



A REPORT ON THE INVESTIGATION BY
CAMBRIDGESHIRE CONSTABULARY INTO
THE MURDERS OF JESSICA CHAPMAN AND
HOLLY WELLS AT SOHAM ON 4 AUGUST 2002

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS
AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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A REPORT BY HER MAJESTY'S
INSPECTORATE OF CONSTABULARY

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Foreword

In undertaking the review of this important and sensitive investigation, HMIC have made substantial use of a range of material much of which is of a sensitive operational nature. For that reason, certain sections of the report to the Home Secretary are not appropriate for publication.

Fully appreciating the understandable public interest in this matter, and particularly that of the Chapman and Wells families for whom HMIC have such high regard, HMIC are today releasing a detailed Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations drawing on all the relevant parts of the report including those sections containing the sensitive material.

HMIC is taking active steps to ensure that the police service and relevant partner agencies implement these recommendations as we strive together for improvement.

SECTION ONE

Introduction – Background to the Report

- 1.1 In the early evening of Sunday 4 August 2002, two ten year old girls Jessica Chapman and Holly Wells went missing in their home town of Soham, Cambridgeshire. When their parents, friends and neighbours could not locate them, this was reported to Cambridgeshire Constabulary at 9.56pm. A police search was immediately initiated which over the following days was to grow into one of the most large-scale searches recently conducted in the UK. Unsurprisingly, as some thirteen days passed without the girls being recovered or without public evidence of real progress being made, media and public interest rose to the highest levels of intensity.
- 1.2 Sadly, on Saturday 17 August 2002, the girls' bodies were found near Lakenheath, Suffolk. That same day Ian Huntley and Maxine Carr were arrested in connection with their murder. Carr was a classroom assistant at the girls' school. Huntley was a caretaker at the nearby Soham Village College. They lived together in a house at 5 College Close provided with Huntley's job. Subsequently, on 17 December 2003 following trial at the Old Bailey, Huntley was convicted of the murders of the two girls and of conspiring to pervert the course of justice. Carr was convicted of conspiring to pervert the course of justice.
- 1.3 Cambridgeshire Constabulary is a modest sized force and during the early stages of the investigation, which became known as Operation Fincham, there had been queries raised in the media as to the force's ability to manage a high profile case of such proportions. Further media comment was made upon the absence of the Chief Constable on leave.
- 1.4 To their credit, within this period Cambridgeshire Constabulary had already conducted an internal review of their own investigation and had requested the Metropolitan Police Service to conduct an external one. The concept of conducting a review of such major investigations is considered good policing practice. Such a step is not normally taken, however, until 28 days have elapsed. In this case Cambridgeshire actually commissioned the external review on 15 August 2002, only 11 days after the disappearance of Jessica and Holly. Two days later of course the bodies of the girls were discovered and Huntley and Carr were arrested.
- 1.5 While reviews are normally to assist a Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) to discover and arrest offenders, Cambridgeshire nonetheless continued with their request to the Metropolitan Police Service and the review was still carried out under revised terms of reference. This proved to be a most thorough and professionally conducted piece of work containing forty-one recommendations and highlighting ten areas of good policing practice.
- 1.6 It must be noted here that during the trial of Huntley and Carr almost the entirety of the review was given Public Interest Immunity status. This was because it deals in detail with a variety of current operational police procedures and techniques as well as outlining offender behaviour. It has been ruled that it is not in the public interest for such details to be published.

- 1.7 The Metropolitan Police Review was finalised and presented to Cambridgeshire Constabulary in October 2002.
- 1.8 During the course of the investigation and trial, it further came to notice that there had been significant failings with regard to police vetting procedures in both Cambridgeshire and Humberside in relation to Huntley's appointment as a caretaker in a school on the same complex as that attended by Jessica and Holly.
- 1.9 On behalf of the Home Secretary, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, Sir Keith Povey, initiated a prompt review of the circumstances and vetting failures in relation to Huntley and submitted an initial detailed report of the findings for consideration by the Home Secretary. For legal reasons, no public comment could be made while the trial was in progress.
- 1.10 As the conclusion of the trial approached, decisions were made by the Home Secretary on how the various concerns emerging about the vetting issues and about the investigation should be addressed. Arrangements were made for formal announcements of his decision at the conclusion of the trial.
- 1.11 The announcements set out the following steps to be taken:
 - A public inquiry into circumstances surrounding vetting procedures and the exchange of data between agencies, to be undertaken by Sir Michael Richard.
 - An examination of the manner in which Cambridgeshire Constabulary had undertaken the investigation into the disappearance of Jessica and Holly with an emphasis on identifying lessons for the police service as a whole, to be undertaken on behalf of HMCIC by HMI Sir Ronnie Flanagan.
 - A multi-agency Serious Case Review of circumstances in North Lincolnshire, to be undertaken by Sir Chris Kelly.

The Home Secretary's specific requirement to HMCIC

- 1.12 Following the successful conviction of Huntley and Carr, on 17 December 2003 the Home Secretary David Blunkett announced that he had asked HMCIC:

'to consider the findings of the contemporary review by the Metropolitan Police into how Cambridgeshire carried out the early part of the criminal investigation.'
- 1.13 Following a comprehensive assessment of the issues to be addressed, the following Terms of Reference were approved by Sir Keith Povey on 15 January 2004.

