


# A guide for families on the role of the PIRC and Family Liaison Officers

**pirc**

Police Investigations &  
Review Commissioner

independent and effective investigations and reviews



This leaflet is designed to tell you about the Police Investigations & Review Commissioner (PIRC) and outline the role of the PIRC Family Liaison Officer (FLO). It also provides you with information on what may happen during the course of the investigation and tries to provide relevant information in the form of frequently asked questions on page 4.

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.

## **Who is the Police Investigations & Review Commissioner?**

The post of the Police Investigations & Review Commissioner is a Ministerial appointment first established in 2007 by the Police, Public Order and Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2006 and amended by the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012.

Under the Act, one of the Commissioner's functions is to undertake independent investigations into the most serious incidents involving the police.

## **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 the circumstances surrounding a person's death where there has been contact, directly or indirectly, between the deceased and the police in the period leading up to the 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 COPFS if it instructed the investigation or to Police Scotland if it requested we investigate.

## **Who are the PIRC FLOs?**

PIRC FLOs are specially trained and are part of the investigation team. 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 a family member or person to be the contact person for 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 try to answer your questions throughout the investigation. The FLO may also have questions for you.

## **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 and your family.

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.

## **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 deceased 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.

## **What if I am contacted by the media?**

There may be media interest surrounding the death. 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 this is the case, you should speak to the FLO, who may be able to assist in reducing the level of contact you have with the media.

The media sometimes want pictures of the person who died, or members of their family, and they will sometimes go to considerable lengths to get these. The FLO may ask you to choose a photograph which you are prepared to share with the media. The FLO will arrange for copies to be made and given to the media, where this has been requested and you consent.

## **Frequently asked questions**

### **Who will be in charge of the PIRC investigation?**

The PIRC will appoint a Senior 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 or your family, this office will try 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 Senior 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 matter will be investigated 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 conclusion 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 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 COPFS. VIA will maintain contact with you regarding what happens next.

If Police Scotland requested that the PIRC carry out the independent investigation, the PIRC will provide the police with a report and may also publish the report on the PIRC website. The PIRC Family Liaison Officer 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.

## **Is there anything I can do if I am unhappy with how the media are reporting the incident?**

If you want to formally complain about the way a newspaper has reported the case, you can contact the Press Complaints Commission, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. Tel [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]. Helpline [REDACTED] Scottish Helpline [REDACTED].

If you are unhappy about the way a broadcaster (for example, a TV or radio reporter) has dealt with your case, you can make a complaint to Ofcom, Riverside House, 2a Southwark Bridge Road, London SE1 9HA. Tel 0300 123 3333 or 020 7981 3040.

## 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 PIRC Family Liaison Officer 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  
01698 324502  
[www.petalsupport.com](http://www.petalsupport.com)

### **Citizens Advice Scotland**

██████████  
[www.cas.org.uk](http://www.cas.org.uk)

### **Victim Support Scotland (VSS)**

██████████  
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This leaflet is also available on the PIRC website:

[www.pirc.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.pirc.scotland.gov.uk)

The website contains more detailed information on the role of the PIRC.

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