g. CCTV).
- ☐ Fully brief SIO.

SECTION 2 – GENERAL INFORMATION

5.6 REPORTABLE CASES

The following cases must be reported in writing to the Coroner:

- Sudden deaths
- Finding of a body or any foetus which may, or could, have had an independent existence
- Finding of old human remains
- Finding of a mutilated body or dismembered part of a body
- Calcite remains or ashes

- Bodies brought into this country for burial without a satisfactory medical certificate
- All deaths which occur in police cells or of persons otherwise in custody
- Fatal road traffic collisions
- Work-Related deaths / Industrial Accidents

5.7 THE CORONER

The coroner's standard role is to confirm and certify the death of an individual within their jurisdiction. A coroner may also conduct or order an inquest into the manner or cause of death, and investigate or confirm the identity of an unknown person who has been found dead within the coroner's jurisdiction.

When a body is being removed from the scene, it is to be removed to a hospital within the same Coroners jurisdiction. If the body needs to be removed out of the area, the Coroner is to be consulted to agree this removal.

When necessary the Coroner may hold an inquest into a death. At an inquest the Coroner has to establish who has died, and how, when and where they died.

Should a Section 9 statement be required from any officer involved in the investigation of a death of a person, a wet signed copy will be required. This differs from criminal court procedures and is at the direction of the Coroner.

5.8 INITIAL ACTION

5.8.1 Scene Preservation

The first police officer attending a sudden death will take charge of the scene and must take immediate steps to ensure that the body and the immediate scene are not interfered with until it has been established that there are no suspicious circumstances.

5.8.2 Medical Assistance

If there is any doubt that the victim is not dead then preservation of life must take priority and medical assistance be sought.

5.8.3 Confirmation / Verification of Death

Life extinct is to be confirmed by a doctor, or verified in the case of a Paramedic. However, when there are NO suspicious circumstances and the arrival of a doctor or paramedic attending the scene would cause undue delay, a supervisor of at least the rank of Sergeant may confirm death in the clearly defined circumstances stipulated within section **5.3.2 Preservation of Life** (above)

5.9 NON SUSPICIOUS SUDDEN DEATHS

If there are no suspicious circumstances the officer attending is to assess whether the death meets the criteria for the streamline process as detailed in [Appendix A](#), and if so, that process is to be followed.

Prior to leaving the scene, the new sudden death form ([Appendix B](#)) is to be completed and should accompany the deceased to the mortuary. (This does not replace the need to complete the coroner's report form via Civica as normal).

The following information is to be passed to the force control room before the officer leaves the scene:

- Confirmation of deceased's full name and date of birth
- Who has verified death with date and time
 - Paramedic
 - GP
 - Police Sergeant
 - Custody Nurse
- Is the deceased of large build – YES/NO
- Accessibility of location (e.g. narrow stairs / flats / caravan)
- Difficulty in location scene (e.g. field / terrain / water)
- Location of deceased (e.g. floor / loft / wedged behind door)
- Any decomposition / bodily fluids / contaminants
- Any Notifiable disease? What?

- Who is the person to contact at the scene:
 - Name
 - Relationship to deceased
 - Contact Number
- If CSI / CID are in attendance, what is the estimated time for Funeral Directors to attend.
- Any other relevant information that would assist the Funeral Director.
- Has the Streamline process be utilised – YES/NO

The force control room will not contact the Funeral Director until this information is received.

The flow chart included in 5.1 above gives an overview of the procedures to be followed by the officer on attending a sudden, non-suspicious death in relation to the process of managing non evidential property, and what should be considered with regards to seizures from the scene that may assist the pathologist and or the coroner.

Under no circumstances should any EVIDENTIAL property be moved or removed from the scene other than by designated personnel, please see [Appendix C](#).

5.10 SUSPICIOUS OR UNEXPECTED DEATHS

There is a category of deaths that initially need to be treated as suspicious due to the fact that the circumstances surrounding the death or the cause of death are not clear. When there is doubt regarding the cause of death a thorough investigation will be commenced to ensure that potential evidence is not lost and the cause of death is established.

Whether the attending officer deems a death to be suspicious is subjective based on the available facts at the time. However; if the attending officer is unsure whether the death is suspicious or not, they should treat the scene as a murder scene; Section 2.1 above, provides more detailed guidance. Further advice with regards to scene preservation can be found below.

5.10.1 Scene Preservation

A priority for officers attending to the report of a murder or where the circumstances surrounding the death or cause of death are not clear is the integrity of the scene and the preservation of evidence.

