



Who Needs To See This Bulletin?

Please ensure that this bulletin is circulated to Family Liaison Officers and their Deploying Managers and/or Line Managers.

Quick-Time Learning Bulletin

Family Liaison

The role of the Family Liaison Officer (FLO) is carried out on behalf of the Governor/Director following a death in custody, or when a prisoner has a serious or terminal illness. The grade of the FLO is less important than having the right person with the necessary skills to undertake the role. The FLO offers the family appropriate support, timely information and practical assistance, and provides a vital link between the prison and the family. It is important that we continue to learn from the work that FLOs do so that we can continue to provide the best support possible to families.

At the FLO learning day held in March a number of learning points were identified that may assist FLOs in their work with families.

KEY LEARNING POINTS

Early engagement with families

- There is no easy way to tell a family that a relative has died in prison. Experience tells us that the best way to inform a family is for the first contact to be made directly by the establishment.
- Every family will react differently to the news of a death in custody.
- Family relationships can be complex and you may need to provide information to several different members of the same family.
- A prompt and sensitive condolence letter from the prison can have a beneficial impact on the nature of the relationship that the FLO/prison has with the family.
- Families should be given an explanation of what they can expect from the prison's FLO and how this differs with the role of the police and Prisons and Probation Ombudsman's FLOs. The roles of a NOMS FLO and a PPO FLO are very distinct. Prison-based FLOs are responsible for the day-to-day relationship between a prison and a family. The role of PPO FLO is independent of NOMS. Their role is to enable families to participate in the PPO investigation; to obtain answers to their questions; and to provide a clear point of contact with the PPO's office.

Next of kin

- The legal next of kin is usually considered to be the spouse or civil partner of the deceased in the first instance, followed by the children, parents or siblings. If the prisoner has not nominated a next of kin, or the legal next of kin is not clear, the coroner will be able to assist in identifying the legal next of kin.
- Remember that the victims of the deceased may be a family member and the nominated next of kin. FLOs should be aware of this before they break the news of the death.

Support for FLOs

- Line Managers and/or the Safer Custody Team Leader are required to provide support for FLOs (Chapter 1, PSI 64/2011).
- Where possible, there should be a FLO rota which will help ensure that the role is fairly distributed amongst all the FLOs.
- Deployment Risk Assessments – must be undertaken before a FLO is deployed, and where there is a risk of media attention, remember that the FLO could also become the subject of the media attention and support should be given.
- The FLO network database provides details of other trained FLOs across the estate; use it for sharing experiences and information. The list of FLOs is circulated by the National Safer Custody Managers.
- It is important that FLOs have the time to do the role. A sponsor on the Senior Management Team may help facilitate this or consider asking the detail office to provide the necessary time.
- Utilise resources within the prison to provide support – psychology team, occupational health or members of the chaplaincy team.
- Include the FLO in the hot and critical incident debrief.

Out of region deployment/working with other prisons

- If the family involved live some distance from the prison then there are a number of options available. Some staff may drive the long distances themselves to inform a family. This is not always possible or practicable. There is also the option of contacting a prison located nearby the family and asking if their FLO is available to inform the family face to face.
- Some regions have arrangements in place for mutual support between prisons for appropriate family liaison cover.
- Consider the possibility of mentoring and cross deployment of new and experienced FLOs within regions and/or prisons.

End of life care

- Make use of published End of Life Care toolkits e.g. the Liverpool Care Pathway.
- Consider the appropriateness of an open door policy for a prisoner close to death – this will enable medical treatment to be given at night and allow families to visit at short notice.

Recording information

- FLO Log books must be completed for all deaths. Log books can be ordered from Branston using the following order numbers BD015 (FLO log book) and BD014 (Decision log book).

Reminder

Following a death in custody, the Governor/Director must:

- write a personal letter of condolence to the family.
- write to the family once the final response and action plan to the draft PPO report has been agreed, and again following the conclusion of the inquest.

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