

Case 6 Bulletin 31 – General	LEARNING THE LESSONS
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Suicide of indecent images suspect

Managing a man under investigation for possession of indecent images of children, raising issues about:

- *Informing individuals they are under investigation.*
- *Carrying out risk assessments.*
- *Contacting forces in other areas.*
- *Reducing the risk of suicide.*

This case is relevant if you work in:

Investigation



Public protection



Overview of incident

Officers from a force’s online offences team went to search a property and arrest Mr A for possession of indecent images of children. Mr A was not at home and his partner, Ms B, said that he was working away from the area. Police had not been aware of this. The area was outside the jurisdiction of the force. Mr A did not have access to a phone and contacted his partner via FaceTime video messenger. He was not expected home for another two weeks.

Detective Constable (DC) C left her details with Ms B and asked her to tell Mr A to get in touch. DC C’s intention was to speak to Mr A about how the matter would be dealt with and what support was available to him. However, because Mr A had no access to a mobile phone the force believed they had no way to contact him directly. DC C considered using Ms B’s FaceTime account to contact Mr A, but this was rejected as inappropriate in the circumstances. Ms B contacted Mr A on the same day, after officers left her home, and then told DC C that Mr A would attend the local police station 16 days later, three days after his return home.

DC C did not complete a risk assessment or record the rationale for the steps taken to ask Mr A to get in touch. DC C spoke to Ms B a number of times over the phone in the 24-hours following the visit to her home but did not make more attempts to contact Mr A directly.

National Police Chiefs’ Council’s Interim Guidance for Suicide Prevention – Risk Management for Perpetrators of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Indecent Images of Children (IIOC)

“Suicide risk assessments are always required to be completed for CSE and IIOC suspects/offenders. These types of offenders should all be considered to be of potential high

risk until proven otherwise. Clear, positive and appropriate action is necessary, including providing advice and support as needed.”

“If a suspect cannot be traced and is very likely to become aware of law enforcement interest e.g. via a third party, arrangements should be made to expedite enquiries to trace them without delay. Meanwhile, they may need access to support services and efforts should be made to give, send or leave them the requisite details (e.g. in an appropriate note left at a last known address). An assessment should be made to determine if they are likely to be missing to avoid capture or if they are likely to consider harming themselves which should help determine the urgency and amount and level of time and resources that will be required to trace them. An appropriate marker could be placed on intelligence systems (including PNC) indicating any such concern for welfare.”

[Read the guidance online](#)

The following day, Mr A returned but did not go home. After arriving, he contacted Ms B at about 10pm to let her know he was back. He told her the name of the city he was in but he would not say where he was staying. He then switched off his phone. Ms B notified the police. A missing person enquiry was opened in co-operation with the force for the area where Mr A said he was.

Around 5am the next morning, Mr A was found dead, having committed suicide less than 48 hours after police first visited his property.

Type of investigation

Local death or serious injury investigation reviewed by IPCC.

Findings and recommendations

Local recommendations

Finding 1

1. DC C failed to complete a suicide risk assessment or record her rationale for decisions about how to tell Mr A about police enquiries.

Local recommendation 1

2. The force should make sure that suicide risk assessments are completed for suspects of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Indecent Images of Children (IIOC) offences.

Local recommendation 2

3. The force should make sure all risk assessments of the suspects of CSE/IIOC offences are auditable. It should also make sure that there are systems in place for senior officers to check that risk assessments are completed properly.

Local recommendation 3

4. The force should remind officers of the importance of documenting their decisions and rationales.

Response to the recommendations

Local recommendations

Local recommendation 1

1. The force suicide reduction strategy, which forms part of the guidance for the online offences team, has been amended to bring it into line with the National Police Chiefs' Council's interim guidance on suicide prevention risk management for perpetrators of child sexual exploitation and indecent images of children. The guidance prompts officers to record all risk assessments and steps taken to mitigate risk on the force information systems.

Local recommendation 2

2. Intelligence package referrals to the online offences team are stored on the force's shared drive and are available to supervisors for review. Post-arrest, or following execution of a warrant, all considerations and decisions about managing risk should be put on the crime investigation system in line with the force's suicide reduction guidance.

Local recommendation 3

3. Officers in the online offences team have been advised of the importance of documenting clear and accessible rationales.

Outcomes for officers and staff

Detective Constable C

1. There were no misconduct or performance outcomes for the officer. Learning from the investigation was shared with the whole team.

Questions to consider

Questions for policy makers and managers

1. How does your force manage the risk to suspects who are outside the force's area?
2. When someone is under investigation for sexual offences relating to children, how do you make sure the risk of suicide is monitored, managed and mitigated?

Questions for police officers and police staff

3. Thinking about this case, what would you have done if you had a suspect who could not be contacted directly?

4. If you were faced by the same situation, would you have made arrangements for the man to be arrested by a force near his work?
5. What would you have done to manage the risks to the suspect?

For more information about this case, please email learning@ipcc.gsi.gov.uk