

Anger as second watchdog review fails to establish which senior cop shelved investigation into child sex grooming

From the [Manchester Evening News](#)

A second watchdog review into which senior cop shelved an investigation into a south Manchester child sex grooming gang has failed to identify which officer pulled the plug, or the reason why.

At least 57 children and young girls – many of them in care – were raped and abused by up to 100 members of a gang of Asian men 18 years ago.

Two years ago a damning report commissioned by Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham revealed it failed to establish which senior cop pulled the plug on Operation Augusta. Now, it has emerged the police watchdog has also failed to establish their identity after conducting its own two-year probe.

The three officers whose conduct was referred were treated as witnesses throughout. This was kept under constant review throughout our investigation.

[Despite significant efforts, we were](#) unable to determine who took the final decision to close Operation Augusta in July 2005, nor the rationale for doing so.

Challenges faced included the passage of time; a lack of available records of meetings and decisions taken at that time; and the fact some former GMP-employed police witnesses

were either unable or unwilling to engage with our investigation.

Following a review in May 2022 of the substantial amount of evidence gathered, we determined there was no indication any of the three former officers had acted in a way that may have breached the standards of professional behaviour. As this meant there was no legal basis to continue the investigation, it was discontinued on 20 July.

Furious police whistleblower Maggie Oliver, who worked on Op Augusta, said: "Paedophiles were allowed to continue to abuse young girls for years. That's not acceptable in my opinion. The mayoral probe found police and social workers knew what was happening but the abuse continued. . ." *Readers may recall Mrs Oliver's [observation that the collation of information](#) about the assaults by Muslim men ended on 7th July 2005, the day of the worst London jihad bombings. She thinks by order from higher than GMP.*

The M.E.N. understands the three officers concerned are Dave Jones, Steve Heywood and Tony Cook, the latter being the only officer who could produce his notes of the key meetings. It is understood West Midlands Police chief Dave Thompson was not referred to the IOPC.

Maggie Oliver worked on Op Augusta and was stunned to discover that it had been shelved when she returned from holiday. She was interviewed by the IOPC.

She told the M.E.N: "I never expected this to lead to anything. It was clear to me that they would never pin responsibility on any serving surviving officer. The fact is paedophiles were allowed to continue to abuse young girls for years. That's not acceptable in my opinion." She went on: "But the establishment protects the establishment. Things have changed in one way. People now know that there are cover-ups."

Neither GMP nor Manchester City Council have been able to locate minutes of the 'gold' meeting where the decision to close down Op Augusta was rubberstamped, the mayoral review revealed.

IOPC Director of Major Investigations Steve Noonan said: "The findings of the mayoral report caused understandable concern and it was important for our investigation into the resourcing and decision-making behind Operation Augusta to be both thorough and independent of the police."

"We gathered and reviewed a significant amount of evidence, which helped us understand some of the actions taken back then. While we found evidence that arrangements were put in place for the future safeguarding of survivors of child sexual exploitation, unfortunately, we – like the mayoral review team – were not able to locate evidence showing who took the decision to close Operation Augusta and, more importantly, why."

"We have identified several areas of potential learning for GMP to consider and now await further information on how practices have changed since 2005, which will inform our decision on whether to issue any statutory recommendations."

Only a note found in the 'policy log' of the senior investigating officer, Tony Cook, reported that Dave Thompson had stated he was unable to put permanent staff into Op Augusta and that it would close on July 1, 2005. In 2020, Dave Thompson told the M.E.N: "I would not have closed an investigation like this."

Tony Cook told the M.E.N: "I have fully co-operated with the inquiry. I gave them all the notes I took at the time. I fully assisted the investigation as I did with the mayor's review."

The chief constable at the time Op Augusta ended was Mike Todd, who was found dead near the summit of Snowdon in north

Wales in 2008.