

THE
ANGIOLINI
INQUIRY

The Angiolini Inquiry

Part 1 Report

February 2024

Return to an Address of the Honourable
the House of Commons
dated 29 February 2024
for

The Angiolini Inquiry

Part 1 Report

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Foreword

Sarah

“I yearn for her. I remember all the lovely things about her: she was caring, she was funny. She was clever, but she was good at practical things too. She was a beautiful dancer. She was a wonderful daughter. She was always there to listen, to advise, or simply to share the minutiae of the day.”

Susan Everard, Sarah’s mother¹

Part 1 of this independent Inquiry was commissioned in late 2021 by the then Home Secretary to establish a definitive account of the career and conduct of the individual responsible for the premeditated and brutal murder of Sarah Everard.² This Report of Part 1 of the Inquiry therefore focuses on Sarah’s assailant. I have, however, always been conscious that this focus can create a perception of Sarah being marginalised from the whole process.

Throughout this Inquiry I have sought evidence and understanding of the depraved actions of Wayne Couzens but at no time have I, or the team with whom I have been so privileged to work, lost sight of the daily agony that continues for Sarah’s loving family and friends, nor of the excruciating loss of a wonderful young woman who had so much to give and so much for which to live. Some small degree of understanding of their pain can be gained from the Victim Personal Statements that Sarah’s parents and sister prepared and bravely read aloud in court, in the presence of her murderer. These statements can be found in Appendix A to this Report.

While this Inquiry has been a sorrowful undertaking, it has provided the Inquiry team with the opportunity to get to know Sarah’s loving family. Their courage and determination that Sarah’s tragic death should bring about greater and earlier recognition of potential sexual and murderous predators, and thereby help improve the safety of women in public spaces, has been humbling. It has been an immense privilege to get to know them.

The course of Sarah’s promising and loving life was brought to an appalling halt on 3 March 2021. Sarah was walking home along a busy London street when she was abducted, and then raped and murdered, by Couzens, an off-duty police officer serving with the Metropolitan Police Service.³

Sarah’s parents believe that it was because Couzens was a police officer and presented himself to her as a plain clothes officer that Sarah died. If it wasn’t for Couzens’ knowledge of policing and the police equipment he used to falsely arrest and abduct Sarah, she would

¹ See Appendix A.

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simply never have got in his car.⁴ This Report looks back many years before the crimes for which Couzens is now serving a whole-life sentence,⁵ and has considered a broad range of information to establish an overall timeline through to the days and hours before he carried out the most heinous of crimes.

Angiolini Inquiry

The then Home Secretary, the Rt Hon. Priti Patel MP, appointed me as Chair of the Angiolini Inquiry on 22 November 2021.⁶ The Terms of Reference for Part 1 of this Inquiry were set by the then Home Secretary and published on the gov.uk website on 10 January 2022.⁷ I was asked to conclude this Inquiry within nine months. The team started work immediately. However, ongoing criminal prosecutions against Couzens and ongoing misconduct proceedings relevant to the case took place over many months and prevented the Inquiry from proceeding in a number of important aspects.⁸

The Terms of Reference for Part 2 of the Inquiry were announced in May 2023.⁹ These were informed by the work of the Inquiry in Part 1, as well as by submissions received as part of a public consultation on the Terms of Reference for Part 2. The scope of Part 2 includes the recruitment and vetting of police officers, culture and standards in policing, and measures to help prevent sexually motivated violence against women in public spaces. The work for this part of the Inquiry is ongoing.

In February 2023, a former Metropolitan Police Service officer, David Carrick, was convicted of 49 crimes, including rape.¹⁰ The then Home Secretary, the Rt Hon. Suella Braverman MP, extended the scope of the Angiolini Inquiry to look into Carrick's criminal behaviour and the decision-making around his police vetting, as well as any abuse of police powers.¹¹ The Terms of Reference for this part of the Angiolini Inquiry were published on 7 February 2023,¹² and the work is ongoing.

Acknowledgements

Piecing together the history of Couzens provided the benefit of hindsight. Much of the information provided to the Inquiry had not been considered in its entirety, or was not available for consideration, before it came to us. This Part 1 Report draws on evidence from those who know or knew Couzens, those who worked with him, and experts who have been able to provide theories and evidence to inform my findings.

I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to all of those who have helped and supported me with Part 1 of the Inquiry. I am particularly grateful to:

- the witnesses who participated in the Inquiry, for their time and candour in providing evidence;

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- the organisations who disclosed material to the Inquiry;
- the expert witnesses for their professional expertise and contributions;
- Four Communications for its media advice and support;
- Hestia’s counselling services for support to witnesses and the Inquiry Secretariat;
- my Reference Group members for their sage advice and guidance: Andrea Simon, Zoë Billingham CBE, Sir Stephen Lander KCB, Sir Iain Livingstone QPM; and
- Solicitors to the Inquiry: Isabelle Mitchell and Sarah Jones, and their colleagues from Eversheds Sutherland, for all of their advice and excellent support.

I would like to thank the Inquiry Secretariat for their commitment, hard work and support to me during this part of the Inquiry, especially when the subject matter is such difficult material. I would like to give special thanks to my lead investigators, Lindsey Miller and Charlotte Triggs OBE, and to my Deputy Secretary, Victoria Oliveira, for their outstanding commitment, wisdom and support.

Throughout the Inquiry I have had the great privilege of working alongside Laura Gibb, a senior civil servant and Secretary to the Inquiry. Her ferocious intellect, appetite for hard work and commitment to the Inquiry was matched with outstanding organisational and people skills and a genuine compassion for, and understanding of, the concept of the public good. Civil servants rarely seek or receive public recognition for their work, but Laura and her team have reminded me of the great fortune this country has in the calibre and dedication of its civil service.

I also want to pay tribute to all the Metropolitan Police Service officers and staff involved in Operation Temora, the investigation into Sarah’s disappearance and, subsequently, her abduction, rape and murder. Much of this Report will criticise significant failures in policing duties and responsibilities. In contrast, as noted by Lord Justice Fulford in the remarks he made when sentencing Couzens, the investigation into Sarah’s murder represents the best of the Metropolitan Police Service’s ability to investigate crime while using the technological advances in evidence-gathering available to them.¹³

Wayne Couzens

Couzens is a predatory sex offender and murderer. Evidence of his preference for violent and extreme pornography and history of alleged sexual offending dates back nearly 20 years prior to Sarah’s murder.¹⁴ Chapter 2 of this Report provides more detail about the Inquiry’s view of Couzens’ character and the potential drivers of his offending.

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The victims who were subject to his indecent exposures and who reported his offending were not taken sufficiently seriously by the police. The police officers who responded to those victims were not adequately trained, equipped or motivated to investigate the allegations properly.¹⁵ There may be many more victims of his sexual offending who have not, as yet, come forward.

Indecent exposure, particularly where the perpetrator is masturbating, is a serious sexual crime and may indicate a potential trajectory towards even more serious sexual and violent offending.¹⁶ In this Report, I make recommendations about what needs to change to ensure that masturbatory indecent exposure is treated as the serious crime it is and that victims are taken seriously. I encourage victims of indecent exposure to report their experiences to the police and for the police to respond with professionalism.

The then Home Secretary asked me to establish the circumstances and decision-making relating to Couzens' vetting and re-vetting, including whether any red flags were missed.¹⁷ They were. Couzens' alleged sexual offending history and his often poorly and chaotically managed personal debt over many years were red flags.¹⁸ Those indicators should have given pause to those responsible for the police vetting and transfer processes and the vetting decisions, and prompted them to carry out further investigations and refuse Couzens' vetting clearance.

As previous reviews of police vetting have found, poor availability of information between police forces means that this was harder.¹⁹ Had those responsible for police vetting not allowed process to usurp their independent thought and curiosity, Couzens may not have held the office of constable for as long as he did.

The seriousness of this issue is compounded because Couzens was entrusted to guard, with a firearm, some of the most important public sites in London.²⁰ This Report reaches conclusions and makes a related recommendation about the changes that need to be made to the recruitment, selection, welfare, supervision and vetting of firearms officers.

The Inquiry found evidence of Couzens' sexual offending, unmanaged indebtedness, predilection for extreme pornography and a vile, sexualised expression of his sense of humour.²¹ He used his position as a police officer to impress or intimidate people he met.²² Couzens should never have been a police officer, but opportunities to deny him that privilege were missed.

Since Sarah's murder, an intense and prolonged public discourse has ensued about the case, expressing the horror and shock that an off-duty police officer could abuse their powers and carry out the worst of crimes. And wider debates have raged about public trust and confidence in the police and women's safety in public spaces. Neither of these problems have been resolved. In fact, public trust and confidence in policing has

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deteriorated further.²³ It also remains the case that women in public spaces are at risk from those men who choose to predate upon them.²⁴ Every day during the Inquiry, I saw shocking press reports from around the country about sexual offending by police officers. These problems are by no means unique to the Metropolitan Police Service.²⁵

This case has left a stain on the reputation of the police service and damaged the social contract on which British policing is based, namely policing by consent. As Lord Justice Fulford remarked when sentencing Couzens:

“In this country it is expected that the police will act in the public interest; indeed, the authority of the police is to a truly significant extent dependent on the public’s consent, and the power of officers to detain, arrest and otherwise control important aspects of our lives is only effective because of the critical trust that we repose in the constabulary, that they will act lawfully and in the best interests of society. If that is undermined, one of the enduring safeguards of law and order in this country is inevitably jeopardised.”²⁶

Everyone wants answers about how and why this happened, none more so than Sarah’s loving family. This Report makes recommendations that need to be implemented by those responsible for policing to ensure that everything possible is being done to prevent those entrusted with the power of the office of constable from abusing that power in the most dreadful of circumstances.

I hope that those in authority in every police force read this Report and feel galvanised to continue, and to accelerate, the work required to identify individuals who should not be part of any police force or in a position of public authority. This should help to secure the transformation of those organisations to ensure that no one feels comfortable expressing misogynistic, sexist or racist views while holding an office intended to protect those most vulnerable in society.

As long as vile behaviour and deeply abusive language are normalised and accepted as ‘banter’ in policing culture and elsewhere, people like Couzens will be able to continue to commit atrocious crimes undetected. Many will say that Couzens’ crimes are a world away from the sexist and misogynistic behaviour that exists within policing, but they sit on the same continuum.

Policing needs to grasp fully the extent of the cultural problems it faces and the way that this affects the public it serves. It needs to do more than make further changes to policies, guidance and training, although these are important and worthwhile. All policing leaders need to rethink fundamentally how they lead their organisations to ensure that certain types of behaviour, from the unacceptable to the criminal, are never tolerated.

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I will use the opportunity to explore the themes and issues arising from Part 1 of the Inquiry in Part 2, to help ensure that policing can improve and public trust and confidence in policing can begin to be restored. There are wider societal issues about the safety of women in public made clear by the tragic murders of several women on our streets before and since Sarah's death. These wider issues will also be dealt with in Part 2.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elish Angiolini". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rt Hon. Lady Elish Angiolini LT DBE KC

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Note on the text

Language and terminology

This Report uses graphic and sexually explicit language to describe certain activities, behaviours and situations. Some readers may find this distressing.

This Report uses legal terminology to describe those involved in interactions with the police or those participating in or present at incidents that would potentially have had police involvement if they had been reported. The term ‘complainant’ is used to describe a person who reports that they have been a victim of crime. This term is used interchangeably with the term ‘victim’, which is used more generally to refer to a person who has had a crime, proven or alleged, committed against them, whether or not it was reported to the authorities. The term ‘informant’ is used to describe a person who reports a crime (who may or may not have also been the victim, or intended victim, of the crime).

Under Section 66 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003, the legal term used to describe the crime of intentionally exposing one’s genitals with intent that someone will see them and be caused alarm or distress is ‘exposure’. However, throughout this Report – with the exception of the part of Chapter 3 that describes the provisions of Section 66 – the Inquiry has chosen to refer to this offence as ‘indecent exposure’. The Inquiry considers that the addition of the qualifier ‘indecent’ better reflects the sexual and offensive nature of this crime.

Witness anonymity

In accordance with the commitments the Inquiry made to witnesses, every effort has been made to protect the privacy of those who provided evidence. As such, material has been presented in such a way as to ensure, as far as possible, that individuals are not identifiable. Only in a few, exceptional cases are witnesses named or clearly identifiable, for instance where they hold an accountable role in an organisation, where their identity is relevant and necessary to fulfil the Inquiry’s Terms of Reference, or where they have provided evidence as experts.

References

Most footnotes in this Report contain document reference numbers used for the evidence that has been relied on by the Inquiry. These reference numbers have been redacted. This is to ensure that the identities of individual witnesses and victims are kept confidential, as there is a risk that documents could be linked together and sources discovered. The remaining footnotes are explanatory and designed to help readers understand technical or other specialist terms or to provide brief background information.

Executive summary

Setting up the Inquiry

- ES.1 On 30 September 2021, Wayne Couzens, a serving officer with the Metropolitan Police Service, was sentenced to life imprisonment, with a whole-life order, for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard. In his sentencing remarks, Lord Justice Fulford stated that Couzens “used his position as a police officer to enable this to happen” and described how Couzens’ crimes have “very considerably added to the sense of insecurity that many have living in our cities, perhaps particularly women, when travelling by themselves and especially at night”.¹
- ES.2 On 22 November 2021, the then Home Secretary, the Rt Hon. Priti Patel MP, addressed Couzens’ crimes and sentencing, announcing to Parliament that she was “launching an independent inquiry” and confirming “that the Right Honourable Dame Elish Angiolini QC has agreed to be the Chair of that inquiry”.² This was the first announcement confirming that the Angiolini Inquiry would be established.

Scope

- ES.3 In her announcement on 22 November 2021, the then Home Secretary confirmed that the Inquiry would be made up of two parts, with Part 1 to establish how Couzens “was able to serve as a police officer for so long and seek to establish a definitive account of his conduct [...] [Part 1] will also seek to understand the extent to which his behaviour rang alarm bells with his colleagues.”³
- ES.4 The Angiolini Inquiry was commissioned as an independent, non-statutory inquiry. At the time, the then Home Secretary described how the non-statutory inquiry was designed to give Sarah Everard’s family “closure as quickly as possible”, explaining that “statutory inquiries can be long-running, with limited flexibility” and that “recommendations are not made for a number of years”.⁴
- ES.5 The Terms of Reference outlined the Inquiry’s investigative scope, which sought to establish a comprehensive account of the career and overall conduct of the killer of Sarah Everard, to identify any missed opportunities, and to make recommendations based on the findings.

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Evidence-gathering and investigation

ES.6 The Inquiry received evidence from a range of organisations and interviewed 144 witnesses, including current and former police officers, police staff, individuals with knowledge of National Security Vetting, individuals employed by policing organisations, current and former senior leaders of police forces and policing and other relevant organisations, and members of the public. The Inquiry also commissioned expert witnesses to provide written reports.

Inquiry findings

ES.7 Couzens is a predatory sex offender and murderer. Evidence of his preference for violent and extreme pornography and history of alleged sexual offending dates back nearly 20 years prior to the murder of Sarah Everard.

ES.8 The victims who were subject to his indecent exposures and who reported his offending were not taken sufficiently seriously by the police. The police officers who responded to those victims were not adequately trained, equipped or motivated to investigate the allegations properly.

ES.9 The then Home Secretary asked the Inquiry to establish the circumstances and decision-making relating to Couzens' vetting and re-vetting, including whether any red flags were missed. They were. Couzens' alleged sexual offending history and his often poorly and chaotically managed personal debt over many years were red flags. Those indicators should have given pause to those responsible for the police vetting and transfer processes and the vetting decisions, and prompted them to carry out further investigations and refuse Couzens' vetting clearance.

ES.10 As long as vile behaviour and deeply abusive language are normalised and accepted as 'banter' in policing culture and elsewhere, people like Couzens will be able to continue to commit atrocious crimes undetected. Many will say that Couzens' crimes are a world away from the sexist and misogynistic behaviour that exists within policing, but they sit on the same continuum.

ES.11 Policing needs to grasp fully the extent of the cultural problems it faces and the way that this affects the public it serves. It needs to do more than make further changes to policies, guidance and training, although these are important and worthwhile. All policing leaders need to rethink fundamentally how they lead their organisations to ensure that certain types of behaviour, from the unacceptable to the criminal, are never tolerated.

Missed opportunities

ES.12 This Inquiry cannot, of course, make any conclusive finding that earlier intervention would have prevented the horrific crimes against Sarah Everard. However, more diligent adherence to vetting guidance, improved information-sharing and greater scrutiny of Couzens' financial situation and the associated stress and pressure created by significant debt could have made a difference. More thorough and committed investigation of reports of alleged indecent exposure in particular would almost certainly have brought him to the attention of his employers, and could have led to prosecution, his removal from policing roles and outright dismissal.

Sexual offences

- ES.13 Since the then Home Secretary commissioned this Inquiry, it has become clear that Couzens' terrible crimes were not committed in isolation but were the culmination of a trajectory of sexually motivated behaviour and offending. Couzens' convictions for indecently exposing his genitals intending that someone would see them and be caused alarm and distress are now well known, after he pleaded guilty to three separate offences.
- ES.14 Further, in the course of its own investigations, the Inquiry received evidence from a number of credible sources demonstrating that Couzens' history of sexual offending was not restricted to indecently exposing himself. The Inquiry was also provided with evidence relating to alleged sexual abuse perpetrated by Couzens in his early twenties, which included an alleged very serious sexual assault of a child barely into her teens. Other alleged offending and activity, which was predominantly aimed at adult women, included sharing unsolicited photographs of his penis and sexual touching. There were also allegations of possession of indecent images of children. In order to protect the victims, who have shown great courage in coming forward, this Report excludes any details that could result in their identification.
- ES.15 The Inquiry is in no doubt that the failure to investigate the June 2015 report of alleged indecent exposure was a red flag and a missed opportunity to disrupt or even prevent further offending by Couzens. Instead, he was able to continue in post as an authorised firearms officer with the Civil Nuclear Constabulary.
- ES.16 The Inquiry was struck by the similarities in approach between the investigations in relation to the June 2015 allegation and the 2021 drive-through restaurant offences. Both seemed destined to fail from the start, involving poor recording and decision-making and lacking the positive steps that could potentially have led to the identification of the suspect and detection of the crime. Rather than embarking on a process of detailed, thorough and time-consuming evidence-gathering, the officers displayed apathy and disinterest and found reasons not to pursue the cases.
- ES.17 From an investigative perspective, the 2020 case involving a cyclist was more complex than the other two, with no immediate direct link to a specific car registered to Couzens as there had been in the 2015 and 2021 cases, or till receipts as there were in the 2021 offences. This does not, however, excuse the failure to investigate any potential lines of enquiry, including taking a detailed witness statement, attempting to identify the car and its keeper, and tracing the female police officer to whom the complainant spoke immediately after the incident.
- ES.18 All three investigations were of poor quality and inadequate, which is a deeply disheartening and unacceptable state of affairs. In Part 2, the Inquiry will explore whether there exists a deep-rooted culture in policing in which finding reasons not to pursue a crime is preferred over any attempt to build a successful case for prosecution.
- ES.19 Given that levels of reporting are low and that perpetrators therefore routinely escape any intervention by the criminal justice system, the Inquiry concludes that those cases of indecent exposure that are reported must be thoroughly and

comprehensively investigated. Furthermore, victims need to be encouraged to report and to believe they have no reason for shame or embarrassment. These emotions should be left to perpetrators to experience.

Recruitment and vetting

- ES.20 From the evidence it has seen, the Inquiry is satisfied that Couzens at times sought to deliberately mask his financial situation, omitted pertinent civil liability information in relation to financial matters, exaggerated his length of service in the Territorial Army, and misstated address details to increase his chances of being recruited to the various police forces with which he served. The Inquiry is also persuaded that, despite these misrepresentations, there were *additional* failings on the part of some of those involved in his recruitment and vetting.
- ES.21 Couzens entered into an Individual Voluntary Arrangement in February 2007. It is therefore possible – although the Inquiry cannot know for sure given the lack of documentation now available – that he failed vetting for a regular officer post at Kent Police in 2008 because of that Individual Voluntary Arrangement. It is indisputable, however, that, despite having been refused vetting clearance by the Central Vetting Unit of Kent Police in 2008, Couzens remained a special constable with that force. This means that he was deployed, potentially on his own (having achieved Independent Patrol Status in 2007), with the same warranted powers and carrying out the same role as a regular constable.
- ES.22 The Civil Nuclear Constabulary put Couzens forward for National Security Vetting before receiving the force vetting recommendation from Thames Valley Police, the organisation to which the Civil Nuclear Constabulary outsourced its force vetting. This meant that the Civil Nuclear Constabulary was willing to sponsor Couzens for Developed Vetting security clearance without having received full information about the outcome of the force vetting process – in this case, the information about the existence of the Individual Voluntary Arrangement, and the lack of information about the size of his debt or whether it was being properly managed. The Inquiry considers that this decision enabled Couzens to evade proper scrutiny of his finances through the lens of police force vetting.
- ES.23 The Inquiry also questions why the Civil Nuclear Constabulary would outsource force vetting checks to a Home Office police force to ensure that it had greater assurance about the applicants being recruited if the recommendations made by that force were not taken into consideration.
- ES.24 The Inquiry is satisfied that, when the Civil Nuclear Constabulary requested that the Office for Civil Nuclear Security put Couzens forward for Developed Vetting clearance, both organisations were aware that there were *some* financial issues in his background, but the Office for Civil Nuclear Security was not aware of the recommendation that Couzens should not pass force vetting.
- ES.25 Due to what was explained to the Inquiry as a “principle of vetting confidentiality”,⁵ the Civil Nuclear Constabulary did not, when deciding to employ Couzens, have sight of the material generated by the National Security Vetting process.

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- ES.26 Due to the passage of time, the Metropolitan Police Service cannot now confirm whether the Police National Database intelligence about the 2015 indecent exposure allegation involving Couzens was not identified because the correct checks were not carried out, or was identified but not considered during his original vetting in 2018.
- ES.27 However, the Police National Database entry was considered and discounted during the re-vet process carried out in 2021, after Couzens' arrest, by a senior vetting officer, who indicated that vetting clearance would still have been recommended. The Inquiry has not seen the tasking instructions to the senior vetting officer to clarify what was required in the retrospective assessment, but the recorded rationale for how the Police National Database entry had been considered during the re-vet process did not include any explanation of why the information had been discounted. This is a deeply significant failing.
- ES.28 The purpose of vetting is not to ingather evidence of a corroborative standard for criminal proceedings, or to accept witness accounts without further challenge or scrutiny. Rather it is to assess whether, in light of all the available information – including non-conviction information, which the College of Policing's Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting makes clear should also be taken into account – the force is satisfied that employment of the applicant is appropriate and that they are a fit and proper person to take the oath of constable. The Metropolitan Police Service's willingness to accept conclusions from the re-vet process, including that an uninvestigated allegation of indecent exposure did not warrant further exploration during the vetting process, is of serious concern to the Inquiry.

Firearms

- ES.29 The risk assessment carried out on Couzens by the Metropolitan Police Service when determining his suitability to be authorised to carry a firearm should have been more robust and not reliant on the vetting process.
- ES.30 The Inquiry was told that the risk assessment process did not include any checks of information held on the Police National Database or of other intelligence sources. This is because it was assumed that those checks had been done as part of the force vetting procedures. This is clearly a weakness in the process, given both the potential length of time between vetting renewals and the degree of discretion allowed for by the Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting in force at the time.
- ES.31 Those assessing Couzens' risk to be authorised as a firearms officer were not able to access information about the 2015 indecent exposure allegation. If they had, it is likely his application to be an authorised firearms officer would have been rejected.
- ES.32 Witnesses confirmed that officers at the Metropolitan Police Service do not undergo formal psychological assessment before becoming authorised firearms officers, although they are tested rigorously during the assessment centres and firearms courses in a number of difficult situations reflecting what they might come across in their duties.

ES.33 Couzens' suitability assessment to become an authorised firearms officer at the Metropolitan Police Service may have been less rigorous than if he had applied for a firearms licence as a member of the public. Sergeants supervising Couzens as an authorised firearms officer were not trained to assess an officer's state of mind or offer welfare support.

Finances

ES.34 The Inquiry considers that significant financial vulnerability can create pressures that may affect an individual's ability to discharge the duties of a police officer. It is clear from the evidence available that Couzens had instances of excessive, impulsive spending. He sought to manage his levels of debt through a series of loans, payday loans and credit cards.

ES.35 It is likely that Couzens entered into the 2007 Individual Voluntary Arrangement in order to increase his chances of passing force vetting. It is also likely that he was unaware of the relevant vetting guidance stipulating that an Individual Voluntary Arrangement should have been a barrier to clearance.

ES.36 The Inquiry concludes that the salary information provided to Couzens in 2018, when he sought confirmation of his salary with the Metropolitan Police Service, was incorrect, and that this initial mistake was compounded by a further error that placed him on an even higher pay point to which he was not entitled.

ES.37 It was clear from the supporting evidence produced by Couzens during the pay dispute with the Metropolitan Police Service, which began in late 2020, that he had been "promised various things upon his transfer from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary to the Metropolitan Police Service"⁶ that had not materialised. This included his having been told that he would not start his career in the Metropolitan Police Service at the lowest pay point on the scale.

ES.38 The Inquiry questions why the errors made by the Metropolitan Police Service in calculating Couzens' pay when he joined the force were not discovered earlier through routine compliance checks. This may be indicative of a lack of oversight and governance controls.

ES.39 The Inquiry concludes that Couzens struggled to manage his finances for most of his adult life. At the time of Sarah Everard's abduction, rape and murder, however, he appears to have been under unprecedented financial pressure, which had begun to accumulate during his time at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary and continued to escalate after he joined the Metropolitan Police Service. The scale of his debts, combined with the prospect of a pay cut and salary recovery action (involving an amount of just under £15,000) as a result of Metropolitan Police Service administrative errors, as well as the imminent resumption of his mortgage payments, are likely, in the Inquiry's view, to have caused a great deal of strain. It appears that his response to that situation was to engage in further spending, thereby creating a vicious cycle. The Inquiry also notes the correlation between this period of increasing financial pressure and the escalation of Couzens' sexual offending.

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- ES.40 Despite Couzens' apparent lack of control over his finances in the months leading up to his crimes, the Inquiry finds that, at key moments of scrutiny, he was able to present with a 'veneer of solvency'. In 2011, when he underwent vetting for the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, he could demonstrate that he had taken active steps – via the 2007 Individual Voluntary Arrangement – to manage his earlier debts (although this was recognised by the Defence Vetting Agency as a risk to be managed through aftercare).
- ES.41 Later, in the run-up to his application to the Metropolitan Police Service, Couzens manipulated his finances so that his unsecured debts and overdrafts were reduced, resulting in no findings of note from his creditworthiness check and the grant of clearance. It is a matter of concern that the vetting process did not reveal the longevity and extent of his indebtedness.
- ES.42 The Inquiry heard in witness evidence that, from a vetting perspective, financial difficulties are a risk insofar as they can signal vulnerability, meaning that an individual may be more susceptible to bribery or corruption. While this is certainly true, the Inquiry takes the view that financial difficulties can also create another risk, which was not explicitly considered during the force vetting or National Security Vetting processes for Couzens, namely the risk that they may cause or contribute to stress, which may affect individuals' mental health to the extent that their ability to perform their duties may be compromised.

Workplace culture

- ES.43 In the early stages of this Inquiry, the often repeated theory used to explain the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard by a serving constable of the Metropolitan Police Service was one that cast Couzens as a 'bad apple', an individual who uniquely tarnished the force's reputation. Since then, Baroness Casey of Blackstock has taken a wrecking ball to the 'bad apple' theory. Her view has been reinforced by the imprisonment of a second police officer from the same unit as Couzens – the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command – for multiple rapes and serious sexual offences against 11 women.
- ES.44 Couzens spent his working life (both paid and voluntary roles) in environments that were overwhelmingly dominated by men, where women were very much in a minority. Such is true of the motor repair industry, the Armed Forces and the police service.
- ES.45 Despite the favourable light in which Couzens was generally perceived by witnesses from Kent Special Constabulary, and the absence of any suggestion that he behaved badly towards women while on duty, the Inquiry concludes and is satisfied that, by the time Couzens resigned from Kent Special Constabulary, he already had a history of abusive and potentially criminal sexual activity. These behaviours ranged from intimidation, sexual touching, sharing unsolicited photographs of his penis and showing extreme pornography, to an alleged very serious sexual assault against a child barely into her teens. All behaviours involved either the exploitation of vulnerable female victims or, in the case of the pornography, testing colleagues' boundaries. The fact that the Inquiry heard no evidence of Couzens behaving

improperly on duty as a special constable leads to the conclusion that he had the ability to control and compartmentalise his behaviour, deliberately concealing his sexual tendencies when he considered it appropriate to do so.

ES.46 The existence of the 2015 indecent exposure allegation and the incident from 2013 where Couzens was reported as missing suggest to the Inquiry that Couzens successfully hid an established tendency towards sexual wrongdoing and/or dishonesty from his colleagues in the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, just as he had in Kent Special Constabulary.

ES.47 The Inquiry concludes that Couzens was selective about when and to whom he revealed views and opinions that were at odds with the Code of Ethics and which fell below the high standards of professional behaviour expected of those who serve in the police. As he had done in his previous career with Kent Special Constabulary and the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, Couzens successfully hid such tendencies, including potentially criminal conduct, from his colleagues at the Metropolitan Police Service (the only exception being his contributions in the WhatsApp group referred to in paragraph ES.49).

ES.48 Although Couzens was not wholly a product of his working environments, those environments did nothing to discourage his misogynistic view of women and meant that, as long as he presented himself as professional, his deviant behaviour outside of work could flourish.

ES.49 The Inquiry saw no evidence that Couzens' colleagues knew of and directly encouraged his offending or other relevant sexual activity. There is, however, evidence of a WhatsApp group in which Couzens' deeply offensive and misogynistic views, relating to the sexual abuse of female victims of domestic violence and other vulnerable members of the public, were treated as acceptable and went unchallenged. The Inquiry also considers that the alleged incidents of indecent exposure (some involving masturbation) went unchecked by police officers responsible for investigating them.

Recommendations

ES.50 The recommendations made in this Report are informed by the evidence considered by the Inquiry and the conclusions reached from that evidence. These recommendations are being made now because it is important that immediate action is taken to remedy the issues identified within the Report.

ES.51 This Report is the first of the Angiolini Inquiry reports. The recommendations made in this Report do not anticipate or prejudice the evidence that will be considered in the later stages of the Inquiry. Nor does this Report prejudice the conclusions to be made from the evidence gathered in Part 2 of the Inquiry. The Inquiry expects to make further recommendations in subsequent reports. These will also be grounded in the evidence the Inquiry considers.

ES.52 The Inquiry commends these recommendations to those who have responsibility for policing.

Recommendation 1: Approach to investigating indecent exposure

At the earliest opportunity, and by September 2024 at the latest, police forces should ensure that they have a specialist policy on investigating all sexual offences, including so-called 'non-contact' offences, such as indecent exposure.

Recommendation 2: Guidance and training on indecent exposure

By December 2024, the College of Policing, in collaboration with the National Police Chiefs' Council, should improve guidance and training on indecent exposure, in order to improve the quality of investigations and management of indecent exposure cases. In particular, the College of Policing should:

- a. review and update training, informed by crime statistics and research into the nature of indecent exposure and its impact on victims;
- b. review and update the guidance for police officers to improve the handling of indecent exposure cases;
- c. include guidance on appropriate resourcing for investigations; and
- d. ensure that guidance and training reflect the Sentencing Council guidelines, which recognise factors indicating increased harm and culpability.

This activity should be informed by the results of Recommendation 4 below.

Recommendation 3: Treatment of masturbatory indecent exposure within the criminal justice system

With immediate effect, the Home Office, Ministry of Justice, College of Policing and National Police Chiefs' Council should work together to conduct a fundamental review of the way masturbatory indecent exposure is treated within the criminal justice system. The review should focus on: recognising the seriousness of the offence; identifying it as an indicator of disinhibition by perpetrators; and understanding and addressing the wider issue of sexual precursor conduct so as to prevent victimisation, improve the response to victims when it occurs and bring more offenders to justice.

Recommendation 4: Research into masturbatory indecent exposure

With immediate effect, the Home Office, in collaboration with the College of Policing, should commission research to establish if there is an evidence-based link between active masturbatory indecent exposure and subsequent contact offending. Where relevant, findings should then be used to shape policy, training and guidance for police officers investigating indecent exposure cases (as per Recommendation 2).

Recommendation 5: Public information campaign on indecent exposure

By March 2025, the Home Office, together with the National Police Chiefs' Council, should launch a public campaign to:

- a. raise awareness about the illegality/criminality and legal consequences of any type of indecent exposure and boost the confidence of victims to report cases of indecent exposure to ensure that more offenders are brought to justice; and
- b. increase publicity around the relevant legislation in order to encourage reporting of unsolicited photographs sent of genitals with the intention to cause harm, distress or humiliation and to discourage perpetrators from doing so.

Recommendation 6: Review of indecent exposure allegations and other sexual offences recorded against serving police officers

By September 2024, the National Police Chiefs' Council, in collaboration with all force vetting units, and building on the results of the recent data-washing exercise, should conduct a review of the circumstances of all allegations of indecent exposure and other sexual offences recorded on the Police National Database and the Police National Computer against serving officers. This is to identify, investigate and ultimately remove those officers found to have committed sexual offences from all police forces.

Recommendation 7: In-person interviews and home visits

With immediate effect, the College of Policing, in collaboration with force recruitment, should ensure that every new candidate applying to become a police officer in any police force undergoes an in-person interview and home visit. This should be designed to provide a holistic picture of the candidate and a better understanding of the candidate's motivations for joining the police and their dedication to serving the public. In particular, this should include the following:

- a. An in-person interview with the candidate to ensure that face-to-face contact is made with the recruiting force before the vetting or onboarding of the candidate is progressed.
- b. A visit to the residence of all new candidates. This should be used as another opportunity, in advance of vetting enquiries, to engage with the candidate, relevant family members or other occupants of the residence, wherever possible.
- c. An integrity questionnaire, used as part of the in-person home visit, to explore fully the candidate's personal attitudes and values, including increased scrutiny of the candidate's motivations and suitability for joining the police.
- d. Corresponding guidance and training for home visits must be developed to ensure that the visits will enable a better sense of the candidate's character, rather than judge living arrangements or socio-economic status.

Recommendation 8: Recruitment and vetting policy, processes and practices

By June 2024, the College of Policing, in collaboration with force vetting units, should take further steps to prevent those unsuitable for policing from joining the policing profession. This should include further developing the Vetting Code of Practice, Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting, and other guidance on recruitment and vetting practices in order to prevent those who commit sexually motivated crimes against women and those otherwise unsuitable for policing from holding the office of constable. In particular, recruitment and vetting policy, processes and practices must be developed in the following areas:

- a. Applicants should be required to undergo an assessment of their psychological suitability for the role (which is not just a questionnaire).
- b. There should be more robust use of the Police National Database during vetting, including as a tool to reveal unreported adverse information about applicants to ensure that potential risks are not missed. In particular, the Database should be used when individuals attempt to move between forces.
- c. Any individual identified as having a conviction or caution for a sexual offence should be rejected during police vetting. This should be clearly outlined in the Vetting Code of Practice and reflected in the Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting, which should consider all contact and non-contact sexual offences.
- d. The Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting should be amended to make it clear that military and/or Ministry of Defence checks should be carried out on all applicants who have served as military reservists.

- e. There should be a fundamental review of the link between debt, mental health, vulnerability to corruption and suitability to be a police officer, to inform vetting decisions. Detailed consideration should be given to the amount of unsecured personal debt held by officers, and rules should be amended to mandate officers to report any significant changes in debt to vetting teams. In addition, the rules should require applicants and officers to provide further insight into their finances, including any payday loans, when requested during the vetting process.
- f. There should be increased rigour in relation to checks for authorised firearms officers, to ensure that vetting standards are met, as well as the introduction of a psychological assessment and an appropriate process for seeking feedback from supervisors or line managers to determine suitability for the role.
- g. No police officer should be onboarded, even if only for initial training, before all vetting is complete. In addition, each officer's force vetting should be completed before their National Security Vetting is initiated. All force vetting information should be passed to National Security Vetting officers for consideration.

Recommendation 9: Professional rigour in decision-making

By March 2025, the College of Policing, in collaboration with force vetting units, should take steps to improve the quality and consistency of police vetting decision-making. This should include encouraging the use of greater professional rigour and curiosity when investigating lines of enquiry, in order to prevent those who commit sexually motivated crimes against women and those otherwise unsuitable for policing from joining the policing profession. These steps should include the following:

- a. Recruiting forces should be able to request that unresolved allegations discovered during vetting processes be reinvestigated.
- b. In collaboration with the National Police Chiefs' Council, a national vetting capability should be created, as an advisory function, to provide another layer of confidence in instances where complex vetting investigations and decisions are required. In such cases, forces should approach the national vetting function to seek proposed lines of enquiry and ensure that they are following an agreed, standardised approach when considering complex cases.
- c. Consideration should be given during vetting to any information or intelligence about police officers being reported missing, regardless of how quickly such reports were closed.

- d. Forces must ensure that force vetting units are complying with and practising Section 6.2 of the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting (2021), which states that force vetting units “must record the results of vetting enquiries; the rationale for refusing, suspending, withdrawing or granting clearance, including with restrictions; and where adverse information has been revealed and considered”. This is to ensure that an audit trail is recorded to give the force confidence in decisions made at the time and to allow future vetting officers to constructively scrutinise vetting enquiries and outcomes.

Recommendation 10: Vetting Code of Practice and transfers

With immediate effect, all recruiting forces should have regard to the new Vetting Code of Practice, which requires the parent force to provide all relevant information requested about the transferee to enable an effective assessment of risk by the force conducting a full re-vet of the transferee.

Recommendation 11: Information-sharing

By December 2024, the College of Policing, in collaboration with force vetting and recruitment units, should ensure that information-sharing practices, including data retention policies, are strengthened in order to prevent those who commit sexually motivated crimes against women and those otherwise unsuitable for policing from remaining in, or moving across, the policing profession. In particular, there should be a focus on the following information:

- a. Previous failures to achieve vetting should be recorded by all forces and flagged to recruiting forces. This should also trigger a re-vet with the current or recruiting force.
- b. A shared agreement should be made about the quality, relevant and necessary content, and sources of information that will be provided in a reference for a future force, also known as a ‘shared referencing protocol’, with directed questions that must be answered (for example, regarding any past disciplinary or honesty/integrity issues). Information to be shared as part of the protocol should be covered within the relevant forces’ fair processing notices. The protocol should apply to all transfers and applications to police forces from individuals in the uniformed services, including:
 - the Ministry of Defence (including the Army, the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy, as well as their respective reserve forces);
 - fire and rescue services;
 - HM Prison and Probation Service;
 - other police forces; and

- relevant government agencies, such as Border Force or Immigration Enforcement.

This is to improve forces' access to – and ability to use – the totality of information they hold about officers in order to prevent, detect and deal with those likely to commit offences.

- c. As per Recommendation 8(b), there should be expanded access to and use of the Police National Database, including as a tool for revealing relevant uninvestigated adverse information about officers.
- d. Any adverse information or intelligence (developed or otherwise) should be passed by the current Professional Standards Directorate to the receiving Professional Standards Directorate for any officers transferring. No decisions on their appointment should be made until that intelligence has been reviewed, recorded and closed and the vetting units have had time to consider it. If the recruiting force identifies adverse information as a result of the vetting process, this should be shared with the current force for consideration and potential action.

Recommendation 12: Right to privacy

With immediate effect, police forces should convey to all existing and prospective officers and staff that they must be held to a higher standard of behaviour and accountability than members of the public, and that therefore their right to privacy can be fettered in certain circumstances. These circumstances include, but are not limited to: recruitment, vetting, aftercare, transfer, promotion, role change, returning to policing and maintaining standards. This is to ensure that members of the police are fully aware and accountable for the unique powers entrusted to them and the standards of professional behaviour they swear to uphold. Updated fair processing notices concerning changes to processing of personal data should be provided prior to any new processing taking place, including data-sharing.

Recommendation 13: Aftercare

By December 2024, the College of Policing, in collaboration with all force vetting units, should develop a stronger approach to force vetting aftercare in order to monitor an individual effectively throughout their career with the police and be aware of any change in circumstances as soon as possible to ensure that potential risks/red flags are identified and assessed. In particular, that approach should include the following:

- a. Mandatory, randomised re-vetting should be introduced, as an additional layer to standardised vetting periods, for police officers and staff, akin to randomised drug-testing.

- b. In addition to police officers and staff being required to declare any material changes in their circumstances within a managed system, such as a human resources system, supervisors, or anyone with concerns relating to behaviour, welfare or performance, should report them to Professional Standards Departments at any point.
- c. Professional Standards Departments should systematically exchange relevant and necessary information with vetting and counter-corruption units to consider information disclosed by any individual, and any action necessary.

Recommendation 14: Positive culture and elimination of misconduct or criminality often excused as ‘banter’

With immediate effect, every police force should commit publicly to being an anti-sexist, anti-misogynistic, anti-racist organisation in order to address, understand and eradicate sexism, racism and misogyny, contributing to a wider positive culture to remove all forms of discrimination from the profession. This includes properly addressing – and taking steps to root out – so-called ‘banter’ that often veils or excuses malign or toxic behaviour in police ranks.

Recommendation 15: Reporting by police officers and staff of harassment, sexual offences and inappropriate behaviour committed by fellow officers

With immediate effect, all police forces should take action to understand and confront the barriers that police officers and staff face when reporting sexual offences committed by a person that they work with or in the workplace. This is in order to encourage victims, who are also police officers or police staff, to come forward and submit complaints, as well as to identify and remove those who are not fit for service. To do this, forces should:

- a. ensure, when a complaint is made, that sufficient and appropriate resources are dedicated to supporting the complainant, including maintaining anonymity where needed or requested, and ensuring an investigation is carried out as appropriate;
- b. address cultural barriers to reporting, such as re-victimising complainants by labelling or treating them as ‘troublemakers’; and
- c. provide dedicated reporting processes for women in police forces who experience inappropriate behaviour related to their gender.

Recommendation 16: Recruitment and retention of women in police forces

By September 2024, the College of Policing and the National Police Chiefs' Council should review and examine the conditions of female officers and staff in order to encourage more women to join the police and progress in policing careers. To ensure success, this should include a review of:

- a. working conditions that do not address the realities of modern working lives, including families where both parents are officers and share caring responsibilities;
- b. processes, training and refreshers for officers returning from parental leave; and
- c. kit, equipment and facilities designed largely by and for men.

Chapter 1: Wayne Couzens – life, career and crimes

Introduction

- 1.1 The Inquiry was charged with establishing “an overall timeline of Wayne Couzens’ career and relevant incidents, including allegations of criminal behaviour and/or misconduct”.¹
- 1.2 During the course of gathering evidence, it became apparent to the Inquiry that key facts and events from Couzens’ earlier years, including from his personal life, are relevant to how he was perceived by others and to his behaviour, as well as to the decisions he took about his career. Information about those earlier years, and about how Couzens was perceived by others, is also relevant to later vetting decisions and to the identification of any warning signs. In order to fulfil its Terms of Reference, the Inquiry has therefore had to consider the evidence from those earlier years and his personal life in order to identify any relevant incidents, and the circumstances surrounding them, to determine whether any potential risks and/or red flags were missed.
- 1.3 This first chapter, therefore, provides a narrative timeline of these key facts and events from Couzens’ life, including in relation to his upbringing, career, behaviour and crimes (alleged and proven). The timeline set out in this chapter has been created using witness and documentary evidence provided to the Inquiry.
- 1.4 Some of the material contained in this chapter (and later chapters) has been described in such a way as to protect the identities and privacy of those involved.
- 1.5 Much of the information in this chapter is expanded on in later chapters, which provide more details about incidents related to Couzens’ career, life and crimes. Those later chapters set out the Inquiry’s analysis of these incidents and how they are connected to the Inquiry’s Terms of Reference.

1972 to 2001: Early life, education, first job

Childhood and adolescence

- 1.6 Couzens was born in Dover, Kent, in December 1972.² The elder of two siblings,³ he is understood to have lived with his parents in Dover until they separated,⁴ when he was still of primary school age. The Inquiry heard evidence from witnesses that,

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following his parents' separation, Couzens lived with his father and his father's new partner in Dover, albeit with continued contact with his mother and grandmother, while his sibling stayed with their mother in another town in Kent.⁵

- 1.7 According to information provided by Couzens when he was applying to the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, he attended secondary school in Dover from 1984 to 1989, leaving after having taken his GCSEs.⁶ The Inquiry understands that Couzens never liked school, had always lacked confidence and thought he was average academically.⁷ The Inquiry also understands that Couzens recalled having been bullied at school, both by fellow pupils and by a primary school and a secondary school teacher.⁸ The Inquiry heard that Couzens described himself as an awkward young child who was shy and fearful and did not have any close friends at secondary school.⁹
- 1.8 Witness evidence seems to support Couzens' description of himself at this time: the Inquiry was told that, as a teenager, Couzens was "quite shy" and "quite quiet and guarded".¹⁰ Couzens did not appear to have a group of friends his own age, but rather spent time with younger people.¹¹ Witnesses recalled that, despite Couzens' age advantage, he tended to be "on the periphery of the group".¹² They did not remember him ever going to the pub or otherwise going out to socialise.¹³ It was reported that Couzens "would often have [...] grand ideas" (including opening a ski school, even though he had been skiing only once), and that he was "strangely over-confident in his ability to achieve the[m]".¹⁴ The Inquiry was also told by a witness that, once Couzens obtained his driving licence, he would take them and their female friends out for drives in his car. The witness does not recall feeling that Couzens was "predatory in any way", noting that he actually "seemed to lack confidence when it came to women".¹⁵

Professional training and employment

- 1.9 The Inquiry heard from witnesses that, during the school holidays, Couzens worked at his father's garage in Dover¹⁶ and that, after he left school, he took a job there.¹⁷ The Inquiry was told that he appeared "quiet and unassuming" in the workplace.¹⁸ Couzens asserted on various application forms that he obtained a City & Guilds qualification in Vehicle Body Repairs from a local college. He recorded having studied, possibly part time, for the qualification for a period of two or three years, completing it in either 1992 or 1993.¹⁹ The Inquiry obtained evidence demonstrating

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that Couzens achieved a City & Guilds Part 1 Certificate in Vehicle Body Competences, with a credit in Unit 04, Light Vehicle Body Repair Technology, but that he was awarded it in 1990.²⁰

- 1.10 Couzens continued to work at the garage until early 2011,²¹ when he was 38 years old. There is some evidence to suggest that he left the garage a couple of times to pursue other projects, including a three-year stint building roads and a period when he ran a second-hand car sales business. He returned to the garage – and was welcomed back by his father – when those projects did not come to fruition.²² In addition, as described in more detail in paragraphs 1.20 to 1.45, from 2002 onwards, he also carried out volunteer roles with the Army and Kent Police in his spare time.

Family, social and romantic relationships in early adulthood

- 1.11 The Inquiry heard a range of views about Couzens' adult relationship with his father. Some witnesses could not recall there having been any problems in the relationship.²³ On the other hand, more than one person who had observed Couzens and his father at the garage remembered some tensions.²⁴ The Inquiry was also told by someone who knew the family well that Couzens was not happy working for his father but that the job was "a means to an end and provided him with money when he needed it".²⁵
- 1.12 People who formed friendships with Couzens when he was in his early twenties described him as "mild mannered" and "hilarious",²⁶ "self-confident"²⁷ and "likeable".²⁸ During this time, he also appears to have become more sociable, going out for drinks, to the pub and on nights out.²⁹ At work, however, Couzens appears not to have been such good company; the Inquiry was told that he was "occasionally [...] moody and unpredictable", and that he "always put himself before others".³⁰
- 1.13 According to witnesses, some of those whom Couzens socialised with during this period were several years younger than him – and, in hindsight, one individual described it as "strange" that, at his age, Couzens chose to hang around with a group of friends who were so much younger.³¹ Couzens was reportedly popular with the group as he appeared to be successful, having a nice car and a job in the garage.³² The Inquiry heard that Couzens took recreational drugs during this period.³³

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- 1.14 Someone who knew Couzens well for a considerable length of time, including during this period, was asked whether they had ever observed anything unusual about Couzens that gave them cause for concern. This witness told the Inquiry that they “genuinely [could] not think of anything that would have been a red flag”, also indicating that Couzens “was always a happy, outgoing and extremely kind man who would do anything for anyone”. They recalled that Couzens was very concerned about his physical appearance, insisting on “wearing smart or designer clothes and shoes and smelling of expensive aftershave” when he was only going to a friend’s house to watch TV. Looking back, the witness considered that this may have been a sign of insecurity.³⁴ Other witnesses remember Couzens having had a hair transplant,³⁵ with one individual surmising that he had had the procedure because he lacked confidence.³⁶ On the other hand, the Inquiry heard from some people that Couzens “never seemed to take pride in his appearance”³⁷ and that “he was not particularly into flashy clothes or designer labels”.³⁸
- 1.15 The witness who knew Couzens well also described him as restless, “always seeking the next new thing, whether that was a new car, new mobile phone or new job”. They recalled that Couzens could never hold on to money – “he always spent it”³⁹ – and this impression was shared by another individual, who described him as “not good with money [...] if he had money in his pocket, he was the kind of person that spent it”.⁴⁰ The witness who knew Couzens well told the Inquiry that Couzens frequently changed cars and enjoyed driving cars that were “perceived to be glamorous”. They recalled that Couzens’ desire for more permeated most aspects of his life, including his career. He “seemed to lack the ability to settle once he had achieved the role he had set his sights on”, and it was widely known that he was “always concentrating on his next big idea”.⁴¹ Another witness had similar views of him, suggesting to the Inquiry that Couzens “had big ambitions” and “aspired to be something better”. However, they also opined that Couzens’ “ideas seemed disproportionate to his skills and capabilities”.⁴²
- 1.16 In his twenties, Couzens is reported to have had some relationships with women.⁴³ A witness recalled that there was a “significant age gap” between Couzens and a girlfriend he had during this period, reflecting that, “with the benefit of hindsight”, the girl was “alarmingly young given [Couzens’] age at the time”.⁴⁴ Someone close to the family remembered Couzens also having met a woman online; the woman reportedly moved in with him and met the family, but the relationship “fizzled out quickly”.⁴⁵
- 1.17 The Inquiry heard from a witness that, when Couzens was in his twenties, while most men his age were going out, meeting people and dating, he had decided that he wanted to join the Army and was training all hours of the day. The witness did

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also note, though, that Couzens “always seemed to keep his cards close to his chest” and it would not therefore have been surprising if he had had “lots of girlfriends but was just secretive about them”.⁴⁶ The Inquiry understands that Couzens had always had a sexual interest in women and self-reported having had three relationships prior to his marriage.⁴⁷

First known interactions with the authorities and allegation of sexual assault

- 1.18 In 1995, Couzens, then in his early twenties, appears to have had his first known interactions with the authorities. He declared on various application forms that he was found guilty of a motoring offence in that year,⁴⁸ and also reported having been the subject of a County Court Judgment in relation to a car financing debt.⁴⁹ The Inquiry saw some evidence to suggest that this debt was settled in 1998.⁵⁰
- 1.19 It was also alleged that, in 1995, Couzens committed an offence of kidnapping. The incident, which allegedly took place in London, was reported to the police on the day it occurred, but the perpetrator was not caught. The victim re-contacted the police after seeing photographs of Couzens in the media following his arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard and recognising him as her attacker. Couzens was arrested for and questioned in relation to the alleged offence in March 2022.⁵¹ A decision to take no further action was made on the basis of “evidential difficulties”,⁵² and therefore no charges were brought.

Early 2002 to late 2010: Territorial Army, Kent Special Constabulary

Enlistment, training and performance in Territorial Army

- 1.20 In early 2002, Couzens, who was by now 29 years old and living in Kent, applied to join a regiment of the Territorial Army⁵³ based in Kent. He passed the medical examination and security check and was found eligible for enlistment.⁵⁴ In April 2002, he formally enlisted at the rank of private for a period of three years,⁵⁵ carrying out his duties in his spare time while continuing to work at the garage. The Inquiry heard that Couzens was interested in the military and firearms,⁵⁶ which may have explained his decision to enlist, although one witness suggested that Couzens

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53 [***] The Territorial Army, now known as the Army Reserve, is the British Army’s reserve force. Reservists serve in their spare time and are paid to train in the evening or at the weekend. Reservists are paid a daily rate for their service and also receive a tax-free bonus, or ‘bounty’, on top of their pay, provided that they meet their minimum training commitment (currently usually 19 or 27 days) and pass their annual military training tests.

