

**Mike Veale, Chief Constable of Wiltshire Police, has today (Friday 2 December 2016) published an [open letter video](#) in relation to the ongoing national investigation into allegations of non-recent child abuse made against Sir Edward Heath (Operation Conifer). Alternatively you can read the full letter below.**

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As many people know, Operation Conifer is a national investigation, led by Wiltshire Police on behalf of the Police Service, into allegations of non-recent child abuse made against Sir Edward Heath.

When I took on this investigation I knew it would attract intense scrutiny. I also recognised it could potentially damage confidence in Wiltshire Police – a small but strong performing police force with a very commendable reputation for delivering high quality services – and a Force that I am very proud of. Sir Edward Heath was an extremely prominent, influential and high profile person who was arguably one of the most powerful people in the world commensurate with the publicly elected office he held. Therefore as you would expect, the decision to undertake this incredibly complex and challenging investigation was not taken lightly particularly knowing, or at least expecting, that we would be placed under intense scrutiny.

As a Chief Constable, I rightly expect this scrutiny, and it is therefore important to reaffirm to the public, and to my staff, that the conduct of this investigation is my responsibility and my responsibility alone. It is my role to ensure that public accountability or criticism of the way we do our business is aimed at me as the Chief Constable. I am an experienced senior investigator, with over 30 years in policing and I have complete confidence in my investigation team, who I know are under intense pressure and scrutiny on a daily basis. It is my role to ensure the investigation is proportionate, measured, legal and necessary and the role of the Police and Crime Commissioner is to hold me to account for the effective and efficient running of the investigation.

Over the last few weeks particularly, there has been much speculation about this case. Whilst it is not commonplace for us to comment on a live ongoing criminal investigation (which is what Operation Conifer is) I really am very concerned and profoundly disappointed about the impact of this speculation on the public's confidence in the police, the potential prejudicial impact upon a live criminal investigation, not to mention the confidence of persons who have come forward with information.

It is therefore time for me to set the record straight and ensure the current facts are entirely and unequivocally clear about this case.

**Fact:** As some may expect I am often challenged over the decision to pursue this investigation and I understand the reasons why these challenges are made. But it is important to ask the question, if the Force had received allegations of non-recent child abuse against a former Prime Minister and done nothing, what would the reaction have been? Within the national context of the independent inquiry of exploring allegations of institutional failures in the past, Wiltshire Police was duty bound to record these allegations and launch an impartial and thorough investigation. The decision to progress this investigation

was considered in the context of knowing Sir Edward Heath has been dead for over ten years, but the College of Policing national guidance\* is clear, coherent and compelling. It is clear that I am expected to conduct a proportionate investigation which will result in a distinct outcome or report and the closer the suspect is to the state the greater the obligation and the more probing the investigation should be.

Another strong factor for this investigation is the relative proximity to Sir Edward Heath's death. It is well known Sir Edward Heath died approximately 10 years ago; therefore there remains the likelihood that witnesses that can serve to corroborate or, equally as important, negate the allegations are still alive. If abuse has occurred then it remains relevant to support those affected and seek to bring to justice any person still living who may have committed associated criminal offences. It is important to identify any vulnerable individuals who require safeguarding today.

**Fact:** This national investigation has a significant number of allegations spanning a significant number of individuals. It is complex and multi-stranded and in addition to this there are a number of investigations that have fallen out of the main investigation that we are pursuing.

**Fact:** This is not a 'fishing trip' or 'witch-hunt' – both of these terms have been unfairly levelled at us. The legal role of the police service is to, on behalf of the public, impartially investigate allegations without fear or favour, and go where the evidence takes us. Critically, it is not the role of the police to judge the guilt or innocence of people in our Criminal Justice System.

**Fact:** I take my responsibilities of operational independence, which is the bedrock of British Policing, very seriously indeed. Therefore I will remain operationally independent and will not be influenced by inappropriate and unacceptable pressure from people who don't know the detail of this case. I will not be buckling under pressure to not investigate or to conclude the investigation prematurely. However, we will remain cognisant of the obvious sensitivities that surround this case, and we will do all that we are able in order to conduct ourselves with dignity and respect for all those involved or linked to this case.

**Fact:** As I have already indicated, a significant number of individuals have disclosed allegations of abuse. I will not be confirming numbers of people who have come forward. This investigation is still live, and as such, the numbers will be subject to change. My investigators are testing, checking and challenging the evidence and ensuring that at all times our approach is proportionate and justified. This comprehensive and balanced approach has resulted in my investigation team discontinuing a number of lines of enquiry. As I have said – we will go where the evidence takes us without fear or favour.

**Fact:** When people come forward with allegations, they are given a high quality and professional response. Identifying and safeguarding children and vulnerable adults who may be at risk of abuse today must remain our priority. Maintaining the integrity and confidentiality of people who courageously come forward with information also remains an absolute priority for us.

**Fact:** As part of the Operation Conifer investigation, we have not spoken to the witness known as 'Nick'.

**Fact:** The recent media coverage regarding a confidential report that had been commissioned by Wiltshire

Police as part of the investigation, through a recognised National Crime Agency registered expert, referred to satanic ritual sex abuse. Let me be clear, this part of the investigation is only one small element of the overall enquiry and does not relate to Sir Edward Heath. It is also very important for me to reiterate that the report forms part of a live ongoing criminal investigation, so the disclosure of this information is something which we take very seriously.

Uncontrolled release of case-sensitive information into the public domain risks prejudicing investigations into any live suspects, unfair speculation and misinformed judgements being made which ultimately may unfairly damage both the reputation of Sir Edward Heath and / or those who have disclosed abuse.

I consider the disclosure of this information a significant breach of confidentiality and trust and I am carefully considering what pro-active action the Force will be taking in relation to this.

I wish to be clear around a number of further aspects:

- I have a strong and obvious public duty to investigate allegations of non-recent child abuse against Sir Edward Heath through an objective and proportionate investigation in line with national guidance. At the conclusion of the investigation a confidential closing report will be written. Our approach to public confidence is to be as open and transparent as possible, and at that time I will take advice as to what I can legally put in to the public domain.
- This investigation may contribute to the wider picture of truth-seeking and reconciliation relating to non-recent child abuse allegations involving institution settings, being led by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA).
- The operational security of the investigation and the anonymity of the people who have come forward remains of paramount importance to Wiltshire Police.
- Further to the publishing of the Henriques report in relation to Operation Midland, the College of Policing are reviewing the recommendations from that report. Wiltshire Police will monitor the response of the College of Policing and if there is any subsequent change to national guidance, the Force will adopt this. At this time the guidance remains unchanged and very clear.
- Operation Conifer continues at this time. The proportionality and justification for the investigation remains under constant review assisted by an external scrutiny panel and has also been subject of an independent review by Operation Hydrant.
- As I have said Sir Edward Heath was an incredibly high profile powerful politician who held the highest office in this country. The role of the police is to investigate impartially and fairly. The College of Policing guidance, informed by high level legal advice, states that there is a positive duty to investigate cases and that where the alleged suspect is an agent of the state; in this case an elected public official, and where there is likely public interest, this is even more to be the case.

In closing, as this remains a live ongoing criminal investigation, unless there are operational reasons to do so we will not be commenting any further on the detail of this case until such time it has concluded.

Wiltshire Police will continue to do all that it can to protect the integrity of the investigation and the anonymity of those people coming forward.

Thank you.

Mike Veale

**Chief Constable, Wiltshire Police**