Terms of Reference

- a) To consider the recommendations made and the areas of good practice highlighted in the Metropolitan Police Review of the Cambridgeshire Constabulary investigation into the murders of Jessica Chapman and Holly Wells in order to identify all issues of both local and national relevance to future similar police investigations.

- b) To consider the conduct of the investigation after the period covered by the Metropolitan Police Review to ensure that all further issues of local and national relevance to police investigations are similarly identified.
- c) To establish the extent to which Cambridgeshire Constabulary have implemented appropriate recommendations contained in the review and to ensure that an action plan is put in place with monitoring mechanism, time-scales, and identified accountable officers, to implement any outstanding recommendations appropriate to such investigations.
- d) As appropriate, and having regard to the ongoing inquiry by Sir Michael Bichard, to make recommendations with both force level and national level relevance, as to how such investigations might more effectively be undertaken in the future.

1.14 This, then, is the report of Sir Ronnie Flanagan HMIC in response to the above Terms of Reference.

The approach to addressing the Terms of Reference

1.15 In addressing these Terms of Reference, particularly in respect to the policing lessons to be learned, as well as assessing how the recommendations of the Metropolitan Police Review have been implemented I have sought to consider three specific issues:

1. To what extent was Cambridgeshire Constabulary in a position to meet the demands of a 'critical incident' immediately prior to the disappearance of Jessica Chapman and Holly Wells?

Note: A 'critical incident' in policing terms may be defined as 'Any incident where the effectiveness of the police response is likely to have a significant impact on the confidence of the victim(s), their family and / or the community'.

2. How effectively did the force respond to the report of the two missing girls and to the subsequent investigation?
3. How effective was the prosecution of Ian Huntley and Maxine Carr?

Methodology

Steering Group

- 1.16 The importance of aligning emerging findings of this report with current work nationally on behalf of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and the National Centre for Policing Excellence (NCPE), was recognised from the outset. To that end, a Steering Group was established bringing together lead HMIC staff and key individuals responsible for development work nationally.

Document review

- 1.17 The review undertaken by the Metropolitan Police was subject to in depth analysis by members of the Steering Group and by a recently retired senior officer with very extensive experience and expertise in homicide investigation. It was thus established that the review was most thorough, wide ranging and professionally conducted. Issues for both the force and the police service nationally were identified and an action schedule compiled in order to ensure that all lessons could be learned. Additionally, a number of significant documents relating to different stages of the investigation have been examined.
- 1.18 It should be noted that HMIC have received wholehearted assistance and support from Cambridgeshire Constabulary in undertaking this work. This has included providing the team with copies of the results of a two-day confidential de-brief of officers which was facilitated by the experts from NCPE.

Force Inspection

- 1.19 In order to determine the extent to which Cambridgeshire Constabulary has implemented the 41 recommendations contained within the Metropolitan Police Review, between 9-11 March 2004 a focused inspection of the force was undertaken by HMIC. In addition to receiving a formal action schedule drawn up by the force in response to the recommendations, a number of visits were made and interviews carried out in order to check the extent to which implementation had been undertaken.

Formal interviews

- 1.20 A core element of the Review were the personal interviews undertaken with a wide range of people from both within and outside the force. These were carried out personally by myself and Assistant HMI Tim Hollis.

Requests for the views of staff involved on the enquiry

1.21 Being mindful of the number of staff, both from within Cambridgeshire and provided by way of mutual aid from other forces, who worked on Operation Fincham active steps were taken to invite contributions from across the board, these included:

- A circulation within the force at the commencement of the review
- A wider appeal through Police Review
- A final circulation within the force towards the conclusion of the review.

On each occasion, individuals contacted HMIC in order to share their thoughts and experiences on Operation Fincham.

1.22 Throughout, I have been most impressed by the integrity and candid nature of these contributions, which have been incorporated in the review work as appropriate.

