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Mrs Rachael Griffin  
Senior Coroner for Dorset  
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[REDACTED]  
Dorset Police  
Force Headquarters  
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[REDACTED]  
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15 September 2022

Dear Mrs Griffin

**Re: Regulation 28 Report to Prevent Future Deaths**

I write to provide a response on behalf of Dorset Police to the Regulation 28 Report, ("the Report") received on the 21<sup>st</sup> July 2022, following the conclusion of the inquest touching the death of Gaia Kima Pope-Sutherland.

I have carefully considered the entirety of the Report and wish to reiterate that as an Organisation we continue to take seriously the need to reflect meaningfully on the evidence heard during Gaia's inquest and are committed to ongoing service improvement that goes beyond the content of your Report. However, for the purpose of this response I will focus specially on the points at Section 5, paragraph 2(iii – v) of the Report and address them in turn below.

Knowledge and training about life-threatening illnesses, such as epilepsy and mental health conditions

This concern is directed to Chief Constable [REDACTED] at the College of Policing. I wish to formally record my support for the learning from the inquest in relation to life-threatening illnesses to be shared with the College to inform National knowledge and understanding. I have personally written to CC Marsh to offer to support this work and to utilise the Organisation's learning from Gaia's inquest to inform and enhance any National training provision. I am aware that any updates to training and information relating to medical issues would go through the College of Policing clinical governance group for appropriate oversight and to ensure guidance was implemented.

I appreciate that this particular concern comes from the need for staff and officers, specifically including call handlers through to senior officers with oversight of an investigation, to identify and appreciate the specific risk that a diagnosis of epilepsy and a dependency on medication can cause to an individual's welfare.

To provide reassurance from a Dorset Police perspective the Organisation has delivered a series of training inputs through bespoke Missing Persons Training and the Vulnerability continuous professional development programme since 2019. This training programme has targeted front line officers through to Commanders with a specific module focused on the



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Identification of vulnerability and heightened risk factors such as medical conditions. This programme remains a priority and provides a good foundation for the ongoing continued professional development and learning.

Review of policies relating to concern for welfare reports, missing person reports and call handling, grading and deployment of resources

The Missing Person Policy has been reviewed on two occasions since Gaia's death in 2017. Firstly in 2018 and then more recently in 2021. This policy like other police guidance documents respond to updates following Organisational and National learning through reviews, inspections and inquiries that advance understanding and inform ongoing improvements to our policing response.

The latest review of the missing person policy was in the process of being finalised during Gaia's inquest. I enclose a copy of the finalised policy, which is now adopted, and work is ongoing to embed the changes in working practice. I highlight a few aspects of the updated policy that were relevant to the matters explored in the course of Gaia's inquest:

- a) A detailed flow chart for assessing the low, medium and high-risk categories has been re-introduced, (p.36) this provides clear guidance on how to understand and afford a risk grading to a person who is missing.
- b) The 'Absent' category is no longer in use within Niche, (p.6); The Dorset Police policy clearly states that this category is not to be used.
- c) Increased guidance for staff and officers on the use of PPNs, (para 3.9.2, p.27). The upgraded guidance focusses on the purpose of a PPN, requirements for staff and the importance of multi-agency engagement.
- d) The existence and availability of specialist/additional resources is highlighted, (paragraphs 3.2.4 and 3.6 at p.19), to ensure that we utilise officers and staff, both internally and externally to inform our investigations, with the ability to seek advice from experts.
- e) The roles and responsibilities of those involved in each stage of the handling of a missing person report is clearly defined, (paragraphs 3.3-3.4, p.5-7).

In addition, the Organisation commissioned a review with the independent charity Missing People UK which is now complete. This is enabling the Organisation to expand the work conducted so far and involves the implementation of a number of recommendations including improvement areas such as:

- a) Continuing to ensure that missing people are an Organisation-wide priority. A plan will be overseen by senior leaders to implement and review progress within the Organisation and also from partner agencies such as Children's Services and education providers;
- b) Adopting a person-centred approach to service delivery, investigations and incidents;
- c) Victim Service Assessments (VSA) are being conducted through Organisation Inspections in line with HMICFRS methodology 6 times a year, focusing on our investigative approach and victim service;





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- d) Continuing to embed and promote the Missing Person teams across the Organisation, to encourage awareness and understanding of how the teams work and to emphasise the importance of an efficient frontline response to missing person reports;
- e) The missing person coordinator meeting daily with partners to discuss current missing persons and those missing from the previous 24 hours;
- f) Enhancing cross border information sharing, to better communicate and safeguard people travelling and reporting missing people in different police areas;
- g) Continuing to improve the engagement and communication with families of missing people.

The Dorset Police concern for welfare policy is designed, in consultation with partner agencies, to ensure that the public get the right service to meet their specific needs at the first point of contact. The current version is subject to a review led by the Prevention Department to capture the latest physical and mental ill health trends and guidance from key professionals. The initial draft of the policy is close to completion.

