

Abigail Combes

Assistant Coroner - South Yorkshire
The Coroners Court and Office
Crown Court building
College Road
Doncaster
DN1 3HS

3 January 2023

Dear Mrs Combes,

Regarding the death of Lee Bowman

Thank you for your Regulation 28 Notice of 8th November 2023 relating to the tragic death of Lee Bowman. As always in these cases, our thoughts are with his family and friends. Thank you for your work to uncover the facts of the incident and to look to improve responses to missing persons in the future.

The College of Policing has been in contact with officers from Nottinghamshire and South Yorkshire Police forces as well as liaising with Deputy Chief Constable Hankinson, the national policing lead for Missing People on behalf of the National Police Chiefs' Council.

The College of Policing has extensive guidance contained in its Authorised Professional Practice (APP) on Missing People [Missing persons | College of Policing](#). The APP supports all forces of England and Wales to manage missing persons enquiries. The document focuses extensively on the need for accurate risk assessment with actions to trace a missing person being based on the assessed level of risk.

There are other College documents and training that are also relevant to the way in which policing responds to reports of missing people.

Our training product on vulnerability and risk, for example, is a day long course for police responders that emphasises, when dealing with calls for service from the public, the importance of investigating a person's circumstances fully so that any policing response can be based on comprehensive understanding of the vulnerabilities of an individual and the risks of harm that may result from those vulnerabilities.

There is significant content across a range of College products about the need to recognise one's own values and biases and how these can affect decisions. For example, our content relating to stop and

search specifically calls attention to the risks of unconscious bias and how this can lead to unfair use of police powers. Similar content can be found in our content on dealing with vulnerability related risks.

The issues related to unconscious bias and the need for careful, balanced risk assessment are recognised within the College of Policing and across the police service.

Your second matter of concern refers to reliance on PNC and intelligence records. Unfortunately, the report to us contains no detail of what was in these records or any commentary on why investigators gave them greater weight. It is, therefore, difficult for us to respond to these particular circumstances. However, the College has recently published Evidence Based Guidelines on Risk Assessment **Vulnerability-related risks | College of Policing**. This document is based on a broad range of research and sets out clear guidance on how to carry out risk assessment and is based on risk principles **Risk | College of Policing**. It emphasises the importance of gathering information from a range of sources to inform a decision maker's professional judgement about the level of risk and what action should be taken to address that risk.


Your report also mentions the lack of activity in Mr Bowman's bank account. Police find it very difficult to acquire information from financial institutions except in high-risk cases – in this context, 'high risk' refers to fears of very serious injury or death. In the case of Mr Bowman, the risk of harm was assessed as high after the passage of a significant period of time. Inactivity on his bank account could have led to his risk being raised earlier, but there is a Catch 22 – the risk of harm could have been raised because of the lack of bank activity but the lack of activity could not be identified without the case being assessed as high risk. This is a broader issue than Mr Bowman's case but does indicate the difficult environment in which policing sometimes operates. There were of course other (non-financial) indicators of risk in this case, such as the family's concerns about lack of contact, but we feel it useful to point out that, sometimes, not all sources of help (such as financial data) are accessible to police and this can lead to inefficiencies in investigations.

In reading your report, our subject matter expert was troubled by the term 'chaotic lifestyle' that appeared to have been used in some of the risk assessments. Terminology such as this is imprecise and invites readers of such comments to assign their own assumptions to what the term means. We will update our Missing Persons APP to alert police officers and staff to the need to avoid such value laden but imprecise terms. Instead, they should set out clearly and simply what matters and issues have been identified that have a bearing on the assessment of risk.

I hope that this response addresses your matters of concern. We will continue to support policing to improve responses to missing persons.

Yours sincerely



Chief Constable 
Chief Executive Officer
College of Policing