SECTION FIVE

Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

- 5.1 Operation Fincham – the investigation into the tragic deaths of Jessica Chapman and Holly Wells in Soham on 4 August 2002, represented one of the most high profile investigations confronting the British police service for many years.
- 5.2 Occurring at a time when the performance of the public sector in general and the police service in particular was coming under increasing scrutiny, it meant that the investigation into the murders undertaken by Cambridgeshire Constabulary, was subject to particularly close examination and comment. This is entirely healthy if important lessons are to be learned by the Police Service in continuously improving standards. As indicated in Section One, the terms of reference for this report were drawn up with that specific emphasis in mind.
- 5.3 One of the terms of reference in this work was to assess the extent to which Cambridgeshire Constabulary have implemented the recommendations of the Metropolitan Police Review and to ensure that an action plan was in place with monitoring mechanisms, time-scales and identified accountable officers to implement any outstanding recommendations appropriate to such investigations. As indicated in Section One of the report this was assessed by means of a focused inspection in Cambridgeshire. A comprehensive action plan as described above was produced and was validated by way of visits and interviews during the inspection.
- 5.4 This inspection took place between 9-11 March 2004 and was undertaken by the lead staff officer from the HM Inspector's Regional Office accompanied by a detective superintendent specialist crime staff officer from Queen Anne's Gate. To provide additional objectivity and quality assurance, they were supported by a detective superintendent from the Police Service of Northern Ireland.
- 5.5 At the conclusion of the visit it was assessed that, with regard to the recommendations for which the force has specific responsibility, 97% compliance had been achieved. Only one recommendation was classified as not yet complete and this was in relation to joint critical incident training to be arranged jointly with two other forces. This is ongoing and will be reviewed by HMIC to ensure compliance.
- 5.6 It should be noted that a number of the recommendations relate to long term capacity building and training. As a consequence, they do not lend themselves to one off implementation rather they are subject to an ongoing commitment by the force. As a result of the inspection visit, I am satisfied that the systems and processes required to deliver long term improvement had been identified and put in place but this will be subject to ongoing inspection activity.
- 5.7 I am thus able to reassure the Home Secretary that Cambridgeshire Constabulary has taken positive and appropriate steps to implement the Metropolitan Police review findings in full. Those recommendations directed at national level have similarly been taken in hand by ACPO and NCPE and will be subject to on-going monitoring by HMIC.

- 5.8 Using the facilities of NCPE, Cambridgeshire Constabulary has also undertaken a comprehensive and independently facilitated debrief of Operation Fincham. This process itself identified a number of further areas for improvement which NCPE is well placed to take forward on behalf of the police service. This externally facilitated debrief is something I strongly commend.
- 5.9. As indicated in Section One of this report, I have additionally considered three specific issues all of which were raised during the course of the investigation:
- To what extent was Cambridgeshire Constabulary in a position to meet the demands of a critical incident immediately prior to the disappearance of Jessica Chapman and Holly Wells?
 - How effectively did the force respond to the report of the two missing girls and to the subsequent investigation?
 - How effective was the prosecution of Ian Huntley and Maxine Carr?
- 5.10 In concluding this report, each issue is considered in detail together with some comment on Cambridgeshire Constabulary's current performance.

Cambridgeshire Constabulary – force preparedness

- 5.11 Cambridgeshire is a modest sized force of some 1400 police officers and 830 police staff providing police services to a population of approximately 770,000 people. The bulk of the population is centred on the two major conurbations – Cambridge City and Peterborough, with the remainder spread across substantial rural areas.
- 5.12 Leadership in the force is provided by an establishment of three Chief Officers, supported by superintending ranks working to a devolved structure where much of the day to day operational responsibility rests within three local police Basic Command Units (BCUs).
- 5.13 Prior to events in Soham, the overall performance of the force had not been cause for particular concern.
- 5.14 In terms of dealing with major events, the picture was quite positive. For a number of years, Cambridgeshire Constabulary had been dealing with significant public order disruption and criminal activity caused by animal rights activists and directed at the premises of Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS). As a consequence, the force has well established mechanisms for managing major police operations utilising the Gold, Silver and Bronze command structure supported by a strong logistic capability.
- 5.15 In dealing with homicide investigations, the picture is not dissimilar. Over the previous few years, the force had dealt with an average of nine homicide investigations per year. Whilst the majority of these had been of a domestic nature, prior to events in Soham they had also recently successfully investigated two significant and critical incidents involving murder.

- 5.16 One of these occurred in September 2001, when a young man walking home in Peterborough was subject to an horrific attack by a gang of youths wielding machetes. The incident was classified as a racial attack and it had the potential seriously to inflame feelings in the local community. The force provided invaluable community support and reassurance which successfully reduced tension. They investigated the offence and obtained the conviction of three youths at court. The force thus had confidence in its ability to investigate difficult homicide cases.
- 5.17 There are aspects of the devolved structure and force policies adopted by the force which do have some bearing on events in connection with Soham:
- During a reorganisation in the early 1990s, a decision had been made to abolish the post of detective chief superintendent. As a consequence, there was no 'head of profession' for CID. There were a number of detective superintendents in the force who were based either on the BCUs, reporting to the uniform police commander, or at headquarters providing guidance on policy. This decision has since been reversed.
 - The role of the Force Operations Room in respect of the command of incidents varied. In responding to an armed incident, the duty officer (Oscar One) had a clear responsibility for managing the initial response and subsequent developments. In the case of a Missing from Home (MFH) enquiry, as was initially the case with regard to Jessica Chapman and Holly Wells, the responsibility lay with the BCU. The role of the Force Operations Room was to provide support and advice as requested. They were also responsible for facilitating contact with on-call senior officers.
 - At the time of the events in Soham, force policy in respect of vulnerable MFH enquiries was that incidents should be drawn to the attention of CID officers, if still, missing after seven days. It should be noted that this policy has since been revised.
- 5.18 In light of the current debate about force structure and performance, HMIC considered the impact of force size upon Cambridgeshire's capacity to deal with a critical incident such as Operation Fincham.
- 5.19 Taking into account previous performance in dealing with homicide and with public disorder, there was no evidence to suggest an inherent weakness in meeting the demands of major incidents. As discussed below, the initial response to the MFH report on the night of 4 August 2002 was prompt, well co-ordinated and professional.
- 5.20 Even in a much larger force, the *initial* response to an incident is likely to be provided by a relatively small number of officers. The important issue then is how quickly the force comprehends the nature and scale of the incident with which it is dealing, and how well it co-ordinates its response. This is as important as the scale of the resources immediately available.
- 5.21 I am of the view, however, that there was evidence of the impact of force size in terms of resilience at command level.