The Organisation reviewed and updated the call handling, deployment and grading policy in 2021 and implemented changes in March 2022. The Deployment Policy has been recently reviewed in line with national guidance to ensure that each public contact is risk assessed to inform the appropriate police response. The revised grading of incidents is now a key performance measure with regular reviews and evaluation to ensure compliance. As part of the implementation process, we have now moved to the evaluation stage to understand how the changes in the policy have translated into deployment decision making. The Organisation has commissioned an external audit conducted by the South West Audit Partnership which has been taking place over the summer. A full report is due this Autumn which will inform ongoing developments.

#### Training on each of these policies

The next stage of the Vulnerability Programme is the 'Vulnerability 4' training package, scheduled for delivery between January and April 2023. The Vulnerability 4 training will include updates on the concern for welfare, missing people and the call handling, grading and deployment policies. It will be provided to police officers and staff, including control room call handlers, senior officers up to the rank of Chief Inspector and role-specific training to the ranks above Chief Inspector.

In the meantime, the updated version of the missing person policy has been disseminated locally through Commanders and Inspectors, who are cascading the learning to frontline officers and ensuring the policy has been read and understood. Force Contact Centre training on the new missing person policy begins from the 19<sup>th</sup> September on the current 10 week cycle for all staff. Every training cycle will include refresher training on missing people and concern for welfare matters for the foreseeable future.

The content of Vulnerability 4 will also be built into initial training for Police Officers, Call Handlers and PCSO's to ensure ongoing development of new staff into the Organisation. Furthermore, in 2023, there will be a similar opportunity to raise awareness further in relation to epilepsy, psychosis, medical conditions, medication and the effect of such on an individual and subsequent risks. The Organisation will work with the clinical lead to ensure such are covered in the First Aid Training which is rolled out to operational officers and staff.



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Contact Management staff have received vulnerability training since 2019 specifically tailored to meet call handling and dispatch requirements including enhanced risk assessments (Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigative opportunities, Vulnerability and Engagement), identifying the 'voice of the child' within incidents, and knowledge of support agencies for signposting. They also have continual professional development training as part of their shift pattern with additional opportunities through power hours to ensure refreshed guidance is cascaded. The Contact Management Quality Assurance team conduct live time dip sampling of calls and incidents providing Immediate feedback ensuring a continual learning culture.

The Make the Difference Team, a small team of officers who are commissioned with scrutiny and review activity on behalf of the Organisation, regularly review and scrutinise a selection of our missing person investigations and have had bespoke 'masterclass' sessions with child protection specialists from HMICFRS. This has allowed the Organisation to improve our standards and understand how to maintain good practice in these types of investigation whilst also reflecting HMICFRS methodology in their review of investigations.

#### Review of record keeping and training on record keeping

The Organisation has carefully considered a proportionate and targeted response to the concerns raised through Gaia's inquest in relation to record keeping. The Organisation holds millions of records and works across multiple systems and processes Organisation-wide, regionally and working with partner agencies. These processes are carefully mapped and overseen by business owners, with some areas inspected by HMICFRS and the Information Commissioner in relation to crime data integrity, record keeping and data protection.

The Organisation has focused improvements on the key systems and processes that gave rise to a concern during Gaia's inquest and the upgrade of the Niche system and developing IT solutions has also provided opportunities to design out risks of retrospective entries and updates to logs and documents. The Organisation has sought to reinforce standards and promote the individual responsibility of staff, officers and volunteers to maintain clear and accurate records as part of their business and service delivery. Organisation-wide messaging on the importance of accurate and transparent record keeping and the integration of records management inputs into existing training will deliver the learning identified through the inquest and Preventing Future Deaths report. This will reinforce people's understanding and individual responsibility to keep accurate records. This approach is deemed a necessary and proportionate response to the recommendation, a wholesale review of record keeping across the entirety of systems in Dorset has not taken place.

The Organisation's record management system, 'Niche' was upgraded in August 2022. The Niche training has been utilised to reinforce the expectations and importance record management and data quality. POLSA and LPSM trained staff have been directed to use Niche to log their decisions and key information. Niche can be accessed remotely via mobile technology and once an entry is made it cannot be amended retrospectively. If information changes or details are recorded in error an additional chronological entry can be made highlighting any amendments and this can be cross referenced to the original entry. Once created, logs are also locked and cannot be amended. As previously noted Vulnerability 4 training will include a session on log keeping and recording.

The Organisation has reviewed its approach to the management of training activity as several areas of improvement were identified in relation to the process, governance and systems. As a result, revised processes remain in place, to monitor the identification of training need, the effectiveness of roll out, evaluation of training and officer and staff attendance. Rates of





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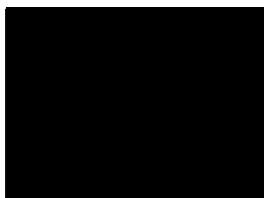
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training completion and escalation procedures are in place with strategic oversight and recorded decision making through the Joint Workforce Supply Group.

At the submission of the Organisation's response to the Preventing Future Deaths Report I propose to send out a further Organisation-wide message to all staff and officers providing a reminder along with guidance about the importance of accurate and transparent record keeping.

Whilst progress has been made on a number of the matters discussed above, I appreciate that there is further work to be done. On behalf of Dorset Police I provide an assurance that improvement work continues as a priority to ensure the Organisation continues to keep people safe. This commitment will continue far beyond the conclusion of these Inquest proceedings.

Yours sincerely



Acting Chief Constable