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west midlands
police and crime
commissioner

Mrs Louise Hunt, Senior Coroner
Birmingham and Solihull
Coroner's Court
50 Newton Street
Birmingham
B4 6NE

By email: birmingham.coroner@nhs.net

15 October 2019

Dear

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mrs Hunt".

RE: Police and Crime Commissioner's response to the Coroner's Regulation 28 report: Ms Karen Burns (deceased)

I would like to express my deepest sympathy to the family of Ms Burns following her sad death.

I sincerely apologise for the delay in response to this report.

Please see below response from the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner to the Coroner's Regulation 28 report to prevent future deaths dated 12 August 2019. The response has arisen following the inquest into the death of Karen Janes Burns, which was concluded on 12 August 2019.

The coroner's report notes two matters for consideration:

- 1. The 101 call made by the deceased's ex-partner was incorrectly graded as a P3 (response time of 8 hours) and not a P2 (response time of 1 hour):**

Since 2010, we have lost 2,131 officers and £175 million in resources. This has meant we have had to prioritise certain aspects of the service and have less ability to cover everything as we have done in the past.

West Midlands Police has accepted that the call was incorrectly graded, which was recognised as human error. It has been discussed with the member of staff in question by management.

Additional training for all control room staff will take place to ensure such errors are eliminated as far as possible. The Coroner's report found that the wrong grading of this call made no difference to the deceased in this case since even a correctly graded P2 call would not have been responded to, due to pressure on resources on the night of 22/23 March 2019.

- 2. The risk created by the lack of resources available to West Midlands Police:**

On the night of 22/23 March 2019 most calls graded P2, and even some calls graded P1 (response time of 15 minutes), could not be reached due to the high level of demand and resources available.

With the limited resources available, West Midlands Police aim to allocate these calls in the most efficient and appropriate way to deal with the demand for a huge range of policing activities.

It is very clear that over the last few years, the West Midlands policing mission has grown. One of the ways in which it has grown is through the Police helping other services to deal with increased mental health demand.

West Midlands Police recognise that response to emergency calls from the public within an appropriate time is of vital importance and they seek to ensure appropriate prioritisation based on threat, harm and risk.

Before and after the events of Ms Burns' death, West Midlands Police has taken dramatic steps to ensure that the response resources it has, are allocated as quickly and efficiently as possible to all emergency calls. These include:

- a. **Introducing a process of escalation, where dispatchers can escalate calls which they have particular concerns about, to a supervisor. This means resources can be prioritised for that call when possible.**
- b. **Introducing a process of involving the Force Incident Manager. When response shifts become particularly busy resources from outside the area can be redeployed to response, where possible.**

(This process was employed on the night of 22/23 March 2019 and further units were allocated to assist in Birmingham East. These additional units were immediately deployed to P1 incidents requiring assistance and therefore were unavailable for allocation to any P2 incidents.)

- c. **Introducing a "Log Closure Doctrine". This will encourage bolder decision-making from dispatchers dealing with emergency calls to ensure resources are focussed on those calls with the most pressing needs.**
- d. **Reducing the number of logs held by each dispatcher. Logs more than 24 hours old are now dealt with by another team so dispatchers can concentrate only on the most critical calls without the distraction of managing older logs.**

Numbers of logs held by each dispatcher has decreased from around 160 (as on the night of 22/23 March 2019) to around 60.

- e. **Changing the dispatch model, including where people sit and how they interact, to promote more efficient handling of calls.**
- f. **Changing shift patterns to build better relationships between teams and to promote more efficient handling of calls and transfer of calls between shifts.**

West Midlands Police takes its response to emergency calls extremely seriously. The force constantly monitor the level of resources and performance to ensure appropriate resources are allocated across the full range of demands which the police face.

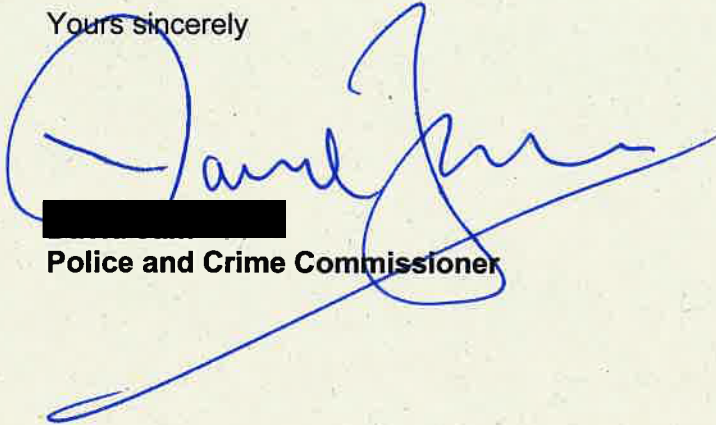
Learning from this incident has been captured and training has been provided to the call handlers involved. A new Command and Control platform is also being developed to support the call handlers and those involved in resource despatch, allowing for improved identification of resource availability and response times. This has also triggered a review of THRIVE+ training for staff.

Monitoring of call response times and resolution has demonstrated that West Midlands Police's actions taken have improved ability to respond with the limited resources available to them.

I will be holding West Midlands Police to account to ensure that the changes they have already made are fully embedded and further work is done to mitigate an incident like this happening again.

Once again, I apologise for the lateness of this response and thank you for your patience.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'David Jones', is written over a black rectangular redaction box. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Police and Crime Commissioner