

# Family Liaison

National Guidance

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## Purpose/Scope

The purpose of this guidance document is to provide police officers and police staff with instruction and guidance on the deployment and management of Family Liaison Officers (FLOs).

This guidance document supports the following publications:

* ACPO Murder Investigation Manual 2006
* Road Death Investigation Manual
* Investigation of Death SOP
* Crime Investigation SOP

In the event of a death of a human being, where there is a police investigation, the police have a positive duty to communicate effectively and inclusively with the bereaved family. On most occasions this can be achieved by deploying a trained FLO.

The guidance set out in this document should be considered in circumstances in which there has been an unexplained or violent death and will include cases of homicide and mass fatality incidents. It can also be considered in circumstances that do not involve a fatality where a Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) believes family liaison might enhance the effectiveness of the police response.

Identify what Policy/SOP(s) the guidance document supports.

Give a summary of the purpose of the instruction within the document and how this will support staff – if appropriate identify who it intends to support, e.g. police officers / police staff.

## Aims of Family Liaison

The primary function of a FLO is that of an investigator. The FLO will be responsible for gathering evidence from the family that will assist with the investigation.

The key aims are:

To work with the family to investigate the murder or death of a loved one and comply with their right to receive all relevant information connected with the enquiry, subject to the needs of the investigation;

To analyse the needs, concerns and expectations of the family to identify all the relevant and reasonable action that the police should take; and,

To secure the confidence and trust of the family, thereby enhancing their contribution to the investigation.

## Principal Roles in Family Liaison

### Strategic Lead for Family Liaison

Strategic responsibility for family liaison at the national level is undertaken by an officer of at least Superintendent rank.

### Senior Investigating Officer (SIO)

A SIO is the lead investigator in cases of homicide or other complex investigations. The SIO is accountable for all aspects of the investigation including the family liaison strategy and the deployment, support and supervision of FLOs.

### Senior Identification Manager (SIM)

The role of the SIM in instances of mass disaster relates to the formulation and development of a family liaison strategy. This will be achieved in consultation with the SIO. In formulating the strategy, the SIM must aim to achieve a partnership approach with the family in the context of the investigation. The selection, deployment, support and supervision of the FLOs is crucial to this role.

### Family Liaison Coordinator (FLC)

The FLC manages the deployments of FLOs and Family Liaison Advisors (FLAs) within each divisional area. The FLC is responsible for providing assistance and advice to SIO / SIMs and arranging support, guidance and development opportunities for those involved in family liaison.

### Family Liaison Advisor (FLA)

The FLA will be responsible for providing assistance to SIO / SIMs and for providing support and guidance and monitoring the welfare of FLOs during deployment.

### Family Liaison Officer (FLO)

The primary purpose of a FLO is that of an investigator. Their role is to gather evidence and information from the family to contribute to the investigation and preserve its integrity. The FLO also provides support and information, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, securing confidence and trust of families of victims of crime and ensuring family members are given timely information in accordance with the needs of the investigation.

### Family Liaison Strategic Working Group (FLWG)

The FLWG is made up of family liaison coordinators from across Scotland and includes representatives from the British Transport Police (BTP) and Crown Office and Procurator Fiscals Service (COPFS). The group is chaired by the Strategic Lead for family liaison. The main purpose of the group is to ensure there is a common approach to family liaison in the areas of crime, roads policing and civil emergencies and to identify and disseminate best practice.

## Selection and training

### Family Liaison Officers

#### Selection

Those performing the role of a FLO must always act with the highest degree of professionalism and must carry out their duties with great sensitivity. Careful consideration should therefore be given about the suitability of the officers selected. Officers should be volunteers, having a clear and reasoned motive reflecting a genuine commitment for wishing to train as a FLO.

Applications for this role will be invited by divisional FLCs as and when required. An application form should be submitted via the officer’s line manager. Line manager’s should consider the application and provide comments on their personal knowledge of the applicant.

Each applicant will be interviewed by the divisional FLC in order to assess their understanding of the FLO role and suitability.

Selection for this role will be considered from police officers who meet the criteria contained within the FLO role profile.

Applicants, with the exception of Roads Policing officers, require to have passed the National Investigator Exam and have successfully completed the Initial Investigators Interviewing Skills Course (IIISC), or, be in an investigatory role which deems them eligible to complete the IIISC prior to being selected to attend the FLO training course.

In addition to this criteria, care and consideration is required in selection in circumstances where officers have suffered a significant loss in the past 18 month period, or have recently undergone a major life trauma. Officers who apply to become a FLO should be consulted in the decision making process around these factors. The potential impact should be considered on a case-by-case basis rather than automatically excluding any officer who has experienced such a trauma from selection or training.

#### Training

All FLOs are trained to a national standard. Officers undertake a five day training course at the Scottish Police College. This course is assessed by course facilitators and officers must pass in order to be deployed as a FLO.

Annual refresher training will also be organised and delivered at a local level by the divisional FLCs.

### Family Liaison Coordinators / Family Liaison Advisors

#### Selection

Officers selected to undertake the role of FLC or FLA should be suitably experienced FLOs and investigators. There is no application or interview process for this role, instead the officers are identified by senior management or existing FLCs and requested to undertake the role.

All officers are trained as FLCs, however may be deployed within their respective division as a FLA.

#### Training

All officers will be required to undertake a four day National FLC training course at the Scottish Police College.

## Deployment of Family Liaison Officers

### Deployment Criteria

Family Liaison Officers should be deployed in the following cases:

* Murder;
* Suspicious Deaths, where there is obvious or apparent criminality;
* Missing person enquiry, where there is reason to suspect foul play;
* Any other serious criminal enquiry, where deployment of a FLO would be significantly beneficial to the progress of the enquiry.

The deployment of FLOs may also be considered in other types of non-criminal deaths, where communication has to be maintained between the police and family of the deceased for an extended period. As the availability of trained FLOs will inevitably be limited, careful consideration should be given to their use in non-criminal deaths and this should be detailed in the Family Liaison Strategy.

Family Liaison Officers should be considered in the following cases:

* Death which is likely to be the subject of a Fatal Accident Enquiry (FAI);
* Multiple deaths due to a public transport incident;
* A critical incident;
* Any death which is likely to raise serious public concern and generate significant and sustained media interest;
* The investigation of every road collision involving a fatality, potential fatality or life changing injury.

Where COPFS has directed an independent investigation into the case of:

* Police deaths in custody;
* Victims or families of police shootings;
* Police related road deaths,

Fully trained independent FLOs will be deployed by the Senior Investigator of the Police Investigation and Review Commission (PIRC).

### Deployment process

Great care must be taken in the selection, briefing and supervision of FLOs undertaking deployments.

