

**Ian Hopkins QPM, MBA
Chief Constable**

HM Assistant Coroner Mr Andrew Bridgeman
Coroner's Court
1 Mount Tabor Street
Stockport SK1 3AG

6th August 2019

Dear Mr Bridgeman

Re: Regulation 28 Report following the Inquest touching upon the death of Mr Alfred Sykes

Thank you for your report dated 18th June 2019 in respect of Mr Alfred Sykes (deceased) and pursuant to Regulations 28 and 29 of The Coroners (Investigations) Regulations 2013 and paragraph 7, Schedule 5 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009.

Having carefully considered your report and the matters therein, I reply to the concerns raised as follows:

Extract from Regulation 28:

- 1. My concern is that the report from the member of the public at 4:00am on 8th February of Alfred Sykes's last sighting was given any or any adequate consideration and action, seemingly because it was more than 300m radius from 22 Egerton Road.*

Response: The information obtained from the witness who contacted the police at 0400hrs was not acted upon immediately and the Police Search Advisor/Search manager, who had already been spoken to and had provided initial search advice at 0300hrs, was not re-contacted. At this time this was still an unconfirmed sighting and therefore activity and advice concentrated on the known place last seen and advice provide by the PolSA/Search Manager.

OPUS log – 08/02/19 04:26 – Call from witness at 0400hrs stating that at 1600hrs 07/02/19 he came across a gentleman on Egerton Road in the Davenport area asking call for Longmead Avenue & when caller couldn't say where this was asking if any football fields nearby. Caller pointed him in the direction of football field in Woodsmoor & last seen walking south on Egerton Road in direction of Woodsmoor Lane. Male was seen asking other people further along the road. Described as white male approx.80 years of age wearing dark jeans & grey fleece with dark woolly hat. Caller didn't know the males name but mentions has seen Facebook report of elderly missing person from Natalie Mills & has put two and two together. Says male didn't appear distressed in anyway but did admit to being lost. From the brief caller has passed I've located this missing report.

The PoISA/Search Manager was provided with this information shortly after coming on duty at 0700hrs on the 8th February, with confirmation that the male the witness had spoken to was in fact Mr Sykes being obtained after 0900hrs. The PoISA/Search Manager recognised the significance of the information provided by this witness and based all search advice around 300 metres of the new place last seen (PLS) of 22 Egerton Road.

As guidance to a reasonable, realistic and proportionate size of search area, a 300 meters radius around the PLS is recommended and nationally recognised in order to achieve a high level of confidence. A radius of 300 metres equates to a total search area of 283,239 Square meters (or 69.9 acres). The 300 metre radius will always be a guide and natural boundaries should be used such as main roads, motorways, railway lines, fences etc.

The decision on which boundaries are selected can be subjective and will be recommended by the PoISA/Search Manager allocated to the investigation. Woodsmoor Lane was selected as the boundary to the south of the 300 metre radius and as a result the fields did not form part of the search area that police resources were tasked to.

The PLS can move during the course of a search as more information or searching uncovers more sightings or signs. As with this investigation, eighteen reports of sightings were received by the police, there will often be reports of sightings of the missing person which turn out to be incorrect. To avoid ad hoc searching, it is therefore important that the PLS is not changed based on these reports until a confirmed sighting is received.

Once the search of the 300 metres around the PLS has been completed, if the person has not been found the search should be planned according to a combination of the missing person behaviour profile and the 'geographic profile'. In other words, link the behaviour type of the missing person to the actual terrain.

In addition to providing search areas for divisional police resources to search within the 300 metre radius, the PoISA/Search Manager, in an attempt to identify a potential route, obtained the services of a Mountain Rescue Team trailing dog. Having obtained a piece of clothing belonging to Mr Sykes, the trailing dog handler commenced his search southwards on Egerton Road passing the fields and heading in the direction of Mr Sykes home address. Unfortunately during the course of the search no positive trail was achieved.

