

Our Ref: IM-FOI-2022-1011
Date: 31 May 2022



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (SCOTLAND) ACT 2002

I refer to your recent request for information which has been handled in accordance with the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002.

For ease of reference, your request is replicated below together with the response.

Since August 2019 has Police Scotland made any policy, procedure or recommendation changes which would improve or change their approach to a sudden death or an immediately unexplained death?

All deaths in the community, whether COVID-19 related or otherwise, are progressed in line with the existing Investigation of Death PSoS Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) (currently V4.00, published on 12/12/2018). This applies to all deaths, irrespective of whether the death is COVID-19 related or not.

In terms of the timescale requested, I can confirm that following discussions with COPFS, the Scottish Government and other key external stakeholders, four Police Scotland guidance documents in relation to *Death in the Community – Coronavirus (Covid-19)* were circulated to provide further clarity to officers.

This guidance was circulated under *Memo PS022/20, PS036/20, PS045/20 and, Memo PS 081/20*, and a summary of the key messages and changes are as follows:-

For “medical deaths” (both within and out with office hours) where the GP does not issue a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) Police Scotland are required to attend the scene, conduct relevant investigations and prepare and submit a Sudden Death Report in all deaths (regardless of the age of the deceased).

All deaths in the community should, as far as possible, be progressed in line with existing procedures, with additional measures being introduced, for the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, which supplements the Investigation of Death SOP.

Risk assessments are carried out whenever COVID-19 is suspected as being to ensure Police Scotland attendance complies with Health and Safety guidance. Attending officers are to record responses to a set of questions relevant to the pandemic and associated risks.

In terms of Police Reportable Deaths, where COVID-19 cannot be excluded and a scene examination is required, guidance on scene management is contained within memo PS035/20.

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In terms of Medical Death during Office Hours, there was no significant change to guidance. Where no MCCD is to be issued, Police will attend and gather information to report the circumstances of the death, and undertakers to be advised that no preparatory work should be conducted on the deceased until further notice.

In terms of Medical Death out with Office Hours, Police are to attend and obtain all the necessary information to report the circumstances of the death, and during the COVID-19 pandemic contact with NHS 24 out with office hours should cease. Contact will be made with deceased's GP or Doctor the next working day to establish whether a MCCD is to be issued.

In terms of Deaths in Care Homes, on 21 May 2020 the Lord Advocate instructed that all COVID-19 related deaths that give rise to public anxiety, which includes deaths in care settings, require to be reported to the Scottish Fatalities Investigation Unit (SFIU). The attending GP or Doctor who issued the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) will submit a report to SFIU. All retrospective COVID-19 related deaths which occurred in care settings that were not subject of a report to SFIU, now require to be reported.

In terms of Formal Identification/Family Viewings, procedures were amended to minimise the number of persons attending mortuaries. Similarly, persons attending any post mortem examinations were kept to a minimum.

Finally, it may be of interest that work is underway to finalise a new guidance document which updates the information contained within the Investigation of Death PSoS SOP v4 referred to in the introduction above. It is hoped that the current draft document will be completed for circulation /publication in the near future.

If you require further assistance or are dissatisfied with the way in which Police Scotland has dealt with your request, you are entitled, in the first instance, to request a review of our actions and decisions.

Your request must specify the matter which gives rise to your dissatisfaction and it must be submitted within 40 working days of receiving this response - either by email to foi@scotland.pnn.police.uk or by post to Information Management (Disclosure), Police Scotland, Clyde Gateway, 2 French Street, Dalmarnock, G40 4EH.

If you remain dissatisfied following the outcome of that review, you are thereafter entitled to apply to the Office of the Scottish Information Commissioner within six months for a decision. You can apply [online](#), by email to enquiries@itspublicknowledge.info or by post to Office of the Scottish Information Commissioner, Kinburn Castle, Doubledykes Road, St Andrews, Fife, KY16 9DS.

Should you wish to appeal against the Office of the Scottish Information Commissioner's decision, there is an appeal to the Court of Session on a point of law only.

As part of our commitment to demonstrate openness and transparency in respect of the information we hold, an anonymised version of this response will be posted to the Police Scotland Freedom of Information [Disclosure Log](#) in seven days' time.