SIO’s should firstly liaise with the Divisional FLC in order to identify suitable FLOs for deployment. FLCs should be aware of any issues that would prevent deployment of a particular FLO which the SIO may not. The following circumstances will have a bearing on the selection process:

* A recent bereavement of a close relative, partner or other major life trauma;
* Workload;
* Frequency of recent deployment in the role;
* Previous experience in the role;
* Availability, annual leave, court or other similar commitments;
* Previous contact and relationship with the family (this should be avoided to reduce the impact of the role on the professional objectivity of the officer and the exit strategy);
* Whether the FLO lives or usually works near the family’s residence (increasing the likelihood of chance encounters with the family outside the confines of the officer’s role as a FLO).

The role of a FLO is voluntary therefore some officers may decline to deploy and SIO’s should be mindful that they may have a good reason for doing so, for example personal, welfare or health and safety reasons. FLO’s should not be forced to deploy and FLC’s should endeavour to identify alternative officers.

It is considered best practice to deploy two trained FLOs to any incident. Where logistical issues such as mass death incidents occur, mutual aid may be required. The deployment of FLOs in pairs has obvious benefits for both the family and the investigation. In cases where one FLO is unavailable for reasons such as annual leave, court or sickness, then having a dual deployment provides resilience and ensures that the liaison function can continue, without the need to introduce a new FLO who is unfamiliar with both the family and the investigation.

It is common for divided families or complex family dynamics to be encountered when selecting and deploying FLOs. In such instances, the SIO / SIM should consider the deployment of additional FLOs. Care must be taken however, to ensure that there is a coordination of information flow to the various family sections and that the information passed is both accurate and consistent to each.

Ultimately, the number of FLOs to be deployed in each case is a decision for each SIO to consider and this should be clearly documented in the SIO policy file after consultation with the FLC.

On occasions, gender may be a critical factor for cultural or other reasons. Where the victim is from a minority group, consideration should always be given to the deployment of a FLO with specific knowledge and experience of that community. Further information can be found within the Partnerships, Prevention & Community Wellbeing intranet page PPCW Equality and Diversity Unit (spnet.local).

The SIO / FLC should also carefully consider the deployment of an officer who relates or resonates with the cultural background of the family members. The attachment of such an officer to a family without prior consultation can, on occasion, be detrimental to the police / family relationship.

### Briefing the FLO

The SIO / SIM is responsible for briefing the FLO once deployed and prior to meeting with the family for the first time. The briefing should include the following:

* What details are known about the alleged offence?
* What information is already in the public domain?
* What information is known about the family (background and composition)?
* Risk Assessment;
* Aims and objectives of the deployment;
* What enquiries they wish the FLO to carry out in regard to the family?
* Witness Categorisation;
* Resources available to the FLO (mobile, vehicle);
* Expectations including attendance at briefings, FLO log entries and SIO examination of FLO logs;
* FLO welfare checks.

### Supporting and supervising the FLO

The SIO / SIM has a duty of care and an obligation to support and constantly monitor the health and welfare of FLOs. The FLC and FLA will also be responsible for monitoring FLO welfare during deployments. There should be an awareness of the dangers of undue stress levels being maintained by FLOs as they are exposed to the raw emotions and needs of the bereaved. The FLOs must not be left feeling isolated.

The SIO / SIM must ensure that FLO logs are regularly reviewed and where practicable, this should be done prior to their submission to the major incident room. SIO / SIMs, in conjunction with the FLC, must be prepared to continuously review the deployment of a FLO. In doing this, the following should be considered:

The suitability for the officer for retention in the role;

* Whether additional FLOs should be deployed;
* The needs of the family;
* Any changes in family circumstances;
* Any changes in the FLO’s circumstances;
* Any changes in the investigation.

The SIO / SIM has a responsibility for ensuring that a FLO is not deployed any longer than is necessary to meet the immediate needs of the family and the investigation.

When such needs have been met, an exit strategy should be implemented for the FLOs and responsibilities for liaison should be transferred to the Victim Information and Advice Service (VIA), in accordance with the ACPOS and COPFS Joint Protocol 2010 – In Partnership, Managing Family Liaison.

### Delivery of Death Messages

As a general rule, a FLO should not be deployed to deliver a death message as this may delay the process of informing the family. It may also hinder the professional relationship which is formed between the FLO and family throughout the investigation.

The deployment of a FLO to pass a death message should only be undertaken in exceptional circumstances. It would conflict with the requirement to complete a Risk Assessment process, which is crucial prior to a FLO being deployed to a family and attending the family home.

Where a decision is taken to deploy a FLO to carry out this task, careful consideration as to the circumstances and reason for doing so must be made by the SIO and such decisions should be recorded in the SIO Policy file and FLO log book.

## Family Liaison Strategy

### The SIO is the person that has ownership of the strategy.

It is essential that prior to any FLO deployment, the SIO / SIM has formulated a Family Liaison Strategy. The FLC or FLA can assist with this. The FLO should work to the aims and objectives set by the SIO. These objectives should include:

* Gather material and information from the family in a manner which contributes to the investigation and preserves its integrity;
* Obtain full victimology, lifestyle and behavioural information;
* Provide relevant information to the family, subject to the needs of the investigation and in a way that respects their human rights;
* Explain police and criminal justice processes;
* Police communication and media strategy;
* Provide the family with information about support available and where appropriate and with consent of the family, make referrals to relevant support organisations;
* Manage the health and wellbeing of FLOs;
* Manage the withdrawal of family liaison deployments.

The family liaison strategy is one of the most important considerations that the SIO / SIM will have to address throughout the investigation. In discharging this obligation, the SIO / SIM must take into account the following issues:

* The roles and lines of responsibility for the management of FLOs;
* There must be direct communication between the SIO / SIM and FLO in connection with their role and issues concerning the family;
* That FLOs are an integral part of the investigation team and are expected to be present at and participate in all regular team briefings and debriefings.

In determining the Family Liaison Strategy, it is essential that the SIO / SIM consider the needs of both the family and the FLO. The strategy must take into account a number of important factors:

* Identifying the family.
* Selection and appointment of FLOs.
* Supporting and supervising the FLO.
* Strategic and tactical management.
* Suspect within the family.
* Communication with the family.
* Indirect communication.
* Working with representatives of the family.
* Family and the media.
* Any additional issues in connection with deaths abroad.
* Exit strategies.

The strategy is a dynamic process that must be reviewed at regular intervals and in consultation with the FLO.

FLOs should be fully aware of the aims and objectives of their deployment prior to meeting with the family and should have sight of the family liaison strategy document.

SIO / SIMs must always take into account family dynamics to ensure that an appropriate level of support is offered. This is particularly important in situations where the family is extended, split in some way or involves the possible association of the victim with a particular cultural or lifestyle diversity.

## Risk Assessments

Risk assessment and management is a dynamic process subject to constant change. Family liaison risk assessments are required to identify and minimise any risk specific to that particular investigation and FLO deployment.

### Risk Assessment 1

Prior to the deployment of a FLO, the officer passing the death message should gather and record relevant information to enable Family Liaison Risk Assessment Form 1 (Force Form 061-001) to be completed. This should then enable a suitable and sufficient specific risk assessment to be developed from the Generic Risk Assessment Form (Family Liaison Risk Assessment Form 2).

