

Christine and Shania Chambers (deceased)

Independent Investigation Summary Report

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Commissioner's Foreword

Christine Chambers and her two year old daughter, Shania, were brutally murdered by David Oakes, Shania's father, on 6 June 2011. They both died in their own home, as a result of shotgun wounds. David Oakes was convicted of their murder at Chelmsford Crown Court and on 11 May 2012 he was sentenced to life imprisonment. Essex Police had contact with this family on numerous occasions and therefore referred the case to the IPCC. A decision was made to independently investigate the actions and decisions of Essex Police when dealing with reported incidents involving Christine Chambers and David Oakes in the previous two years.

Christine Chambers lived with her two daughters, aged ten and two years. Ms Chambers had been in a relationship with David Oakes for six years until early April 2011. The first police involvement in this case was in March 2009, when Ms Chambers reported that Mr Oakes was alone with Shania and had threatened to harm her. Two further incidents took place in early April 2009, both reported by anonymous callers alleging that Mr Oakes was behaving in a threatening manner towards Ms Chambers and her daughters. There was no further police involvement until 7 November 2010, when officers attended the home address, following an ambulance service notification, and found that a man (Mr. Oakes) had barricaded himself in the house and had sustained cuts.

The next contact with police was on 14 April 2011, when Ms Chambers reported that Mr Oakes had taken Shania and refused to return her. Attending officers were told by Ms Chambers that her relationship with Mr Oakes had ended. There were 11 further incidents involving the police and Ms Chambers and Mr. Oakes, the last before the murders was on 25 May 2011 when Ms Chambers reported to the police that Mr. Oakes was in breach of a non molestation order, making constant contact with her.

During this period, Ms Chambers and Mr. Oakes were both seeking custody

of Shania, and proceedings were ongoing. On 21 April 2011, Ms Chambers had obtained a non-molestation order against Mr Oakes and on 26 April 2011 a hearing at Chelmsford County Court made an Interim Residency Order in favour of Ms Chambers and Mr Oakes was ordered to return Shania to her. The case was adjourned for further hearing on 6 June 2011, the day both Ms Chambers and Shania were murdered.

The IPCC investigation has now been completed and the summary report follows. It has concluded that it is impossible to say with any certainty whether if individual officers or the Force had done things differently Ms Chambers and Shania would still be alive today. However, there were clearly systemic failings by the police and occasions when individual police officers could have done more. This is a terrible, tragic and disturbing case and the investigation has identified several key issues which not only apply to this tragedy, but also to many other cases where domestic homicide is the outcome. These issues are:

- Ms Chambers contacted the police on numerous occasions in relation to Mr. Oakes' behaviour; however each incident was dealt with as an isolated one, to a significant extent. There was a failure to recognise any pattern or connection between the events and in particular a failure to identify or act upon the evident escalation in the number of Ms Chambers' calls to the police during the two months prior to the murders. This was reflected in the risk assessment forms completed by the police officers. A police officer suggested to Ms Chambers and Mr. Oakes that they tried to find a mediator, which is not appropriate in situations where domestic violence is present, and in this case a non molestation order was in place.
- On occasions Ms Chambers declined to make complaints about Mr. Oakes or withdrew them. Insufficient regard was given to the context in which she was making her decisions, in particular the ongoing child custody proceedings. Her expressed fear of Mr. Oakes was not taken

into consideration as a potential motivation for not pursuing complaints against him. Indeed on 27 April 2011, Ms Chambers contacted Essex Police to report that her daughter had been returned to her by Mr Oakes the previous day, following a court order. She wished to report him for harassment and had not done so previously as she felt it may have jeopardised her case. In any event, regardless of Ms Chambers' decisions, the safety of the children should have been assessed. There was an over reliance on the information given by Ms Chambers and her assessment of the danger she faced. Vital information was known by many others which was either not known by the police or not sufficiently taken account of in their risk assessments. Furthermore, there was little focus on Mr. Oakes himself and inadequate action taken to arrest him at the earliest opportunity, in spite of the fact that the police were aware of the non molestation order against him and his attempts to inform the police and social services that Shania was at risk in the care of her mother.