The scene of a suspicious death must be controlled, preserved and a scene log commenced. A common path into and out of the scene is to be used which is NOT likely to have been used by any offenders. Access into the scene must be restricted and any persons entering the scene must be wearing a full forensic PPE.

Officers need to be mindful of cross contamination issues. Officers, other staff involved in the incident and vehicles should not have contact with more than one potential crime scene or suspect.

In circumstances where the death is deemed to be suspicious the body of the deceased will not be removed without the authority of the Coroner.

In the case of the victim being removed prior to police attendance the scene will be preserved in the same manner as if the body was still in situ.

5.10.2 Staffing

A supervisory officer must attend the scene and the incident must be brought to the attention of a Detective Inspector or in his/her absence, a Detective Sergeant who will request the assistance of a crime scene manager as a priority.

All deaths where foul play is suspected must be referred to the on call Force Senior Investigating Officer by the Detective Inspector at the scene.

The senior detective officer will take charge of and control the scene. It is only with that person's permission that any person enters the scene.

The senior detective officer in attendance will take charge of the investigation process and will be assisted by a crime scene manager and other specialist resources as required.

Whilst the views of a GP may be taken into account it must be remembered that they cannot be expected to give a definitive cause of death or give a decision as to whether it is suspicious or not.

Where it is obvious that foul play is apparent or if any doubt exists the Senior Investigating Officer must be notified.

5.10.3 Pathologist

The Home Office Pathologist can only be called to attend the scene of a suspicious death following the approval of the Senior Investigating Officer. It is advised that this decision should, where practical, have the support of the Coroner.

Where necessary a post-mortem examination may be directed by the Coroner. There are two types of post-mortem, a standard post-mortem, which would normally occur when there are no suspicious circumstances, and a home office post-mortem where there are deemed to be suspicions or concerns around the death. This is to be carried out by a forensically trained pathologist. A home office post-mortem will only be carried out with the authority of the Coroner in consultation with the Senior Investigating Officer.

The Coroner MUST be consulted and authorise any Post-Mortem before it commences

5.10.4 Religious and Cultural Beliefs

All religious faiths will have different customs regarding dealing with the deceased and the investigative process may go against the wishes of the family or against religious beliefs when it comes to how we deal with the body. This will be a difficult subject; however, all suspicious deaths need to be fully investigated.

North Wales Police have both a Diversity Unit and members of the Independent Advisory Group (AIG) who are able to provide advice.

The IAG is a group of volunteers who have been vetted and advise the Force on Diversity issues related to major and critical incidents. The list of advisors contained on the General Information Pages, which can be accessed via this link: [IAG Advisory Group Contact List](#)

The IAG folder identifies the diversity specialisms of each member.

Several members of the IAG can be called out 24/7, however there needs to be consideration of whether night time call outs are really necessary, or it can wait until morning.

Call out for a major or critical incident will be approved by the Cadre Superintendent, and the Diversity Unit notified by email.

For a planned operation or non-urgent advice contact should be made with the Diversity Unit.

5.11 DRUG RELATED DEATHS

A drug related death is where there is prima facie evidence of a fatal overdose of controlled drugs. Such evidence would be recent drugs misuse, for example controlled drugs and/or hypodermic syringe found near to the body and/or person is known to the police as a drug user.

As in all cases of suspicious death, the scene must be controlled, preserved and a scene log commenced with a Detective Inspector or in his/her immediate absence a Detective Sergeant attending who will take responsibility for the scene and for deciding upon specialist assistance.

Where on duty and available, a Drug Expert Witness will attend the scene of the death with the Detective Inspector / Sergeant.

If it becomes apparent that murder/manslaughter is suspected or a third party has administered the drug then the Senior Investigating Officer on duty must be informed.

In cases where the involvement of a third party is not suspected, all apparent drugs (including prescribed medication) and paraphernalia are to be photographed in situ and seized. Details of all should be listed on the Civica report to the coroner.

5.12 DEATH IN POLICE CUSTODY/POLICE CARE

The decision as to whether a death is a “Death in Police Custody or Care” will be taken by the Superintendent, Professional Standards Department, and therefore all such incidents, whether they appear to fit the definition or not, will be immediately reported to that officer, or during out of hours the on call Cadre SIO.

In reaching that decision, the Superintendent, PSD, will take into account the Home Office definition of “Death in Police Custody” contained within Home Office Circular 13/2002 Deaths in Police Custody: Deaths of Members of the Public During or Following Police Contact.