- 5.22 While the force has a total establishment of three chief officers, on 3 August 2002 only one chief officer was actually on duty. The Chief Constable had been appointed only weeks earlier, leaving a vacancy at deputy chief constable level so that, with the Chief Constable on his planned summer leave, the one remaining Assistant Chief Constable was effectively covering all three chief officer positions.
- 5.23 Similarly, with August being a period of significant absence on annual leave, a number of other senior officers were not in force. For example, the BCU commander for the area covering Soham was off as was the detective superintendent. Consequently, a detective chief inspector was both acting detective superintendent as well as being the senior on call officer for the BCU on the night the girls went missing. The force was thus, at that time, heavily reliant upon officers performing acting rank to provide leadership at a variety of levels. As the scale of events surrounding the disappearance of the two girls became apparent, this fact did have a direct impact on the force's ability to respond in the earlier stages of the investigation.
- 5.24 A second aspect which is relevant is that of overall capacity. Self evidently, smaller forces are more reliant upon mutual aid from others when confronted by an incident of this magnitude. The need for sound contingency planning for such events therefore takes on a greater significance. Whilst well tried and tested national mechanisms exist to provide mutual aid in response to public disorder this is not the case in respect of major enquiries.
- 5.25 A further important dimension, particularly with smaller forces, is the impact such large-scale enquiries and the resources which have to be committed to them have upon the force's performance in other areas of activity. Undoubtedly, for example, Cambridgeshire's subsequent dip in performance in some areas of volume crime can be attributed, at least in part, to the prolonged commitment to Operation Fincham. (See paragraphs 5.82 to 5.88).

Conclusions:

- 5.26 Whilst I am not suggesting that evidence emerging from events in Soham indicates that smaller forces are inherently disadvantaged when dealing with critical incidents of this nature, the debate recently enjoined regarding strategically sized forces is certainly timely. At the very least, there is scope for much greater collaboration at regional and national levels.
- 5.27 There are issues in connection with the size of a force which have implications for chief officers in terms of resilience and contingency planning.
- 5.28 In terms of capability building, there is need for a higher degree of contingency planning in determining from where specialist assistance will be drawn in the event of a critical incident. This is particularly relevant when addressing the need to call upon mutual aid from other forces.
- 5.29 If a critical incident does occur, at the earliest stage smaller forces need to consider issues with regard to their overall resilience and options in terms of calling upon suitably experienced and skilled officers to undertake key roles.

- 5.30 I am of the view that there is an important support role to be undertaken at national level by both ACPO (Crime) and the NCPE in addressing these issues in the future.
- 5.31 Similarly, the concept of lead forces in specialist areas of policing and of recognised centres of excellence needs fully to be explored by ACPO. It may well be desirable, for example, for small forces to pool expert resources within their region or agree that individual forces will lead in the investigation of specific types of incidents beyond their own force area.

The initial response by Cambridgeshire

- 5.32 The call to Cambridgeshire Constabulary advising them that Jessica and Holly were missing was received on a Sunday night in August when staffing levels were low. In spite of that, the initial response by uniformed officers on the ground and the support provided both by police officers and police staff in the force control room was to a high standard. This included the force helicopter, a police dog handler and traffic officers with four wheel drive vehicles to access the fens. In commenting upon this initial response, the review team provided by the Metropolitan Police commented that:

‘Officers and support staff made sterling efforts; particular mention should be made of the good work undertaken by the initial investigating officers. The incident commander and her colleagues conducted extensive enquiries during the first hours after the children were reported missing. Their actions were commendable. During the enquiry the determination and commitment of those involved was of the highest order.’

Having met many of the officers involved and explored all aspects of the initial response, I fully supports those sentiments

- 5.33 Sadly, the good momentum generated during the night of Sunday 4 August was not maintained. When details of the incident were recounted to the on call senior officer covering the area, a decision was made which effectively resulted in nothing further being done until officers reported on early shift.
- 5.34 In my opinion, this was an error of judgement. It is true that an extended line of communication, involving some three intermediaries between the supervising sergeant on the ground and the senior ‘on call’ officer did not help to convey to that senior officer, the sense of seriousness and urgency being experienced by the sergeant. The broad circumstances surrounding the unexplained and unusual disappearance of Jessica and Holly were nonetheless provided.
- 5.35 A greater sense of urgency could and in my view should have been immediately adopted to recognise the critical nature of this incident and the fact that the two young girls were at significant risk, be it from accidental mishap or as tragically transpired, much worse.

