



**Private and Confidential**

Mr Tony Brown  
HM Senior Coroner for North  
Northumberland  
17 Church Street  
Berwick upon Tweed  
Northumberland  
TD15 1EE



13 February 2017

Dear Mr Brown

**Inquest into the death of Joshua Harry Smith (Deceased)**

**Regulation 28 Report to Prevent Future Deaths**

We are writing further to your Regulation 28 Report for the Prevention of Future Deaths dated 2 December 2016 and issued following the Inquest into the death of Joshua Harry Smith, which was held between 31 October 2016 and 3 November 2016 at Berwick upon Tweed Coroner's Court.

On 6 January 2017 a multi-agency meeting took place in order to discuss the concerns you identified, and also to conduct a formal debrief. At the request of the agencies, Northumberland National Park Mountain Rescue were also in attendance, which offered the added benefit of their specific knowledge in matters of Search and Rescue.

This is a joint response, sent by North East Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust and Northumbria Police. Thank you for granting the agencies an extended period of time to consider your report. We understand that Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service and HM Coastguard are providing separate responses.

We will address each point you have raised in your matters of concern below:

**Communication with the Caller**

As identified in your Report, Joshua mentioned his location in the initial phases of the call, but this was not heard by the Call Handler until later, when the call was replayed.

A number of questions asked by the Call Handler were of the "closed" type, which limited the opportunity for Joshua to be more specific about his location. The nature of the questions posed by the Call Handler may be explained by the fact the NHS Pathways telephone triage system in use by the North East Ambulance Service requires Call Handlers to ask closed questions in order to identify the nature of the medical complaint and provide the most accurate ambulance response. Failure to follow NHS Pathways may lead to increased clinical risk and, ultimately, potentially unsafe calls.

Northumbria, Durham and Cleveland Police Call Handlers are trained to the THRIVE standard. THRIVE (Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigation, Vulnerability, Engagement) is a risk assessment tool which assists call handlers to assess the nature of the emergency response required. The tool enables operatives to decide whether it may be necessary for another agency to become involved. Police Call Handlers are also trained in the use of the National Decision Making Model (NDM), which is a dynamic decision making tool.

Such training ensures that risk to callers, and the appropriate level of response, is at the forefront of a Call Handler's mind. Within the remit of the ambulance service, however, the main consideration is the clinical aspect, as the principle reason for contacting an ambulance is a medical emergency,

With the above in mind, NEAS must ensure that Call Handlers remain within the NHS Pathways licence requirements and maintain focus on the clinical complaint. However, in order to enhance the skill set of Call Handlers and provide them with the necessary tools allowing them to identify triggers that would alert them to the need for other emergency services, as a result of joint work with Police colleagues, a specific THRIVE training program for NEAS has been devised with commencement of delivery in March 2017. This further training will ensure that there is, so far as possible, a consistency of response between Control Room staff across agencies. Furthermore, NEAS operational staff have received training in NDM and Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme (JESIP) principles in 2016/17 Essential Annual Training, which will be repeated for the 2017/18 period.

Whilst the above training is being rolled out, in order to enhance the Trust ability to respond appropriately to incidents of a similar nature, a suitably trained "Dispatch Supervisor" role has been introduced to take over from the Duty Manager and deal specifically with this type of emergency.

### **Communication between Agencies**

As we believe you are aware, NEAS now have Tactical Advisors. In addition to standardisation of Call Handler training therefore, the presence of the Tactical Advisor will ensure that (1) the appropriate tactical response is made (dispatch of the HART team, for example, being a matter raised in your Report), and a decision regarding the appropriateness of this response is made more quickly and (2) communication between agencies is improved. This very point was discussed at length during the meeting and the consensus reached was that in incidents of this nature, early communication with HMCG would be a priority. This approach is also reflected in the updated "Control action following 999 calls to water incidents" procedure in use at NEAS. The Group were also informed of further training that NEAS HART operatives are conducting around incidents in or near water.

HM Coroner may be aware that inter-agency training already takes place. For example, North/South "Blue Light" Working Groups are already in existence and meet regularly. In relation to JESIP, training between police, ambulance and fire services currently takes place. Our organisations remain fully supportive of the approaches of the Joint Doctrine; Interoperability Framework and continue to work and train with our other emergency service colleagues. During our debrief meeting the agencies present considered that it would also be appropriate for HM Coastguard to receive JESIP training and to attend emergency response exercises more frequently in general. This is particularly the case as JESIP does envisage the involvement of HM Coastguard where appropriate.

Further positive discussion revolved around the type and level of information required by HMCG to equip them with the necessary details to make, an informed decision relating to their level of involvement and provide the necessary specialised support.

The consensus was that the priority should always be to instigate effective inter-agency communication and set up a command and control centre where all the information can be funnelled and shared in an efficient and proactive way.

An important point that was highlighted was the need to ensure that safeguarding concerns are also taken into relevant consideration in similar incidents.

Furthermore, our organisations work under a Joint Operating Procedure alongside Durham Constabulary and Cleveland Police. The aim being to provide information to police officers, police staff and partners in respect of the medical care options that is available through NEAS and the NHS. The procedure provides guidance to staff on what action to take in the event of clinical care not being available. The procedure also informs NEAS of the powers and responsibilities the police service has in response to incidents involving medical matters. This joint procedure enables our staff to directly contact our respective control rooms to seek advice and assistance whilst relaying information directly from the scene.

## Use of Technology

Your report identifies the fact that Joshua's location could not be clearly identified using his mobile phone. As you are aware, the topography of the area (on or near cliffs) made triangulation difficult. Northumberland National Park Mountain Rescue have advised other agencies of a further software tool available to them, SARLOCK, which enables a text message to be sent to a missing person's phone. If the phone is a smartphone, the missing person is then able to click on the message and, using the internet, the smartphone provides Mountain Rescue with its location. Although this system cannot be independently utilised by other agencies, Mountain Rescue teams are able to distribute a notification of the casualty's whereabouts to all partner agencies upon notification of an incident to them. Serious consideration is being given to the relevance of sourcing expert advice from Mountain Rescue and the considerable benefits that could derive from the utilisation of this software. Although it is not possible to say whether this would have helped in Joshua's case, the potential benefits are clear for all to see.

The multi-agency meeting also identified that whilst the new Coastguard helicopter has Airwave capability (the standard communication system utilised by land based agencies), HM Coastguard currently only have limited access to the Airwave system. HM Coastguard are currently giving consideration to improving their Airwave capability, in order to facilitate communication between agencies.

## NEAS Procedures

As previously mentioned, in addition to the actions referred to above; NEAS have also finalised their revised procedure in respect of responding to a 999 call to water based incident. This new procedure (attached) has been considered by other partner agencies and has been approved.

The agencies sincerely hope that the update contained within this letter will reassure both yourself and Joshua's family that lessons have been learned from this incident, and that efforts will continue to be made to prevent such a tragic incident occurring again.

Yours faithfully



Yvonne Ormston  
Chief Executive



Steve Ashman  
Chief Constable

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