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Your Family Liaison Officer

What is a Family Liaison Officer?

Family Liaison Officers (FLOs) have been in existence since 2000, so are a relatively new addition to British policing. A family liaison officer is responsible for keeping the family informed during fatal investigations. They receive special training for this role and should be able to deal sympathetically with families at what is clearly a very difficult time.

A national strategy document for Family Liaison, 2008, is available on the Association of Chief Police Officers website. www.acpo.police.uk

FLOs and Road Deaths

In a road death an FLO is employed as part of a family liaison strategy. This means your FLO reports to the Senior Investigating Officer. The FLO will be supported by a Family Liaison Co-ordinator and is a vital part of the investigation team.

While FLOs should be extremely sensitive to a family's needs and grief, it is important to remember that it is primarily an investigative role.

FLOs volunteer for this role. It can be useful to remember that this is not their only role and duties are conducted alongside other operational duties. Different forces have different policies on how many families individual FLOs can support at any given time.

Specific responsibilities of FLOs in road deaths

While your FLO will not be the police officer who has informed you of the death of your loved one, he/she should be made available to you shortly after this happened. Specific responsibilities of the FLO in a road death include arranging for the body to be viewed, ensuring the return of personal belongings is carried out tactfully and sensitively and in some cases escorting families to the scene of the crash.

Keeping in touch with your FLO

It may be helpful to establish in advance how you would like your FLO to keep in touch with you. Whether email or phone works best, and how late you can be visited in the evening. You may also want to establish whether your FLO will make contact with you on a regular basis, or only when there is some information to communicate.

Keeping a log

Your FLO will be keeping a detailed log of their correspondence and meetings with you and RoadPeace suggests you do the same. Keeping a record of meetings, phone calls and correspondence with your FLO is useful at a time where it is particularly hard to rely on memory. It will also help you to have one place where you keep details of the investigation, phone numbers of relevant personnel etc. If your FLO is away for any period of time (for holiday or training) you should establish if there is an alternative point of contact for you during this time.

appointment will come to an end. An final meeting, face to face, is often appropriate.

FLOs and the Crown Prosecution Service

The FLO is responsible for liaising between the bereaved family and the Crown Prosecution Service. The FLO will inform you of what charge the police are recommending (if there is going to be a charge) and inform you about meeting with the CPS to discuss their charging decision. The FLO is also detailed to help you with your Victim Personal Statement (see separate sheet).

Regional Differences in FLO deployment

There are 43 police forces throughout England and Wales and they all operate independently. This means FLO deployment will vary from force to force although in theory the same training material and policies apply across the board. In practice we come across some fairly extreme regional differences. RoadPeace is currently conducting a national survey of good FLO practice and would like to hear from anyone who would like to contribute to this.

What to do when things go wrong

FLOs are employed at a time of great stress and upset and unfortunately the relationship is not always harmonious. If you feel your needs have not been met, or that you have met with insensitivity, then you are entitled to put forward a complaint and ask for a different FLO. We have worked with families who have found that changing their FLO has been helpful. Initial complaints should be taken to the Senior Investigating Officer on the case.

The end of the relationship

FLOs operate under strict guidelines to protect the welfare of the families they deal with and themselves. An exit strategy will be considered during the investigation and FLOs should let you know what this will entail. Normally FLOs remain with a family throughout an inquest and/or trial. They should discuss with you when their