It is accepted that as a result of this new information including a direction of travel, references to a sports field and confirmation that the male spoken to was in fact Mr Sykes, the search parameters should have

been reviewed and the fields located off Woodsmoor Lane should have formed part of the search area and treated as a priority.

Extract from Regulation 28:

2. *However the significance of the sighting and the information was not lost on two police officers who on their own initiative looked around the playing fields. In evidence, [REDACTED] advised that just two police officers for such a large area was insufficient. I agree.*

Response: [REDACTED] stated during the inquest the fields were searched by one officer, when in fact it was searched by two. The fields located off Woodsmoor Lane should have formed part of the search area and as such search trained police officers or members of the Mountain Rescue Team with the appropriate experience and training should have been deployed into the playing fields.

Extract from Regulation 28:

3. *Had there been a greater number of officers deployed on the morning of 8th February to search the fields to which Alfred Sykes had been directed and was last seen walking towards, it is likely he would have been found that morning.*

Response: If all of the fields in the direction Mr Sykes was travelling had been included within the reviewed search area based on the new PLS, then more resources with the required skills and experience would have been deployed into this area.

On this occasion the decision was made to deploy Mountain Rescue Team resources towards Bramhall Park where Mr Sykes had previously been located. Deploying sufficient and suitably trained resources into the location of the fields would have increased the possibility of locating Mr Sykes earlier and potentially that morning.

Extract from Regulation 28:

4. *The evidence is that Alfred Sykes would not have been found alive, in combination his frailties and the weather but in different circumstances (particularly the weather) the outcome might have been different for him and for others in the future.*

Further, earlier discovery would have;

1. *Lessened the anguish for the family;*
2. *Saved resources in the continued search over the following 3 days.*

Response: Not deploying search resources into the fields off Woodsmoor Lane likely delayed the discovery of Mr Sykes, potentially resulting in search and investigation tasks which may not have been

required. If the fields were inaccessible at the material time, this would impact on the decision to search them but this would be a decision for the PoISA based on the facts presented.

As with all incidents there will always be learning opportunities in order to improve the Police response and minimise future potential risks.

Missing Person – Review process

A missing person investigation will always be led by the police division from which the person has gone missing and the role of the PoISA/Search Manager is to provide advice and manage searches. Greater Manchester Police currently have a dedicated Specialist Search Unit comprising of a Search Coordinator (PoISC) and seven PoISA's, also referred to as Missing Persons Search Managers. These officers provide continuous 24/7 support to the force in respect of all search related matters including Missing Persons. Having a dedicated unit allows for continuity and constant peer review of investigations and the search approach being adopted.

As a high risk missing person investigation becomes protracted over a period of time, the force Search Coordinator may request a peer review by a PoISA from another force with no previous involvement in the investigation or by the National Search Advisor. This allows for an independent review of the investigation and ensures that the most appropriate search tactics are being adopted.

In respect of the investigation into Mr Sykes the search was not protracted however the review by a different PoISA with no involvement should have been completed as best practice.

Missing Person Reviews

As a result of this report, with immediate effect all high risk missing person searches being conducted by a PoISA from the Specialist Search Unit, will be reviewed by another officer on a daily basis and the PoISC (Force Search Coordinator) appraised of the circumstances at the earliest opportunity.

This will ensure that search strategies are appropriate and proportionate to the investigation whilst also allowing the PoISC to refer outside of the force if deemed appropriate.

PoISA/Search Manager Continuous Professional Development

In order to remain operationally competent, PoISA's must adhere to strict criteria set by the PNSC which includes coordinating a minimum of number of searches annually and completing a minimum number of hours of continuous professional development. The activity and competency levels are overseen by the forces Search Coordinator (PoISC).

As a result of this incident, the annual PoISA/Search Manager CPD will now include refresher training by way of an exercise in respect of missing person search, using incidents that have occurred within the force or nationally or the previous twelve months. This will ensure that officers remain operationally competent and any training issues can be appropriately addressed.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Hopkins', written over a horizontal line.

Ian Hopkins
Chief Constable