

Ms Rebecca Sutton
Assistant Coroner
County Durham and Darlington

23 July 2025

Dear Ms Sutton,

Preventing Future Deaths Report – Sophie Ann Louise Cotton

Thank you for providing the College of Policing with a copy of your report dated 27 May 2025 following the death of Sophie Ann Louise Cotton. We extend our sincere condolences to her family and all those affected.

We have carefully considered the matters of concern raised in your report and provide the following response on behalf of the College of Policing.

1. During the 16:44 call, by following the “Right Care, Right Person” procedure there was a refusal to the request that the police attend, even when a family member was expressing the view that there was a real and immediate risk to life.

In relation to the operational elements and decision-making processes, we have been in contact with Durham Constabulary and understand that a full response to these points is being provided.

Right Care Right Person (RCRP) is a national initiative that aims to ensure that vulnerable people get the right support from the right services. The College host the implementation toolkit for RCRP, which provides national guidance for all forces to follow., it applies to calls for service about:

- concern for the welfare of a person
- people who have walked out of a healthcare setting
- people who are absent without leave (AWOL) from mental health services
- medical incidents

RCRP has been developed under the National Partnership Agreement (NPA) which sets out the support of all key agencies including NPCC, Home Office, Department for Health & Social Care, NHS England, Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, and College of Policing.

RCRP is based on the legal position that the police owe responsibility to take all reasonable measures to assist where there is either:

- a real and immediate risk to the life of a person (European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) Article 2)
- a real and immediate risk of that person being subject to serious harm or other inhumane treatment (ECHR Article 3)

Where the legal thresholds are met, the police are under a duty to respond to incidents, and in addition, to respond to incidents involving crime.

The College of Policing worked with the NPCC to create and publish the national Right Care Right Person implementation guidance toolkit. The section that specifically relates to the force control room can be found on the following link <https://www.college.police.uk/guidance/right-care-right-person-toolkit/force-control-room-implementation-guidance>

2. During the 16:44 call the “Right Care, Right Person” advice to contact mental health services appears to have disregarded the fact that the mental health crisis team do not have the power to enter locked premises and so would require police attendance to facilitate entry to the premises.

The College RCRP guidance reaffirms the position as set out within the case of *Syed v DPP* [2010] EWHC 81 (Admin) in relation to the powers of entry available to the police. The toolkit states *‘There is no specific power of entry to carry out a concern for welfare check...’*

The framework encourages forces to work with partners to identify any gaps in service, including to work with the Fire and Rescue Service, who have similar powers available to effect entry in emergency situations, and who have the appropriate skills, training and equipment to effect entry where necessary. However, based on the force’s risk assessment on the information known at the time, if the force’s assessment of risk does not amount to a risk to save life and limb, the police do not have a power to effect entry into a person’s home for the purpose of undertaking a welfare check.

Ongoing monitoring and work is being undertaken with partners with regards to powers of entry to ensure all partners are aware of the legal parameters in which all agencies operate, including for all agencies to understand the specific legal powers available to them, and to ensure all options are being considered.

3. During the 16:57 call there was no decision for police to attend, even though this was the third caller (and second professional caller) that had expressed serious concerns about Sophie Cotton.

The toolkit outlines two separate routes for escalation processes covering ‘real-time escalation’, which is at the point of the call being received, as well as ‘partnership escalation’, which ensures partners have the ability to escalate concerns arising, especially where emerging themes are identified. The guidance advises forces to *‘to review the effectiveness and impact of RCRP, and to capture use of the escalation process.’* It is imperative that where decisions are subjected to an escalation process, and decisions have changed, that this is communicated to the call taker as soon as practicable.

The toolkit also provides advice and guidance to forces on their development and implementation of RCRP. As part of this guidance, it sets out that forces should ensure police officers and staff understand the interoperability between RCRP and non-RCRP-incidents and that policies are clear and easily accessible, specifically for control room staff and call handlers.

Whilst the College sets out the national implementation guidance and toolkits for RCRP, it is for each force to undertake risk assessments in line with their own established control room procedures and force policy, as well as any agreements in place at a local level, when deciding which incidents they will respond to.

The College collates all information in respect of concerns that are raised, and reviews these against the toolkit and guidance provided to forces. The toolkit is subject to ongoing review and where necessary amendments will be made. The College continues to encourage forces to follow the guidance within their development of RCRP and provides ongoing support and advice to forces.

4. Although there is a procedure in place to have a negative “Right Care, Right Person” decision reviewed by a supervisor, this causes additional delay in circumstances when attendance could be extremely time sensitive.

The College have been in contact with Durham Constabulary who have highlighted that they have reviewed their policies and procedures in line with the College of Policing toolkit and Approved Professional Practice in response to the concerns raised, to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in their response to calls for service.

The concerns raised will also be communicated with all forces within the national tactical delivery Board, where learning can be shared. The College continually reviews the content of the toolkit guidance to ensure forces are provided with the tools, training, and support to effectively implement and deliver RCRP.

We hope this reassures you of our continued commitment to supporting police forces in reviewing and refining operational processes and policies in response to concerns raised.

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you require any further information.

Yours sincerely


Chief Executive Officer
College of Policing

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