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joined the Territorial Army mainly to get his gun licence.⁵⁷ The Inquiry understands that Couzens' paternal grandfather had been a sergeant major in the Army and that Couzens himself had always wanted to be in the Army.⁵⁸

- 1.21 Couzens should have completed his initial training in November 2002 but, for reasons that appear to have been outside his control, he did not finish the course on time and instead obtained his Certificate of Proficiency in January 2003.⁵⁹ His instructors described him as “keen” and a hard worker, although it was noted that he had poor physical fitness.⁶⁰ Also in January 2003, Couzens requested and was granted a short extension to his training year to allow him to complete combat infantry training within his first year of employment, so that he could earn his annual ‘bounty’ (bonus) payment.⁶¹
- 1.22 Couzens embarked upon the Territorial Army Combat Infantryman’s Course in March 2003. However, his Commanding Officer reported that he arrived poorly prepared and, after having failed two of the first three modules, he withdrew “for personal reasons”.⁶² Couzens reattempted the course in July of the same year and passed. This time, it was reported that Couzens had been placed in the top third of the cohort, had demonstrated clear leadership potential and had achieved ‘best shot’ on the course.⁶³ In his performance assessment from September 2003 he was described as “one of the hard core” of his cohort, with the potential to make a good junior non-commissioned officer (the first rung of leadership in the Territorial Army).⁶⁴
- 1.23 In May 2004, Couzens took a military driving course and was commended by the instructor as the best overall student.⁶⁵ One month later, he applied to attempt selection for the Special Air Service (Reserve) and was posted to the corresponding unit for training. He attended the pre-selection training course but failed the selection process, returning to his original regiment in mid-2005.⁶⁶
- 1.24 A fellow reservist described Couzens as “keen to be a soldier”, remarking that “fitness was definitely important to him” and that he would “train in his spare time, more so than his colleagues”.⁶⁷ A witness who knew Couzens well recalled that, in preparation for applying to join the Army, Couzens was “training all hours of the day [...] out [...] running on a Saturday night carrying a heavy rucksack”.⁶⁸ Another reservist observed that Couzens was “well respected” but noted that he had “never volunteered for an operational tour”.⁶⁹ Someone else who knew Couzens at this time said that he “seemed to love [the Territorial Army]”, always appearing to be “happier and more friendly” after training weekends.⁷⁰

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Discharge from Territorial Army

- 1.25 In November 2005, Couzens successfully applied to extend his service with the Territorial Army for a further three years, with a new end date of April 2008.⁷¹ Less than a year later, however, he failed to attend training for a period of more than six months and, in May 2007, received a letter from his Commanding Officer reminding him of his obligations as a reservist.⁷²
- 1.26 Couzens last attended Territorial Army training in July 2007. He was discharged from the Territorial Army in April 2008⁷³ for failing to fulfil his training obligation, after having apparently ignored two further letters from his Commanding Officer.⁷⁴ He also failed to return items of equipment and uniform and was billed for £526.⁷⁵ In February and March 2008, officers from the Territorial Army, seeking to enquire about Couzens' lack of attendance and ascertain whether he wished to return his kit, visited his home and the police station where he was by then serving as a special constable (see paragraphs 1.29 to 1.45), but Couzens was not present at either location.⁷⁶ The Inquiry has not seen any record of the kit ever having been returned or of the associated debt ever having been settled. The Inquiry was told by an Army officer familiar with the operations of the Army Reserve that it was not uncommon for reservists to stop attending and to fail to return kit without informing the Army of their intention to leave. It was also normal practice for the Army to make efforts to recover outstanding kit by visiting the officer's recorded home address or place of work.⁷⁷

Alleged inappropriate behaviour during period of enlistment with Territorial Army

- 1.27 The Inquiry heard evidence alleging that, in 2003, while in the Territorial Army, Couzens behaved in an intimidating manner towards a woman at an event for reservists.⁷⁸ The victim did not report the alleged incident to the authorities at the time but contacted the police after having seen Couzens' face in the press following his arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard, and recognising him as the man with whom she had interacted.⁷⁹ The victim did not wish to make a complaint⁸⁰ and thus no further police action was taken.
- 1.28 In addition, the Inquiry learned that, in 2004, Couzens is alleged to have shown pornographic videos to a group of reservists in a social setting. While initially the videos appeared to be "quite tame and mainstream", depicting "normal consensual sex", the material gradually became more violent and extreme, featuring "forceful oral sex" where women were being "made to gag", and then bestiality.⁸¹ This incident was reported to the Metropolitan Police Service almost immediately after Couzens'

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arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard,⁸² and he was arrested for and questioned in relation to it in March 2022.⁸³ A decision to take no further action was made on the basis of “evidential difficulties”⁸⁴ and therefore no charges were brought.

Application to join Kent Special Constabulary⁸⁵

- 1.29 Couzens’ declining interest in the Territorial Army appears to have coincided with him applying to join the police service. He applied to join Kent Special Constabulary in May 2006 but had apparently already tried to become a police officer on more than one occasion. In his application form for Kent Special Constabulary, he self-reports having applied in 2004 to become a regular officer with Kent Police, failing at the interview stage.⁸⁶ At some point in the year preceding his application to be a special constable, Couzens also applied to join the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, once again failing the selection process.⁸⁷ He was successful in his application to Kent Special Constabulary and passed the necessary vetting checks (more details about these checks are provided in Chapter 4). Couzens took up his role as a special constable in December 2006,⁸⁸ carrying out his duties in his spare time while continuing to work at the garage.

Changes in personal life

- 1.30 Around this time, there were also significant changes in Couzens’ personal life. In the mid-2000s, he married a woman from abroad, whom he said he had met online a couple of years earlier.⁸⁹ The Inquiry heard that Couzens’ family did not find out about the wedding until after the event.⁹⁰ In 2007, the couple started to cohabit in a property in Kent.⁹¹
- 1.31 Prior to his marriage, Couzens does not appear to have had any relationships with women that lasted more than a couple of years. The Inquiry heard from more than one source that, before he was married, Couzens had sought sexual gratification via the internet, either by watching livestreamed material⁹² or by using an ‘adult friend finder’ dating website.⁹³ During that time the Inquiry also understands that Couzens had used sex workers.⁹⁴
- 1.32 Couzens also appears to have experienced further financial difficulties during this period. In February 2007, he entered into an Individual Voluntary Arrangement: a formal, albeit voluntary, debt repayment plan, concluded under the terms of the

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85 [***] The Special Constabulary is a force of warranted, uniformed volunteer police officers who directly supplement the regular police service. Special constables are warranted constables, with all the powers of a regular police officer. In Kent, the minimum commitment for special constables is 16 hours of operational policing per month.

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Insolvency Act 1986, to manage debts owed to a variety of creditors.⁹⁵ The Inquiry saw documentary evidence that Couzens made the agreed monthly payments towards the Individual Voluntary Arrangement until March 2011;⁹⁶ in his July 2012 security appraisal for the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, Couzens declared that the Individual Voluntary Arrangement had been satisfied as at February 2012.⁹⁷

Training and performance at Kent Special Constabulary

- 1.33 Couzens achieved Independent Patrol Status as a special constable in October 2007, after completing over 260 hours of duty and training and making seven arrests.⁹⁸ One officer described him as an “average” student, adding that he was “polite and disciplined”.⁹⁹ Another officer noted that he was “knowledgeable and competent” and that he was “confident and firm, but fair” in his dealings with the public.¹⁰⁰
- 1.34 As a special constable with Kent Special Constabulary, the Inquiry understands that Couzens would have supported regular police officers, undertaken patrols and investigated reports of crime.¹⁰¹ One witness said that members of Kent Special Constabulary were “very much part of the policing family”, out “on the streets and getting involved in real policing because there were not enough regular officers to cover the demand”.¹⁰²
- 1.35 Almost everyone the Inquiry spoke to who served in Kent Special Constabulary alongside Couzens remembered him in positive terms, as someone who was “quite knowledgeable about the law”,¹⁰³ “generally quite switched on”,¹⁰⁴ “calm and even tempered”,¹⁰⁵ “keen”¹⁰⁶ and a “valued member of the team”.¹⁰⁷ One witness went so far as to say that Couzens was a “phenomenal officer”.¹⁰⁸ More than one former colleague mentioned Couzens’ military background, which they felt explained his “quite authoritative”¹⁰⁹ demeanour, his rank-oriented approach,¹¹⁰ his being “very precise in everything that he did”¹¹¹ and his “very disciplined [...] style”.¹¹²

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- 1.36 Couzens was regarded by his superiors as an officer who could be relied upon to get the job done; he was “reliable”,¹¹³ “diligent”,¹¹⁴ “very focussed” and “organised”,¹¹⁵ an “all-round good guy”.¹¹⁶ He, along with another officer, was the subject of one complaint from a member of the public during his time in Kent Special Constabulary, but the Inquiry saw evidence to demonstrate that the complaint was investigated and recorded in his Professional Standards Department file as unsubstantiated, with no action taken.¹¹⁷
- 1.37 In May 2008, aged 35, Couzens submitted another application to join Kent Police as a regular officer. His application was once again unsuccessful; the Inquiry saw documentary evidence suggesting that the application failed at the financial vetting stage¹¹⁸ (see Chapter 4 for more details).
- 1.38 In May 2008, Couzens also applied and was interviewed for a promotion to section officer (equivalent to sergeant) with Kent Special Constabulary, despite having previously been advised by a colleague that he would not be qualified for a section officer post until he had been patrolling independently for one year.¹¹⁹ The Inquiry was told that Couzens was successful in his application and was promoted to and performed a section officer role.¹²⁰
- 1.39 Couzens resigned from Kent Special Constabulary in September 2010, after what is described as a “lengthy” leave of absence.¹²¹ According to documentary evidence seen by the Inquiry, the resignation was due both to family commitments, and to the fact that he was at the vetting stage of an application to join the Civil Nuclear Constabulary.¹²² A witness suggested to the Inquiry that Couzens “would have been attracted to a career with the Civil Nuclear Constabulary as [it] would have appealed to his nature and to the fact that he had an interest in guns”.¹²³

Alleged inappropriate behaviour and sexual offending during period of service with Kent Special Constabulary

- 1.40 Although, as described in paragraphs 1.35 to 1.36, most of those who worked with Couzens in Kent Special Constabulary had only positive things to say about him, the Inquiry heard evidence alleging that, when he was a section officer, Couzens behaved inappropriately towards women. The Inquiry was told that, on three separate occasions when Couzens was off duty and attending social events, he is alleged to have engaged in activity that amounted to sexual harassment and assault.¹²⁴ These alleged incidents were not reported at the time they occurred or subsequently. They were not the subject of a formal police investigation. These alleged incidents are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

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- 1.41 The Inquiry has also seen police records linking Couzens to three alleged sexual offences committed against women during the period covered in this section.
- 1.42 In 2004, it is alleged that Couzens committed an offence of indecent exposure against a teenage girl in South London. The alleged offence was not reported at the time but was subsequently reported to the Metropolitan Police Service in late 2021 after the victim saw an image of Couzens in the media and identified him as the alleged perpetrator.¹²⁵
- 1.43 At some point between late 2006 and early 2007, it is alleged that Couzens attempted to rape a woman during an event in London. The victim did not report the alleged offence at the time, but, after Couzens' arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard, she believed she recognised him as the perpetrator and contacted the Metropolitan Police Service.¹²⁶
- 1.44 In late November 2008, it is alleged that Couzens committed a further offence of indecent exposure in South London. The victim reported the alleged incident to the Metropolitan Police Service the same day and officers attended the scene. They made initial enquiries, although a statement was not taken from the victim, and a crime was recorded but no suspect was identified. After Couzens' arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard, the victim informed the Metropolitan Police Service that she believed him to be the perpetrator.¹²⁷
- 1.45 Couzens was arrested for and interviewed in relation to these three alleged offences in March 2022. For each, a decision to take no further action was made on the basis of there being insufficient evidence, and therefore no charges were brought.¹²⁸

March 2011 to September 2018: Civil Nuclear Constabulary

Application, training and early career at Civil Nuclear Constabulary

- 1.46 As indicated in paragraph 1.39, in September 2010, shortly before his 38th birthday, Couzens told his supervisor that he was resigning from Kent Special Constabulary, in part because he had reached the vetting stage of an application to join the Civil Nuclear Constabulary¹²⁹ as an authorised firearms officer.¹³⁰ That application, which had been submitted in October 2009,¹³¹ was ultimately successful. Couzens passed Police Recruitment Vetting checks,¹³² passed – at the second attempt – the fitness test¹³³ and was appointed to a full-time position at the rank of constable in early

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129 [***] The Civil Nuclear Constabulary is the armed police force in charge of protecting civil nuclear facilities and nuclear materials, whether on site or in transit. It is governed by the Civil Nuclear Police Authority.

130 [***] An authorised firearms officer is a police officer who has been selected, trained, accredited and authorised by their chief officer to carry firearms operationally.

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March 2011.¹³⁴ He completed a 17-week residential training course, which included firearms skills training,¹³⁵ and in June 2011 was granted National Security Vetting clearance at the Developed Vetting level.¹³⁶ He was posted as an authorised firearms officer to Sellafield (a nuclear site), Cumbria, in July 2011.¹³⁷ His basic starting salary was £23,025, rising to £25,700 on successful completion of initial training.¹³⁸

- 1.47 The Inquiry saw evidence to suggest that Sellafield was not one of Couzens' preferred work locations.¹³⁹ In early 2012, during his two-year probationary period, he applied for and was granted a voluntary transfer to Dungeness, Kent.¹⁴⁰ The transfer was presumably so that he could be closer to his family, who the Inquiry understands had not moved with him to Cumbria.¹⁴¹ Once Couzens had transferred to Dungeness, documentary evidence shows that he was living in a flat with his family in Kent.¹⁴²
- 1.48 In March 2013, Couzens successfully completed his two-year probationary period, and his basic salary rose to £27,194¹⁴³ (the Inquiry understands that this could be – and reportedly was, in Couzens' case¹⁴⁴ – supplemented by overtime payments).¹⁴⁵ During his probation, Couzens was described by his superiors as "diligent",¹⁴⁶ "confident"¹⁴⁷ and "knowledgeable and competent".¹⁴⁸ They remarked upon his "professionalism"¹⁴⁹ and commented that "his work [...] [was] of a good standard",¹⁵⁰ that he needed "a minimum of supervision",¹⁵¹ and that he "set an example to others by doing more than [was] expected".¹⁵² His end-of-probation report records that he had "expressed a desire to seek promotion at an early stage",¹⁵³ and there is evidence from his 2013/14 performance review that he was studying for his sergeants' exam and intended to take it in 2014.¹⁵⁴
- 1.49 The Inquiry was told, however, that at that time there was little prospect of Couzens being promoted to sergeant at Dungeness, as there were only a handful of posts at that level and they were all filled.¹⁵⁵ The Inquiry was also told that the work at Dungeness, which consisted primarily of carrying a firearm and providing static security or undertaking patrols, could be "quite mundane [...] more so than in other

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sites”.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, a witness who knew Couzens during this period said that Couzens found the job “intensely boring”, and that being a “glorified security guard” was not what he had envisaged when he applied for the role.¹⁵⁷ It is perhaps for these reasons that, during the second half of 2013, Couzens applied again to join Kent Police. On this occasion his application was rejected at the shortlist stage¹⁵⁸ (i.e. he was not interviewed).

Strategic Escort Group

- 1.50 In January 2014, shortly after his failed attempt to join Kent Police, Couzens applied to join the Strategic Escort Group,¹⁵⁹ a specialist team of officers at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary who travel by road and sea to defend and protect nuclear material in transit around the UK and internationally.¹⁶⁰ His supervisors supported his application,¹⁶¹ which was ultimately successful, and he was deployed to the Strategic Escort Group in July 2014.¹⁶² National Security Vetting at the Developed Vetting level was required for officers in the Strategic Escort Group;¹⁶³ as described in paragraph 1.46, Couzens was already cleared to this level as a result of his initial posting to Sellafield, meaning that no further National Security Vetting was required.
- 1.51 The Inquiry was told by personnel from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary that the Strategic Escort Group was seen “as the peak of the Constabulary”,¹⁶⁴ and that the training requirements were more rigorous than for regular authorised firearms officers in terms of physical fitness, skills and weapons discipline.¹⁶⁵ The Inquiry also heard that there was a financial incentive for being part of the Strategic Escort Group.¹⁶⁶ This financial benefit may have been important to Couzens: documentary evidence shows that in January 2014, just before he applied to the Strategic Escort Group, he took out a joint mortgage and purchased a house in Kent.¹⁶⁷
- 1.52 Although Couzens told several people¹⁶⁸ that he had carried out overseas missions with the Strategic Escort Group, Civil Nuclear Constabulary records confirm that he was never deployed outside the UK.¹⁶⁹ One witness told the Inquiry that Couzens had “struggled with his fitness”,¹⁷⁰ and it appears from documentary evidence that Couzens only took part in a handful of Strategic Escort Group operations,¹⁷¹ returning to his unit in Dungeness between deployments to carry out authorised firearms officer duties.¹⁷²

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- 1.53 It is relevant to note here that the Inquiry’s review of Couzens’ rota and shifts in the Strategic Escort Group revealed that he was deployed with three officers¹⁷³ who, along with Couzens himself and three others, were later involved in the sending of grossly offensive messages via a WhatsApp group (see Chapter 7 for more details).

Unintentional Taser discharge

- 1.54 Couzens remained part of the Strategic Escort Group until September 2016, at which point he returned permanently to his substantive post in Dungeness.¹⁷⁴ Just before this happened, while he was between Strategic Escort Group deployments and working in Dungeness, he unintentionally discharged his Taser while arming up for duty. According to the official report into the incident, Couzens failed to conduct the correct arming procedure, which was relatively new, having been introduced only a few months earlier. The report states that Couzens had failed to complete mandatory video training on the new arming procedure before its go-live date, and that he was therefore not fully aware of it.¹⁷⁵
- 1.55 As a result of the Taser incident (discussed further in Chapter 5), Couzens was placed on stage one of the unsatisfactory performance procedure,¹⁷⁶ which appears to have involved a performance improvement or development plan,¹⁷⁷ and he would have had to requalify to carry a firearm.¹⁷⁸ None of the witnesses from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary spoken to by the Inquiry seemed unduly alarmed by the incident, expressing the view that unintentional Taser discharges did happen. Their collective view was that seeing an unintentional Taser discharge on an officer’s performance record would not automatically be cause for concern: it would depend on the circumstances of the incident.¹⁷⁹

Performance at Civil Nuclear Constabulary and search for next career move

- 1.56 The Inquiry spoke to a number of witnesses from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary who had worked with Couzens, and also reviewed his performance records. The predominant impression was of a keen¹⁸⁰ and capable¹⁸¹ officer who was a good team player¹⁸² and could be relied on to perform.¹⁸³ Several people described him as a “family man”,¹⁸⁴ and his interest in and dedication to his physical fitness were also highlighted.¹⁸⁵ Some of those who gave evidence, however, also offered an alternative view of Couzens, describing him as “a bit dopey with paperwork”,¹⁸⁶

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“run of the mill”¹⁸⁷ and “not the cleverest person in the world”.¹⁸⁸ There was also a sense that he was restless, “always looking for the next step”¹⁸⁹ and “chasing a dream”.¹⁹⁰ It was suggested that he regarded the Civil Nuclear Constabulary as a “stepping stone into something else”.¹⁹¹

- 1.57 One witness recalled having heard something slightly unusual about Couzens, namely that, at some point while serving at Dungeness, he had kept a ‘go bag’ containing documents and basic rations in his car for use in case some major disruption occurred, such as a climate event or civil war. When talking about the bag at the time, Couzens is reported to have made comments suggesting that he believed turmoil could happen and that it was best to be prepared. The Inquiry was also told that Couzens had purchased a 4×4 vehicle that he fuelled with chip fat. Couzens had said that he wanted to be able to just go and move his family if he had to, without having to rely on fuel or electricity.¹⁹²
- 1.58 It appears from evidence made available to the Inquiry that, from mid-2016 onwards, Couzens began to look for opportunities to move on from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary. It was also around this time that he sold the jointly owned house in Kent and moved to a less expensive property in another town in Kent.¹⁹³ The Inquiry was told that these property transactions were because there had been a miscalculation which changed the mortgage position.¹⁹⁴
- 1.59 In June 2016, Couzens started another application to join Kent Police but did not submit it. He then submitted a further application to Kent Police in February 2017, only to withdraw it a couple of months later.¹⁹⁵ In May 2018, he applied to transfer to the Metropolitan Police Service.¹⁹⁶ Evidence seen by the Inquiry reveals that that application was made against a backdrop of changes to Civil Nuclear Constabulary officers’ terms and conditions, the primary effect of which would have been to align Couzens’ base pay to “100% parity with Home Office forces”.^{197,198} It is unclear from the material seen by the Inquiry what the net effect on Couzens’ monthly salary would have been, but the changes included a “two-year freeze on incremental pay progression”, as well as the removal of certain allowances and adjustments to overtime.¹⁹⁹
- 1.60 Couzens’ application to transfer to the Metropolitan Police Service, which is considered in more detail in the following section, was successful, and he left the Civil Nuclear Constabulary in September 2018.²⁰⁰ His basic salary upon resignation

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197 As described in this Report, Home Office forces are the 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales (as opposed to the national police forces, namely the British Transport Police, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary and the Ministry of Defence Police, which have different funding and accountability arrangements).

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was £34,371,²⁰¹ plus any overtime payments. In his exit interview, Couzens spoke in very complimentary terms about his time at the Constabulary. He stated that the main reason for his transfer was his “age and the risk of injury”, adding that he would like to work as a detective, a role that would represent career progression and would allow him to manage his fitness more easily.²⁰²

- 1.61 This is consistent with the account provided to the Inquiry by a witness, who said that Couzens had failed a physical assessment at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary and was “concerned that he would not be able to reach retirement age whilst still in a firearms role because it was a very physically demanding role”. The witness said that Couzens felt “a desk job” would be a better fit for him and talked about “trying to become a detective”.²⁰³ The Inquiry notes, in this regard, that between January 2014 and November 2015 Couzens was away from work or on restricted duties owing to illness or injury for over 200 calendar days.²⁰⁴

Interaction with the authorities while working at Civil Nuclear Constabulary

- 1.62 The Inquiry found that, while working at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, Couzens committed two motoring offences, one in 2013 and the second in 2014.²⁰⁵
- 1.63 Additionally, in June 2013, Couzens was reported as missing to Kent Police after he failed to return to his home address following an apparent late evening trip to the gym in Folkestone. At around 3am, just over an hour after the missing person report was created, the case was closed because Couzens arrived home.²⁰⁶ This incident is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Alleged sexual offence committed while working at Civil Nuclear Constabulary

- 1.64 The Inquiry has also seen police records linking Couzens with an alleged sexual offence committed during this period: in June 2015, he is alleged to have indecently exposed himself in Dover while driving a car. The incident was reported to Kent Police at the time, a crime was confirmed to have taken place and Couzens was identified as the registered keeper of the vehicle, but the investigation did not progress and he was never spoken to regarding the allegations.²⁰⁷ The case was reopened after Couzens’ arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard, and in September 2022 he was charged with an offence of indecent exposure. In February 2023, Couzens entered a not guilty plea in respect of the offence and the court accepted the prosecution’s request that this offence ‘lie on the file’²⁰⁸ (see Chapter 3 for more details).

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September 2018 to March 2021: Metropolitan Police Service

Transfer to Metropolitan Police Service, training and probation

- 1.65 As noted in paragraph 1.59, in May 2018 Couzens, then aged 45, applied to transfer to the Metropolitan Police Service. He stated in a message to the Metropolitan Police Service, sent as an add-on shortly after he submitted his application, that he would “prefer not to transfer over as an [authorised firearms officer]” and would like to be considered “for area and response sections to gain some experience in general policing”. In the same message, he expressed a desire to qualify as a detective and “move into an investigation role”.²⁰⁹
- 1.66 Couzens passed the necessary assessments, a fitness test and Police Recruitment Vetting²¹⁰ and was assigned to the Bromley Basic Command Unit in September 2018 as a police constable.²¹¹ His National Security Vetting clearance, which was still valid but, from the evidence available to the Inquiry, looks to have been downgraded from Developed Vetting to Security Check while he was still at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary,²¹² presumably for operational reasons,²¹³ was transferred across.²¹⁴
- 1.67 The Inquiry saw evidence that, during the onboarding process, Couzens contacted the Recruitment Team at the Metropolitan Police Service to enquire about his starting salary and allowances. He wanted to ascertain whether there would be a large salary reduction, stating that, if so, he might not be able to transfer.²¹⁵ He was informed in an email from the Recruitment Team that his starting salary would be £31,245 plus two London allowances and London weighting totalling just over £6,700, rising at the end of October 2018 to £32,229 plus the allowances and weighting.²¹⁶ However, his formal offer letter²¹⁷ did not make any mention of his starting salary. Payroll documents from September 2018 show that his annual salary upon joining the Metropolitan Police Service was £33,267, plus the two London allowances and London weighting.²¹⁸
- 1.68 When Couzens took up his new position at the Metropolitan Police Service in early September 2018, he was expecting to undertake a two-week induction course for transferees/rejoiners²¹⁹ before being deployed as a fully operational officer. However, either shortly before or on his first day with the Metropolitan Police Service he was told that, because he was transferring from a non-Home Office force, he would also need to complete a seven-week Certificate in Knowledge of Policing

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213 [***] The Inquiry understands that Couzens only needed National Security Vetting clearance at the Developed Vetting level while posted to Sellafield and with the Strategic Escort Group. Once he was posted to Dungeness, the Security Check level would have sufficed.

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course.²²⁰ Having almost finished that course, in November 2018, he was then informed that he would, additionally, need to undergo the full 18-week foundation course for new recruits, comprising 13 weeks of training and then a further 5 weeks to achieve Independent Patrol Status.²²¹

- 1.69 Around this time, it appears that Couzens also became aware, reportedly for the first time, that he would have to serve the two-year probationary period normally required for newly recruited constables.²²² The Inquiry found that there was seemingly some uncertainty over the issue of probation as it applied to Couzens: his formal offer letter was silent on the issue²²³ and senior management at Bromley was not sure whether he needed to serve the probationary period or not.²²⁴
- 1.70 There is no record of this issue ever having been definitively settled at the time, although the Inquiry saw some correspondence, dating from after Couzens' arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard, suggesting that he was recorded as a substantive officer from the day he joined the Metropolitan Police Service, and that, once he had transferred to the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command (see paragraph 1.73 for more detail about his transfer), he was not seen as 'under probation' given that he had completed the Certificate in Knowledge of Policing and the initial foundation training and had gained Independent Patrol Status.²²⁵ The Inquiry also saw evidence that, upon learning of the requirement for a full probationary period, Couzens wrote to a senior officer, expressing concern about the potential for him to lose his job and his pension – which he stated had been transferred across from his previous service – if he did not pass probation.²²⁶ The Inquiry was informed by the Metropolitan Police Service, however, that Couzens' pension was not transferred across.²²⁷
- 1.71 Couzens successfully completed all his training on schedule and was deployed to Emergency Response Team B, in Bromley, in late February 2019.²²⁸ The Inquiry was told that Couzens had been allowed to retain his driving skills qualification from his previous force without undergoing additional training.²²⁹ He was therefore immediately assigned the position of response driver.²³⁰
- 1.72 As indicated in paragraph 1.65, Couzens had been explicit, when applying to the Metropolitan Police Service, about not wanting to continue as an authorised firearms officer. Nevertheless, documentary evidence made available to the Inquiry suggests that, during his first week of employment, he contacted an officer in one of the firearms commands to enquire about transferring across. Couzens' perception was that he was at Bromley temporarily, that he had not yet been assigned to a station or

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section, and that no one knew what to do with him.²³¹ Couzens was informed that he could not apply for a firearms role until he had completed his Certificate in Knowledge of Policing and foundation training.²³²

Internal move to Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command

- 1.73 Accordingly, in late February 2019, towards the end of his training period and just before his deployment to the Emergency Response Team in Bromley, Couzens submitted an application to transfer to the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command as an authorised firearms officer.²³³ While that first application was unsuccessful, reportedly because all the available positions had been filled,²³⁴ Couzens submitted a further application to the Command in June 2019.²³⁵ He was interviewed,²³⁶ passed a risk assessment process²³⁷ and completed a series of firearms and other training courses.²³⁸ In early February 2020, he was posted to the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command at the Lillie Road Base in London.²³⁹ The Command is responsible for providing policing and armed protection to the Palace of Westminster (Parliament), Downing Street and the diplomatic missions, embassies and consulates in London.²⁴⁰
- 1.74 A witness said that Couzens had described his job in the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command as “very stressful but very boring”.²⁴¹ Another witness told the Inquiry that they had been surprised at Couzens’ decision to join the Command given that, when he applied to the Metropolitan Police Service, he had been set on taking a desk-based role. The job in the Command was not going to be sedentary, and the decision to take it did not seem consistent with the concerns that Couzens had shared about his physical fitness.²⁴² When questioned about the move, Couzens admitted that he would be “standing around in the cold holding a gun that he was unlikely to use”, but also said that he was “looking forward to a new challenge”.²⁴³ The witness felt that Couzens’ approach was “typical” and reflected his restlessness.²⁴⁴
- 1.75 In early March 2020, only a month after he joined the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command, Couzens submitted an application to rejoin the Civil Nuclear Constabulary. He reached and passed the interview stage before withdrawing his application.²⁴⁵

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Sickness absence owing to injury and period of recuperative duties²⁴⁶

- 1.76 In mid-July 2020, after he had been with the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command for around five months, Couzens was signed off work, owing to sickness, for three weeks because he had sustained an injury to his left index finger. At the time, he told his employer that he had sustained the injury from a drill while doing some DIY at home.²⁴⁷ The Inquiry learned, however, that after his arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard, Couzens admitted that he had drilled his finger on purpose while working on one of his cars, and that this was not the first time he had deliberately harmed himself, with previous incidents reportedly serving as a distraction at times when he was having difficulty coping.²⁴⁸ The Inquiry notes that this pattern of self-harm appears to have continued after Couzens' crimes, including while he was in custody following his arrest.²⁴⁹
- 1.77 While on sickness absence, Couzens applied to be relieved of his firearms duties, and he returned to work in early August on light duties, pending an assessment by Occupational Health.²⁵⁰ Following the assessment, he was deemed fit for recuperative duties²⁵¹ (the terms of which included a ban on any overtime), which consisted of office-based work, done mainly from home, in the Counter Terrorism Protect and Prepare Unit.²⁵² In late August 2020, he made an application to be treated by the Police Rehabilitation Centre,²⁵³ and received virtual physiotherapy from the Centre from mid-October to late November.²⁵⁴ Following a medical functionality test, which he passed, Couzens was discharged from Occupational Health in late December 2020.²⁵⁵
- 1.78 In line with standard procedure, Couzens had to be reauthorised to resume armed duties²⁵⁶ and therefore underwent a series of reassessments. In January 2021, he passed – at the second attempt – the required job-related fitness test and, around a month later, completed the necessary firearms and Taser re-training.²⁵⁷ During this period of requalification, he worked with other officers on COVID-19 patrols, enforcing the COVID-19 Regulations that were in force at the time.²⁵⁸ In mid-February, his firearms authority was reinstated and he resumed his duties as an authorised firearms officer based at Lillie Road.²⁵⁹

246 [***] The Police Regulations 2003 define 'recuperative duties' as "duties falling short of full deployment, undertaken by a police officer following an injury, accident, illness or medical incident, during which the officer adapts to and prepares for a return to full duties and the full hours for which they are paid, and is assessed to determine whether he or she is capable of making such a return".

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Pay dispute with Metropolitan Police Service

- 1.79 In September 2020, during his period of recuperative duties, Couzens contacted Shared Services Connected Ltd (SSCL), which supplied human resources management services to the Metropolitan Police Service, to enquire why he had not received his yearly salary increment. In response, SSCL informed him that, having looked into his query, it had discovered that he had been placed on a higher pay point than he should have been when he joined the Metropolitan Police Service and had in fact been overpaid for the preceding two years. He was told that corrective action would be taken and that the Payroll Department would be in contact regarding recovery of the overpayment from him. The Inquiry saw evidence showing that Couzens pushed back against this decision.²⁶⁰
- 1.80 Over the following months there were a number of email exchanges among the various teams from SSCL and the Metropolitan Police Service that were looking into Couzens' case,²⁶¹ between SSCL and Couzens,²⁶² and between SSCL and the Metropolitan Police Service and an adviser supporting Couzens,²⁶³ who appears to have started intervening in the case in around December.²⁶⁴ SSCL concluded that two errors had been made when Couzens was first employed, resulting in him having been placed on the higher pay point.²⁶⁵ Couzens had not alerted the Payroll Department to the fact that he was receiving a higher salary than the one he had been told he would receive²⁶⁶ and, in total, the Metropolitan Police Service found that he had been overpaid just under £15,000 compared with the pay point he should have been placed on²⁶⁷ upon recruitment.
- 1.81 In January 2021, the Pay and Reward Team at the Metropolitan Police Service wrote to Couzens' adviser to propose a compromise solution whereby, going forward, Couzens would be placed on the correct, lower pay point but, in recognition of the administrative errors made when he was onboarded, the historical overpayments would not be recovered.²⁶⁸ This solution was communicated to Couzens later that same month, but the Inquiry has not seen any record of the dispute having been formally resolved.²⁶⁹ More than one of Couzens' colleagues in the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command told the Inquiry that he had mentioned the pay dispute to them,²⁷⁰ with one of them stating that Couzens had been "talking about going off sick because of it"²⁷¹ and another saying that he was "clearly stressed" about it.²⁷² A fuller account of the pay dispute can be found in Chapter 6.

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- 1.82 The Inquiry notes that the pay dispute with the Metropolitan Police Service came at the end of a period in which Couzens' finances began to show renewed signs of instability. Just over a year before the dispute arose, in the summer of 2019, Couzens purchased, for less than £10,000, a small plot of woodland in Hoad's Wood, Kent. It was close to this plot of woodland that Sarah Everard's body was ultimately discovered.²⁷³
- 1.83 Less than 12 months later, however, in March 2020, financial information seen by the Inquiry suggests that payments of the mortgage for Couzens' house in Kent were suspended for a 'payment holiday', which appears to have ended in March 2021,²⁷⁴ around the time that Couzens abducted, raped and murdered Sarah. Then, in August 2020, Couzens initiated contact with a debt management company to seek assistance with his finances. In October 2020, he entered into a debt management plan covering around £27,000 of unsecured debt.^{275,276} The plan required monthly repayments.²⁷⁷

Performance at Metropolitan Police Service

- 1.84 In general, there appears to have been nothing particularly remarkable about Couzens during his time at the Metropolitan Police Service, with several colleagues in the two teams he served in describing him as "quiet"²⁷⁸ and one officer from the Emergency Response Team observing that he "kept himself to himself" and was a "very closed book".²⁷⁹ In Bromley, many of those who had worked with or supervised him said that they knew he was only there temporarily while he was awaiting deployment to a firearms command.²⁸⁰ Nevertheless, Couzens gave the impression of being a dedicated and professional officer, being described as "easy to work with and to manage",²⁸¹ although more than one individual did question his driving skills²⁸² and another individual said that his "knowledge of general policing was not that great".²⁸³ A witness who worked with Couzens at the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command described him as a "competent and experienced [authorised firearms officer]"²⁸⁴ and, while some of his Command colleagues said that they did not really know him, since he had only worked in the team for a short time,²⁸⁵ those who did remember him said that he was a "normal bloke",²⁸⁶ a "nice, friendly guy"²⁸⁷ and a "very happy, friendly and smiley man".²⁸⁸

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275 This does not include car or mortgage loans.

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- 1.85 The Inquiry notes, however, that while Couzens' colleagues in the Emergency Response Team and the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command described him in largely positive terms, he reportedly struggled with certain procedures, in particular completing paperwork²⁸⁹ and using unfamiliar computer systems and technology.²⁹⁰
- 1.86 In addition, his 2019/20 performance review flagged a concern about his sickness record, noting that the number of sickness absences over the preceding 18 months would have reached the threshold for an attendance management warning letter²⁹¹ (the Inquiry has not seen any evidence of such a letter having been sent, however).
- 1.87 The Inquiry examined Couzens' sickness absence records and found that, during the course of his Metropolitan Police Service career, he took five separate periods of sickness absence, totalling 55 days. Analysis carried out by the Metropolitan Police Service, at the request of the Inquiry, shows that Couzens' average sickness absence rate was 10.41 per cent for the financial year 2019/20 and 5.5 per cent for the financial year 2020/21. These rates are significantly higher than the average over the same periods for the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command (3.9 per cent and 3.1 per cent, respectively) and for the Metropolitan Police Service as a whole (4.1 per cent and 3.0 per cent, respectively).²⁹² The Inquiry learned that, during one of these sickness absences, in early December 2019, Couzens purchased, from an online marketplace, a variety of items that could be used for covert surveillance, including a "mini spy car key chain" (consisting of a motion detection camera and hidden camcorder), a "portable pocket-size mini HD telescope" and an "eyewear video spy camera" with a hidden lens that could be attached to a pair of glasses.²⁹³
- 1.88 There were also hints that, during his time with the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command, Couzens' very long commute (reportedly around 2.5 hours each way) from his home in Kent to the Lillie Road Base in London²⁹⁴ may have been a source of anxiety. One witness told the Inquiry that Couzens had asked if he could start work later, but his request was refused, which apparently "caused stress for him".²⁹⁵ Another witness noted that he was "always quite late to arrive on shifts" and that he "could appear a bit stressed but [...] that was just related to him running late".²⁹⁶
- 1.89 A witness told the Inquiry that they were aware that Couzens' commute "was a problem for him". The witness reflected that they "could not understand why he was doing [it] and how he was managing". The witness said that Couzens had a discount card for travel, and so mostly used the train rather than driving, as it was a cheaper option.²⁹⁷ Couzens reportedly disliked travelling by train, however, because (as he

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told it) he had to travel in uniform²⁹⁸ and would inevitably be called upon to intervene in any incidents that occurred. He was unable to use any travelling time to relax or get some rest, feeling rather that he was “at the beck and call of other travellers”.²⁹⁹

Mental health

1.90 The Inquiry saw evidence that Couzens may have been struggling with his mental health while employed by the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command. It was suggested that these problems started with the emergence of COVID-19, in early 2020, and worsened after the finger injury described in paragraph 1.76, when he was on recuperative duties and mostly working from home. He reportedly became irritable about small things and, on one occasion during the summer of 2020, punched through several doors.³⁰⁰ The Inquiry understands that the pay dispute with the Metropolitan Police Service added to Couzens’ concerns, as he was worried about how he would be able to pay his mortgage³⁰¹ once the payment holiday he had begun in the spring of 2020 expired (see paragraph 1.83). Two medical issues were also said to have contributed to his low mood.³⁰² Evidence suggests that a family member believed that Couzens was depressed and tried to seek professional help for him, but could not get an appointment with a specialist.³⁰³

Abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard, and events preceding and following the crimes

1.91 In his sentencing remarks, Lord Justice Fulford described the preparatory purchases and activities that Couzens undertook in the weeks leading up to the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard in March 2021.³⁰⁴ Lord Justice Fulford described how Couzens had “spent at least a month travelling to London to research how best to commit” the crimes³⁰⁵ (the prosecution noted that his vehicle had been seen in London on three occasions in late January and early to mid-February at times that did not appear to correspond to his working commitments).³⁰⁶ On 10 February, Couzens purchased a police standard-issue handcuff key with double-locking pin, which, following his arrest, was found in the front of his car. On 28 February, he used the internet to book a hire car for the period from 17:00 on 3 March to 09:30 on 4 March. Immediately after making the hire car booking, he purchased a roll of self-adhesive carpet protector film.³⁰⁷

298 [***] The Inquiry was informed that, while Metropolitan Police Service guidance is that officers should not travel to and from work in uniform, this is not a policy directive and so individuals can choose to do so.

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- 1.92 Couzens worked what would be his last shift at the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command overnight on 2 March.³⁰⁸ He was posted to a site,³⁰⁹ and was carrying the standard kit.³¹⁰ Couzens travelled back to Kent by train with a colleague in the early morning of 3 March after his shift had ended.³¹¹ He was then due to start a five-day rest period before returning to work on 8 March.³¹²
- 1.93 On 3 March, however, Couzens falsely stated that he was working overtime, leaving home that afternoon in his own car. He travelled to Dover to pick up the hire car that he had booked on 28 February, leaving his own car in Dover, and then drove in the hire car to Central London. At around 8pm, he went to a supermarket in Kensington to buy a packet of hairbands,³¹³ which, as Lord Justice Fulford noted in his sentencing remarks, were either for use in order to maintain an erection or as a means of restraint.³¹⁴ He then drove around for over an hour until, just after 9.30pm, he stopped on Poynders Road, in the Clapham area of South London. Using his police-issue equipment to execute a false arrest, he handcuffed Sarah Everard behind her back and then abducted her.³¹⁵
- 1.94 That night, Sarah had been walking home after having had dinner at a friend's flat. She had arrived at the flat at around 6.30pm, having stopped at a supermarket en route to buy a bottle of red wine. The two friends had eaten, drunk the bottle of wine and talked about various subjects. Sarah was in good spirits when she left her friend's flat, at around 9.10pm. While walking, she telephoned her boyfriend and they spoke for around 15 minutes, making plans for the week ahead.³¹⁶ In his sentencing remarks, Lord Justice Fulford said that it was "most likely that [Couzens] suggested to Sarah that she had breached the restrictions on movement that were being enforced during that stage of the pandemic".³¹⁷
- 1.95 With Sarah in the back of the hire car, Couzens drove south via Folkestone to Dover, returning to where he had parked his own car and, at around 11.30pm, transferring Sarah into it. For a period of several hours he then drove his own car, with Sarah in it, around a large area, much of it rural, mainly to the north west of Dover but as far west as Ashford and passing through the Hoad's Wood area (see paragraph 1.82) more than once. At some point during this period, Couzens raped Sarah and then murdered her,³¹⁸ strangling her with what he said was his belt³¹⁹ and the prosecution opined, given all the circumstances, was likely to be his police belt.³²⁰

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- 1.96 At around 8.30am on 4 March, Couzens was in Dover again. He stopped at a coffee shop to buy a hot chocolate and a Bakewell tart before returning the hire car.³²¹ He then drove in his own car to Sandwich, where he disposed of Sarah's mobile phone by throwing it into the river.³²²
- 1.97 Couzens returned home on the morning of 4 March at a time consistent with his having been on a normal night shift.³²³ Later that same morning, he took a call from the local dental surgery and rearranged some appointments.³²⁴
- 1.98 Sarah's boyfriend reported her missing to the police in the evening of 4 March, having been unable to contact her since the phone conversation they had had the previous evening. After having gone round to Sarah's flat and getting no answer, and then calling hospitals and the emergency services, he made enquiries with other friends and family.³²⁵ Late that same night, a group of them walked the route she was presumed to have taken home on the evening of 3 March, looking for any sign of her. Sarah's friends and family continued their search for her in the days that followed, organising their activities via a dedicated WhatsApp group. They conducted further physical searches of the area and put up 'missing' posters; they also publicised the details of Sarah's disappearance on social media.³²⁶
- 1.99 In the morning of 5 March, Couzens emailed his line manager at the Metropolitan Police Service to advise him that he had submitted an expression of interest for a Taser instructor position.³²⁷ Later that morning he drove to Hoad's Wood, stopping en route to buy a coffee and some fast food. Using a can of petrol he had also purchased that morning, he set light to Sarah's body, which he had placed in a large discarded fridge in the woods. While her body was still burning, he drove back to Dover and bought two builders' bags at a DIY store; he also telephoned a vet to make an appointment for the family pet. He then returned to Hoad's Wood, where he must have placed Sarah's burned body in the bags and moved it to a pond in the same area of woodland where she was subsequently found.³²⁸
- 1.100 On 6 March 2021, Couzens reported via the Metropolitan Police Service attendance management system that he was absent from work, selecting the reason "mental health/other" from a drop-down menu.³²⁹ Just after 10pm he emailed his supervisor to say that he felt "unable to carry firearms", explaining that "the stress of [his] payroll situation [was] causing him financial implications".³³⁰ On the morning of 7 March, Couzens took his family on an outing to Hoad's Wood,³³¹ where Sarah's body was lying in the builders' bags in the pond.

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- 1.101 As indicated in paragraph 1.92, Couzens was expected back at work on 8 March. He was due to attend a training course.³³² He did not attend the course and, at around 4pm, sent a text message to a colleague, informing them that he was unwell.³³³ That afternoon, however, Couzens drove to the Lillie Road Base in London and told the Base sergeant that he wanted to hand in his “blue card” (firearms authority).³³⁴ He was also seen heading in the direction of the part of the Base where his locker was located.³³⁵ His firearms authority had been withdrawn that morning at the request of his supervisor,³³⁶ so he would have been unable to access weapons if he had attempted to.³³⁷ The Inquiry saw evidence to suggest that, upon returning home on the evening of 8 March, Couzens told a family member that he had been signed off work owing to depression.³³⁸
- 1.102 Due to the outstanding investigation by the Metropolitan Police Service’s Operation Temora investigative team, Couzens was first arrested in relation to Sarah Everard’s disappearance on 9 March 2021.³³⁹ Immediately prior to his arrest, he performed a factory reset of his mobile phone, resulting in the deletion of typical user data, such as messages, photographs and internet browsing history.³⁴⁰
- 1.103 On 12 March, Couzens was charged with the abduction and murder of Sarah Everard and suspended on full pay from the Metropolitan Police Service.³⁴¹ He was subsequently also charged with Sarah’s rape.³⁴² On 16 July 2021, following his guilty pleas for Sarah’s abduction, rape and murder, he was dismissed from the Metropolitan Police Service.³⁴³

Inappropriate behaviour while working for Metropolitan Police Service

- 1.104 The Inquiry learned – from material that came to light after his arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard – that, while Couzens was employed by the Metropolitan Police Service, he was part of a WhatsApp group chat comprising a total of seven officers. All the officers had previously served at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary and at that time were employed by the Metropolitan Police Service (see paragraph 1.53). Between March and October 2019, members of the group exchanged wholly inappropriate and grossly offensive messages, with Couzens himself making sexually obscene and mocking comments about victims of domestic violence, as well as discriminatory comments about race and ethnicity.³⁴⁴
- 1.105 All the members of the WhatsApp group, excluding Couzens, who was not investigated due to the criminal proceedings he was already facing related to the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard, were subject to an investigation by

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the Independent Office for Police Conduct. This led to misconduct proceedings and dismissal for those who were still serving as police officers.³⁴⁵ Two of the officers were subsequently charged with and found guilty of the criminal offence of sending grossly offensive messages on a public communications network.³⁴⁶ At the time of writing, those individuals have an appeal pending before the High Court.³⁴⁷

1.106 Evidence considered by the Inquiry suggests that, during the period he was employed by the Metropolitan Police Service, Couzens behaved in other ways that are wholly inappropriate for a police constable. A witness told the Inquiry that, in December 2020, Couzens had gone into a shop in the town where he was living in plain clothes but wearing a belt holding what looked like items of police gear, including handcuffs, a baton and pepper spray. When the witness remarked upon the gear, Couzens identified himself as “an undercover police officer”.³⁴⁸ However, the Inquiry heard evidence from Couzens’ employer at the time that there was no reason why Couzens would have been wearing his police kit in his home town,³⁴⁹ and the Inquiry has not seen any evidence to suggest that Couzens was ever deployed on any undercover operations in Kent or elsewhere. The Inquiry notes that some of the kit worn by Couzens on this occasion in December 2020 is similar to the items he is reported to have used during the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard.

1.107 There were a further two incidents in February 2021 when Couzens disclosed his occupation as a police officer to members of the public in circumstances when he was off duty and where it was not relevant information.³⁵⁰ These were apparently not isolated incidents: the Inquiry heard that Couzens had also identified himself as a police officer on two occasions in 2018, when he would have had no professional reason to do so.³⁵¹

Behaviour towards women and alleged ‘cyberflashing’ offence

1.108 While working for the Metropolitan Police Service, Couzens also seems to have sought to engage with women in various ways. The evidence suggests that at least some of this may have been for the purpose of sexual gratification.

1.109 Firstly, between October and December 2020, while he was working from home on recuperative duties, Couzens communicated, via online messages, with several female vendors who were selling women’s clothing on an internet-based marketplace.³⁵² He asked some of the vendors to take and send photographs of themselves wearing the clothing, and to masturbate into the items of clothing before sending them, soiled, to him, offering to pay an additional fee for those services.³⁵³ On 4 December 2020, he is alleged to have committed an offence commonly known

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as ‘cyberflashing’ (although the incident was not reported to the police), when he allegedly sent an unsolicited photograph of his erect penis to one of the online vendors when negotiating a purchase.³⁵⁴

1.110 Then, in early December 2020, Couzens created a profile, using a different first name from the one he generally went by, on an online dating website. The profile stated that he was looking to meet new people.³⁵⁵ The Inquiry also saw evidence to suggest that Couzens may have visited a different online dating site in February 2021.³⁵⁶

1.111 Lastly, in early February 2021, Couzens made seven telephone calls to numbers known to belong to escorts.³⁵⁷ He also sent an email to an individual working for an online escort service, enquiring about availability.³⁵⁸ The Inquiry did not see any evidence to suggest that Couzens ever met any of these escorts in person.

Sexual offences and alleged sexual offences committed while working for Metropolitan Police Service

1.112 Following his arrest and conviction for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard, Couzens was also found to have committed three further sexual offences against women during the period from September 2018 to March 2021.

1.113 In November 2020, at the time when he was working from home on recuperative duties, Couzens committed an offence of indecent exposure in Kent. The victim reported the incident to Kent Police at the time, but the investigation was closed because no suspect was identified. The victim contacted the police again to identify Couzens as her attacker after having seen his photograph in the media following his arrest,³⁵⁹ and he was charged with the offence in August 2022.³⁶⁰ In March 2023, following a guilty plea, he was sentenced to a term of 19 months’ imprisonment for this offence.³⁶¹

1.114 On two separate occasions in February 2021, Couzens committed further offences of indecent exposure in Kent. These offences were reported to the Metropolitan Police Service in late February 2021, and Couzens was identified as a suspect,³⁶² but no further action was taken to investigate the incidents until after Couzens had been arrested for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard.³⁶³ He was charged with the offences in March 2022 and, in March 2023, following a guilty plea, he was sentenced to a term of six months’ imprisonment for each one.³⁶⁴

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- 1.115 It is alleged that Couzens committed four further sexual offences during this period, all of which remain unproven. In October 2019, it is alleged that he raped a woman in a tunnel under a bridge in London. The alleged offence was reported to the police in March 2020, but no suspect was identified and the investigation was closed. The victim recontacted the police in April 2021 after having seen Couzens on the news and recognising him as her alleged attacker.³⁶⁵ Couzens was arrested for and questioned in relation to the alleged offence in March 2022.³⁶⁶ No further action was taken owing to “evidential difficulties”.³⁶⁷
- 1.116 It is alleged that, in January and February 2021, Couzens committed two offences of indecent exposure in Kent. These alleged offences came to light during the course of the investigation into the proven offences referred to in paragraph 1.114.³⁶⁸ Couzens entered a not guilty plea in respect of these two alleged offences, which were ordered to ‘lie on the file’.³⁶⁹
- 1.117 Lastly, it is also alleged that, in early February 2021, Couzens committed an offence of indecent exposure in Kent. The victim reported the alleged incident at the time but the investigation was closed on the same day without a suspect having been identified.³⁷⁰ The investigation was reopened after Couzens’ arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard,³⁷¹ and he was arrested for and questioned in relation to the alleged offence in March 2022.³⁷² No further action was taken because the alleged offence did not reach the evidential threshold for charging.³⁷³
- 1.118 On 30 September 2021, Couzens was sentenced to life imprisonment, with a whole-life order, for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard.³⁷⁴ He is also serving concurrent, shorter terms for the offences detailed in paragraphs 1.113 to 1.114. Couzens appealed against the sentence for the abduction, rape and murder offences but, in July 2022, his appeal was dismissed.³⁷⁵

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Chapter 2: Red flags and missed opportunities

Introduction

“What did I miss?”

- 2.1 This was a question that a number of witnesses reflected upon during the evidence-gathering phase. Many police officers who gave evidence to the Inquiry regarded themselves as good judges of character and prided themselves on their ability to detect criminality and/or patterns of offending behaviour. They were genuinely shocked that a colleague, who was described variously as quiet,¹ helpful,² “not that memorable”,³ “mild-mannered”⁴ and “run of the mill”,⁵ could have been responsible for the horrendous acts that culminated in the death of Sarah Everard.⁶
- 2.2 No one who had worked with Wayne Couzens in any of his various policing roles linked to him the report of a serving officer with the Metropolitan Police Service being arrested for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard. In fact, a witness told the Inquiry that, when they heard Couzens had been arrested, they assumed he had been searching for the details of the case inappropriately on police systems,⁷ not that he was in any way responsible for the crime.
- 2.3 This Inquiry found, however, that almost all the individuals and organisations with which and for which Couzens worked only saw one side of him. The evidence available to the Inquiry makes it clear that, throughout his life, Couzens was able to hide his malign behaviours from almost all those with whom he came into contact.
- 2.4 To his colleagues, Couzens was a man who worked with a fellow applicant to improve their physical fitness so they would pass the mandated fitness tests for entry into the police service;⁸ who, at the end of a long shift, offered to continue working to help his team with outstanding tasks from the day’s policing;⁹ who was seen as someone who knew what he was doing and who would impart knowledge gained from previous experience.¹⁰

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- 2.5 The Inquiry saw evidence that, away from work, Couzens was regarded as a private person, focused on his family.¹¹ He played the guitar and had at one time been in a band.¹² He was apparently a patriot,¹³ with an interest in military history,¹⁴ who had visited historical sites of military interest on a number of occasions.¹⁵
- 2.6 It was Sarah Everard who experienced the full and terrible expression of Couzens' darker side. But the Inquiry has discovered evidence of his deviant behaviours dating back almost 30 years which, had it been available to or, in some cases, properly considered by his employers, could potentially have halted his policing career before it had even begun. This Report makes recommendations for the steps that those responsible for policing must take to ensure that they can better identify those within their ranks who are able to disguise themselves as good officers but who, in reality, pose a serious risk to the public.

