



Rachel C Griffin
HM Senior Coroner - Dorset
Town Hall
Bournemouth
Dorset
BH2 6DY



31st July 2023

Ref: Death of Ivan Ignatov

Dear Ms Griffin,

Thank you for your letter dated 8th June 2023 regarding the death of Ivan Ignatov which occurred between the 19th and 23rd July 2020. We were saddened to hear of the circumstances and the loss felt by Mr Ignatov's family and friends. These cases are always tragic and it is incumbent on all of us to ensure that lessons are learned. We would like to assure you that we take the recommendations in your report extremely seriously and will ensure that the learning from this incident will be incorporated into our training and guidance. Thank you for your work and for identifying matters of concern.

Having read your report we have set out to answer the recommendations pertinent to standards, guidance and training:

1. No set Risk Assessment question re first time in custody on the Niche/RMS custody record application or in APP.

The risks associated with a detainee's first time in custody are referenced in College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice (APP) under the heading 'Risk of Suicide and Self-harm' and sub-heading 'factors which may indicate a risk'. A detainee's first time in custody is not however included in the APP's risk assessment 'checklist: assessing detainees'. Following your recommendation, we will change the risk assessment checklist to include the question 'Is this your first time in police custody?'

The checklist sets out the questions which custody officers *must* ask when assessing detainees. Once this amendment has been made the College will write to forces informing them of the change. We are aware that many force's custody systems are embedded within a wider records management systems and may take some time to update their systems.

There is a substantial list of questions about issues that may indicate a higher risk of harm for detainees and the answers to these questions are recorded. When answers to the existing questions suggest a risk of harm, custody officers should enquire further and take steps to ensure the safety of the detainee. We are aware that this is a very common process with custody officers routinely assessing whether detainees should be subject to extra checking and arranging for this extra care.

2. Insufficient national guidance to custody officers on how to assess risk (low , med, high risk like policing grades missing persons).

There is very limited evidence on the effectiveness of risk assessment tools. These tools are designed to assist professional judgement. The College has produced risk assessment principles that give strong and consistent messages about assessing risk. The first of the ten principles makes clear that risk assessing is not a certain process and that assessors make decisions in situations of considerable uncertainty. Principle three makes clear that risk assessing is a matter of judgement and balance. Principle four states that harm can never be totally prevented. The ten risk principles, taken together, give comprehensive guidance on how to carry out risk assessment.

The 'high, medium, low' grading system for missing persons is still based on officers using their professional judgement. It does not transfer well to the custody setting because the role of the custody officer and the function of detention is completely different to the roles and functions in relation to investigating a missing person. We consider the current arrangements in which custody officers consider the nature of the risk of harm and how best to reduce or remove that risk to be effective (by, for example, increase visiting, removing ligature material from detainees, enlisting the support of an appropriate adult, calling in a medical practitioner). Creating categories of risk in a custody setting would not, in our view, assist in managing the nuances of risk that custody officers routinely manage. We do however maintain an open-mind based on the evidence and work with partners.

3. Lack of guidance on releasing a person without an address.

It is important to recognise that, if a custody officer concludes that the reasons for detention no longer exist, the law is clear that the detained person must be released, with or without bail, unless there are

other powers to detain (S34 Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984). As set out below, in our experience, there would not have been sufficient grounds to detain Mr Ignatov for mental health assessment. This means that, regardless of his accommodation situation, he had to be released when the custody officer concluded that there were no grounds for continued detention.

There is content in Detention and Custody APP on action to take if a person does not have an address when being released from custody. It must be borne in mind that it is not unusual for detainees to be of no fixed address, and it is noted in the APP that detainees could be referred to social care, hostels/refuges etc. There are two issues to be considered. Firstly, is there a likelihood that the detainee may come to harm – the police can signpost detainees to support services but do not have powers to take further action unless their behaviour gives rise to concerns about a person's mental health to the extent that they should be subject to a mental health assessment under mental health legislation. For this to happen, there would need to be a belief that the person presented a risk of significant harm to themselves or others. Whilst there were some indicators of this in the case of Mr Ignatov, in our experience, the circumstances as described would not have met the threshold to justify detaining him for the purposes of mental health assessment. In such cases, options for the custody officers include signposting detainees to available support before release. There are no additional powers to detain.

The second issue relates to steps that may be taken if a person does not attend a police station or court to answer their bail. Detainees of no fixed address pose particular problems in this regard and custody officers, when releasing people without a fixed address, will have regard to any other arrangements that could be put in place to communicate with the released person, should that be necessary. For example, there may be services regularly accessed by the person that could be used as an information conduit, or family/friends who may be willing and able to assist.

The Detention and Custody APP contains a number of references to risk assessment prior to release. Reference is made to referral of detainees to social care, healthcare and charity support organisations. APP states that forces should also provide written material to help a detainee self-refer to agencies should they wish to at a later point.

Thank you once again for raising these issues of concern, and we hope that the above assists in addressing your recommendations.

Yours sincerely



Chief Executive Officer
College of Policing



Chair
National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC)