
Possible successors to Met police chief

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By Lucy Bogustawski, PA

There are several possible successors to Sir Ian Blair as Britain's top police officer.

Sir Hugh Orde, 50, has been hotly tipped as a possible successor to head the Metropolitan Police.

He joined the police force in 1977 and rose to rank of Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) in September 2002.

He was involved in the inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence and also played a major role in the investigation by former Met Commissioner Sir John Stevens into allegations of state collusion in a number of sectarian murders in Northern Ireland during the Troubles.

However, Sir Hugh today appeared to rule out the suggestion of him becoming head of the Met Police.

He said: "My concern currently is to protect the community of Northern Ireland and to deal with the dissident republican threat and that is where 100% of my energy currently is."

"I have two years of my contract left here, I have no plans to move at the moment - wait and see, I suspect is the best answer to this."

He added: "I have done six years, I am in my seventh year as chief of Northern Ireland, it is a fairly busy and fairly challenging job and I am not convinced that anyone who has done this would be prepared to move on and do another five years in such a challenging role."

In February last year it emerged that the married officer had been conducting a long-term affair with an undercover detective at the Met, fathering a son with the officer.

Earlier this year he also caused controversy when he claimed Britain should negotiate with al-Qa'ida.

The Chief Constable of West Yorkshire, Sir Norman Bettison, has also been tipped to replace Mr Blair.

He began his police career in 1975 when he joined South Yorkshire Police as a constable and in 1998 became Chief Constable of Merseyside Police.

Following a brief retirement from the police in 2004 when he acted as Chief Executive of Centrex providing training and development to police forces and enforcement agencies, he rejoined the police service in January last year as head of West Yorkshire Police.

He gained notoriety over the investigation into the disappearance of Dewsbury schoolgirl Shannon Matthews earlier this year and was forced to defend the professionalism of the inquiry.

Sir Ronnie Flanagan was appointed Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary in 2005, but is perhaps better known as Chief Constable of both the PSNI and the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

During his five years in the role he presided over the Good Friday Agreement and Omagh bomb.

After accumulating expertise in anti-terrorism operations and becoming chief constable, he guided through the fraught transition that turned the battle-scarred RUC into the modernised PSNI.

As an inspector, he wrote the report into the Soham murder investigation, accusing Cambridgeshire Constabulary of losing momentum after a good initial response.

Last year he was criticised after Northern Ireland's police ombudsman found officers colluded with loyalists behind more than a dozen murders in north Belfast at a time when he was in charge.

He denied knowledge of any such events.

Sir Ronnie, 58, is politically well-trusted and was used by Tony Blair to report on reforms to improve the Iraqi police.

Speculation also surrounds second-in-command Sir Paul Stephenson as Sir Ian's replacement.

He was appointed deputy commissioner of the Met in 2005 from his position as Chief Constable of Lancashire Constabulary.

He spoke out over assistant commissioner Tarique Ghaffur's race allegations against the Met, saying he thought the subsequent employment tribunal was necessary and would "robustly challenge" the allegations.

In 2006 he lauded police action to foil an alleged terrorist plot to blow up aircraft flying between the UK and US. He said at the time plotters intended "to commit mass murder on an unimaginable scale".

Outside bets are also being taken for Peter Neyroud, the former chief constable of Thames Valley who is now chief executive of the National Policing Improvement Agency, and Mike Fuller, the UK's first black chief constable who has been in charge of Kent since 2004. His career began in the Met, in Special Branch and Scotland Yard.

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