



Home Office



IAPDC

18 February 2021

Dear all,

As Policing Minister and Co-Chair of the Ministerial Board on Deaths in Custody, I am writing together with Juliet Lyon, Chair of the Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody (IAPDC), to seek your input on areas of work which we believe, if collaboratively addressed, will help to prevent deaths in police custody. Ahead of the Police and Crime Commissioner elections in May this year we would be grateful for your assistance in highlighting good practice in your area and any gaps in provision you have identified.

Every death in police custody is a tragedy, and the Government is committed to delivering meaningful and lasting change to prevent such deaths. We appreciate the work that you and police forces are already doing to prevent deaths and note the low number of deaths within police custody suites. Unfortunately, however, deaths in or following police custody are still occurring. In 2019/2020 there were 18 individuals who lost their lives – a figure that has not greatly fluctuated over the last decade. The findings from the recent inquest into the sad death of Kevin Clarke in 2017 have provided a stark reminder of changes that must still be made.

We recognise the progress that has been made in response to the recommendations made by Dame Elish Angiolini in her 2017 review of deaths and serious incidents in police custody. The Government will be publishing an update in early 2021 to give further detail on recommendations that have been implemented and work in progress.

We have identified the following priority areas where we believe focused attention could help prevent deaths and support bereaved families appropriately:

- **Mental health:** 11 of the 18 people who died in 2019/20 in or following police custody had mental health concerns and 14 had links to drugs and/or alcohol. These high rates are consistent with long term trends. While schemes such as street triage; custody liaison and diversion; and emergency places of safety go some considerable way to ensuring those in crisis can receive appropriate treatment and support for their needs, we understand that the availability of such initiatives can be area-specific. We are interested in identifying and sharing best practice where it exists. It is the IAPDC view that mental health professionals should be the first responders on the scene for those in crisis.


- **Apparent post-custody suicides:** There were 54 apparent suicides following police custody in 2019/20, a figure significantly higher than the recorded number of deaths in police custody. We believe that these figures demonstrate the urgent need for adequate pre-release assessments specifically to identify early warning signs of behaviour linked to risk of suicide, as well as custody and community-based support interventions, potentially involving the third sector. We would appreciate your views on this issue.
- **Embedding learning:** Ensuring forces learn lessons after a death in custody is vital, especially for bereaved families who repeatedly make clear their wish that no other family should go through the same experience as they have. The Government is currently assessing how Prevention of Future Deaths reports issued by coroners are understood and responded to across custodial agencies. We continue to work closely with the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) to embed lessons learned as quickly as possible after deaths or serious incidents in police custody. We would be interested to know of successful local examples of sharing learning following a death including where family members have been involved and supported.

In summary, we would welcome any examples of good, local practice in preventing deaths at point of, during and after police custody, and ensuring forces are learning from these tragic events. We would also invite your views on how the Ministerial Board and the IAPDC can assist you and police forces in this regard.

We would be most grateful if you could send your responses to iap@justice.gov.uk by 19th March. We will then re-engage with you to reflect on best practice and priorities to ensure that we can provide forces with the support they need to prevent future deaths.



Kit Malthouse MP
Minister of State for Crime and Policing
and Co-Chair of the Ministerial Board on
Deaths in Custody



Juliet Lyon CBE
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