



HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland
Improving Policing across Scotland

Wednesday, 09th October, 2024

PRESS RELEASE

Police officers in Edinburgh praised for innovative approach to dealing with missing person investigations

A new report by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland has highlighted the way Edinburgh officers work closely with partner agencies to help reduce the number of people who may repeatedly go missing.

It praised procedures set up by Police Scotland's Edinburgh City division to work with others in relation to young people who have gone missing.

And it said a unique partnership between Edinburgh City policing and the charity Alzheimer Scotland for inquiries involving missing people with dementia had been so well received, it was hoped the pilot project they had set up could be rolled out across Scotland.

HM Assistant Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland, Mr Mark Hargreaves, said: "We visited Edinburgh City during our inspection and the collaborative approach and practical arrangements put in place by police and partners in that area was impressive.

"There was a clear focus on working together to achieve the best possible outcomes for missing people, to reduce repeat incidents, and to provide support to missing people once returned."

The HMICS report said that when someone had gone missing and was either found by police officers or returned home through their own choice, they would undergo what is known as a 'return discussion'.

Such discussions help identify why the person went missing, and what steps can be taken to stop them from going missing again or help them be found quickly in the future.

The report said while police officers have the skills to carry out such interviews, research suggests they were not always the best agency to conduct them.

HMICS inspectors said that across Police Scotland there was no widespread approach to the provision of return discussions for adults.

But it said a model developed by Alzheimer Scotland in partnership with Edinburgh City division gave a "compelling example" of what benefits could be achieved when other agencies took on the role of conducting return discussions and information was shared.

The report said: "Intelligence gathered from return discussions for all missing people can be invaluable in identifying vulnerabilities and can also provide useful information in the event of an individual becoming missing again.

"Any information gleaned from a return discussion is of benefit to all those potentially involved in the ongoing care and support of that missing person.

"The most compelling example we identified was the model developed by Alzheimer Scotland, in partnership with Edinburgh City division.

"Specialists from Alzheimer Scotland will carry out return discussions with missing persons living with dementia and will share appropriate information with the division.

"Alzheimer Scotland has received funding from the RS McDonald Charitable Trust to enable this pilot to be extended further to Motherwell and Fife local authority areas.

“It is Police Scotland’s ambition to roll out this pilot nationally to all those living with dementia, but this is currently reliant on the prospective up-scaling of the model and provision of funding for Alzheimer Scotland to continue the work.”

The HMICS report said police officers in Edinburgh also worked with a range of other partners in relation to return discussions for other groups.

It said staff within mental health services carry out return discussions for their patients who had gone missing, and the intelligence gathered was used to inform risk assessments and is shared with police where necessary.

The Edinburgh City police division also had partnership arrangements in place with local authority social work services who would carry out return discussions with children and young people who had gone missing.

Additionally, the report praised officers in Edinburgh for working with its partners over the way the return of a missing young person is confirmed by residential childcare staff.

The HMICS inspectors said: “Safe and well checks are the initial interaction between police and missing persons on their return. These are carried out exclusively by police officers.

“Police Scotland national guidance states that the initial safe and well check should be carried out as soon as possible following a person’s return.

“However, we received mixed views from partners on the practical approach taken to safe and well checks, particularly in respect of children and young people living in residential childcare.

“Partners highlighted that the practice could often be very disruptive for the young person returned to the service, and could also upset other children living there as, at times, these visits would be made by police during the night.

“This issue has been addressed by police and partners in some divisions, resulting in improved outcomes.

“Edinburgh City division has worked with partners to agree an arrangement whereby the return of a missing young person is confirmed by residential childcare staff at the service, with details provided to local policing.

“This often takes place via a telephone conversation, with arrangements for a follow-up appointment the next day – or sometimes within a few hours if the incident takes place in the middle of the night.

“We heard from police and partners that this small adjustment has made a considerable difference to the working relationship, as well as having a positive impact on the children and young people living at the service.

“We would suggest that Police Scotland examine the learning achieved from this approach, for consideration of wider implementation across divisions.”

HMICS published its full ‘Thematic inspection of police response to missing person in Scotland’ report last week.

The review stated more than 16,000 missing person investigations were carried out by Police Scotland last year.

Data for the last four years showed that of those who went missing – of which more than half were aged under 18 – over 99 per cent were traced alive.

But the inspection found while overall the policing response was ‘very good’, there were areas where improvements could be made.

It said missing person investigations placed a significant demand on policing in Scotland, with the equivalent of 900 full-time officers dedicated to such inquiries each year.

HM Assistant Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland, Mark Hargreaves, said despite the vast majority of missing people being traced, the heartbreak experienced by those whose loved ones were not found safe and well must never be forgotten.

Mr Hargreaves said: “Police Scotland has demonstrated consistent success in resolving missing person incidents and locating people as swiftly as possible.

“However, the impact on families in the relatively small number of situations where a person is not found, or tragically is found dead, can be devastating.

“We have highlighted where improvements can be made in the operational response when someone is reported missing.

“More too needs to be done to ensure that clear leadership and strategic direction is in place.”

Ends

Notes

HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) was established under the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 and has wide ranging powers to look into the ‘state, effectiveness and efficiency’ of both the Police Service of Scotland (Police Scotland) and the Scottish Police Authority (SPA).

HMICS has a statutory duty to inquire into the arrangements made by the Chief Constable and the SPA to meet their obligations in terms of best value and continuous improvement.

Ends notes

NOTES TO EDITORS

The 'HMICS Thematic Inspection of police response to missing persons in Scotland' is available to download at the [HMICS website](#).

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