### Risk Assessment 2

The responsibility for ensuring the FLO generic risk assessment is amended / adapted to suit individual needs and requirements is the responsibility of the SIO / SIM with, where necessary, input from the FLC / FLA.

The SIO / SIM must ensure that intelligence checks and a thorough search of databases are carried out to establish as much information as possible about the premises, the occupants, family members and persons who frequent the premises, where FLOs are ultimately to be deployed. Once these checks have been carried out, a specific risk assessment using Family Liaison Risk Assessment Form 2 (Force Form 061-002) should be completed by the SIO / SIM.

The following should also be considered when conducting a risk assessment for family liaison:

* Consideration must be given as to whether the FLO is fit to do the job (workload, rest days, leave, other life experiences / issues, suitably experienced).
* Addresses to be visited must be viewed as workplaces for the FLO and any risks must be mitigated. Considerations for disease, dangerous animals or other aggravating factors must be taken into account.
* What is the classification status of the family, i.e. significant witness, Trace Interview Eliminate?
* The risk assessment should also take account of any community tension that exists in that location and any changes in tension revealed during the course of the ongoing assessment.
* What are the threats to others? In some instances, the SIO may have to decide whether the risk that is identified should be further disseminated to others, including those external agencies, who may themselves be involved in providing care, support or counselling to the family, e.g. Victim Support. In cases where it is thought that others might be at risk, advice should be sought regarding the content of any disclosure of information in order to comply with the Data Protection Act 2018 and Human Rights legislation.

It is the responsibility of the SIO / SIM to regularly review the individual Risk Assessment with regard to any FLO deployment they have responsibility for. When completed, the Individual Risk Assessment should be regarded as a dynamic document and must be amended / updated when circumstances change and new potential risks are identified.

It is incumbent on FLOs to make the SIO / SIM aware of any change in circumstances that may impact on risk. Changes in circumstances may include the following:

* People:Once deployed, FLOs may encounter additional family members who become involved in the liaison process. In such cases, officers should gather as much information as possible in relation to these individuals, in a sensitive and professional manner. Such information will provide the SIO with a sound knowledge of family dynamics.
* Action / Activity:The family liaison strategy should be reviewed at regular intervals throughout each deployment. This may be amended depending on the tasks that the FLOs are required to carry out. Any change in the FLO role should be measured against the potential impact that it may have on the family and whether or not there is a potential for an increased risk.
* Location:If at any time during deployment, there is a change in location, then a further risk assessment should be carried out in relation to the new property.

## Role of the Family Liaison Coordinator

Each division within Police Scotland will have a number of trained FLCs. There will be a principal FLC (and deputy if available) who will be responsible for the overall administrative functions. Additional FLCs will thereafter be used to support this administrative role if required, however will generally be utilised to perform the role of FLA.

### Administrative Functions

The Family Liaison Coordinator is responsible for administrative supervision of the FLO scheme at a Divisional level and should maintain a register of all FLOs within their area providing:

* Details of their lifestyle diversity, which may be provided on a voluntary basis by FLOs;
* Ethnic and cultural origins;
* FLO experience (types of incident where deployed) and brief synopsis on specific FLO skills utilised and enhanced;
* Details of any other skills or qualifications held by the officer (e.g. language skills);
* Current availability status of the FLO (e.g. if currently deployed, workload, reason why not deployable);
* Record of deployments undertaken;
* Provide details of all deployments to the National Family Liaison Coordinator.

### Support Functions

The Family Liaison Coordinator can act as a support point for SIO / SIMs regarding selection and deployment of FLOs, functions of family liaison, strategies and risk assessments. The FLC can also support SIO / SIMs by assisting in tasking, briefing and debriefing FLOs.

They may also provide advice regarding complex cases with multiple deployments of FLOs and coordinate the information that comes from them.

The FLC will also act as a support point for FLOs and should:

* Provide advice and direction;
* Maintain contact details of appropriate organisations, lay people and professional consultants to assist them in their role;
* Coordinate FLO peer support and ensure FLOs receive or have access to welfare and occupational support and advice to mitigate the emotional demands of their work;
* Provide an independent channel for FLO debriefing to identify and share good practice;
* Liaise regionally and nationally to gather and share best practice for implementation within own area to drive continuous improvement;
* Coordinate Continuous Professional Development (CPD) events in line with training needs and national guidance to maintain and enhance the competency of FLOs and FLAs.

At the conclusion of each FLO deployment, the FLC (or appointed FLA) should speak to both the FLO and SIO / SIM in order to identify any issues or training gaps which need addressed. In addition, any problems or difficulties which may have arisen and how they were resolved should be discussed and any best practice issues identified.

FLC should ensure that there is a suitable mechanism in place to ensure the sharing of best practice between FLOs in addition to the aforementioned CPD events.

The FLC should ensure that FLOs are only deployed in the role on one active enquiry at any time and should confirm that FLOs have exited from families prior to becoming involved in another case. It is recognised as best practice that a period of time should elapse between deployments.

## Role of the Family Liaison Advisor

The Family Liaison Advisor provides support to SIO / SIMs by way of tactical and operational advice regarding deployments of FLOs and also support FLOs throughout their deployment.

The key roles of the FLA are to:

* Supervise and monitor workload and welfare of FLOs and provide appropriate advice and support to ensure they are able to competently assist the investigation;
* Provide advice to the SIO / SIM to inform policy decisions in relation to the investigation and ensure the appropriately managed exit of the FLO from the investigation;
* Coordinate risk assessments in support of the investigative strategy of the SIO / SIM, to ensure the safety of families, FLOs and the integrity of the investigation;
* Conduct routine briefing and debriefing of the FLOs to identify and communicate to the SIO / SIM any issues likely to have an impact on the investigation and or family liaison.

## Role of the Family Liaison Officer

The primary purpose of a FLO is that of an investigator. Their role is to gather evidence and information from the family to contribute to the investigation and preserve its integrity. The FLO also provides support and information, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, securing confidence and trust of families of victims of crime and ensuring family members are given timely information in accordance with the needs of the investigation.

### Personal Criteria

It is important to understand that two distinct selection processes govern deployment in the role. The first of these relates to the overall selection criteria for training in the role, whereas the second relates to deployment as a FLO in a particular case. Even though an individual has been trained and is fully competent, circumstances may dictate that an individual’s deployment or retention in the role with a particular family is inappropriate.

There is an onus on the FLO to inform the FLC / FLA / SIO / SIM of any factors that they are aware of that make their deployment or continued retention inappropriate, e.g. change in officer’s personal circumstances, views expressed by the family or conflicts within the family.

### Action on Appointment

On appointment, the FLOs should be made aware of the Family Liaison Strategy, which will have been prepared by the SIO. It is essential that the parameters of the role of the FLO during the deployment are set out in a clear and unambiguous manner and they are aware of their aims and objectives.

