

Following Sutcliffe's conviction a review of the investigation was conducted by Sir Lawrence Byford, one of H.M. Inspectors of Constabulary. One of the main recommendations of the Byford enquiry was that it was imperative that incident room procedures were standardised. This was necessary to ensure the adoption of a single compatible system, which would permit the merging of cross border offences. This would enable any officer with incident room knowledge to go to any incident room with the benefit of knowing the manner in which the information was being recorded, how it was being indexed and how it could be retrieved. Such standardisation would facilitate the introduction of a computerised system.

ACPO crime committee set up a working party to address the problems of standardisation of incident room procedures. The objectives of an Incident Room were to:

- Provide an accurate record of information
- Show the state of the enquiry
- Provide knowledge of enquiry suspects/subjects
- Highlight information and pinpoint suspects
- Act as a means of historical reference
- Facilitate production of reports
- Assist in establishing priorities

In consequence, in 1984 the Major Investigation Incident Room Standardised Administrative Procedures (MIRSAP) were adopted in all forces in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The computerised system known as the Home Office Large Major Enquiry System (HOLMES) was subsequently developed. These procedures provided for the first time a standardised approach to the collation and dissemination of data in long running enquiries and enable enquiries which take place across force boundaries to be merged successfully.

An incident room is the hub of any major enquiry where all the information is gathered, recorded, analysed and indexed, to enable the Senior Investigating Officer to direct and control the manner in which the investigation is conducted. From the research we have undertaken it appears that none of the above mentioned objectives are achieved in the Omagh major incident room. The information has become impossible to manage and does not assist the investigation in the way that it should.

This assessment may appear harsh and it is not intended to reflect in any way on the commitment and dedication of the PSNI staff involved in the enquiry. They have worked in accordance with the training they have received and within the operational constraints placed upon them. It has to be accepted that the working environment of the PSNI is unique in the British Police Service, with their priority being the fight against terrorism. The problems found within the database tend to highlight three main issues, which may need to be considered by the PSNI when preparing for HOLMES 2, namely:

1. Training

The Omagh incident room staff believe they mainly work in accordance with MIRSAP and adhere to the way they have been trained. It is evident that they do not work in accordance with MIRSAP and if they are adhering to their training then that training is flawed. The PSNI have introduced their own procedures, which clearly contravene national guidelines and MIRSAP. They are in danger of replicating the situation that gave rise to MIRSAP originally.

Within the PSNI HOLMES 2 has been identified as the potential solution to their problems, (*Recommendation 225 – Page 204 PSNI Review Document*), this is totally inaccurate. HOLMES 2 will exacerbate the situation. It is more labour intensive and offers a wider indexing scope, which if not controlled rigorously will lead to information being dealt with in an even more obscure fashion.

2. Major Incident Room Roles

MIRSAP gives clear guidance as to the rank and ability required to perform certain roles. PSNI do not adhere to this. It is not uncommon for Receivers to be untrained and of the wrong rank and also to fulfil other roles concurrently. Indexers are often required to assume responsibility above their role. Indexers are also allowed to split the indexing function relating to a document between a number of indexers which leads to duplication.

One of the roles laid down by MIRSAP is that of the Indexing Supervisor. It is their responsibility to quality assure the indexing process and ensure that information is recorded accurately in accordance with data protection principles and legislative requirements. This role does not exist within PSNI incident rooms. Random dip sampling occurs which is inadequate and ineffective.

3. Orthodox Major Investigative Practices

Whilst it is acknowledged that the PSNI have great expertise in terrorist matters, it must be remembered that these incidents are also murder investigations and they should be run in accordance with MIRSAP and the Murder Investigation Manual. The work undertaken appears to suggest that the orthodox murder investigation may have run behind the intelligence, responding to it as opposed to running in tandem with it whether or not the end results are the same. The HOLMES system seems to be almost irrelevant to the management of the investigation and is used as a filing cabinet rather than an investigative tool.

The above issues have implications both internally, as previously outlined, and externally for the PSNI. They are included in the North West Regional User Groups for HOLMES 2 Casualty Bureau and Major Incident Room. One of the aims of these groups is to build upon the current national standards and develop regional working practices. These regional working practices will be expected to fit together nationally to obtain maximum benefit from the HOLMES 2 system.

In the event of forces being required to run a linked incident an additional incident room would be established to cater for the Central Research Unit. This unit would be responsible for identifying any potential matches or similarities between the incidents. As the PSNI work currently they would make this impossible, as their data is not contained in appropriate indexes in any standard way.

ACPO Crime Committee reviewed and updated MIRSAP in April 2000. A full revision was required to accommodate changes to working practices provided by the introduction of HOLMES 2. The need for standardisation was reinforced.

During the course of this research there has been limited evidence that the PSNI have complied with their own internal review recommendations. It is essential that the PSNI review their working practices and accept they do not comply with MIRSAP. They need to be fully conversant with it before delivering any training in respect of HOLMES 2. Their training programme needs to be reviewed to ensure compliance. It may be that other forces could be of assistance, in particular those that are already using HOLMES 2. Other reviews undertaken show that the PSNI are not alone in the difficulties they are experiencing.