



2nd November 2021

To all Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales,

As Policing Minister and Co-Chair of the Ministerial Board on Deaths in Custody (MBDC), I am writing together with Juliet Lyon CBE, Chair of the Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody (IAPDC), to express our gratitude to those of you who responded to our [request](#) in February for examples of good practice your police force areas employ to prevent deaths in custody.

As you prepare your Police and Crime Plans for the coming years, the latest data from the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) – which showed 19 people died in or following police custody, 92 people died during or following other contact with the police, and that there were 54 apparent post-custody suicides – demonstrates an urgent need to take a zero-tolerance approach to deaths in custody. This year I met with the IOPC and the College of Policing (CoP) to discuss this strategy, and I also welcomed the opportunity to outline it at the annual National Police Custody Forum in June.

A wider summary of work taken forward to prevent deaths in, or following, police custody is outlined in the [Government's recent update](#) on progress against recommendations made in the Angiolini Review. Other work continues, including steps taken by the IOPC to produce early notifications following a death and the CoP's work to develop a National Personal Safety Curriculum training custody officers on decision-making.

In February we identified three priority areas where we believe focused attention could help to prevent deaths: responding to mental health need, support to prevent apparent post-custody suicides, and embedding learning. We asked for wider thoughts on the role of leadership, and how the Home Office and Ministerial Board on Deaths in Custody could support forces to protect lives. In the wake of findings from inquests into the deaths of Black men following the use of force, we would also like to know what efforts are being made to collate, publish and respond to data on the use of force and disproportionality. In total we received 20 responses from PCCs and a further three from associated agencies, including the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners. Returns yielded a promising range of practical local examples, positive suggestions for my department and others, and a realistic assessment of some of the key challenges remaining.

Having examined these contributions, we are pleased to share with you the IAPDC's interim report summarising the initial findings from this exercise.

- **Mental health:** A number of PCCs outlined methods that officers employ to assist them in responding to members of the public who are experiencing a mental health crisis. Responses highlighted how positive relationships with mental health professionals – such as custody-based Liaison and Diversion (L&D) teams, or practitioners who support first responders – are of paramount importance. It was pleasing to hear of clear leadership, committed staff and cross-agency relationships. Challenges remain in terms of forces all accessing and reaching the same high standard of mental healthcare and substance misuse treatment. There is scope for engaging families in support for relatives in difficulty or distress.
- **Apparent post-custody suicides:** According to the latest IOPC statistics there were 54 apparent suicides which took place within 48 hours of someone being released from police

custody in 2020/21. Many PCCs outlined their awareness of the risk of self-inflicted death post release and highlighted the difficult dual role police often face as both enforcer and supporter. While risk assessments and support schemes are in operation across forces, we were concerned that many forms of support appear to rely on individuals proactively seeking help rather than involving any consistent, systematic aftercare. Exceptions to these occur in some forces, for example where L&D staff make referrals for detainees and follow-up with them in the subsequent weeks. Understanding the demographic backgrounds involved, maximising the role of charities such as the Samaritans, and establishing strong links between police, health and community providers all seem crucial in this area.

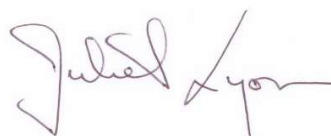
- **Embedding learning:** Some forces appear to have robust internal methods for sharing learning following a critical incident, such as the circulation of learning bulletins and good governance mechanisms. We think more could be done – in collaboration with the Home Office, Coroners, investigatory bodies and respectfully with bereaved families – to share and embed learning promptly and across force boundaries.

Overall, the exercise revealed the continued need to place emphasis on keeping people safe in custody and looking after them properly with compassion and dignity. All forces, departments and relevant organisations need to adopt a proactive approach to sharing good practice and learning – both centrally and horizontally across forces. In that spirit, we hope the attached interim report will serve as a useful resource for all PCCs, Chief Constables, officers and relevant partners.

We encourage all PCCs and forces to reflect on some of the good practice examples and broader themes that emerge from its findings. We would now welcome your thoughts on the paper and additional ideas, particularly from those recently appointed as PCCs or those who were unable to respond to our original call. Overall, I urge you all to consider the prevention of deaths in custody and post-custody suicides as top priorities as you develop your upcoming Police and Crime Plans. We would ask for responses to be provided week commencing

22nd November 2021.

The IAPDC and MBDC will progress the work which stems from these findings, including wider sharing and profiling of identified good practice. We will engage with relevant organisations to emphasise a zero-tolerance approach to deaths in custody, which are a catastrophe not just for the individual and their family, but for the force and all relevant partners.



Kind regards,

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

Juliet Lyon CBE
Chair of the Independent Advisory
Panel on Deaths in Custody