The FLO is responsible for the passing of information regarding the enquiry to the family with the agreement of the SIO.

The FLOs must meet with the family as soon as is reasonably practicable after deployment. Before this meeting, the FLO will:

* Establish that a risk assessment for the deployment has been carried out;
* Received an operational briefing from the SIO or FLC;
* Familiarise themselves with any available information and/or intelligence that could impact on the deployment;
* Establish the extent of previous police contact with the family since the incident / death;
* Establish what information has been passed to the family prior to their deployment, to whom and by whom;
* Establish what information concerning the incident is already in the public domain.

During the course of their deployment, the FLO will be responsible for the following tasks:

* Obtaining statements from the family relating to identification of the body, lifestyle, victimology and behavioural characteristics of the victim;
* Obtaining relevant background details of the victim and family members;
* Advising the family in respect of police investigative procedures and the criminal justice process;
* Ensuring the family receive appropriate information and are kept informed of the progress of the investigation;
* Advising the family on the existence and role of the Support for Families Bereaved by Crime (SFBC) service and submit a referral with the consent of the family member;
* Advise on the existence and role of other appropriate support agencies and how to contact them.

### Initial forms

A Family Liaison Deployment form and relevant risk assessments should be completed and forwarded to the FLC.

Early contact should be made with the VIA and the COPFS Victim Profile (Force Form 061-004) should be submitted at earliest opportunity.

### Victimology

In the aftermath of any homicide or any other critical incident, one of the highest priority actions is the gathering of victimology or lifestyle information about the victim. This is generally done by tasking the FLO at an early stage and should be submitted to the Major Incident Room (MIR) or SIO in the form of statements and messages. These should be cross referenced to the Family Liaison log.

This information would be gathered from those individuals who have been identified as being close to the victim. Often, this is the family of the deceased however, on occasion, enquiries can reveal that those closest to the victim were friends and associates who have to be identified through sensitive but thorough investigation.

The advantage of having this lifestyle information is that in the early stages, it can open up possible lines of enquiry by identifying routines, places frequented, associates etc., which might not be immediately apparent.

All victimology information has the potential to provide the investigation with lines of enquiry. It is important to prioritise these lines of enquiry at an early stage. The FLO, if relevant, should seek to obtain:

* A photograph of the victim which is as true a likeness as to how they looked before the incident;
* A full Personal Descriptive Form (PDF);
* A breakdown of the typical routine of the victim in the weeks leading up to the incident, broken down into a daily basis;
* Any variations to that routine;
* Precursor events, no matter how unimportant or unrelated they may seem to be (phone calls, altercations etc.);
* Details of associates and their relationship with the victim;
* Hobbies and activities, including memberships of clubs;
* Methods of transport used by the victim;
* Social activities, pubs, clubs, coffee shops, restaurants and areas frequented;
* Whether the victim was vulnerable in any way;
* Whether there is an explanation for the presence of the victim at the scene;
* Medical information, including GP details;
* Financial background / details;
* Details of any online or social media profiles.

### Record Keeping

Record keeping is an essential part of a FLO deployment.

At the outset of every deployment, the FLO will be issued with and commence the Police Scotland Family Liaison Log (FLO log). All contact with the family / next of kin, representatives of the family and any other parties connected with the family should be documented here and it should be the only method of recording such contact.

Entries should be made timeously, accurately and should be examined at regular intervals by the SIO. The log contains numbered self-carbonated pages which allows the log entries to be submitted to the Home Office Large Major Enquiry System (HOLMES) receiver or office manager, where appropriate.

Officers completing the FLO log should be aware that it is a disclosable document. It is therefore important that where any other means of recording contact has been made prior to entry into the approved log, such as notebooks etc., then to ensure evidential integrity, these notes should also be retained.

The FLO log should include the following information:

* Details of all non-sensitive strategic and tactical decisions agreed with the SIO / SIM affecting Family Liaison Strategy;
* Date and time of all contacts made, including the times of any meetings;
* Method of contact and venue where applicable e.g. by telephone, email, at home address;
* Details of the purpose of the contact and any information exchanged;
* Details of any complaint made by the family and action taken to appraise the SIO / SIM;
* Details of who initiated contact e.g. Police, family, others;
* Details of non-family members present at meetings (care and discretion should be employed in establishing these details if they are not volunteered or already known);
* All attempts to contact the family or their representatives without success;
* All attempts to contact the family, which were refused or declined and any reasons given;
* Date and time of submission of entry to the enquiry system (where applicable).

Where the FLO becomes aware of any sensitive issues that may require to be brought to the attention of the enquiry, they should be submitted to the incident room on a message form.

Under no circumstances should intelligence be entered into the FLO log. The normal procedures apply in regard to intelligence submissions.

When complete, the FLO log should be handed to the SIO or MIR to be retained with the other case papers.

## Working and Communicating with the Family

The first contact with the family is vital in laying the foundations for a successful partnership.

On first meeting with a family, FLOs should clearly explain who they are and what their role is. This should be done in clear and unambiguous terms that the family can understand. It is important that they understand that the primary role is that of an investigating officer.

Contact must be honest and, as far as possible, open. It is paramount that families are treated appropriately, professionally, with respect and with consideration given to their needs. Officers must never make assumptions as to the particular needs and expectations of a family and must never deliberately mislead them.

The victim’s family must be provided with the timely sharing of all possible information so far as the investigation permits. It is important to explain to a family that while they will be provided with as much information as possible, there may be times when some information is temporarily withheld as releasing it may harm the integrity of the investigation.

Family members can be significant witnesses and in such cases, there is a need from the outset to exercise extreme care in the information that is shared with them. This is to safeguard against allegations being made, at any later trial, that the information shared by the FLO contaminated the evidence of a particular family member(s). In all such cases, it is important that the FLO maintains an accurate record of all that is said to and by him/her in the FLO log.

Any information released to the family in relation to the investigation, must first be authorised by the SIO / SIM and recorded in the FLO log.

In some cases, language barriers may exist and communication may require the services of a suitably qualified interpreter. Where such a need arises, great care must be taken to ensure that all information is clearly relayed and understanding sought. Caution should also be taken when interpreters are involved in the investigation process, to ensure that gender, personal background or beliefs are not conflicting with those of the family.

In addition to providing the family with information concerning the death of the victim and explaining the police and criminal justice process, FLOs may also have to address other issues with the family e.g. as far as possible, protect the family from unwanted media intrusion, facilitate the wishes of the family to visit the scene and facilitate access to medical and support services for the family if required.

### SIO

The SIO should meet with the family as soon as practicable and in conjunction with the wishes of the family. This meeting should be a main priority during the initial stage of the investigation and one in which the SIO provides the family with their contact details, an explanation of their role as SIO and what the family can expect from police.

Care must be taken and unrealistic promises should not be made to the family.