- Ms Chambers was involved in two parallel processes at the same time – court proceedings for custody of Shania and complaints about Mr. Oakes' behaviour to the police. Her solicitor, CAFCASS and the County Court who issued the non molestation order had substantial information concerning Mr. Oakes' violence towards Ms Chambers, yet this was not available to the police or social services. In addition neighbours had some knowledge of the situation and had witnessed some of the incidents, whilst a family member knew that Ms Chambers was barricading herself in her home. This was undoubtedly the sort of case that should have been dealt with by MARAC - a multi agency risk assessment conference, but was not referred to one. In part this was because the level of risk had not been assessed accurately so it did not meet the threshold for referral, and also because of the lack of information sharing to enable the full picture to be exposed.

Whilst individual police officers could and should have done things better, this is not essentially a failure of individuals, but a failure of systems. The roles and responsibilities of other agencies involved are being addressed separately by the Serious Case Review and Domestic Homicide Review. The investigation identified a lack of adequate training, insufficient resources allocated to domestic violence cases and poor oversight. Essex Police set up the Domestic Abuse and Safeguarding Team (DAST) offices in 2005. There is evidence that despite consistent warnings from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) and a number of its own internal reports, the Force had failed to ensure they were properly resourced.

There was a substantial inputting backlog in DV1 (domestic violence) forms and various methods were introduced to reduce this, however the figure steadily rose and in June 2011 reached approximately 2200. Five of the DV1 forms in this backlog related to Ms Chambers and Mr Oakes. The information contained within these forms is not only important to the Force but also other agencies with which the Force has agreements on sharing information.

On 25 July 2011 the Force produced an Interim Management Review Report identifying the organisational lessons learnt from the deaths of Christine and Shania Chambers and setting out the actions taken by the Force up to that date. As a result of this internal review process the Force has now completed or put in place actions to strengthen its response to domestic abuse incidents and these are detailed in this investigation summary report.

Many women are reluctant to pursue criminal proceedings against abusive partners, sometimes even to seek help at all. There are many reasons for this, and often it is fear that they will exacerbate the situation and increase the danger they face. Victims of domestic violence are frequently most at risk from a coercive and controlling partner when they seek external help or try to end the relationship.

Undoubtedly this poses significant challenges for the police and other agencies, but it is essential in these situations that all possible is done to protect the victims. Unwillingness to seek help or give evidence against the perpetrator is a strong sign of vulnerability, not culpability, and must be recognised as a high risk factor when a risk assessment is completed. The deaths of Christine and Shania Chambers are shocking and the way they were killed is too unbearable for most people to contemplate. I would like to extend my sincere and heartfelt condolences to their family. When sentencing Mr. Oakes, the Judge said that Ms Chambers, 'carried not a shred of blame' for what happened. This is a sentiment I strongly endorse.

Rachel Cerfontyne

Introduction

1. Christine Chambers lived at 40, Bartram Avenue, Braintree, Essex with her two daughters, aged ten and two years. Ms Chambers had been in a relationship with David Oakes, the father of Shania, for 6 years until early April 2011.
2. On 21 April 2011, Ms Chambers obtained a non-molestation order against Mr Oakes and an order under the Children's Act. At a subsequent hearing the court ordered that Shania should reside with Ms Chambers. The case was adjourned for further hearing on 6 June 2011.
3. During April and May 2011 a number of incidents, involving Ms Chambers and Mr Oakes were reported to Essex Police.
4. During the early hours of 6 June 2011 Ms Chamber's older daughter went to her father's home nearby. She informed him that Mr Oakes was at her home with a gun and had made threats. Essex Police was informed.
5. Essex Police attempted to make contact with anyone within the house at Bartram Avenue and then forced entry to the premises. They found that Ms Chambers and Shania were both dead as result of shotgun wounds. Mr Oakes was also found in the house. He had a shotgun wound to his head but survived. He was charged with the murders of Ms Chambers and Shania and has been convicted and sentenced to whole life imprisonment.
6. On 6 June 2011 Essex Police referred this matter to the IPCC, who decided it should be subject to an independent investigation.

Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference were:

1. To investigate the actions and decisions of Essex Police when dealing with reported incidents involving Christine Chambers and David Oakes in the previous two years including:

- How Essex Police dealt with the breaches of non-molestation order reported on 22/04/11, 27/04/11, 04/05/11 and 25/05/11
- The interaction between Christine Chambers and Essex Police during the period 14/04/11 and 06/06/11
- The interaction between Essex Police and any other agencies or multi agency bodies
- The initial response by Essex Police on 06/06/11 to the report of the incident at 40, Bartram Avenue, Braintree

2. To investigate the response of Essex Police to the HMIC recommendations of 2006, 2007, 2008 and the subsequent internal reviews regarding the processing of DV1 forms.

3. To assist in fulfilling the state's investigative obligation arising under the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) by ensuring as far as possible that:

- a) The investigation is independent on a practical as well as an institutional level;
- b) The full facts are brought to light and any lessons are learned.

4. To identify whether any subject of the investigation may have committed a criminal offence and if appropriate make early contact with the relevant

prosecuting body.

5. To identify whether any subject of the investigation may have breached their standards of professional behaviour. If such a breach may have occurred, to determine whether that breach amounts to misconduct or gross misconduct and whether there is a case to answer.

6. To consider and report on whether there is organisational learning for the appropriate authority, including:

- Whether any change in policy or practice would help to prevent a recurrence of the event, incident or conduct investigated.
- Whether the incident highlights any good practice that should be disseminated.

Family Concerns

The family of Christine and Shania Chambers have not made an official complaint concerning Essex Police; however they have posed the following questions and asked that the investigation address them:

- Why a panic alarm was not installed at 40, Bartram Avenue.
- Whether efforts were made to recover keys to 40, Bartram Avenue from Mr Oakes.
- Whether officers were offered a key to Mr Oakes' home when they were seeking to arrest him.
- Whether officers seeking to arrest Mr Oakes were informed where he was likely to hide at his caravan when officers attended the address.

- Why Mr Oakes was not arrested for offences reported by Ms Chambers.
- Why was Mr Oakes' caravan not searched for guns prior to 6 June 2011.
- Whether or not Mr Oakes was a police informant.

Subjects of Investigation

The actions of Essex Police officers, who had involvement in matters subject of this investigation, were kept under constant review. No criminal offences or misconduct were identified in respect of any officer.

Policies and Procedures

Throughout the investigation, the officers' performance of their duties have been assessed with regard to the Association of Chief Police Officers' (ACPO) and Essex Police guidance in relation domestic abuse, specifically:

- ACPO Guidance on Investigating Domestic Abuse 2008;
- Essex Police Domestic Abuse Policy 2007
- Reassessment of DV1s within DAST 14 April 2011
- Braintree Arrest Package Policy 31 May 2011
- Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment and Honour Based Violence Risk Identification, Assessment and Management Model (DASH 2009)

Chronological summary of incidents and Essex Police response

The IPCC investigated 16 interactions between Essex Police, Christine Chambers and David Oakes over a period commencing early 2009 until the murder of Christine and Shania Chambers in June 2011. These took place either at the address in Bartram Avenue, Braintree or at Steeple Bay Caravan Park, Steeple, near Maldon, Essex.

Incident reported on 6 April 2009: An anonymous caller reported that a man was trying to get into a caravan at Steeple Bay Caravan Park where his wife and child were and a child's shouting and crying could be heard. Officers attended and arrested Mr Oakes for assault. Ms Chamber's older daughter was found to have a small cut to her face, apparently caused by a can that Mr Oakes had thrown at Ms Chambers, but which had hit her daughter. Ms Chambers did not provide a statement to the police about these events, nor consent to her daughter being interviewed or photographed; as a result the police took no further action. A DV1 form was completed. The person who reported this incident to Essex Police did not want officers to attend their address. This was a potential independent witness to Mr Oakes' behaviour and it does not appear that this was further explored by police.

Incident reported on 10 April 2009: It was reported to police that a man had taken a little girl from a woman and had made threats. Action was taken by the officers to arrest Mr Oakes for breach of the peace. However, Ms Chambers declined to make a complaint and again no further action was taken against Mr Oakes. The person who reported this incident did not give a name but their telephone number and location were known. It appears that the possibility of a potential independent witness was not explored. A DV1 form was completed but details were not transferred to Essex County Council. Details of the children were entered onto the DV1 but do not appear

on the PROtect entry, which may explain the failure to transfer the information.

