2.5 ACCOUNTABILITY

2.5.1 POLICY FILES

One of the most important aspects of managing any murder investigation is the systematic recording of the SIO's policies. SIOs should use the Policy File to record critical policy decisions. It is the definitive record upon which they will rely when subsequently asked to account for decisions at:

- Magistrates' or crown court;
- Coroner inquests;
- Other judicial proceedings;
- Reviews;
- Appeals.

Policy Files should be mainly used to record strategic policy decisions. It is not an action book but should be used to document the progress of an investigation. Individual actions, unless likely to be controversial, should be administered within the MIR.

The use of Policy Files is subject to ACPO Crime Committee guidelines revised in 1999. The guidelines can be summarised as follows:

- A Policy File should be maintained on all enquiries where a major incident room is set up;
- The format of Policy Files should be standardised by forces;
- There is a facility on HOLMES for the Policy Files to be typed and this should be used at the discretion of the SIO;
- All members of the investigation team, subject to the SIO's directions, should be made aware of policy decisions;
- At the conclusion of the enquiry, the Policy File must be retained and stored with the case papers.

Policy Files are sequentially numbered bound books. Each entry is signed and dated by the SIO or anyone directed or requested to make an entry on behalf of the SIO.

The SIO must adopt a disciplined approach to planning the investigation and this should be recorded in the Policy File. In particular, the SIO should concentrate on strategic and operational priorities. Financial issues and resources are an important strategic consideration that should be properly reflected in the Policy File, but care should be taken to avoid a lack of focus by filling the Policy File with routine administrative and logistical issues.

Policy should be constrained to strategic, critical, tactical and investigative issues. Care should be taken when making entries regarding sensitive matters which can be anticipated as likely to be subject of PII hearings at a later stage of the investigation. In constructing the Policy File the SIO should always attempt to look forward and anticipate likely future challenges to the decisions made by them.

Further information on policy keeping and the SIO's Policy File is provided in Appendix 3 and *ACPO (2005) Guidance on Major Incident Room Standardised Administrative Procedures (MIRSAP),* Section 3.11.3.

2.5.2 OTHER RELEVANT RECORDS

It is likely that all of those with management responsibilities will maintain records in addition to those kept by the SIO. It is important that the SIO is aware of the other records that are being kept and periodically reviews them to ensure that they accurately reflect the investigative strategy recorded in the SIO's Policy File. The following managers typically maintain a policy file:

- Crime Scene Manager (CSM);
- House-to-House Manager;
- Covert Manager.

ACPO (2005) Guidance on Major Incident Room Standardised Administrative Procedures (MIRSAP), Section 3.11 lists the other documents that may be relevant and SIOs should be aware which of these are being used in a particular investigation.

2.6 COMPLEX CASES

In most homicide and major incident investigations credible material is gathered at an early stage and provides a clear focus for enquiries. Such cases are detected relatively quickly. Only a minority of investigations are complex. These can be grouped as low information investigations, high information investigations, critical incidents and linked series investigations.

2.6.1 LOW INFORMATION INVESTIGATIONS

In some cases there is insufficient material available to the investigation to enable progress to be made. This usually occurs at three points.

Homicide Determination – there is insufficient material to determine that the incident is a homicide. Such cases include reports of missing from home, kidnap, no body scenarios, or where there are competing or ambiguous explanations of the cause of death.

Suspect Identification – the circumstances of the incident are clear, but there is insufficient material to enable a credible suspect to be identified.

Evidence Gathering – credible suspects are identified, but there is insufficient material to enable them to be charged with the offence.