The SIO should offer to meet the family at significant stages of the investigation or at the family’s request and it is best practice for any visit to be made alongside the FLO.

### Indirect Communication

When there is no direct dialogue with the family, the family should be encouraged to appoint a representative to act on their behalf. This might be solicitors or members of community interest groups. The wishes of the family must always be respected in this regard. The FLO must work constructively and positively with any representative of the family to ensure that the family are supported and are receiving correct information concerning the progress of the investigation. Any communication with representatives of the family should be recorded in the FLO log.

The SIO / SIM must ensure that any telephone call with a representative is subsequently supported by written correspondence to provide a formal record of communication.

In cases where direct dialogue with the family has been ineffective, strained or has broken down, the SIO / SIM may consider involving local advocates to facilitate communication. The purpose of an independent advisor would include, advising the SIO / SIM in re-establishing effective dialogue with the family and rebuilding trust and confidence in the police investigation.

The family and / or their representative should be consulted about the engagement of any independent advocate and asked to nominate representatives in whom they have confidence and trust. The SIO / SIM should ensure that a terms of reference, operating protocols and confidentiality agreements are documented when an independent advocate is engaged by the police.

In some cases, the FLO may be expected to work alongside local advocates in the liaison process. The intention is to build the families trust and confidence in the police investigation, with the objective of restoring effective direct police communication with the family.

### Media

Media interest in major enquiries is inevitably high. The SIO / SIM will have to balance the need to exploit any investigative advantage from family exposure to the media, with the need to protect the family from any unwanted media intrusion.

The FLO should actively discourage the family from issuing statements to the media that are independent of the investigation and could impact on the investigative process. To achieve this, it is important for the family to be involved in a partnership approach with the SIO / SIM, together with Corporate Communications and the FLO to develop and agree the police / family media strategy. This is particularly important when media appeals involve publishing a photograph or video and specific information regarding the victim or family.

In cases where the family wish to deal with the media directly, the SIO / SIM should endeavour to agree a plan with the family to ensure that this does not adversely impact on the investigation.

Where it is not possible to pursue such a strategy, the SIO/SIM should advise the family of the possible outcomes of independent media contact and devise a contingency plan to minimise the possibility of an adverse impact on the investigation.

Whether the family deals with the media directly or through the police, they should be reminded that any material arising from such contact, including video recordings, photographs or written accounts, remain the property of the media. This material could be used again, at a later date, without consultation or reference to the wishes of the family.

FLOs should apprise themselves of the media reporting of the case on a daily basis to ensure they are prepared for potential questions from the family.

The FLO must not issue any statements to the media unless specifically requested to do so by the SIO and in liaison with Corporate Communications.

FLOs must ensure they are in a position to notify families of any form of media release made by the police prior to it being broadcast or published.

## Significant witness Interviews/Suspect within the family

### Significant Witness Interviews

Information has been removed due to its content being exempt in terms of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, Section 34, Investigation by Scottish public authorities and proceedings arising out of such investigations.

Where a FLO is tasked to conduct a significant witness interview, it is important that they are debriefed afterwards and their ongoing deployment in the role with the family reviewed.

When a decision is made to task a FLO to conduct a significant witness interview, the rationale for it and the decisions made following debrief should be recorded in the SIO policy file.

### Suspect within the family

Information has been removed due to its content being exempt in terms of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, Section 34, Investigation by Scottish public authorities and proceedings arising out of such investigations.

## Identification and Visiting

The FLO will have a crucial role to play in the identification process of the deceased. In the case of mass fatalities, the FLO role in this regard cannot be understated.

Close liaison with the SIO / SIM and the Procurator Fiscal concerning issues of viewing, identification and body release must be undertaken by the FLO.

It must be recognised that the formal identification procedure and visiting their loved one are separate processes. The formal identification will form an essential element of the post mortem process.

### Formal Identification

Formal visual identification of a body may not always be possible due to the injuries sustained or decomposition of the remains. The SIO / SIM, in liaison with the Procurator Fiscal, will decide what processes will be employed to establish the identity of the deceased, especially if they are invasive, mutilate or use DNA. When other forms of identification are to be undertaken, for example, fingerprints, dental records or DNA profiling, the process and reasons for it must be explained in an open an honest manner by the FLO whenever possible.

Where DNA profiling and the taking of samples are appropriate, the FLO should approach an appropriate person (preferably the mother of the victim, where available) in confidence and ask if there is anything that the police should know about lineage before obtaining blood samples for DNA purposes.

If formal visual identification is possible, the FLO, after consultation with the SIO/SIM should ask the family who they wish to nominate to carry out this task. Provided no conflict occurs in this decision, the wishes of the family should be followed.

The FLO should liaise with mortuary staff to ensure the body is in a presentable state and where possible, blood and other debris wiped away from the face and other exposed parts of the deceased.

In cases where formal visual identification is not appropriate, this must not be confused with the needs of family members to view the remains for bereavement purposes.

### Visiting

The police have no legal right to refuse a family’s request to visit their loved one regardless of the condition of the remains. The FLO must not make assumptions on behalf of the family or pass comment on whether it is advisable or not. Sensitive and responsive management of visiting may be critical to the family grieving and might prove to be of long term benefit.

When family members inform the FLO that they wish to visit their loved ones, it is the FLOs responsibility to work with the family to support them and to give them sufficient information to make an informed choice. To help families in deciding whether or not to visit their loved one at the mortuary, the FLO should obtain as much information as possible about what the family will see.

Where visiting takes place after a post mortem, the FLO should, in advance and in consultation with mortuary staff, explain to the family the necessity and consequences of this procedure. It is advisable for the FLO to attend the mortuary in order to gather information before any family member attends. The information should then be passed onto the family sensitively.

The information established and sensitively given should include:

* The condition of the body, including any odour, colour and temperature. Details of any injuries to be disclosed should be agreed with the SIO in order to prevent specialist knowledge from being revealed;
* A detailed description of the layout of the mortuary that the family members will go in and the facilities they contain.
* Where available, a photograph of the deceased may be used if it is likely to assist family members to decide whether they wish to visit or to prepare them for visiting their loved one.

In some circumstances, for example where family members wish to visit again, or in cases where there are divided families, the FLO might have to accompany different members of the family on separate occasions. FLOs should be mindful that deterioration may have occurred in the intervening period therefore they should view the body again prior to the family in order to prepare them for what they are going to see.

The family may wish to touch or kiss their loved one or perform particular cultural rites. Guidance should be sought from SIO and Procurator Fiscal about whether this is possible or appropriate. In circumstances where investigative priorities prevent such requests being facilitated, the reasons must be fully explained to the family.

## Post Mortem & Organ Retention/Donation

### Post Mortem and Registering the Death

The FLO will be required to explain the requirement for a post mortem examination to establish a cause of death. This must be done in a sensitive manner as the thought of such an examination can cause considerable distress to families.