- 5.36 Bearing in mind the time it takes to call out additional resources to provide command and control for an extended incident of this nature (a fact well known in forces of modest size), then instructions could have been given to commence the necessary call-outs and the senior officer could have deployed himself to take command of the incident.
- 5.37 Had this option been chosen, then the good momentum achieved by the officers during the night would have been consolidated to provide a sound framework for a more substantial, properly co-ordinated policing operation the following day.
- 5.38 The situation was compounded on Monday 5 August. Although local officers in Ely commenced renewed activity to search for the two girls that morning and steps were taken to interview people who appeared to have seen Jessica and Holly the previous evening, the matter was being treated as a routine MFH enquiry.
- 5.39 It was not until the afternoon of Monday 5 August that a sense of urgency was evidenced on the part of the senior officers and that steps were taken to mobilise the not inconsiderable resources available to the force that day.
- 5.40 In spite of a lack of information of what had befallen the two girls, that morning a number of people interviewed described feeling significant unease about the circumstances. Some had read what is electronically available in Cambridgeshire, in the 'Chief Constable's log', the daily summary of significant events during the previous 24 hours, and were anticipating the declaring of a major incident. Others, whilst only obtaining details from the news reports, were also expecting a similar call.
- 5.41 It is thus clear that there was information already available within the force which, if responded to differently, could have prompted a more positive approach at an early stage. This delay in putting into place appropriate mechanisms had an impact on the extent to which the force was able to manage the sheer volume of information which was to descend upon it in connection with what rapidly became one of the largest enquiries of its kind in the UK for many years, certainly with regard to the number of calls received by police.
- 5.42 In my view, the response provided to this incident by Cambridgeshire Constabulary on the morning of Monday 5 August was well below that which was to be expected of a force responding to a critical incident of this nature. Neither did it meet the expectations of either the families of Jessica and Holly or the people of Soham who had themselves responded so positively on the Sunday night and again on the Monday.
- 5.43 It is to their credit that, in spite of this delay, when requested a significant number of officers responded promptly and with considerable energy and, commencing that afternoon, action was taken to prepare the force to undertake the substantial and prolonged investigation, Operation Fincham.
- 5.44 The force did not however, provide sufficient resources effectively to manage the substantial numbers of members of the public who responded to the television appeal made that evening to assist in searching for Jessica and Holly. Whilst sterling

efforts were made by officers at the rendezvous point in Soham, overall the public and members of the family were not reassured. This was regrettable.

- 5.45 On Tuesday 6 August, the force started to shake off the lacklustre performance of the previous day and considerable energy and expertise was being applied to various aspects of the Operation. A major incident room was established; a dedicated team were brought in to co-ordinate the search for the two girls; the support being provided by Family Liaison Officers since the previous day was enhanced; a dedicated intelligence cell was set up; and substantial and very effective logistical support was mobilised. Additionally, significant support from other forces, from national policing units and from individual experts was coming on line to assist Cambridgeshire.
- 5.46 While I would wish to put on record my high regard for the commitment and professionalism displayed by a number of the teams working on specific tasks within Operation Fincham, at strategic command level the day was still marked by what might be described as a lack of 'grip'.
- 5.47 A significant number of senior officers spoken to were of the opinion that, whilst the full range of activity that would have been expected was being put into place, the overall sense of purpose and co-ordination was lacking. Evidence was provided of a considerable degree of self-tasking by individual senior officers in the absence of clear direction.
- 5.48 It was not until Wednesday 7 August that Operation Fincham really got into its stride. The force was then starting to rise to the considerable demands of the investigation which involved an enormous quantity of information provided by the public and significant and unremitting requests for information from the media. An internal review of the investigation to date was initiated and a gold commander of acting assistant chief constable rank was appointed.
- 5.49 Ironically, the overlaying of the Gold, Silver and Bronze command structure on this operation contributed to a lack of clarity of command of the incident, particularly in relation to the role of the SIO and was subject to comment in the internal review. The command structure adopted allied with inadequacies with regards to the overall focus and direction of the investigation continued to hamper the inquiry at this time.
- 5.50 It was during the second week of Operation Fincham that questions about the effectiveness of the investigation started to be raised more generally and indeed publicly. One strand of this related to questions being asked as to the continued absence of the Chief Constable on leave. As a consequence of increasingly adverse comment, he returned from holiday early and resumed command of the force on Wednesday 14 August.
- 5.51 When interviewed, the Chief Constable readily accepted that his continued absence on leave was an error. I agree. It is true that he had only been appointed weeks before the incident and that he had confidence in the overall ability of his force and in those individuals in command. It is of further importance to note that his absence did not lead to any loss of evidence or impair the specific investigation although it was the source of critical media and public perception.

