

Dr Nicholas Shaw
HM Assistant Coroner for Cumbria
Fairfield
Station Road
Cockermouth
Cumbria
CA13 9PT

17 March 2025

Dear Dr Shaw,

Re: Death of Matthew Brierley (Ref: 11873028)

Thank you for your report dated 8 January 2025 in relation to the death of Mr Matthew Brierley. As I understand from the detail of your report, on 16 March 2024, Mr Brierley was arrested in connection with indecent images of children and subsequently placed on police bail. He died in the car park of Buttermere Hotel, Cumbria, on 24 April 2024 having taken his own life by [REDACTED]. I note within the body of your report, that three areas are of concern, and that you have asked for a response (as per your statutory duty).

The areas of concern are;

1. That men in Matthew's circumstances are at a markedly elevated risk of suicide
2. The examination process for devices (connected with such investigations) & application of bail conditions (whether standard or otherwise).
3. The risk assessment process following release from custody & proactive contact

As you may be aware, the College of Policing is the professional body for everyone working across policing. It is an operationally independent non-departmental public body. In this context, I have provided a reply under each heading to both assist you and respond as thoroughly as possible.

1. That men in Matthew's circumstances are at a markedly elevated risk of suicide

The College of Policing recognises that suspects of child sexual exploitation, possession/distribution of indecent images of children and other sexual offending are at

increased risk of suicide (such as those matching Mr Brierley's demographics). We have produced comprehensive practitioner advice for officers and staff that outlines a series of measures to mitigate against this risk and have also added the latest guidance document from the Faculty of Forensic and Legal Medicine on how to care for suspects of sexual assault in police custody. (Please find further details [here](#)).

2. The examination process for devices (connected with such investigations) & application of bail conditions (whether standard or otherwise).

As operationally independent organisations, each police force will have provisions for the forensic examination of mobile phones and other digital devices. The context of each investigation will also shape the extent of both lines of enquiry and the depth or otherwise, of those examination processes, which will invariably have an impact on the time taken to complete those examinations. Similarly, the context of each case and presentation of risks would also help inform decision makers. Given the case specifics here, I would expect that officers appropriately recognise their responsibilities to safeguard children under Working Together 2023 and the Children Act 1989 and that this had a strong bearing on the bail conditions imposed. I would also expect the application of those bail conditions to have had a duration and scrutiny in compliance with the law (please see [here](#) for further information). I shall outline wider risk-assessment provisions when addressing point 3, below.

3. The risk assessment process following release from custody & proactive contact

The Detention and Custody Authorised Professional Practice (APP) has a detailed chapter under '[Detention and Custody Risk Assessment](#)' where it provides clear guidance to Custody Officers that the National Decision Model should be used to assess the threat(s) and risk(s) throughout the period of detention. It also makes clear that the risks can escalate towards the point of release and that custody officers should engage with detainees and offer the relevant support where applicable. Outside of the College, there is the [National Custody Strategy](#) (2022), produced by the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) which is also referenced in the custody APP. It contains six strategic principles and makes explicit reference to working in partnership with key stakeholders (such as Liaison and Diversion). I note that Mr Brierley was offered and declined the support of Liaison and Diversion (which is in line with APP) and that you have understandably queried whether proactive support was offered post release. Without further case information I am unaware as to what extent the investigating officer(s) made further contact/offers of support but would expect there to have been an appropriate investigation plan and bail management position while Mr Brierley remained a suspect. As you will appreciate, each police force also has a separate local partnership support arrangement which may or may not have been applicable here.

I trust that the above assists in answering your queries and that you are reassured by the provisions and guidance that are in place. Please do not hesitate to contact me or my lead for Crime and Criminal Justice, Chief Superintendent [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] if you need any further information or assistance.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Chief Executive Officer
College of Policing

E: [REDACTED]