Incident reported on 7 November 2010: Officers attended the address at Bartram Avenue following an ambulance service notification that a man had barricaded himself in the house and had sustained cuts. Ms Chambers was by this time with the children at a neighbour's house. The officers did not complete a DV1 form as the incident did not fall within the definition of domestic abuse. However, it appears that no consideration was given to the emotional wellbeing of any children who may have been present at the start of the incident, nor was a referral made to a specialist department within Essex Police or Essex County Council Social Care.

Incident reported on 14 April 2011: Ms Chambers reported that Mr Oakes had taken Shania and refused to return her. Attending officers were told by Ms Chambers that her relationship with Mr Oakes had ended. They told Ms Chambers that they could not remove Shania from Mr Oakes' custody and advised her to obtain legal advice. A DV1 form was completed in respect of this incident and it was assessed as Standard Risk. Ms Chambers declined to complete the questions within the DV1 and the risk assessment within the DV1 was marked 'refused' but was signed by Ms Chambers.

Incident reported on 17 April 2011: A neighbour witnessed Mr Oakes taking items from the house at Bartram Avenue, while Ms Chambers was away and reported this to the police. As a result the police made contact with Ms Chambers and arranged to see her the following day. The neighbour was present when the police visited Ms Chambers and there are differences between the neighbour's account of what the officers told Ms Chambers and the account of the officers themselves. According to the neighbour, the officers had said the removal of the property was not theft as Mr Oakes had a key; Ms Chambers had wanted her house keys back from Mr Oakes and the officers had advised to call the council or go to B & Q. Ms Chambers had asked about a panic alarm and was advised that it was quicker to use her

mobile phone. Ms Chambers informed the officers she had previously been assaulted by Mr Oakes but this had not been reported to the police. One of the officers has stated they advised Ms Chambers it was civil matter as both Ms Chambers and Mr Oakes had contributed to the purchase of the items taken. Neither officer recalled conversations about keys, locks or panic alarms.

Incident reported on 18 April 2011: A neighbour reported concern that Mr Oakes had just arrived at Bartram Avenue. One of the officers who attended spoke with Ms Chambers, who reported no offences or concerns. He stated that the area was searched for the male concerned. The second officer was requested to provide a statement for this investigation, through their Federation Representative, but failed to do so.

Incident reported on 22 April 2011: Ms Chambers telephoned police to report she had taken out a non-molestation order against Mr Oakes the previous day and that he had been calling her. The attending officer, who also attended on 14 April 2011, read the texts, noted that two had been sent prior to the service of the non-molestation order on Mr Oakes and he did not consider that the other texts contravened the order. The officer stated that he told Ms Chambers he would take a statement from her if she made a complaint, which appears to be a confusing and contradictory message if he did not consider that the non molestation order had been breached. The officer also advised Ms Chambers that if she made a complaint Mr Oakes would be arrested and if there was sufficient evidence to charge it was likely he would be remanded in custody until 26 April 2011. This information appears to have had the effect of persuading Ms Chambers not to make a complaint as this date clashed with a family court hearing. If Mr Oakes had breached the non-molestation order, this information would have been important evidence for the family court to take into consideration.

The officer completed a DV1 form and advised Ms Chambers to keep any future text messages. He also advised her to contact the police again if necessary.

Incident reported on 26 April 2011: Mr Oakes contacted police to say that Ms Chambers had gained full custody of Shania at a hearing at Chelmsford County Court that morning and he was concerned for the child's welfare. An officer attended Bartram Avenue to check on the welfare of the children. He spoke with Shania and checked the house. He had no concerns for her welfare. He informed Mr Oakes of his findings by telephone.

Incident reported on 27 April 2011: Ms Chambers contacted police to report she had got her daughter back from Mr Oakes via the court the previous day and she now wished to report him for harassment – she had not done so earlier as she felt it may have jeopardised her custody case. The officer who attended was also the officer who dealt with the incidents reported by her on 14 and 22 April 2011. The officer obtained a statement of complaint from Ms Chambers. This statement mentioned that Mr Oakes had been violent to her in the past. No further details of this violence were included.