Summary of evidence and main conclusions

- 2.7 In addition to the testimony provided by witnesses, the Inquiry had access to a large quantity of administrative and other documents from the organisations that employed Couzens. These included some personnel and service records from the Ministry of Defence, and personnel files (including application and vetting forms), training records and supervisor assessments from Kent Police, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary and the Metropolitan Police Service. The Inquiry was also provided with documentation relating to Couzens' National Security Vetting.
- 2.8 The Inquiry found little evidence that Couzens behaved overtly in a predatory, intimidating or misogynistic manner while on duty as a police officer or while engaged as a military reservist. However, in contrast, the Inquiry saw evidence about other serving police officers behaving in an inappropriate and derogatory fashion towards women at work, openly and brazenly, leading to them being subject to professional standards risk mitigations, or acquiring nicknames that reflected their conduct (or both).¹⁶
- 2.9 The incidents of alleged inappropriate and potentially criminal behaviour by Couzens that came to the attention of the Inquiry were isolated, sporadic and separated by a considerable time period. There was no discernible pattern or trend to the alleged incidents of overtly sexual or harassing behaviour that he did display, other than that they were generally directed towards women. As is often the case when women feel intimidated by unwanted, inappropriate and overbearing male behaviour, none of the concerns were reported by the victims of this alleged offending at the time. Victims cited similar reasons for not reporting, including, but not limited to, the lack of a confidential and supportive route for making a report, the fear of being disbelieved or the potential to be ostracised by colleagues and thereby damaging their own careers.

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- 2.10 There is, therefore, little before the Inquiry suggesting that Couzens exhibited behaviour on duty as a police officer, or in his previous role as an Army reservist, that should have been challenged or indeed reported to senior colleagues by his fellow officers. The Inquiry has, however, identified a number of instances where information about his conduct off duty and/or information about his personal circumstances, including, for example, his finances, was or should have been available during vetting and other processes for Kent Police, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary and the Metropolitan Police Service. In those instances, had more professional and investigative curiosity been exhibited, had the guidance been adhered to more closely at a corporate level, or had information been analysed and shared more meticulously, there would have been the opportunity to intervene and to potentially disrupt his policing career.
- 2.11 The inability to identify sexual offenders and patterns or trends of sexual offending often stems from the understandable apprehension of many victims to report such offending behaviour. There is a concern that, even when reports are made, they may be investigated poorly, or not at all.
- 2.12 If the offender is a serving police officer, this is particularly critical, as under-reporting leads to a lack of intelligence, information and investigative opportunity, allowing such individuals to continue to operate in plain sight with often unfettered access to some of society's most vulnerable individuals.
- 2.13 Sexual offending is a form of criminality which, in the main, provokes a reactive response from policing, and is reliant on reports from the public. As such, police vetting is also compromised in its ability to detect it because, on the face of it, there is often no adverse information or intelligence affecting vetting clearance that would otherwise prevent that individual from securing employment within the police.
- 2.14 In cases where there is information available to police forces about an individual's personal circumstances, such as their finances, the vetting or re-vetting processes should, according to guidance, cause a force to pause before employing – or continuing to employ – that individual. However, disparate practices and approaches to what is intended to be national and uniform guidance lead to different decisions being taken in different forces (or in different units within the same force) based on the same information.
- 2.15 This chapter contains a summary of the instances identified by the Inquiry where opportunities were missed to scrutinise Couzens and his personal circumstances in more detail. Had these opportunities been taken, his policing career might have been curtailed well before he ever targeted Sarah Everard in March 2021.
- 2.16 This Inquiry cannot, of course, make any conclusive finding that earlier intervention would have prevented this horrific crime. However, more diligent adherence to vetting guidance, improved information-sharing and greater scrutiny of Couzens' financial situation and the associated stress and pressure created by significant debt could have made a difference. More thorough and committed investigation of reports of alleged indecent exposure in particular would almost certainly have brought him to the attention of his employers, and could have led to prosecution, his removal from policing roles and outright dismissal.

Missed opportunities

Recruitment and vetting

Kent Police

- 2.17 The Inquiry found that, in 2006, when Couzens applied for a volunteer special constable position with Kent Special Constabulary (part of Kent Police) – a position with associated warranted powers equal to those of a full-time police officer – he admitted on his application form that he had failed an interview for a full-time post with that same force in 2004.¹⁷
- 2.18 In 2008, he failed vetting for another full-time post with Kent Police.¹⁸ Yet he secured a promotion to section officer in Kent Special Constabulary and was allowed to remain in the Special Constabulary for another two years. On neither occasion did a failure to secure employment with the regular force result in any additional scrutiny of Couzens' circumstances or of his suitability to serve in the Special Constabulary.
- 2.19 During the 2008 application process, Kent Police sought confirmation from the Ministry of Defence of Couzens' time as a reservist with the Territorial Army. The Ministry of Defence indicated that, as a volunteer, Couzens was not subject to regular serviceperson procedure, which meant that additional information regarding the circumstances of his discharge (which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4) was not provided.¹⁹ The Ministry of Defence did, however, confirm his dates of enlistment and discharge, which did not accord with the dates Couzens had entered on his application.²⁰
- 2.20 Vetting officers responsible for both police and National Security Vetting who were spoken to by the Inquiry indicated that information about the circumstances of Couzens' discharge from the Territorial Army should have been available and that, had the information been available, they would have made further enquiries, as it was potentially relevant as an honesty and integrity matter.²¹ However, the processes in place at the time did not require disclosure of those circumstances.

Civil Nuclear Constabulary

- 2.21 In 2009, Couzens applied to join the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, and, as part of the application process, he attended an assessment centre.²² Assessment centre results are valid for 12 months, but he was given special dispensation for his results to be used past their expiry date due to being allocated to a later induction course in March 2011.²³ The Inquiry was told that, if Couzens had been unable to take up his place on the course in March 2011, his results would not have been further extended.²⁴ He failed the fitness test twice, before passing it prior to attending the

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induction course.²⁵ While repeat failures at the fitness test do not necessarily mean an application should not progress, they do seem indicative of someone who might be lacking in application and motivation for a role that is demonstrably physically demanding.

- 2.22 As part of the recruitment process, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary contacted Kent Police to query whether there had been any professional standards-related issues during Couzens' service. That check came back clear.²⁶ The Civil Nuclear Constabulary was not notified that he had previously failed vetting when applying to be a full-time officer at Kent Police, although there wasn't a formal requirement for Kent Police to provide that information.
- 2.23 On his application form, Couzens listed his dates of service with the Territorial Army; those dates were incorrect.²⁷ The Civil Nuclear Constabulary did not seek any reference from the Ministry of Defence, despite the nature of the role for which Couzens was applying – authorised firearms officer. The guidance in force at the time suggested that, because he was a reservist, a check with the Ministry of Defence was not necessary.²⁸
- 2.24 The Civil Nuclear Constabulary outsourced police vetting to Thames Valley Police,²⁹ who recommended that Couzens not pass force vetting because the information available suggested that he had a current Individual Voluntary Arrangement, where a portion of his debt had been written off (see paragraph 1.32).³⁰ The 2011 vetting guidance states that "applicants who are the subject of a current Individual Voluntary Arrangement should not be considered".³¹
- 2.25 Despite Thames Valley Police's efforts to obtain more information from Couzens, to confirm whether he did indeed have a current Individual Voluntary Arrangement where a portion of his debt had been written off (as opposed to, for instance, a debt management plan, where he was repaying the total amount of his debt), he did not provide it.³² In the meantime, despite not having received a force vetting recommendation from Thames Valley Police, nor having issued a contract with terms and conditions in place, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary sponsored Couzens for National Security Vetting at the Developed Vetting level.³³ Couzens was therefore undergoing National Security Vetting before force vetting was complete, contrary to recommended vetting practice.³⁴
- 2.26 The Civil Nuclear Constabulary took the view that National Security Vetting would confirm Couzens' financial position and did not wait for the force vetting recommendation from Thames Valley Police.³⁵ This was in direct conflict with the police vetting guidance in force at the time and meant that, when it was received,

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the recommendation of Thames Valley Police that he should not pass force vetting was ignored.³⁶ This begs the question of what value, if any, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary considered Thames Valley Police to be adding to the vetting process. Why outsource the vetting to a Home Office force if the results and recommendations from that force were deemed immaterial?

Missing person report

2.27 As set out in Chapter 3, Couzens was reported missing in 2013.³⁷ The Inquiry believes that this incident is relevant to his role as an authorised firearms officer at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, but, since he was not due to be re-vetted by the Constabulary until ten years after joining, the corresponding Police National Database entry was never scrutinised. From the material available to the Inquiry, it is assumed that the Civil Nuclear Constabulary was not aware of the incident. Any indication that Couzens had gone missing or any concerns expressed about his whereabouts were not therefore examined further, which is of grave concern given his role as a police officer at that time.

Metropolitan Police Service

2.28 Couzens applied to transfer from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary to the Metropolitan Police Service in May 2018.³⁸ There were errors made in the initial vetting process:

- There were inconsistencies in the names of Couzens' family members that the vetting officer checked against the Police National Database.³⁹
- More significantly, the outcome of the Police National Database check on Couzens at the time of his application in 2018 was recorded as "no trace". A re-vet exercise carried out in March 2021, the day after Couzens' arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard, identified entries from before 2018, which the original vetting officer had not noted.⁴⁰ Those entries were:
 - a reference to Couzens being reported missing in 2013;⁴¹ and
 - a reference to Couzens' car being linked to an offence of indecent exposure in 2015, which was described as being "NFA'd [meaning that 'no further action' was taken] due to evidential difficulties".⁴²

2.29 The re-vet exercise in March 2021, and the subsequent review report submitted in May 2021 to the Metropolitan Police Service senior leadership, suggested that this intelligence from the Police National Database was either not identified in 2018 because no checks of the Police National Database were conducted⁴³ or that the outcomes of any checks were recorded, incorrectly, as "no trace".⁴⁴ Due to the

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passage of time, the Metropolitan Police Service cannot now confirm whether the intelligence about the 2015 indecent exposure allegation involving Couzens was not identified in 2018, or whether it was identified but not considered.

2.30 During the 2021 re-vet after Couzens' arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard, a senior vetting officer identified the link between the applicant's car and the alleged offence but, as highlighted in paragraph 2.28, noted that no further action was taken in the case.⁴⁵

2.31 In October 2021, the senior vetting officer carried out a more detailed retrospective assessment of the case, with the findings written in the first person to represent what the findings would have been at the time of the original application:

"The applicant was also linked to an incident of indecent exposure in 2015 when their car was identified after a report of someone driving naked from the waist down. Despite the nature of the suspect trace the applicant was not arrested, cautioned or convicted of any offence, the incident of indecent exposure resulted in a decision to take no further action due to evidential difficulties (victim based).

The applicant is currently serving as a PC with the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, I cannot foresee that the applicant could be subjected to adverse pressures or affect the clearance level applied for. Clearance granted [...]"⁴⁶

2.32 It is unclear whether this assessment, made in October 2021, that clearance would have been appropriate in 2018 was regarded as justified as a result of the victim's disengagement from the case or the investigating force's lack of action, or indeed the general apathy that the Inquiry has encountered in its examination of offences of this kind. What is abundantly clear, however, is that the Metropolitan Police Service was aware in 2021, during an internal review of Couzens' vetting, of an uninvestigated incident of public indecent exposure linked to Couzens, yet did not regard it as serious enough to merit further scrutiny of any kind.⁴⁷

2.33 In 2019, Couzens applied to the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command to be an authorised firearms officer. As part of the process to determine whether he was a fit and proper person to deploy with a firearm, he was subjected to a risk assessment by the Professional Standards Department, based on a review of complaints and conduct during his policing career. Two issues came to the attention of the Inquiry:

- A red flag during this process is "debt", yet the risk assessment was based on what information might already be held internally by the force and not on any fresh vetting process. Any information on debt would only therefore have been available to the force if Couzens had self-declared it or if Human Resources had, for example, noted excessive overtime requests from him.
- Similarly, at the time of the risk assessment, no fresh checks of the Police National Database were carried out. The checks were assumed to have been done when an applicant underwent force vetting. Had Police National Database

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checks been carried out during the risk assessment for Couzens, the 2015 indecent exposure allegation in Kent would have been revealed. Had this happened, it is likely – according to evidence provided to the Inquiry by those familiar with the risk assessment process – that Couzens would have been rejected, and, in the case of an appeal against the rejection, the matter would have been referred back to his borough Professional Standards Unit for further enquiries/investigation.⁴⁸

Indecent exposure allegations

“The fact that no police came to find him or his black car, to question him about these incidents, can only have served to confirm and strengthen, in the defendant’s mind, a dangerous belief in his invincibility; in his power sexually to dominate and abuse women without being stopped.”

6 March 2023, R v Wayne Couzens sentencing remarks,
Mrs Justice May⁴⁹

- 2.34 Couzens is a serial sex offender. In 2015, he was identified as the registered keeper of a vehicle implicated in an alleged indecent exposure that was reported immediately after it happened, and yet he repeatedly evaded arrest or detection.⁵⁰
- 2.35 The details of the 2015 case, involving an offender who allegedly exposed his erect penis while driving in a Kent town centre, are set out in Chapter 3 of this Report. Couzens was charged with this offence on 19 August 2022, following an investigation by the Metropolitan Police Service team responsible for the successful investigation of the murder of Sarah Everard.⁵¹ He subsequently pleaded not guilty and the alleged offence was left to ‘lie on the file’.⁵² The Inquiry concludes that the alleged crime had been detectable in 2015 and that the investigation was not complex and did not require resources that would have been disproportionate in the circumstances. A reasonably competent police officer should have been able to conduct the basic enquiries that would have resulted in Couzens being at least named as a suspect on the Police National Database.⁵³ This did not happen. The Inquiry believes this was due to an approach that was biased towards closing down the case at the earliest opportunity, based upon untested assumptions about the informant’s reliability and an unwillingness to pursue further evidence.
- 2.36 Gaps in the initial investigation included a failure to explore why the informant, after making the effort to report the incident over the phone, declined to cooperate with the investigation, with no effort made to further engage with them.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the assessment that there were no reasonable lines of enquiry is unfathomable given the information available to the investigating officer, including the Automatic Number Plate Recognition check confirming that the vehicle described by the informant and registered to Couzens was indeed at the location at the time.⁵⁵

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- 2.37 The Inquiry considers that, by failing to investigate the 2015 case adequately, Kent Police potentially missed a very significant opportunity to disrupt Couzens' offending career. Allowing him to escape any kind of police response, or to be named as a suspect on the Police National Database, paved the way for him to slip through the net repeatedly, and subsequently indulge in what a victim described as acts "of aggression".⁵⁶ Such acts, committed while posing as a trustworthy and competent member of the policing family, caused serious and long-term psychological harm to some victims.
- 2.38 In 2020, Kent Police had another opportunity to investigate Couzens for an alleged sexual offence. This time, he intentionally indecently exposed himself to a female cyclist on a narrow country lane, stepping out of woodland while naked and masturbating "furiously".⁵⁷
- 2.39 From an investigative perspective, this case was more complex than the 2015 allegation. There was no direct link to a specific car as there had been in the 2015 case. There was, however, a black car parked in the vicinity and the cyclist was able to recall part of the registration number from the number plate. Also, immediately after the incident, the cyclist spoke to two women whom she encountered nearby. One introduced herself as a police officer and said she would "go and have a look".⁵⁸
- 2.40 Later the same day, the cyclist reported the offence to Kent Police via an online form in which she provided a brief outline of the facts.⁵⁹ Once again, the case seemed doomed to fail from the outset. No attempt appears to have been made to identify the car, track down the female police officer (to find out what evidence she might provide) or to arrange an appointment with the complainant to obtain her detailed written statement. Instead, Kent Police relied on the false premise that there were no additional lines of enquiry.⁶⁰ This was patently incorrect, as became obvious when Couzens pleaded guilty to this offence in March 2023, following a thorough investigation of the same allegation by the Metropolitan Police Service's Major Investigation Team.⁶¹
- 2.41 While the Inquiry recognises that Kent Police's local investigation would have had access to fewer resources than the Metropolitan Police Service's Major Investigation Team, which also benefited from knowing the registration number of a black vehicle Couzens owned, there were additional lines of enquiry that Kent Police could have investigated. They included a check of the Automatic Number Plate Recognition records and a search of the partial number plate provided by the complainant using Vehicle Online Descriptive Searching, with a view to identifying the vehicle.⁶²
- 2.42 According to the investigating inspector, both options were considered and dismissed by the officer in the case,⁶³ who was the subject of a conduct investigation in relation to this investigation (see paragraph 3.124). However, the Inquiry

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considers that the failure to follow up such investigatory actions constitutes a missed opportunity. Had these enquiries been made, it is possible that they could have identified the car parked nearby as being registered to Couzens.

- 2.43 Chapter 3 of this Report sets out the Inquiry's findings in relation to the investigation into the allegations of indecent exposure at the drive-through restaurant in January and February 2021, including the two offences to which Couzens pleaded guilty.⁶⁴ These allegations were reported to the Metropolitan Police Service on 28 February 2021, when the call handler graded the report as suitable for an appointment.⁶⁵ The first available appointment for an officer to visit the scene was 3 March, which turned out to be just hours before Couzens abducted Sarah Everard.⁶⁶ The Inquiry explored what could have been achieved by the Metropolitan Police Service in the three days between the offences being reported and the appointment at the restaurant, to establish whether opportunities to identify Couzens and disrupt his offending were missed.
- 2.44 The Inquiry carefully considered the grading of the report and considers the decision to deal with the allegations by way of an appointment was justifiable for the reasons set out in Chapter 3. The experienced officers who gave evidence to the Independent Office for Police Conduct concluded that there was insufficient evidence to justify circulating Couzens as wanted on the Police National Computer.⁶⁷ It was accepted by the Misconduct Panel that heard this case that the officer in the case had no immediate grounds to either arrest or circulate the suspect as wanted.⁶⁸
- 2.45 In the view of this Inquiry, the most appropriate action would have been a registered keeper check at Couzens' recorded address, to find out whether he was still in possession of the car and whether he matched the witnesses' descriptions of him. This would have required either the officer in the case seeking and receiving supervisory approval to drive several hours, crossing force borders, to Kent and back to carry out the check; or a request to be made to Kent Police to undertake the work and report back to the Metropolitan Police Service.⁶⁹ While the first option seems neither realistic nor proportionate, for the second option it is simply not possible to determine how quickly Kent Police would have responded had such a request been made. Nor can it be known – if indeed a check had been made without delay, by either police force – whether Couzens would in fact have been at home, thereby enabling the check to be completed.
- 2.46 The Inquiry concludes that, even if the officer in the case had done a superb job on 3 March 2021, it is unlikely that Couzens' crimes against Sarah Everard could have been disrupted or prevented at such a late stage. Holding the officer in any way responsible for these crimes is inappropriate, and misleading.
- 2.47 The Inquiry finds, however, that there is a strong possibility that Couzens' abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard might have been prevented, or his offending disrupted, had at least one of the earlier allegations made against him been properly

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investigated, leading to his arrest and referral for prosecution and/or to police misconduct proceedings. It is a sobering thought that, had his actions satisfied the definition of gross misconduct, dismissal from the police could have been justified and he would no longer have been a serving police officer. His superficial persona as a responsible citizen would have been dismantled.

Barriers to reporting sexual misconduct and offending

- 2.48 It is a well-established and accepted fact that much sexual offending is unreported.⁷⁰ In view of this, the Inquiry was not surprised to find that, and understands why, there were instances of Couzens' alleged inappropriate behaviour towards women that went unreported.
- 2.49 Victims' reluctance to report is entirely understandable. To avoid offenders such as Couzens exploiting a situation where they can offend with little fear of redress, action needs to be taken to encourage greater reporting, with systems that appeal to victims, treat those who report in a sympathetic manner and offer appropriate support. Furthermore, reports must be taken seriously, properly resourced and actively pursued to achieve positive outcomes.

Virtual indecent exposure allegations (including 'cyberflashing')

- 2.50 The unsolicited photographs of Couzens' penis that he allegedly shared, in circumstances that are detailed in Chapter 3, also went unreported. When challenged after leaving photographs on a young woman's phone, he defended himself by suggesting that it was the woman's fault for leaving her phone unattended and just a harmless prank of the kind often played by police officers and soldiers.⁷¹
- 2.51 When he sent a photograph to the online seller of an item of clothing, he at first adopted a light-hearted tone, apologising and 'blaming' her for being 'hot', before becoming very serious and accusing her of blackmail when she expressed reluctance about completing the related sales transaction with him.⁷²
- 2.52 The view of this Inquiry, that women and girls typically put up with this type of inappropriate behaviour, is supported by the many accounts of female politicians, celebrities and schoolgirls who routinely receive such images, according to multiple news reports and other items across the media.⁷³
- 2.53 The Inquiry is strongly of the opinion that this is a form of obnoxious sexual harassment, which is harmful and unacceptable. Had those officers responsible for supervising Couzens been made aware of his activities, steps could have been taken to discipline him for breaching professional standards of behaviour. In such circumstances, those experiencing such harassment need to be encouraged to report it and to have confidence that they will be listened to and action will be taken against the perpetrators.

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Offensive WhatsApp chat

- 2.54 As set out in Chapter 7, the forensic examination of a mobile phone seized from Couzens at the time of his arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard revealed his membership of a WhatsApp group made up of former members of the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, some of whom, like him, had transferred to the Metropolitan Police Service.⁷⁴ In a series of online conversations, he and the other officers shared grossly offensive messages ridiculing and mocking victims of domestic and sexual abuse, specific named colleagues and members of the public, including persons with disabilities and ethnic minority groups.⁷⁵
- 2.55 As explained in Chapter 7, the standards of professional behaviour included in the Code of Ethics for police officers and staff include a requirement to challenge and report improper conduct.⁷⁶ The Inquiry found that, with just one exception,⁷⁷ very offensive messages, including those of a sexual nature sent by Couzens, were not challenged. Nor were any reported by other members of the group at the time.
- 2.56 The Inquiry also noted that, in subsequent prosecutions and police misconduct proceedings, the group's messages were condemned by both a criminal court and a police Misconduct Panel.⁷⁸ Following a criminal prosecution, this conduct resulted in two members of the group being convicted and sentenced to a term of imprisonment⁷⁹ (an appeal by these convicted former officers remains outstanding at the time of writing). Following police misconduct proceedings, two of the officers were dismissed without notice and the Misconduct Panel ruled that the other four former officers would have been dismissed had they still been serving.⁸⁰
- 2.57 Had the WhatsApp chat been reported by a colleague who witnessed it, Couzens might have been the subject of criminal prosecution and misconduct proceedings, meaning that his policing career could potentially have ended and his offending could potentially have been disrupted or even prevented. The Inquiry considers this to have been a missed opportunity.

Potential drivers of Wayne Couzens' offending

- 2.58 The first part of this chapter describes how many people who gave evidence to the Inquiry wanted to know what they had missed about the Couzens they knew, and how he could have perpetrated such horrific crimes. It also details the opportunities that some police forces missed to prevent Couzens from offending and/or from continuing his policing career. None of this removes any responsibility from Couzens for the crimes he committed and the trail of human devastation he left in his wake. This part of the chapter sets out the Inquiry's understanding of Couzens' character, and of some of the potential drivers of his offending.

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- 2.59 The Inquiry considered evidence from a range of people who knew Couzens, as well as from the forensic clinical psychologist Dr Adrian West, a witness with expertise relating to the behaviours of violent sex offenders. From this evidence, the Inquiry has summarised what it has learned about Couzens and what it deems to be relevant to its understanding of his offending behaviour for the purposes of answering the Terms of Reference for Part 1. This material is intended to support the Inquiry's recommendations by providing information about the Inquiry's assessment of the potential motivations for Couzens' offending, which ought to be considered by those designing new vetting, recruitment and transfer policies and training. This may help to prevent someone like Couzens from becoming or remaining a police officer in future.
- 2.60 The Inquiry asked Couzens for a statement about the offences he perpetrated, as well as his experience of working in policing and anything else he wanted to tell us about. He declined to provide a statement to the Inquiry. The summary below is based on the Inquiry's knowledge of him. It should be considered in light of those limitations.
- 2.61 The Inquiry believes that "a basic hypothesis for understanding the actions and motivations of Couzens is that he committed the offences against Sarah Everard against a background of sexually deviant behaviours and fantasies that might have had their origins in his life as early as his adolescence".⁸¹ This could be characterised as a background of established sexual deviancy and perversion.⁸²
- 2.62 Academic literature conceptualises perversion as representing a "fusion of sexual and aggressive forces",⁸³ where arousal is achieved from increasingly extreme acts of sexual aggression and there is a persistent theme of non-consenting victims. Dr West believes that Couzens' compulsion to act on those forces was demonstrated by the offences he committed against Sarah Everard, and in particular the degree of premeditation and the deception he performed to abduct Sarah by using his position as a police officer.⁸⁴
- 2.63 His compulsion to carry out this attack may have been felt for some time.⁸⁵ The Metropolitan Police Service believes that the car journeys he made around London prior to the attack were 'hunting' trips.⁸⁶ At least one of these journeys coincides with one of the indecent exposure offences at a drive-through restaurant.⁸⁷ Academic research suggests that the possible compulsion for sexual deviancy demonstrated by Couzens implies a strong potential for repetition.⁸⁸ Dr West also voiced his concern about other offences Couzens may have committed – prior to the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard – of which the police are not aware. The Inquiry agrees.

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- 2.64 Those who made allegations of indecent exposure in 2015, 2020 and 2021⁸⁹ should have had their allegations properly investigated. If this had happened, and Couzens had been listed as a suspect in any of those cases, the police may have been able to disrupt his offending behaviour and identify a pattern of behaviour that should have catalysed a more thorough and/or urgent response by the police and different vetting decisions.
- 2.65 Research suggests that masturbatory fantasy and rehearsal or practice is commonplace prior to serious sexual offending of this nature, and is in fact critical to the commission of the most serious sexual offences.⁹⁰ In this case, Dr West believes that Couzens may have carried out repetitive masturbatory fantasies and behaviours before he committed his crimes against Sarah Everard.⁹¹ The Inquiry assumes that this formed part of a trajectory of escalating risk of contact sexual violence by Couzens. As a result of an offender becoming used to being sexually aroused and masturbating to a particular stimulus, they may seek out greater stimulation and/or more risky scenarios in which to engage, so as to achieve or intensify their arousal.⁹² This may go some way to explaining Couzens' repeated trips to a drive-through restaurant where he indecently exposed himself to staff immediately prior to Sarah's murder and should be considered by those investigating crimes or assessing for vetting as a significant red flag.
- 2.66 The repeated indecent exposures and alleged indecent exposures almost immediately prior to the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard could have been an attempt to signal his dangerousness. Dr West told the Inquiry that it is likely that, by this stage, Couzens' deviant sexual interests and behaviours so dominated his life that he was "acutely aware of the impending homicidal threat that he posed but his associated levels of preoccupation and arousal were more than enough to distract him from any conscious thoughts of anxiety or guilt".⁹³ The Inquiry saw evidence that, on the date of his offences against Sarah, Couzens was observed to have a sense of excitement going to work to do what he falsely said was an overtime shift.⁹⁴
- 2.67 Other sexual deviations Couzens may have had include viewing extreme pornography,⁹⁵ the online purchase of women's clothing where he additionally asked the seller to masturbate into the items, as well as his alleged possession of indecent images of children.⁹⁶ The Inquiry heard allegations (which were never reported to the police) of his offending behaviour that included allegations of serious sexual offences dating back 20 years before the offences for which he is now serving a whole-life sentence.

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- 2.68 The cumulation of these incidents and allegations indicates someone with a long-held callous⁹⁷ and scornful⁹⁸ attitude towards women. This is also exemplified in Couzens' contribution to the WhatsApp chat referred to in paragraphs 2.54 to 2.57 – for example, “Did you finger her to check if she was ok?”, when referring to a vulnerable member of the public.⁹⁹ Those responsible for developing new vetting policy and practice need to consider if and how these indicators could be discovered and assessed.
- 2.69 Couzens' full use of pornography is difficult to determine because he reset his mobile phone immediately prior to being arrested for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard.¹⁰⁰ Couzens' willingness, however, to show friends and colleagues violent and extreme pornography in 2004¹⁰¹ (and other pornography earlier)¹⁰² indicates the extent of his disinhibition and interest in such material some 17 years before he murdered Sarah. Academic research suggests that sexual deviants have a varied diet of perverted sexual interests.¹⁰³ The Inquiry notes the allegation that Couzens possessed indecent images of children.¹⁰⁴ He has not been convicted of this. These relevant allegations and incidents, when combined, paint a picture of someone wholly unsuitable to hold the office of constable.
- 2.70 Most of those who knew him may not expect to read this catalogue of perverted, sexual deviancy in his background because he knew how to ensure that this side of his character was not known or visible to others. Couzens hid his offending in plain sight, lying overtly to assume the powers of a police constable and to achieve status as a hyper-masculine firearms officer.¹⁰⁵ The fact that he had never been caught for the offences he committed in public prior to Sarah Everard's murder may have emboldened him.¹⁰⁶
- 2.71 This Report makes recommendations about the steps those responsible for policing must take to prevent this happening again. Efforts need to be made to reveal those within the workforce who pose a greater risk to the public when entrusted with the powers of the office of constable and are able to disguise themselves as good police officers.

Reflections from senior leaders

- 2.72 The Inquiry took evidence from current and former leaders of policing organisations – including forces where Couzens worked, and external bodies, such as the National Police Chiefs' Council, the College of Policing and the Independent Office for Police Conduct – about what changes have been made in policing in the almost three years since Sarah Everard was abducted, raped and murdered by a serving

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police officer. The purpose of taking this evidence was to ensure that the Inquiry's recommendations were informed by first-hand accounts of the operating context and challenges facing policing today.

- 2.73 The Inquiry learned that, overall, there is a general recognition by senior leaders that policing “needed to have quite a seismic response” to the case of Couzens and the effect it had on public trust and confidence in policing.¹⁰⁷ One senior leader explained, “Wayne Couzens is a complete outlier for the police in terms of the nature of the threat and horrendous crimes he committed,” and suggested caution when considering “the degree to which the whole system needs to change in response [...] and whether these issues should have been picked up by normal processes”.¹⁰⁸
- 2.74 This response is similar to some of the sentiment the Inquiry heard to the effect that this was an issue for the Metropolitan Police Service rather than an issue facing the whole of policing. Another senior leader reflected:
- “Policing is coming to terms with how bad the situation is. There is a debate about whether it is a case of ‘bad apples.’ It was comfortable to think that somehow Wayne Couzens was a bad apple but on closer examination we see things that are wrong which are not isolated people or clusters of people but point to wider institutional problems.”¹⁰⁹
- 2.75 The Inquiry asked senior leaders about the specific changes and improvements made in policing since Sarah Everard’s murder by Couzens in March 2021. Even though issues of failures of vetting, misconduct and misogyny in policing have long been flagged in previous reports and inquiries, the Inquiry heard that Sarah’s murder represented a “watershed moment” for policing,¹¹⁰ culminating in an overall recognition by some senior leaders that change in policing is essential. Indeed, Sarah’s murder made certain issues more visible to the wider public,¹¹¹ and, as a result, the appetite of police forces to accept change seems to have grown.
- 2.76 Each force in England and Wales has the freedom to derogate from the guidance on recruitment and vetting, and many choose to do so. This can create variation in vetting standards and practice between police forces, which is a weakness in the system.
- 2.77 Other challenges include reduced resources to deliver proper vetting and aftercare, a lack of information-sharing between departments, and certain cultural barriers to improving and professionalising the police service. These barriers include reluctance to report inappropriate behaviour due to the perception that nothing will be done if reports are made.

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- 2.78 As one senior leader told the Inquiry: “Why would [people] put their hand up if senior officers are not then following through on these concerns?”¹¹² As this Report was being written, the Home Office announced its intention to change the rules governing officers’ disciplinary processes to give Chief Constables the power to automatically dismiss officers with findings of gross misconduct against them.¹¹³ Once implemented, this should make it easier for police forces to remove those who should not be working in policing.
- 2.79 In the Metropolitan Police Service in particular, the Inquiry heard that there is a concerning issue with short-termism, which is highlighted in the Baroness Casey Review report.¹¹⁴ The Inquiry heard evidence to support Baroness Casey’s theory that the Metropolitan Police Service lacks a workforce plan with a strategic assessment of the needs and skills of the organisation.¹¹⁵ The absence of a workforce plan in the Metropolitan Police Service compounds issues related to the recruitment, vetting, training and retention of good officers. Beyond the Metropolitan Police Service, the Inquiry was told that Chief Constables “are not incentivised to care about the long-term health of their police force”.¹¹⁶ This is of particular concern when developing a positive and healthy police culture, improving vetting practices and establishing long-term strategic leadership.
- 2.80 In response to recent reviews and reports, the Inquiry was told by senior leaders that there is a “real sense of the police being very highly scrutinised”¹¹⁷ and “feeling under siege”,¹¹⁸ and that “any allegations of poor police practice were suddenly very high profile”¹¹⁹ following Sarah Everard’s murder. One senior leader told the Inquiry that “there was a sense of leading an organisation where there could be passive resistance to change”¹²⁰ as officers were being told to “push to improve trust” over other priorities, such as “tackling terrorism”.¹²¹
- 2.81 From discussions with senior leaders, the Inquiry understands that there is a serious disconnect between what senior leaders are saying about the gravity of the issues in policing that are raised by Couzens’ crimes, and the actions being taken to address them. This Report highlights failures of previous investigations into allegations of sexual offending relating to Couzens, sub-optimal recruitment and vetting practices, and unacceptable workplace cultures that exist within forces. However, the Inquiry notes that these issues are not novel. Indeed, police forces and their leaders have been presented with many recommendations to implement meaningful changes and improvements.
- 2.82 From an analysis of over 20 years of reports and inquiries and their repeated recommendations relating to trust in the police, counter-corruption, workplace culture, information-sharing, training, the management of and response to sexual offences, and vetting, it is clear that these topics are not new to police leaders.

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As an example, more than 70 recommendations relating to police misconduct, and more than 30 recommendations around supervision and welfare, have been made in previous reports into policing.¹²²

- 2.83 In the State of Policing 2022, the annual assessment of policing in England and Wales,¹²³ His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary Andy Cooke addresses this very issue. He writes that His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) does not have the power to enforce its recommendations and instead relies on forces "voluntarily acting upon them".¹²⁴ He highlights the reality that "forces have either failed to act or not acted quickly enough to address our recommendations",¹²⁵ referring in particular to recommendations in place from 2016 to address the issue of police officers abusing their position for sexual purpose. Mr Cooke advocated for additional legislation to expedite the recommended improvements and deliver a policing service of a high quality.¹²⁶
- 2.84 One senior leader told the Inquiry that, after Sarah Everard's murder, "All chief constables would almost all universally acknowledge that things need to change."¹²⁷ However, the Inquiry was told by one leader that "policing is splendidly ignorant of evidence of what it should be doing",¹²⁸ and that to effect change "the bar needs to be raised" and "recommendations [from previous reports] need to be implemented".¹²⁹
- 2.85 The Inquiry credits the work of the Metropolitan Police Service, the College of Policing and the National Police Chiefs' Council (under the leadership of its former Violence Against Women and Girls National Police Lead, Deputy Chief Constable Maggie Blyth), which have made some progress in tackling issues in policing relating to the abuse of power for sexual purpose by police officers, violence against women and girls-related misconduct, and the wider vetting framework. Their individual and collective efforts are helping to improve policing's understanding of the scale of the problem, tackle barriers that prevent forces from removing the wrong people from policing, and strengthen the vetting framework that every force should have regard to when considering new joiners.
- 2.86 The Inquiry also heard about "bystander" and "upstander" training. These aim to teach officers about the "wrongful use of social media"¹³⁰ and to "encourag[e] officers to step away from bad behaviour"¹³¹ and to feel empowered to "call out bad behaviour".¹³² More time is required to see the impact of these approaches. Part 2 of this Inquiry will follow up on these measures to protect women in public and improve the policing cohort.

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2.87 The Inquiry does acknowledge that austerity has, as Baroness Casey described it in relation to the Metropolitan Police Service, “disfigured” policing.¹³³ It has irrevocably altered policing from the front line to the back office, intensified challenges for forces and had an impact on the quality of the service to the public.¹³⁴ Nevertheless, overall the Inquiry believes that senior leaders need to accelerate the pace and scope of cultural change and improve standards of investigation if they are to stand the best chance of preventing someone like Couzens from holding the office of constable.

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Chapter 3: Sexual activity and offending

Introduction

- 3.1 This chapter expands upon the allegations made against Wayne Couzens enumerated in Chapter 1. These include criminal behaviour and relevant incidents of a sexual nature. The understandable reluctance of some victims to report to the authorities, and police failures to thoroughly investigate those offences that were reported, resulted in a number of risks and red flags relating to his vetting and other decision-making being missed. To satisfy its Terms of Reference and explain its findings, the Inquiry describes in detail, in this Report, the allegations against Couzens. This includes the apparent chasm identified by the Inquiry between the victims' perception of the seriousness and impact of Couzens' offending and the corresponding police response. For completeness, the victims' own views, expressed in their own words, are included.
- 3.2 This Inquiry was commissioned to understand exactly how Couzens, a serving officer with the Metropolitan Police Service, came to abduct, rape and murder Sarah Everard.¹ Since the then Home Secretary commissioned this Inquiry in November 2021, it has become clear that these terrible crimes were not committed in isolation but were the culmination of a trajectory of sexually motivated behaviour and offending. Couzens' convictions for indecently exposing his genitals intending that someone would see them and be caused alarm and distress are now well known, after he pleaded guilty to three separate offences.^{2,3}
- 3.3 Further, in the course of its own investigations, the Inquiry received evidence from a number of credible sources demonstrating that Couzens' history of sexual offending was not restricted to indecently exposing himself. The Inquiry was also provided with evidence relating to alleged sexual abuse perpetrated by Couzens in his early twenties, which included an alleged very serious sexual assault of a child barely into her teens.⁴ Other alleged offending and activity, which was predominantly aimed at adult women, included sharing unsolicited photographs of his penis⁵ and sexual touching.⁶ In order to protect the victims, who have shown great courage in coming forward, this Report excludes any details that could result in their identification.

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Conclusion 1

Wayne Couzens deliberately targeted his victims and, in some cases, his behaviour made them question their own responsibility for what happened, deterring them from reporting his behaviour to an appropriate authority.

- 3.4 This chapter sets out and analyses the available evidence about Couzens' alleged sexual offending and relevant activity and considers expert evidence commissioned by the Inquiry. **Overall, the Inquiry considers that Couzens deliberately targeted and exerted power over his victims. He exploited their vulnerabilities, such as youth and inexperience, previous abuse, and chaotic background, and in some cases made them question their own responsibility for what happened, thereby deterring them from reporting his behaviour to an appropriate authority.** The Inquiry's detailed findings and recommendations are contained in the rest of this chapter.

Indecent exposure: The allegations

Table 1: Indecent exposure offences alleged against Wayne Couzens

	Date of offending	Alleged indecent exposure offences	Date reported or brought to police attention and initial investigating force	Date of police interview	Date on which Wayne Couzens charged by police	Outcome of criminal prosecution
A	Summer 2004	Masturbating with intent to shock a passer-by while driving ⁷	After 9 March 2021 Metropolitan Police Service	23 March 2022	Not charged – insufficient evidence	Not applicable
B	21 November 2008	Masturbating with intent to shock a passer-by while on foot ⁸	21 November 2008 Metropolitan Police Service	23 March 2022	Not charged – insufficient evidence	Not applicable
C	9 June 2015	Exposed erect penis while driving in town centre ⁹	9 June 2015 Kent Police	23 March 2022	19 August 2022	13 February 2023: case ordered to 'lie on the file' following a not guilty plea ¹⁰

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	Date of offending	Alleged indecent exposure offences	Date reported or brought to police attention and initial investigating force	Date of police interview	Date on which Wayne Couzens charged by police	Outcome of criminal prosecution
D	13 November 2020	Masturbating while standing next to woodland with intent to shock a passing cyclist ¹¹	13 November 2020 Kent Police	23 March 2022	19 August 2022	6 March 2023: sentenced to 19 months' imprisonment following a guilty plea ¹²
E	3 February 2021	Exposed erect penis with intent to shock a passer-by while on foot ¹³	3 February 2021 Kent Police	23 March 2022	Not charged – insufficient evidence	Not applicable
F	Between 22 January and 1 February 2021	Exposed erect penis with intent to shock a female employee at drive-through restaurant ¹⁴	28 February 2021 Metropolitan Police Service	Not applicable	18 March 2022	13 February 2023: case ordered to 'lie on the file' following a not guilty plea ¹⁵
G	Between 30 January and 6 February 2021	Exposed erect penis with intent to shock a female employee at drive-through restaurant ¹⁶	28 February 2021 Metropolitan Police Service	Not applicable	18 March 2022	13 February 2023: case ordered to 'lie on the file' following a not guilty plea ¹⁷
H	14 February 2021	Exposed erect penis with intent to shock a female employee at drive-through restaurant ¹⁸	28 February 2021 Metropolitan Police Service	Not applicable	18 March 2022	6 March 2023: sentenced to six months' imprisonment following a guilty plea ¹⁹
I	27 February 2021	Exposed erect penis with intent to shock a female employee at drive-through restaurant ²⁰	28 February 2021 Metropolitan Police Service	Not applicable	18 March 2022	6 March 2023: sentenced to six months' imprisonment following a guilty plea ²¹

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- 3.5 On 30 September 2021, Couzens was sentenced to life imprisonment, with a whole-life order, for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard.²² Just over 16 months later, on 13 February 2023, Couzens was back in the Central Criminal Court, this time via video link from prison, and pleaded guilty to three offences of indecent exposure (offences D, H and I in Table 1).²³ At his sentencing hearing on 6 March 2023, the judge imposed a sentence of 19 months' imprisonment.²⁴
- 3.6 On 18 March 2022, the Crown Prosecution Service announced on its website that it had authorised four new charges against Couzens. The charges (offences F–I in Table 1) alleged that Couzens had, on four occasions between 22 January and 27 February 2021, “intentionally exposed his genitals intending that someone would see them and be caused alarm and distress”.^{25,26}
- 3.7 While the prosecution of Couzens for offences of indecent exposure generated extensive news coverage, away from the public eye further allegations continued to be the subject of police investigation. On 23 March 2022, five days after the announcement of the first four charges, officers from the Metropolitan Police Service visited Couzens in prison and questioned him about a further five incidents (offences A–E in Table 1) alleged to have taken place between 2004 and February 2021.²⁷ On 19 August 2022, the Crown Prosecution Service announced that Couzens had been charged with a further two alleged offences of exposing his genitals. The dates of the alleged offences were 9 June 2015 and 13 November 2020 (offences C and D in Table 1).²⁸
- 3.8 The allegations, some of which led to convictions, suggested that Couzens may repeatedly have indecently exposed himself in public. This was extremely significant and relevant to the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry. According to forensic clinical psychologist Dr Adrian West, “exposure of the genitals to an unsuspecting person, usually a stranger with the intent of obtaining sexual stimulation [...] is one of the most commonly reported paraphilias”.^{29,30} Dr West told the Inquiry: “There are more than 3,000 convictions in England and Wales for indecent exposure per year; it is the most common type of sexual offence committed by adults.”³¹
- 3.9 The Inquiry set out to answer various questions concerning the alleged incidents, including the circumstances in which they were reported to the police and why, prior to his arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard, none had resulted in Couzens being the subject of internal police misconduct proceedings or a criminal prosecution. Had opportunities to disrupt his offending been missed?

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26 The locations where the alleged offences occurred were not included in the Crown Prosecution Service press notice, nor are they published in this Report, because complainants in sexual offence cases have the benefit of lifelong anonymity. Details which might lead to their identification, such as a complainant's name or address, place of work or educational establishment, must not be published.

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30 [***] In this context, a paraphilia means an attraction to something that is outside the normal range.

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Timing of the alleged offences and of the associated reports to the police

- 3.10 This section expands upon the information set out in Table 1, describing in more detail the nature of the allegations, when they happened, when they were reported or came to the attention of the police, and their outcomes. The steps taken by the police to investigate the allegations for which Couzens was later prosecuted are dealt with in paragraphs 3.31 to 3.148.
- 3.11 The series of four indecent exposure charges (offences F–I in Table 1) announced on 18 March 2022 stemmed from a telephone call to the Metropolitan Police Service on 28 February 2021. This was just three days before the abduction of Sarah Everard. Although the person who reported these offences (the informant) was aware of only two incidents, two further allegations were later identified and charged. The initial report related to incidents in February 2021 when a male customer drove his car through a drive-through restaurant while exposing his erect penis to female staff at the restaurant's payment and collection windows. The informant told the police call handler that on both occasions the man had used the same bank card to purchase food and that the receipts had been retained. The informant also provided the call handler with the make, model and registration number of the vehicle driven by the perpetrator on the most recent occasion, which an employee had noted down. A police check of the Police National Computer on 28 February 2021 revealed the name of the vehicle's registered keeper and his address in Kent. The registered keeper was Wayne Couzens.³²
- 3.12 As indicated in paragraph 3.5, on 13 February 2023 Couzens pleaded guilty to three offences. They involved indecently exposing himself to a cyclist on 13 November 2020 (offence D in Table 1) and to employees at a drive-through restaurant on 14 and 27 February 2021 (offences H and I in Table 1). He maintained his pleas of not guilty to the remaining three counts (offence C, exposing his erect penis while driving, and offences F and G, further offences at the drive-through restaurant). The Crown Prosecution Service accepted Couzens' pleas in relation to the outstanding offences C, F and G and the court ordered those offences to 'lie on the file'.³³ This term, and the decision taken by the Crown Prosecution Service, is explained in more detail in paragraphs 3.20 to 3.22.
- 3.13 The first of the two alleged indecent exposure offences charged on 19 August 2022 (offence C in Table 1) was reported to the police immediately after it happened on 9 June 2015,³⁴ when Couzens was a serving officer with the Civil Nuclear Constabulary.³⁵ The informant and their partner observed a car driver exposing his erect penis as he drove along a road in the centre of Dover. The informant gave the police call handler details of the vehicle's make, model and registration number.³⁶ Although the car was registered to Wayne Couzens, at his home address in Kent, he was not contacted by the police at that time.³⁷ It was only after he was arrested for Sarah Everard's abduction, rape and murder in 2021 that the report was

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reinvestigated. At court, he maintained his not guilty plea in relation to this alleged offence and it, like the two drive-through allegations (offences F and G in Table 1), was ordered to 'lie on the file'.³⁸

- 3.14 The second of the indecent exposure offences charged on 19 August 2022 (offence D in Table 1) took place on 13 November 2020. The female complainant was cycling alone on a narrow country lane when a naked man stepped out of woodland. He was masturbating and looked directly at her as she cycled towards him. She reported the incident to Kent Police via an online reporting system the same day and provided a description of the perpetrator and the "possible" partial registration number relating to a black car that was parked nearby,³⁹ a registration number then considered insufficient to be linked to a specific vehicle.⁴⁰ At the time Couzens owned a black car, the same vehicle he would later use in the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard.⁴¹
- 3.15 After seeing a photograph of Couzens following his arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard, the complainant recontacted the police on 11 March 2021. She said that she was 90 per cent certain that the man who had been arrested in connection with the disappearance of Sarah Everard was the man who had indecently exposed himself to her.⁴² At the time of the incident Couzens was serving in the Metropolitan Police Service⁴³ but working mainly from home in Kent on recuperative duties.⁴⁴ He was scheduled to be on duty that day.⁴⁵ He pleaded guilty to this offence on 13 February 2023.⁴⁶
- 3.16 Of the remaining three alleged offences covered in Couzens' March 2022 interview, none was prosecuted. The earliest dated back to the summer of 2004 (offence A in Table 1), when a man in a passing car in South London was seen exposing his erect penis and masturbating by a teenage girl who described him as looking straight at her.⁴⁷ This case was not reported at the time and only came to police notice 17 years later, after the complainant recognised Couzens from news pictures following his arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard.⁴⁸ The Inquiry was advised that, following an investigation by the police, a decision to take no further action was made on the basis of "evidential difficulties".⁴⁹
- 3.17 The second of the alleged indecent exposure offences covered in the March 2022 interview that did not result in a charge concerned an incident that took place on 21 November 2008, in another part of South London (offence B in Table 1). A woman pushing a child in a pram heard a man call 'hello'. She turned to see a man masturbating on the opposite kerb with his trousers round his ankles. The incident was reported to the police that day with the suspect recorded as not known. However, 12 years later, in 2021, the complainant recontacted the police

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after recognising Couzens as the person she had seen indecently exposing himself.⁵⁰ Following a police investigation, a decision to take no further action was made on the basis of “evidential difficulties”.⁵¹

- 3.18 The third and final alleged offence of indecent exposure to be addressed in the March 2022 interview and not charged (offence E in Table 1) arose from an incident in a residential area in a town in Kent on 3 February 2021, one month prior to the abduction of Sarah Everard. A woman was returning from a run when she saw a man standing on the pavement near to some bushes, his erect penis exposed from his trousers. The woman described how, despite her initial terror, she remonstrated with the man. In her opinion, “he seemed to get enjoyment out of me seeing his penis”.⁵² She too reported the incident to the police that day using an online reporting system and described the perpetrator as a white man in his late forties, stocky with strawberry blonde hair and a local accent.⁵³ A decision to take no further action on the basis that the case did not reach the threshold for charging was made by the Crown Prosecution Service and notified to the Inquiry in September 2022.⁵⁴
- 3.19 The Inquiry notes that, of the nine allegations of indecent exposure referred to in Table 1, eight were initially reported to the police at or shortly after the time the offence occurred. Just one came to police attention following Couzens’ arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard.⁵⁵ In two cases, complainants who had reported prior to the arrest recontacted the police to say that they had recognised Couzens as the offender in their case.⁵⁶

Prosecution decision to allow cases to ‘lie on the file’

- 3.20 After Couzens entered guilty pleas to three allegations of indecent exposure at court on 13 February 2023, the Crown Prosecution Service had to decide whether to pursue the remaining three alleged indecent exposure offences, to which Couzens had pleaded not guilty, to trial. At the time when prosecutors decided to charge Couzens with the indecent exposure offences, they applied the Code for Crown Prosecutors.⁵⁷ To bring charges, they had to be satisfied that there was a realistic prospect of conviction and a prosecution was in the public interest.⁵⁸ Whether there is a realistic prospect of conviction depends on whether a jury is more likely than not to convict a defendant. This is not the same test as the one a jury is asked to apply, which is the criminal standard of proof. A jury must be sure beyond reasonable doubt of a defendant’s guilt in order to find them guilty after hearing all the evidence.⁵⁹

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- 3.21 On 13 February 2023, the prosecution had to determine whether it continued to be in the public interest for the three remaining not guilty charges to proceed to trial.⁶⁰ Applying once again the Code for Crown Prosecutors, they decided that Couzens' pleas were acceptable and the public interest did not require a trial for the remaining indecent exposure offences. Reasons for this decision included the fact that Couzens was already serving a whole-life sentence and, even if he were to be found guilty of six rather than three indecent exposure offences, it would make no difference to his overall sentence.⁶¹
- 3.22 Prosecutors also concluded that his guilty pleas adequately marked his offending as a serving police officer and the pattern of offences culminating in his crimes against Sarah Everard. Furthermore, the prosecution provided justice for the majority of the victims, and their Victim Personal Statements (referred to in paragraphs 3.168 to 3.180) meant the effect of his conduct could be recognised and acknowledged.⁶² The decision to let cases 'lie on the file' means there was no verdict in those specific cases. They are now in effect dormant and can only be revived and proceeded with in exceptional circumstances.⁶³

Wayne Couzens' history of indecent exposure

- 3.23 By pleading guilty to the indecent exposure of his genitals on three occasions, Couzens has admitted he is a repeat offender. The Inquiry explored the possibility that these offences, for which Couzens was brought to justice, were merely examples of his offending and that he was actually a more prolific offender than his convictions suggest.
- 3.24 Thanks to a wealth of available research, it is well known that many victims of sexual crime do not report to the police. It seems highly likely, therefore, that for every offence that is reported, there will be others that are not. Professor Lesley McMillan, Professor of Criminology and Sociology at Glasgow Caledonian University, who provided expert evidence to the Inquiry,⁶⁴ said:

"A study for UN Women UK in 2021 found that 71% of women in the UK had experienced some form of sexual harassment in public, with higher rates of 86% for younger women aged 18-24 years of age.⁶⁵ This survey used a definition of sexual harassment that included indecent exposure, and 19% of women reported an experience of indecent exposure that included 'flashing' or masturbation.⁶⁶ It also showed over 95% of women did not report their experience of public sexual harassment, rising to 98% of women aged 18-34 years of age."^{67,68}

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- 3.25 Professor McMillan concluded: “It is therefore likely that [Couzens] may have committed other offences that were not reported or where he was not identified as the offender.”⁶⁹ The Inquiry accepts this conclusion.
- 3.26 Furthermore, the Inquiry was informed by witnesses in the course of its investigations of alleged acts that would have justified further criminal investigation and potential prosecution of Couzens if they had been reported to the police.⁷⁰
- 3.27 The Inquiry regarded as extremely significant Couzens’ increasing disinhibition as demonstrated by the progression from indecently exposing himself to a lone cyclist on a narrow country lane⁷¹ to repeated offending at a busy drive-through restaurant.⁷² Clearly such repeated offending carried with it the increased risk of being apprehended. Was his brazen use of his own vehicle and bank card⁷³ the result of an increased confidence fuelled by having somehow escaped being stopped and dealt with by anyone in authority over a period of years?
- 3.28 Was it the case – as put forward by Professor Elizabeth Gilchrist, a forensic psychologist registered with the Health and Care Professions Council and Professor of Psychological Therapies at the University of Edinburgh, who provided expert evidence to the Inquiry⁷⁴ – that “[a]s his finances became more precarious, his job satisfaction dipped[, as well as] his ability to maintain his own sense of success, he is likely to have reached the stage of thinking he had nothing left to lose”?⁷⁵ Or was it demonstrative of a desire to be caught?
- 3.29 Dr West, who has expertise in this area, expressed the view that:
- “The apparent recklessness of his most recently repeated indecent exposure offences at the [drive-through restaurant] also points to the possibility that Wayne Couzens might have been in some way signalling his dangerousness. It is likely that by that stage, his deviant sexual interests and behaviours so dominated his life, that he was acutely aware of the impending homicidal threat that he posed but his associated level of preoccupation and arousal were more than enough to distract him from any conscious thoughts of anxiety or guilt.”⁷⁶

Conclusion 2

An increase in the frequency of sexual offending can be deadly serious and needs to be treated as such.