5.13 DEATH IN A PRISON ESTABLISHMENT

A local agreement has been adopted by North Wales Police and HMP Berwyn, this will ensure all sudden, unexpected or suspicious deaths within the prison are investigated professionally and effectively, ensuring all evidence and information is secured and preserved.

In addition to deaths within the confines of the prison itself, the local agreement is equally as applicable to the death of an inmate who is outside the establishment e.g. in hospital.

This local agreement will support the following death in custody contingencies already in place with HMP Berwyn:

- Death of a man in custody

- Death of a man on escort or bed watch
- Death of any other person

It will also seek to clarify the actions to be taken by staff within HMP Berwyn upon the discovery of a death, and provide additional clarity of the reporting route and action to be taken by North Wales Police.

The agreement will not extend to cover the direction or scrutiny of any internal procedures of HMP Berwyn, or any internal investigation launched as a result of death within the prison establishment. The process for an internal investigation as a result of a death within a prison establishment will already be well documented.

All deaths, regardless of circumstances should be reported to North Wales Police, who in turn will report to the Coroner.

Deaths in the prison environment are extremely sensitive matters. The traumatic impact upon family members, the personnel involved and often the community as a whole cannot be overstated. It is imperative that investigations are carried out ethically, impartially and to the highest professional standards.

A death in a prison environment may lead to media attention, speculation, possible mistrust and even disorder from the deceased's family, relations, friends and both the prison and local community.

At the same time, staff within HMP Berwyn involved in the incident may be deeply affected and require support.

Given the wide definition of a death within the prison environment, it is neither sensible nor practical to define procedures for all eventualities. In some cases professional judgement and common sense will determine the way forward.

5.13.1 Confirmation of a Death

Upon the confirmation of a death within the prison environment, HMP will adopt processes as outlined within their contingency procedure for sudden, unexpected or suspicious deaths.

The below will be adhered to as a minimum standard to ensure that all evidence is secured and preserved and to allow for a thorough investigation:

- Secure the immediate vicinity of the deceased. Treat both the deceased and the area in which the deceased has been located as scenes.
- Despite any attempts to preserve life, the deceased is to remain in situ – they are not to be moved prior to the arrival of the Police.
- Secure and preserve all documentation, including any CCTV.
- Inform North Wales Police Control Room immediately.

Contact is to be made by HMP Berwyn with the Force Control Centre to report the matter. The person reporting should confirm if contact has been made with the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman.

5.13.2 Response from North Wales Police

Upon contact from HMP Berwyn notifying NWP that a death has occurred within the Prison, the call handler must obtain full details of the incident from the Prison, to include:

- Their reference number
- Details of the deceased
- Location of death
- Current location of the deceased.
- Instruct the prison to ensure that all relevant locations are secured and closed off for forensic examination

Upon receipt of the call, the Force Incident Manager (FIM) is to be informed.

During normal office working hours, the FCC is to contact the local Det Insp. For out of hours, the covering Det Insp CADRE is to be contacted.

Det Insp CADRE is to attend the scene and take command and control of the investigation and to work closely with a Prison Custody Manager.

The Det Insp CADRE will direct appropriate resource as required supported by the FCC. Any investigation is to be carried out in line with the [MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE ASSOCIATION OF CHIEF POLICE OFFICERS AND THE PRISONS AND PROBATION OMBUDSMAN.](#)

Det Insp CADRE to make an assessment as to whether there is a requirement to inform the SIO on call, or require them to attend the scene. The SIO is to be called in all cases where the death is believed to be a homicide or suspicious.

Det Insp CADRE is to ensure that the Coroner is made aware as soon as practicable given the time of day and operational commitments.

Det Insp CADRE is to ensure that the Duty Media Officer is notified of the incident.

5.14 WORK RELATED DEATHS / INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENTS

In line with the Work Related Deaths – A protocol for liaison 2016, the definition of a work related death is a fatality resulting from an incident arising out of, or in connection with, work.

The principles set out in that protocol also apply to cases where the victim suffers injuries in such an incident that are so serious that there is a clear indication, according to medical opinion, of a strong likelihood of death.

