

Assisted Suicide (POLICY ONLY)

OFFICIAL

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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.

Where content exists within APP we should not be reproducing it locally but instead signposting the on-line version. Similarly, we should not retain or develop any local policy documents if the subject matter is covered by APP. We may have some relatively low volume procedural documents but only if they are deemed necessary to supplement the content of APP.

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.

Leadership & Me framework and the Just Principles

As an organisation, through our policies and Leadership & Me framework, we will ensure we create a consistently great place to work were, as Healthy People:

- You take responsibility for how you behave.
- You are inclusive and any exclusion is addressed.
- You have a safe space to speak, and things are talked out.
- You can focus on doing your own job well.
- You are trusted and empowered to make decisions and do the right thing.
- We are all One Team - inquisitive and open to new ways of doing things better together.

The Leadership & Me framework means we have a consistent approach to our behaviours across the organisation, and therefore consistent approach through our policies, which is necessary to deliver against our One Team ethos. The Leadership & Me framework is underpinned by our Just Principles:

JUST LISTEN	ACTIVE LISTENING CARE & RESPECT EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE
JUST LEAD	PRIDE & DIRECTION RESPONSIBILITY TRUST – HONESTY & HUMILITY DELIVERY
JUST THINK	MAKING DECISIONS CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT ADAPTING PLANS CHANGE
JUST TALK	TEAMWORK COURAGE-SPEAKING UP PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK RELATIONSHIPS

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 policy document sets out principles to help guide decision making and is in some parts quite prescriptive. However, it is vital that officers and staff have the freedom to innovate, exercise discretion and take risk-based decisions centred on

the needs of the victim and the merits of each case. Non-statutory policies, including College of Policing APP, provide guidance only. They are 'living documents' and it is recognised that there may be a better way of doing this. Accordingly, if staff depart from a policy but are able to give a good rationale for their actions, and have acted with honesty, integrity and professionalism, to make the best decision for the community we serve, they will be trusted and supported.

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

The Chief Officer lead for this policy is the Assistant Chief Constable responsible for Investigation & Intelligence.

Outcome Evaluation

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