- 3.30 **Whatever the reason for Couzens’ increased risk-taking and repeat offending, it is clear that this type of increase in the frequency of offending can be deadly serious and needs to be treated as such.**

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Police investigations of the allegations against Wayne Couzens

Conclusion 3

There was a lamentable and repeated failure to deal, in a reasonable and professional manner, with the several allegations reported to different police forces by a number of people prior to Sarah Everard's murder.

- 3.31 The Inquiry finds that, of the eight cases reported to the police prior to Sarah Everard's murder (offences B–I in Table 1), not one led to Couzens' arrest and referral for prosecution at the time. While it would be unfair to include offence B, given the age of the complaint and the limited evidence available, the Inquiry concludes that some of these cases were capable of reaching that stage, and subsequently did. The fact that so little progress was made in relation to offences C–I prior to Couzens' arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard demonstrates to the Inquiry a lamentable and repeated failure to deal with these reports in a reasonable and professional manner.
- 3.32 It was the Metropolitan Police Service's Major Investigation Team that undertook the investigation of Couzens' crimes against Sarah Everard,⁷⁷ an investigation that the judge, when passing sentence, described as "the most impressive" he had "encountered in the 30 years since [he had] been sitting as a [...] judge".⁷⁸ Following Couzens' arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah, the same team took on the role of reviewing and reinvestigating other reports of alleged criminality made against him.⁷⁹ These included the six allegations of indecent exposure for which he was later prosecuted, including the three to which he pleaded guilty.⁸⁰ Ultimately the excellent work of the Major Investigation Team brought Couzens to justice.
- 3.33 As part of its examination of allegations of criminal behaviour made against Couzens and whether any potential risks and/or red flags were missed, the Inquiry wanted to know why earlier investigations had failed to achieve the same outcome as that of the Major Investigation Team. It explored three investigations: the first involving the 2015 allegation that Couzens exposed his penis when driving along a town centre road in Kent (offence C in Table 1); the second from 2020 when he exposed his penis to a lone female cyclist on a narrow country lane (offence D in Table 1); and the third from 2021 when he exposed his penis at the drive-through restaurant (offences H and I in Table 1).
- 3.34 Although out of sequence, this section will start by examining the 2015 and 2021 allegations, before turning to the 2020 offence. Both the 2015 and 2021 investigations involved allegations of offending while driving a car, and both uncovered clear evidence of Wayne Couzens being the registered keeper

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of the relevant vehicle,⁸¹ thereby linking him to the offences. Both were also the subject of detailed investigations by the Independent Office for Police Conduct and therefore offer a window through which to compare how they were handled by two different police force areas, Kent Police and the Metropolitan Police Service.⁸² The investigation into the 2021 case resulted in a finding of gross misconduct,⁸³ while the investigation into the 2015 case resulted in a finding of misconduct not proven, with the officer assessed as “practice requiring improvement”.⁸⁴

The alleged offence of 9 June 2015

- 3.35 A member of the public, the informant, called the police on 9 June 2015 to report a man driving a car on a main road in Dover, naked below the waist and with his erect penis exposed (offence C in Table 1). The call handler made an appointment for officers to meet the informant on 12 June 2015. However, the appointment was missed by the informant and “on 18 June 2015 the investigation was closed after the informant’s reliability was questioned and [they] declined any further involvement”.⁸⁵
- 3.36 The aim of the Independent Office for Police Conduct investigation into this case was to consider whether officers “adequately completed basic investigative actions” in relation to the reported crime.⁸⁶ Once finalised, it would be passed to a senior member of Independent Office for Police Conduct staff⁸⁷ to assess “whether to refer any matter to the Crown Prosecution Service”⁸⁸ or “whether any person to whose conduct the investigation relates has a case to answer for misconduct or gross misconduct or no case to answer”.⁸⁹
- 3.37 Kent Police received the initial call at 20:24 on 9 June 2015.⁹⁰ The Inquiry listened to the recording of the call and found the caller to be a willing and helpful witness who gave a clear account of what they had “literally [...] just seen”, including the make, model, colour and registration number of the car.⁹¹ The informant also said they thought the driver was wearing a red top. The informant and their partner were together when the car drove by and they both took offence at what they saw. The informant described it as “revolting”.⁹² As well as taking down the details and arranging an appointment, the call handler said they would broadcast the details over the police radio “so we can pull him over and speak to him”.⁹³
- 3.38 In the view of the Independent Office for Police Conduct, the call handler’s entry on Kent Police’s computer system, STORM, largely reflected what the informant said but did not make reference to the partner being a potential witness. It further stated that the man “was wearing a red t-shirt” but did not note the informant’s uncertainty,

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evidenced by use during the call of the verb “think”.⁹⁴ While both these omissions may appear minor, they in fact played a very significant part in the subsequent decision to take no further action in this case. As such they highlight the importance of call handlers accurately recording what they are told.

- 3.39 Although the call handler was polite to the informant, the Inquiry has concerns about their reaction to the informant’s disclosure, which they described as “a very weird one”.⁹⁵ Commenting on the response, Professor McMillan said:

“This suggests more training is needed in all roles for sexual offence disclosure, from those taking initial calls and interacting in any way with those who have been victimised, not just those in specialist investigative or sexual offence roles. It may be the call handler was unprepared for what was being disclosed, but the responses on the call were not optimal empathic responses that suggest the incident is being taken seriously. The response does not appear to recognise the potential traumatic impact for the person who is the subject of indecent exposure especially as the caller notes ‘I find that revolting I find, it’s even hard to talk about’.”⁹⁶

The Inquiry agrees with this opinion.

- 3.40 The Independent Office for Police Conduct examined how the call handler graded the crime report. Due to the time that had elapsed since the investigation took place, the Independent Office for Police Conduct was not able to obtain every piece of guidance that would have applied in 2015. This included the relevant Kent Police guidance for grading sexual offences.⁹⁷ A piece of relevant guidance that was available to the Independent Office for Police Conduct was the Kent Police guidance for sexual offences and call gradings that applied in 2021, at the time of the Independent Office for Police Conduct’s investigation.⁹⁸
- 3.41 In the call handler’s opinion, the appropriate response to this report of a crime, which they considered “low risk”,⁹⁹ would have been a police appointment rather than a grading of Immediate or High. The call handler explained their reasoning in a statement for the Independent Office for Police Conduct made six years after the incident. Reasons for the decision included there being, at the time of the report, no immediate risk to the informant or any other person,¹⁰⁰ a decision that was accepted as appropriate by the Independent Office for Police Conduct.¹⁰¹
- 3.42 The Independent Office for Police Conduct found that, within minutes of the call, various checks were carried out in relation to the vehicle. Details on the Police National Computer matched those provided by the caller. Insurance details were

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also checked. The registered keeper was Wayne Couzens, with no other man insured to drive the car. These details were not recorded on the STORM log at the time.¹⁰²

- 3.43 At approximately 20:35 on 9 June 2015, a member of Kent Police described as “a dispatcher”¹⁰³ broadcast information about the indecent exposure incident via the police radio, including details of the car. The dispatcher also noted, and conveyed to those receiving the broadcast, the name of the registered keeper, Wayne Couzens, and his home address.¹⁰⁴ The Independent Office for Police Conduct reviewed radio transmissions for approximately two hours following this broadcast but found nothing relevant.¹⁰⁵
- 3.44 As previously mentioned, the appointment arranged for 12 June 2015 did not take place¹⁰⁶ because the informant failed to attend. The officer recorded on the STORM log that attempts to contact the informant were unsuccessful and quoted negative comments about the informant’s reliability made by individuals to whom the officer had spoken.¹⁰⁷
- 3.45 The Independent Office for Police Conduct found that the investigation was reviewed by a detective on 16 June 2015. The detective added an entry on the STORM log, stating that it was not entirely clear what had happened and requesting further information.¹⁰⁸ On 17 June, a member of police staff created a crime report and the case was allocated to an officer in a local policing team (the officer in the case).¹⁰⁹ The incident was recorded as an “indecent exposure” and the vehicle’s details noted, including the name of the registered keeper, Wayne Couzens.¹¹⁰ The staff member also arranged for a “marker” to be placed on the vehicle’s record on the Police National Computer.¹¹¹ According to the Independent Office for Police Conduct, “a marker signifies the vehicle may be involved in criminal activity and this information would be provided to anyone who checked the vehicle on PNC [Police National Computer]”.¹¹²
- 3.46 When a vehicle with a marker attached activates the Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) system, it has the effect of notifying the police control room. This means staff in the control room can alert police officers over the police radio to the vehicle’s location and to the marker attached to it.¹¹³ On 17 June 2015, an ANPR researcher carried out checks that confirmed the vehicle linked to the indecent exposure in Dover was in the area at the relevant time. According to the researcher, the ANPR cameras showed the driver was wearing a top that was “more blue/grey in colour”, not red as described by the informant.¹¹⁴ However, according to the Independent Office for Police Conduct report, the same researcher later told the

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Independent Office for Police Conduct in the course of its investigation that “it was difficult to be certain about the colours on an ANPR image due to the quality of the camera and the light conditions at the time the image was taken”.¹¹⁵

- 3.47 Also on 17 June 2015, the officer in the case, a police sergeant, added the following note to the crime report: “[I]t is understood that the inf [informant] has some issues and may not be telling the call taker all the correct facts.”¹¹⁶ The officer in the case relied upon the evidence relating to the colour of the driver’s T-shirt, evidence that was later to be brought into question in any event, to justify the assessment of the informant as unreliable.¹¹⁷ The same officer also made further assumptions about the informant’s reliability based on the comments reportedly made by other individuals at the informant’s address to the officer who attended the appointment that the informant missed.¹¹⁸
- 3.48 The Independent Office for Police Conduct found evidence that, on 18 June 2015, the officer in the case accessed Kent Police records for Couzens, which included his phone number and home address.¹¹⁹ Later, the same officer accessed Couzens’ nominal file, which is a collection of all the information held by Kent Police in relation to a named person. This included his address, phone number and vehicle details in addition to investigations assigned to Couzens when he volunteered with Kent Special Constabulary between 2006 and 2009. Which sections of the nominal file were accessed by the officer, and whether they included the section recording that Couzens had worked as a special constable in Kent and referring to cases on which he worked, is unknown.¹²⁰
- 3.49 The same officer in the case did not subsequently provide any information about Couzens’ nominal file when investigated by the Independent Office for Police Conduct in relation to the 2015 investigation.¹²¹ This is unfortunate because it leaves open the possibility that the officer may have been aware of Couzens’ previous role with Kent Special Constabulary, which may have been a factor in the officer’s decision-making. Had it been possible to audit precisely which pages of the file the officer accessed, this speculation, and any corresponding unfairness to the officer, would have been avoided.
- 3.50 In a further entry on the crime report, the same officer in the case recorded having spoken to the informant. This entry, made at 22:44 on 18 June 2015, stated that the informant could not be certain about what the driver wore at the time he indecently exposed himself.¹²² It said: “[The informant] was embarrassed speaking about the incident and would not provide any further info.”¹²³ The entry went on to say that the matter was only reported because the informant’s partner told the informant to do so and that the informant declined further involvement with the investigation.¹²⁴

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- 3.51 There was a final entry on the crime report by the same officer in the case at 23:00 on 18 June 2015. It read:

“The witness will not support any action, there are no other witnesses and suspect is unknown. Witness account differs from ANPR image and [...] reliability [has] been questioned by [individuals] where [the witness] resides so unclear if this actually occurred. Therefore no further action will be taken.”¹²⁵

The officer also, in an entry made two minutes previously, referred to there being “no outstanding reasonable lines of enquiry” and “evidential difficulties”.¹²⁶

Conclusion 4

The actions of the officer in the June 2015 case fell far short of what would be expected of a competent police constable.

- 3.52 **This short entry made by the officer in the case, a police sergeant, with the intention of closing the 2015 case, struck the Inquiry as deeply concerning. The Inquiry considers that the actions of the officer in the case fell far short of what would be expected of a competent police constable.** The Inquiry consulted a senior detective with extensive investigative expertise, who was identified by His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), and is independent of Kent Police and the Metropolitan Police Service.¹²⁷ This experienced investigator expressed an opinion on the case based on reading the final report of the Independent Office for Police Conduct.¹²⁸
- 3.53 The experienced investigator concluded that the basis on which the officer in the case made the decision to take no further action was “factually incorrect”.¹²⁹ There was a known suspect (the registered keeper, who was also the vehicle’s insured driver), ANPR evidence placed the vehicle in the area at the appropriate time, and there was a witness, namely the informant, who “could have been supported and encouraged to re-engage”¹³⁰ having originally supported an investigation. Furthermore, had the informant’s partner been identified as another witness, corroboration for the informant’s account may have been obtained. The experienced investigator told the Inquiry that, by recording that there were “no outstanding reasonable lines of enquiry”, it was possible the officer in the case was “dishonest”.¹³¹ The Inquiry shares the view that dishonesty was one of several possible explanations for the officer’s decision.
- 3.54 When considering the severity of the allegation against the officer in the case, the Independent Office for Police Conduct found no evidence that the officer acted “dishonestly”. This appears to have related to whether the decision was influenced

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by knowledge of Couzens and his previous service as a Kent special constable, rather than the officer's reliance on factually incorrect grounds to close the investigation. The words used by the Independent Office for Police Conduct were:

"I am conscious that a crime report such as this would have been considered 'volume crime' and is on the lower end of severity of crimes [the officer in the case] would have dealt with. It would therefore have been reasonable for [the officer in the case] to deal with the matter in a proportionate way. I am also conscious there is no evidence of this having been an intentional failure to investigate the matter. There is limited evidence that [the officer] knew or recalled Wayne Couzens when dealing with this matter and no evidence of [the officer] acting dishonestly."¹³²

3.55 The Inquiry questions whether indecent exposure should be considered at "the lower end of severity" within policing. The offence can be tried before a jury on indictment in the Crown Court and can attract a sentence of imprisonment of up to two years,¹³³ or more for multiple offending.¹³⁴ While it would have been "reasonable" to deal with it "in a proportionate way", the Inquiry has not seen any evidence of the officer doing so. Whether Couzens' previous service as a Kent special constable influenced the outcome of this case is considered in paragraphs 3.65 to 3.66.

3.56 Following the decision to take no further action on the case in June 2015, the marker on the car remained. The Inquiry saw a police report recording that, on 28 July 2015, Kent Police stopped the vehicle used in the alleged indecent exposure incident. The driver was a new registered keeper who confirmed they had recently purchased the car. The police report does not include details of the date when the sale took place or the name of the seller.¹³⁵

3.57 On 30 October 2015, the relevant crime report was loaded onto the Police National Database. Although there is a section allowing the details of the people involved to be recorded, only the informant's details were inserted. This is because the officer in the case did not register Couzens on the crime report as a suspect. Instead, he is named *within the body of the report* as the registered keeper of the relevant vehicle, but with no additional details, such as his date of birth.¹³⁶ As a result, any search of the Police National Database using the name 'Wayne Couzens' would return:

"[...] several results including matters which relate to others with the same name. One of the results it would return is the crime report related to the indecent exposure in Kent [in] 2015. However, with no further information, such as a date of birth, the search results are not narrow or specific enough to be useful to anyone using the system."¹³⁷

3.58 The relevance of this Police National Database entry to Couzens' subsequent vetting when applying to join the Metropolitan Police Service is explained in more detail in Chapter 4.

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- 3.59 The Independent Office for Police Conduct investigation addressed both “[w]orking practice for indecent exposure investigations in 2015”¹³⁸ and relevant “[l]egislation, policies and guidance”.¹³⁹ A police officer with experience of 2015 working practice informed the Independent Office for Police Conduct that the potential key areas for investigation at the time would have included the identification of witnesses and “capturing their accounts”, suspect identification, any available CCTV, and checks of the Police National Computer and ANPR.¹⁴⁰ This contradicts the decision of the officer in the case that there were no reasonable lines of enquiry. Then, as now, the College of Policing’s Authorised Professional Practice was the official source of professional practice for police officers and staff. The Authorised Professional Practice describes the National Decision Model, which sets out a five-stage framework, the first two stages being to “[g]ather information and intelligence” and to “[a]ssess threat and risk and develop a working strategy”.¹⁴¹ The Independent Office for Police Conduct was informed that “205 reports were received in relation to indecent exposure allegations”¹⁴² by Kent Police in 2015. This was described as “a low number in comparison to other volume crime”.¹⁴³

Conclusion 5

The officer in the June 2015 case placed far too little emphasis on the quality of the information provided by the informant.

Conclusion 6

The officer in the June 2015 case gave too much weight to untested and subjective opinions about the informant’s reliability, as well as to a possible mistake the informant may have made in describing a feature of the incident.

- 3.60 Having listened to the recording of the informant and call handler’s telephone call,¹⁴⁴ the Inquiry concludes that the officer in the case placed far too little emphasis on the quality of the information provided by the informant. The fact that the informant’s report was shown to be accurate, including the make, model, colour and registration number of the vehicle, was given insufficient weight by the officer in the case when assessing the evidence. This was despite the presence of the vehicle in the area at the time being confirmed by ANPR.
- 3.61 Conversely, the officer in the case placed too much weight on untested and subjective opinions about the informant’s reliability as well as the possible mistake the informant may have made about the colour of the driver’s T-shirt.

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Despite the informant providing sufficient details to identify Couzens' car, address and telephone number, the offender was recorded as unknown by the officer in the case. Derogatory comments by individuals who knew the informant were used to raise doubt about whether the incident "actually occurred".¹⁴⁵ However, no explanation was given as to why, had it not occurred, the informant would invent the incident and report it to the police in the absence of any history of inaccurate or malicious reporting of crimes.

- 3.62 Conclusions similar to those of the Inquiry were reached by the Independent Office for Police Conduct investigation. They included how the officer "did not appear to have considered the consistencies" in the informant's account. Although it did not suggest that the officer was under an obligation to listen to the audio recording of the initial report, the Independent Office for Police Conduct made the point that by not doing so the officer was unaware of the informant's lack of certainty about the colour of the alleged offender's T-shirt.¹⁴⁶

Conclusion 7

The failure to investigate the June 2015 indecent exposure report was a red flag and a missed opportunity to disrupt or prevent Wayne Couzens' offending and allowed him to continue working as a police officer.

- 3.63 **The Inquiry is in no doubt that the failure to investigate this case was a red flag and a missed opportunity to disrupt or even prevent further offending by Couzens.** Instead, he was able to continue in post as an authorised firearms officer with the Civil Nuclear Constabulary.¹⁴⁷ The Inquiry asked the Chief Constable of the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, Simon Chesterman, how he would have approached the allegation if it had come to the Constabulary's notice. He said:

"I would have immediately suspended him and investigated the matter, without hesitation. I would have done this regardless of whether there was another force investigating it. The police report included a car registration number and it would not have been difficult to the [sic] identify Wayne Couzens and where he worked."¹⁴⁸

- 3.64 In Chief Constable Simon Chesterman's opinion:

"The alleged indecent exposure offence committed by Wayne Couzens was a very odd thing to do, especially for a serving police officer. Therefore, if that allegation came across my desk whilst he was working at the CNC [Civil Nuclear Constabulary], I would have suspended him. Given that this was an alleged sexual offence, it would have also been a huge red flag and I would not have recruited anyone with this on their record, nor allow an officer to continue in the CNC."¹⁴⁹

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- 3.65 To fully understand the failure to properly investigate this allegation of criminal behaviour, the Inquiry explored possible explanations for what had resulted in a missed opportunity regarding Couzens’ vetting and related decision-making. Had poor performance or even dishonesty contributed to the failure to progress this investigation and the haste with which it was closed? The Inquiry questioned whether Couzens’ former role as a Kent special constable¹⁵⁰ had in any way influenced the outcome. As referred to in paragraph 3.48, there was evidence of the officer in the case accessing Couzens’ nominal file twice during the investigation, scrutiny of which would have revealed Couzens’ previous role as a special constable. The investigation by the Independent Office for Police Conduct considered whether connections existed between Couzens and the officer in the case. They established that both had worked out of the same Kent police station at one time. However, no evidence of them working together on any investigation or being known to one another was established.¹⁵¹
- 3.66 Also of relevance to the Inquiry was the knowledge that a relative of Couzens was a serving officer with Kent Police in 2015 and was known to the officer in the case as a “casual professional acquaintance”.¹⁵² The Independent Office for Police Conduct explored whether, when the circumstances of the June 2015 offence (including details relating to Couzens) were broadcast over the airwaves, his relative might have heard them. The Independent Office for Police Conduct concluded from the relative’s shift pattern that it appeared the individual was not on duty at the time.¹⁵³ It could not, however, rule out the possibility that a Kent police officer who knew Couzens from his work as a special constable, or in a personal capacity, might have heard the broadcast.¹⁵⁴ Presented with “limited evidence that [the officer in the case] knew or recalled Couzens when dealing with this matter”¹⁵⁵ (the same evidence as was considered by the Independent Office for Police Conduct), the Inquiry found there was no evidence to support any suggestion that the officer in the case closed the case to protect Couzens or the reputation of Kent Police.

The drive-through offences of 2021

- 3.67 Turning to the drive-through offences of 14 and 27 February 2021, reported to the police on 28 February 2021 (offences H and I in Table 1), the Inquiry had similar questions about whether the initial investigation by the Metropolitan Police Service was influenced in any way by Couzens being one of their own serving officers. Checks by the Independent Office for Police Conduct showed that the officer who was initially allocated the role of officer in the case, and who transferred information from the computer aided dispatch report to the Crime Reporting Information System (CRIS), had no known connections with Couzens.¹⁵⁶ Enquiries were also made about the officer who attended the scheduled appointment with the informant and about another officer who was involved in supervising the investigation.¹⁵⁷ The Independent Office for Police Conduct reviewed their training records and career histories, including previous investigations. It found “no evidence to indicate

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they had any association that could have had an impact on their actions and decision making in this case”.¹⁵⁸ Based on the evidence with which it was presented, the Inquiry accepts the finding of the Independent Office for Police Conduct on this issue.

- 3.68 As noted in paragraph 3.11, the offences at the drive-through restaurant were reported on 28 February 2021, by an employee who telephoned the police.¹⁵⁹ As with the 2015 case, the Inquiry listened to the audio recording and was impressed by the informant, who gave a clear account and had anticipated the evidence the police would need, including the registration number of the car and the bank card receipts.¹⁶⁰ The call handler recorded the information on the computer aided dispatch and graded the matter as appropriate to be dealt with by way of an appointment. The first available appointment when a police officer could attend was 3 March 2021.¹⁶¹ Later on 28 February, a police check of the Police National Computer revealed the name of the registered keeper of the vehicle, with an address in Kent. The registered keeper’s name was Wayne Couzens.¹⁶² The records on the Police National Computer did not reveal that Couzens was a police officer as it does not hold that information.
- 3.69 On 1 March 2021, an update on the computer aided dispatch confirmed that a crime report (also known as a CRIS) had been set up and an officer in the case allocated. The officer in the case transferred the information from the computer aided dispatch, including the name of the registered keeper of the car obtained from the Police National Computer, to the crime report.¹⁶³
- 3.70 On 3 March 2021, the officer assigned to the appointment (a different officer from the initial officer in the case) met the informant at the drive-through restaurant for the prearranged appointment.¹⁶⁴ Exactly what was said, and whether the officer later lied about it, was subsequently to become the subject of police misconduct proceedings against the officer.¹⁶⁵ What is clear is that no CCTV coverage of the car registered to Couzens was seized, although the appointment took place in the office where the CCTV system was located and the informant had relied upon the CCTV footage to obtain the registration number of the relevant car.¹⁶⁶
- 3.71 When asked by the Independent Office for Police Conduct why the CCTV evidence was not seized, the officer relied on being told “that the drive through CCTV auto deletes once an order has been obtained [and] hence there was no CCTV of the offender or the offence”.¹⁶⁷ According to the evidence, this was untrue because the officer was shown the relevant footage during the appointment at the restaurant.¹⁶⁸ The evidence was accepted by the Misconduct Panel at the officer’s subsequent misconduct hearing. The Panel found it “inconceivable” that the informant would not

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have shown the officer the relevant footage.¹⁶⁹ The Inquiry concludes it must have been available at the time of the appointment on 3 March 2021 and notes that it was relied upon by the Major Investigation Team when they took over the case following the arrest of Couzens for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard.¹⁷⁰

- 3.72 None of the witnesses to the indecent exposure offences could be spoken to during the appointment as none was working at that time.¹⁷¹ The informant was, however, able to pass to the officer the witnesses' handwritten notes describing the suspect and other information, as well as two receipts that included the last four digits from the same bank card, registered to Wayne Couzens.¹⁷² Although the appointment had been allocated a two-hour slot, the informant estimated the officer was only there for approximately 15–20 minutes.¹⁷³
- 3.73 Back at the police station, the same officer who had attended the appointment completed checks on the vehicle registration number using the Police National Computer, confirming that Wayne Couzens was the registered keeper.¹⁷⁴ The same officer did not have access to the Police National Database, which ruled out making enquiries across police borders.¹⁷⁵ Information, including Couzens' name and address, was entered on the suspect screen by the officer, together with the finding that the only other person insured to drive the vehicle was female. The names of staff members who had witnessed the incidents were also listed, though there was no reference to their handwritten notes.¹⁷⁶ Nor was there a record of the restaurant receipts or any mention of CCTV entered on the system. The officer noted that further investigation was required and that the suspect would need to be arrested for "indecent exposure".¹⁷⁷ These were the officer's last entries on the crime report, although on 4 March 2021 the same officer was formally assigned the role of officer in the case.¹⁷⁸
- 3.74 By 10 March 2021, the day on which the vehicle and registered keeper were identified as being of interest in the investigation into the disappearance of Sarah Everard, the investigation had progressed no further with no other actions or enquiries recorded.¹⁷⁹ The explanation given by the officer in the case to the Independent Office for Police Conduct for the lack of any progress was the belief that the My Investigation Support Team would take forward the investigation.¹⁸⁰ The Inquiry explored whether this was a rational or reasonable belief.
- 3.75 The Independent Office for Police Conduct, as part of its investigation into this case, obtained evidence from an experienced police officer who described what was expected of an officer when speaking to a victim about a case and what the minimum standards of an investigation would look like.¹⁸¹ The officer explained that,

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regardless of how the case was reported to the police, it would require an officer to attend and speak to the victim.¹⁸² Where the suspect was not on the scene “and the crime did not fall under a certain crime type”, a scheduled appointment would be appropriate.¹⁸³ To comply with Home Office crime recording, sometimes a skeleton crime report is created so that information is recorded within the required 24 hours, which happened in this case.¹⁸⁴ Due to the lack of information on the skeleton report, the officer attending the appointment, who should allocate themselves as officer in the case, would be starting “from scratch”.¹⁸⁵ Appointments are usually scheduled for one hour, or two hours if the incident is “domestic”.¹⁸⁶ The officer should ask questions regarding witnesses and CCTV. They might take a statement from a victim or formally identify the crime scene.¹⁸⁷ It is their responsibility to identify a suspect and ensure that appropriate action is taken.¹⁸⁸ It is not usual to check whether any suspect is a serving police officer.¹⁸⁹

- 3.76 The same experienced officer went on to address the difference between a “person of interest” and a “suspect”, explaining that it is a matter of judgement for the officer in the case whether to contact them and invite them for an interview under caution or to arrange for them to be arrested. Every case is different and any investigation needs to be proportionate.¹⁹⁰ They confirmed the recent introduction of the My Investigation Support Team and explained that the Team had responsibility for investigating most volume crime. This meant that most emergency response officers were not responsible for investigating their own cases.¹⁹¹
- 3.77 Another experienced supervising officer explained to the Independent Office for Police Conduct what would justify circulating a person as being wanted on the Police National Computer.¹⁹² Circulating someone as wanted notifies officers nationally that a person needs to be arrested in relation to an offence.¹⁹³ The associated risk and known facts would be part of the consideration and there would need to be sufficient evidence and information to give officers a power of arrest.¹⁹⁴ The greater the perceived risk, the more important it would be to locate the suspect. In this officer’s opinion, the level of risk in the drive-through cases would have been assessed as low.¹⁹⁵
- 3.78 Another supervising officer told the Independent Office for Police Conduct that they had not received specific training on how to investigate or supervise an indecent exposure investigation, and suggested that this type of case was not common.¹⁹⁶ Similarly, the officer in the case had received no specific training about the offence

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of indecent exposure but had previously and infrequently dealt with two or three similar offences¹⁹⁷ and had received training in sexual offences and general investigation.¹⁹⁸

- 3.79 The Independent Office for Police Conduct investigation into the handling of the drive-through offences took account of relevant legislation and policies and guidance. These included police officers' power of arrest under Section 24 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984,¹⁹⁹ national guidance on the principles for the grading of calls by police call handlers,²⁰⁰ the Metropolitan Police Service's policy on crime recording,²⁰¹ the Metropolitan Police Service's policy for first responders to rape and serious sexual assault,²⁰² and the Metropolitan Police Service's general investigation policy.²⁰³ The last document emphasises the importance, in relation to a crime scene, of seizing CCTV and updating the crime report (known as the CRIS), including with a summary of what appears on the recording. It also guides the investigator to consider tasking the ANPR Team to check a vehicle's movements. Statements from victims and witnesses should be taken as soon as practicable.²⁰⁴ In the drive-through restaurant case, none of these actions was carried out.
- 3.80 The Independent Office for Police Conduct report quotes the College of Policing guidance on the investigation process. Under the section on initial investigation, the policy states:
- “Investigations should be conducted thoroughly, and investigators should not assume that a crime cannot be solved or that someone else will carry out an investigation at a later stage.”²⁰⁵
- 3.81 Although the officer in the case expected the My Investigation Support Team to carry out the investigation,²⁰⁶ it was unclear, as the Independent Office for Police Conduct uncovered, exactly how the My Investigation Support Team was to be accessed. There was also confusion about its role, possibly due to the Team having only recently been introduced.²⁰⁷ This was an unfortunate situation, later acknowledged by the Misconduct Panel responsible for conducting the officer's misconduct hearing.²⁰⁸ The confusion and lack of clarity in relation to accessing the My Investigation Support Team are also noted by this Inquiry.
- 3.82 As with the 2015 case, the Independent Office for Police Conduct concluded that the call handler's decision to grade the call as suitable for an appointment appeared appropriate against the National Contact Management Guidance and Principles.²⁰⁹ Unlike the 2015 case, which was reported as the offender drove away from the

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scene, the drive-through offences were not in progress at the time of reporting. Nor was there any suggestion that the perpetrator was in the area at the time. There were, however, two offences that could be considered a series and relied upon to justify an increased level of seriousness, but this is not a factor that is included in the guidance.²¹⁰ Furthermore, arranging the scheduled appointment for 3 March 2021 meant that the Metropolitan Police Service did not meet the 48-hour response time set out in the National Contact Management Guidance and Principles and the Metropolitan Police Appointments Protocol.²¹¹ However, the Protocol also stated: “For non-domestic appointments, as long as there is no risk, and the victim agrees, the appointment can be made anytime within the next 7 days.”²¹² The Independent Office for Police Conduct’s final report states that the informant was contacted on 28 February 2021 – the same day the report was made – and was notified that the first available appointment for police to attend was on 3 March. That appointment was agreed with the informant.²¹³

Conclusion 8

The officer in the case for the 2021 drive-through indecent exposure offences also placed too little emphasis on the quality of the information provided by the informant.

- 3.83 **Once again, the Inquiry considers that too little emphasis was placed on the quality of the information provided by the informant. The fact that they provided a registration number for the offender’s vehicle and two bank card receipts²¹⁴ was given little weight by the officer in the case when assessing the evidence.** Both the officer in the case and one of the experienced officers whose opinion on the case was sought by the Independent Office for Police Conduct commented that, merely because Wayne Couzens was the registered keeper of the vehicle, it did not mean he was necessarily the driver at the time.²¹⁵ Additionally, the officer in the case suggested that the bank card used by the offender could have been stolen.²¹⁶

Conclusion 9

Rather than providing an excuse for inaction, unanswered questions about a case should spur an investigator to look for further evidence to prove the matter either way.

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- 3.84 **While both these scenarios are possible, the Inquiry considers there is no reason to assume they are true or that the case cannot be solved. Rather than providing an excuse for inaction, such considerations should spur an investigator into action, looking for further evidence to prove the matter either way, a response not demonstrated by the officer in the case.** No checks on the bank card were instigated²¹⁷ and no arrangements for witnesses to provide statements were set in motion.²¹⁸ Nor were there any efforts made to establish whether the registered keeper matched the description provided by the witnesses that he was white and middle-aged with grey stubble.²¹⁹
- 3.85 According to the experienced officers who gave evidence to the Independent Office for Police Conduct, there would have been insufficient evidence to justify Couzens being circulated as wanted on the Police National Computer following the appointment attended by the officer in the case and the informant. In their view, a case file containing items such as statements, CCTV and an interview plan was required to justify wider circulation and support a power of arrest.²²⁰ Regrettably no case file containing the items was even in the pipeline, let alone available, because of the failure to progress the investigation in a timely and effective way.

Conclusion 10

The investigation of the 2021 drive-through offences was poor and slow, demonstrating a complete lack of investigative curiosity.

- 3.86 **As with the 2015 case, the Inquiry is concerned by the quality of the investigation of the drive-through offences in 2021. In its opinion this investigation was poor and slow and the assumption that someone else would investigate it led to a significant blockage. The Inquiry notes a complete lack of investigative curiosity and a failure to fully explore all the circumstances.**

Handling of police misconduct related to indecent exposure investigations

- 3.87 To identify and understand how potential risks and red flags regarding Couzens' vetting and related decision-making were allowed to happen, the Inquiry also considered the findings of the investigations conducted by the Independent Office for Police Conduct into alleged relevant misconduct by the police officers involved. On 27 April 2023, the officer responsible for closing the 2015 crime report faced disciplinary action. That officer was a police sergeant and the action taken was a misconduct meeting.²²¹ Of the two types of misconduct proceedings, a misconduct meeting is appropriate "where there is a case to answer in respect of misconduct and where the maximum outcome would be a final written warning".²²² The alternative, a misconduct hearing, is appropriate where "there is a case

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to answer in respect of gross misconduct”,²²³ as well as when the officer has an outstanding outcome such as a written warning following earlier proceedings. The maximum outcome available at a misconduct hearing is dismissal without notice.²²⁴

- 3.88 Following its investigation, the Independent Office for Police Conduct carried out an initial severity assessment of the case and determined that there was a case to answer for misconduct that was so serious as to justify disciplinary action (but not dismissal) and that a misconduct meeting was appropriate.²²⁵ The basis for this decision was that, having regard to the College of Policing guidance on outcomes in police misconduct proceedings, there was no evidence the officer had acted dishonestly, but significant harm had potentially been caused because the crime was not linked to Couzens and so not discoverable during his vetting process when he joined the Metropolitan Police Service. Beyond that, the Independent Office for Police Conduct determined that there were no particular aggravating features (as identified in the guidance) that would elevate the matter to warrant dismissal.²²⁶
- 3.89 This misconduct meeting was held by Kent Police.²²⁷ As is standard practice, it was held in private and dealt with by a single officer of the rank of chief inspector.²²⁸ It was alleged that, by failing to properly investigate the 2015 report, the officer in the case had breached the standards of professional behaviour in relation to duties and responsibilities²²⁹ (see Chapter 7 for details of the Code of Ethics and related standards). Allegations against the officer detailed a number of failings. These were:
- recording the crime as not detectable, that the suspect had not been identified and there were no other reasonable lines of enquiry;²³⁰
 - not establishing whether there were other witnesses;²³¹
 - not conducting other lines of enquiry such as CCTV;²³²
 - not identifying Couzens as a suspect despite full details of the vehicle matching police records;
 - not contacting the registered keeper to make enquiries and obtain further details such as a description and date of birth – this resulted in not recording Couzens as a person linked to the matter and no nominal record being created on the Police National Database;²³³
 - not considering if it was appropriate to interview Couzens about the offence or to take other action to establish whether he was a suspect or not;²³⁴

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- assessing the informant as unreliable due to information on the crime report taken from a conversation between another officer and individuals at the informant's accommodation, and making no effort to confirm comments made about the informant;²³⁵ and
- stating on the crime report that the informant may not have provided "correct facts" despite there being supporting evidence.²³⁶

3.90 Asked if they accepted that their performance had amounted to misconduct, the police sergeant denied that it had.²³⁷

3.91 Having considered the case against the sergeant, the chief inspector reached the finding "Misconduct not proven".²³⁸ This, the chief inspector explained, "means underperformance or conduct not amounting to misconduct or gross misconduct, which falls short of the expectations of the public and the police service as set out in the 'Code of Ethics' issued by the College of Policing under section 39A of the Police Act 1996 (codes of practice for chief officers)". In determining this, the chief inspector noted the following:

- the subject officer may have been required to act outside their level of experience and/or without appropriate training or supervision
- the subject officer acted in good faith (i.e. a genuine belief that there was a legitimate purpose but got things wrong).²³⁹

3.92 The appropriate outcome determined by the chief inspector was "Practice Requiring Improvement (Reflective Practice Review Process)".²⁴⁰

3.93 In reaching this decision, the chief inspector noted "the public interest in this case and the subsequent and tragic outcome".²⁴¹ The chief inspector took care not to "confuse the tragic consequences with what the officer knew or could reasonably have known, at the time of their decision".²⁴² The chief inspector declared that "[t]he question of proportionality will be a factor",²⁴³ referencing Home Office guidance on professional standards, performance and integrity in policing which stated:

"The question of proportionality may also be a factor in considering whether it is in the public interest that misconduct (rather than gross misconduct) cases are referred to proceedings. Did the alleged misconduct for which there is a case to answer happen several years ago, for example? So, for example, if the alleged misconduct happened some time ago and the outcome would have been a written warning that would by now have expired, this might be grounds not to proceed with a misconduct meeting."²⁴⁴

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- 3.94 The Inquiry interprets this extract from the guidance to mean that lapse of time is relevant to whether or not it is in the public interest to hold misconduct proceedings, rather than to mean that it should be taken into account when determining the outcome of any such proceedings. In this case the conduct only came to light in 2021, almost six years after the event, with no opportunity for proceedings to take place earlier.
- 3.95 Giving due regard to College of Policing guidance on outcomes in police misconduct proceedings, the chief inspector noted that they had “considered the standards of the time rather than current attitudes and standards”, and there had been “no performance matters relevant to the subject officer since 2015 when the incident occurred”.²⁴⁵ The chief inspector stated:
- “Since 2015 there is a greater focus on Sexual Offences, Violence against Women and Girls and Domestic Abuse. This is apparent with changes in legislation, policies and priorities for police forces”.²⁴⁶
- 3.96 The suggestion that sexual offences and violence against women and girls have only recently been the subject of “greater focus” by police forces is disputed by the Inquiry. The spotlight on sexual offences goes back to at least 2002 and a joint thematic inspection into rape offences by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Her Majesty’s Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate.²⁴⁷ This resulted in a cross-government Rape Action Plan in July 2002,²⁴⁸ followed by a stocktake to assess progress in implementation in 2005.²⁴⁹ Further joint inspections by the Inspectorates for Constabulary and the Crown Prosecution Service have followed at regular intervals.²⁵⁰ The first cross-government action plan – *Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls* – was published in March 2011.²⁵¹ Furthermore, the Sexual Offences Act 2003, which came into effect in 2004, changed the status of indecent exposure from a public nuisance offence to a sexual offence.
- 3.97 Unlike the Kent Police sergeant dealt with at a private misconduct meeting for the 2015 allegation, the Metropolitan Police Service police constable was the subject of a public misconduct hearing.²⁵² The constable faced two charges. The first charge involved “Failings in duties and responsibilities in relation to the initial investigation”, while the second charge was of “Failings in honesty and integrity in relation to your response to the notice of allegations”.²⁵³
- 3.98 While the two cases were brought by two different police forces, Kent Police and the Metropolitan Police Service, it appeared to the Inquiry that the main reason for the difference in approach between them was that the constable from the Metropolitan Police Service was accused of a breach of the standard of professional behaviour involving *honesty and integrity*. A breach of this standard is regarded as particularly

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serious given the need for the public to have confidence and trust in the police.²⁵⁴ This applies especially in cases of “operational dishonesty”, for example in connection with the investigation of an alleged offence.²⁵⁵ This alleged breach, however, did not occur in the course of the investigation into Couzens but was made in a response to the Independent Office for Police Conduct when it investigated the constable’s actions in relation to the offences at the drive-through restaurant.²⁵⁶

3.99 The police constable’s misconduct hearing took place over several days.²⁵⁷ In its written Notice of Outcome, the Misconduct Panel, consisting of a legally qualified chair, a senior police officer and an independent member, expressed sympathy to the family of Sarah Everard and recognised “the public interest in this case”.²⁵⁸

3.100 Having heard the evidence, including from the former officer concerned, the Panel was satisfied in the case of the first charge that there had been a breach of the professional standard of behaviour relating to duties and responsibilities, including by:

- failing to take adequate steps to secure relevant CCTV footage;
- failing to investigate whether local CCTV cameras had captured relevant footage;
- failing to record the steps taken in relation to relevant CCTV evidence;
- taking possession of handwritten statements from restaurant employees as well as till receipts but not recording them and retaining them appropriately;
- not taking a statement from the informant; and
- failing to take adequate steps to instigate a registered keeper’s enquiry by officers local to the address of the registered keeper of the vehicle driven by the perpetrator.²⁵⁹

3.101 The Panel rejected the allegation that the former officer had “immediate grounds to either arrest or circulate the suspect as wanted”.²⁶⁰ In conclusion it found the breach of duties and responsibilities amounted to misconduct.²⁶¹

3.102 After considering the second charge, the breach of the professional standard of behaviour relating to honesty and integrity, the Panel had “no hesitation in finding this was a dishonest statement made knowingly and intentionally” by the then officer.²⁶² The Panel found the officer had made a statement to the Independent Office for Police Conduct indicating that no CCTV existed, which was “clearly

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untrue”.²⁶³ In the view of the Panel, a finding of dishonesty against the officer amounted to gross misconduct.²⁶⁴ Had the officer still been serving, this would have justified dismissal without notice.²⁶⁵

- 3.103 **The Inquiry was struck by the similarities in approach between the investigations in relation to the 2015 town centre allegation and the 2021 drive-through offences. Both seemed destined to fail from the start, involving poor recording and decision-making and lacking the positive steps that could potentially have led to the identification of the suspect and detection of the crime. Rather than embarking on a process of detailed, thorough and time-consuming evidence-gathering, the officers displayed apathy and disinterest and found reasons not to pursue the cases. Why this might be is not clear to the Inquiry but inadequate supervision, resource issues, and the absence of clear policies and guidance may be factors. Inadequate training may also be an issue.²⁶⁶ The question of whether a culture of apathy exists more widely across police forces is one the Inquiry intends to return to in Part 2.**
- 3.104 The Inquiry considered whether the way in which the drive-through case was handled might have affected Couzens’ subsequent criminal actions. Could his crimes against Sarah Everard have been disrupted or even prevented by a prompt resolution of this investigation? There were just three days between the report of the drive-through offences on 28 February 2021 and Sarah’s abduction on 3 March. The officer’s appointment with the informant at the drive-through restaurant took place on the same day as the abduction.²⁶⁷
- 3.105 As already described in paragraph 3.85, experienced officers gave evidence in the course of the Independent Office for Police Conduct investigation that there was insufficient evidence to justify circulating Couzens as wanted on the Police National Computer at the time. It was also accepted by the Misconduct Panel that the officer in the case had no immediate grounds to arrest or circulate the suspect as wanted.

Conclusion 11

It is unlikely that Wayne Couzens’ crimes against Sarah Everard could have been disrupted following the report of the drive-through offences on 28 February 2021.

- 3.106 In the view of this Inquiry, the most appropriate action would have been a registered keeper check at Couzens’ recorded address to find out whether he was still in possession of the car and whether he matched the witnesses’ description of him. This would have required the officer in the case to drive to Kent to carry out the check. This would have taken several hours and involved crossing force borders. Alternatively, Kent Police could have been asked to undertake the check and report back to the Metropolitan Police Service. While the first option seems neither realistic

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nor proportionate, it is simply not possible to say how quickly Kent Police would have responded had such a request been made. Nor can it be known, even if a check had been made without delay, whether Couzens would have been at home, thereby enabling the check to be carried out. **The Inquiry concludes that, in reality, it is unlikely that Couzens' crimes against Sarah Everard could have been disrupted at such a late stage.**

- 3.107 **If, on the other hand, the 2015 case had been more thoroughly investigated, there is a significant likelihood that Couzens could have been identified as a sex offender at a time when he was a serving officer in the Civil Nuclear Constabulary. This could potentially have impacted on his career, including his transfer to the Metropolitan Police Service, and have increased the likelihood of his being identified in relation to further offending. This Inquiry concludes that this offence was a red flag and a significant missed opportunity.**

The offence of 13 November 2020

- 3.108 On 6 March 2023, Couzens was sentenced following his earlier guilty plea to exposing his genitals to a lone female cyclist on 13 November 2020 with intent to cause alarm and distress. The sentence imposed was one of 19 months' imprisonment.²⁶⁸ The incident occurred on a narrow country lane in Kent when the cyclist was alone.²⁶⁹ There was a black car parked nearby and afterwards the complainant spoke to two walkers, one of whom was a female police officer.²⁷⁰
- 3.109 This section of the Report describes the criminal investigation by Kent Police and the handling of a subsequent complaint to the Independent Office for Police Conduct submitted by the victim (also referred to as the complainant) in the case.
- 3.110 At 15:23 on 13 November 2020 (about four months before Sarah Everard's murder), a "Report threats, verbal abuse or assault" form²⁷¹ was sent to Kent Police via the Single Online Home reporting service.²⁷² It contained the following report of a crime:
- "I was cycling along [location]. I saw a man standing on the bank on the left-hand side of the road. He was looking directly at me as I cycled towards him. He was completely naked and was masturbating. There were no clothes on the ground near him. I cycled past and there was a car parked in the lay-by. There was no one in the car. It was a black car (possible number plate NX 12)."²⁷³
- 3.111 In answer to the form's question "Do you know this person?", the female complainant replied, "No but I can describe them." In reply to further questions, she stated that his approximate age was 50, he was a white, "[m]iddle aged man, bald (shaved head), no beard, slight paunch".²⁷⁴

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3.112 According to a crime report print seen by the Inquiry, the case was disposed of (finalised) by Kent Police one day after it was reported in the following terms:

“Type 18 – Investigation Complete; No suspect Identified. Crime Investigated As Far As Reasonably Possible – Case Closed Pending Further Investigative Opportunities Becoming Available.”²⁷⁵

3.113 On 11 March 2021, the complainant made a further online report to Kent Police. She stated:

“I reported an incident in November 2020 to my local police station (reference [...]). The local officer I spoke to was PC [name of officer]. The incident was indecent exposure. There should be a record of the details I gave at the time. It took place on a patch of woodland just outside [location]. The man who exposed himself looks very much like the man arrested in connection with the disappearance of Sarah Everard.”²⁷⁶

3.114 In response, Kent Police reopened the investigation on 12 March 2021.²⁷⁷

3.115 Police records for 12 March 2021 confirm that, following consultation with their “conduit” in the Metropolitan Police Service, Kent Police:

“[...] agreed to reopen this matter and re-visit the victim to obtain a statement ref the incident and the subsequent identification from the media ref couzens [sic].”²⁷⁸

It is also recorded that “[t]here is talk in the report of a partial index number which will also be relevance [sic] for exploration please”.²⁷⁹

3.116 The same crime report recounts that, by 13:35 on 12 March 2021, following an earlier voicemail message asking the complainant to contact the police, statements from the complainant and her partner had been obtained over the telephone. Arrangements were made for another officer to attend and get the statements signed. By 15:36, this task was complete.²⁸⁰

3.117 An update to the report on 18 March 2021 notes information from the Metropolitan Police Service to the effect that Couzens could not be linked to the offence in Kent because he was on duty as a Metropolitan Police Service officer at the relevant time.²⁸¹ This information had been conveyed to the complainant, who “was understanding of this and thanked the police”.²⁸² On 19 March, the case was closed for a second time, Couzens having been “eliminated from this enquiry”.²⁸³

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3.118 On 25 May 2021, Kent Police re-engaged with the complainant requesting the timing of the incident on 13 November 2020. The complainant provided accurate timings for her movements relying on her phone records and other personal digital devices, culminating in her producing a statement²⁸⁴ and exhibits to this effect by 16 June 2021.²⁸⁵ An entry on the crime report dated 17 February 2022 confirmed that Kent Police had been informed Couzens was being treated as a suspect for this offence by the Metropolitan Police Service.²⁸⁶

3.119 Meanwhile, on 1 October 2021, the complainant submitted an online complaint form to the Independent Office for Police Conduct.²⁸⁷ She described her complaint in the following terms:

“The initial investigation of the crime was not sufficiently thorough. I stated that I could identify the offender when I spoke to PC [officer’s name]. The indecent exposure was very serious and should have been investigated more thoroughly. I was not given an opportunity to provide a statement.”²⁸⁸

3.120 When asked what she would like to happen, she noted among other outcomes that she wanted the police “to learn from the incident” and “to apologise/acknowledge something went wrong”.²⁸⁹

3.121 When asked whether she had further information, she explained:

“One of the witnesses I spoke to in the immediate aftermath told me she was a police officer. I told PC [name of officer who telephoned her following her initial report] that I would be able to identify this woman but, again, I was not offered the opportunity to do this. The case was closed with no opportunity for me to provide a statement.”²⁹⁰

3.122 On 17 December 2021, Kent Police Professional Standards Department referred the case to the Independent Office for Police Conduct.²⁹¹ On 22 December 2021, the Independent Office for Police Conduct wrote to the Head of Kent Police Professional Standards Department informing them of its decision that there should be a local investigation into the matter by Kent Police.²⁹² In reaching a decision that an independent investigation by the Independent Office for Police Conduct itself was unwarranted, the following points were relied upon:

- The complainant did not appear to have provided a statement following her initial report, though one was taken when her case was reopened.
- There was “no reference to another witness being approached or spoken to by the police, although it is unclear whether [the complainant] made the police aware of another witness at the time”.

