

The Bichard Inquiry

News Release

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Sir Michael Bichard reports good progress, but says a great deal still to do on his most important Inquiry recommendations

Sir Michael Bichard, Chairman of the Bichard Inquiry, has called upon the Government to ensure that a national IT intelligence system and a registration or barring scheme for those working with children is delivered on time, by 2007.

The conclusions form part of his review of the Government's work to date in implementing The Bichard Inquiry recommendations. They were presented today and largely reflected good progress across Government, in social services and in school recruitment procedures, since he first reported in June last year.

He however stressed the need for sustained action to deliver a national IT intelligence system that would not encounter delays - the Number 1 recommendation in his original report – and resources to be allocated and legislation taken forward to put in place a new scheme barring those who should not work with children. He also noted slow progress in the timeliness of police inputting information on to the Police National Computer (PNC) – recommendations 4-6.

Sir Michael Bichard's original inquiry followed the conviction of Ian Huntley for the murders of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman. He announced the start of his review of the original recommendations in November 2004.

He said today:

“I think the fact that all those involved knew that there would be a public review has concentrated minds and enables me today to say that good progress has been made. Even so in respect of the most important recommendations - the National IT system and a registration or barring scheme for those working with children, a very great deal remains to be done before we can claim success.”

He particularly highlighted progress in the following areas:

- The Government has reaffirmed the need for Police to be informed of offences against children. Cases not referred will be kept on file and decisions inspected by Social Services Commission;
- on-line training for teachers involved in interviews/selection for posts in schools. From March 2006 all interview panels will include at least one trained person – OFSTED will monitor school recruitment and selection procedures, those working with children will be subject to the more stringent enhanced procedures;
- number of registered bodies allowed to carry out checks for schools will be reduced to protect quality; and
- a new code on information management has been developed and a new code for inputting data on to the Police National Computer (PNC) has been published.

He however also said:

“Although there is a commitment to a police national IT intelligence system, central budget provision and a strategic (high-level) business case, its successful delivery is by no means guaranteed without a detailed business case and the delay in providing this is a concern to me.

“Equally although there is commitment to a new scheme for barring those who should not work with children, which meets all the requirements of my

proposed registration scheme, that project still needs to be delivered by 2007. The resources for this have not yet been allocated; the legislation will need to be taken through Parliament and the scheme will need to ensure that it is easily accessed by those employing workers including parents recruiting, for example, an out of school tutor.”

He also highlighted concerns for ensuring recruitment and vetting controls covering overseas workers in the UK were effective. He made a recommendation to Government to engage now in discussions to achieve an exchange of intelligence with those countries providing the largest number of overseas workers to the relevant sectors.

Sir Michael also reported on the police’s record on inputting data on to the PNC, he said:

“Police performance on putting data on to the PNC about arrests and summons in particular has not improved significantly or, in some respects, at all. That has been a long standing problem and it is disappointing that after all this time, more has not been achieved.”

He concluded:

“We are on the verge of having in the United Kingdom a coherent set of protective measures unrivalled anywhere, but if the national intelligence system and the barring scheme (registration scheme) are not in place by 2007, we shall have fallen short. “

He asked for preparatory work on these schemes to be completed by Spring 2006 and suggested that the Home Secretary should commit to publishing reviews of progress in September this year and March 2006.

Sir Michael also said he hoped such reviews of Inquiries would occur as a matter of course in the future.

Notes for editors

1. Full copies of the review and original report and recommendations are available online at www.bichardinquiry.org.uk.

2. Sir Michael Bichard is also Rector of the University of the Arts London and a former Permanent Secretary at the Department for Education and Employment.

3. The Bichard Inquiry is an Independent Public Inquiry and was set up in the light of the conviction of Ian Huntley for the murders of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman. Sir Michael Bichard presented his conclusions on 22 June 2004. He reported on child protection procedures and the effectiveness of the relevant intelligence-based record keeping, vetting practices in Humberside Police and Cambridgeshire Constabulary since 1995 and information sharing with other agencies. He also assessed matters of local and national relevance and made recommendations to the Home Secretary.

**Issued on behalf of The Bichard Inquiry by Nadine Smith,
tel: 020 7276 1203.**