

# Executive Summary

**Independent IPCC investigation of  
the Metropolitan Police Service's  
response to the stabbing of Peter  
Woodhams on 21 January 2006**

## **Introduction**

On 21 January 2006 Peter Woodhams was the victim of a serious assault in which he was stabbed by two males in the Custom House area of East London sustaining significant facial injuries. The stabbing was investigated by the Metropolitan Police Service which categorised it as grievous bodily harm with intent. No suspects were spoken to or arrested and on 17 March 2006 the investigation was marked as 'complete'.

On 21 August 2006 Peter Woodhams was fatally shot in the Custom House area of East London. Peter's family believe that if the MPS had properly investigated the stabbing, Peter may still be alive.

On 24 August 2006 the MPS referred the matter of the police investigation into the stabbing to the IPCC and an independent investigation was started. The IPCC subsequently received complaints from Peter's fiancée Jane Bowden and other members the Woodhams family. These complaints were recorded by both the MPS and Derbyshire Constabulary, to which one of the officers had transferred.

The MPS investigated the shooting and two men, Bradley Tucker and a 17-year-old youth, were charged with murder. At the trial in March 2007 Bradley Tucker was found guilty of murder; the 17-year-old was acquitted. The MPS also reopened the stabbing investigation.

The following report outlines the findings of the IPCC independent investigation into the response of the Metropolitan Police Service to the stabbing of Peter Woodhams on the 21 January 2006.

## Terms of reference

The IPCC investigated the following allegations:

- That the Metropolitan Police failed to conduct a proper investigation into the stabbing of Mr Peter Woodhams on 21 January 2006, including that:
  - they failed to record a statement from Miss Jane Bowden
  - they failed at the time to take Mr Woodhams' clothing as forensic evidence of the crime, and failed later to seize it when they became aware it was still in Peter's possession
  - they failed to seize the blanket in which Peter was wrapped for possible forensic analysis
  - they failed to take steps to investigate whether the suspect names put forward were responsible for the stabbing
  - they delayed taking a victim statement from Peter Woodhams
  - an officer failed to take complete details and a proper account from a witness to the stabbing
  - they delayed erecting witness appeal boards in the location of the incident
  - during the viewing of suspect photographs Peter was inappropriately shown pictures of white males despite having described the two assailants as black and mixed race
- That the Officer in the Case failed to return the calls of Newham Council who was assessing Peter & Jane's rehousing needs in light of the incident.
- That the Metropolitan Police failed to communicate with the affected parties during their original investigation into the stabbing, including that they did not respond to Jane Bowden's telephone calls.

The investigation also sought to identify any organisational lessons arising from this incident, for the Metropolitan Police Service.

The investigation was separate from, and was carried out in parallel to, the murder investigation into the death of Peter Woodhams carried out by the MPS.

## The IPCC investigation

Code 5 of The Police (Conduct) Regulations 2004 states that officers should be conscientious and diligent in the performance of their duties.

Nine officers were investigated in relation to the allegation that their conduct fell below this standard. All but one of these officers is currently serving with the MPS. One, the Officer in the Case (OIC) responsible for investigating the stabbing, is now serving as a PC with Derbyshire Constabulary.

The IPCC investigation assessed the conduct of officers involved in the primary and secondary investigation of the stabbing. The primary investigation refers to the investigative actions carried out by officers attending the scene in response to reports of the stabbing. The secondary investigation refers to the subsequent investigation conducted by officers within the Serious Crime Unit in Newham Borough.

During the IPCC investigation, all material relating to the original stabbing investigation was examined, including data held on information and intelligence systems. In addition, witness statements were taken from officers not subject to the investigation and from members of the public. The investigation compared the stabbing investigation conducted by officers from Newham Borough with the standards outlined within the MPS policies and standard operating procedures for the primary and secondary investigation of crime. The findings of the IPCC investigation are outlined below.

### IPCC assessment of the primary investigation into the stabbing

The IPCC received a number of specific complaints from the Woodhams family in relation to the primary investigation. The IPCC has considered the following complaints in relation to the relevant polices and found as follows:

- That one of the officers who attended the scene failed to take complete details and a proper account from a witness at the scene.