- 5.52 In my opinion, a more experienced chief constable would have recognised the magnitude and wider implications of Operation Fincham at an earlier stage, would have returned to duty and would thus have avoided the criticism that was levelled at him. There is no doubt that the Chief Constable agrees and has learned from this experience.
- 5.53 On Thursday 15 August, a decision was made to appoint another senior officer (as acting detective chief superintendent) to head the investigation. Whilst the original SIO was an experienced detective, it was noted by the senior Metropolitan officer who had arrived to initiate the external review, that he had not in fact received formal SIO training. While, as will be noted later, the investigation continued to ultimate successful prosecution, it should also be noted that the original SIO gave the investigation his all. He worked day and night throughout the period and remains deeply affected by the tragic outcome to befall Jessica and Holly. It would have been better for all concerned if the new appointment had been made earlier.
- 5.54 Coincidentally, a number of operational developments came to fruition which resulted in the discovery of clothing belonging to the two girls in a building on Soham Village College and led to the arrest of Ian Huntley and Maxine Carr on Saturday 17 August. By coincidence, the bodies of Jessica and Holly were discovered in Suffolk by a passer-by the same day.
- 5.55 Subsequently, Ian Huntley was charged with the murder of the two girls and with conspiring to pervert the course of justice. Maxine Carr was charged with two counts of assisting offenders (one in respect of each girl) and with conspiring to pervert the course of justice. Huntley pleaded guilty to the count of conspiring to pervert the course of justice but contested the murder charges. He was convicted of both. Carr was acquitted of the charges of assisting offenders but convicted of conspiring to pervert the course of justice.

Conclusions

- 5.56 A critical incident of the nature surrounding the disappearance of Jessica Chapman and Holly Wells would present a challenge to any police force. It is in this knowledge that chief officers are expected to develop the capability of their forces and to put in place systems and staff capable of meeting such challenges.
- 5.57 There are many examples of individuals and teams involved in Operation Fincham responding with great energy and professionalism to the challenges confronting them. HMIC regards it as regrettable that some of these challenges became more substantial than they might have been had the initial response of the force been immediately sustained and then better co-ordinated.
- 5.58 That having been said, these criticisms must be balanced by the fact that overall Operation Fincham was a success. Huntley and Carr were arrested within 13 days of the murders taking place and were subsequently successfully prosecuted in court.
- 5.59 With regards to Huntley, an interesting point was made to me by members of the prosecution team. They observed that, had Huntley been arrested much earlier and refused to co-operate with police as he subsequently did, then the prosecution would have been denied use of the false and incriminating media interviews in which he

chose to engage. It was also, of course, Huntley's appearance on television which alerted his previous victims to his presence in Soham and they in turn drew the attention of police to his conduct in the past.

- 5.60 Whilst this examination has, inevitably, focused on things that could have been done better so that lessons can be learned for the future, I would wish to put on record my respect for the integrity and honesty of those interviewed in connection with Operation Fincham. So many of those involved clearly felt deeply about the deaths of the two girls and have thought long and hard about what more could have been done. The harsh reality is, however, that Jessica and Holly were already dead when the police were contacted and nothing those involved in the investigation could have done would have altered that fact.
- 5.61 Set against the enormous commitment and professionalism displayed by so many of the officers, police staff and special constables from Cambridgeshire and beyond who contributed to the success of Operation Fincham, the initial failings did not undermine the final success of the investigation.

The prosecution of Huntley and Carr

- 5.62 If the initial response of Cambridgeshire Constabulary to the disappearance of Jessica and Holly left something to be desired, there is no doubt that this lapse was significantly compensated for in the manner in which the force set about building the prosecution case against Huntley and Carr.
- 5.63 As a force, Cambridgeshire committed considerable resources to the prosecution phase of Operation Fincham. Any temptation significantly to reduce resources immediately following arrest was firmly resisted and the investigation was well supported for the next 16 months. Both the Police Authority and the Home Office were strongly supportive in this respect. That is not to say that the commitment was open ended. Rather, there was a clear mechanism to monitor the Operation as well as to balance the overall needs of the force.
- 5.64 At a time when the overall effectiveness of the British Criminal Justice system has come under intense scrutiny and when public confidence in it is perceived to be low, one has to be most impressed by the quality of the teamwork that developed following the arrests. It was founded upon a number of strands.
- 5.65 Of particular note was the support provided from an early stage by the local Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). Senior staff were attached full time to the inquiry and, as a consequence, formed a very strong and positive working relationship with the police investigation team. I must commend the head of the CPS in Cambridgeshire for this imaginative step and I regard this as good practice for cases of similar scale and complexity. I make this statement fully mindful of the resource implications of such a commitment which, in the case of Operation Fincham, was certainly justified.
- 5.66 Of equal significance was the decision to identify and appoint leading Counsel at a very early stage thus allowing them to make a most significant ongoing contribution to the manner in which the prosecution case was developed. In meeting with them all, I was very impressed by the strength of the relationships which were established and the quality of the teamwork achieved.

- 5.67 A point that must also be noted is the commitment of Cambridgeshire Constabulary to the families of Jessica and Holly. The team of Family Liaison Officers (FLOs) continued to provide them with information, advice and support throughout this period. This was not without pressure on them all, especially when addressing the difficult issue of what facts could be disclosed to the families and what could not. I fully understand the complex legal issues surrounding this matter and the very real frustration felt by the families in this and in a number of other areas. These have been raised by Mr. Wells in a personal meeting with the Home Secretary and are being addressed.
- 5.68 The quiet dignity with which the Chapman and Wells families confronted their ordeal generated nation-wide admiration and has been a source of inspiration to so many. I felt it a privilege to meet the families personally and could but marvel at their strength and courage. I was deeply impressed too by the quality of the relationship that had been established by the FLOs and how important their work had been in assisting the families to meet the challenges that confronted them over so many months. I wish to put on record my utter admiration for the families and the way in which the FLOs performed their duty. The latter were fine ambassadors for Cambridgeshire Constabulary and for the police service at large.

