

Assisted Suicide

POLICY (only)

OFFICIAL

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Policy Holder	D/Ch Supt Head of Centralised Crime
Policy Author	D/Supt MIT
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Policy

National Context

[Authorised Professional Practice](#) (APP) is produced by the College of Policing as the official source of professional practice on policing. All officers and staff are expected to have regard to APP in discharging their responsibilities. Essentially, our “policy” is to comply with APP as it develops to cover all areas of policing.

Statement

Merseyside Police, together with partner agencies, will deal professionally with all incidents involving planned or completed incidents of assisted suicide. All members of the Force, whilst investigating the possible commission of the offence of aiding and abetting the suicide or attempted suicide of another, will act in a compassionate and supportive manner, being non-judgemental as to the wishes of those involved. At all times during an investigation, consideration will be given to the potential impact on any cultural or religious issues.

Officers and staff will work in line with the [Force Strategy](#).

Rationale

It is recognised that there are times when terminally ill people, with full capacity, will want to end their own life and that decision, although deeply upsetting to relatives or friends of the individual, may well be reluctantly supported by them. In contrast, consideration must be given to a terminally ill individual who may not have full capacity to reach such a decision, and it may also be possible that a person is coerced into contemplating suicide. These latter situations, as potential separate offences to assisting a suicide, are clearly the duty of the police, with partner agencies, to investigate and prevent.

Whilst the act of suicide or attempted suicide are not offences in this country, under Section 2(1) of the [Suicide Act 1961](#), the offence of complicity in another’s suicide is created. There have been recent occasions where citizens of this country have travelled abroad to commit suicide, being assisted by organisations such as ‘Dignitas’ in Zurich, Switzerland. Therefore, a person assisting a terminally ill patient to contact an organisation to carry out the suicide, making or paying for travel arrangements or indeed assisting them to travel to a place where the suicide is to be committed, may well commit such an offence.

The legislation provides that *‘a person who aids, abets, counsels or procures the suicide of another, or an attempt by another, shall be liable on conviction on indictment to imprisonment*

for a term not exceeding 14 years. By definition, to aid means to help, promote or encourage. Abet is to encourage or assist an offender or an offence, to counsel is to advise, (particularly in giving of formal advice) or to devise a plan of action and to procure is to obtain or acquire – by care or effort.

Under the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996, it is the duty of the police service to investigate crime and to pursue all reasonable lines of enquiry. The obligation on the police to prevent and detect crime was confirmed in *Rice v Connolly* (1966) with the wide discretion available to Chief Constables in how to discharge those duties being detailed in *R v Metropolitan police ex parte Blackburn* (1968). Also, of consideration in formulating this policy is the possibility that the Chief Constable could be subjected to judicial review, by an interested party, for an alleged failure by the Force to exercise that discretion reasonably and investigate any such incident.

It is therefore a requirement that whilst members of the Force retain a non-judgemental, compassionate and supportive role, the possible commission of the criminal offence of aiding and abetting another's suicide must be investigated.

Aims

This policy aims to set out recommended procedures and a standard investigation process. These can be applied to deal with incidents where individuals are assisted in committing their own suicide, in the United Kingdom or when travelling abroad, where active euthanasia may be legal, or where assisted suicides are tolerated, as humane acts in helping a terminally ill person to end their life and are not prosecuted.

Depending on the age of the individual who is intending to commit or who has committed suicide, this policy is in support of the existing protocols and Force policies that deal with vulnerable adult and child protection procedures.

Objectives

- a) Together with our partners, safeguard vulnerable people.
- b) To ensure that all those involved in the policing response to assisted suicide incidents are aware of their roles and responsibilities.

Application and Scope

All police officers and police staff, including the extended police family and those working voluntarily or under contract to Merseyside Police must be aware of, and are required to comply with, all relevant policy and associated procedures.

This is a non-statutory policy that sets out the principles to help guide decision making. It provides guidance that, on occasions, officers and staff may depart from based on the particular circumstances they encounter. On such occasions, officers and staff will be supported provided they can demonstrate a clear rationale which can be objectively justified for why they have departed from the policy.

The policy does not apply to the criminal investigation of a homicide where the defence to murder or suicide pact is raised.

The Chief Officer lead for this policy is the Assistant Chief Constable responsible for Crime, PPU and Intelligence.

Outcome Evaluation

The Head of Crime will consider a Serious Crime Review (SCRU) in respect of relevant cases and where appropriate, CPD to embed any learning or recommendations identified.