5.14.1 Initial Action

A Police Officer attending an incident involving a work related death or injury, should carry out the following action:

- Identify, secure, preserve and take control of the scene and any other relevant place.
- Supervise and record all activity.
- Ensure a Det. Inspector / Det. Sergeant is informed – they should attend and take control of the scene.
- Enquire whether the employer or other responsible person in control of the premises or activity has informed the HSE, the local authority or other investigating / enforcing body.
- Contact and discuss the incident with the HSE, the local authority or other enforcing authority, and agree arrangements for controlling the scene, access to others to ensure the safety of the public.

5.15 DEATH WITHIN A HOSPITAL

Only the following deaths within a hospital environment will require the attendance of a Police Officer:

- Body found outdoors
- Sudden Infant Death
- Under the age of 18 years
- Fatal Road Traffic Collision
- Accident other than RTC, e.g.; fall/drowning/poisoning
- The deceased is unknown
- Drugs – legal and illegal
- Neglect – including care prior to death
- Suicide suspected
- Foul play suspected

If a report is received from a hospital, an officer should ascertain the reason for the report. If it does not meet the aforementioned criteria, then the hospital staff should be informed to follow their own reporting procedure.

If the criteria is met, then an incident should be created on ICAD and dispatch arranged.

5.16 SUICIDE

Where the attending officer at the scene, believes, with all things considered the death, is because of suspected suicide, the attending officer is to contact the FCC to notify the duty Detective Sergeant to attend the scene. Police must always apply professional curiosity and an investigative mindset to test the obvious explanation.

A search of the premises must be conducted in order to identify if there are any supporting factors to support the hypothesis of suicide, i.e. a note.

Any evidence is to be seized as a matter of course. In the case of a hanging, the ligature in particular is to be seized and should accompany the deceased to the mortuary; ensure care is taken to preserve the knot for any potential forensic examination. If there is a requirement for officers to cut the deceased from position, then the cut in the ligature should be carried out **above** the knot.

The details of all persons present in the household at the time of death, any known history of domestic abuse associated with the victim or household and details of close associates who may have information about any history of domestic abuse should be recorded.

In all cases of death by suspected suicide, a CID 16 should be submitted along with details of specific vulnerabilities or factors, e.g. children or DA.

5.16.1 Domestic Abuse

Attending officers should be alert to signs or disclosures of a history of domestic abuse, especially coercive controlling behaviour.

Reasonable and prompt system checks should be made for any known history of domestic abuse crimes and non-crime incidents. Where possible, this should be done prior to the DI/DS leaving the scene and/or within initial enquiries. Subsequent searches for domestic abuse history should then be conducted to inform the investigation (e.g., on call-

handling, intelligence, and public protection systems) – this should involve consulting local partners for intelligence of any history of domestic abuse undisclosed to police.

Where domestic abuse is identified as a factor in the suspected suicide, a referral for a Domestic Homicide Review and a submission to the VKPP Domestic Homicide Project should be considered by the supervising Detective Inspector (*Further information available on PVPU Sharepoint*).

5.16.2 Support for bereaved

Consider those impacted by the death including wider family, the person finding, neighbours and professionals. A list of support services available can be found on the PVPU Sharepoint site ([PVPU SharePoint Site - Suspected suicide events \(nwp.net\)](#)) or through contact with the Coroner's office.

5.17 NEXT OF KIN

All possible enquiries to identify and trace the next of kin are to be expedited.

The next of kin should be informed as soon as possible of the death. The delivery of this message should be carried out by the officer who was dispatched to deal with the incident. All efforts should be made to do this **in person**. This can be reallocated as the supervisory officer sees fit, however the delivery of the agony message is ***not*** the responsibility of the Coroner's Officer.

6. DECLARATION & LEGALITIES

- 6.1 In line with all Force policies, the overarching purpose of this document is to directly support the PCC police and crime plan objectives. Overall the intention of this policy is to make North Wales the safest place to live, work and visit in the UK.

6.2 In the writing of this policy cognisance has been taken of the college of policing code of ethics (2014).

6.3 North Wales Police policies will be written in accordance with the approved corporate format and published on the Force Intranet, allowing access to staff and public, where appropriate, on the pages of the public facing Internet site under the Force publication scheme and Freedom of Information Act 2000.

6.4 The following main legal requirements have been identified within this policy:

- Equality Act 2010
- Human Rights Act 1998
- The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and the Welsh Language Standards for the Chief Constable
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Health and Safety Act 1974

6.5 This policy has been written giving due regard to the above legislation and has considered the risk of unfair and/or disproportionate impacts on individuals or groups (actual or perceived) and has done so via an equality impact assessment (EIA).

6.6 New legislative requirements or changes in Force structure may necessitate a review of this policy document.