At the conclusion of the post mortem examination, the pathologist will issue a Medical certificate of the Cause of Death. This certificate will be used by the family to register the death with the relevant registrar who will then issue a certificate of registration of death (Form 14) along with a notification of death certificate and abbreviated extract of the death entry.

If the investigation is still ongoing and the Procurator Fiscal has not yet instructed that the body can be returned to the family, the FLO should take possession of the Certificate of Registration of Death (Form 14) and return this to the mortuary.

### Organ Retention and Release of the body

At the conclusion of the post mortem, the FLO should establish which tissues and / or organs, or other samples have been retained for further pathological examination and the reasons for their retention. FLOs should be prepared to discuss these issues with the family. The Procurator Fiscal may speak to the family directly in relation to organ retention to seek their views on whether to delay a funeral until all organs are reunited with the body or have a separate burial / cremation of the retained organs later or allow the pathologist to dispose of the organs sensitively. In some cases the Procurator Fiscal may issue a letter detailing, which organs / tissues have been retained and the reasons for the retention.

The Procurator Fiscal is responsible for authorising the release of the body. The FLO should consult regularly with the SIO / SIM and Procurator Fiscal in regard to this and ensure the family are kept up to date with developments.

In cases of homicide, the family should be made aware that there may be a requirement for an additional post mortem examination(s) to be carried out on behalf of the defence. This process can impact significantly on when the body can be released.

### Human Tissue and Organ Donation

Organ donation must occur very quickly after death and is therefore only possible from those dying in intensive care or emergency departments. Tissue donation however, may be possible up to 48 hours after death, when the deceased is in the mortuary or funeral home. Donated tissue such as skin, bones, tendons, eyes and heart valves can be retrieved after death. Families who are suddenly bereaved as a result of a criminal act or fatal road traffic collision, do not always think about tissue donation at the time, but this could be something that brings them great comfort at a later stage.

It is important that FLOs do not attempt to provide a medial view on tissue or organ donation.

The Human Tissue (Authorisation) (Scotland) Act 2019, which provides for an opt-out system of organ and tissue donation, gained Royal Assent in July 2019. The new system came into force in March 2021.

Under the opt-out system, if an adult does not opt in or opt out of donation, they may be deemed to have authorised donation for transplantation. This is subject to the safeguards in the Act which seek to ensure that donation will not go ahead, where it would be against the person’s wishes.

### Funerals

Whether a FLO attends a funeral is a decision for the SIO / SIM in conjunction with the FLO. The wishes of the family should be borne in mind and officers should ensure they do not attend a funeral without the prior knowledge and agreement of the family.

Where a FLO does attend the funeral, they should keep a discreet distance and ensure they do not take any active part in proceedings. At the conclusion of the service, officers should decline any invite to attend a post funeral event.

## Exit Strategy/VIA (Victim Information & Advice)

FLOs must remain focused on their primary role as an investigator throughout their deployment. Where the FLO has developed a good relationship with the family, there is potential for the family becoming over reliant on the FLO and the FLO becoming over reliant on the family. The implications of this could have a long term effect on both the family and FLO.

A robust exit strategy must be agreed between the SIO / FLC and FLO. At an appropriate time once the investigatory role of the FLO is exhausted then steps must be taken for the FLO to exit. At the outset of their deployment, FLOs should make families aware that there will come a point where they will exit their role.

Where an investigation remains undetected/unresolved, the Senior Investigating Officer should, in conjunction with the FLC and FLOs, discuss and agree an exit strategy to ensure that FLOs are not deployed any longer than absolutely necessary. If the FLOs role is reduced to simply maintaining contact with no information to pass, that may not be an effective use of their skills whilst precluding them from further deployments.

Once no further investigative work is being carried out, the Family Liaison Officer should inform the family that their contact will cease however should any further information come to light, the family will be informed - albeit it may not be the same officer undertaking that role.

If the case is detected and an accused has appeared at court, responsibility for liaison with the family should be handed over to VIA.

FLOs should make contact with VIA when initially deployed and submit the COPFS Victim Profile form. It is also recognised as good practice that VIA identify the individual who will be responsible for the family once the FLO has exited. This will also allow the FLO the opportunity to provide the VIA representative with early information surrounding the victim, family background, circumstances of the death and the involvement of any support agencies.

The timing and location of the exit meeting should be agreed between the family, FLO, VIA officer and SIO. The Procurator Fiscal’s office is normally the location for an exit meeting, however a police station or the family home, subject to any relevant risk assessment, are also suitable.

It is recognised as good practice for the SIO, or their Deputy, to chair the exit meeting, as they are responsible for the implementation of the Family Liaison Strategy throughout the deployment.

Once the formal handover to VIA has taken place, the FLO will no longer be the point of contact for the family. The SIO will provide details of whom that responsibility will pass to on behalf of the police should the family have any queries or concerns that they wish addressed.

Once the FLO has exited the family, there should be no further contact between the FLO and the family.

### Victim Information and Advice

VIA is a dedicated service within the COPFS. The principal aims of VIA are:

* To provide information to the next of kin of a victim and witnesses regarding the Criminal Justice process in general;
* To keep victims and bereaved next of kin informed about the progress of the case; and,
* To advise on and facilitate referral to other agencies for specialist support and counselling as required.

VIA is an integral part of COPFS and staff work closely with their colleagues at the local Procurator Fiscals office. As they are not involved in prosecuting cases, they are able to concentrate solely on victims and next of kin.

VIA will advise the FLO of the outcome of preliminary court proceedings. At this time, consideration should be given to the FLO withdrawing from the case and passing responsibility for giving information to the family to the VIA officer. The exact timing of this handover will depend on the circumstances of the case. It may be after the funeral, after the accused first appears in court or it may be later if police investigations have not been completed.

## Welfare

The SIO / SIM has a duty of care to support, review and constantly monitor the welfare and health of all staff under their direction. They should be aware of the dangers of undue stress levels being endured by FLCs / FLAs and FLOs as they are exposed to raw emotions and needs of the bereaved.

In order to support peers and look after themselves, all those involved in family liaison should:

* Commit to support colleagues in mental health and stress within the workplace;
* Have an awareness of the signs of mental health / stress and ways to seek support;
* Have confidence to challenge the culture of stigma around mental health and stress;
* Have knowledge of how to proactively look after their own wellbeing and improve resilience.

In addition, FLCs and FLAs should create a supportive environment for the FLO and that they are given the confidence to speak about stress and mental wellness during deployments and at any other time.

