

<b>Case 7   Issue 41 – Call handling</b>		
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### Missed opportunity to safeguard a vulnerable adult

*Police officers were not given information about a vulnerable man after concerns for his safety were reported, raising issues about:*

- *Communications between control room dispatchers and police officers*

This case is relevant to the following areas:

<b>Call handling</b>		<b>Mental health</b>	
<b>Public protection</b>		<b>Neighbourhood policing</b>	

### Overview of incident

A member of the public, Ms A called the police to report concerns over the safety of her neighbour, Mr B. She told the call handler she could hear screaming from Mr B’s address and had heard the same the previous evening. Ms A said that Mr B was a vulnerable adult with mental health issues. She also disclosed that Mr B’s partner had previously taken their own life.

Ms A explained she heard Mr B state “just kill me, it would be easier if you just kill me”. She also said during this time two men and a woman had been at Mr B’s address. She explained she believed there was suspicious activity involving drugs and sex at Mr B’s address involving the three visitors.

Over the radio, control room dispatcher C asked for units to attend to the on-going disturbance at the property. He highlighted that the visitors had been to the man’s address the previous day but there were no police reports in relation to this.

Police officers subsequently attended Mr B’s address and tried to talk with him. Mr B did not engage with the officers and did not open the door to his property. There was no further communication between the dispatcher and the officers while they were in attendance. The control room dispatcher had not told the officers that Mr B was a vulnerable adult. The officers also did not read the incident log which would have referenced this information.

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The attending officers could see Mr B through the letterbox. He appeared to be talking on his mobile phone. He continued to refuse to open the door to the officers. Police officer D spoke to Ms A. During this conversation, he was informed of Mr B's vulnerabilities. She gave information which demonstrated Mr B was at risk of potential harm. After numerous attempts by the officers to engage with Mr B, the officers left the address and closed the log as no offences were disclosed.

### **Section 17(1)(e) of the *Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984***

A constable may enter and search any premises for the purpose... of saving life or limb or preventing serious damage to property.

More information: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1984/60/section/17>

Police officer D, who spoke to Ms A, did not inform his other colleagues in attendance of the information provided by Ms A until after they left the address. At this point police officer D expressed his concerns about Mr B's safety. Despite this, the officer did not submit intelligence outlining the additional information provided by Ms A.

Six days later, the two men and the woman who had been spotted at Mr B's address returned. They attempted to enter the vulnerable man's address but were unable to receive a response at the door. One of the men, Mr E, could see Mr B's feet through the letterbox. Mr E requested assistance from two men who were working nearby, one of whom was a retired police officer. They forced entry into Mr B's address due to their concerns. They found Mr B with a ligature around his neck. Mr B was pronounced dead by a paramedic.

The paramedic noted that Mr B had a black eye which was deemed to have been inflicted before his death. There was also unexplained bruising on his back. The three individuals who had attended Mr B's address were subsequently arrested for assault.

### **Type of investigation**

IOPC local DSI investigation

### **Findings and recommendations**

#### ***Local recommendations***

##### **Finding 1**

1. The control room dispatcher did not tell the attending officers that the man was considered vulnerable. Had this information been relayed, it may have altered the officer's decision to leave the location and/or make further attempts to engage with the man.

##### **Local recommendation 1**

2. The IOPC recommends the force develops a policy which clearly defines the role of the control room dispatcher. The policy should include what information the dispatcher is expected to relay and what actions should be completed on receipt of specific information.

## Response to the recommendations

### *Local recommendations*

#### Local recommendation 1

1. The role of dispatchers has been re-visited by the force, outputs have been clearly outlined in performance development reviews (a sample number was checked to ensure compliancy), and the objectives of the role are clearly defined. All the objectives relate to the core role of dispatcher (and extend into the supervisor role profile).
2. The force noted that a refresh of THRIVE, as well as the new call handling kit currently being implemented, will assist in areas such as this. The technology will help the user identify risk through better searching of available data.

## Outcomes for officers and staff

There was no indication any police officer had behaved in a manner that would justify the bringing of disciplinary proceedings or had committed a criminal offence.

## Force commentary

The force will implement enhanced telephony and recording equipment to assist call handlers with the introduction of the customer relationship management system. This will offer more information at the initial point of contact to a call handler. It will also present an informant's call history to the call handler to aid better decision making.

## Questions to consider

### Questions for policy makers and managers

1. How does your force make sure communication between staff in the control room and attending officers is effective?
2. What steps does your force take to identify and record potential vulnerabilities?

### Questions for police officers and police staff

3. What additional steps could the attending officers have taken to safeguard the vulnerable man?
4. What should the attending officer have done with the additional information obtained from the neighbour?

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5. Do you think the attending officers would have been in a position to consider forcing entry if they had been aware of the man's vulnerabilities?