



## **PRACTICE ADVICE - FAMILY LIAISON OFFICERS (FLOs)** **DEPLOYMENT TO REPORTS OF MISSING PERSONS**

This guidance provides practice advice on dealing with the deployment of trained Family Liaison Officers (FLOs) to reports of missing persons. It is not recommended that FLOs are routinely deployed in cases of missing persons.

There are a number of other documents to support the investigations into missing persons.

- ***APP – Major Investigations and Public Protection – Missing Persons***
- ***APP – Major Investigations and Public Protection – Strategic Responsibilities***
- ***APP – Major Investigations and Public Protection – Risk Assessment***
- ***APP – Major Investigations and Public Protection – Expectations***
- ***APP – Major Investigations and Public Protection – Missing Person Investigations***
- ***APP – Major Investigations and Public Protection – Specific Investigations***
- ***APP – Major Investigations and Public Protection – Quick Reference Guide***
- ***APP – Major Investigations and Public Protection – Suicide and Bereavement Response***
- ***APP – Major Investigations and Public Protection – Identification, Reporting and Associated Investigations***

### **Background**

One of the considerations for FLO deployments to reports of missing persons is the potential for them to minimise distress and ensure a high quality of service to the missing person's family. Any deployment of an FLO should, however, be carefully considered as part of a comprehensive strategy. The primary role of an FLO is that of an investigator. There must be an investigative function to any deployment and they should never be deployed solely as a support role.

### **When FLOs could be deployed to reports of missing persons**

Consideration could be given to the deployment of FLOs in cases that involve:

- A high probability of criminality, i.e., suspicion that a person has been murdered'

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- Where a 'Looked After' child or 'Adult in Care' has gone missing, and there is likely to be an investigation into the circumstances or other multi-agency parallel investigations. The deployment of an FLO may assist in gathering information and evidence from the family;
- Where the missing person investigation is a critical incident and there are significant issues about the confidence of the family and / or community.

### **The role of Family Liaison Officers**

Before any decision is made to deploy an FLO, it is important the Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) is clear on the role and objective of the FLO.

One of the primary concerns of family members will be the need for information. The family should be provided with timely information, so far as the investigation permits. The FLO should have direct communication with the SIO in connection with their role and issues concerning the family. Any information released to the family must first be authorised by the SIO. If the FLO is not updated regularly with the progress of the investigation they will not be able to update the family.

Considerations around the following should be taken into account before deployment:

- Why are the services of the FLO being sought?
- What will they do?
- How will they be tasked and by whom?
- How will they be supported and supervised?
- What type of investigation is it?
- How will any risk be managed?

Deploying an FLO will bring expectations that information will be shared in a professional and timely manner and that the updates will be meaningful. If this is not done then the family may feel exasperated, frustrated and let down leading to reputational issues for the force.

The aims and objectives of any FLO deployment will be to:

- Assist in the gathering of evidence and information from the family;
- Keep the family updated with the position of the investigation;
- Be honest and open with the family;
- Ensure that the family are given information about support agencies and that referrals are made to appropriate support agencies in accordance with the family's wishes.

When there is a report of a missing person it is also important that objectives are set for the FLO deployment that reflect what, if any, ante mortem collection needs to be carried out, i.e., what exhibits need to be taken should there be a need for identification at a later stage. These can be medical notes, dental records, photographs, yellow ante mortem forms to be completed, or any other exhibits to aid identification.

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Early consideration of collecting ante mortem evidence will also prevent loss of evidence at a later stage should the family move, or any potential for DNA harvest being lost.

### **Withdrawal Strategy**

Once a review has been undertaken of the FLO strategy, risk assessment, victimology, the ante mortem collection is completed and all the FLO objectives are complete, a withdrawal strategy should be put in place.

Withdrawal should be centred around support from other organisations, such as Missing People and the family informed that the FLOs will be withdrawing from the enquiry. However, it is recommended that the family is told that any significant or urgent information once the FLO has withdrawn is likely to be shared by a response officer or Missing Persons Unit within their own police force/service to prevent unnecessary delay in delivering that information.

If the reason for the withdrawal of the FLO is because a crime is no longer suspected following investigation, then consideration should be given to having a single point of contact for the family, as would have been the case if an FLO had not been appointed. It is advisable to have a structured handover between the FLO and the new single point of contact and that this is fully explained to the family.

### **Support for Law Enforcement Agencies**

In addition to support identified in the APP<sup>1</sup>, police investigators can contact the following specialists for advice and assistance in Missing and Unidentified Person Investigations.

National Crime Agency (NCA)

UK Missing Persons Unit, National Investigative Capabilities, Investigations Command  
National Crime Agency

Tel: 0117 372 0734, General Enquiries: 0800 234 6034, [ukmpu@nca.gov.uk](mailto:ukmpu@nca.gov.uk)

Major Crime Investigative Support (MCIS)

employs a number of specialist services including:-

- ❖ National SIO Advisor (NSIOA)
- ❖ Crime Investigation Support Officer (CISO)
- ❖ National Forensic Specialist Advisor (NFSA)

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<sup>1</sup> (***APP – Major investigations and public protection – Missing persons investigations page 6***)

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- ❖ National Family Liaison Advisor
- ❖ National Missing Persons Advisor (Crime)

Contact details NCA MCIS 0345 000 5463

**Additional Support Agencies**

In addition to the APP<sup>2</sup> the following organisations may be able to assist (some at a cost) at an appropriate time:-

Missing People

284 Upper Richmond Road West, London, SW14 7JE

T 020 8392 4590 or Freephone 116 000, Email 116000@missingpeople.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care

PO Box 80, Richmond, Surrey TW9 1RG

Tel: 0844 477 9400, E-mail: [helpline@cruse.org.uk](mailto:helpline@cruse.org.uk),

Internet: [www.crusebereavementcare.org](http://www.crusebereavementcare.org)

SOBS – Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide

National helpline: 0870 241 3337 (open daily 9.00 am to 9.00 pm)

Tel: 0115 944 1117 (office)

Email: [sobs.admin@care4free.net](mailto:sobs.admin@care4free.net) Website: [www.uk-sobs.org.uk](http://www.uk-sobs.org.uk)

Assist Trauma Care

11 Albert Street, Rugby, CV 21 2RX

Helpline 01788 560800 or website [www.assisttraumacare.org.uk](http://www.assisttraumacare.org.uk)

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<sup>2</sup> **APP – Major investigations and public protection – Missing persons page 5.**