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Police spies' use of dead children's identities was common, MPs told

Mick Creedon, who is leading inquiry into 40-year undercover operation, admits police have yet to inform any parents of affected children



📷 Keith Vaz, chairman of the home affairs select committee, said: 'It is imperative that a timetable is set for completion of the operation, and the victims informed and apologised to as soon as possible.' Photograph: Linda Nyland for the Guardian

Rob Evans and Paul Lewis

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Police have admitted that undercover officers routinely stole the identities of dead children to infiltrate political groups.

The admission was made to MPs by the chief constable leading an investigation into a 40-year undercover operation to spy on political activists.

Mick Creedon also admitted that police have yet to inform any parents of children whose identities were stolen in a practice which MPs have criticised as "gruesome" and "heartless".

Following [an investigation by the Guardian](#), Creedon has now told MPs that the technique was "common practice" within a clandestine unit known as

the Special Demonstration Squad (SDS).

However, he declined to specify how many identities were stolen by the [Metropolitan police](#) unit, which operated between 1968 and 2008, adding that he could not answer the question "at this time with any degree of absolute certainty".

In February, [the Guardian revealed](#) how more than 80 undercover officers trawled through national birth and death records to find suitable candidates.

The technique was dubbed the "jackal run" after it was depicted in Frederick Forysth's novel *The Day of the Jackal*.

The spies then developed aliases based on the children's identities and were issued with identity documents such as passports, driving licences and national insurance numbers to make their new personas appear credible.

After assuming the identities of the dead children, [they spent up to 10 years infiltrating activist groups](#) across the political spectrum.

Police have previously admitted that the technique was also used by a second undercover squad, the National Public Order Intelligence Unit, which began operating in 1999.

As a result of the disclosures, the Metropolitan police called in Creedon, Derbyshire's chief constable, as an outsider to take over an internal inquiry into the SDS which has been examining a series of allegations since October 2011.

Following [pressure from Keith Vaz](#), the chairman of the home affairs select committee, Creedon has disclosed brief details of the "very complex, difficult and protracted" inquiry, which police say will not be finished for at least another three years. Creedon admitted that since the revelations, an unspecified number of parents have contacted police to find out if the identities of their dead children had been used, but none has been given an answer.

"No families of children whose identities have been used have been contacted and informed ... This issue is very complicated and mistakes could put lives in jeopardy," he said.

Undercover police have [fathered at least four children](#) with activists they had been sent to spy on.

Creedon refused to specify how many children had been fathered in total, but admitted that they too had not been contacted by police.

On Friday, Vaz said it was vital that the inquiry, which is examining 50,000 documents, "does not go the way of the original phone-hacking investigations".

He added: "It is imperative that a timetable is set for completion of the operation, and the victims informed and apologised to as soon as possible.

"In particular, the families of dead children whose identities were used, the offspring conceived by police officers using their undercover identities and those who had sexual relations with them using their alias must be contacted as a matter of urgency."

Creedon said the inquiry - known as Operation Herne - is forecast to cost at least £2.8m and involve 33 police staff.



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