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- Although the complainant believed the offender to be Couzens, “there is no evidence to support this”.
- There was “little evidence to support [the complainant’s] allegations, particularly in respect to the witness she refers to”.
- “An investigation is therefore necessary to assess whether there is any veracity to the allegations made by [the complainant].”²⁹³

3.123 After learning that Couzens was now considered a suspect by the Metropolitan Police Service,²⁹⁴ Kent Police Professional Standards Department again referred the case to the Independent Office for Police Conduct. This referral was dated 18 February 2022.²⁹⁵ A reply addressed to the Head of Kent Police Professional Standards Department was dated 23 February 2022 and acknowledged that Couzens “is being treated as a suspect for the alleged offence and will be interviewed about the incident in due course”.²⁹⁶ It also confirmed the original decision to hold a local rather than an Independent Office for Police Conduct investigation into the victim’s complaint. One reason for this decision was that “the complaint investigation is well advanced and due to be finalised shortly, and there remains a lack of supporting evidence”.²⁹⁷

3.124 An investigation into the victim’s formal complaint was carried out by a Kent officer of inspector rank who considered four complaints against Kent Police. The complaints were as follows:

- Complaint 1: “The complainant alleges that Kent Police failed to investigate their report of indecent exposure which resulted in the person concerned being able to continue to commit crime.”
- Complaint 2: “The complainant states Kent Police should have taken a statement from her regarding the indecent exposure she witnessed.”
- Complaint 3: “The complainant states she informed a female off-duty officer of the indecent exposure immediately after witnessing it and no officer has spoken to her to see if she acquired the full registration of the vehicle.”
- Complaint 4: “The complainant alleges that Kent Police failed to research the part registration number she supplied when reporting the crime.”²⁹⁸

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3.125 To assist in the decision-making, the investigating inspector obtained a written rationale from the “subject officer”, an acting sergeant, who had filed the crime report without allocating it for further enquiries on 14 November 2020.²⁹⁹ The rationale of the subject officer can be summarised as follows:

- After receiving the online report of a crime, the subject officer called the victim who had confirmed she:
 - was “not able to provide further description/information to assist in identifying the suspect”,³⁰⁰
 - had not seen the suspect get into or out of the car parked nearby and could provide no further description of the vehicle;³⁰¹ and
 - was not certain of the partial registration number she had given the police.³⁰²
- The subject officer confirmed the absence of CCTV in the incident location,³⁰³ a narrow country lane, and:
 - had not been informed of any further witnesses;³⁰⁴ and
 - had considered a check of the partial registration number on the Police National Computer but: (i) had no available access; and (ii) considered there were “too many variables for a search of this type of VODS [vehicle online descriptive searching] to be effective”.³⁰⁵
- ANPR was not carried out due to the “lack of any confirmed details” and the ease of “avoiding any ANPR cameras in the area”.³⁰⁶

3.126 The subject officer’s account explained that, based on the lack of available information, they made the decision to file the report, a decision they had discussed with the victim “whilst on the phone”. The victim had “understood the evidential difficulties”.³⁰⁷

3.127 The investigating inspector’s conclusion in relation to each of the four complaints was “that on the balance of probabilities the service provided was acceptable”.³⁰⁸ The inspector accepted the decision-making process and rationale of the subject officer.³⁰⁹

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- 3.128 In respect of complaint 1, the investigating inspector stated that the subject officer “reviewed the available evidence at the time”.³¹⁰ Next, the inspector referred to the victim’s description of the offender as “good”, commenting that “being strawberry blonde and presumably left-handed is particularly unusual”.³¹¹ In fact this detailed description of the offender was only included in a statement that was obtained from the victim on 12 March 2021,³¹² four months after the subject officer had finalised the case based only on the evidence contained in the online report form.
- 3.129 In relation to complaint 2, the investigating inspector concluded that there was no obligation to have taken a statement when the case was reported online on 13 November 2020 because there was no identified suspect.³¹³
- 3.130 In relation to complaint 3, the investigating inspector commented that the victim had not referred to having spoken to a woman who identified herself as a police officer immediately after the incident. This was challenged by the victim, who said she had informed the police constable who telephoned her of this potential witness. After “hypothesis[ing]”³¹⁴ over what in the inspector’s opinion the female officer/potential witness would have done had she encountered the suspect, the investigating inspector concluded that she had not located the suspect or identified the car. The inspector was unable to determine whether or not the victim had informed the subject officer of the potential witness to whom she said she had spoken.³¹⁵
- 3.131 In relation to complaint 4, the subject officer had conducted no research into the partial registration number provided by the victim.³¹⁶ The investigating inspector’s report noted, in relation to the partial registration number:
- “A VODS search [vehicle online descriptive searching] could have been conducted but do not believe it was proportionate in these circumstances as there was no evidence linking the male to the vehicle considering the potential for a number of vehicles to be identified and nothing to indicate the driver of the vehicle had registered it locally.”³¹⁷
- 3.132 The Inquiry heard from the complainant about her experience of Kent Police in response to both her initial online report and her complaint. She told the Inquiry that, after sending the online report, she received a telephone call from a police constable from Kent Police whose name she wrote down. The name is different from that of the subject officer, a police sergeant, who was investigated.³¹⁸
- 3.133 Referring to the telephone call she received, the complainant said that the caller had informed her that she had not provided sufficient detail to enable the suspect or the vehicle to be identified. She told the Inquiry:

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“I found this distressing and emphasised to PC [officer’s name] that I would be able to recognise the perpetrator again as I had got a good look at him. Despite this, he did not proceed to ask me any further questions or prompt me as to what further information was required, nor was I asked to provide a witness statement. I also believe that no attempts were made to identify the police officer that I had spoken to immediately after the incident, nor were any investigations made into whether similar offences had been committed in the area.”³¹⁹

- 3.134 Commenting on how she had been treated during the call, the complainant said: “PC [officer’s name] came across as very casual over the phone. I felt like my report was an inconvenience to him and was not taken seriously as it was just a report of indecent exposure.”³²⁰
- 3.135 It was only after she reported Couzens as the perpetrator in her case that the complainant felt she was “taken seriously”³²¹ and given the opportunity to provide a statement. She described the officer who visited her at home to take the statement as “thorough and professional” and “the first police officer that I had dealt with who discussed the possibility that indecent exposure was a progressive crime”.³²²
- 3.136 Later in this chapter, the Inquiry considers how indecent exposure as a crime is treated by society and the police, and the lack of seriousness that is often attached to it. In the view of the Inquiry this case is a typical example. Being confronted alone on a country lane by a naked Couzens, masturbating “furiously” in her direction,³²³ was for this complainant “an act of aggression”³²⁴ and one that made her “very afraid”.³²⁵ When she completed the online reporting form, she should not have been expected to include every detail of the encounter, yet this it would seem is what Kent Police expected her to do. Rather than receiving a home visit from a sympathetic and (had she been given the choice) female officer,³²⁶ to talk through the incident and obtain a full account, she was simply informed at the earliest opportunity that she had not provided sufficient detail and the case was to be finalised without any further investigation.³²⁷
- 3.137 Faced with the realisation that opportunities to identify Couzens were not taken and the same offender had gone on to abduct, rape and murder a young woman less than four months later, the complainant declared: “The horror of what happened will remain with me for the rest of my life.”³²⁸
- 3.138 Even when the complainant challenged the way her case was handled by bravely filing a complaint, she was presented with a mystery over which officer from Kent Police she had spoken to. Despite the complainant having noted down the name of the caller at the time of the call,³²⁹ the investigating inspector was adamant the

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individual concerned had never spoken to her.³³⁰ She felt “powerless” and disbelieved by the investigating inspector³³¹ and conveyed her concerns to the Independent Office for Police Conduct. Under paragraph 16, Schedule 3 of the Police Reform Act 2002, the Independent Office for Police Conduct has no power to appoint or direct a change of local investigator, though they could and did offer a right of review at the end of the local investigation against its findings and outcome.³³² This did not alleviate her concerns.³³³

3.139 Nor was the complainant’s confidence in Kent Police increased when, on 21 January 2022, she received an email from the inspector responsible for investigating her complaint, insisting that “Wayne Couzens was not the person you witnessed”.³³⁴ This contradicted information previously provided to the complainant by a Metropolitan Police Service officer informing her that Couzens was a suspect in her case.³³⁵

3.140 Eventually, as a result of her involvement with the Metropolitan Police Service in connection with the prosecution of Couzens, the complainant felt her position improved. She told the Inquiry:

“During my engagement with the [Metropolitan Police Service], I felt like I was treated as a victim of a crime, which was not my experience in November 2020. Each MPS officer that I dealt with was professional and familiar with the details of my case. In hindsight I feel like I was only taken seriously after I identified Wayne Couzens as the perpetrator, following the murder of Sarah Everard.”³³⁶

3.141 As previously stated, this is the third of three investigations that the Inquiry examined involving allegations relating to Couzens indecently exposing himself. One way in which it differs from the other two is in the method of reporting. Whereas the 2015 and 2021 cases were the subject of 999 calls, this offence was reported via an online form. As a result, no computer aided dispatch form was created, meaning the report was not viewed by the Intelligence Department or the Community Safety Unit.³³⁷ This omission was identified as a “Learning detail” by the investigating inspector, who recommended that online reports of indecent exposure should be shared with other police departments “to safeguard against similar incidents not being linked in the future”.³³⁸ The Inquiry understands that, following a review by Kent Police into the response to indecent exposure allegations in January 2022, a process change was introduced. Regardless of how an incident is reported, it should now be reviewed by the Forces Analytical Team to identify and respond to potential repeat or patterns of offending.³³⁹

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- 3.142 From an investigative perspective, the 2020 case involving a cyclist was more complex than the other two, with no immediate direct link to a specific car registered to Wayne Couzens³⁴⁰ as there had been in the 2015 and 2021 cases, or till receipts as there were in the 2021 offences. This does not, however, excuse the failure to investigate any potential lines of enquiry, including taking a detailed witness statement, attempting to identify the car and its keeper, and tracing the female police officer to whom the complainant spoke immediately after the incident.

Conclusion 12

The three lethargic and inadequate investigations into the allegations of indecent exposure against Wayne Couzens suggest the officers in the cases found reasons not to pursue the criminal investigation rather than build a successful case for prosecution.

- 3.143 **All three investigations were of poor quality and inadequate, which is a deeply disheartening and unacceptable state of affairs. In Part 2, the Inquiry will explore whether there exists a deep-rooted culture in policing in which finding reasons not to pursue a crime is preferred over any attempt to build a successful case for prosecution.**
- 3.144 The complainant told the Inquiry that the investigating inspector's final report contained a number of inaccuracies. She did not challenge them due to finding it "so upsetting". She suggested that victims should have the opportunity "to add a paragraph of their own to the report. This would give victims a voice, even if the report does not find in their favour."³⁴¹
- 3.145 When making her complaint to the Independent Office for Police Conduct, the complainant indicated that she was looking for an apology for the way her case was handled.³⁴² She did not receive an apology as a result of her complaint not being upheld. Instead, this victim of Couzens was left with "an overwhelming lack of trust in the police". She told the Inquiry: "If I became a victim of another crime, I am not sure whether I would have the confidence to make a report to the police, especially not to my local police force, Kent."³⁴³
- 3.146 After considering the 2015 alleged driving incident, the 2020 offence targeting a lone female cyclist and the 2021 offences at the drive-through restaurant, the Inquiry was struck by certain similarities in the response by the police in general to these offences. Not only was there a bias towards taking no investigative action, but there was also a marked failure to recognise indecent exposure offences as a potential indicator of future, more serious offending.³⁴⁴

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344 [***] A 2023 study commissioned by the Ministry of Justice found a very strong positive association between offenders with the precursor of indecent exposure and sexual homicide, albeit this finding was based on a small dataset.

3.147 In a letter dated 9 May 2023 to the Chair of this Inquiry, Chief Constable Andy Marsh, Chief Executive Officer of the College of Policing, said:

“I can confirm that the College will carry out a review into whether policing gives enough emphasis on the potential for exposure offences to be an indicator of future risk of harm. An overseas academic is currently carrying out research in this area and has agreed to share findings with the College. As this research is ongoing, and therefore unpublished, I am unable to share any findings at present.

This is a substantial piece of work which is reliant on international academic research. I envisage that the review will conclude either towards the end of this year or in early 2024.”³⁴⁵

The Inquiry has since been provided with a copy of the academic research in question and intends to return to the question of the review in Part 2.

3.148 The Inquiry also received an assurance, following the conclusion of the misconduct proceedings relating to the officer in the drive-through case, that the Metropolitan Police Service was “taking steps to improve”, which included making the following changes:

- “All investigations into offences of exposure will be led by CID [Criminal Investigation Department] who are specially trained to look into more serious and complex crimes.”
- “We’re increasing capacity in our intelligence teams to identify perpetrators and linked offences, so we can get ahead of the curve and stop offenders in their tracks.”³⁴⁶

Indecent exposure: The law

3.149 The Inquiry observes that there has been, within policing, an apparently widely held perception that indecent exposure is a ‘low-level’ offence. This has been reinforced by the failures to properly investigate allegations involving Couzens. In Part 2, the Inquiry will consider the extent to which practices have changed. One possible explanation for this perception, brought to the attention of the Inquiry by Dr West, is the understanding of experts in the 1960s leading to “a benign and limited view of the potential risk of future sexual violence that the offence of exposure may present”. Dr West provided examples from contemporary literature describing perpetrators as “weak and insecure men” and “shy, timid, passive and self-effacing”. He continued:

“In considering the effects of the act on the victim, those experts referenced Allen (1962) whose (highly questionable) view was that whilst it could frighten children and produce a sexual trauma, the effects on adult women were probably exaggerated.”³⁴⁷

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- 3.150 To satisfy its Terms of Reference and establish the reasons why allegations of criminal behaviour involving Couzens did not affect his vetting and other related decision-making, the Inquiry reviewed the history of the law relating to indecent exposure seeking further explanations for why it is not taken sufficiently seriously.
- 3.151 Most offences involving indecent exposure in England and Wales were prosecuted under Section 4 of the Vagrancy Act 1824 prior to 1 May 2004, when it was repealed by the Sexual Offences Act 2003. To obtain a conviction under the Vagrancy Act, it was necessary to prove that the offender had been:

“[...] wilfully, openly, lewdly, and obscenely exposing his Person in any Street, Road, or public Highway, or in the View thereof, or in any Place of public Resort, with Intent to insult any Female”.³⁴⁸

- 3.152 This type of offence could be committed only by a person exposing his penis towards a female victim. It was a ‘summary-only’ offence, meaning a prosecution could be dealt with only in the magistrates’ court and not in the Crown Court (a higher court), and it carried a six-month time limit within which the necessary steps to commence criminal proceedings had to be instigated. Significantly, this offence had no specific sexual association; rather it occupied a category involving public “nuisance”. Offenders found guilty of an offence under the Vagrancy Act could be categorised as “rogues and vagabonds”.³⁴⁹
- 3.153 An alternative offence, which was also repealed by the Sexual Offences Act 2003, was set out at Section 28 of the Town Police Clauses Act 1847. It could be used to prosecute “every Person who wilfully and indecently exposes his Person”, including where the person exposed to (the victim) was male. This offence, like Section 4 of the Vagrancy Act, was also summary-only and subject to the same conditions as applied to the Vagrancy Act.³⁵⁰
- 3.154 With the aim of better protecting the public from sexual offending, the Sexual Offences Act 2003 radically altered the landscape of sexual offences in England and Wales. At the most serious end of the scale are offences of rape (Section 1) and assault by penetration (Section 2), both of which may be tried only on indictment, which means in the Crown Court, and both of which are subject to a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.³⁵¹
- 3.155 Exposure (Section 66) is the first in a list included in a part of the Act headed “Other offences” and is defined as follows:

“Exposure

(1) A person commits an offence if—

(a) he intentionally exposes his genitals, and

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(b) he intends that someone will see them and be caused alarm or distress.”³⁵²

- 3.156 The offence is not restricted to male offenders and does not specifically require exposure of a penis. It is ‘triable-either-way’, which means a prosecution can be dealt with either on indictment (in the Crown Court) or summarily (in the magistrates’ court). It carries a maximum penalty of two years’ imprisonment following conviction on indictment and six months’ where the case is dealt with summarily. A financial penalty (a fine) may also be imposed.³⁵³
- 3.157 Other offences from this part of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 that have the same maximum penalty include a form of voyeurism, intercourse with an animal and sexual penetration of a corpse. It includes just one offence that carries a lesser sentence, namely sexual activity in a public lavatory, a summary-only offence carrying a maximum penalty of six months’ imprisonment or a fine or both.³⁵⁴
- 3.158 An additional potential outcome following a conviction for an offence of exposure is the notification requirements set out in Part 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003. A convicted offender who meets the necessary requirements must notify the police of information including his (or her) date of birth, national insurance number and address,³⁵⁵ which will be added to what is commonly known as the sex offenders’ register. Thereafter, any relevant changes must also be notified.³⁵⁶ Had Couzens been successfully prosecuted for an offence of exposure at the time the allegations were reported to the police, it is likely he would have had to comply with these provisions if he had been sentenced to a term of imprisonment or made the subject of a community sentence of at least 12 months.³⁵⁷

Indecent exposure: Policy and guidance for police forces

- 3.159 Having explored where on the scale of seriousness indecent exposure is placed in the context of the legal framework, the Inquiry looked for policy and guidance available to police investigators dealing with the offence. The Inquiry’s search revealed that the focus of any such policy and guidance was very much on those offences carrying the heaviest penalties, namely rape and serious sexual offences.³⁵⁸
- 3.160 The Inquiry was provided with guidance on indecent exposure produced by the College of Policing.³⁵⁹ Published in 2016, it was aimed at “learners completing their initial training”.³⁶⁰ Its stated primary source of content was the section on sexual offences in the Authorised Professional Practice on Public Protection and “supporting evidence-based research of ‘what works’ in policing”.³⁶¹ This guidance was subsequently retired and will, the Inquiry understands, be replaced with advice

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from the College of Policing on rape and sexual offences that will help colleagues to “deal effectively with victims of these terrible offences and fulfil their vital roles in the investigation process”.³⁶² The advice will be aimed at various levels of response and investigation. This includes first responders, secondary investigators, supervisors, and managers and leadership.³⁶³ The first suite of advice was published in September 2023 and is aimed at first responders.³⁶⁴ Further parts will follow, including a package of learning for investigators, alongside training for the Crown Prosecution Service.³⁶⁵

3.161 The Inquiry welcomes the intention to update the guidance but remains concerned that the old guidance informed a whole national cohort of officers who are currently responsible for investigating cases of indecent exposure. It is important to note that the 2016 guidance was not in place in 2015 when the first allegation was made to the police about Couzens having indecently exposed himself.

3.162 The old (now obsolete) guidance informed readers that the offence of indecent exposure “is commonly known as ‘flashing’” and set out the definition taken from Section 66 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003.³⁶⁶ It then stated:

“There is no definition of alarm or distress, and therefore these words should be given their ordinary meaning. It is not necessary for anybody to actually see the person’s genitals, or for anyone to be alarmed or distressed. When taking statements from victims it is important that you accurately record exactly how they felt at the time of the exposure and what the alleged suspect actually did.”³⁶⁷

3.163 The now obsolete guidance then provided the following “example of exposure”:

“Derek jumps out from behind a tree and deliberately exposes his genitals to Keith, who is walking past with his dog. Keith does not see Derek’s genitals as he happens to look away at that moment. Derek has committed an offence under Section 66 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003, as he intended Keith to see his genitals and be alarmed (regardless of the fact that Keith did not).”³⁶⁸

Conclusion 13

The term ‘flashing’, used in the now obsolete College of Policing guidance, conveyed nothing of the victim’s experience and may have downplayed the seriousness of the offender’s behaviour.

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Conclusion 14

The example of indecent exposure used in the now obsolete College of Policing guidance is inadequate. This example has informed a whole national cohort of officers who are currently responsible for investigating indecent exposure cases.

- 3.164 The Inquiry questions how the use of the colloquial expression ‘flashing’ might affect investigators trained using this guidance, and whether the slightly sleazy connotations of the term, suggesting a somewhat pathetic offender, possibly a ‘dirty old man’ in a ‘flasher mac’, adequately describe the types of behaviour linked to Couzens. **The Inquiry is concerned that this term conveys nothing of the victim’s experience and may downplay the seriousness of the offender’s behaviour by minimising, or ignoring, the potential sexual element.**
- 3.165 **The Inquiry does not believe that the example of Derek and Keith would have enhanced a trainee investigator’s understanding of the real nature of the offence of indecent exposure, and in fact considers it to be inadequate. Having advised learners of the importance of recording how complainants felt at the time of the indecent exposure,³⁶⁹ the example employed introduced the reader to Keith, who was unaware of Derek’s activities and, as such, would presumably not have felt anything at the time.**
- 3.166 The Inquiry compared the example of Derek and Keith with the circumstances of the nine allegations linked to Couzens (see Table 1 and paragraphs 3.11 to 3.19 for the brief facts of each). In all but one of these incidents, a female complainant described being the target of an intentional act that included overt sexual exhibitionism and intention to shock, frighten and disturb the victim, causing significant distress.³⁷⁰ The Inquiry considers that this type of example would have provided a far more informative case study for trainee investigators than the anodyne example of Derek and Keith. It would also have been helpful if the scenario had provided descriptions of the emotional and physical impact of the offence on complainants. In the next section, this Report addresses the impact of Couzens’ offending on those victims who provided a Victim Personal Statement.

Conclusion 15

The Inquiry is extremely concerned that current national guidance for police forces on investigating sexual offences does not appear to cover indecent exposure, which may support a view that indecent exposure is not a serious offence.

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3.167 Returning to the new guidance, the Inquiry welcomes the focus on victims that runs through the course, including the importance of taking a trauma-informed approach, and the emphasis on professional curiosity when investigating sexual offences. However, the course does not appear to cover any non-contact offences, including indecent exposure,³⁷¹ implying that the new guidance does not apply to such cases. **The Inquiry is extremely concerned about this omission, especially since it is not aware of any other current guidance or training materials that address the specific features of indecent exposure. Nor has the Inquiry seen an updated example of indecent exposure, one that more closely represents the experience of Couzens’ victims, meaning that Derek and Keith may still feature in officers’ memories when responding to present day reports. The Inquiry is also concerned that excluding indecent exposure from guidance that is badged as covering ‘rape and serious sexual offences’ provides support for a view that indecent exposure is not a ‘serious offence’.** This issue was addressed by Operation Soteria Bluestone, in which policing practitioners and leading academics are working together with the aim of “improving outcomes for victims of rape and sexual offences”.³⁷² Its Year 1 report explained: “As a programme, we have adopted the term RAOSO (Rape and Other Sexual Offences) to avoid implying that some offences are more or less serious than others.”³⁷³

How Wayne Couzens’ victims were affected, in their own words

3.168 As stated at the start of this chapter, the Inquiry examined in detail the circumstances leading to missed opportunities affecting vetting and related decision-making regarding Couzens. These included the apparent chasm between the perception of Couzens’ victims of the seriousness and impact of his offending and the police’s low-level response. To ensure that this is understood, the victims’ own views, including in their own words, are expressed in this section.

3.169 Among the rights included in the Victims’ Code is the right to make a Victim Personal Statement.³⁷⁴ This is to provide victims with the opportunity to explain, in their own words, how a crime affected them emotionally, financially or in some other way.³⁷⁵ Victims can express a preference about whether they would like to read their statement aloud in court or have it read on their behalf.³⁷⁶ The statement is considered by the judge or magistrate when determining a defendant’s sentence.³⁷⁷

3.170 Couzens was already serving a whole-life sentence for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard when he was sentenced for three indecent exposure offences on 6 March 2023.³⁷⁸ As a result, his existing whole-life term was not affected by the additional sentence imposed on that date. While confirming this to be the case, the sentencing judge acknowledged the wider significance of the proceedings, explaining:

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“But sentencing also serves as a public recognition of the fact that offences have been committed, to note the impact upon the victim or victims, and, where appropriate, to mark with gratitude their courage and resilience in reporting the offences, giving statements about what happened to them and being prepared to follow through by giving evidence at any trial. Without that persistence and fortitude by members of the public who have been offended against justice could not happen.”³⁷⁹

3.171 The words of Couzens’ victims are extremely powerful and provide some insight into the impact on them of his offending. As one explained, describing his behaviour:

“[...] this was an act of aggression”.³⁸⁰

3.172 The enduring impact of being a victim of Couzens was also described as follows:

“I cannot erase the memory of the violence of the act on that date and I cannot erase the memory of your subsequent crimes of rape and murder. These monstrous acts are now part of my life.”³⁸¹

3.173 Being a victim resulted in increased concerns about personal safety, with a victim needing “to take measures to keep myself safe such as taking public transport home. It should not be for me to have to take measures to keep myself safe. I should not have to be in fear of somebody attacking me and I should feel able to walk home while feeling safe.”³⁸²

3.174 One complainant believed that “males who expose themselves have a tendency to escalate their behaviour”.³⁸³ This had led to a sense of being “in danger [...] which remained until we knew who he was and that he was in custody”.³⁸⁴

3.175 Hearing about the link between her perpetrator and Sarah Everard’s death had led to “survivor’s guilt”. Other effects included a diminished trust in the police.³⁸⁵

3.176 Professor McMillan³⁸⁶ gave her opinion of the impact on complainants of witnessing indecent exposure by Couzens. She said:

“For indecent exposure in particular, victim-survivors report feeling frightened, shocked and vulnerable and that their fear of sexual crime overall is increased. For many it is a very isolating experience as it often happens when they are alone or in public spaces without others around. The reactions detailed in witness statements by those who were working in [the drive-through restaurant] and the [young woman] who was exposed to the mobile phone images, are consistent with what we might expect for those subjected to indecent exposure. These show distress, fear, repulsion, questioning what they saw, looking again to check they were not imagining it, as well as laughter which can be a minimising or deflection

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strategy, or caused by anxiety. The disclosures also describe the response of some colleagues as being dismissive of the experience which is also not uncommon and in line with the view that indecent exposure is often viewed as more of a nuisance than a sexual crime.”³⁸⁷

3.177 A further impact experienced by some victims was the unwanted intrusion in their private lives as a result of being a victim of Couzens.³⁸⁸ The Inquiry heard that, even when such intrusion did not materialise, a victim could feel:

“[...] scared that my identity would be made public”.³⁸⁹

Whether taking the form of people tracking them down in person at home, calling them on their phones or communicating on social media, the contact from individuals, including from journalists, was intrusive and caused unnecessary anxiety and concern. It was clear that this was a serious issue, from victims’ descriptions. They included:

- “I have been harassed at my home address. I have had people calling my personal and work phones. The consequence of this is that I have had to change my social media and disconnect my phone. All I have wanted is to be left alone.”³⁹⁰
- “Eventually I stopped answering the door. I changed my social media accounts to try and make it harder for people to find me because I just wanted for me and my family to be left alone.”³⁹¹

Conclusion 16

It is inappropriate and unethical that any victim of crime should be further victimised by being the recipient of unwanted attention from reporters following court proceedings.

3.178 **The Inquiry is concerned to learn about the unwarranted interference endured by victims of Couzens. It seems wholly inappropriate that any victim of crime should be further victimised by being the recipient of unwanted attention of this sort.** The Inquiry heard evidence which assumed that personal information (including names and workplace information) referred to in court may be used to help in tracking down and making contact with complainants in order to obtain more information about their experiences.³⁹² A witness suggested that “journalists should be sanctioned for improper use of information obtained in court, either by way of fine or excluded from future court proceedings”.³⁹³ Such behaviour seems to the Inquiry unethical and abhorrent as well as contrary to the spirit of the anonymity provisions.

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3.179 Sadly, serious after-effects are not unusual for victims of sexual offending. According to Professor McMillan, they:

“[...] can be considerable and can include physical, mental, social and interpersonal effects which can be experienced immediately or many months or years after the event. Sexual violence increases the chances of depression, anxiety, psychosomatic disorders and suicidal behaviour.”³⁹⁴

3.180 The Inquiry saw evidence of similar outcomes among some victims of Couzens.³⁹⁵ Their bravery in speaking out is recognised and commended.

Conclusion 17

The Inquiry has serious concerns about treating indecent exposure as a low-level offence within policing.

3.181 **Although the Inquiry recognises that indecent exposure is less serious than some other sexual offences, including rape and assault by penetration, it nevertheless has serious concerns about treating it as ‘low level’ within policing.**³⁹⁶ In particular, more evidence is needed about the risk of harm to society when an offender displays sexual exhibitionism by masturbating in a public place. Furthermore, the Inquiry is interested in whether there is a recognised trajectory from indecent exposure to contact offences.

Reporting indecent exposure

3.182 The precise number of indecent exposure cases reported to the police in England and Wales across any calendar year is not published by the Home Office as part of its official statistics. The data that is available covers the financial year, from April to March, and combines indecent exposure and voyeurism in one set of figures. From the year ending March 2013 to the year ending March 2023, the number of recorded cases of indecent exposure and voyeurism nearly doubled, from 6,420 cases in the year ending March 2013 to 12,933 cases in the year ending March 2023.³⁹⁷ This is reflected in the force-specific data where, generally, all forces have seen a steady increase over the past ten years. From the year ending March 2021 to the year ending March 2022, there was a jump of more than 2,000 in the number of reported voyeurism and indecent exposure crimes.³⁹⁸ Although reasons for the significant increase are not known, the Inquiry speculates that the publicity surrounding Couzens’ offending might be a driver. There is evidence that high-profile cases, including Operation Yewtree (involving Jimmy Savile and others), can impact on rates of reporting sexual offences.³⁹⁹

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- 3.183 From the year ending March 2013 to the year ending March 2023, crimes of indecent exposure and voyeurism recorded by Kent Police increased three-fold, from 130 cases in 2013 to 394 in 2023. Voyeurism and indecent exposure as a percentage of the force's total recorded sexual crimes was 8.59 per cent in the year ending March 2016 and fell to 5.94 per cent in the year ending March 2023, which is a larger reduction than the national average (voyeurism and indecent exposure as a percentage of total recorded sexual crimes in England and Wales was 7.77 per cent in the year ending March 2016 and fell to 6.64 per cent in the year ending March 2023). In the same period, crimes of indecent exposure and voyeurism recorded by the Metropolitan Police Service increased by about two-and-a-half times, from 1,126 cases in the year ending March 2013 to 2,705 in the year ending March 2023. Voyeurism and indecent exposure as a percentage of the force's total recorded sexual crimes increased from 9.41 per cent in the year ending March 2016 to 10.89 per cent in the year ending March 2023.⁴⁰⁰
- 3.184 The Office for National Statistics is clear that "sexual offences are often hidden crimes that are not always reported to the police".⁴⁰¹ As a result, sexual offences recorded by the police "do not provide a reliable measure of the trends in these types of crime".⁴⁰² An indication of the scale of crime (including unreported) is provided by the Crime Survey for England and Wales, relying on the responses of members of the public who are invited to report their experiences. The Crime Survey provides reliable estimates of the prevalence of sexual assaults using a consistent methodology that is not affected by changes in recording practices and police activity or by changes in the propensity of victims to report to the police.
- 3.185 According to the Crime Survey for England and Wales, in the year ending March 2022, an estimated 2.3 per cent of adults (3.3 per cent of women and 1.2 per cent of men) aged 16 years and over were victims of sexual assault (including attempts); this equates to an estimated 1.1 million adults (798,000 women and 275,000 men). Unwanted sexual touching was the most common type of sexual assault experienced by adults (an estimated 1.7 per cent of adults aged 16 years and over), with an estimated 0.4 per cent of adults experiencing indecent exposure on one or more occasions, and an estimated 0.6 per cent of adults experiencing rape or assault by penetration.⁴⁰³
- 3.186 As is the case with sexual offences in general, incidents of indecent exposure are often not reported to the police. There are many reasons for this, including shame, embarrassment and fear of not being believed. The 2004 allegation linked to Couzens (offence A in Table 1) was not reported at the time, when the person who was targeted was still in her teens and attending full-time education, characteristics that are likely to have contributed to her being vulnerable, at least by age. Elsewhere in this Report, the Inquiry comments on the understandable reluctance of other young and vulnerable women to report this type of offending to the authorities.
- 3.187 Even when victims make a formal report to the police, they can feel they are not taken seriously, as the following extract from one of the Victim Personal Statements makes clear. The complainant said:

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“Indecent exposure is a sexual offence which should be taken seriously. Currently our society, and some police forces, do not, in my experience, take this crime as seriously as they should.”⁴⁰⁴

Conclusion 18

Reported cases of indecent exposure must be thoroughly and comprehensively investigated. Victims also need to be encouraged to report.

- 3.188 Given that levels of reporting are low and that perpetrators therefore routinely escape any intervention by the criminal justice system, the Inquiry concludes that those cases of indecent exposure that are reported must be thoroughly and comprehensively investigated. Furthermore, victims need to be encouraged to report and to believe they have no reason for shame or embarrassment. These emotions should be left to perpetrators to experience.

Internet purchases and allegations of ‘cyberflashing’

Conclusion 19

The purchases of garments made by Wayne Couzens via an online marketplace were sexually motivated and intended for the purpose of his sexual gratification.

- 3.189 The Inquiry was provided with documentary evidence that, during the period from October to December 2020, Couzens made purchases, via an online marketplace, of women’s clothing including bikinis, shorts and playsuits.⁴⁰⁵ The Inquiry was provided with a list of the purchases, together with a copy of the messages exchanged between the sellers and Couzens. On at least 11 occasions, sellers (addressed by Couzens as female) were requested to “cum” into the items.⁴⁰⁶ The Inquiry understands this to mean that they were to perform a sexual act – to masturbate and climax – while wearing the clothing. Increased sale prices were negotiated to reflect the sellers’ anticipated cooperation.⁴⁰⁷ **In view of the type of garments and the content of the messages, the Inquiry concludes that the purchases were sexually motivated and intended for the purpose of Couzens’ sexual gratification.**
- 3.190 It is alleged that, in early December 2020, Couzens sent an online seller an unsolicited photograph of his erect penis. This, he said, with “Apologies in advance if you’re offended”, was because “Your pics are so hot and you are sooo fit, this is

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what it did, and the reason I will buy more items from you.”⁴⁰⁸ The seller says that she was so shocked that she immediately deleted the photograph. Later, Couzens sent another apology, requested the item being sold and explained it had been “just a typical stupid male reaction, no reasonable excuses”.⁴⁰⁹

- 3.191 When the seller expressed reluctance to send him the item, Couzens informed her he had studied law, accused her of blackmail and set out the legal definition of the relevant criminal offence. The seller noted how swiftly the tone of his messages changed, from “playful, harmless and almost submissive” to “very serious”,⁴¹⁰ making her feel “very panicked”. She explained: “It was the way his tone had switched so quickly in the messages that really concerned me.”⁴¹¹
- 3.192 The Inquiry considers it relevant to note at this point that another woman with whom Couzens had contact also reported having been at the receiving end of a rapid and “unsettling” change in his demeanour. This happened in 2021 when, in a telephone call, Couzens complained about a letter sent by the woman’s employer to his family. The woman told the Inquiry that his voice was “loud” and “designed to be aggressive”. The conversation was “hard going”; she “felt as though [she] was constantly having to repeat [her] point as Mr Couzens was attempting to twist [her] words”. She found it “challenging and was physically shaking”. Then, suddenly and without warning, Couzens became “dead calm and very quiet”. To the woman, it was “almost as if his anger had transferred” from her organisation to another individual. The change was so sudden and so striking that the caller “immediately had concerns for [the individual’s] welfare”.⁴¹²
- 3.193 The alleged sending of the photograph to the online seller was not reported to the police but, if it had been, might have resulted in a prosecution, under the Communications Act 2003 (Section 127), for improper use of a public electronic communications network by sending a message that is grossly offensive.⁴¹³ This offence is commonly known as ‘cyberflashing’. The Inquiry understands that the Online Safety Act 2023 creates a more specific offence involving the sending of a photograph or film of genitals to another person with the intention to cause alarm, distress or humiliation. This online act of indecent exposure⁴¹⁴ is due to be included in Section 66A of the Sexual Offences Act as a sexual offence subject to the same criminal sanctions as an act of indecent exposure committed in person. This is a welcome development.

Conclusion 20

Evidence seen by the Inquiry that Wayne Couzens allegedly sent an unsolicited photograph of his erect penis to an online seller provides further potential evidence of his willingness to indecently expose himself.

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- 3.194 **It is clear to the Inquiry that the alleged sending of the photograph provides further potential evidence of Couzens' willingness to indecently expose himself, on this occasion virtually rather than in person.** A further, earlier allegation of Couzens having photographed his penis and saved the photograph to a young woman's phone, without her knowledge or consent, is described in paragraph 3.217.

Use of sex workers and escorts

- 3.195 The Inquiry is aware of reports in the media that Couzens used the services of prostitutes.⁴¹⁵ The Inquiry found evidence that he had indeed been in contact with sex workers. This included telephone calls⁴¹⁶ and an email⁴¹⁷ in early February 2021.
- 3.196 The Inquiry has not, however, seen any evidence of Couzens having met any sex workers, or any evidence to support the suggestion, reported in some media outlets, that Couzens took an escort to a police social function.

Pornography and indecent images

- 3.197 In the course of investigating how Couzens was able to abuse his position while serving as a Metropolitan Police Service officer, and examining relevant incidents including his overall conduct, the Inquiry found evidence that Couzens had a long-term interest in pornography. This included in his early twenties when he is alleged to have considered it acceptable to play a pornographic video for friends to watch, without apparently taking into account how it would make them feel or asking them first.⁴¹⁸
- 3.198 The Inquiry also saw evidence of an incident during Couzens' volunteer service with the Territorial Army, which occurred following a training exercise, when he and six or more colleagues were socialising in a private reservists' bar. Couzens, who was then in his early thirties, produced a personal laptop on which he proceeded to play pornographic videos and show them to the group. A witness remembered that "[i]nitially the videos were quite tame and mainstream" and commented: "This did not concern me at all because every soldier there probably had similar material at home." However, they "gradually became more extreme".⁴¹⁹
- 3.199 The first video included women being subjected to forceful oral sex,⁴²⁰ the second women being subjected to sexual penetration by an animal.⁴²¹ Describing Couzens' demeanour, the witness said:

"He may just have been excited to show off his collection; to the best of my knowledge he was not acting as though he was sexually aroused by it."⁴²²

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- 3.200 In fact, the witness's impression was that Couzens was proud of his collection of pornographic videos, as another individual might be of their collection of model cars.⁴²³ When challenged, Couzens did not become defensive or confrontational, simply saying "Fair enough!" or words to that effect. So far as the witness was aware, this was an isolated incident.⁴²⁴
- 3.201 The witness, who was of a senior rank to Couzens, told the Inquiry that the culture at that time was very "macho"⁴²⁵ (see Chapter 7 for a more detailed discussion of workplace culture). Unlike "nowadays", there was no formal mechanism to report this type of behaviour and he had not reported the incident. Considering what would happen if the same situation arose now, he was confident that there would be a clear process for reporting and handling such conduct.⁴²⁶ The Inquiry notes that possession of extreme pornography has since become a criminal offence, which it was not at that time.⁴²⁷
- 3.202 When Couzens was arrested for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard in March 2021, a search of his home address resulted in the seizure of various devices including mobile phones,⁴²⁸ a laptop⁴²⁹ and a USB stick,⁴³⁰ which were forensically analysed and from which digitally stored evidence was recovered. A Metropolitan Police Service officer who reviewed downloaded data told the Inquiry that "[t]here was pornography across all of his devices, but there was nothing that led me in the direction of thinking that there was a fixation on a specific area".⁴³¹
- 3.203 Two previously deleted "sexploitation" video files were recovered.⁴³² As well as referencing rape, the storyline of one film involves the murder of a woman by an impotent police officer after she taunts him. In a police interview on 5 August 2021 at HM Prison Belmarsh, Couzens provided a prepared statement in which he claimed he had never accessed the films.⁴³³ The Inquiry notes that possession of these films is not unlawful.
- 3.204 Forensic analysis also revealed indecent photographs of children across several devices. In 2022, there was a final review of the material using a specialist software tool, followed by grading with the Sentencing Council's definitive guidelines.⁴³⁴ This revealed a total of 19 unlawful images across three devices. In terms of individual devices, four Category C images were found on a Samsung mobile phone; on a Sony Xperia mobile phone, two images were Category A, one was Category B and nine were Category C; and a USB stick was found to store three Category C

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427 [***] As of 2009, Section 63 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 made it an offence for a person to be in possession of extreme pornographic images.

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434 [***] When assessing the seriousness of offences involving the possession of indecent images of children, the Sentencing Council's guidelines set out three categories of images: Category A – images involving penetrative sexual activity; Category B – images involving non-penetrative sexual activity; and Category C – indecent images not falling within categories A or B.

images.⁴³⁵ In the police interview on 5 August 2021 referred to in paragraph 3.203, Couzens, in his prepared statement, denied having ever downloaded or viewed any indecent images of children. No charges were brought on the basis of there being insufficient evidence.⁴³⁶

Treatment of women

- 3.205 The known “brutal circumstances of the death of Sarah Everard”⁴³⁷ described during Couzens’ sentencing prove beyond reasonable doubt Couzens’ capacity to subject a woman to almost unimaginable cruelty. Furthermore, as noted in the introduction to this chapter, it is now a matter of public record, as a result of his guilty pleas, that Couzens intentionally caused several women alarm and distress by exposing his genitals to them and, on one occasion, masturbating while he did so.
- 3.206 The Inquiry explored the overall conduct of Couzens and the extent to which any negative behaviours, particularly in relation to women, were known and raised by colleagues. This included whether he had displayed any propensity to behave badly towards women, including during his career as an Army reservist and as a volunteer police officer. Couzens’ ability, which the Inquiry has identified, to demonstrate very different personality traits to different people in different situations makes it important to consider his conduct within a social setting as well as at work, so as not to miss significant information.
- 3.207 Describing Couzens in his teens, a female witness said that he had “never made me feel uncomfortable in any way”.⁴³⁸ She had observed nothing inappropriate and “never felt that he was predatory in any way. It was almost the opposite; he seemed to lack confidence when it came to women.”⁴³⁹
- 3.208 This evidence is in stark contrast to other evidence provided to the Inquiry involving an alleged very serious sexual assault of a child barely into her teens perpetrated by Couzens in his early twenties. Due to her being too young to consent, any sexual activity with the victim would have been a crime. The alleged sexual assault was, and remains today, serious sexual offending whether compared with the Sexual Offences Act 1956 in force at the time or the law that applies today.⁴⁴⁰ The allegation was not reported at the time⁴⁴¹ and was not the subject of a police investigation.

Conclusion 21

The evidence of a historical allegation of very serious sexual assault suggests that Wayne Couzens’ offending in 2021 was not an isolated incident but may have been part of a pattern of offending dating back many years.

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3.209 The evidence of alleged sexual assault referred to in paragraph 3.208 provides an important link in the chain of events culminating in Couzens’ abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard, suggesting that his offending in 2021 was not an isolated incident but may have been part of a pattern of offending dating back many years.

3.210 Further evidence of how Couzens treated women was provided by a female witness who volunteered information about her experience to the police, after hearing of the arrest of Couzens for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard.

3.211 The alleged incident, which was not reported at the time, occurred at a Territorial Army event in early spring 2003. The witness was alone, looking for the women’s washroom, when Couzens blocked her path and demanded her telephone number. She assumed he was asking on a professional basis and told him to call the relevant helpline. In response, he made it clear that this was not what he wanted.⁴⁴²

3.212 The witness described her younger self as “naïve, not particularly streetwise about military people and how they could behave, or about men and how they acted in that environment”.⁴⁴³ Couzens was “intimidating”⁴⁴⁴ and made her feel “deeply uncomfortable”.⁴⁴⁵ She was much relieved when a door opened down the corridor and someone emerged from an office, prompting Couzens to disappear.⁴⁴⁶ Commenting on the impact of the encounter, the woman said:

“I often felt vulnerable after that. I was always aware of where my car was, whenever I was at an event. I always tried to leave premises with other people.”⁴⁴⁷

3.213 She added:

“In hindsight, I take the view that what happened to me that evening did so partly because Wayne Couzens took advantage of the fact that I was unfamiliar with the environment. I didn’t know where I was going so I looked uncertain, which made me vulnerable.”⁴⁴⁸

3.214 Even though the alleged incident had happened many years before, the witness was “able to completely recognise him as someone who had made me feel deeply uncomfortable and concerned for my safety”, when she saw pictures of Couzens following his arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard.⁴⁴⁹ It is clear to the Inquiry that this experience left its mark on the witness and influenced the steps she took to protect herself thereafter.

3.215 The witness explained why she had not reported the alleged incident at the time, for reasons set out elsewhere in this Report, but which included fear of being regarded as a “clueless girl” by the male senior officer hierarchy.⁴⁵⁰

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- 3.216 The Inquiry heard of three alleged incidents of Couzens' inappropriate behaviour towards women when he was a volunteer section officer in Kent Special Constabulary. Each is alleged to have occurred when Couzens was off duty, at a time when he was in his mid to late thirties.
- 3.217 The first alleged incident involved Couzens leaving approximately six photographs of his semi-erect, as well as erect, penis on a young woman's phone. When confronted about the incident, Couzens did not deny what he had done. Instead, "he laughed it off and said it was nothing", likening it to what used to happen in the Army⁴⁵¹ (it was confirmed by another witness that such behaviour was common among police colleagues too⁴⁵²). He also compared it to what might happen if a police officer left their police notebook on their desk and returned to find notes or pictures left in it.⁴⁵³
- 3.218 The second alleged incident involved the manner in which Couzens applied a plaster to the wounded leg of a young woman, a situation that felt "indecent". The individual concerned was made to feel "extremely uncomfortable" when Couzens lifted her skirt "much higher than it needed to be". He proceeded to squeeze her knee "very slightly".⁴⁵⁴
- 3.219 The Inquiry heard of another alleged incident that happened in the rear of a car on the way home from a social event. Couzens is alleged to have sexually assaulted a young woman seated next to him by putting his hand underneath the full skirt of her dress, touching her over her underwear.⁴⁵⁵
- 3.220 None of the alleged incidents described in paragraphs 3.217 to 3.219 was reported to the authorities at the time.⁴⁵⁶ The barriers to reporting that victims experience are discussed elsewhere in this Report.

Use of dating websites

- 3.221 Despite Couzens' marital status, there was evidence of his accessing dating websites at various times between 2008 and February 2021.⁴⁵⁷ On 2 December 2020, Couzens set up a profile on a dating website. The profile used a pseudonym but included his own photograph. No further activity was recorded.⁴⁵⁸

Further alleged sexual and other offences

- 3.222 Following Couzens' arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard, and his identification by the media, the police received reports from complainants who said Couzens had sexually assaulted them. These included an alleged attempted kidnapping at knifepoint in North London in 1995. Couzens was named by the

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complainant as a suspect following his arrest.⁴⁵⁹ The allegation was included in Couzens' police interview on 23 March 2022.⁴⁶⁰ Due to there being insufficient evidence, no further action was taken.⁴⁶¹

3.223 Further allegations included reports of rape by two women. The first, between November 2006 and January 2007, allegedly took place during a singles event (linked to a dating website) at a bar in East London.⁴⁶² Reasonable lines of enquiry having been exhausted, no further action was taken on the basis of there being insufficient evidence.⁴⁶³

3.224 The second, in October 2019, allegedly occurred below a bridge in London.⁴⁶⁴ Following a police investigation, a decision to take no further action was made on the basis of "evidential difficulties".⁴⁶⁵

3.225 A third alleged incident related to the sexual assault of a man in a bar in Kent in the summer of 2019. The complainant was in drag and wearing a blonde wig when a man engaged him in conversation. The same man then touched him inappropriately, leading to the complainant remonstrating with him, at which point the man informed him he was a police officer. The complainant, who was angered by the man's apparent abuse of his position as a police officer, rebuffed him in no uncertain terms. The man then invited him outside to perform a sexual act. The man collected his drinks and returned to his partner.⁴⁶⁶ A report of this incident was not made at the time, but it came following Couzens' arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard when the complainant recognised him from news items.⁴⁶⁷ The Inquiry understands this case was the subject of a decision to take no further action on the basis of "evidential difficulties".⁴⁶⁸ It is the only allegation of which the Inquiry is aware involving sexual touching directed at a male victim.

Reported as missing

3.226 The Inquiry was provided with evidence of a further incident that it considered relevant to Couzens' overall conduct, and to potential risks and/or red flags in relation to his vetting. The incident occurred on 30 June 2013, at a time when Couzens was an authorised firearms officer with the Civil Nuclear Constabulary. At 01:44, he was reported missing to Kent Police, following an alleged routine outing to a gym in Folkestone at 21:00.⁴⁶⁹ The informant, who would normally have expected him to return by midnight at the latest, confirmed to the call handler that he had never previously been that late. Also, according to the informant, Couzens

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would normally answer phone calls, but on this occasion there was no response and calls were diverting to answerphone.⁴⁷⁰ Couzens had never previously been reported missing.⁴⁷¹

- 3.227 According to the computer aided dispatch record of this incident, Couzens was driving a “courtsey” [sic] car. The informant was quoted as being “worried as the car is new to him and something might have happened”.⁴⁷² They were able to provide the police with both the vehicle index number and its colour. The police record stated that the details of the car were broadcast to patrols. It also noted that a check of the vehicle index on the ANPR system revealed that the car had been recorded passing a site at Ashford at 22:59 that night.⁴⁷³ A map of the area consulted by the Inquiry shows that Ashford is some distance from Folkestone, and in particular from the location of the gym, and would not have been on any reasonably direct route back to Couzens’ home.
- 3.228 Less than one hour after the initial report, at 02:29, the informant again called the police. Couzens had been in contact by phone to say he had crashed his car due to being tired. He was returning home on foot and would arrive in ten minutes. As a result of this update, the police case was closed.⁴⁷⁴ More recent enquiries suggested that Couzens had booked a hotel room in Kent for that night.⁴⁷⁵
- 3.229 The Inquiry’s Terms of Reference required it to establish a timeline of any relevant incidents concerning Couzens. This incident was unusual and, while there is no evidence to suggest this is the case, comparing the pattern of behaviour that preceded the offending for which he was convicted, it is appropriate to consider whether Couzens could have committed, or attempted to commit, any similar offences on this occasion. Couzens could have been driving around looking for a victim, in the same way as he did almost eight years later on the evening he abducted Sarah Everard and on other dates in the lead-up to his crimes. In another similarity with the later abduction, rape and murder of Sarah, the car Couzens drove on this occasion was not his own.
- 3.230 The Inquiry sought information about whether any crimes could be linked to the vehicle Couzens was driving on 30 June 2013, and whether there were contemporaneous reports of indecent exposure or of other sexual or violent offending in the relevant area. Police enquiries revealed the vehicle was not linked with any crime reports and that there were no relevant reports of indecent exposure or of other sexual offences during this period.⁴⁷⁶ The Inquiry notes the negative outcome of these enquiries, although it is widely understood that there is significant under-reporting of sexual offences, including rape.

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Conclusion 22

Wayne Couzens being reported as a missing person in 2013 was a red flag about his suitability to be a police officer.

3.231 As well as regarding this incident as suspicious, the Inquiry considers it to have been a potentially relevant incident and a red flag that was identifiable to the Metropolitan Police Service during the vetting of Couzens when he transferred forces. Further details are contained in Chapter 2.

Reflections from senior leaders

3.232 The Inquiry interviewed senior leaders in the field of policing about their views on the attitudes of the police in responding to sexual offence cases. The Inquiry heard that there is evidence of some frontline officers actively putting the “principles of the violence against women and girls strategy into practice” and seeing “the protection of women as integral to their role”.⁴⁷⁷

3.233 The Inquiry asked senior leaders of policing organisations about what their specific responses were to Couzens’ crimes. From Kent Police in particular, senior leaders positioned themselves as leaders in prioritising sexual crimes.⁴⁷⁸ In the immediate aftermath of Couzens’ murder of Sarah Everard, Kent Police held a number of public consultations to “try and reassure the public that dealing with violence against women and girls was a priority for Kent Police”, to inform the public about what had been done and ask what more could be done, and to demonstrate that the force “had heard what they had said”.⁴⁷⁹ The Inquiry also heard that Kent Police introduced verification checks to allow the public to confirm with the control room that an officer was on duty and meant to be in a certain place; “in the first three or four months after the initiative was implemented [...] over 130 checks were carried out”.⁴⁸⁰ In addition, the Inquiry received evidence of Kent Police using public engagement to inform strategy and having implemented policy and procedure and conducted reviews to improve the operational, tactical and strategic approach taken to indecent exposure, including enhanced oversight of all such reports.⁴⁸¹

3.234 In relation to the policy and guidance for the management of indecent exposure cases, the Inquiry team spoke to senior leaders of policing organisations about their views on indecent exposure and other sexual crimes. Senior leaders pointed to the pervasive attitudes within society towards sexual offending,⁴⁸² which are mirrored in the police management of indecent exposure and reflected in the (now obsolete) College of Policing training materials discussed in paragraphs 3.160 to 3.166, which minimise the seriousness of this kind of offending. One senior leader quoted from

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the Peelian principles:⁴⁸³ “the police are the public and the public are the police”.⁴⁸⁴ The Inquiry was told by senior leaders of policing organisations that, because crimes such as indecent exposure are normalised in society as ‘flashing’, this attitude is similarly “endemic” in policing.⁴⁸⁵ The prevalent problems of misogyny and an acceptance of violence against women that exist within society are reflected in the police as well. In the view of senior leaders, indecent exposure is not being treated with the seriousness it should be as a sexual offence. The Inquiry was told that this is due to the combination of cultural norms,⁴⁸⁶ a lack of resources and training,⁴⁸⁷ and the increased demands on policing. These significant cultural barriers result in the mismanagement of cases of violence against women and girls and may lead to emboldened reoffenders.

