

Ref PPCW: 48.20
22 April 2020

Catherine E Lobban
Police Powers and Workforce unit
Police Division
Scottish Government

Catherine.lobban@gov.scot



David Duncan
Chief Superintendent
Partnerships, Prevention and
Community Wellbeing
Police Scotland
2 French Street
Glasgow
G40 4EH

PPCWCommand@scotland.pnn.police.uk

Dear Catherine,

I write to you following your correspondence from Neurological Alliance of Scotland to the Health Minister on 17 April 2020, which highlighted concerns that some people with neurological and cognitive deficits may not be able to interpret or adhere to social distancing requirements. The Alliance have asked what safeguards the police have in place to assess/identify instances where individuals may have cognitive issues affecting their judgement, powers of reasoning, brain injury and autism etc.

Police Scotland remain in the unprecedented situation whereby officers are required to ensure individuals are adhering to the Coronavirus social distancing restrictions, and therefore engage with people to establish why they are out with their home. Our officers have been provided with clear guidance and direction ensuring the tone and style of this engagement is positive, with common sense and discretion applied in order to maintain and build on our positive relationship with the public and communities. The policing style which continues to be adopted is to:

- Engage to establish the individuals circumstances and if they are aware of guidelines in place.
- Explain the risks to public health and to the NHS in line with government guidelines.
- Encourage voluntary compliance.
- Enforce if officers are faced with non-compliance and as a last resort.

Police officers are aware that professional judgement must be applied and effective engagement must firstly take place to establish individual circumstances, any needs and concerns to ensure understanding. Officers can often be the initial gateway to appropriate care either through criminal justice or healthcare, and it is essential that individuals with additional needs are recognised and assisted by officers using a "person centred approach". Effective police intervention can often have a significant role in reducing the impact and harm caused as a result of persons in crisis or deteriorating mental health, connecting individuals to appropriate support.

I understand there has also been some reporting which suggests Police Scotland has not implemented or updated guidance in relation to people with specific health conditions, such as Autism and/or Learning Disabilities (and their carers). I can confirm this is not the case and Police Scotland has revised internal guidance for all officers and staff ensuring they take cognisance of these changes when engaging with individuals. As you will appreciate, the pace at which emergency legislation and guidance has been introduced raises its own challenges around ensuring clarity and consistency. Police Scotland will continually monitor and review our approach, ensuring we take opportunities to consider feedback from staff, partners and communities and, where appropriate, use this to make improvements

We also acknowledge the vast experience and support available from partners, particularly those representing vulnerable, minority and disabled communities and continue to engage nationally and locally during this time. This collaboration enables Police Scotland to identify and address any emerging community tensions or vulnerabilities at an early stage. Engagement with Autism charities such as Autism Scotland and ATLAS (sub group of Reach for Autism) has identified that individuals with disabilities and Autism are experiencing some anxiety regarding being stopped by police, which can be stressful for individuals who may find it difficult to communicate and explain their reasons for being out with their home.

In response to the above concerns and in consultation with the above partners, Police Scotland have produced additional guidance to assist officers when engaging people with Autism and learning disabilities. This approach takes cognisance above concerns also ensures a consistent approach, whilst maintaining dignity, freedom and safety for the individuals concerned. We have consulted partners with regards to Autism alert cards. Although there is no national card, local initiatives do exist. This is included in the revised guidance and will further assist officers in identifying people with Autism, enabling them to adapt their engagement style and approach.

Police Scotland already work in partnership with Headway, which is a UK wide charity that works to improve life after brain injury. The charity provides support, services and information to brain injury survivors, their families and carers as well as professionals in the health and legal fields. Headway recognise the difficulty in identifying when a person has a brain injury therefore they have designed a Brain Injury Identity Card to help police officers and staff more easily identify brain injury survivors and ensure that they receive an appropriate response. This card is endorsed and supported by Police Scotland. Similarly, Police Scotland support and endorse the Brain Injury Identity Cards for under 18's developed by the Child Brain Injury Trust. These cards assist police officers in responding appropriately and delivering a service according to individual needs.

Police Scotland is undertaking a survey via the link below to track public confidence levels and experience of our approaches to policing during the COVID-19 pandemic. I would encourage you to share this with your network and wider contacts, ensuring we can consider meaningful feedback from our communities and address concerns at an early stage.

<https://consult.scotland.police.uk/surveys/your-police-2020-2021>

I hope you find this information of assistance and provides reassurance that Police Scotland is committed to protecting all of our communities. Should you wish to contact the Safer Communities team for any further questions, please email:

SCDEdinburghDiversityUnit@scotland.pnn.police.uk diversityunit@Scotland.pnn.police.uk

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

David Duncan
Chief Superintendent