Decision of Sir Stephen Watson, Chief Constable
15th December 2025

Preliminary matters

1. I have today conducted an accelerated misconduct hearing at Unit A, GMP Force Headquarters, and have given consideration to various breaches of the Standards of Professional Behaviour as pertain to Officer A.

2. On the morning of the hearing, I was presented with a number of written submissions as advanced by Officer A. These submissions collectively related to applications concerning: his fitness to participate; pre-knowledge of disability; request for an adjournment pending an outcome of a grievance; abuse of process; directions of disclosure; exclusion of evidence; an application to dismiss/stay proceedings; and to suggest reasonable adjustments in the course of these proceedings.

3. I gave consideration to all of the above but came to the clear view that none of the applications carried sufficient merit to delay the fair discharge of these proceedings as had been arranged. That the officer literally submitted a veritable barrage of applications in the hours before the commencement of the hearing strikes me as both cynical and unreasonable. As a case in point, the suggestion of reasonable adjustments in the course of this hearing was rendered unfeasible because of the lateness involved in its submission.

4. The officer accepted that the conduct alleged was inappropriate and that it constituted a breach in the standards of professional behaviour. On the basis of an assertion of various mental health conditions however, the subject officer denies formal misconduct or gross misconduct. This submission was underpinned by the assertion that he formed no malign intent given that his decision making was significantly impaired as a result of the mental health issues afore described.

5. In so far as my own assessment of the allegations set forth, I have determined that the allegations amount to gross misconduct. Accordingly, I have found the breaches alleged proven and that the same relates to Authority, Respect and Courtesy; and Discreditable Conduct.

6. In coming to a determination as to the most appropriate outcome, I have taken cognisance of the submissions of the appropriate authority as contained within the bundle of evidence submitted to me prior to this hearing, with elements of the same being amplified in invited verbal submissions by the representative of the appropriate authority.

7. I have similarly given careful consideration to the submissions made on Officer A’s behalf, both through his Federation representative, and in respect of his own verbal submissions; some of which were in answer to questions that I posed to him directly.

8. In determining the appropriate disciplinary action, I have had regard to the relevant provisions of the College of Policing's Guidance on Outcomes in Misconduct Proceedings. I do recognise that it does not automatically follow that where breaches of the code of conduct are found to be so serious as to justify dismissal, that dismissal can be the only sanction implied. Nevertheless, it remains very powerfully the case that the principal objective in the conduct of these hearings must be to preserve public confidence in the police service.

9. My approach has been to 'adopt' the '3 stage approach' referred to in the College of Policing's Guidance.

10. I have assessed the seriousness of the conduct. It is a matter of fact that Officer A had, over a protracted period, exchanged a particularly significant number of telephone messages with a known third party (Ms P). It is acknowledged by the officer that Ms P was highly vulnerable when he first came into contact with her and that her vulnerability would have persisted beyond the date of his first contact with her. Such messages were exclusively text based. What is clear is that the volume of communication, both emerging from police issued and personal devices was exceptional in that collectively, over 239 messages were exchanged.

11. His conduct was persistent, unforced and occurred over a protracted period of time. Officer A knew, or ought to have known, that given the acknowledged vulnerability of Ms P, that his conduct was reprehensible and morally indefensible; and contrary to the standards and values of the Force. I must be clear that in this element of my determination, I do not accept that put forward by the officer which was to suggest that he was so afflicted by various mental health conditions that not only did he not form any malign or inappropriate intent; but that he could not even remember the detail of the events in question.

12. With regard to the aggravating factors set out in the College of Policing's Guidance, I have already pointed to the fact that the misconduct was deliberate and unforced. By definition, the breach clearly implies a significant deviation from that properly expected of a well conducted officer. I reiterate the point that I do find that the officer's conduct was substantially informed by his apparently seeking or encouraging some form of sexual engagement with a highly vulnerable person. I should be clear that even if a member of the public were found not to be especially vulnerable, the character and content of the messaging under consideration in this case would equally be held to be wholly inappropriate.

13. It is also clear that this type of behaviour falls squarely into that which understandably concerns the public greatly in the light of contemporary failures of police standards, discipline and behaviour.

14. In respect of harm, I refer principally to the potential harm to

the reputation and standing of the service. If the full facts of this case were to be fully understood by the general public, I consider that it would be inevitable that Officer A's conduct and actions would bring the profession into disrepute and damage the trust that the public have a right to expect of their police.

15. With regard to mitigating circumstances, as set out in the College of Policing's Guidance, I have taken into account Officer A's record of service. The substance of Officer A's advocacy speaks to the impact of his suffering from a variety of then undiagnosed mental health conditions. Whilst the officer was able to submit sufficient detail to demonstrate that he is currently diagnosed with a range of conditions, I was not presented with any information which was to suggest a medical link between his various afflictions and causation in respect of his conduct. Whilst therefore not being in any way dismissive of that put forward in this regard, I was not persuaded that these issues came close to mitigating the evidenced misconduct found.

16. I reiterate the point that the core purpose of these proceedings is to sustain public confidence in the police. As articulated above, there is no doubt that the facts of this case have the grave potential to substantially diminish public confidence. In conclusion, I consider that the level of seriousness in this case is very high.

17. Officer A's conduct in this matter clearly falls far below the behaviours and standards that the public have every right to expect. Notwithstanding the fact that the officer only partially accepted that he had misconducted himself, the fact remains that he has demonstrably breached the standards of professional behaviour.

18. I have given considerable thought as to whether a lesser sanction than dismissal might be appropriate to meet the statutory purpose of these proceedings. I have however come to the conclusion that the nature of this officer's misconduct is such that dismissal is the only appropriate outcome.

Sir Stephen Watson QPM
Chief Constable