3.235 Several senior leaders described indecent exposure as a “pre-cursor offence” to “more serious” sexual offences.⁴⁸⁸ Despite this, they spoke of their struggles to allocate resources to respond appropriately and proportionately.⁴⁸⁹ The Inquiry noted the lack of available evidence, including reliable data, that conclusively makes the connection between indecent exposure and other sexual offending. More research in this space is required to formulate evidence-based policy and training to deal with these cases (see Recommendation 4).

3.236 Since Sarah Everard was murdered in March 2021, the Home Office and external policing bodies – such as HMICFRS, the National Police Chiefs’ Council, the College of Policing and the London Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime – have commissioned reviews, schemes and investigations to better understand how to improve the police response to violence against women and girls.

3.237 In June 2021, the Home Office launched Operation Soteria Bluestone to address systemic issues relating to the investigation and prosecution of crimes related to violence against women and girls. This work involves collaborative research between police forces and academics to improve the way the police investigate rape, with the aim of doubling the number of adult rape cases brought to court. In its Year 1 report, Operation Soteria Bluestone found that there is a lack of sufficient specialist knowledge about sexual offending within policing.⁴⁹⁰ As a result of poor knowledge and resources to deal with these offences, officers default to investigation procedures rather than connection with victims.⁴⁹¹ The report found that disproportionate investigation effort was put into testing the credibility of victims, rather than suspects’ offending behaviour.⁴⁹² The report further found that these factors result in low victim confidence in both the police and the criminal justice system.⁴⁹³ As a result of these findings, the Operation Soteria Bluestone Year 1 report recommended research-informed specialist investigative practice for rape and

483 [***] The Peelian principles, named after Sir Robert Peel (Home Secretary when the Metropolitan Police Service was founded) refer to the UK’s policing model of ‘policing by consent’. According to the Peelian principles, the police’s authority is dependent on public consent, as opposed to the power of the state.

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sexual offences.⁴⁹⁴ This was echoed by senior leaders of police organisations, who told the Inquiry that indecent exposure, like other sexual offences, should be investigated at a “specialist level”.⁴⁹⁵ The Inquiry agrees.

3.238 In July 2021, the Government published its *Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy*,⁴⁹⁶ which was followed by the publication, by HMICFRS, of the *Police Response to Violence Against Women and Girls – Final Inspection Report* in September 2021.⁴⁹⁷ In December 2021, the National Police Chiefs’ Council and College of Policing published a document entitled *Policing Violence Against Women and Girls: National Framework for Delivery*, under the leadership of Deputy Chief Constable Maggie Blyth.⁴⁹⁸ In March 2022, as part of its wider strategy, the Government published a *Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan*. Delivery of this plan is overseen by a Violence Against Women and Girls Ministerial Steering Group.⁴⁹⁹ In February 2023, the Home Office published the *Strategic Policing Requirement*, which includes violence against women and girls as a “national threat”.⁵⁰⁰

3.239 To meet these wider institutional problems, greater and more focused leadership on these issues was introduced. This included the forementioned work by the National Police Chiefs’ Council to develop a strategy to better deal with violence against women and girls.

3.240 In the Inquiry’s view, more recent national-level strategies represent a significant and more focused step towards tackling violence against women and girls. However, the Inquiry agrees with senior leaders that, in its current state, this work lacks long-term funding at a national level, as well as national governance to oversee the capabilities and specialist skills to manage the threat.⁵⁰¹ Part 2 of the Inquiry will review progress in this area.

Recommendations on sexual offending

Recommendation 1: Approach to investigating indecent exposure

At the earliest opportunity, and by September 2024 at the latest, police forces should ensure that they have a specialist policy on investigating all sexual offences, including so-called ‘non-contact’ offences, such as indecent exposure.

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Recommendation 2: Guidance and training on indecent exposure

By December 2024, the College of Policing, in collaboration with the National Police Chiefs' Council, should improve guidance and training on indecent exposure, in order to improve the quality of investigations and management of indecent exposure cases. In particular, the College of Policing should:

- a. review and update training, informed by crime statistics and research into the nature of indecent exposure and its impact on victims;
- b. review and update the guidance for police officers to improve the handling of indecent exposure cases;
- c. include guidance on appropriate resourcing for investigations; and
- d. ensure that guidance and training reflect the Sentencing Council guidelines, which recognise factors indicating increased harm and culpability.

This activity should be informed by the results of Recommendation 4 below.

Recommendation 3: Treatment of masturbatory indecent exposure within the criminal justice system

With immediate effect, the Home Office, Ministry of Justice, College of Policing and National Police Chiefs' Council should work together to conduct a fundamental review of the way masturbatory indecent exposure is treated within the criminal justice system. The review should focus on: recognising the seriousness of the offence; identifying it as an indicator of disinhibition by perpetrators; and understanding and addressing the wider issue of sexual precursor conduct so as to prevent victimisation, improve the response to victims when it occurs and bring more offenders to justice.

Recommendation 4: Research into masturbatory indecent exposure

With immediate effect, the Home Office, in collaboration with the College of Policing, should commission research to establish if there is an evidence-based link between active masturbatory indecent exposure and subsequent contact offending. Where relevant, findings should then be used to shape policy, training and guidance for police officers investigating indecent exposure cases (as per Recommendation 2).

Recommendation 5: Public information campaign on indecent exposure

By March 2025, the Home Office, together with the National Police Chiefs' Council, should launch a public campaign to:

- a. raise awareness about the illegality/criminality and legal consequences of any type of indecent exposure and to boost the confidence of victims to report cases of indecent exposure to ensure that more offenders are brought to justice; and
- b. increase publicity around the relevant legislation in order to encourage reporting of unsolicited photographs sent of genitals with the intention to cause harm, distress or humiliation and to discourage perpetrators from doing so.

Chapter 4: Recruitment and vetting

“In this country it is expected that the police will act in the public interest. Indeed, the authority of the police is to a truly significant extent dependent on the public’s consent, and the power of officers to detain, arrest and otherwise control important aspects of our lives is only effective because of the critical trust that we repose in the constabulary that they will act lawfully and in the best interests of society. If that is undermined, one of the enduring safeguards of law and order in this country is inevitably jeopardised.”

R v Wayne Couzens, sentencing remarks, Lord Justice Fulford,
30 September 2021¹

Introduction

- 4.1 It is a central tenet of policing, and particularly ‘policing by consent’ in the United Kingdom, that members of the public should have confidence in the police force and its officers. The public has a right to expect officers to be held to higher standards of personal and professional behaviour. If those higher standards are not adhered to by police officers and staff, public confidence in policing, and policing itself, will suffer the effects.
- 4.2 It is therefore imperative that police forces select, recruit and vet candidates who embody the values of honesty and integrity, who are ethical, and who can relate to the communities in which they serve. It is equally important to ensure that these officers and police staff, once recruited, continue to demonstrate those qualities while serving within the employing force or forces for the duration of their careers.

Parallel reviews

HMICFRS inspection of police vetting, misconduct and misogyny

- 4.3 Following the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard by Wayne Couzens, an off-duty police officer, His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) was instructed in October 2021 by the then Home Secretary to complete an inspection of police vetting, to assess current vetting and counter-corruption capacity and capability in policing across England and Wales. This was to include forces’ ability to detect and deal with misogynistic and predatory behaviour and was also to consider arrangements for transferees, whistleblowing arrangements, the work of counter-corruption units and, where relevant, wider Professional Standards Departments. The report setting out the background to

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its commission, and initial findings, entitled *An Inspection of Vetting, Misconduct, and Misogyny in the Police Service*, was published in November 2022 (the November report).²

- 4.4 HMICFRS has previously assessed police vetting as part of its ongoing scrutiny of HM police forces within its remit. Previous assessments include the implications of the 1987 murder of private investigator Daniel Morgan, published in March 2022,³ and the use of vetting to address abuse of position for a sexual purpose in September 2018.⁴
- 4.5 During the 2021–22 inspection narrated in the November report, HMICFRS reviewed hundreds of police vetting files and found too many cases where people should not have been allowed to join the police, including officers with criminal records or links to organised crime. It also found cases where evidence that a prospective officer may present a risk to the public was ignored.⁵
- 4.6 Inspectors found examples of police officers transferring between forces despite a history of concerning intelligence, complaints or misconduct allegations. HMICFRS said there were incidents that should have been assessed as gross misconduct that were assessed as misconduct only, or not treated as misconduct at all.⁶
- 4.7 HMICFRS concluded that a culture of misogyny, sexism and predatory behaviour towards female police officers and staff and towards members of the public still exists and is even prevalent in many forces.⁷
- 4.8 HMICFRS made 43 recommendations, which include the need to:
- update minimum standards for pre-employment checks. As a minimum, pre-employment checks should:
 - obtain and verify previous employment history for at least the previous five years (including dates of employment, roles carried out and reason for leaving); and
 - verify the qualifications the applicant claims to have;
 - establish better processes for managing risks relating to vetting decisions, corruption investigations and information security;
 - improve the quality and consistency of vetting decision-making and improve the recording of the rationale for some decisions. In particular, if adverse information has been identified during the vetting process, all vetting decisions (refusals, clearances and appeals) should be supported with a sufficiently detailed written rationale that:

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- follows the National Decision Model;
- includes the identification of all relevant risks; and
- takes full account of the relevant risk factors described in the Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting;
- extend the scope of the law on police complaint and misconduct procedures to ensure that police officers who make criminal allegations against other members of their own force are afforded rights similar to those held by members of the public who make criminal allegations;
- strengthen guidance for forces on vetting processes and relationships and behaviours in the workplace;
- understand and define what constitutes misogynistic and predatory behaviour in a policing context;
- improve how the police collect corruption-related intelligence; and
- improve how the police assess and investigate allegations of misconduct.⁸

Baroness Casey's review of standards of behaviour and internal culture of the Metropolitan Police Service

- 4.9 Similarly, in October 2021, Baroness Casey of Blackstock was commissioned by Dame Cressida Dick, then Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service, to undertake a review into the standards of behaviour and internal culture of the Metropolitan Police Service and make recommendations on the actions required.⁹
- 4.10 The approach of the Casey Review team was to talk to officers, staff and others, and to review and analyse information, data, systems and operational performance for their relevance to the Metropolitan Police Service's culture and standards.¹⁰
- 4.11 Baroness Casey published her report in March 2023. She found that there are "systemic and fundamental problems in how the Met is run"¹¹ and in relation to vetting and recruitment practices in particular:¹²
- Recruitment and vetting systems are poor and fail to guard against those who seek power in order to abuse it.¹³
 - Policing attracts those who wish to abuse the powers conferred by a warrant card.¹⁴ The Metropolitan Police Service has not taken this fact seriously. Its vetting processes are not vigilant in identifying clear warning signs such as

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previous indecent exposure or domestic abuse from applicant officers. Transferees from other forces are trusted to be good enough.¹⁵ Periodic re-vetting has been perfunctory, and self-declarations are relied upon.¹⁶

4.12 The Terms of Reference for Part 1 of this Inquiry were published in January 2022, and while Part 1 is focused only on the recruitment and vetting practices and processes carried out by three police forces in relation to one officer, a number of similar themes and failures to those identified by HMICFRS and by Baroness Casey have been identified across the 15-year period of Couzens' policing career, in particular:

- the lack of professional curiosity about potentially adverse information;
- the lack of additional scrutiny applied to transferee officers; and
- an over-reliance on the self-declarations and disclosures made by the vetting subject rather than any further independent checks or verifications of information provided.

Review of progress by HMICFRS

4.13 In January 2023, the Home Secretary asked HMICFRS to provide an urgent update on the progress that police forces in England and Wales had made in implementing the recommendations made in the November report.

4.14 On 11 May 2023, His Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary wrote to the Home Secretary to provide an update.¹⁷ He confirmed that, to a degree, forces can offer some reassurance that the recommendations are being acted upon, but some responses weren't detailed enough, and some forces appeared to have either downplayed or overstated their progress in some areas.¹⁸

4.15 The conclusion was that there have undoubtedly been some improvements since the inspection, but not all forces can demonstrate acceptable progress on some recommendations; and, in particular, while vetting appears to have been tightened, there are still some cases likely to cause concern, with examples and case studies provided in an annex to the letter.

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Recruitment and vetting: Overarching policy and process

Recruitment

4.16 While application processes vary to a degree between police forces in England and Wales, and some aspects have evolved since Couzens applied to join Kent Special Constabulary in 2006, at the time of writing there are a number of stages that a prospective applicant must go through before they can take up the office of police constable.¹⁹

- The applicant, who must be over 17,²⁰ applies to their preferred force and, following submission of the application, the force undertakes an eligibility check.
- The application requires full name, date of birth and address, a note of any previous convictions,²¹ a note of the applicant's personal finances,²² and a note of any tattoos the applicant has.²³
- Some forces also ask the applicant questions based on the College of Policing Competency and Values Framework,²⁴ which defines relevant behaviours, competencies and values which uphold the principles of the policing Code of Ethics.
- The application is then sifted in accordance with force policies and the national sift, which comprises:
 - a situational judgement test, which is a series of 15 job-relevant scenarios to assess the applicant's judgement and decision-making skills. Each scenario has four possible actions that could be taken, and applicants are asked to rate each of the actions in terms of their assessment of the effectiveness in addressing the scenario; and
 - a behavioural styles questionnaire, which measures typical behaviours and preferences at work and assesses whether applicants have the right behaviours and attitudes for the police. It consists of 80 statements, with applicants being asked to decide the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement.²⁵
- The next stage is a competency-based interview (online) which is recorded by the candidate, focusing on the Competency and Values Framework, and then submitted.²⁶

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- A written exercise, to be completed as if the candidate were a serving police constable, then follows.²⁷
- The candidate then completes a briefing exercise, where they consider materials and prepare a response to a scenario, again as if they were a serving constable.²⁸
- The candidate then undergoes a medical and fitness test.²⁹
- Lastly come background and security checks, and vetting checks, including financial checks.³⁰

Vetting

- 4.17 As set out in paragraph 4.16, an integral, albeit not standalone, aspect of recruiting the right individuals to the right jobs in policing is the vetting process.
- 4.18 The Inquiry heard evidence from a number of experienced staff within vetting units and human resources departments at the police forces where Couzens was employed over several years: namely, Kent Police, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary and the Metropolitan Police Service. Evidence was also taken from Thames Valley Police, which assisted the Civil Nuclear Constabulary with vetting and background checks on Couzens. While the precise terminology and processes for vetting used by those forces may differ and may have changed in some respects since Couzens first became a police officer, there was clear consensus about the nature and purpose of vetting.

Purpose and limitations of vetting

- 4.19 The Inquiry was told by witnesses involved in the various vetting regimes, which are outlined later in this chapter, that the purpose of vetting is to protect the police organisation, its assets and the public;^{31,32} to seek reassurance regarding prospective officers' honesty and integrity;³³ and to establish whether a person is going to pose a risk by looking for characteristics that may indicate that a person is unreliable or potentially vulnerable to blackmail or inducement.³⁴ The public has to be confident that the right people, whether they be police officers, members of police staff or police contractors, are occupying certain positions. These people are trusted to have access to vulnerable witnesses, victims, individuals who are accused of crimes and defendants, as well as to personal information and police assets. It is therefore crucial that they do not present a danger or risk to anyone with whom they come into contact.³⁵

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4.20 The current Vetting Code of Practice (July 2023), which sets out the police vetting standards to be applied by forces in England and Wales, states:

“Everyone in policing must maintain the highest ethical and professional standards, and must act with the utmost integrity. This is crucial in ensuring that public trust and confidence in the service is maintained.

It is essential that the public is confident that police vetting processes are effective in identifying those who pose a potential risk to others, or who are otherwise unsuitable for working within the police service.

It is imperative that those working in policing are also able to maintain the trust and confidence of their chief constable to perform their role in delivering policing services.

Vetting is an integral part of a police force’s framework of ethics and professional standards. Vetting must form part of a wider security regime, rather than being used in isolation. It assists with identifying individuals who are unsuitable to work within the police service, or to have access to police assets. This includes people who:

- are unsuitable through criminal activity or association
- pose a risk to the public and to those who are particularly vulnerable
- have a demonstrable lack of honesty
- have previously behaved in a manner that is inconsistent with the Standards of Professional Behaviour
- are financially vulnerable

A thorough and effective vetting regime is an important component in considering an individual’s suitability to work in policing. An assessment of an individual’s integrity, professionalism and demonstration of the expected character indicates whether they will achieve and maintain the required level of vetting clearance. This helps to ensure public trust and confidence in those working in policing to deliver a public service.”³⁶

4.21 It is important to note at the outset that there are two types of vetting regime in the police service:

- **Force vetting**³⁷ is applied to all individuals who require unsupervised access to police assets and must be underpinned by the completion of the ‘authentication procedure’, which is used to confirm an individual’s identity, nationality, right to work and residency.³⁸ The force vetting process consists of the following:
 - **Recruitment Vetting**³⁹ is the initial vetting process for all police staff, officers and Special Constabulary volunteers.

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- **Management Vetting**⁴⁰ is also employed in leadership roles or sensitive functions within the police and applies to police personnel with long-term, frequent and uncontrolled access to SECRET assets and occasional access to TOP SECRET assets. The Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting sets out the purpose of Management Vetting checks, which is to provide “additional assurance in relation to the integrity, reliability and potential for financial vulnerability”⁴¹ of individuals with access to sensitive police information, premises, financial or operational assets, where risk of compromise could cause serious damage to ongoing investigations or the prosecution of offenders, or could undermine operational capability or standing of the force.⁴²
- **Non-Police Personnel Vetting**⁴³ assesses the honesty, integrity, reliability and overall suitability for clearance of anyone other than police officers, police staff and members of the Special Constabulary who has unsupervised physical or remote access to police premises, information intelligence, financial or operational assets, corporate databases, data networks or hard-copy material. This vetting process is less relevant to the Inquiry and focuses on agency staff, statutory partners, contractors, consultants, auditors, researchers, and so on.⁴⁴
- **National Security Vetting** allows individuals access to government information, locations and equipment. The three common categories of vetting under the National Security Vetting framework are the **Counter Terrorist Check**, **Security Check** and **Developed Vetting**.⁴⁵

4.22 Each level of vetting requires a different standard of checks and aims to provide an appropriate level of “assurance as to the trustworthiness, integrity and reliability” of individuals with access to sensitive government assets or locations, or of individuals with close proximity to certain public figures.⁴⁶

4.23 National Security Vetting is underpinned by the **Baseline Personnel Security Standard**, which requires the verification of:

- identity;
- nationality and immigration status (including an entitlement to undertake the work in question);
- employment history (past three years); and
- criminal record (unspent convictions only).⁴⁷

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Completion of the Baseline Personnel Security Standard process allows access to government information/assets marked UK OFFICIAL and occasional access to UK SECRET.⁴⁸

- 4.24 **Counter Terrorist Checks** are “designed to prevent those with links to individuals associated with, or part of, terrorist organisations, who may be vulnerable to pressure, from encountering people, facilities, or information of use to terrorists. CTC [Counter Terrorist Check] clearance does not provide individuals with clearance to access protectively marked police or government assets, which is dependent on an individual’s BPSS [Baseline Personnel Security Standard] clearance.”⁴⁹ Successful Counter Terrorist Checks depend on the completion of the Baseline Personnel Security Standard, completion of a security questionnaire, a departmental/companies record check, checks of information about spent/unspent criminal convictions, and checks against the records of the Security Service (MI5). Counter Terrorist Check clearances are subject to review every ten years.⁵⁰
- 4.25 A **Security Check** offers “further checks on an individual’s integrity beyond the Baseline Personnel Security Standard”.⁵¹ Security Check clearance provides long-term, frequent and uncontrolled access to assets marked SECRET, and occasional and supervised access to assets marked TOP SECRET. Successful Security Check clearance is dependent on:
- completion of the Baseline Personnel Security Standard;
 - completion of a security questionnaire;
 - a departmental/companies records check, including checks of personal information on staff reports, sick leave and other relevant information;
 - checks of spent and unspent criminal convictions;
 - credit and financial checks; and
 - a check against Security Service records.

In cases where doubts are raised by the financial or Security Service checks, individuals may be subject to further checks, such as a financial questionnaire should credit/finance checks reveal adverse information, or an interview if there are unresolved security concerns.⁵²

- 4.26 A **Developed Vetting** clearance is required for individuals needing frequent, uncontrolled access to TOP SECRET assets or any access to TOP SECRET codeword material. Additionally, Developed Vetting clearance is also required for individuals who:

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- while not in posts which require them to have access to TOP SECRET assets or TOP SECRET codeword material, will be in a position to directly or indirectly bring about the same degree of damage;
- require frequent and uncontrolled access to Category I nuclear material; and
- require access to certain levels of classified material originating from another country or international organisation.⁵³

4.27 Force vetting and National Security Vetting are separate processes, designed to counter specific threats. The purpose of force vetting is to specifically provide a level of assurance, which National Security Vetting cannot provide, as to the integrity of individuals who have access to sensitive criminal intelligence, financial or operational police assets or premises. The purpose of National Security Vetting is to protect sensitive government national security assets by providing an acceptable level of assurance as to the integrity of individuals who have access to protectively marked government assets and/or who require access to persons, sites and materials at risk of terrorist attack.⁵⁴

4.28 Throughout his policing career, Couzens engaged with both vetting processes. While there is some commonality between the two, there are clear distinctions and both processes draw on different procedures and sources of information to guide decisions.

Force vetting

4.29 Recruitment Vetting checks offer the minimum acceptable level of background checks for officers and staff who require access to police assets up to OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE level, with occasional access to SECRET.⁵⁵ A higher level of vetting clearance is required for access to more sensitive information. The minimum checks for Recruitment Vetting include:

- a check against the Police National Computer;⁵⁶
- a check against all force databases (including non-conviction databases);
- checks with the Counter Terrorism Unit; and
- a search of the Police National Database⁵⁷ on the applicant, associates, co-residents, partner and any family aged over ten.

The applicant is also subject to checks including record management system checks, crime report allegations, a credit reference check and consideration of financial position, open-source enquiries, checks against professional standards

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56 The Police National Computer is the main database of criminal records in the UK and is used by frontline police officers and other UK law enforcement organisations to access real-time information of national and local significance.

57 The Police National Database is a national intelligence-sharing system used for the purpose of preventing and detecting crime. It makes police intelligence available to licensed users in police forces and other organisations.

records where necessary, and Ministry of Defence checks where relevant.⁵⁸ The applicant is not required as part of the credit check to produce bank statements or undergo more stringent analysis of their financial circumstances.

4.30 The minimum checks for Management Vetting include:

- Police National Computer checks;
- local intelligence checks;
- Police National Database or other force checks; and
- checks of all force databases, including non-conviction databases and checks with the Counter Terrorism Unit.

4.31 In addition, for the applicant only, the following are required:

- checks of voter records;
- checks of existing vetting, professional standards and Ministry of Defence databases;
- personal finance checks (including a financial questionnaire and force credit check) and an assessment of information returned;
- business interests and secondary employment checks (where relevant);
- occupational health checks (where relevant);
- open-source searches of social media sites and search engines;
- enquiries, where relevant, relating to vulnerability to pressure (including indiscriminate use of drink, drugs and gambling); and
- checks of appraisals by current/former supervisors, and interviews at the discretion of the force vetting manager.

Management Vetting is also subject to a process of ongoing aftercare, with at least two reviews during the lifetime of the clearance.⁵⁹ See more on police vetting aftercare in paragraphs 4.216 to 4.220.

4.32 While the Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting (and its predecessors) sets out the applicable rules, the March 2022 HMICFRS inspection of the Metropolitan Police Service's counter-corruption arrangements and other matters related to the Daniel Morgan Independent Panel pointed out that vetting guidance is "open to interpretation".⁶⁰

4.33 The report noted, in particular:

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“This section [on convictions and cautions] of APP [Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting] appears to give forces considerable latitude to set their own standards, in relation to the level of risk they are willing to accept when deciding on the suitability of applicants to become officers. This level of subjectivity brings with it an inevitability that decisions made by forces are not consistent.”⁶¹

4.34 In making decisions, police vetting teams refer to the National Decision Model (see Figure 1), which places the police Code of Ethics at the heart of all decisions.⁶² This model is suitable for all decisions, and, according to the underpinning guidance from the College of Policing, it should be used by everyone in policing. It can be applied:

- to spontaneous incidents or planned operations;
- by an individual or team of people; and
- to both operational and non-operational situations.⁶³

4.35 The 2017 version of the College of Policing’s Vetting Code of Practice,⁶⁴ which was in place at the time that Couzens was applying to the Metropolitan Police Service, required decision-makers to consider the information they had against a range of criteria, including the Code of Ethics and standards of professional behaviour, before considering the risk of harm, especially in terms of police corruption, infiltration, financial vulnerability, criminal links, substance misuse and a range of other factors as set out in the 2017 version of the Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting.⁶⁵ A prison sentence and inclusion on what is commonly known as the ‘sex offenders’ register’ led to automatic rejections.⁶⁶ Cases of domestic abuse, offences motivated by discrimination and the targeting of vulnerable people were also grounds for rejection.⁶⁷ Other convictions and cautions, if disclosed, were also subject to a risk-based assessment, taking into consideration the seriousness of the offence, willingness of the individual to engage with the vetting process, and level of clearance required.⁶⁸

4.36 Under the heading ‘Recording decision making’ in the National Decision Model, decision-makers are “accountable for their decisions and must be prepared to provide a rationale for what they did and why”.⁶⁹ The Vetting Code of Practice was revised and updated in July 2023.⁷⁰ These requirements on vetting decision-makers remain in place, with key changes listed below:

- Vetting will be repeated if there is a material change in a person’s circumstances, including misconduct where an individual is not dismissed.⁷¹

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- If a person cannot pass vetting checks or maintain clearance, they should be dismissed from policing.⁷²
- Adverse information or changes in circumstances that may impact on a person's vetting clearance must be assessed to mitigate risk.⁷³
- Vetting clearance will be rejected as a result of cautions and convictions – particularly if these relate to dishonesty, violence or targeting a vulnerable person because of protected characteristics – unless the person being vetted can prove otherwise.⁷⁴

Figure 1: National Decision Model for policing



Source: College of Policing, Vetting Code of Practice, 2023, p. 5.

Previous untested allegations or non-conviction information

4.37 The 2017 version of the Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting stated that if there was information and intelligence related to a new applicant, forces should apply a two-stage test:

“1. Are there reasonable grounds for suspecting that the applicant, a family member or other relevant associate:

- is or has been involved in criminal activity
- has financial vulnerabilities (applicant only)

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- is or has been subjected to any adverse information?

2. If so, is it appropriate, in all the circumstances, to refuse vetting clearance?”⁷⁵

4.38 If a decision about vetting was based solely on untested allegations recorded in the form of intelligence, those allegations should be put to the applicant to allow them to respond, in a face-to-face interview, a telephone interview or a letter.⁷⁶

4.39 This guidance was updated in the Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting of 2019,⁷⁷ and then in the 2021 version, which confirms that where the applicant has previously come to adverse police attention – for example, has been arrested, the subject of a criminal allegation or subject of investigation – but these matters have not resulted in a criminal conviction, a case-by-case assessment is to be made.⁷⁸

4.40 The assessment will include consideration of the:

- number of allegations;
- severity of the allegation(s);
- credibility of the allegation(s), including whether there is irrefutable evidence to show that these are false or malicious;
- reasons for the matters not being progressed;
- amount of time that has passed since the matters being considered; and
- age of the subject at the material time.⁷⁹

4.41 As in the 2017 version, where the vetting decision is based solely on untested allegations (recorded in the form of intelligence), the updated guidance states that forces should put the allegations to the applicant, where appropriate, and allow them to respond. This can be done by way of face-to-face interview, telephone interview, email, letter or other appropriate method.⁸⁰ Where forces decide not to put the information to the vetting subject, they should record the rationale for doing so on the vetting file.⁸¹ This would be particularly pertinent if, for example, putting the allegations to the applicant would reveal the source of the information.

4.42 In both the 2017 and 2021 guidance, there are separate considerations for officers transferring from one force to another, where the focus is on ensuring the integrity of the officers and, in particular, that there are no outstanding complaints or matters under investigation in their current policing role.⁸²

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National Security Vetting

- 4.43 United Kingdom Security Vetting is the main UK government provider of national security clearances. Its website makes it explicitly clear what the purpose of vetting is:

“Vetting helps employers and employees identify, manage and mitigate risks for roles where national security concerns are a consideration, like jobs with access to high risk sites, highly classified information or systems. Vetting establishes trust between employers and employees, sometimes through confidential conversations. It is the start of an ongoing dialogue about managing risks, which lasts for as long as a person holds a security clearance.”⁸³

- 4.44 The national security approach delivered through United Kingdom Security Vetting and its predecessors is a centralised system with a set of uniform practices and rules reaching across a range of law enforcement, government agencies and industry. It differs in this regard from the force vetting policies and procedures employed by police forces in England and Wales, where 43 different geographical constabularies and three ‘non-Home Office’ police forces (British Transport Police, Civil Nuclear Constabulary and Ministry of Defence Police)⁸⁴ are each permitted to interpret College of Policing vetting guidance.
- 4.45 Professor Michael Goodman, Professor of Intelligence and International Affairs at King’s College, University of London, provided expert evidence to the Inquiry, including a short history of National Security Vetting. He explained that force vetting for the police was formally introduced in 2004, when the Association of Chief Police Officers prepared the first version of its National Vetting Policy for the Police Community.⁸⁵ Before then, police forces relied on basic recruitment checks and National Security Vetting to provide assurances about the integrity of their officers and staff. The process for granting National Security Vetting clearances was introduced in the 1990s.⁸⁶
- 4.46 The Association of Chief Police Officers’ National Vetting Policy drew a “clear distinction between Force Vetting, which deals with criminality and corruption, and National Security Vetting (NSV), which focuses upon the protection of the national infrastructure including national security and espionage”.⁸⁷
- 4.47 The 2004 Association of Chief Police Officers’ guidance was revised a number of times. Following its first draft in December 2003, at least 18 versions were published, resulting in Version 3.0, which was published in August 2010 and was in place at the time Couzens went through the recruitment process with the Civil Nuclear Constabulary. The purpose of vetting was spelled out in the opening paragraph: by “establishing uniformity in vetting procedures”, the Association of Chief Police Officers was aspiring to maintain the commitment of the police service to the “highest levels of honesty and integrity, and to the prevention of corrupt; dishonest; unethical or unprofessional behaviour”.⁸⁸

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4.48 Across policing, all officers and staff have to undergo a certain degree of force vetting, which varies according to the role they undertake. There are a small number of units within the police where individuals will also require National Security Vetting (including, but not limited to, Counter Terrorism Units and Commands, and some roles within the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, such as that occupied by Couzens in the early days of his career there). Where that is the case, the 2010 guidance (in force when Couzens was being vetted for the Civil Nuclear Constabulary) is clear:

“[I]ndividuals requiring [National Security Vetting (NSV)] clearance must complete the appropriate security questionnaire(s) only after the appropriate [police vetting] checks have been satisfactorily completed [...] **it is imperative that all the elements of FV [force vetting] are satisfactorily completed before entering into the NSV-related actions** [emphasis added].”⁸⁹

4.49 At no point is it suggested in the 2010 police vetting guidance that the National Security Vetting process should or can replicate the requirements of specific police vetting, as the clear choreography envisaged in various iterations of the guidance is that police vetting is to be completed before National Security Vetting commences.

4.50 All police officers should therefore have undergone at least some form of force vetting (likely to be a minimum of Recruitment Vetting) and many officers hold a combination of force vetting and National Security Vetting, depending on the role they are in. In summary, for the duration of Couzens’ career as a police officer:

- Recruitment Vetting was to be renewed every ten years.
- Management Vetting was to be renewed every five to seven years.
- Counter Terrorist Check was to be renewed every ten years (although the risk owner, likely the employing force, has the discretion to review a clearance at any time during that period).
- Security Check was to be renewed every ten years.
- Developed Vetting was to be renewed at intervals of no more than seven years.⁹⁰

4.51 The Inquiry notes that vetting is not without its challenges and is not, and could never be, an ‘exact science’. It is part of a wider system of checks and balances to ensure, insofar as possible, that the right individuals are recruited for the right roles at the right time. In policing, the overall process should also include wider recruitment practices, dissemination and embedding of professional standards and ethics, rigorous performance management, and the tone and direction set by the leadership of the organisation. It is a way of assessing risk and identifying factors which might make a candidate or applicant unsuitable to be a police officer, or could make them more vulnerable or open to coercion, blackmail or corruption.

4.52 Vetting cannot therefore offer the recruiting force a guarantee that an individual who obtains clearance is going to be a ‘fit and proper’ person to occupy the office of police constable, or, conversely, that an individual who is refused clearance will

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not demonstrate the kinds of traits or personal qualities that would make them an excellent officer. Vetting is also only as good as the information and investigations on which it is based at the time it is undertaken, and can only be truly effective as a risk mitigator if it is supported by regular review and what is known as ‘aftercare’.⁹¹

- 4.53 Professor Goodman told the Inquiry that, for those undertaking National Security Vetting, the key requirement is to be honest and open. In theory, therefore, it would be possible to obtain national security clearances having previously been convicted of a criminal offence (although it would depend on the nature of the offence itself).
- 4.54 For those becoming police officers, this is a bit more complex. Honesty and integrity are still central, of course, but as the latest Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting (from 2021) states:

“[I]t is not appropriate to identify a prescriptive list of convictions and cautions that should lead to a vetting rejection. Each case must be considered on its own individual merits in relation to the role being undertaken and the assets being accessed.”^{92,93}

There is similar scope for a vetting officer dealing with police vetting to make a judgement in the example of the applicant coming to the attention of the police but where the offence does not result in a conviction itself.⁹⁴ In these instances, “a case-by-case assessment will be made”.⁹⁵ However, any conviction that results in a prison sentence or becoming a registered sex offender results in a vetting rejection in all cases.⁹⁶

Vetting process for new applicants

- 4.55 The vetting process in the police is the same for both special constables and regular officers. This is because individuals in both roles are ‘warranted’ (i.e. officers carry a warrant card and are able to arrest members of the public) and are essentially carrying out the same task, namely dealing with law and order issues affecting the public. The Inquiry heard, however, of different approaches to the same vetting process applied by different parts of the organisation, when, for example, Couzens was a special constable in Kent Police before the establishment of the Central Vetting Unit in 2007.⁹⁷ At that time, Issue 1 (2004) of the National Vetting Policy for the Police Community issued by the Association of Chief Police Officers was in place, and there is a reference in a footnote to the opening paragraph of the guidance: “In the context of this policy, reference to ‘forces’ also refers to police agencies. References to ‘Police Officers’ and to ‘all members of staff’ include members of the Special Constabulary and PCSOs [police community support

91 [***] In both force vetting and National Security Vetting contexts, aftercare is the term used to describe the ongoing management of personnel security. Its purpose is to investigate and monitor anything of continuing security concern, between periods of normal review, which could affect an individual holding force vetting or National Security Vetting clearance.

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officers].”⁹⁸ That seems to have been interpreted by some as a different, separate approach to be applied to special constables. That is explored in further detail in paragraphs 4.79 to 4.112.

- 4.56 Since its establishment, in late 2012, the College of Policing has been responsible for issuing guidance for police forces on how to carry out the vetting process. Previously, as discussed in paragraphs 4.45 to 4.47, such guidance was issued by the Association of Chief Police Officers. Before the vetting process in a police force is initiated, any first-time applicant must complete various forms and produce various items of documentation to allow the Force Human Resources Department to check that the applicant has the right to work in the UK free of restrictions, has lived in the UK for a period of three years or longer without breaks (with exceptions, for example in relation to service in the Armed Forces) and is over the age of 17: this is the authentication procedure referred to in paragraph 4.21.
- 4.57 The Recruitment Team within the force will also carry out or commission other specialist units to carry out basic checks on the Police National Computer and assess whether the applicant has any criminal record or associations which cause concern. Depending on the outcome of those initial eligibility and background checks, the candidate may get shortlisted for interview and further assessment.
- 4.58 The formal vetting process only starts once the candidate has been assessed and has passed the interview stage. After the vetting process is completed, the assessment of the Force Vetting Team – essentially either a pass or a fail – will be passed back to Human Resources, which, based on all the information available (not just the vetting information), will take the final decision on whether or not to recruit the candidate.
- 4.59 As indicated in paragraph 4.48, some applicants will also need to undergo National Security Vetting, which is a separate process.

Transfers

- 4.60 For transferees, meaning officers transferring from one police force to another, both the recruitment and the vetting processes are, or can be, slightly different depending on the force and the role for which the prospective transferee is applying. Since 2018, the transfer process has been governed by the Police Constable Transfer Guidance,⁹⁹ whereby the underpinning principles encourage forces to consider nominating force transfer coordinators to manage transfer applications, and thereafter that forces communicate with one another to:
- adopt uniform procedures;
 - ensure that there are no delays in sending necessary paperwork and in responding to requests for information;

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- ensure that appropriate communication is maintained with respect to training requirements to address any potential gaps and that police officers' training records are shared appropriately between forces; and
- demonstrate to applicants that their service is valued and that they are motivated to transfer from one force to another.¹⁰⁰

- 4.61 Additionally, there are separate considerations in the Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting for officers who are transferring from another force, focused primarily on ensuring that there are no outstanding professional standards investigations or misconduct proceedings.¹⁰¹
- 4.62 The following sections of this chapter review the vetting procedures followed by Kent Police, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary and the Metropolitan Police Service in relation to Couzens, cross-referencing those against the applications submitted by Couzens and other information provided to the Inquiry.
- 4.63 The Inquiry was told that, occasionally, and for various reasons, applicants do not declare or are reluctant to provide pertinent information in their vetting application. Some may be dishonest; others may be worried about disclosing certain information because they feel sensitive about it¹⁰² or because of the impact it might have on them obtaining a particular vetting clearance;¹⁰³ or they simply may not be in possession of the information, yet make no attempt to get it.¹⁰⁴
- 4.64 The Inquiry was provided with examples of applicants deliberately omitting family members' details from vetting forms because of concerns about their immigration status and the related fear that drawing the authorities' attention to the existence of family members could lead to their being deported.¹⁰⁵
- 4.65 The Inquiry also heard evidence of genuine mistakes, whereby applicants did not understand how incidents in their past had been dealt with or disposed of by the police, for instance where they had been spoken to by the police, taken to a police station, questioned and then released. As far as the applicants were concerned, that was the end of the matter and there was no requirement in the guidance to disclose the incidents; in reality, however, they had accepted a caution which was subsequently entered into police systems and appeared in vetting checks. The Inquiry was told that sometimes applicants were genuinely surprised when they found out that they had been formally cautioned by the police.¹⁰⁶

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Wayne Couzens' approach to the recruitment and vetting process

Conclusion 23

Wayne Couzens, at times, sought to deliberately mask his financial situation to increase his chances of being recruited to various police forces. There were additional failings on the part of some of those involved in his recruitment and vetting.

- 4.66 From the evidence it has seen, the Inquiry is satisfied that Couzens at times sought to deliberately mask his financial situation, omitted pertinent civil liability information in relation to financial matters, exaggerated his length of service in the Territorial Army, and misstated address details to increase his chances of being recruited to the various police forces with which he served. The Inquiry is also persuaded that, despite these misrepresentations, there were *additional* failings on the part of some of those involved in his recruitment and vetting. The Inquiry's detailed findings and recommendations on police recruitment and vetting practices for Couzens are set out in the remainder of this chapter.

Kent Police

Force policies on recruitment and vetting

- 4.67 In May 2006, Couzens successfully applied to be a special constable with Kent Police. He passed force vetting and, after a two-month training period, entered into service on 20 December 2006.
- 4.68 At that time, according to the force recruitment policy, recruitment activity at Kent Police was guided by projected vacancies.¹⁰⁷ Recruitment campaigns were held in certain periods depending on need, with certain community groups notified.¹⁰⁸ Between 2005 and 2008, the recruitment process for regular officers consisted of a paper sift of applications against nationally set criteria; a series of assessments ('assessment centre') consistent with national standards (a structured interview, four role-play exercises, two written tests, verbal and numerical reasoning tests); a medical examination; and a job-related fitness test (with a maximum of three attempts to pass).¹⁰⁹ All applications were also subject to satisfactory security, reference and professional standards checks.¹¹⁰

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- 4.69 Vetting functions were performed by the Human Resources Department assisted by the Force Intelligence Bureau. The Bureau would undertake relevant computer systems checks in line with the Recruitment Vetting policy in operation at that time, reporting the results to Human Resources. Human Resources would then make a decision as to the suitability of the applicant for recruitment.¹¹¹
- 4.70 The force policy on Recruitment Vetting in effect at the time describes the criteria to be applied, without exception, to full-time or part-time police officers, police staff and members of the Special Constabulary.¹¹² The policy also sets out the principles on which it is based: that is, legitimate public expectation about the calibre of those appointed as police officers; the importance of honesty and integrity given the nature of the work; the vulnerability of police officers, particularly if they are experiencing financial hardship; and confidentiality.¹¹³
- 4.71 The following checks were required under the force vetting policy, which also details which units were responsible for conducting them and when:
- background checks, including local area checks;
 - Special Branch checks;
 - a financial information form;
 - a security questionnaire (to be completed by applicants who are shortlisted for interview so that any issues can be raised at interview) – the security questionnaire will also include identity documents and the basic check verification form will be attached; and
 - medical declarations and references.¹¹⁴
- 4.72 The policy also notes that the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 means that the 1974 Act does not apply to the police service, meaning that the force was entitled to ask prospective employees to reveal spent convictions in the Recruitment Vetting process. The policy sets out a list of criminal convictions and cautions that would normally be a bar to any employment with the force, which includes convictions for recordable offences, including indecency, and cautions for such offences within the past five years.¹¹⁵
- 4.73 Under the policy, a case-by-case review mechanism¹¹⁶ could be applied in cases where the recruiter, selector or assessor believed there was justification to do so. If a manager believed that there was a case for considering an applicant even though they had a conviction or caution which would normally be a bar to entry, a written report outlining the reasons for considering the candidate was to be submitted to the head of the Human Resources Department for authority to proceed. If, on the other

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hand, it was suspected that an individual had failed to declare a criminal conviction, caution or association, enquiries were to be made and, if it was established that this was the case, the application was to be rejected.¹¹⁷

4.74 For matters not related to the criminal convictions criteria, the policy provides that managerial discretion should be exercised, with the basis of decisions fully documented and retained in the recruitment paperwork.¹¹⁸

4.75 With regard to applicants' financial status, the policy sets out that individual applications are designated as:

- low risk: no significant risk to the force and vetting may continue;
- medium risk: existing debts which pose a risk to the force, so further advice must be sought; or
- high risk: serious financial difficulties which pose a significant risk to the force, and the candidate will normally be rejected (although there are exceptions).¹¹⁹

Wayne Couzens' application

4.76 The Inquiry was advised that Couzens' personnel file had been located in an archive room.¹²⁰ The information available covers the period of his service as a special constable with Kent Police, from his application in May 2006 to his resignation in September 2010. Within this file is reference to Couzens having made an application to join Kent Police as a regular constable in 2008, but having failed at the vetting stage.¹²¹ The Inquiry was advised that the application itself could not be located and is thought to have been destroyed, in line with the policy at the time, which was to destroy regular constable applications one year after the failed application.¹²²

4.77 In his Kent Special Constabulary application form, submitted in May 2006, Couzens disclosed that he had applied to two different forces – Kent Police, as a regular officer, and the Civil Nuclear Constabulary – in the preceding two years, but he had been unsuccessful and had been advised to apply to the Special Constabulary to “gain vital experience” before applying to a regular force again. He confirmed that he had failed the interview for Kent Police in September 2004 and that he had “failed on selection” for the Civil Nuclear Constabulary as he “did not meet their criteria”. He described his past financial history as “a little rocky, but I have always been honest and paid in full any monies that I have borrowed”, but no further details of his finances were provided.¹²³

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- 4.78 In the form, Couzens also disclosed experience and training in the Territorial Army from 17 March 2002.¹²⁴ There is no mention of a spouse or partner, but the application form was filled in before his marriage. He also noted that he had been studying GCSE Russian from 2005.¹²⁵ There is no record available to indicate whether his referees were spoken to or contacted, or, if so, what they said about him; two of the referees were also listed in his application to obtain National Security Vetting in 2011 (this is referred to in more detail in the section on the Civil Nuclear Constabulary (see paragraphs 4.113 to 4.235)).¹²⁶

Vetting process

- 4.79 While Couzens' application form for Kent Special Constabulary has been recovered, no vetting records were found. The Inquiry has therefore sought to explore how the vetting decision was likely to have been made in his case with a range of experienced practitioners from within the force.
- 4.80 Couzens' vetting to become a special constable was undertaken before the Central Vetting Unit was created in Kent (see paragraph 4.87). The Inquiry was told by someone familiar with the vetting process at Kent at that time that all applicants for regular officer posts had their vetting checks conducted centrally by the Force Intelligence Bureau, whereas checks on applicants for Kent Special Constabulary could be done "out on area", namely by local teams.¹²⁷ It was therefore entirely possible, the Inquiry heard, that someone applying to Kent Police at that time could have failed vetting to be a regular officer through the central Force Intelligence Bureau process, but could have passed the locally administered vetting process for special constables, even though this latter process, on the face of it, applied the same policies and criteria.¹²⁸
- 4.81 The lack of vetting records means that the Inquiry does not know whether Couzens' failed application to Kent Police in 2004 was considered when he was being vetted for the position of special constable. As indicated in paragraph 4.76, there was a policy in place at Kent Police in 2008 regarding the destruction of regular constable applications after one year had elapsed, but it is unclear whether that policy was in place in 2004.
- 4.82 From the records that are available, however, it is also clear that, in May 2008, Couzens applied again to join Kent Police as a regular constable.¹²⁹ As part of that process, on 13 May 2008, a letter was sent to the Specials Recruitment Team at Kent Police from the Kent Police College Recruitment Department seeking confirmation of his service as a special constable and requesting completion of a reference (including a note of any complaints against him).¹³⁰ Additionally, on 1 August 2008, the Kent Police College Recruitment Department sought confirmation of Couzens' service from the Territorial Army. In a letter dated 9 September 2008, the Territorial Army confirmed that Couzens was:

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“[...] a volunteer member of the Territorial Army therefore not subject to regular Serviceperson’s procedure. He will not have been issued with an Army Form B108 (Certificate of Service) or received a conduct grading on discharge.”¹³¹

- 4.83 The Inquiry was advised by the Ministry of Defence that Army Reserve (formerly Territorial Army) soldiers who were discharged after six years of unbroken service would be entitled to a valedictory letter upon request. This is because the majority of members of the Army Reserve are already in civilian employment and so they do not receive a testimonial on discharge. The valedictory letter does not contain an assessment of character but is a recognition of service. As Couzens’ service was 5 years and 364 days, he was not entitled to receive a valedictory letter. Moreover, his record shows that he was discharged under the authority of the Territorial Army Regulations 1978 due to his failure to fulfil training obligations of 27 days per calendar year. It is therefore unlikely that his unit would have produced a positive recommendation for employment had they been approached. The Inquiry was also told that, unlike a soldier in the regular Armed Forces – who would receive a certificate of discharge, including an assessment of military character – as a part-time volunteer reservist, an assessment would not have been made by the military as to his character, and the expectation is (and was) that reservists would approach their full-time employer for references.¹³² Couzens’ full-time employer at that stage was the family business.
- 4.84 The letter dated 9 September 2008 from the Territorial Army confirms Couzens’ date of enlistment as 17 April 2002 and his date of discharge as 16 April 2008.¹³³ The Inquiry understands that, while Couzens’ date of discharge was 16 April 2008, he had not attended training since 11 July 2007.¹³⁴ The Inquiry was told that, had the information about Couzens’ failure to return his kit and the ensuing debt owed to the Territorial Army (see paragraph 1.26) been available when he was applying to join Kent Police as a regular officer in 2008, it would have been “classed as dishonesty” and would have caused concern to those involved in the vetting process.¹³⁵
- 4.85 On a letter dated 14 November 2008, which seems to be a duplicate of the letter of 13 May 2008 from the Kent Police College Recruitment Department referred to in paragraph 4.82, is a handwritten note stating:
- “Not actioned due to failure on Force Vetting.”¹³⁶
- 4.86 At the time in question, vetting and human resources processes were distinct, and vetting information was confidential and to be held on the vetting file only (this remains the case today). As a result, the personnel file available to the Inquiry does not include a note of any reason for the failure of Couzens to pass force vetting at that time.

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Central Vetting Unit

- 4.87 HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (now known as His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services) made a recommendation that, by April 2007, all chief officers should have carried out an analysis of current vetting structures within their force and, where gaps existed, move towards being fully compliant with the 2004 Association of Chief Police Officers' National Vetting Policy.¹³⁷ Kent Police's newly established Central Vetting Unit began taking over vetting functions for the force from early 2007.¹³⁸
- 4.88 As indicated in paragraph 4.76, Couzens applied to become a regular officer with Kent Police in 2008, but failed vetting. At that time, his vetting would have been carried out by staff in the Central Vetting Unit. The Inquiry therefore explored, with a witness with knowledge of the Unit, the training and processes in effect at the time to understand what factors would have been considered when this application was assessed.
- 4.89 The Inquiry was told that, while the Central Vetting Unit would use third-party companies such as Experian (a multinational company offering analysis of financial data) to conduct credit checks for applicants, it would be police staff within the Unit who assessed the results of those checks and the other information provided during the vetting process.¹³⁹
- 4.90 The Inquiry heard evidence¹⁴⁰ that staff within the Central Vetting Unit were recruited mainly from within Kent Police. Due to the nature of the work, those who took up the roles had to undergo force vetting at the Management Vetting level, as well as National Security Vetting to the Security Check level. In terms of the sort of skills sought in those who came to work at the Unit, some of the key qualities were honesty, integrity and confidentiality; it was also important to ensure that vetting staff understood the obligations for handling personal data.¹⁴¹
- 4.91 Those recruited to work in the Central Vetting Unit undertook a wide variety of bespoke training. They were trained on both the Police National Computer and Genesis, which was the local intelligence database for Kent Police. Users had to take a test on both systems when they had completed their training. Vetting team leaders or experienced vetting assistants would train the new starters on the other databases used; these more experienced staff would be able to quality-assure the checks being conducted to make sure that there was confidence in the output. The induction was therefore a combination of formal training and ongoing 'on the job' learning, focusing primarily on the use of systems. At a certain point a nationwide training module on vetting was created, which was taken by new recruits when they joined the Unit.¹⁴²

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Checks conducted

- 4.92 Vetting decisions would be informed by the details entered on the vetting application form by the applicant, including background information about family members, as well as by credit checks carried out via Experian, and also by information contained on the Police National Computer and the Police National Database.¹⁴³
- 4.93 The Police National Database had a predecessor called the Impact Nominal Index; this had been introduced following the Bichard Inquiry into the deaths of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman, to facilitate the sharing of information between different police forces.¹⁴⁴ It signalled where information about an individual was held by another police force, and then that force could be asked to provide it. As the Impact Nominal Index was developed into the Police National Database, it became easier to access the actual underlying information.
- 4.94 The Inquiry was told, however,¹⁴⁵ that at times, even now, information may be missing from the Police National Database for a number of days or weeks because it has not been uploaded by the police force in question. Some forces do not upload as a matter of course and there are also IT-related issues,¹⁴⁶ but it was recognised by witnesses with a responsibility for vetting functions that any delay in updating the Police National Database could create a risk of some relevant intelligence being missed during vetting checks. The Inquiry heard that the Police National Database can be updated retrospectively but that some Police National Database uploads do not happen until after a period of weeks from the date of the relevant incident.¹⁴⁷
- 4.95 The Experian credit check enabled a review of the candidate's previous six years' accounts and payments or missed payments. It also identified County Court Judgments and other similar potential risk indicators that may apply to the candidate.¹⁴⁸

Decision-making

- 4.96 Vetting assistants would prepare the documents enumerating the checks conducted and their outcome, but it was the vetting team leaders who were responsible for making the clearance decisions, applying the National Decision Model (see paragraph 4.34).¹⁴⁹
- 4.97 The Inquiry was told that every case would be considered on its merits; there was no absolute list of factors that might prevent clearance from being granted. Only in extreme cases – for example, if someone had served a prison sentence for a particular type of crime – would a candidate be refused clearance automatically in accordance with the relevant guidance. In other cases where applicants did not fully meet the criteria set out in the force vetting policy, the force would seek to respond flexibly, conducting a risk analysis before deciding whether to accept or reject the applicant and considering whether there were any steps that could be taken to

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mitigate the risk by providing the individual with support. Decision-makers could apply a considerable degree of discretion, but they had the option to escalate the decision to someone more senior if they were unsure about how to proceed. The head of the Human Resources Department (consulting others as necessary) would be responsible for making a final determination about whether to proceed with the recruitment.¹⁵⁰

- 4.98 The Inquiry was told that the Association of Chief Police Officers' guidance that was in place for vetting decisions at the time that Couzens was vetted by Kent Police was very prescriptive in terms of the grounds for refusal of clearance, meaning that fewer decisions had to be escalated.¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, the final clearance decision still lay with the individual force. That meant that the guidance could be overridden if the force vetting manager felt that the decision to refuse clearance would be disproportionate, for example if an offence committed by the applicant had taken place a number of years ago.¹⁵²
- 4.99 The guidance outlines acceptable practice but does not have the force and effect of law, and thus departure from it does not result in sanction. In fact, guidance can and often does allow for a range of discretion.