At this incident the officer did not complete a DV1 form as he considered it a continuation of the previous incident. He later completed the form when instructed on his return to the police station. He did not re-visit or contact Ms Chambers in order to complete the form, which was referred to as a 'skeleton DV1'. The risk assessment was marked 'refused'. The form was completed from details previously obtained. The officer gave a number of reasons why the DV1 was completed in this manner including the fact that Ms Chambers did not indicate she was in fear of Mr Oakes.

This particular officer's views on completion of the DV1, in this instance, show a lack of understanding of the DASH Risk Model, which is fundamental

when dealing with domestic abuse. If the officer had completed the DV1 with Ms Chambers he may have had her cooperation as she fully assisted in completing the risk assessment when she was seen, only a week later, by another officer on 4 May 2011.

The arrest pack in respect of this incident was reviewed by a supervisor who, having reviewed the evidence, took a different view to the original officer and decided there was not a breach of a non-molestation order. If action had been taken, Mr Oakes could have been arrested, his account obtained and evidence recovered from his mobile telephone. It is likely that a further assessment of the evidence would then have been made by the Crown Prosecution Service.

On 28 April 2011 An officer went to the caravan site to meet Ms Chambers regarding matters relating to property. This developed into a volatile situation between Ms Chambers and Mr Oakes and the officer called for assistance. On the same day Mr Oakes contacted Essex Police and as a result an officer attended Bartram Avenue to check on the welfare of the children. This officer advised Ms Chambers to contact her housing association, to get her locks changed and the officer demonstrated how easy it would be to change the front door lock.

Incident reported on 4 May 2011: Ms Chambers contacted police to inform them Mr Oakes had called her, left voicemails and sent her text messages. On this occasion when an officer attended, Ms Chambers completed the risk assessment section within the DV1 form. Ms Chambers answered affirmatively to the question whether Mr Oakes “constantly texted, called, contacted, followed, stalked or harassed her”, but this did not trigger the officer to ask the additional 11 questions, which he should have done. Essex Police do not provide their front line officers with this training.

It appears that no attempts were made to arrest Mr Oakes until 9 May 2011, as the original officer was working night shifts. This was contrary to the policy

that was in place in Braintree at that time. When officers did attend the caravan site to arrest Mr Oakes, they noted details of vehicles in the vicinity, which were not registered to Mr Oakes and on one occasion called at neighbouring caravans. However, it appears that no enquiries were made at the site office, which may have been a useful source of information. There is no evidence that consideration was given to circulating Mr Oakes via the Police National Computer (PNC) in order to try and trace him.

No officer contacted Ms Chambers, who might have had relevant information as to Mr Oakes' whereabouts and have been able to provide details of any vehicles he was using. If information concerning vehicles used by Mr Oakes had been obtained officers could have made use of Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras, which read vehicle number plates using optical character recognition software.

Contact with Ms Chambers would also have provided reassurance that her complaint was still being investigated. Eventually, on 14 May 2011, Ms Chambers contacted Essex Police to inform them that she wished to withdraw her complaint. Undoubtedly she had been persuaded by Mr Oakes to take this action. This was certainly the view of Ms Chambers' solicitor.

On 16 May 2011, Mr Oakes was arrested and the matter was referred to the Crown Prosecution Service. The CPS was not informed of previous incidents involving Ms Chambers and Mr Oakes, and did not consider the statement of complaint taken from Ms Chambers contained sufficient details about the impact Mr Oakes' contact was having on her. The DV1 form completed when this incident was initially reported was not re-assessed by a Domestic Abuse Liaison Officer (DALO) until 17 May 2011, which was after Mr Oakes had been dealt with. It was not inputted onto PROtect until 26 May 2011 when it was transferred to Essex County Council. This was contrary to Force policy but would appear to be due to an under resourced office trying to cope with large increases in workload. The DALO did not contact Ms Chambers as it was considered that this incident was a medium risk and there is no expectation in the Force that there will be contact at this risk level. This also

meant that, even though there had been a positive response to the stalking/harassment question of the DASH Risk Assessment, the additional 11 questions were not asked of Ms Chambers. The Force only asks these additional questions in high risk cases, as part of the safety planning for the victim.