Conclusion: **This complaint is upheld.**

- That police attending the scene failed to seize for forensic analysis a blanket that had been wrapped around Peter following the stabbing.

Conclusion: While it is easy to see how this opportunity was missed once Peter had left the scene and the blanket had been returned to its owner, it should have been seized. **This complaint is upheld.**

- That police attending the hospital failed to seize for forensic analysis Peter's clothing worn at the time of the stabbing.

Conclusion: **This complaint is upheld.**

In addition the IPCC found that the first two police constables who attended the scene did all they could to render first aid, identify witnesses, manage the scene and accompany Peter to hospital. Subsequently, however, officers involved in the primary investigation failed to request the attendance of a scenes of crime officer, failed to ensure the scene was photographed, failed to commence an Incident Management Log, and failed to properly record the incident in their pocket

notebooks. The IPCC also found that the sergeants attending the scene failed to adequately direct and control officers to ensure that appropriate investigative opportunities were maximised.

As a result of its investigation into the conduct of six officers involved in the primary investigation of the stabbing, the IPCC found that four had failed in their performance of duties. Of these four officers, two uniformed sergeants and one detective sergeant have accepted written warnings in relation to their conduct, and one detective constable received words of advice. Two uniformed constables were found not to have failed in their performance of duties.

### **IPCC assessment of the secondary investigation into the stabbing**

The secondary investigation was conducted by officers within the Serious Crime Unit in Newham Borough. The investigation was conducted by a detective constable (Officer A), under the direct supervision of a detective sergeant (Officer B). A detective inspector had overall responsibility for the Serious Crime Unit and other investigative units on the Borough.

The IPCC received a number of specific complaints from the Woodhams family in relation to the secondary investigation. The IPCC has considered the following complaints in relation to the relevant polices and found as follows:

- That officers failed to make active investigations into the crime by not making contact with Peter or his family members.

Conclusion: Officer A made efforts to contact Jane's aunt on 26 January but found that the number given was unobtainable. The next day he received another message from her but there is no record of Officer A making any further efforts to contact her. There is also no evidence that he responded to contact from another member of the family. **This complaint is upheld.**

- That officers delayed taking a victim statement from Peter Woodhams.

Conclusion: Officer A made efforts to contact Mr Woodhams immediately following his return to work and then took a statement from him the day after contact was first made. **This complaint is not upheld.**

- That officers failed to take a witness statement from Jane Bowden.

Conclusion: As a witness to the incident, if not the stabbing itself, a statement should have been taken from Jane. **This complaint is upheld.**

- That officers delayed erecting witness appeals boards.

Conclusion: Officer A completed the request form for witness appeal boards the same day he took the statement from Peter Woodhams. This is reasonable as Officer A would have wanted to establish where exactly the stabbing had occurred in order to place the board in this location. **This complaint is not upheld.**

- That officers failed to seize for forensic analysis Peter's clothing worn at the time of the stabbing.

Conclusion: **This complaint is upheld.**

- That officers failed to investigate whether those identified to the family as suspects (via anonymous phone calls) were responsible or not for the stabbing

incident.

Conclusion: While the outcome of the arrest of any suspects or the provision of an identity parade cannot be predicted in hindsight, the police response to the provision of a list of suspects was inadequate. **This complaint is upheld.**

- That during the viewing of suspect photographs, Peter was inappropriately shown pictures of white males despite having described his assailants as black and mixed race.

Conclusion: It is the IPCC's view that this issue does not amount to misconduct on the part of any individual officer, but that there is opportunity for organisational learning. **This complaint is not upheld.**

- That officers failed to further investigate and communicate with Peter and his family between the stabbing and the murder on 21 August 2006.

Conclusion: The stabbing investigation was concluded in March 2006 when Officer A recorded that there was insufficient evidence to arrest any of the suspects, and that he had explained this to Mr Woodhams who had agreed to get in contact if further information came to light. The IPCC agrees that the investigation should not have been closed at this stage as further investigation was possible. However, given that the investigation was closed, the MPS was not required to further communicate with Mr Woodhams and his family. **This complaint is not upheld.**

- That police did not return the calls of Newham Council.