Home visits

- 4.100 The Inquiry was told that, *after* Couzens' time at Kent Police, the force introduced a system of in-person visits to the homes of candidates for roles in the Special Constabulary. These visits, which the Inquiry understands were also carried out for candidates for regular officer roles, took place at the end of the pre-employment checking process, which sometimes coincided with the vetting process. These visits, designed to assist with assessing suitability for the role and involving the completion of a questionnaire, were resource-intensive as they were conducted by a senior officer.¹⁵³ The visits were described to the Inquiry in the following terms:

"[A]s well as being a useful information-gathering exercise, they play a useful deterrent function, alerting the applicant very early in the process that we are going to check the information they have provided us with."¹⁵⁴

- 4.101 The home visit process primarily involved going out to an applicant's home and asking questions there. This allowed an opportunity to observe the applicant's home life and environment. Witness evidence indicated that, while the visit was supposed to take 30 to 45 minutes, officers would often spend up to 2 hours with the applicant to "spend a decent amount of time observing and looking at each applicant's home environment as well as gauging the personality and calibre of the applicant".¹⁵⁵ Witness evidence provided to the Inquiry noted that family members would be present in the interview itself, asking questions about, for example, any potential backlash someone might face if they went out of the house in uniform.¹⁵⁶

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4.102 Witness evidence did identify a risk with home visits, namely that they could perhaps become rather perfunctory, with a list of questions being asked and answered with no real quest for detail.¹⁵⁷ The Inquiry was also told that, at the stage when the home visit interview takes place, applicants are more or less through the formal application process. The home interviews are “pretty much a final interview” and a real opportunity to get to know the candidate.¹⁵⁸

4.103 As indicated in paragraph 4.100, such visits were not in place at the time Couzens applied to Kent Special Constabulary.¹⁵⁹ The Inquiry was advised by Kent Police that, in March 2023, the new Police Constable Integrity Questionnaire was introduced as part of what is described as the “Final Candidate Checkpoint process”.¹⁶⁰

4.104 That process is completed to allow a review of all information for the candidate, including vetting information changes, professional standards expectations and testing the values of the candidate.

4.105 The process, instead of a physical home visit, offers the candidate the opportunity to engage with a serving police officer, virtually via Microsoft Teams, to understand the challenges and requirements of modern policing. This new process was described to the Inquiry as:

“[...] more efficient removing travel time and offering a more flexible solution to free up valuable time for the operational supervisors conducting the checks.”¹⁶¹

4.106 During the Final Candidate Checkpoint process, candidates are asked to highlight any changes to their vetting declarations regarding business interests, family members, personal circumstances, and so on. Previously this would have been addressed in a meeting at the candidate’s home address in which the assessor went through the home visit questionnaire.

4.107 The main objectives of the new questionnaire are to:

- check the overall living circumstances and family dynamic within the applicant’s residence;
- confirm understanding of key areas, such as violence against women and girls, counter-corruption and the Code of Ethics – ensuring awareness and understanding of values, briefing on the Code of Ethics, and ensuring that applicants agree to adhere to them;
- carry out an integrity check by ensuring that face-to-face answers match what the candidate has put on the application form;
- ensure that the right motivations are in place for wanting to join the police;

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- reconfirm personal details ahead of adding new joiners to police systems; and
- address any candidate concerns or questions one to one ahead of their start date.¹⁶²

4.108 Information highlighted on the questionnaire is reviewed, and the candidate's application is placed on hold awaiting an outcome: for example, if a candidate mentions in the interview information that is not contained in the vetting form.¹⁶³

4.109 The Final Candidate Checkpoint process is not an assessment, so there is no pass or fail. If candidates mention information that does not align with the values of the force or that should be highlighted to the Vetting Team or Professional Standards Department, this is actioned and highlighted as part of their clearances. Part of the questionnaire is a detailed check that crucial information has been declared to vetting and is still current and correct.¹⁶⁴

Conclusion 24

Home visits are an important part of the application process and should be used for all police recruitment.

4.110 The Inquiry recognises that home visits are an important part of the application process, offering a unique opportunity to talk to the applicant, to observe their lifestyle as well as their family life, and to reach a conclusion about their suitability for the job, which is just as important for special constables as it is for full-time officers. The Inquiry considers that all new applicants to police forces should undergo a home visit interview as part of the recruitment process, before appointment. This is to ensure that, insofar as possible, the candidates' motivations, values and behaviours align with the College of Policing Competency and Values Framework.¹⁶⁵

Conclusion 25

At Kent Police, the same vetting policy appears to have been applied in different years by different teams with different results. There was also an element of discretion exercised by the force vetting staff even where the guidance itself was quite prescriptive.

4.111 The Inquiry presumes, based on the evidence available to it and given the passage of time, that the version of the Association of Chief Police Officers' vetting policy in place when Couzens applied to be a special constable with Kent Police in 2006 was the same as that in place when he applied to be a

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regular officer with Kent Police in 2008. If that was indeed the case, it is clear that the same policy was applied in different years by different teams with different results. There was also an element of discretion exercised by the force vetting staff, even where the guidance itself was quite prescriptive.

Conclusion 26

Wayne Couzens remained a special constable with Kent Police despite having failed vetting to be a regular officer in the same force.

- 4.112 As indicated in paragraph 1.32, Couzens entered into an Individual Voluntary Arrangement in February 2007. It is therefore possible – although the Inquiry cannot know for sure given the lack of documentation now available – that he failed vetting for the regular officer post at Kent Police in 2008 because of that Individual Voluntary Arrangement. It is indisputable, however, that, despite having been refused vetting clearance by the Central Vetting Unit of Kent Police in 2008, Couzens remained a special constable with that force. He did not undergo any form of re-vetting before his resignation in September 2010. This means that he was deployed, potentially on his own (having achieved Independent Patrol Status in 2007), with the same warranted powers and carrying out the same role as a regular constable. The risks to his integrity, and to the force, were presumably also the same, particularly as he had not been re-vetted in the interim during his time as a special constable. The only mitigation to those risks would seem to be that, as a special constable, he was not deployed on a full-time basis. That mitigation was clearly inadvertent, however, rather than a deliberate decision by the force following a formal risk assessment.

Civil Nuclear Constabulary

Force policies on recruitment and vetting

- 4.113 When Couzens applied to join the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, in late 2009, the Constabulary's recruitment process consisted of shortlisting against national recruitment criteria, with additional criteria for eyesight, hearing and driving licences as compared with other forces. This was followed by a telephone interview with the Recruitment Team; an assessment centre consistent with the National Policing Improvement Agency assessment process (situational judgement, written and briefing exercises and a competency-based interview); a firearms assessment; a medical examination; a fitness test (with a higher standard required for authorised firearms officers than for regular officers in Home Office police forces); reference checks; and then vetting.¹⁶⁶
- 4.114 At the time when Couzens was applying to join the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, the force was running an ongoing recruitment campaign, with a particularly large uplift of officers needed at the Sellafield site in Cumbria.¹⁶⁷ The recruitment campaign

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focused on increasing the numbers in that location. The Inquiry heard that not many other police forces were recruiting during this period, meaning that a number of candidates were coming through the Civil Nuclear Constabulary recruitment pipeline who might otherwise have wanted to apply to a Home Office police force. It was therefore considered important to manage applicants' expectations about what to expect from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary,¹⁶⁸ namely that the role was more akin to a specialised armed guard¹⁶⁹ and that opportunities for investigative work and community engagement, for example, were negligible.

- 4.115 The national recruitment guidance for police officers that was drawn up by the National Policing Improvement Agency and was in force at the time¹⁷⁰ specified certain criteria that applicants must satisfy, including those relating to age, nationality status, right to work, previous criminal history, close family members, financial checks and criminal associations. Using this guidance, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary Recruitment Team carried out basic checks on the Police National Computer via the Force Communications Team.¹⁷¹
- 4.116 The Inquiry was told that, as per the national recruitment guidance, any criminal convictions or cautions an individual had received would raise a concern and would be scrutinised further, for example by ascertaining the age of the individual at the time of committing the offence, the nature of the offence and how long ago it had occurred.¹⁷² If an applicant had failed to declare an involvement with the police that was subsequently discovered during the checks carried out by the force, the applicant should be rejected automatically since the failure to disclose raised concerns about honesty and integrity. If the applicant had declared that they had committed an offence deemed 'more minor', there was a list of criteria a candidate would be required to meet, depending on what they had declared, and this would be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Recruitment Team. The guidance therefore allowed a degree of discretion to police forces during the recruitment process depending on the nature of the conviction or the declaration from the applicant regarding their criminal history.¹⁷³
- 4.117 The Inquiry was also told that, during the recruitment process, information about an applicant's financial situation could also cause concern. Any outstanding County Court Judgments or evidence of a debt being in arrears would merit further investigation to ascertain the degree to which a candidate could be vulnerable to, for instance, bribery. The recruitment guidance set out criteria for these situations: if an individual was in financial difficulty because they had a mortgage and had lost their job, or if a County Court Judgment was 'spent' and there was proof of that, their recruitment would not necessarily be blocked.¹⁷⁴
- 4.118 The national recruitment guidance in effect at the time referred to the relevant provision of the Police Regulations 2003 that a member of a police force should not wilfully refuse or neglect to discharge any lawful debt, and stated that applicants

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to the police service should normally be free from undischarged debt or liability, and able to manage existing loans. The emphasis was on sensible management of debt.¹⁷⁵ Crucially, the guidance also clearly stated the following:

“[A]pplicants who are the subject of a current Individual Voluntary Arrangement (IVA) **should not be considered** [emphasis added].”¹⁷⁶

- 4.119 The National Policing Improvement Agency recruitment guidance was, however, to be read in accordance with the Association of Chief Police Officers’ vetting guidance issued in August 2010, which stated: “Applicants who are the subject of a current Individual Voluntary Arrangement/Trust Deed should not be considered.”¹⁷⁷ It went on to state: “Applicants who have discharged the Individual Voluntary Arrangement/Trust Deed should be considered.”¹⁷⁸ It was therefore explicit under the Association of Chief Police Officers’ vetting guidance that forces had an ability to consider for recruitment applicants who had a discharged Individual Voluntary Arrangement or Trust Deed, whereas it was not mentioned, and was therefore only implicit, under the parallel National Policing Improvement Agency recruitment guidance.
- 4.120 The Civil Nuclear Constabulary Recruitment Team had access only to the Police National Computer, which listed cautions and convictions; no other databases were available to them. The Team was therefore unable to check applicants’ financial situations and had to rely on the information provided in the application forms, although the Team did have the assurance that further checks, including of finances, would be carried out during the vetting process. The financial aspect would also be considered by Human Resources.¹⁷⁹ Essentially, the role of the Civil Nuclear Constabulary Recruitment Team was to facilitate the process of applicants going through the assessment centre and prepare them for security vetting checks.¹⁸⁰ The Inquiry was told that there were a number of checks and balances to determine whether a candidate could move on to the next stage.¹⁸¹
- 4.121 The Inquiry saw evidence that, as part of this process, a check of Couzens’ complaints and discipline history was sought from Kent Police, as well as a reference from a named garage (the family business) in Dover.¹⁸² No information was sought from the Territorial Army; even if it had been, it is unlikely that a positive recommendation would have been provided (see paragraph 4.83).¹⁸³
- 4.122 The Civil Nuclear Constabulary had no force-specific vetting guidance in place at the time Couzens applied as it had outsourced its vetting to Thames Valley Police (see paragraph 4.130).
- 4.123 The standard vetting checks undertaken by Thames Valley Police included:

- voters’ register;

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- Police National Computer;
- credit check via Experian (albeit information about levels of debt could be out of date);
- Parasol (an IT system containing National Security Vetting at Counter Terrorist Check and Security Check levels);
- criminal intelligence and Special Branch checks; and
- Impact Nominal Index – an early version of the Police National Database.¹⁸⁴

Wayne Couzens' application

- 4.124 In his Civil Nuclear Constabulary application form,¹⁸⁵ Couzens ranked his preferred locations as: (i) Dungeness; (ii) Harwell; and (iii) Sizewell. He did not mention Sellafield at all, no doubt due to its location far from his home in Kent. His file notes that he passed the initial check (presumably the eligibility check) on 23 December 2009.¹⁸⁶
- 4.125 He passed the assessment centre on 13 April 2010¹⁸⁷ and was advised that he had passed his medical in a letter dated 26 August 2010.¹⁸⁸ This was also noted in his file under the entry for Stage Three Post Assessment Centre Activities.¹⁸⁹ On 21 October 2010, he was told by letter that his assessment results should have expired by the time of the March 2011 intake, but since the March intake had already been scheduled, and since his results would have been expired for less than six months, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary would honour them for that intake.¹⁹⁰
- 4.126 Couzens was advised by letter dated 18 January 2011 that he had failed the fitness test against the new standard in early January 2011 (date unknown from the available disclosure)¹⁹¹ and he was told that he could not be offered a place on the March 2011 intake. On 25 January 2011, however, he was re-offered a place on the March 2011 intake subject to passing another fitness test on 15 February 2011.¹⁹² According to the Civil Nuclear Constabulary file, on 9 February 2011 he was offered a posting at Sellafield and informed that his training course would start on 7 March 2011. On the face of it, the Sellafield posting offer came before he had retaken the fitness test.¹⁹³
- 4.127 In his application form, Couzens:
- documents a driving offence in 1995;

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- makes reference to an Individual Voluntary Arrangement;
- makes reference to a County Court Judgment cleared in 1998;
- lists previous addresses;
- lists next of kin and immediate family;
- lists previous employment with a garage in Dover;
- lists service with the Territorial Army from 1998 to 2009. That was clearly incorrect as the information obtained from the Ministry of Defence shows that he served from April 2002 to April 2008 (and he last attended training in July 2007).¹⁹⁴

4.128 Despite the fact that he confirmed details in his application of relatives who lived abroad and enclosed marriage documents in a foreign language (translated into English), the Civil Nuclear Constabulary Human Resources documentation at the time of his offer of employment notes the word “no” in response to the question “does the candidate have any foreign connections?”¹⁹⁵ The authorisation from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary that the application was to progress is unsigned.

Vetting roles and responsibilities

4.129 At the time of Couzens’ application, vetting at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary consisted of two stages: first, force vetting; and then National Security Vetting. Both processes were overseen in the force by the Civil Nuclear Constabulary Vetting Team. By the time the Vetting Team received applicants’ vetting forms, those applicants had already undergone the human resources aspect of the recruitment process, including the authentication procedure as described in paragraph 4.21.¹⁹⁶ The Vetting Team would then review the vetting forms for any omissions and errors and would liaise with the organisations responsible for conducting the two different vetting processes: force vetting and National Security Vetting.¹⁹⁷

4.130 The Inquiry heard evidence that the Civil Nuclear Constabulary had outsourced its force vetting to Thames Valley Police, a Home Office police force, some time before 2010.¹⁹⁸ This was a decision taken by vetting leadership at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary in order to offer further assurance about an applicant’s background before they were employed by the force.¹⁹⁹

4.131 Before Thames Valley Police’s involvement in force vetting, authorised firearms officers being recruited to the Civil Nuclear Constabulary underwent only National Security Vetting checks. Those with responsibility for vetting at the force had recognised, however, that since National Security Vetting was designed to counter threats to government assets, it offered only limited assurance that the individual

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was suitable to be a police officer or an authorised firearms officer. This was due both to the fact that the National Security Vetting process relied on fewer information sources – and, in particular, fewer police databases – than the force vetting process, and also to the distinct way in which National Security Vetting decisions were made.²⁰⁰

Vetting process

- 4.132 There are now a series of annually reviewed Memoranda of Understanding between Thames Valley Police and the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, which formalise the arrangements for force vetting and outline the nature of the checks to be carried out. The Inquiry has not seen any Memoranda of Understanding predating 2014 but has taken evidence from vetting professionals from both Thames Valley Police and the Civil Nuclear Constabulary about the process in force at the time of Couzens' application in 2010–11.²⁰¹
- 4.133 At that time, the Thames Valley Police Vetting Team comprised a combination of police staff and officers.²⁰² The vetting system was completely paper based, with vetting assistants responsible for carrying out the relevant checks, collating all the results, and printing them off to form a single pack. The vetting assistants would then pass the completed pack to a supervisor, who would make the vetting decision in accordance with the Association of Chief Police Officers' National Vetting Policy in force at the time (Version 3.0, dated August 2010).²⁰³
- 4.134 In terms of training, the Inquiry was told that vetting assistants received one-on-one mentoring from a team leader, who was also a supervisor. The Inquiry did not get a clear indication of how long the mentoring lasted, but was told that it was probably until the assistant felt confident with the processes and was able to run through the various vetting checks unsupervised. But even after mentoring ended, members of the Team would frequently liaise with each other to sense check points.²⁰⁴
- 4.135 The Civil Nuclear Constabulary Vetting Team would send all vetting forms to Thames Valley Police in hard copy, and members of the Thames Valley Police Vetting Team would select new files to review in date or priority order. The Thames Valley Police Vetting Team would review a vetting form, carry out the vetting checks on the Civil Nuclear Constabulary's behalf, fill in a checklist and then make a recommendation based on the standards set out in the guidance applicable at the time. Importantly, it was then for the Civil Nuclear Constabulary to make the decision about whether or not to proceed with employing the applicant, although the Inquiry was told that usually the recommendation from Thames Valley Police would be followed.²⁰⁵

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Wayne Couzens' vetting

- 4.136 The Inquiry saw a document known as the "CVU [Central Vetting Unit] Checklist", which was used by the Thames Valley Police Vetting Team to track and record progress with each vetting file.²⁰⁶
- 4.137 The Central Vetting Unit Checklist for Couzens confirms that checks were carried out with other police forces – in this case, Kent, as Couzens was living in that force area at the time. The handwritten annotations alongside 'Other Force Disclosures Enquiry' confirm that the relevant paperwork was sent to Kent Police on 2 March 2011 and was returned by Kent Police on 18 March 2011. Nothing of note was returned from Kent Police following criminal intelligence and Special Branch checks. The checklist also confirms that a check of the Impact Nominal Index (the predecessor database to the Police National Database) was carried out to undertake intelligence checks and that the checks came back as 'NT', meaning 'no trace'. This confirmed that no other forces had uploaded any information about Couzens to the national databases by the time they were checked.²⁰⁷

Financial checks

- 4.138 Another of the items on the Central Vetting Unit Checklist is entitled 'Credit Reference'. Alongside this item, there is an annotation reading: "full financial declaration – left message, 4/3/11, emailed. Feb and March. Not required." This confirmed that further information was being sought from Couzens about his financial situation for vetting purposes.²⁰⁸ The Inquiry was told that this was because he had declared an Individual Voluntary Arrangement in his application, but that he had not provided much information about it.²⁰⁹ The annotation confirms that the Thames Valley Police Vetting Team had emailed him, in line with the normal protocol in such cases, to request a full financial declaration in February 2011 and had also left a voicemail message for him on 4 March 2011.²¹⁰ The "Not required" comment is explained in a more detailed file note which appears later in the application pack and is referred to in paragraph 4.147.²¹¹
- 4.139 The email sent to Couzens on 18 February 2011 by a member of the Thames Valley Police Vetting Team read:

"I have recently been passed your application to become a Police Officer for the CNC [Civil Nuclear Constabulary] as we carry out vetting on their behalf. On your forms you have declared in the financial section that you have arranged an IVA [Individual Voluntary Arrangement], therefore can you please provide further information on this including the following: 1. How the debt arose, how much this was and how much is outstanding; 2. The terms on the IVA – Are you paying back the full debt or a percentage (if so how much), When are you due to finish paying off all debt; If you have any paperwork relating to this then if possible please supply a copy."²¹²

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4.140 The Inquiry was told in evidence that it was necessary to gather this information because the Association of Chief Police Officers' vetting guidance in place at the time directed that any applicant who had an Individual Voluntary Arrangement where a portion of the debt had been written off should be refused clearance. The evidence to the Inquiry was that the Thames Valley Police Vetting Team was seeking to establish the full picture in Couzens' case to ascertain whether any of the debt had been written off via an Individual Voluntary Arrangement or whether, alternatively, there was a debt management plan in place which involved payment of the full outstanding amount. The evidence suggested that, if applicants were keeping up to date with payments and were repaying the entire amount, Thames Valley Police would *potentially* have recommended them for clearance, but that a full financial declaration was needed before any determination could be made.²¹³ This position, as explained to the Inquiry, appears to be in accordance with the vetting guidance in force at the time, which is clear that "[a]pplicants who are the subject of a current Individual Voluntary Arrangement/Trust Deed should not be considered" and "[a]pplicants who have discharged the Individual Voluntary Arrangement/Trust Deed should be considered" (see paragraph 4.119).

4.141 In Couzens' case, Thames Valley Police was not sure of the level of debt owed or the status of any repayments, as he had not provided this detail. The Inquiry considers that it was therefore appropriate for further enquiries to be made with Couzens, particularly as the Inquiry was told that the credit check performed as part of the vetting process did not show an Individual Voluntary Arrangement in place, but it did show various credit card accounts as 'Status 8', which meant that they were in default. All were for varying amounts. That credit check was run on 18 February 2011; the email to Couzens was sent the same day.²¹⁴

4.142 Couzens did not reply to the 18 February email and so a further email was sent to him on 25 February 2011; this was followed up with the phone message left for him on 4 March 2011.²¹⁵

4.143 At some point Couzens must have returned the phone call and spoken with a member of the Vetting Team, as the Inquiry has seen an email to him from the Vetting Team dated 7 March 2011, which states:

"Thanks for calling back and speaking with my colleague. Below is the original email I sent in regards to the IVA [Individual Voluntary Arrangement] you have declared in your forms."²¹⁶

4.144 That email was re-sent on 15 March 2011, and Couzens replied on the same day, stating:

"I have just received your message on my answer phone, I have your email so the email address you have for me is correct. I have now had my vetting interview with [redacted] today. If you require any further information please contact me."²¹⁷

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Conclusion 27

Wayne Couzens did not provide Thames Valley Police with all of the financial information requested by them for his force vetting for the Civil Nuclear Constabulary.

4.145 **Couzens never provided Thames Valley Police with the financial information requested.**²¹⁸

4.146 The “vetting interview”²¹⁹ referred to in Couzens’ email is the subject interview undertaken as part of the separate National Security Vetting process that Couzens was also required to undergo as part of his recruitment to the Civil Nuclear Constabulary (see paragraphs 4.161 to 4.215 for more detail). Couzens was therefore already undergoing the National Security Vetting process before the Thames Valley Police force vetting process had been completed, and therefore in advance of any recommendation on force vetting from Thames Valley Police. Although the national guidance on vetting in force at the time stated that the National Security Vetting process should not be undertaken until the relevant force vetting checks had been satisfactorily completed, it also allowed for a scenario where applicants were completing force vetting and National Security Vetting questionnaires in parallel.²²⁰

4.147 The Inquiry saw Thames Valley Police vetting file notes²²¹ and discussed them with witnesses. The notes relate to the concerns about Couzens’ finances, the level of his debt and the fact that he had declared an Individual Voluntary Arrangement which did not otherwise feature in the credit checks undertaken. One such note made by a member of the Vetting Team, dated 17 March 2011, states:

“Wayne had not got back to me regarding his financial declaration so when I chased this he advised he had a ‘vetting interview’ and if I needed anything further to let him know. I spoke with [a Civil Nuclear Constabulary staff member] who advised he had been interviewed as he was going through DV [Developed Vetting] vetting. [The Constabulary staff member] is happy that we do not need to get any further information in relation to his finances and that their HR [Human Resources] were going to take responsibility for this. One [sic] I have received all OOF [out of force checks] the file can be closed with our usual recommendations.”²²²

4.148 This note reveals the Civil Nuclear Constabulary’s position on Couzens’ force vetting: namely, that Thames Valley Police did not need to look into his finances any further.²²³ As explained in more detail in paragraphs 4.154 to 4.155, this appears to have been because the Civil Nuclear Constabulary felt that the National Security Vetting process would address any issues or concerns about his finances.

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Force vetting recommendation

4.149 On 18 March 2011, Thames Valley Police received the outstanding information from Kent Police that was required to complete the force vetting checks, and thereafter a final note was prepared for the vetting file. It is undated and states:

“On Wayne’s vetting forms he has declared an IVA [Individual Voluntary Arrangement]. As per my previous file note, no further information has been sought from Wayne to clarify the amounts and conditions of the IVA. Normally in these circumstances this information would be gained from the applicant to then enable us to make a decision. For a normal IVA where an applicant is only paying a percentage of the debt back and the rest is written off, **as per national guidelines we would refuse clearance based on this** [emphasis added]. Therefore this would be my recommendation for Wayne. However as no financial declaration has been gained this is based purely on information he has given on his forms and therefore could be subject to change if further information was gained from him. There is nothing else of concern on his vetting file. As per my conversation with [a Civil Nuclear Constabulary staff member] my understanding is that what he has already declared regarding his finances including the IVA is not resulting in them refusing his clearance.”²²⁴

4.150 The Inquiry heard from a witness familiar with Thames Valley Police’s role in Civil Nuclear Constabulary vetting that, based on the information available to the Thames Valley Police Vetting Team at the time, and in accordance with the guidance then in place, their recommendation would have been that Couzens should not pass force vetting.²²⁵ The Inquiry considers that, while this was the correct recommendation, the rationale given for the decision was unclear because it could be read as suggesting that there may be certain types of Individual Voluntary Arrangement that might be accepted. This does not properly reflect the provisions of the guidance. Nevertheless, Thames Valley Police recognised that the final clearance decision was for the Civil Nuclear Constabulary as the recruiting force. The Inquiry heard that once Thames Valley Police had completed the vetting checks and had made its recommendation, details of the recommendation would be added to the application pack, which would then be returned to the Civil Nuclear Constabulary. Any recommendation to refuse clearance would be passed to the Civil Nuclear Constabulary security manager, who had a background in vetting and would then take a decision on whether or not to grant clearance.²²⁶

Decision-making

4.151 The Inquiry spoke to witnesses from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary about the Thames Valley Police recommendation not to grant Couzens vetting clearance.²²⁷ The Inquiry heard that, generally, where concerns were raised in relation to finance, despite the clear nature of the guidance, a balancing exercise would be undertaken when deciding whether to grant or refuse clearance, with the factors taken into

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account including the amount of any debts owed and whether the debt(s) had been declared during the application process (as that demonstrated honesty and integrity).²²⁸

4.152 The Inquiry has not seen any documentation from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary setting out the rationale for the final force vetting decision on Couzens. In their evidence to the Inquiry, witnesses for the Constabulary, speaking from memory and having reviewed the material still available from Couzens' application process, opined that an applicant having an Individual Voluntary Arrangement would not necessarily have caused significant concern because, as one witness put it, "everyone is in debt".²²⁹ If the applicant was managing the debt and there was no associated mental instability, the existence of the debt would not preclude that individual from being employed by the Civil Nuclear Constabulary.²³⁰

4.153 The Inquiry also heard from a Civil Nuclear Constabulary witness:

"[I]ndividuals joining the CNC [Civil Nuclear Constabulary] are not going to become a police officer per se and from my experience any Home Office or Scottish Police force would not regard the CNC as a 'police force'; many would see [it] as a specialist armed guard force."²³¹

4.154 On that basis, one justification suggested for proceeding with Couzens' application was that, while Thames Valley Police had flagged the Individual Voluntary Arrangement from a Home Office force vetting perspective, and while by Home Office force standards Couzens may not have passed vetting, the considerations at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary were different: the implication was that their authorised firearms officers had less direct contact with the public and were therefore less susceptible to risks encountered by Home Office police officers. It was also suggested that, because Couzens needed National Security Vetting clearance at the Developed Vetting level to take up his role at Sellafield, "any skeletons in the cupboard"²³² would be identified through that process, which also included financial checks and an interview by a vetting officer, by implication more rigorous than the requirements of the force vetting process. In effect, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary's view appeared to be that Couzens' financial situation would have been double checked.²³³

4.155 The Inquiry notes that, with the exception of a face-to-face interview with a vetting officer, the credit check information considered as part of the Developed Vetting process was the same as that seen by Thames Valley Police staff during the force vetting process (see paragraphs 4.163 to 4.165 for more detailed information about National Security Vetting checks). The only additional information required was a review of personal finances, based on information provided by the applicant, which included an assessment of an individual's assets, liabilities, income and expenditure both on an individual basis and taking into account the joint position with a spouse or partner.²³⁴

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Conclusion 28

Red flags about Wayne Couzens' history of financial difficulties and that he was a Russian speaker were not given proper consideration when he applied to join the Civil Nuclear Constabulary.

- 4.156 The Inquiry accepts that guidance, by its very nature, is intended to inform and advise, rather than to direct, and that a degree of discretion is therefore expected. Nevertheless, both the National Policing Improvement Agency's recruitment policy and the Association of Chief Police Officers' vetting policy in force at the time Couzens was vetted stated categorically that "applicants who are the subject of a current Individual Voluntary Arrangement (IVA) *should not* [emphasis added] be considered".²³⁵ It is also of significant concern to the Inquiry that, although Couzens' prospective role within the Civil Nuclear Constabulary was to guard and protect nuclear sites, while armed, the fact that he was a Russian speaker and had a history of financial difficulties did not seem to raise any red flag at all about his potential susceptibility to bribery or corruption.

Conclusion 29

Thames Valley Police made the correct recommendation to the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, namely that Wayne Couzens should be refused force vetting clearance because he appeared to have a current Individual Voluntary Arrangement where a portion of his debt had been written off. However, the rationale given for the recommendation suggested that the Thames Valley Police Central Vetting Unit may not have properly understood the relevant guidance.

- 4.157 Thames Valley Police recommended to the Civil Nuclear Constabulary that Couzens be refused force vetting clearance because the information available to it at the time suggested that Couzens had an Individual Voluntary Arrangement where a portion of his debt had been written off. However, in the Inquiry's view, and as indicated in paragraph 4.150, while this was the correct recommendation, the rationale given leaves room for some doubt about Thames Valley Police Central Vetting Unit's understanding of the guidance in force at the time, as it suggested that applicants with certain types of Individual Voluntary Arrangement may be recommended for clearance.
- 4.158 Alternatively, taking into account what the Inquiry heard from Civil Nuclear Constabulary witnesses about their force's position on debt, this may have been the Constabulary's view of applicants with Individual Voluntary Arrangements. In any event, Thames Valley Police ultimately recommended

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that Couzens be refused force vetting clearance because he had an Individual Voluntary Arrangement about which he had failed, despite being asked repeatedly, to provide any additional information.

Conclusion 30

The Civil Nuclear Constabulary's decision to put Wayne Couzens forward for National Security Vetting before receiving a recommendation about his force vetting clearance enabled him to evade proper scrutiny of his finances through the lens of police force vetting.

Conclusion 31

The Civil Nuclear Constabulary made its decision to grant force vetting clearance to Wayne Couzens on the basis of limited and incomplete information and consequently missed red flags.

- 4.159 However, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary put Couzens forward for National Security Vetting before receiving the force vetting recommendation from Thames Valley Police, meaning that the Civil Nuclear Constabulary was willing to sponsor Couzens for Developed Vetting security clearance without having received full information about the outcome of the force vetting process – in this case, information about the existence of the Individual Voluntary Arrangement and the lack of information about the size of his debt or whether it was being properly managed. The Inquiry considers that this decision enabled Couzens to evade proper scrutiny of his finances through the lens of police force vetting.
- 4.160 The Inquiry also questions why the Civil Nuclear Constabulary would outsource force vetting checks to a Home Office police force to ensure that it had greater assurance about the applicants being recruited if the recommendations made by that force were not taken into consideration because the nature of policing and the role of the officers working for the Civil Nuclear Constabulary were regarded as different.

National Security Vetting

- 4.161 Because of the nature of the Civil Nuclear Constabulary's work, all police officers working for the force when Couzens was recruited were required to undergo National Security Vetting and be cleared to Security Check level.²³⁶ Those working at particular sites, like Sellafield, were required to hold Developed Vetting security clearance.²³⁷ This remains the case today.²³⁸ These clearances are in addition to the police (force) vetting clearances described in paragraphs 4.113 to 4.160.

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4.162 Relevant aspects of the guidance available to police forces in 2011, when Couzens was being vetted, stated that Developed Vetting was required by individuals who were to be appointed to posts which required them to have frequent and uncontrolled access to government assets marked TOP SECRET or required them to have any access to TOP SECRET codeword material. It was also required for individuals who, while not in such posts, would be in a position to directly or indirectly bring about the same degree of damage, and for those who required frequent and uncontrolled access to Category I nuclear material.²³⁹ This latter point is the justification for Civil Nuclear Constabulary officers posted to Sellafield and other sites requiring Developed Vetting clearance. Lastly, Developed Vetting was also required for individuals who required access to certain levels of classified material originating from another country or an international organisation.²⁴⁰

4.163 According to publicly available information, those undergoing the Developed Vetting process today are subject to the following checks:

- successful completion of the Baseline Personnel Security Standard;
- completion, by the individual, of a Developed Vetting security questionnaire;
- a departmental/company records check, to include personal files, staff reports, sick leave returns and security records;
- a check of both spent and unspent criminal records;
- a check of credit and financial history with a credit reference agency;
- a check of Security Service (MI5) records;
- a full review of personal finances, including an assessment of an individual's assets, liabilities, income and expenditure, both on an individual basis and taking into account the joint position with a spouse or partner;
- a detailed interview conducted by a trained investigating officer;
- further enquiries, including interviews with referees conducted by a trained investigating officer; and
- checks that may extend to third parties included on the security questionnaire.²⁴¹

4.164 While the process has changed slightly, the Inquiry heard that similar checks were in place in 2011 when Couzens was undergoing National Security Vetting.²⁴² At the time Couzens was vetted, National Security Vetting clearance was subject to periodic review. The minimum standard review period for Developed Vetting was initially five years. Subsequently, reviews were required every seven years.²⁴³ These periodic reviews were supported by annual security reviews. In addition, individuals

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with security clearance were responsible for reporting any changes in their personal circumstances which might be of relevance to their clearance. These might be issues like a change in relationship status, change in financial circumstances or change in nationality.²⁴⁴

- 4.165 Although force vetting and National Security Vetting are separate processes, designed to counter specific threats to police and government assets respectively (see paragraph 4.21), the police vetting policy in force at the time Couzens was being vetted for the Civil Nuclear Constabulary recognised that, although the justification for the two vetting processes was different and must be maintained, there was significant overlap in the sources of information that needed to be interrogated in order to grant clearance of either kind. So, where a separate requirement for National Security Vetting existed, the interrogation of the common databases that underpinned both types of clearance was done only once, during the force vetting process, with the information gathered contributing to and taken into account in the National Security Vetting process. The only elements unique to National Security Vetting, and where separate and additional checks were needed, were the security questionnaires, Security Service check and investigations conducted by trained, specialist investigating officers (at Developed Vetting and, where appropriate, at Counter Terrorist Check and Security Check levels).²⁴⁵

Sequencing

- 4.166 The vetting guidance in force at the time of Couzens' recruitment to the Civil Nuclear Constabulary set out the expectation that force vetting would be concluded before National Security Vetting was initiated. This was to ensure that individuals were not entering the National Security Vetting process – which is time-consuming and costly – unnecessarily. Although the guidance did allow for some flexibility, providing for parallel vetting processes to be undertaken if it was impracticable for the force vetting to be satisfactorily completed first, the general policy assumption at the time Couzens was being recruited by the Civil Nuclear Constabulary was that if an applicant did not pass force vetting, they would not proceed to the National Security Vetting stage.²⁴⁶
- 4.167 The Inquiry heard evidence that, at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, it would be possible for a candidate to be appointed and begin initial training before both sets of vetting checks (force vetting and National Security Vetting) had been completed. By way of an example, the Inquiry was told that there could be a training course for new recruits starting on a particular date with a given number of spaces. If the vetting checks had not been completed for some of the candidates, a senior staff member could provide a derogation from the policy and authorise candidates to start the course as long as their Police National Computer checks had come back clear. This ensured that all training spaces could be filled. Further mitigations would also be put in place, such as ensuring that anyone who had not completed the vetting process would not be allowed to handle firearms and would not be able to access Civil Nuclear Constabulary systems until the required clearances had been granted.²⁴⁷

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Responsibilities of the Civil Nuclear Constabulary

- 4.168 The Civil Nuclear Constabulary Vetting Team was responsible for ensuring compliance with both the Association of Chief Police Officers' National Vetting Policy for the Police Community and the policy for National Security Vetting issued by the vetting authority for the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, namely the Office for Civil Nuclear Security, now known as the Office for Nuclear Regulation.²⁴⁸
- 4.169 The Civil Nuclear Constabulary was the sponsor department for National Security Vetting for its employees, but, apart from checking the vetting application forms for omissions or errors and then transmitting them to the Office for Civil Nuclear Security, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary Vetting Team had no involvement at all in the National Security Vetting process. It was the Office for Civil Nuclear Security that would request the Defence Vetting Agency (the predecessor agency to United Kingdom Security Vetting) to conduct the vetting checks and send the findings back to it. The Office for Civil Nuclear Security, as the vetting authority, would then make the final decision on whether to grant clearance, and would inform the Civil Nuclear Constabulary accordingly.²⁴⁹ The Vetting Team at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary would simply be told by the Office for Civil Nuclear Security whether or not the individual had been granted National Security Vetting clearance at the relevant level.²⁵⁰
- 4.170 **The Inquiry observes that this means that the employing organisation (the Civil Nuclear Constabulary) had no access to the information collected by the Defence Vetting Agency and used by the vetting authority (the Office for Civil Nuclear Security) to decide whether one of its prospective employees should or should not be granted National Security Vetting clearance.**
- 4.171 **This is of particular importance in Couzens' case, where the financial review as part of the National Security Vetting process was one of the justifications for the Civil Nuclear Constabulary disregarding Thames Valley Police's concerns about his finances.**

Conclusion 32

Owing to a principle of vetting confidentiality, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary did not have sight of the material generated by the National Security Vetting process when deciding to employ Wayne Couzens.

- 4.172 **Due to what was explained to the Inquiry as a "principle of vetting confidentiality",²⁵¹ at no point in this process did the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, as Couzens' employing organisation, have sight of the material generated by the National Security Vetting process, which was provided by the Defence Vetting Agency (as the service provider) to the Office for Civil Nuclear Security (as the vetting authority).**

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Responsibilities of the Defence Vetting Agency

- 4.173 In 2011, the Defence Vetting Agency carried out National Security Vetting for a range of government departments and agencies, including the Office for Civil Nuclear Security, in line with guidance which was part of the Cabinet Office Security Policy Framework.²⁵² The Inquiry heard that the overarching purpose of the process was to ensure that there were no potential vulnerabilities affecting the individual, or, if there were, that any associated risks could be managed via a process of aftercare and/or an early review (see paragraphs 4.216 to 4.220 for more detailed information).²⁵³
- 4.174 Defence Vetting Agency case assistants were responsible for checking the initial security vetting application form when it was submitted and verifying the data. They were then tasked with identifying any missing information, requesting additional information in follow-up to any adverse findings from any of the initial checks, or determining whether any additional financial enquiries were needed.²⁵⁴ Case assistants also carried out the mandatory checks – the creditworthiness checks, the Police National Computer checks and the Security Service checks – and also a bespoke local police check required by the Office for Civil Nuclear Security.²⁵⁵
- 4.175 A Defence Vetting Agency case officer would review the information that resulted from those searches, and then prepare a list of instructions, known as the ‘tasking sheet’, for a vetting officer.²⁵⁶ If any search results were adverse, they were also highlighted on the tasking sheet, along with the level of financial enquiries required.²⁵⁷
- 4.176 With regard to the financial enquiries, the tasking sheet would reflect where further questions needed to be asked if, for example, the information obtained from the creditworthiness checks did not align with what the applicant had entered on the application form.²⁵⁸
- 4.177 The tasking sheet from the case officer would also detail the interviews to be conducted,²⁵⁹ which would normally include: an interview with the applicant, or ‘subject’; interviews with the applicant’s supervisors; and, for first-time applicants, interviews with character references.²⁶⁰
- 4.178 Once all the checks and interviews listed on the tasking sheet were completed and the associated reports submitted, the case officer then checked that all the documentation was correct, amended any spelling mistakes and sent a hard copy to the customer. The Office for Civil Nuclear Security was a “send evidence” customer of the Defence Vetting Agency; this meant that, as explained in paragraph 4.169, the Office for Civil Nuclear Security, as the vetting authority – rather than the applicant’s employer, as the sponsor – would make a clearance decision on the basis of the

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information provided, which included a cover sheet, the outcome of the credit check, police and Security Service checks, the record of the interviews and a copy of the security questionnaire.²⁶¹ As a “send evidence” customer, the Office for Civil Nuclear Security would also have been responsible for oversight of any aftercare and/or early review procedures.²⁶² The Inquiry was told that, in cases where the Defence Vetting Agency was not the decision-maker (i.e. where it was only recommending to a customer whether or not to grant clearance), the Defence Vetting Agency required instructions from customers to conduct aftercare.²⁶³

- 4.179 Just as the Civil Nuclear Constabulary did not have sight of the material generated by the National Security Vetting procedures, the Office for Civil Nuclear Security did not have sight of the outcome of the police force vetting checks, and in particular it did not have access to the Police National Database.²⁶⁴ The Inquiry heard evidence that, before a Civil Nuclear Constabulary police officer was put forward for National Security Vetting, the Office for Civil Nuclear Security would expect them to have “passed” force vetting, but this was simply an expectation rather than stated firm policy.²⁶⁵

Wayne Couzens’ case

- 4.180 The tasking sheet for Couzens reflects that the mandatory checks were clear and that his security questionnaire did not reveal anything of an adverse nature. The sheet also notes that the customer (the Office for Civil Nuclear Security) had requested that the Defence Vetting Agency should discuss each section of the financial questionnaire with Couzens to ensure that he provided corroborative evidence. The sheet also flagged that additional financial enquiries were needed.²⁶⁶
- 4.181 Additional financial enquiries were needed because Couzens had declared an Individual Voluntary Arrangement. The Inquiry was told that, from a National Security Vetting perspective, having an Individual Voluntary Arrangement did not necessarily mean anything adverse; it simply suggested that Couzens had potentially had some financial difficulties and had sought to address them by taking out the Individual Voluntary Arrangement. The Inquiry was advised that, in general, while such an Arrangement is not a bar to getting National Security Vetting clearance, it is something that, in this case, should have been brought to the attention of the prospective employer by the Office for Civil Nuclear Security and it should have been monitored through the aftercare process carried out by the Office for Civil Nuclear Security (discussed further in paragraphs 4.223 to 4.227).²⁶⁷
- 4.182 The Inquiry heard evidence that it would not be unusual for police officers to be sponsored even where financial problems of varying degrees are apparent and that “a fair part of the population” is expected to be having some sort of financial trouble.²⁶⁸ The Government’s Security Policy Framework in place at that time

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reflects that point.²⁶⁹ The Inquiry was also told that financial vulnerability is the biggest aftercare concern, and in approximately 12 per cent of Security Check and/or Developed Vetting cases, there is some form of adverse credit information which may require further investigation.²⁷⁰

Conclusion 33

The Inquiry is satisfied that, when the Civil Nuclear Constabulary put Wayne Couzens forward, via the Office for Civil Nuclear Security, for Developed Vetting clearance, both organisations were aware that there were *some* financial issues in his background.

- 4.183 The Inquiry heard that the Office for Civil Nuclear Security had advised the Defence Vetting Agency that Couzens had been the subject of an adverse County Court Judgment in 1995 and had asked for details. It had also been flagged that he had minimal savings, despite having sufficient monthly disposable income.²⁷¹ **The Inquiry is therefore satisfied that, when the Civil Nuclear Constabulary requested that the Office for Civil Nuclear Security put Couzens forward for Developed Vetting clearance, both organisations were aware that there were *some* financial issues in his background, but the Office for Civil Nuclear Security was not aware of the recommendation that Couzens should not pass force vetting.**

Conclusion 34

The Office for Civil Nuclear Security made the decision to grant Wayne Couzens Developed Vetting clearance without considering the available information from police vetting, including the recommendation from Thames Valley Police that he should be refused force vetting clearance.

- 4.184 **An Individual Voluntary Arrangement therefore would not necessarily have caused concern for the Office for Civil Nuclear Security, but in Couzens' case, the Office for Civil Nuclear Security did not know that Thames Valley Police had recommended that he not pass force vetting at all on account of his Individual Voluntary Arrangement. The Inquiry was told that the Office for Civil Nuclear Security would have expected this to have been disclosed by the Civil Nuclear Constabulary as part of the departmental records check process, as this would have resulted in enquiries as to why the application was being sponsored at all.**²⁷²

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- 4.185 In the case of Couzens, the departmental records check from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary as sponsor, when putting him forward for National Security Vetting, indicated “no items of interest found”.²⁷³ The Office for Civil Nuclear Security advised the Civil Nuclear Constabulary on 3 June 2011 that Couzens was granted Developed Vetting clearance.²⁷⁴ The force vetting procedure had concluded in March 2011 when the Thames Valley Police vetting recommendation was received by the Civil Nuclear Constabulary.

Wayne Couzens’ interview

- 4.186 The Inquiry saw evidence about the interviews conducted during Couzens’ National Security Vetting process.²⁷⁵ He was described as calm and relaxed.²⁷⁶ The process also revealed that he had an avid interest in military history, especially the Second World War, and had visited sites of historical interest, such as old battlefields and bunkers. Couzens was also reported to have completed DIY on his home.²⁷⁷
- 4.187 He was described as having a responsible attitude towards alcohol consumption; he did not drink and drive; and his referees at the time of the Developed Vetting interview did not note him having any particular interest in pornography.²⁷⁸
- 4.188 The Inquiry, however, saw evidence about an incident when Couzens brought a VHS videotape to a social gathering, which was not in itself unusual as the group of friends would often watch films and television together. On this occasion, however, the VHS tape was pornographic.²⁷⁹ The Inquiry heard from a Defence Vetting Agency officer that “referees tend to not want to say anything adverse, even though there would be nothing adverse about saying that a subject views pornography in general”.²⁸⁰
- 4.189 Dr Dan Lomas, Lecturer in Intelligence and Security Studies at Brunel University London, who provided expert evidence to the Inquiry, explained that during the Developed Vetting process, applicants are taken through the information they have submitted as part of the application process and questioned further on any anomalies:

“The interview may be able to identify anomalies between the information already provided in the DV [Developed Vetting] process and the information or explanations offered by the interviewee on the day, but it should be kept in mind that there is no scientific way of identifying whether an interviewee is withholding or providing misleading information in the vetting interview. Such issues may only come to light well into an individual’s employment, if at all. Beyond the financial, criminal and personal information already provided, the guidelines for DV interviews in place at the time of Couzens’ vetting process also suggested that other areas to cover could include the following:

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- Career to date, including satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the employer;
- Relationships (e.g. marriage/co-habitation, family, friends and associates);
- Personal circumstances (e.g. domestic arrangements);
- Lifestyle (e.g. foreign travel and contacts, drug and alcohol use, hobbies, sports, study);
- Criminal activity;
- Personal beliefs (e.g. political extremism);
- Actual or potential conflicts of interest;
- Financial circumstances.”²⁸¹

4.190 During his own interview with the vetting officer, Couzens was told that being untruthful or withholding information was a serious matter and could result in denial or withdrawal of security clearance.²⁸²

4.191 There was a discussion about his family and close relatives.²⁸³

4.192 It was noted that Couzens had travelled to Russia (in July and December 2005), Ukraine and Egypt. He apparently lost his passport while in one of those countries and a replacement passport was issued by the British Consulate. He was noted as being able to speak almost fluent Russian and a little Spanish.²⁸⁴

4.193 He discussed his circumstances when growing up, the fact that his parents separated when he was of primary school age, and that he lived with his father and a sibling lived with their mother and each would spend alternate weekends with their sibling and the other parent. He confirmed that he had had a happy childhood and felt supported by his parents, leaving home at age 26 to pursue his career.²⁸⁵

4.194 Couzens did not report any behavioural or discipline problems at school such as bullying or exclusion,²⁸⁶ contrary to his position in advance of being sentenced for Sarah Everard’s abduction, rape and murder, when he recalled being bullied by teachers at school and by other children, which he said “took the form of name calling and physical abuse”.²⁸⁷

4.195 He discussed his employment, secondary employment and military service with the vetting officer. On lifestyle and interests, he indicated that he enjoyed spending time with his family, playing sport and going to the gym. He also reported that he was continuing to learn Russian. He confirmed that he had access to the internet, both at home and at work, that he spent around an hour a day online and that he accessed pornography online. He confirmed that none of the sites that he viewed involved the input of personal and financial information.²⁸⁸

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- 4.196 He reported having used chatroom websites, some with sexual content, in the past, and confirmed that he had paid to view those sites and that he no longer had the credit cards which were linked to those sites.²⁸⁹
- 4.197 He confirmed that he no longer had communication with unknown persons via chatrooms, and the risk associated with such conduct was explained in depth to him. He reported that generally he did not consume alcohol and that he was working on his fitness. He confirmed that he had experimented with recreational drugs when he was younger with someone whom he identified, but with whom he had not been in contact for ten years at the time of the vetting interview. He advised that he did not suffer from any mental illness.²⁹⁰
- 4.198 In terms of his finances, Couzens confirmed that the information provided to the Defence Vetting Agency as part of the vetting process was accurate and represented the true state of his finances. In particular, he confirmed that:
- he had never been refused credit;
 - he did not gamble;
 - he did not consider himself extravagant, his financial position was manageable, and he did not save much but could meet all obligations; and
 - he had entered into an Individual Voluntary Arrangement in February 2007 towards which he had paid £12,258.50 for the period 20 February 2007 to 10 March 2011 and that the Individual Voluntary Arrangement would cease in February 2012.²⁹¹
- 4.199 At the time, he reported two separate car loans, two unspecified loans, a credit card balance, an outstanding telephone bill and an overdraft. All of this amounted to £22,540.93 of debt.²⁹²
- 4.200 He discussed his road traffic convictions and stated that there was no undeclared circumstance in his life, past or present, which might make him unsuitable to hold security clearance.²⁹³

Conclusion 35

The potential risks identified at the time Wayne Couzens was undergoing National Security Vetting related to his finances.

- 4.201 **It is therefore clear to the Inquiry that the potential risks which were identified at the time Couzens was undergoing National Security Vetting related, as expected, to his finances.**

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- 4.202 Although Couzens did admit to speaking to individuals in chatrooms, this was not probed further in the vetting process because he stated that this was no longer active behaviour and was able to demonstrate that the credit card he had used to pay for the chatrooms was no longer in use.²⁹⁴
- 4.203 In conclusion, there were no concerns noted about Couzens' family situation or personal conduct, and his levels of debt were reported back to the case officer by the vetting officer – it was felt that his finances could be managed if he was subject to regular review and aftercare.²⁹⁵ It is clear from the disclosure obtained by the Inquiry that those undertaking the vetting checks for Couzens were aware that:
- he had entered into an Individual Voluntary Arrangement in February 2007;²⁹⁶
 - by the time of his Developed Vetting interview, he had paid £12,258.50 towards it, in monthly instalments of £273;²⁹⁷ and
 - the Individual Voluntary Arrangement was due to cease in February 2012.
- 4.204 The Inquiry heard evidence from a Defence Vetting Agency officer that they felt that the Civil Nuclear Constabulary's Vetting Team was looking to the Defence Vetting Agency to help it decide whether to give applicants "permission to hold a firearm"²⁹⁸ – which was, of course, a significant misunderstanding of the purpose of National Security Vetting. It was suggested to the Inquiry that this concern may have arisen as officers can join the Civil Nuclear Constabulary and carry a firearm without prior policing experience; this is different from a Home Office police force, where policing experience is required before an officer is eligible to undertake the training to carry a firearm.²⁹⁹
- 4.205 While the Inquiry heard that it was a perception of Defence Vetting Agency staff in 2011 that the Civil Nuclear Constabulary was using the National Security Vetting clearance process to determine suitability to hold a firearm, the Inquiry notes that, by 2019, guidance had been published emphasising that that was not the function of the clearance process.³⁰⁰
- 4.206 The Office for Nuclear Regulation pre-employment screening and National Security Vetting guidance document, published in 2019, makes it clear that holding a Baseline Personnel Security Standard or National Security Vetting clearance does not in any way indicate the suitability of a person to hold a firearm in any capacity.³⁰¹
- 4.207 The guidance states categorically that a determination of suitability for a Civil Nuclear Constabulary officer to hold a firearm in an official capacity is the responsibility of the Civil Nuclear Constabulary.³⁰²

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Conclusion 36

The Civil Nuclear Constabulary used the National Security Vetting process inappropriately as part of a wider assessment of Wayne Couzens' suitability to carry a firearm.

