g. A meeting to decide how to carry out further investigation was held in June 2001.

h. Further investigative resources were allocated in September 2001, two years after the review was requested.

Intelligence issues

92. In this, as in many other cases, my Office identified significant problems in relation to the receipt, recording, evaluation, handling, and dissemination of intelligence information received.

93. This derived in part from the fact there were no criteria or Force Orders against which to measure the significance of intelligence, and in part because the 1980 Walker Report gave disproportionate powers to junior officers who decided what happened to information and could refuse access even to Chief Officers. In effect, Special Branch officers were deciding what intelligence information to give to investigators when they were not acquainted with the detail of a murder investigation, and the result was that there was significant frustration among investigating officers who suspected that there must be further relevant information available that was not being shared with them.

94. Even as late as November 2001, the ACC North, having taken over responsibility for the Omagh bomb investigation, wrote to my Office seeking RUC information that we had found which was relevant to the police Omagh Bomb Investigation.

95. Moreover, arrests and searches in particular circumstances could not be carried out without first informing Special Branch and then receiving clearance to continue with an investigation. Sometimes that clearance was, without explanation, withheld. In addition to this, recording processes were inadequate.

139. I acknowledged in my Regulations 20 report at para 27.14 that Special Branch INQ000035 "have made a very significant contribution to policing Northern Ireland." However, I identified "a deficiency in information flow from Special Branch to the rest of the Police Service", and said that it was necessary to consider the effect that the practices within Special Branch have had on the ability of the RUC/PSNI to carry out the police investigation into the Omagh bomb.

140. Significant intelligence held by Special Branch was not disclosed to the Omagh Bomb SIO or to Chief Superintendent McVicker. Intelligence which was available on 15 August 2001 was not passed to the Omagh bomb police investigation team for 25 days. Opportunities for early arrests were lost.

141. Other intelligence held by the RUC was not revealed to the Omagh bomb police investigation team. The evidential opportunities which may have derived from the intelligence were, therefore, not exploited.

142. My investigators identified 360 intelligence documents within Special Branch which may have had varying degrees of relevance to the Omagh bomb police investigation. They were recovered from only a sample of the intelligence examined. A wider analysis could identify more (para 27.7 of my Regulation 20 Report). Special Branch did not have detailed written Force policies for the management and dissemination of intelligence - something commented on by Sir John Stevens in 1991 and by the Patten Report in 1997. Special Branch officers, some of them very junior, decided what information should be made available to other officers, some of them very senior.

143. Intelligence analysed by my analysts presented a compelling picture from which informed judgments could have been made as to the possible involvement of individuals.