### Proactive wellbeing support

In order to support staff, it is important to safeguard those in high risk roles and therefore:

* Police Scotland should have a robust pre deployment assessment and also ongoing screening of FLOs;
* Each FLO should have a dedicated FLC or FLA as outlined in the Family Liaison structure;
* Regular meetings with individual FLOs should be completed, to include a discussion and assessment on wellbeing, stress and resilience. It should take into consideration what ongoing support is required and their suitability to continue with ongoing deployments;
* A robust monitoring system of FLO deployments should be maintained, including whether there are any deployment concerns which should be responded to;
* The FLC / FLA should work in conjunction with the FLOs line manager to ensure appropriate support and awareness of deployments;
* The FLC / FLA should explore what can be offered by Occupational Health and wellbeing support. (Employee Assistance Programme, Resilience Wellbeing Assessments, TRiM);
* Peer support should be considered for FLOs, FLAs and FLCs;
* During deployments, the support required by FLOs should be under continual review;
* Following any exit strategy, the FLC / FLA should conduct a debrief of the deployment, including a welfare and wellbeing assessment and what learning can be shared;
* Any resistance or refusal to attend meetings or discuss welfare requirements must be considered by the FLC / FLA before any further deployment of the FLO.

## Support Services

Police Officers are not in a position to provide full practical support and guidance when working with victims’ families. The FLO may find that the family requires support and assistance with a variety of issues e.g. trauma of the bereavement, funeral arrangements, financial or legal advice, health or social services, in accordance with their needs.

### Support for Families Bereaved by Crime

Funded by the Scottish Government, Support for Families Bereaved by Crime (SFBC) was established within Victim Support Scotland in April 2019 to provide practical and emotional support to families bereaved by murder and culpable homicide.

The dedicated key workers are specially trained to support families and can assist with immediate practical tasks such as assisting with funeral arrangements, informing organisations that there has been a death and accessing financial assistance such as state benefits and compensation claims.

A joint protocol has been established between Victim Support Scotland, Police Scotland and COPFS which governs how the parties will refer cases to the SFBC service, share information and work together to support bereaved families.

FLOs should make families aware of this service early in the deployment and provide a brief overview as to what they can offer to enable families to make an informed choice on whether to engage with the service. Explicit consent is required from the family member prior to any referral being made to the service by the FLO.

### Brake – National Road Victim Service

Brake’s National Road Victim Service is a specialist service for people affected by road death and serious injury and the professionals supporting them.

The service is an accredited, professional source of emotional support, practical information and referral to other sources of help.

FLOs deployed to assist in the investigation of a road death should provide families with an information pack, Advice for Bereaved families and Friends following a death on the road. The FLO should seek the views of families and friends to refer them to one of the support services, then, depending on the view of the individual(s), refer them to this service. For further information please see: Procedures following a death on the road - Scotland - Brake the road safety charity.

There are a number of other support organisations that can provide assistance at a local and national level.

## Family Liaison in Mass Fatality Incidents

One of the most important considerations in the aftermath of a disaster is the relationship between bereaved families and the police.

The guidance contained within this document provides advice on family liaison in the immediate aftermath of a mass fatality incident. It does not distinguish between the types of incident that may occur where the Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) process is implemented.

The period following a disaster is intense and often confusing for all those concerned, which of course includes the families of those missing. These families are desperate for information and they must be treated in an appropriate manner.

In the event that a family has reported someone missing, a FLO will be appointed to the family concerned. The appointment of a FLO will benefit the family and the investigation. These benefits include:

* Providing a single point of contact between the SIO / SIM and family;
* Provide a two way flow of information and intelligence;
* To ensure the gathering of ante-mortem data in the appropriate manner without undue delay;
* Completing of the Interpol DVI forms in a professional and timely manner;
* To gather any physical material that may aid identification which would stand up to forensic scrutiny e.g. toothbrush, razors, medical and dental records;
* The obtaining of all relevant statements regarding lifestyle and victimology;
* To ensure that the family receive timely and accurate information regarding the investigation and recovery operation;
* To ensure that the family are assisted through the Criminal Justice process and if relevant, the coronial process in England and Wales;
* To ensure that all requests made by the family to view the deceased are met;
* To assist in facilitating visits to the scene(s) and
* To assist in the provision of suitable support services.

All dealings with the family must be recorded in the FLO log.

Such events, by their very nature, attract significant media interest, which will centre on the families of those reported missing. There should be a media strategy in place and advice should be offered to families from a suitable representative from Corporate Communications.

### Interpol DVI Strategic Aim

The strategic aim will be to ensure the most effective investigation possible into the death of an individual involved in a mass death incident, by the immediate implementation of a family liaison strategy. This strategy will include the deployment of a trained FLO to each family believed to have lost a relative in any such incident. The strategic aim will include:

* Victim Identification:This will facilitate the rapid and accurate identification of disaster victims and human remains by timely collection, collation and submission of ante-mortem information.
* Investigation:The investigation will provide a framework to facilitate the two way documented flow of information between the DVI commander and the family and the identification of critical intelligence, which will support the overall investigation. This will include all relevant information to the family about the judicial process.
* Community Reassurance:A joint media strategy should be agreed with the family to encourage witnesses to come forward and give the public and community reassurance in the investigative process.
* Support from other agencies:This will ensure that families have access to information that will enable them to make informed decisions about the support and assistance that can be obtained from other appropriate organisations.

The DVI Commander is responsible for the overall strategy relating to recovery, identification and repatriation of victims. Family Liaison falls within this strategy and as such requires a distinct strategy of its own.

The level of information passed to families should be as high as possible as they will be in desperate need for information. It is of paramount importance that the police can identify themselves as the primary and most reliable source of such information.

The DVI Commander should appoint an appropriately trained FLC(s) to manage the family liaison response. The FLC should be involved in the process of compiling the family liaison strategy in any mass fatality incident. Their role will also include:

* Supporting and advising the DVI commander on issues relating to the delivery of family liaison;
* Acting as a channel for welfare support;
* Liaising nationally and internationally to share and gather good practice;
* Monitoring the workload for FLOs;
* Ensuring that any necessary equipment such as vehicles and telephones are made available to FLOs;
* Act as a quality assurance point for work submitted by FLOs to ensure that the DVI commander receives timely and accurate information;
* Ensuring that all relevant paperwork from the FLOs is completed and submitted in a timely and efficient manner and
* Implementation of appropriate exit strategies.

All FLOs should be trained to a standard of DVI awareness that would allow them to have a full understanding of any ongoing investigation into a mass fatality incident. This requirement is essential, as they will be expected to explain the processes involved in such an investigation to a bereaved family.

### Humanitarian Assistance Centres / Reception Centres

Where a large scale disaster has occurred involving mass fatalities, families often attend at or near the scene. In such instances, setting up a central resource centre should be considered. A Family and Friends Reception Centre (FFRC) for those concerned about anyone who may have been caught up in the disaster is likely to be set up relatively quickly.

The local authority, police and other agencies involved may then set up a Humanitarian Assistance Centre (HAC) at a slightly later stage, which could include virtual support through a dedicated website. This will be the focal point for information and assistance for families and others directly affected by the disaster.

The existence of such centres can help to maximise the Family Liaison effort by having FLO resources available to capture all the ante-mortem information as well as forensic samples in the immediate aftermath.

