



## Paedophile cases in doubt after collapse of detective's trial

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The collapse of the trial of Soham detective Brian Stevens could lead to a review of hundreds of investigations into alleged paedophiles.

On Friday, a prosecutor halted the trial of a teacher accused of trying to obtain images of children, citing concerns caused by the bungled investigation into Mr Stevens.

Keith Bickell, 56, arrested as part of Operation Ore, was told his case was adjourned because of "the recent discharge in the high-profile case of an East Anglian police officer charged in similar circumstances in the same national operation".

At Exeter magistrates court, prosecutor Michael Ashby said the prosecution needed as long an adjournment as possible so that "the crown can be sure their expert is dependable enough to pursue this case".

He said the crown prosecution service will be holding a review into Operation Ore cases, which may take up to seven months to complete, to "deal with this problem which has now arisen".

However, a spokeswoman said the CPS has not ordered a full-scale review of Operation Ore cases, but is considering the need for one.

In Mr Stevens' case, the prosecution computer expert, Brian Underhill, was found to have made two serious errors in his analysis of the evidence on the detective's laptop computer.

The errors meant the prosecution was unable to prove a link between the allegedly indecent images found on the laptop and Mr Stevens.

Weekend reports said Mr Underhill has worked on about 600 child pornography cases as part of Operation Ore.

Charges against Mr Stevens, who worked as liaison officer with the family of the murdered Soham schoolgirl Jessica Chapman, were dropped at Southwark crown court on Wednesday.

Mr Bickell, who denies charges of inciting another to distribute or show indecent images of children, was remanded on unconditional bail until October.

Meanwhile, the Metropolitan police's most senior paedophile investigation team is facing a reshuffle because of the pressures of the job. There are concerns about the welfare of officers who routinely have to look at disturbing images of children being abused.

But some child protection experts fear an increased turnover of officers on the unit will diminish the pool of experience.

A spokesman said: "The length of time officers generally spend attached to the paedophile unit is currently being reviewed due to the nature of the work they undertake.

"We are actively recruiting new members of staff to work within the present paedophile unit as part of a long-term strategy to maintain a force dedicated to the protection of children."

The unit, thought to number nine, is part of the force's child protection command, a department of 420 officers.

This month their undercover work led to the jailing of a trainee teacher, Luke Sadowski, who had tried to procure a nine-year-old girl for sex on the internet.

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