Conclusion: While it appears that Officer A did not respond promptly to contact from the council, it is clear that at some point he indicated that any request for information from the MPS should be made in writing. It appears that subsequent to this he heard nothing further from the council. **This complaint is not upheld.**

The IPCC investigation also found that Officer A failed to properly document on the appropriate crime recording systems details of suspects, investigative enquiries and decision making as required by policy.

The IPCC also found that Officer B, who was responsible for supervising Officer A's investigation of the stabbing, failed to adequately record his assessment of the primary investigation, and any direction given to Officer A to ensure all investigative opportunities were pursued. The IPCC also found that Officer B failed to review the progress of the investigation as required by policy.

In its investigation the IPCC also examined whether Officer B had been appropriately supervised by the detective inspector responsible for the Serious Crime Unit. At the time of the stabbing investigation, local Borough policy absolved the detective inspector of responsibility for the supervision of investigations. It is the IPCC's view that this policy required review (see Lessons below).

As a result of its investigation into the conduct of three officers involved in the secondary investigation of the stabbing, the IPCC found that Officers A and B had failed in their performance of duties. The IPCC found that the detective inspector had not failed in his duties as the policy in place at the time did not require him to supervise the stabbing investigation.

Officers A and B appeared before a misconduct hearing on Thursday 4 October. They admitted the charges against them.

## **Lessons learnt and recommendations**

### *Primary investigation and supervision*

The IPCC investigation highlighted several failings in the primary investigation into the stabbing of Peter Woodhams carried out by officers attending the scene, and recommended that where a number of supervisory officers are present at a scene responsibility for control of the investigation should be clearly identified.

As a result of the investigation findings, the MPS has informed the IPCC that all police response teams in Newham Borough have received additional training on how to maximise evidential opportunities during the initial response to an incident, particularly in relation to forensics, CCTV and witnesses.

### *Secondary investigation and supervision*

It is the IPCC's view that the policy in place at the time permitted an inappropriate delegation of responsibility. The IPCC has therefore suggested to the MPS that detective inspectors should retain responsibility for the supervision of the investigation of serious crime and of the officers conducting these investigations.

The IPCC has been informed by the MPS in Newham that changes in supervision have been made since the Woodhams stabbing investigation, and in particular that DIs are now required to review investigations after 28 days, and to review and authorise the completion of investigations of serious assaults to ensure that all evidential leads have been concluded and that the minimum standards for the secondary investigation of crime have been met.

### *Use of the Crime Report Information System*

This IPCC investigation has demonstrated the importance of fully documenting all investigative actions on the crime reporting information system in order to provide a full, transparent and auditable account of the actions conducted by officers during an investigation.

### *Witness Album Display System*

As a result of the investigation the IPCC has also recommended that the MPS in general, and in Newham Borough in particular, review the process by which viewings of photographs are conducted and supervised.

### *Identification and Management of Critical Incidents*

The IPCC investigation revealed that while many officers spoken to referred to the Woodhams stabbing as a critical incident, it was not managed by the MPS as such at the time. The IPCC has therefore suggested that the MPS assesses the process by which critical incidents are identified, by which management are made aware of incidents for which they are responsible and for which a response from senior management is required.

As a result of this recommendation the IPCC has been informed by the MPS in Newham that management structures within the Borough have been changed to ensure that all critical incidents and serious offences are reviewed, and that personal intervention by the Senior Management Team takes place where appropriate.

## **Conclusion**

The IPCC investigation revealed serious flaws in the MPS response to the stabbing of Peter Woodhams in January 2006. It is also clear that the MPS has, since the tragic death of Peter Woodhams in August 2006, recognised and responded to those failings. Some related to policies and procedures in place in Newham Borough at the time, which have since been changed. Others were the responsibility of individual officers, each of whom has now accepted their failings and, the IPCC hopes, has learned from them.

Deborah Glass  
Commissioner

Peter Orr  
Senior Investigator

Georgia Wilson  
Deputy Senior Investigator

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