Laura Richards, who helped develop the DASH Risk Assessment with ACPO, has stated that the additional questions should be asked in all cases where there is a positive response to this question, not just high risk cases. This is also the view of ACPO.

Laura Richards, an acknowledged expert, has also viewed the risk assessment contained within the DV1 completed for this incident. It is her opinion that this should have been classified as a high rather than medium risk. The Domestic Abuse Liaison Officer (DALO) made her assessment that this was of medium risk based on the information available at that time. The supervisor of the DALO agreed with this assessment.

In this instance if Ms Chambers had been asked those additional questions, the information regarding a number of previous allegations of violence by Mr Oakes, that she disclosed in the statement to her solicitor, may have been forthcoming. This information was vital to the risk assessment process and may have led to officers considering the case to be high risk. Any high risk case would then have been referred to a MARAC - multi agency risk assessment conference.

Incident reported on 25 May 2011: Ms Chambers informed police that Mr Oakes had breached the non-molestation order by constantly contacting her. Due to lack of officer availability, Ms Chambers was not visited until 27 May. The attending officer took a statement of complaint from Ms Chambers and reviewed over 100 text messages. However, the officer did not complete a DV1 as he had been told one was not required. The next day he returned to

see Ms Chambers, who on this occasion declined to answer the questions within the risk assessment.

This investigation was allocated to another officer, who stated that he was not aware of any previous incidents involving Ms Chambers and Mr Oakes. He did not complete any intelligence checks himself as he assumed that the original officer would have included anything relevant in the arrest pack that had been prepared.

Again it does not appear that the officer considered circulating Mr Oakes via the Police National Computer (PNC) or the use of the Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras.

The officer, instead of arranging for the arrest package to be passed on until Mr Oakes was arrested, kept it in his possession in line with the new policy that had been introduced in Braintree. Due to officer shortages on his shift, other work commitments and rest days, he did not try to arrest Mr Oakes. Ms Chambers had originally contacted Essex Police on 25 May 2011 but by 6 June 2011 no attempt had been made to arrest Mr Oakes and no contact made with Ms Chambers. Although the officer was acting within the guidelines of the new policy, Ms Chambers should have been provided with an update.

At 2.55am on *the night of 6 June 2011*, Mr Flitt reported that his daughter (Ms Chambers' older daughter) had jumped out of the window at 40, Bartram Avenue and was now at his home. She had informed him that David Oakes was at her home with her mother and Shania. Mr Oakes had a shotgun and ammunition and had threatened to shoot people including the police if they came. Police officers were sent to Mr. Flitt's home to obtain further information and took everyone from that address to the police station for their safety.

The relevant Firearms Commanders, Tactical Advisors and Negotiators were appointed and armed officers were sent to the scene to provide containment. After trying to make contact with people within 40 Bartram Avenue and evacuating near neighbours they entered the house to find Ms Chambers and Shania were dead from gunshot wounds.

Considering the post mortem examinations and accounts of the initial unarmed officer at the scene, together with the evidence of the immediate neighbour, even if officers had made an earlier entry to the house they would have been unable to save lives.

Domestic Abuse Practice within Essex Police

Domestic Abuse is defined as,

'Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults, aged 18 and over, who are or have been intimate partners or family members (defined as mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister and grandparents), whether directly related, in-laws or step-family, regardless of gender and sexuality.'

In addition, Essex Police includes parties over the age of 15, who have been in an intimate relationship and when a domestic incident is committed by a person aged over 15 years against a parent, grandparent or guardian. When officers from Essex Police attend an incident, which falls within this definition, there is a requirement for the officer to complete a DV1 form, which is essentially a booklet. Officers are required to record details of the parties involved, any children in the household and brief details of the incident. There are a number of questions that are asked of the victim and upon which a risk assessment of high, medium or standard is made. A blank DV1 form has been obtained.

The risk assessment questions used to be completed in the form of a Victim Initial Risk Indicator Scorecard. In 2009 the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment and Honour Based Violence Risk Identification, Assessment and Management Model (DASH 2009) was introduced and implemented across all police forces. A DASH Risk Checklist is now contained within the DV1 form. This consists of 27 questions that the attending officer must ask as a result of domestic abuse incidents.