Visits to the scene can also be organised so as to ensure that they do not interfere with any rescue or recovery work that is ongoing. It will also reduce the risk of relatives attending the scene unaccompanied at the scene, which can be harrowing and disruptive to the DVI teams.

### Exit Strategies

The DVI Commander and FLC should ensure that exit strategies are implemented at the appropriate time.

FLOs who have been involved in responding to a mass fatality incident must be offered the opportunity to attend a debrief. This will ensure any welfare issues are addressed and working practices reviewed prior to any subsequent deployment.

## Abduction of UK nationals abroad

One of the most demanding roles performed by a FLO is being deployed to a family following abduction of UK nationals abroad. The responding officers provide appropriate support to the family whilst achieving the aims of the Foreign & Commonwealth office (FCO).

The deployment of FLOs also provides an opportunity to obtain the necessary Ante Mortem collection from the family.

Further guidance is provided in FLO guidance on abduction of UK Nationals.

## Deaths Aboard

FLOs may be deployed to assist the FCO in cases where British nationals have been the victims of serious crimes or major disasters abroad. These have included cases of murder, manslaughter, fatal road collisions, terrorist incidents and where people have gone missing in suspicious circumstances.

An SIO should be appointed in any case where a FLO is to be deployed. The role of the FLO in these cases is to assist the overseas force by facilitating the relationship with the family and with evidence gathering in the UK.

### Criteria for deployment

Although considered, FLOs will not be deployed in **all** cases where a British national is murdered, or the victim of another serious crime abroad. They will generally only be deployed if there is an investigative role for them, for example:

* Where identification of the victim is an issue and there is a need for ante-mortem samples such as DNA, dental records, fingerprints etc. or samples from family members;
* The foreign police service is requesting that enquiries are conducted in the UK.

If the victim’s body is returned to Scotland, the Procurator Fiscal may instruct local enquiry to be carried out to clarify how the person died. FLOs can assist the PF in these circumstances. The PF may also order a post mortem examination, even if one was conducted abroad.

In cases where a victim’s body is returned to England or Wales en-route to Scotland, the coroner may have to conduct an inquest.

When a death abroad is first notified to the FCO, desk officers will arrange for the local force to notify the next of kin as soon as possible. This should not normally be carried out by a FLO.

The Desk Officer and their line manager will decide, in consultation with the police advisor, whether to request the deployment of a FLO. If it is decided to do so, this will be done through the Force FLC or on call senior CID management.

### FLO deployment

The SIO / FLC must decide on the most appropriate officer to deploy. This should be an experienced FLO who will be capable of managing the family’s expectations and frustrations and dealing with difficult questions.

On being deployed and having received a briefing from the Desk Officer (probably via the FLC), the FLO should meet with the family to obtain any details they have of the case and to gain an understanding of their needs and family dynamics.

Consideration should be given to the FLO and SIO liaising early with the Desk Officer to discuss a joint strategy for the deployment. This will include how information is passed to the family.

The Desk Officer can, at this time, provide information to the FLO and SIO which may assist in decision making, for example, cultural issues in the country, police/judicial systems, likelihood of getting cooperation from the local authorities, advice on repatriation and what consuls can and cannot do.

FLOs must avoid giving unrealistic expectations to the family in relation to information they may be able to provide, how the investigation will be conducted or Police Scotland’s role in that.

A robust exit strategy must be agreed between the SIO / FLC and FLO. If the FLOs role is reduced to passing on information, that may not be an effective use of their skills and should be continued by the FCO Desk Officer.

### Family Liaison Officers Deployed Abroad

If this is being considered, advice should be sought from Interpol and the FCO.

The first consideration must be whether there is a real operational need for the FLO to travel:

* Can the family be catered for by the foreign police force or consular officers?
* Will the FLO be performing a chaperoning role only?

The SIO should discuss the objectives / strategy, schedules, etc. with the Desk Officer and discuss what assistance consular officials abroad may be able to provide. In addition, a media strategy should be considered.

Once overseas, the FLO should meet with the local Consular officer to discuss issues and agree on roles and responsibilities. Consideration should also be given to arranging a meeting between the consular officer, family and FLO to ensure each understands their objectives and responsibilities, as well as the boundaries and limitations inherent to that country. The FLO should ensure that the consular officer is updated regularly.

When deployed abroad, FLOs should remember that as a UK police officer, they require the host country’s permission to be there and whilst there, they have no powers or authority to question witnesses or officials.

### Interpol

Interpol is the largest international police organisation in the world. Every member country has an Interpol office called a National Central Bureau (NCB). The NCB in the UK is based in London.

In the context of the murder of British nationals abroad, the NCB may be asked by the overseas police force to arrange delivery of the initial notification to the family in the UK, or to deal with requests for further information and evidence. In such instances, the NCB will contact the FCO Desk Officer, informing them of the details of the request, what action has been taken by the NCB, together with the contact details for the victim’s family and those of the police that have been tasked.

The UK NCB has the legal authority to provide UK agencies with evidential material from around the world, in addition to facilitating requests for evidence to be obtained in the UK. It also has an obligation to satisfy international requests for the exchange of information.

### Investigation of Deaths Abroad under the Inquiries into Fatal Accidents and Sudden Deaths etc. (Scotland) Act 2016

Section 6 of this act outlines circumstances in which the Lord Advocate may instruct the investigation of the death of a person, who is ordinarily resident in Scotland, where the death has occurred out with the United Kingdom.

Such circumstances are likely to include where the Lord Advocate:

* Considers that the death was sudden, suspicious or unexplained; or occurred in circumstances giving rise to serious public concern;
* Considers that the circumstances of the death have not been sufficiently established in the course of an investigation in relation to the death;
* Considers that there is a real prospect that those circumstances would be sufficiently established in an inquiry and
* Decides that it is in the public interest for an inquiry to be held into the circumstances of the death.

Any consideration regarding establishing an inquiry abroad is sensitive therefore Homicide Governance and Review (HGR) will be the single point of contact for Police Scotland and will be contacted in the first instance. HGR will then liaise directly with and seek direction from the Scottish Fatalities and Investigation Unit (SFIU) at COPFS.

## Compliance record

EqHIRA completion/review date: 28/03/2023

Information Management Compliant: Yes

Health and Safety Compliant: Yes

## Version control table

| Version | History of amendments | Approval date |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1.00 | Initial Approved version of National Guidance following conversion of Family Liaison SOP under principles of SOP review. | 23/03/2021 |
| 2.00 | ACRA rider added – no change to content | 11/12/2021 |
| 3.00 | Content reviewed regarding ACRA – No amendment necessary. ACRA rider removed. | 04/01/2022 |
| 4.00 | Addition of guidance around formulating a FLO exit strategy. Document formatted. | 28/03/2023 |

## Feedback

All Police Scotland service delivery Policies, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and National Guidance are subject to regular reviews. It is important that user feedback is taken into account when documents are reviewed.

If any officer / staff member wishes to provide comment, or make suggestions for improvements to this or any associated document, Force Form 066-014 should be used.