



# Practice review report: Jessica Chapman and Holly Wells

These case studies are intended to raise issues in a practical application; bringing together the critical factors, particularly around multi-agency working. They will help to contextualise risk factors and raise questions about prevention within situations of known abuse, neglect and harm. They have been summarised to assist in this process, but more information is available in the actual review reports.

## **Circumstances of, and challenges faced by, the individual**

Ian Huntley lived in Grimsby before moving to Soham. He was investigated by the Humberside Police regarding alleged sexual offences, which took place between August 1995 and 1999 (one investigation resulted in a rape charge that was subsequently dropped).

Three of these investigations involved underage girls. None resulted in a conviction, despite which, local police had begun to regard Huntley as a possible serial sex offender. Huntley was also charged in connection with a burglary of a house in Grimsby in November 1995. The case reached court in March 1996 and was ordered to lie on file.

## **What happened?**

In September 2001, Huntley applied for the job of caretaker at Soham Village College. By this time he had changed his surname to Nixon, and applied for the job under that name. He did, however, disclose on the application form that his previous name had been Huntley. Despite this, when the form was sent for checking to the Humberside Police, they only checked against Nixon – and found nothing. If they had checked against Huntley, they would have discovered the burglary charge left on file. The headteacher of Soham Village College later said that he would not have employed Huntley as a caretaker if he had known about the burglary charge, since one of the school caretaker's key responsibilities was to ensure security in the school grounds.

## **Why it happened?**

It emerged almost immediately that the Humberside Police (where all the alleged offences had taken place) had destroyed information relating to the previous allegations against Huntley, on the basis of a belief that it was unlawful under the Data Protection Act to hold data regarding allegations that did not lead to a conviction. This was contradicted by other police forces who thought it too strict an interpretation of the Act. The Cambridgeshire Constabulary was also criticised for failing to contact Humberside Police during the vetting procedure.



## Report recommendations

- the introduction of a national intelligence system where information collected that points to someone posing a threat is shared and acted upon before that person is employed in a sensitive post
- those recruiting staff in schools must be properly trained in safeguarding
- there should be stronger, more consistent vetting including the introduction of a system for registering those working with children and vulnerable adults
- there should be a database of all alleged sexual offenders involved with children that can be searched
- underage sex between 15-year-olds and older people is not always recognised strongly enough, so the Government should reaffirm its guidance on this
- a registration scheme for everyone working with children or vulnerable adults, which employers can access. It would show if there was a reason why someone should not work with children.

Citation Bichard, S.M. (2004) *The Bichard Inquiry report*. London: The Stationery Office (TSO).