Laura Richards BSc, MSc, FRSA assisted in the development of the DASH (2009) Risk Assessment Checklist on behalf of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO).

Question 8, within the DASH Risk Assessment, relates to stalking and harassment. If a positive response is received then a further 11 questions should be asked of the victim. It is considered that these additional questions direct officers to specific areas that provide an indication of the victim's risk of future psychological and physical harm, as well as assisting in evidence collection.

The DV1 form also includes a tear off advice leaflet, which provides details to the victim of how to contact the police and signposts other relevant support agencies. When completed the DV1 form should then be signed by the officer's line manager and submitted to the Domestic Abuse and Safeguarding Team (DAST). There are currently 5 such teams within Essex Police.

The Domestic Abuse and Safeguarding Team (DAST) consists of a Detective Sergeant, Domestic Abuse Liaison Officers (DALO's) and Administrators. This team was formerly called the Domestic Abuse and Hate Crime Unit (DAHCU) and used to include investigators. Following restructure in October 2010, the investigators were transferred to other duties and the line management responsibility for the DAST transferred from Division to Headquarters Public Protection.

A Detective Sergeant has been the supervisor of the DAST office at Chelmsford since 2006. There used to be DAST offices in Chelmsford and Braintree, with a Sergeant supervising each office. Since September 2010 there has only been one supervisor and all staff now work from Chelmsford but still cover Braintree.

The Domestic Abuse Liaison Officers deal with victims of domestic abuse. They re-assess the DASH risk assessment contained within the DV1 forms. Depending upon the risk level, the DALOs take appropriate safeguarding actions for the victim. In high risk cases this would involve speaking personally to the victim to offer safety advice, agreeing an immediate safety plan as well as a range of other measures, including signposting to other organisations. High risk cases are referred to the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), which meets twice a month to share information and agree joint safety plans for victims.

DV1 forms that have initially been assessed as medium risk are also re-assessed by the DALO. They decide whether they need to make telephone contact with the victim, recording their rationale. Letters are sent to the victim offering further support and signposting other agencies.

Once high and medium risk cases have been re-assessed by the DALO details from the DV1 form are inputted on PROtect, a nominal based database used by Essex Police to record incidents of domestic abuse, child abuse and vulnerable adult abuse. Standard risk DV1 forms are also inputted on PROtect and until a policy change in April 2011 were also re-assessed by the DALO.

Every PROtect entry, where children have been recorded on the DV1, is automatically notified to Essex County Council Social Care by way of an overnight transfer of information from the database. The PROtect entry is

also transferred to the Essex Police Intelligence System. Email notifications are also sent to internal police departments or other agencies if relevant.

On receipt of the transferred information Essex County Council input information onto their own database and it is used by them to decide if they need to intervene in the family.

Conclusions

Ms Chambers provided a statement to her solicitor on 19 April 2011 which contained details of allegations of violence, albeit not recent, against Mr Oakes. This statement was provided to Chelmsford County Court for the purposes of civil proceedings. None of these allegations had been made to Essex Police. Both Essex Police and Essex County Council stated that this statement would have been useful in their risk assessments relating to Ms Chambers and the children. Her solicitor has stated that with Ms Chambers consent the statement could have been provided to Essex Police. However, Essex Police was not aware of its existence or content. The Force needs to consider, with Chelmsford County Court and Essex County Council, mechanisms that could be put in place to ensure that this type of information can be shared appropriately with relevant agencies.

The Force set up the Domestic Abuse and Safeguarding Team (DAST) offices in 2005. There is evidence that despite consistent warnings from HMIC and a number of its own internal reports the Force has failed to ensure they were properly resourced. Indeed there had been no increase in staff despite a huge rise in the number of domestic incidents. This would not appear to have been a priority area for the Force.

Various methods were introduced to try to lessen a backlog of DV1 forms that were awaiting inputting but the figure seems to have steadily risen and in June 2011 reached approximately 2200. The information contained within these forms is not only important to the Force but also other agencies with

which the Force has agreements on sharing information. By failing to ensure that there were timely assessments and inputting of these forms the Force has potentially put victims and their families at risk.