Conclusions

- 5.69 It reflects credit upon the force that, in addition to achieving a successful conviction, the manner in which the prosecution case was developed and presented also provided significant good practice for the police service and other Criminal Justice agencies. At a time when we are seeking to develop better joint working across the Criminal Justice system, Operation Fincham has much to offer. Other examples of good practice developed during preparation of the prosecution case include:

Case file management

- 5.70 Due to the scale of the investigation and the number of statements and papers involved, the file was broken down into eight different sections. This enabled the case to be better managed and was highlighted by Counsel and the court as good practice for others to follow. The file was also converted to electronic format so as to enable easy access via laptop computer within the court building. This removed the need for considerable amounts of paper within the limited space at No.1 Court.

Use of analysts

- 5.71 The analysts within Cambridgeshire played a critical role in the investigation. They assisted with different areas of the prosecution case by assessing the evidence and the identification of investigative opportunities. One particular piece of work, relating to a comparison by one of the senior analysts of Regulation of Investigatory Powers (RIPA) intelligence material against previous evidential material obtained through standard investigative procedures, highlighted a number of issues which proved influential to the trial process.

Time-line document

- 5.72 To assist in understanding the various strands of the investigation, the analysts team developed a time-line document for easy reference. In the event this ran to 99 pages. It was subsequently described by the Principal CPS lawyer as *'the single most useful document that came out of Operation Fincham.'* Presentations have already been provided to analysts during a national conference to share this knowledge.

Disclosure team

- 5.73 Junior Counsel was appointed within two weeks of Huntley and Carr being charged to advise on disclosure issues. He was supplemented by a team of officers including two detective sergeants and up to twelve detective constables. The disclosure issues presented a substantial challenge for the force and provided some difficult problems in the early stages. Over time, the process developed into what was subsequently considered to be good practice and resulted in no difficulties being encountered during the court process or since. Counsel leading on the Public Interest Immunity (PII) application was congratulated by the trial Judge on the manner in which the material was presented.

Consultant support to the SIO

- 5.74 The SIO had access to an experienced retired chief officer who possessed extensive knowledge of major crime investigations. This proved to be a beneficial resource by way of mentoring and providing advice to both the SIO and his deputy.

Welfare support

- 5.75 Operation Fincham made enormous demands on police officers and support staff from the outset. The pressure experienced by staff was huge and the welfare support which was deployed from the first week is regarded as invaluable in ensuring that sickness levels were kept to a minimum during the enquiry

Management of expert witnesses/evidence

- 5.76 Prior to the trial and in conjunction with CPS/Counsel, the SIO team identified that there would be benefit in holding a meeting of all expert witnesses to enable them to compare evidence. The value of this meeting was recognised by the experts as enabling them to put their own particular area of expertise into the wider context of the case. The meeting also generated new lines of enquiry and areas where evidence could be rationalised. The key experts were also seen individually and their evidence tested by prosecution Counsel prior to the trial. This enabled Counsel to ensure that the best evidence rule prevailed. The DPP later recommended this as good practice.

Witness support

- 5.77 The investigating team engaged a dedicated witness liaison officer some months prior to the trial. This enabled early contact to be made with witnesses, provided them with a single point of contact and a support facility for use both prior to and after giving evidence. The resources for this were found using the court services together with Cambridgeshire Constabulary welfare staff.

- 5.78 A post trial survey revealed very high levels of satisfaction amongst witnesses and only minor criticisms of how they were managed. At a time when the Criminal Justice service is seeking ways in which to improve service delivery at court and public confidence in the justice system generally, this is seen as good practice.

Electronic presentation of evidence

- 5.79 From the outset Counsel made it clear that he wanted to use information technology (IT) as much as possible for the presentation of the evidence. This set in trail a number of processes which ultimately concluded in much of the evidence being displayed pictorially by using IT. This included evidence in connection with fingerprints, fibres and botany.
- 5.80 The Director of Public Prosecutions was present in court when some of this was shown and identified this as a method for further research and use in the future. All key evidence was available for display via a single DVD. This represented a very significant saving of time and enabled everyone in the court fully to appreciate all aspects of the prosecution case.
- 5.81 It is further interesting to note that the trial judge allowed the jury to have access to the system when they retired to consider their verdicts.

The current performance of Cambridgeshire Constabulary – Reassurance

- 5.82 As has been previously mentioned, events in Cambridgeshire coincided with a trend towards the increasingly close scrutiny of police performance generally. During 2003, concern began to emerge about the overall performance of the force and the Home Office Police Standards Unit (PSU) and HMIC provided various forms of support in order to address this. The performance of the force will remain under critical scrutiny now that the HMIC Baseline Assessment for all forces in England and Wales have been published and Cambridgeshire is still amongst the weaker performing forces.
- 5.83 This fact, together with the concerns expressed in connection with events surrounding the Soham investigation, naturally raises the question as to the degree of confidence that the people of Cambridgeshire can have in their local police. On this point, there are a number of encouraging facts to report.
- 5.84 As has been stated in this report, I am firmly of the opinion that whilst errors were made in connection with the investigation in Soham, there was also a considerable amount of excellent policing delivered by the officers, police staff and special constables of Cambridgeshire. Much of this represents good policing practice to be disseminated nationally.
- 5.85 Taking account of the manner in which the force has responded to the findings of the Metropolitan Police Review and other lessons learned, it is clear that there is a real commitment to continue to improve the quality of service provided to the people of Cambridgeshire.
- 5.86 It is also important to note that relatively recently, both a new Deputy Chief Constable and Assistant Chief Constable have been appointed. The Chief Constable himself now has almost two years experience in post. For a variety of reasons, this is the first

time in a number of years that Cambridgeshire Constabulary has had the benefit of a settled 'top team'.

