



Jim Keeble, chairman of Suffolk Police Federation

## Suffolk pull together to solve murder

During the first week of December last year I was on holiday with my family and it was somewhat surreal to watch the coverage of the Suffolk murders on BBC News 24, the places where I grew up and the people that I work with everyday appearing as the first item on the news across the world.

When I arrived back from holiday on a Monday morning I half expected a call as the enormity of the situation facing my colleagues unfolded. Before becoming federation chairman, I had been working as an experienced detective inspector in the force. No police force anywhere in the country has had to contend with five murders and the bodies being discovered in only ten days.

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This involved the setting up and staffing of five incident rooms and all the associated CCTV, search, forensic, scene cordons, not to mention the world’s press being parked on the front lawn out side of our Martlesham Headquarters.

It was a massive test for Suffolk, especially set against the backdrop of amalgamations, based upon the premise that small forces like ours could not cope with such a series of critical incidents. But we did cope and just prior to Christmas had over 400 extra officers from all over the country helping us in all areas of the investigation.

Between the press and the mutual aid officers we had occupied just about all the free hotel space in Suffolk and North Essex, and the in-force caterers were putting on three meals a day for everyone. I did get drafted in on

December 12 after the final two bodies of Paula Clennell and Annette Nicholls were found at Levington, drawing on my detective skills to act as link officer for the various experts from the National Centre for Policing Excellence.

This was a really challenging two weeks before the arrest of the two suspects and the subsequent charge of one of them with the murder of all five girls, not least because the day job does not stop. We still had discipline cases to deal with and the mass of queries from officers about any number of subjects, but of course mostly about what they were entitled to claim.

Angela Mercer, who had only been the federation’s general secretary for three weeks, found herself on the Gold Command Group as the federation representative. That really was being thrown in at the deep end.

It was a great relief to all of us once the suspect was charged and meant that a lot of officers did get home for Christmas. The whole inquiry showed how with organisation and commitment a small police force like Suffolk can cope with a massive critical incident. As we all know the charging of a suspect is a long way from the end of the job and dealing with all of the 12,000 calls and the thousands of actions generated by the five incident rooms will take many months to complete.

Officers from every corner of the force and all the mutual aid officers can be hugely proud of the commitment and professionalism that they all showed and I for one am very proud to be a Suffolk police officer.