The Force also failed to properly consider the impact under resourcing had on the welfare of its staff within the DAST.

Domestic abuse is a high risk area for the Force. It needs to ensure that the resourcing of DAST offices is regularly reviewed; assess if their DASH training has been sufficient and in line with ACPO guidance; ensure that its officers and supervisors fully understand the importance of how they deal with victims and complete their initial risk assessments when they attend domestic abuse incidents.

Since 6 June 2011 the Force has made improvements in the domestic abuse area with regard to policies, resourcing, risk management and reviews of performance.

Conclusions specific to family concerns

In answer to the concerns raised by Ms Chambers' family:

Whilst the subject of panic alarms may have been discussed with Ms Chambers her circumstances would not appear to have met Essex Police criteria for the installation of such an alarm.

There is no evidence that efforts were made to recover keys to 40, Bartram Avenue from Mr Oakes although Ms Chambers was advised to contact Greenfields Housing Association or change her locks.

None of the officers, who have made statements for this investigation, have stated that they were offered a key to Mr Oakes' caravan or sought to obtain one. Even if they had been able to obtain a key, the circumstances under which they could use it would have been restricted by law.

None of the officers, who have made statements for this investigation, have stated that they were informed where Mr Oakes might hide if officers called at the caravan to arrest him. Had officers contacted Ms Chambers when they were having difficulty in locating Mr Oakes this information might have been imparted. Mr Oakes was in fact arrested on one occasion but Ms Chambers withdrew her complaint. The reasons why he was not arrested on other occasions are detailed elsewhere in this report.

Mr Oakes' caravan was not searched for guns prior to 6 June 2011 as there was no information that Mr Oakes had possession of a gun. Ms Chambers did not pass on any such information to the police. Although it is now known that several years ago she kept a handgun for Mr Oakes at her home.

This investigation has not indicated that Mr Oakes was involved in any activity involving providing assistance to Essex Police.

Actions taken by Essex Police since 6 June 2011

On 25 July 2011 the Force produced an Interim Management Review Report identifying the organisational lessons learnt from the deaths of Christine and Shania Chambers and setting out the actions taken by the Force up to that date. As a result of this internal review process the Force has now completed or put in place the following actions to strengthen its response to domestic abuse incidents:

An officer from outside the Force has reviewed public protection areas, not including domestic abuse. The recommendations from this review have been accepted in full and are being implemented.

A review was conducted of ongoing and filed domestic abuse investigations by a Detective Superintendent.

A new 'arrest package' policy was written to replace the policy introduced at Braintree in May 2011.

A further Interim Domestic Abuse Policy was introduced on 26 September 2011.

A weekly domestic abuse conference call has been established and is attended by the Heads of the relevant departments within Essex Police. All high risk cases are reviewed as are a range of performance aspects.

A Risk Management Conference process has been established with the Head of Public Protection holding fortnightly meetings with the five Divisional Crime Managers to consider and agree tasking in respect of high risk cases in the areas of Domestic Abuse and Public Protection.

A Review and Compliance Team has been created. It will review various areas including Domestic Abuse Crime files at 7, 14 and 72 day anniversaries and all such crime files submitted for filing. Any issues identified will be immediately addressed.

A Domestic Abuse Intelligence Team (DAIT), comprising 10 officers, has been established within the Force Information Room to ensure that officers attending domestic abuse incidents are provided with all relevant information and intelligence.

The Force has increased the staffing of its Public Protection Division by 53.6 staff, including the 10 officers in DAIT. In respect of Domestic Abuse matters there are an additional 18 Domestic Abuse Liaison Officers (DALO) and funding for 5 Domestic Violence inputters (agency staff are currently being used).

There has been investment in training in the DASH model to ensure all staff have received such training and there has been e-learning for PCSOs and front line support staff. This training continues.

A Domestic Violence, DV1 form, pilot has been conducted and is being evaluated. This involved partners in the Domestic Abuse area along the principles of the multi-agency strategic hub. The aim being to improve timeliness and quality of DV1 forms. The Force considers that early indications are positive.

May 2012