5.87 Real success is already being achieved as evidenced by recent review of performance undertaken by the PSU where it was reported that:

- *PSU have been engaged with Cambridgeshire since spring 2003 to help support the force deliver performance improvements. Crime data across the volume crime types is encouraging and reflects the significant progress the force has made. After levels of volume crime peaked around December 2002, crime data has fallen consistently since May 2003 and the force has now closed the gap reducing crime target although more improvement is needed in relation to the investigation of volume crime.*
- *The crime reduction figures make very good reading: as of the end of April 2004, on the previous rolling 12 months, all crime is down 8%; burglary down 23%; vehicle crime down 25%; and robbery down 15%.*
- *The measure of the force's capacity and capability to sustain these improvements will be tested over the coming months as the new ACPO team settles in and the force seeks to consolidate and develop its fragile performance culture. However, the team recognises the challenges ahead and the signs that they are committed and focused on doing what is necessary to sustain the improvements are encouraging.*

5.88 Bearing in mind the important role undertaken by the local Police Authority, who have a responsibility to ensure that policing in Cambridgeshire is delivered in an efficient and effective manner, I maintain close contact with the Chairman and members of the Authority. I share their expressed confidence and that of the PSU as quoted above, that the relatively new chief officer team the Chief Constable now leads are making sustained efforts to improve performance and the belief that the quality of policing in Cambridgeshire is set to improve steadily. Progress is already being made in this regard. Vigilance will be maintained by HMIC to ensure that this is sustained.

Learning the lessons for the British police service

5.89 An important focus throughout this review, and a strongly held desire of so many of those who shared their experiences with the review team, was that the learning derived from the Soham investigation should be shared openly with the police service as a whole. This was a desire too of the families of Jessica and Holly.

5.90 To that end, HMIC has involved key individuals from both ACPO (Homicide) and NCPE in the review. Recommendations have been made formally requiring them to ensure that the all the complex issues and lessons to be learned are identified and made available to the service.

5.91 The commitment of HMIC to maintain the current momentum towards the further improvement of the investigation of homicides is such that it is intended formally to review capability within the service next year.

SCHEDULE OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recommendation One**

During this review, it became apparent that, at national level, there is an inconsistency of understanding as to the nature of critical incidents and the implication for forces dealing with them. It is recommended that ACPO agree a definition and a clear framework to facilitate the management of such incidents and for which suitable training can be provided.

Comment: Considerable work in this regard is already underway based on Metropolitan Police Service experience.

- **Recommendation Two**

The extent to which the Gold, Silver and Bronze command structure is applicable to homicide investigations needs to be clarified. It is recommended that ACPO (Homicide Working Group) identify options in this regard and disseminate clear guidance to the Service.

Comment: This should include the identification of training needs of chief officers supporting but not directly involved in investigations.

- **Recommendation Three**

That ACPO (Crime) and the NCPE consider how mutual aid arrangements for major investigations can be enhanced, for example along the lines of arrangements in relation to public disorder.

Comment: This consideration to include the concept of small forces pooling investigative resources or individual lead forces being identified as centres of excellence for specific types of investigation, even beyond their force boundaries.

- **Recommendation Four**

That the NCPE review existing arrangements for providing a single point of contact for specialist advice in connection with critical incidents.

- **Recommendation Five**

Once it becomes clear that a force is dealing with a critical incident, a chief officer should formally consider the demands on the SIO and who is best placed to meet those demands so that appropriate appointments are made. This decision and the related considerations should be formally recorded.

Comment: For dissemination via NCPE.

- **Recommendation Six**

In order to ensure continued improvement, during scheduled Inspection activity in Cambridgeshire the Regional HMI will look specifically at the extent to which the actions undertaken to implement the Metropolitan Police Review recommendations have changed organisational structures and procedures.

- **Recommendation Seven**

That, on behalf of the police service, ACPO (Homicide working group) working jointly with the NCPE should be responsible for taking forward the national recommendations and good practice emerging from both the Metropolitan Police Review and the Operation Fincham debrief conducted by NCPE.

Comment: This should include consideration of whether any rewriting of the Murder Investigation Manual and MIRSAP procedures is necessary.

- **Recommendation Eight**

That NCPE consider and implement the best way in which the good practice developed during the development of the prosecution case can be made available to the police service.

- **Recommendation Nine**

In order to monitor progress on implementation of the national recommendations, that HMIC undertake a Thematic Inspection into critical incident (homicide) handling in 2005.

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