- 4.208 The Inquiry agrees that, from the evidence before it, an inference could be drawn about the Civil Nuclear Constabulary's approach to National Security Vetting at that time: namely, that, despite the involvement of a Home Office force in support of the force vetting process, National Security Vetting was being applied as part of the overall assessment of fitness to carry a firearm. That is not the purpose of National Security Vetting, and assessment of whether an individual holds the correct values and motivations to join a police force – or, indeed, to carry a firearm within that force – should sit very firmly within the force vetting and assessment procedures.
- 4.209 The Inquiry explored with a Defence Vetting Agency officer what their approach to the vetting process would have been had they been aware of the circumstances of Couzens' discharge from the Territorial Army and/or his behaviour following discharge. The Inquiry was told that these matters would have been pursued with him during the vetting process, because they raised questions about his honesty and integrity.³⁰³
- 4.210 The Inquiry also explored what the approach would have been to the interview had the interviewer received information suggesting that Couzens had shown pornographic material, some of it potentially illegal, to work colleagues in a public setting. The Inquiry was told that he would have been asked about the incident and that, if he had denied it, the interviewer would have probed further to try to establish potential dishonesty; if he had admitted it, the interviewer would have explored the reasons for his actions. The act of showing the material, however, even if it had been illegal, would not necessarily have precluded him from obtaining security clearance.³⁰⁴
- 4.211 While a Developed Vetting interview has a structure built around the themes identified in paragraph 4.189, a vetting officer has some flexibility within that structure to tailor questions to the circumstances of each individual case and may focus on particular aspects of the application form and the answers given during interview. Guidance from 2010 explains that interviewing officers should handle interviews with sensitivity and should avoid judgement, displaying "unswerving neutrality" throughout.³⁰⁵

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4.212 A description of the process today says:

“The Vetting Officer [sic] will be open-minded and is not there to make moral judgements on people’s lifestyles. They will only be interested in assessing potential security risks. It is essential therefore that you are open and honest at all stages of the interview process.”³⁰⁶

4.213 The Inquiry is content that the Defence Vetting Agency vetting officer did what was expected of them at the time in accordance with relevant guidance and that, given what is known about the security clearance process, even if more detail had been obtained about Couzens’ use of chatrooms and access to pornography, it would not necessarily have affected the decision to grant him Developed Vetting clearance.

The vetting decision

4.214 The completed case file was sent back to the Office for Civil Nuclear Security, as per the usual procedure, and the vetting officer’s recommendation was that, on the basis of the information provided, Couzens should be granted Developed Vetting clearance subject to a financial aftercare interview.³⁰⁷

4.215 The Office for Civil Nuclear Security agreed with the recommendation; that agreement is reflected in a decision notice sent by email to the Civil Nuclear Constabulary Vetting Team, confirming that Developed Vetting clearance for Couzens had been granted, effective 3 June 2011 and expiring seven years later (as per the policy at the time), on 2 June 2018.³⁰⁸ The risk rating was Low 3, which indicated a potential problem with personality, behaviour or circumstances that necessitated early review of clearance, for example poor financial profile.³⁰⁹ The vetting officer from the Defence Vetting Agency also recommended a financial review 24 months from the date of clearance being granted (the normal review period would have been seven years) “to confirm finances are comfortable”.³¹⁰

Aftercare

4.216 By this point Couzens was well under way with his initial training at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary and due to deploy, upon its completion, to Sellafield. In accordance with Civil Nuclear Constabulary policy for staff who had undergone National Security Vetting, he would thereafter be subject to the procedures in place for the ongoing monitoring of clearance, otherwise known as “aftercare” (or “ongoing personnel security management”),³¹¹ which, in his case, involved an early review of clearance to ensure that risks identified in the vetting process were being managed appropriately.

4.217 As Dr Lomas told the Inquiry, aftercare forms “an essential, if sometimes overlooked, aspect of the vetting process” for both force vetting in the police and National Security Vetting processes. “Screening itself should only be seen as the start, not

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the completion, of a personnel security regime, and individuals and management are required to keep a periodic review of arrangements should adverse information come to light.”³¹²

- 4.218 Individual clearance holders are also required to report any change in personal circumstances.³¹³ Dr Lomas described the process of aftercare as “a difficult balancing act”. He told the Inquiry that “as with vetting generally, good aftercare is reliant on individuals being open and honest about changes of circumstance”.³¹⁴ The Inquiry was also told that, since the early 2000s, there has been a facility available to anyone, including members of the public, to report security concerns about clearance holders; this is known as the Aftercare Incident Reporting Tool and is available through the United Kingdom Security Vetting’s gov.uk webpages. When such a report is filed, United Kingdom Security Vetting, in conjunction with the National Security Vetting decision-making authorities, considers this information and, where appropriate, aftercare measures will be put in place or clearances may be suspended or withdrawn.³¹⁵ However, the reporting tool clearly relies on someone being aware that such a tool exists, as well as knowing the name/identity of the individual about whom they have concerns and the fact that they have security clearance.
- 4.219 At the time Couzens was serving, as it is today, the emphasis was on ongoing personnel security assurance for all personnel holding Developed Vetting, Security Check and Counter Terrorist Check clearance, meaning that those personnel were subject to an annual review of clearance administered by the Civil Nuclear Constabulary Security Department and consisting of a system of email exchanges. On the anniversary of an individual’s clearance issue date, both the individual and their line manager would receive an email requesting completion of a Security Appraisal Form, which included certain declarations.³¹⁶
- 4.220 Additionally, authorised firearms officers, firearms trainers, firearms supervisors, Constabulary armourers, and anyone else who had access to firearms and ammunition, as well as their respective line managers, were required to complete a separate declaration. The template to be filled in contained a non-exhaustive list of life events/areas of concern that should be considered and reported. They included:
- certain types of offences;
 - certain illnesses (primarily psychiatric);
 - disciplinary issues;
 - financial issues (but only for Security Check and Developed Vetting holders); and
 - general life events (e.g. change of partner or naturalisation).³¹⁷

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Wayne Couzens' aftercare

- 4.221 The Inquiry saw annual Security Appraisal Forms for 2012 and 2013 completed in accordance with Civil Nuclear Constabulary policy. On the forms, in July 2012, Couzens advised of a change of address, and also of the fact that his Individual Voluntary Arrangement was discharged in February 2012.³¹⁸
- 4.222 It should be noted, however, as described in paragraph 1.47, that he transferred from Sellafield to Dungeness in early 2012, meaning that, given the nature of the site at Dungeness, he no longer required Developed Vetting clearance. Nevertheless, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary Vetting Team took the decision to have him retain his Developed Vetting clearance until its expiry. There is no clear auditable reasoning that the Inquiry has seen for such a decision, simply a line in an email dated 13 August 2013 stating “keep as DV [Developed Vetting] until clearance expires (06/2018)”.³¹⁹ The Inquiry was told that in circumstances where a higher level of security clearance was no longer required, it was the practice of the Civil Nuclear Constabulary at the time, and remains so today, to wait until the planned review date to reduce the level of security clearance in order to avoid unnecessary additional costs, unless a change in personal circumstances required an earlier review.³²⁰ The Inquiry considers that individuals should have only the maximum level of security clearance necessary for the role they are in, rather than retaining higher levels of clearance required for a different job.

Office for Civil Nuclear Security aftercare follow-up

- 4.223 Responsibility for following up the financial aftercare in accordance with the National Security Vetting policy in force at the time fell to the Office for Civil Nuclear Security. Indeed, evidence received by the Inquiry confirmed that the Office for Civil Nuclear Security did its own aftercare at that time.³²¹ The evidence received in relation to how that aftercare was, or should have been, conducted in the Couzens case was, however, unclear.
- 4.224 As mentioned in paragraph 4.215, the vetting officer from the Defence Vetting Agency recommended a financial review 24 months from the date of clearance being granted “to confirm finances are comfortable”.³²² The Inquiry was told by United Kingdom Security Vetting that the financial aftercare review would have involved further financial investigation by the Defence Vetting Agency and potentially a further interview with Couzens to explore the ongoing security risk. However, in order to conduct this review, the Office for Civil Nuclear Security would have needed to ask the Defence Vetting Agency to do so, and no such instruction was received after 24 months had elapsed (or at all).³²³ The Inquiry heard other evidence that the financial aftercare review should have taken place 12 months from the date of the granting of the Developed Vetting clearance (therefore around June 2012) and that it would have involved a paper-based credit check, and that this follow-up was the responsibility of the Office for Civil Nuclear Security.³²⁴ It is therefore unclear

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whether the Office for Civil Nuclear Security was required to ask the Defence Vetting Agency to conduct the aftercare, or if that was simply an option open to the Office for Civil Nuclear Security, which could also complete the aftercare itself.

- 4.225 During the period that Couzens held Developed Vetting clearance, what is now the Office for Nuclear Regulation moved to an online process for financial aftercare and only documents that indicated a security concern were uploaded to the national database; anything else was weeded out. Therefore, the Office for Nuclear Regulation could not confirm to the Inquiry that any aftercare check for Couzens was carried out, or, if it was, what form it took and the results of it.³²⁵ The Inquiry also heard evidence that, at the time, the Defence Vetting Agency would not have known whether the financial aftercare review had been conducted by the Office for Civil Nuclear Security in line with the vetting officer's recommendation, as the Office for Civil Nuclear Security did not input such details on the Defence Vetting Agency's system.³²⁶
- 4.226 The Inquiry has therefore not seen any documentary evidence to confirm that the recommended 24-month financial aftercare review was requested or actually happened. However, the absence of any such request within Defence Vetting Agency records allows the Inquiry to draw the inference that, at a minimum, the financial aftercare was never requested from the Defence Vetting Agency, and it remains a possibility that the Office for Civil Nuclear Security carried out no financial aftercare review at all.
- 4.227 The Office for Nuclear Regulation would have expected any further investigation information to confirm that further reductions to the total debt amount owed under the Individual Voluntary Arrangement had been made, and there was therefore not a concern.³²⁷

Move from Developed Vetting to Security Check clearance

- 4.228 On 23 September 2017, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary Vetting Team sent a query to the Dungeness Operational Policy Unit requesting confirmation of whether Couzens' security clearance could be downgraded to Security Check, noting that his Developed Vetting clearance was due for review in 2018. Dungeness confirmed that Couzens could be downgraded to Security Check.³²⁸ While the email does not specifically mention it, it is possible that, given the timescales for Developed Vetting applications and renewals, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary Vetting Team was at that point considering whether to start the renewal process.

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Conclusion 37

The Civil Nuclear Constabulary downgraded Wayne Couzens’ National Security Vetting clearance level in 2017 but re-vetting was not required. At that time the Civil Nuclear Constabulary remained unsighted on the Police National Database entry in relation to the 2015 allegation of indecent exposure.

Conclusion 38

Even if a full National Security Vetting renewal had been undertaken, it is unlikely that the 2015 allegation would have surfaced because, while United Kingdom Security Vetting had access to the Police National Computer (which contains information about recorded criminality), it did not have access to the Police National Database (which contains intelligence about an individual). This is a significant gap.

- 4.229 **Because this was not a formal police force re-vetting, simply a downgrading of Couzens’ National Security Vetting clearance level, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary in 2017 remained unsighted on the Police National Database entry from 2015 in relation to the allegation of indecent exposure involving him in Kent. Even if a full National Security Vetting renewal process had been undertaken, rather than a simple decision by email to confirm a change of clearance status, it is unlikely that the 2015 allegation would have surfaced, as, while United Kingdom Security Vetting had access to the Police National Computer (which contains information about recorded criminality), it did not (and still does not) have access to the Police National Database (which contains intelligence about an individual). The Inquiry finds that this is a significant gap in the vetting process.**

Policing aftercare

- 4.230 At the time Couzens was serving as a police officer, regular reviews of vetting were required only for those holding Management Vetting and higher levels of National Security Vetting (Security Check and Developed Vetting).³²⁹ Officers and staff who had undergone Recruitment Vetting may not have had their clearances renewed until they had been in the force for a decade, if at all. In this regard, Dr Lomas told the Inquiry: “The danger is that [unsuitable individuals who are] allowed to enter the police as a result of [failings in] the recruitment process may not come to light until well into their career as a police officer.”³³⁰ The Inquiry notes that, since March 2021, and as a result of the increased focus on police standards, a high number of disciplinary and vetting-related issues have come to light. The Inquiry understands that the updated Vetting Code of Practice, published in July 2023, provides for ongoing integrity checks for all those working in policing, which will include the opportunity to identify whether there is any change in an individual’s circumstances

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that may have an impact on their vetting clearance and, if so, to take appropriate action.³³¹ As indicated in paragraph 4.313, Part 2 of the Inquiry will examine in more detail the updated vetting framework, including the new Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting, due, at the time of writing this Report, to be published in early 2024.

4.231 Dr Lomas also pointed out that workplace culture and social networks can have “an adverse effect on the effectiveness of the formal aftercare process”.³³² Police professional standards are a core part of the vetting process, and the College of Policing Code of Ethics (under review at the time of writing) informs police officers and staff that they should “never ignore unethical or unprofessional behaviour by a policing colleague, irrespective of the person’s rank, grade or role”, and that such behaviour should be challenged or reported to a line manager.³³³ The Code also states that supervisors have to “ensure staff carry out responsibilities correctly” and challenge or take further action to deal with unprofessional behaviour or wrongdoing.^{334,335}

4.232 The Code of Ethics is clear on what *should* happen. Dr Lomas notes, however, that “repeated cases of officers engaging in illegal/inappropriate and criminal behaviour shows [sic] that the culture within policing does not necessarily offer the correct environment” for officers to fulfil their obligations under the Code and can, in fact, undermine the vetting and aftercare processes.³³⁶

4.233 Vetting is not an end in and of itself. The guidance on both National Security Vetting and police vetting is clear: vetting is something that needs to be maintained throughout a career. In this context, the 2021 Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting states:

“Vetting should not be used in isolation and should form part of a wider protective security regime.”³³⁷

4.234 Nonetheless, aftercare varies from organisation to organisation, from force to force, in both vetting environments.

4.235 In the national security context, aftercare largely depends on the level of clearance obtained and the organisation in which an individual works (and the associated risks).

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Metropolitan Police Service

Force policies on recruitment and vetting

4.236 The evidence seen by the Inquiry about recruitment policies at the Metropolitan Police Service, when Couzens applied to join in May 2018, consists of a managers' guide, available online, that sets out the options and procedures.³³⁸ The Inquiry presumes that this material is based on the national guidance in force at the time, namely the relevant edition of the College of Policing's eligibility criteria for the role of police constable and the 2017 edition of the Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting.³³⁹ By 2018, the Metropolitan Police Service application process was managed via an online platform, with applicants completing virtual forms and submitting additional information electronically.³⁴⁰

4.237 The Inquiry was told that, at the time Couzens was recruited, the recruitment process for new applicants to the Metropolitan Police Service began with checking applicants against the Police National Computer to establish eligibility, together with performing nationality checks. Once applicants had passed that initial stage, they would be invited to what was called 'Day One', which was an in-house assessment. Those who passed that stage would return for 'Day Two', which comprised a fitness test and the taking of a DNA sample and fingerprints. Lastly, candidates who had passed all the preceding stages moved on to pre-employment checks, as part of which they were asked to fill out vetting forms.³⁴¹

4.238 Vetting was conducted in accordance with the detailed procedures set out in the 2017 edition of the Vetting Unit's Quick Reference Handbook on Vetting Checks.³⁴² The Handbook set out which checks needed to be conducted and provided step-by-step instructions on how to conduct them. The checks required by the Metropolitan Police Service for those undergoing Recruitment Vetting at the time in question were as follows:

- barred/advisory list checks: the barred list shows all officers, special constables and staff members who have been dismissed from policing after investigations under the Police (Conduct) Regulations 2020 or the Police (Performance) Regulations 2020. The advisory list shows all officers, special constables and staff members who have resigned or retired during an investigation, or who leave before an allegation comes to light. It also includes designated volunteers who have had their designated status withdrawn because of conduct or performance matters;³⁴³
- complaints and discipline checks, both internal and external;
- Police National Computer check;
- credit check via Experian;

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- voters' register check;
- Police National Database check;
- criminal intelligence checks; and
- checks of other internal databases.³⁴⁴

4.239 Analysis of the Handbook by the Inquiry reveals that the operational guidance it contains does appear to be based on the national vetting guidance in force at the time, namely the 2017 version of the Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting. As with the initial application process, by 2018, candidates were completing electronic, rather than hard copy (paper), vetting forms.

4.240 At the time of Couzens' application in 2018, the Human Resources Team had responsibility for managing the recruitment pipeline. This was because the Metropolitan Police Service was in the middle of an uplift (an increase in staffing) and the force was facing challenges around recruiting the requisite number of new staff. Transactional recruitment activities for new constables and transferees (those officers transferring from another force) were outsourced to a business support services company called Shared Services Connected Ltd (SSCL), but the Metropolitan Police Service retained responsibility for the final decision about who to recruit. SSCL had two teams: one team dealt with new recruits and the other solely with transferees. The teams were involved from the start of the recruitment process right through to the successful candidate's onboarding (the process of incorporating a new employee into an organisation). They also helped to familiarise successful candidates with the relevant culture and policies, so they could become effective and contributing members of the Metropolitan Police Service.³⁴⁵

4.241 Other teams, including the Vetting Unit, also fed into the end-to-end recruitment process. Those teams would carry out the relevant checks and then report back with their findings. Only once all enquiries had been satisfactorily completed would an offer of employment be made by SSCL.³⁴⁶

4.242 The Inquiry was told that, during the Police Uplift Programme, a chief superintendent worked with the Human Resources Team, reflecting the significance accorded to the activity by senior leadership. The programme faced substantial challenges, most significantly the volume of recruitment and onboarding activity: the Inquiry heard evidence that around 500 to 600 new officers, between 25 and 40 transferees, and around 50 special constables, as well as a number of police staff, would start each month.³⁴⁷ There were regular operational meetings to review the number of applicants going through the recruitment process to ensure that Human Resources, with the support of SSCL, was on track to deliver the target numbers of officers and police staff that were in the workforce plan.³⁴⁸

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4.243 Witnesses from the Metropolitan Police Service acknowledged that the recruitment process for people joining the force, whether they were new recruits or transferees, could be quite daunting, and could take some time.³⁴⁹ The Inquiry was told that, at the time Couzens joined the force, the average timescale to hire a new police constable was around 260 days from start to finish.³⁵⁰

Transferees

4.244 The process for recruiting transferees from other police forces was slightly different and, at the time Couzens transferred, was underpinned by bespoke national guidance issued by the College of Policing.³⁵¹ Prospective transferees completed an application form, a vetting form and medical forms, but there were some variations depending on the force the transferee was coming from. Home Office forces were described to the Inquiry as “quite straightforward”, but there were slightly different rules for the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, the British Transport Police and the Ministry of Defence Police. The Metropolitan Police Service Human Resources Team worked closely with SSCL to ensure that SSCL staff were aware of those differences.³⁵²

4.245 Verification of physical fitness could be accepted from the prospective transferee’s current post, so if they had taken and passed a fitness test within the past year, they could submit a certificate to SSCL and the Metropolitan Police Service would accept that as proof of fitness. There was then a medical assessment conducted over the phone. If there were any red flags arising from the medical file, the candidate would be invited for an appointment with the Chief Medical Officer.³⁵³

4.246 Transfer applicants were also subject to pre-employment checks. Those included asking their current force for information about their performance and ensuring that SSCL was also in dialogue with the current force to resolve any outstanding questions. In parallel, the Metropolitan Police Service Vetting Unit undertook the force vetting check.³⁵⁴ In accordance with the guidance in force at the time, vetting clearances were transferable between forces, subject to a ‘vetting health check’, although force vetting managers had the right to request a full re-vet. (The Inquiry notes that, in 2021, the guidance on the transfer of vetting clearance changed, stipulating that only vetting clearance obtained in the 12 months preceding the transfer and to the level required for the role the transferee was moving into could be transferred, and that in all other cases, a full re-vet would be required.)³⁵⁵ The Inquiry notes, in this regard, that the College of Policing’s transfer guidance in force in 2018 emphasised the importance of completing vetting for transferees as quickly as possible, although it did remind forces that minimising the time taken should not compromise the “integrity of the vetting process”.³⁵⁶

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Wayne Couzens' application

4.247 As noted in paragraph 4.236, Couzens applied to transfer to the Metropolitan Police Service in May 2018. In a separate message to SSCL, he stated that he could not find a section in the application form to explain why he was considering a transfer. He wrote:

“I am currently employed as an authorised firearms police officer however I would like to develop my policing skills and diversify my career. I would prefer not to transfer over as an AFO [authorised firearms officer], I would like to be considered for area and response sections to gain some experience in general policing within the Metropolitan Police. Hopefully I would be able to take my detective qualifications in the future and move into an investigation role.”³⁵⁷

4.248 The Inquiry notes that, in 2016, Couzens emailed the Metropolitan Police Service Human Resources Team advising that he knew of Civil Nuclear Constabulary colleagues who had recently transferred to the Metropolitan Police Service. He detailed his training and experience as an authorised firearms officer and asked for the details of a Metropolitan Police Service firearms recruitment team so that he could pursue the option of transferring as an authorised firearms officer.³⁵⁸

Vetting process

4.249 The vetting process at the Metropolitan Police Service is triggered at a stage which ensures that candidates are not “over-vetted or unnecessarily vetted”.³⁵⁹ Therefore, full vetting takes place only when a job offer is potentially going to be made. In 2018, when Couzens was being vetted, SSCL would act as the candidate’s sponsor as part of volume recruitment campaigns, sending them the vetting application forms to complete and submitting all relevant material to the Metropolitan Police Service Vetting Unit for consideration.

4.250 At that time, when the Vetting Unit received a candidate’s vetting application form (submitted via email), it first performed a quality assurance check. This check was mainly for accuracy but also to identify any points to be queried or clarified. The form would then either be returned to the candidate (via SSCL) for a correction or query, or be flagged for further action to plug any gaps. Once the initial quality assurance check had been completed, the form then went into the work queue, meaning it was loaded onto the force vetting system in place at that time, known as ‘Warrantor’, and thereafter picked up and allocated to a vetting officer. Vetting officers within the Metropolitan Police Service Vetting Unit are not normally police officers.³⁶⁰

4.251 The vetting officer then conducted the various vetting checks in accordance with the standards in place for the Metropolitan Police Service at the time, as well as any relevant national standards. If for any reason the Metropolitan Police Service chose to deviate from those national standards, a senior-level body known as the Vetting Board would have to agree to any deviations.³⁶¹ The Inquiry saw evidence

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that in January 2018, a few months prior to Couzens' recruitment, the Vetting Board was asked to approve a number of deviations, including one that allowed internet open-source searches to be conducted only when intelligence or other information indicated a valid reason for checking, rather than as a matter of course. The rationale for this deviation was to balance resource use with the value added by open-source searches.³⁶²

- 4.252 The vetting officer then collated all the material obtained during the checks, inputted the results into the Warrantor system and prepared a recommendation and a rationale for that recommendation. The recommendation and rationale would then be passed to a supervisor, namely a senior vetting officer. The supervisor assessed the rationale and the checks that had been completed and made a decision as to whether to grant or refuse vetting clearance. This was the final decision on behalf of the organisation. The candidate then received an email informing them of the outcome of the vetting process. The result would also be notified to SSCL.³⁶³
- 4.253 Any candidates who, because of the nature of the position they were being recruited into, also required National Security Vetting clearance at the Developed Vetting level would then undergo the separate Developed Vetting process described in paragraph 4.26. The United Kingdom Security Vetting agency undertook Developed Vetting checks on behalf of the Metropolitan Police Service, and presented the findings to the Metropolitan Police Service for consideration. The Metropolitan Police Service was responsible for taking the final decision on whether or not to grant National Security Vetting clearance.³⁶⁴

Appeals process and the Vetting Panel

- 4.254 In accordance with the Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting in force at the time Couzens was vetted, internal applicants had the right to appeal if they were refused national security clearance,³⁶⁵ and all applicants had such a right if refused force vetting clearance.³⁶⁶ They should have been provided, where possible, with the reasoning for such a decision.³⁶⁷ These provisions remain in place in the most recent edition (2021) of the Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting.³⁶⁸
- 4.255 At the Metropolitan Police Service, appeal cases are reviewed by a senior leader within the Vetting Unit who is not involved in the original production of the case. The reviewer is required to check the file and provide a final decision on the appeal.³⁶⁹
- 4.256 The Inquiry was told that, prior to Couzens' recruitment, the Metropolitan Police Service had also established a Vetting Panel, chaired initially by a commander of one of the directorates in the Professional Standards Department but independent of the Vetting Team. Following a recommendation in January 2018, the Chair of the Panel passed to the Director of Operational Support Services.³⁷⁰ The Panel included

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a cross-section of representation from staff support associations, independent advisory groups, the Professional Standards Department and the Human Resources Team. Borderline or particularly difficult cases were presented to the Panel, debated and discussed, and then a final decision was made. The purpose of the Vetting Panel was to test general decision-making. The Inquiry was told that the Vetting Panel played a distinct role in providing independent assessment and giving Metropolitan Police Service leadership the requisite reassurance that vetting decisions were being tested and challenged.³⁷¹

- 4.257 There is no further right to appeal for anybody who is refused force vetting. The Inquiry was advised that the Metropolitan Police Service Vetting Unit occasionally receives letters from Members of Parliament or others making representations on behalf of applicants who have been refused clearance. The Vetting Unit endeavours, where possible, to be transparent and open with candidates and provide the reason(s) for refusal, because it is understood that it can be very disappointing for candidates who have passed a series of assessments and a fitness test to then fail vetting. In some cases, however, the Vetting Unit cannot provide that information because of the requirement to protect the sources of the intelligence upon which the vetting decision was based, or because the intelligence itself was particularly sensitive.³⁷²

The Vetting Academy

- 4.258 The Inquiry heard that the Metropolitan Police Service Vetting Unit had at one stage increased in size to about 100 staff, reflecting the high volume of vetting forms to be reviewed and checked before candidates could be offered employment. A 'Vetting Academy', led by the most skilled and experienced members of the Unit and supported by more formal, standardised training, was established to ensure that there was consistency of decision-making across the team.³⁷³
- 4.259 The Academy provided classroom-based, face-to-face training for all new members of the Vetting Unit. The training covered all aspects of how to process a model vetting case. As the training progressed, individuals started to work on live cases under the supervision of a mentor from the Academy. Work completed as part of the Academy training was fully quality-assured through what were known as 'feedback loops', where trainees were given, among other things, one-on-one coaching sessions to address any issues identified with judgement and decision-making, as well as assistance with any particular issues of concern.³⁷⁴
- 4.260 To graduate from the Academy, trainees had to meet set criteria; upon graduation they were deemed competent to complete vetting checks and were assigned to a team and a team leader, with mentoring and a buddy system in place to help them integrate fully into the Vetting Unit.³⁷⁵

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4.261 The Inquiry heard that between 2017 and 2021, random dip samples of cases across the entire Vetting Team had also been introduced to bolster the quality assurance process. Following the dip sample, any relevant feedback would be provided to the individuals concerned. Guides and desk manuals had also been developed to assist the team. This meant that, once new team members had completed the Academy training, they had the option to look at desk manuals or guides to answer any immediate questions and to refresh their memories.³⁷⁶

Wayne Couzens' vetting application

4.262 Couzens' vetting application is dated 2 June 2018.³⁷⁷ It was received by the Metropolitan Police Service Vetting Unit for processing on 19 July 2018.³⁷⁸ Couzens made a number of disclosures within his vetting application, including:

- 10 January 2015: speeding, Bedfordshire Police, £80 fine and speed awareness course;
- 14 February 2013: speeding, Kent Police, £80 fine and three driving licence points;
- 17 July 1996: driving with no insurance, Kent Police, £300 fine and six driving licence points;
- 2016: unsatisfactory performance procedure for an unintentional Taser discharge while arming for duty. Given a development plan and put on a Taser refresher course. No formal, oral or written action; it was to be considered unsatisfactory performance and not a disciplinary incident; and
- extension to existing mortgage to make substantial improvements to his home.³⁷⁹

In respect of the traffic offences, he advised:

"The dates I have provided are approximate, I have genuinely forgotten the exact dates as I have no record and the points have all expired. I know the year however the day and month of the offences I unfortunately cannot remember."³⁸⁰

4.263 In the 'financial position' section, the applicant is to complete the questions in respect of the last six years unless otherwise stated. The form is, however, unclear and the questions open to interpretation. Couzens responded "no" to the question:

"Have you ever had an Individual Voluntary Arrangement or Debt Referral Order?"³⁸¹

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4.264 The use of the word “ever” in the question suggests that an Individual Voluntary Arrangement is not subject to the six-year rule and should therefore be declared. Couzens also answered “no” to the question:

“Have you had a County Court Judgement [sic] registered against you?”³⁸²

4.265 That would seem to be the correct answer given that the judgment was in 1998 and the question is worded in such a way that the applicant is entitled to assume it is only the past six years which are covered.

4.266 The vetting application form contained a short section with some additional security questions that were required for the National Security Vetting process.³⁸³ At that time, and as they do now, all Metropolitan Police Service officers required National Security clearance at a minimum of Counter Terrorist Check level.³⁸⁴

4.267 Couzens answered those questions. The Inquiry understands that the Metropolitan Police Service did not carry out any National Security Vetting checks on him because his National Security clearance at the Security Check level (which is higher than Counter Terrorist Check) from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary was still valid (it was due to expire in 2021). This security clearance was therefore transferred over.³⁸⁵

4.268 Additionally, in the medical history questionnaire required as part of the application process, Couzens provided a different reason for a period of sickness absence in 2015 from the reason he had provided to his employer at the time. He had told his line manager at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary that he had hurt his hand operating a strimmer (see paragraph 5.47), but when applying to the Metropolitan Police Service in 2018, he described it as “light duties to recover and physio after operation”.³⁸⁶ Couzens’ GP was required to sign the form to confirm that the information in the questionnaire was complete and correct.³⁸⁷

Internal Metropolitan Police Service review of Wayne Couzens’ vetting application

4.269 In May 2021, as part of the internal Metropolitan Police Service investigation that followed Couzens’ arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard, a report, containing a review of the vetting process for him when he applied to transfer to the Metropolitan Police Service from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, was prepared for Metropolitan Police Service senior leadership by those with knowledge of the vetting procedure within the force. This is referred to as ‘the review report’.³⁸⁸

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4.270 This review included an overview of the processes followed and an assessment of whether the decision to grant force vetting clearance to Couzens in 2018, thereby enabling him to commence employment with the Metropolitan Police Service, was the correct one. The Inquiry has had access to the review report, as well as relevant supporting documents, and has had the opportunity to discuss its findings specifically with those who contributed to it, as well as more generally with the Metropolitan Police Service senior leadership in place at the time.

4.271 The catalyst for preparation of the review report, unsurprisingly, was Couzens' arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard.³⁸⁹ The Inquiry was told that, as part of the review report, an experienced senior vetting officer with no previous involvement in Couzens' application was tasked, by way of verbal instructions, with checking what was on the original vetting file and comparing this with what should have been found during the original vetting process in 2018 had all the checks been done in accordance with processes applicable at the time and to a sufficient standard.³⁹⁰ This included re-running some of the checks. The checks were run on 10 March 2021, the day after Couzens was arrested. The findings of this exercise were included as part of the review report produced in May 2021. Later, in October 2021, the same senior vetting officer was further tasked with preparing a retrospective senior vetting officer assessment of the file on the basis that it was potentially needed by the Independent Office for Police Conduct.³⁹¹ The exercise in March 2021, together with the retrospective senior vetting officer assessment prepared in October 2021, is referred to as the 're-vet' process.

4.272 The Inquiry also discussed with someone familiar with the review report, in general terms, the kinds of issues that would raise red flags about a vetting applicant. The issues raised were:

- any convictions, cautions or reprimands, regardless of the age of a caution or conviction;
- intelligence not only in relation to the applicant themselves, but also in relation to their associates and family members, including the people they live with; and
- patterns of behaviour, for instance a case where, despite the applicant having no previous cautions or convictions, there were concerns about patterns of coercive behaviour, and where there was the potential for inappropriate use of power over a vulnerable woman (in this case vetting clearance was denied).³⁹²

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- 4.273 As well as recording the results of the re-vet process, the review report also considered, by way of background, Couzens' vetting history with Kent Police as a special constable and with the Civil Nuclear Constabulary as a full-time police officer. The report noted that, on his application form for the Constabulary, Couzens declared an incident from 1995 of driving without insurance, which resulted in six penalty points being applied to his driving licence. He also declared an Individual Voluntary Arrangement totalling £1,938, which, Couzens advised, was cleared in 1998.³⁹³

Conclusion 39

The Metropolitan Police Service conflated two separate disclosures relating to his debt when reconsidering, after his arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard, Wayne Couzens' vetting process for the Civil Nuclear Constabulary. This meant that the vetting review report incorrectly narrated the extent of Wayne Couzens' debt and financial difficulties.

- 4.274 From its consideration of Couzens' Civil Nuclear Constabulary vetting file, however, the Inquiry has found that this reference to the Individual Voluntary Arrangement in the Metropolitan Police Service review report conflates two separate disclosures: (i) a 1995 County Court Judgment for £1,938 in relation to financing for a vehicle purchase, which was recorded by Thames Valley Police as cleared at Canterbury County Court in 1998; and (ii) an Individual Voluntary Arrangement for a considerably larger sum (over £12,000), entered into in 2007 and which was still current at the time of his vetting by Thames Valley Police in 2011. The Inquiry believes, therefore, that the Metropolitan Police Service review report incorrectly narrated the extent of Couzens' debt and financial difficulties at particular points in time.
- 4.275 Even if it had been recorded correctly, the information about Couzens' financial situation as reflected in the Civil Nuclear Constabulary vetting file is unlikely to have affected the overall findings of the Metropolitan Police Service review report, not least because that information was too historical to have fallen within the scope of the checks carried out by the Metropolitan Police Service Vetting Unit on Couzens in the summer of 2018.

Conclusion 40

The Inquiry found a lack of attention to detail in the Metropolitan Police Service's internal review report.

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4.276 The Inquiry considers, however, that this misinterpretation of the information in the Civil Nuclear Constabulary vetting file does demonstrate a lack of attention to detail during an important stage of the corporate reassurance process on vetting in the aftermath of the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard. The Inquiry has made further observations about a lack of attention to detail by the Metropolitan Police Service in matters affecting Couzens elsewhere in this Report (see Chapter 6).

Debt

4.277 The Inquiry explored with a witness with experience of the vetting process in the Metropolitan Police Service the question of an applicant's level of debt, recognising that vetting policies and practice had changed during the period between Couzens joining the Civil Nuclear Constabulary and joining the Metropolitan Police Service. A creditworthiness check is – and always has been – a standard part of the force vetting process. Such a check does not focus solely on whether a person has any debt, but also considers the extent of the debt as well as how it is being managed. For example, if an individual has a large mortgage, where the total amount borrowed – the overall debt – is significant but the mortgage holder is able to make the monthly payments without any difficulty, the debt is regarded as 'manageable'. On the other hand, however, it was explained to the Inquiry that patterns of defaulting on loans, or outstanding balances increasing because payments were not being made, would be red flags from a financial point of view and could lead to a refusal of vetting clearance.³⁹⁴

4.278 The Inquiry was told that financial checks are important because they allow a force to assess whether candidates could potentially be vulnerable to blackmail, corruption or dishonesty as a result of their financial status.³⁹⁵ At the time he was vetted by the Metropolitan Police Service, however, Couzens' credit check returned no adverse information.³⁹⁶ From the documents the Inquiry has seen, the disclosure in his application form about the extension of his existing mortgage (see paragraph 4.262) did not invite any comment or additional investigation from the original vetting officer.³⁹⁷ The re-vet process did not suggest that any information that would have been available to the Vetting Team was missed about Couzens' finances. Chapter 6 contains more detailed information on Couzens' financial situation at the time he applied to the Metropolitan Police Service.

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Unintentional Taser discharge

4.279 As indicated in paragraph 4.262, in his vetting application form Couzens disclosed that, in 2016, while employed by the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, he had unintentionally discharged his Taser while arming up for duty. In the re-vet process, the senior vetting officer referred to this disclosure, stating that they had “considered the applicant’s [...] declaration of unsatisfactory performance while serving with CNC [Civil Nuclear Constabulary] which [is] not a cause [sic] concern”. The senior vetting officer also noted that, “despite the applicants [sic] declaration the CDS [Conduct and Discipline System] from CNC returned no adverse findings against the applicant who has no outstanding complaints against them”.³⁹⁸ This was not mentioned in the recommendation at the original vetting stage.

Conclusion 41

The Inquiry questions why the Metropolitan Police Service vetting officer did not ask the Civil Nuclear Constabulary about the unintentional Taser discharge incident.

4.280 The review report notes that the Civil Nuclear Constabulary confirmed subsequently that it did not have any record of the Taser incident.³⁹⁹ However, the Inquiry questions why the Metropolitan Police Service vetting officer did not ask the Constabulary about it specifically when making the routine conduct and discipline enquiries in 2018.

Police National Database checks

4.281 The Police National Database check on Couzens, described in the review report, was explored with someone familiar with the review report and the re-vet process. The review report identified a series of errors in the initial vetting process:

- There were inconsistencies in the names of Couzens’ family members that the original vetting officer checked against the Police National Database.
- More significantly, although the outcome of the Police National Database check on Couzens at the time of his application in 2018 was recorded as ‘no trace’, the re-vet process in 2021 identified entries from before 2018. Those entries were as follows:
 - a reference to Couzens being reported missing in 2013; and
 - a reference to Couzens’ car being linked to an alleged offence of indecent exposure in 2015, which was described as being “NFA’d [meaning that no further action was taken] due to evidential difficulties”.⁴⁰⁰

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- 4.282 The review report to the Metropolitan Police Service senior leadership suggests that this intelligence from the Police National Database was either not identified in 2018 because no checks of the Police National Database were conducted,⁴⁰¹ or the outcomes of any checks were recorded incorrectly as ‘no trace’.⁴⁰² The Inquiry was told that it was not possible at the time of the review report in May 2021 (or subsequently) to confirm whether or not the intelligence checks had been completed by the original vetting officer in 2018 because the relevant data had been retained for only two years.⁴⁰³
- 4.283 Evidence seen by the Inquiry shows that, in 2019, as part of a separate process, an audit within the Metropolitan Police Service Vetting Unit was carried out. This concluded that, between January 2019 and May 2019, there were instances in which the vetting officer who had carried out the original vetting check on Couzens had indicated on vetting forms that Police National Database and Integrated Information Platform checks had been conducted, when in fact they had not.⁴⁰⁴ It is therefore possible that the vetting officer did not carry out these checks on Couzens’ application. A management investigation following the 2019 audit found that there had been a lack of robust supervision, or a lack of records of supervision, of that vetting officer, and that their performance was not raised with them by their line manager during their time within the Vetting Unit. This meant that supervisors were unaware that the way in which the vetting officer was carrying out those checks was not in line with management standards.⁴⁰⁵
- 4.284 It is also possible that the vetting officer carried out the checks but that they were not recorded correctly. The Inquiry saw evidence that, in relation to the 2013 missing person entry on the Police National Database, the vetting officer was advised by a more senior colleague that, as the subject was recorded as a ‘victim’, the vetting record would be marked as ‘no trace’ and no comment would be added; comments would only be added if the vetting subject was recorded as a ‘suspect’.⁴⁰⁶ Although the Inquiry has not seen a document confirming this was the advice given, it notes that this advice, if given, is contrary to the guidance in force at the time, which specified that “any traces found on the PND [Police National Database] system that relate to the applicant” should be recorded and checked.⁴⁰⁷

Conclusion 42

Due to the passage of time, the Metropolitan Police Service cannot now confirm whether the intelligence about the 2015 indecent exposure allegation involving Wayne Couzens was not identified because the correct checks were not carried out, or was identified but not considered during his original vetting in 2018.

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- 4.285 Due to the passage of time between Couzens' vetting in 2018 and his arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard in 2021, the Metropolitan Police Service cannot now confirm whether the intelligence about the 2015 indecent exposure allegation was not identified because the correct checks were not carried out, or was identified but, due to the vetting officer's misunderstanding of the vetting process in 2018, not considered by the vetting officer or their supervisor because Couzens was not identified as a 'suspect' in the information provided.
- 4.286 In any event, the Inquiry has examined in detail the relevant material disclosed by the Metropolitan Police Service⁴⁰⁸ and notes that the conclusion of the re-vet process was that, even if the intelligence about the 2015 indecent exposure allegation had been identified by the vetting officer on the Police National Database at the time of the original vetting in 2018, Couzens would still have been recommended to pass vetting.⁴⁰⁹
- 4.287 The senior vetting officer responsible for conducting the re-vet exercise in March 2021 completed a more detailed retrospective vetting assessment on 12 October 2021 and uploaded it to the vetting system on 13 October 2021.⁴¹⁰ The Inquiry was told that the purpose of this assessment was to assist consideration of the vetting process by the Independent Office for Police Conduct.⁴¹¹ In the assessment, the senior vetting officer wrote:
- “The applicant was also linked to an incident of indecent exposure in 2015 when their car was identified after a report of someone driving naked from the waist down. Despite the nature of the suspect trace the applicant was not arrested, cautioned or convicted of any offence, the incident of indecent exposure was NFA'd due to evidential difficulties (victim based).
- The applicant is currently serving as a PC [police constable] with the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, I cannot foresee that the applicant could be subjected to adverse pressures or affect the clearance level applied for. Clearance granted [...]"⁴¹²
- 4.288 The Inquiry was told by the Metropolitan Police Service that this retrospective assessment was written in the first person to represent what the assessment *would have been* at the time of the original application in 2018, taking into consideration the information on the Police National Database about the 2015 allegation of indecent exposure.⁴¹³
- 4.289 The senior vetting officer concluded as part of the re-vet process in 2021 that Couzens would have been granted clearance in accordance with sections 7.19 and 7.26 of the now superseded Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting dated October 2017.⁴¹⁴ Those sections are copied into the narrative as follows:

408 This includes material sought by the Inquiry during the Maxwellisation process to clarify relevant timelines and a detailed chronology of events.

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“7.26 Information relating to the subject

7.26.1 Where information and intelligence relates to the applicant, forces should apply a two-stage test:

1. Are there reasonable grounds for suspecting that the applicant, a family member or other relevant associate:
 - is or has been involved in criminal activity
 - has financial vulnerabilities (applicant only)
 - is or has been subjected to any adverse information?
2. If so, is it appropriate, in all the circumstances, to refuse vetting clearance?

7.19 Transferees and rejoiners

7.19.1 Forces must ensure that the integrity of the individual wishing to transfer into the force or rejoin is beyond question and that there are no outstanding complaints or matters currently under investigation.”⁴¹⁵

Conclusion 43

The Police National Database entry about the 2015 indecent exposure allegation was considered and discounted by the senior vetting officer, who indicated that vetting clearance would still have been recommended. The Inquiry has not seen the tasking instructions to the senior vetting officer to clarify what was required in the retrospective assessment, but the recorded rationale for how the Police National Database entry had been considered during the re-vet process did not include any explanation of why the information had been discounted. This is a deeply significant failing.

4.290 Taking into account all the evidence presented to it, the Inquiry cannot be satisfied that the Police National Database entry in relation to the 2015 alleged indecent exposure incident was known about and actively considered as part of the original vetting process for Couzens in 2018. It can, however, be satisfied that the entry was considered, and discounted, during the re-vet process in 2021 by a senior vetting officer, who indicated that vetting clearance would still have been recommended and did not propose any further review or checks. The rationale set out by the senior vetting officer simply restates the information contained on the Police National Database rather than offering any insight into the decision-making process or the factors taken into account when deciding to discount the information. This is a deeply significant failing, and the re-vet process could not, in the Inquiry’s view, offer adequate reassurance to the Metropolitan Police Service senior leadership that Couzens would have passed vetting without there being the need for further enquiries into the 2015 allegation to be carried out.

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4.291 It is important to note that one potential interpretation of the 2017 Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting is that *either* paragraph 7.26.1 *or* paragraph 7.19.1 applies,⁴¹⁶ depending on whether the vetting subject is a new recruit from outwith policing, or applying to transfer from another force or to rejoin the Metropolitan Police Service. On one view this is entirely reasonable, as it would be expected that the application to a serving police officer of the two-stage test under paragraph 7.26.1 would be unnecessary as the employing force should be aware, and should therefore have alerted the force to which the officer is intending to transfer, of any intelligence relating to criminality, certainly concerning the officer if not also concerning their relatives.

Conclusion 44

Recruiting forces are at risk if previous allegations of crime involving prospective transferees are not properly investigated at the time and incomplete information is therefore potentially provided to the employing force.

- 4.292 The Inquiry considers, however, that in applying only paragraph 7.19.1 to a transferee, a recruiting force is at risk when a situation akin to the 2015 alleged indecent exposure incident arises – namely when a crime report is made which has substance in that it is cogent, supported by independent evidence and corroborated, but is not investigated adequately by the relevant police force. In those circumstances, the crime report is not brought to the attention of the suspect or to their employing force.
- 4.293 As explained in paragraphs 4.217 to 4.220, the current process for both force vetting and National Security Vetting aftercare relies largely on individuals or their line managers declaring matters of interest. This, in itself, represents a risk. In this instance, however, Couzens was apparently unaware that allegations had been made to Kent Police that were linked to him through his vehicle because the force did not consider the report of offending to be of the standard required for further investigative action and the case was therefore closed (a decision which, it must be remembered, was found to be “underperformance or conduct not amounting to misconduct or gross misconduct, which falls short of the expectations of the public and the police service” – see paragraph 3.91). If Couzens was unaware of the report, it is reasonable to assume that his line manager was too, and thus neither of them could bring this information to the attention of the Vetting Unit. Further, although this Police National Database entry was made in 2015, and Couzens remained at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary until 2018, he did not undergo any vetting checks during that period that might have revealed it because he was not due to be re-vetted until 2021.

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Responsibility for making further enquiries

4.294 The vetting review report advised the Metropolitan Police Service senior leadership that the 2015 indecent exposure case was ‘NFA’d’ (i.e. no further action was taken) due to evidential difficulties. Those difficulties were described as follows:

- The named subject was not identified.
- Face-to-face contact was not made with the victim.
- The victim declined to support further investigation to identify the offender and would not support any action.
- There were no other witnesses and the suspect was unknown.
- Following a case review, it was concluded that the crime was not detectable and there were no outstanding reasonable lines of enquiry.
- The witness account differed from the Automatic Number Plate Recognition image and [their] reliability was questioned, so it was unclear if the incident actually occurred.⁴¹⁷

4.295 The nature of the Police National Database intelligence was explored further by the Inquiry, in particular whether, where information of this type surfaced during vetting checks, the recruiting force should make further enquiries. One witness with vetting experience recognised that, although Couzens was not placed at the scene of the indecent exposure incident (and was not therefore identified as a suspect), regardless of the mental state of the victim and what they might have said when reporting the crime, there was a line of enquiry available about the registered keeper of the vehicle which was not pursued.⁴¹⁸

4.296 The Inquiry queried whether it would be open to a vetting officer to refer a matter for investigation or to seek further information through an investigating force. It was told that there was always the option to clarify matters with another force if there was a query about the outcome of a previous investigation, but that it was not likely that a vetting officer would suggest that a previous matter had not been investigated properly and that the investigation should be reopened.⁴¹⁹

4.297 The Inquiry was told in evidence that it was not the vetting officer’s job:

- to investigate something or to question the quality of the investigation and the outcome of that investigation;
- to delve into matters that had already been investigated; or
- to investigate a scenario similar to that described in Couzens’ vetting records at the Metropolitan Police Service.⁴²⁰

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4.298 It was asserted that to do so would be outwith a vetting officer's remit, which consists essentially of reviewing the information that has been gathered from the checks conducted and making a decision about vetting clearance.⁴²¹ While there is the ability for forces to carry out further enquiries with the vetting applicant (as outlined in paragraph 4.41), that is in defined circumstances that would not necessarily cover the situation identified during Couzens' vetting.

Conclusion 45

In cases where allegations are made but not investigated properly, vetting officers cannot commission further enquiries. This is a vulnerability in vetting procedures.

4.299 The Inquiry considers that the indicated limitation on the vetting officer's role, which prevents them from commissioning further enquiries into alleged offending behaviour by an applicant, represents a potential vulnerability in vetting procedures. In cases where a vetting officer may have a question over how a force handled an allegation of criminality by an applicant, there is a risk that clearance may be granted without any further investigation because, essentially, the applicant has been given the benefit of the doubt based on an earlier inadequate outcome.

4.300 The purpose of vetting is not to ingather evidence of a corroborative standard for criminal proceedings, or to accept witness accounts without further challenge or scrutiny. Rather it is to assess whether, in light of all the available information – including non-conviction information, which the Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting makes clear should also be taken into account – the force is satisfied that employment of the applicant is appropriate and that they are a fit and proper person to take the oath of constable.

Conclusions of the review report

4.301 As indicated in paragraph 4.269, the review report on Couzens' vetting was submitted to senior leadership at the Metropolitan Police Service in May 2021. Having considered the findings of the senior vetting officer from the exercise conducted in March 2021, the review report concludes:

"Vetting checks undertaken in this case complied with agreed working practices in place at the time, with the exception of the personal failings of the Vetting Officer whereby PND [Police National Database] and IIP [Integrated Information Platform] checks were not conducted. A re-run of this case was undertaken, including PND and IIP checks. This exercise concluded that the same vetting decision would be reached based on the available information."⁴²²

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4.302 The Inquiry takes issue with this conclusion for two reasons. First, the narrative is not entirely accurate. The outcome of the exercise undertaken by the senior vetting officer in March 2021 did not contain a suggestion that the original vetting officer had failed to carry out the Police National Database and Integrated Information Platform checks; rather, it narrated that those checks returned a ‘no trace’ result⁴²³ (which could have been as a result of the poor training and supervision of the original vetting officer). While this lack of attention to detail in the review report has no bearing on the original vetting decision, it does appear to form part of a worrying pattern at the Metropolitan Police Service.

Conclusion 46

The Metropolitan Police Service’s willingness to accept a decision that an uninvestigated allegation of indecent exposure did not warrant further exploration during the vetting process is of serious concern to the Inquiry.

4.303 Second, and more seriously, the Inquiry is very concerned that, in the Metropolitan Police Service’s view, the discovery during the re-vet process of an uninvestigated allegation of public indecent exposure linked to the vetting applicant that was closed without being investigated was not serious enough to merit further scrutiny. The retrospective assessment provided to the Metropolitan Police Service senior leadership indicated that, even if the 2015 allegation of indecent exposure involving Couzens had been known to the force at the time of Couzens’ application, the outcome would have been the same and he would have passed vetting without any further checks being carried out. It seems to the Inquiry that Couzens’ case – and others like it, where vetting checks reveal that a potentially criminal incident involving the applicant in some way has taken place but has never been fully investigated – is exactly the type of scenario that should at the very least be escalated to a more senior vetting official for review, and possibly referred to the Vetting Panel (or similar) for further discussion and decision. While there is no evidence to suggest that the nature of this alleged incident – namely indecent exposure – influenced the investigating force’s, and thus the vetting officer’s, decision about how to treat it, the Inquiry considers that this is a possibility. How the police approach cases of indecent exposure is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

4.304 It is deeply concerning that the Metropolitan Police Service, when presented with the findings of the re-vet process, including the information on the Police National Database entry about the 2015 indecent exposure incident, seemed comfortable that, without further investigation or scrutiny, the allegation of indecent exposure could simply be put to one side, untested, as if it had never happened.

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4.305 The particular set of circumstances in Couzens' case also raises the question of what a recruiting force should do with information obtained as part of the vetting process which is perhaps unknown to the transferring applicant but which gives the recruiting force concern about their suitability to serve as a police officer. In such cases, the Inquiry takes the view that the recruiting force should pause the transfer process, disclose the information to the employing force and suggest a full re-vet by the employing force, which still has responsibility for the officer and is best placed to take a decision on whether further vetting reveals information which casts doubt on the officer's suitability to serve in their current role.

Changes to the vetting process at the Metropolitan Police Service

4.306 Since Sarah Everard's abduction, rape and murder, and despite the position outlined in the review report that Couzens would have been granted force vetting clearance even if all the available information had been considered, the Inquiry has been told that the Metropolitan Police Service has now changed its vetting process. In particular, the Inquiry was told that a two-year transformation programme has been introduced, entailing a review of the end-to-end vetting process to identify any improvements and ways of streamlining it.⁴²⁴ As a result of this detailed review, a number of changes are in train or have already been introduced.

4.307 The Inquiry heard that the key findings of the review were as follows:

- There is a need to focus vetting officers' skills and time on value-added activity, such as data-mining, analysis and recommendations, as opposed to administrative tasks.
- There is a need to address vulnerabilities of leadership by maintaining management ratios as the Vetting Team grows, so as to avoid stretching the management span of senior vetting officers responsible for making final decisions so that they have sufficient time to review application packs and make decisions.⁴²⁵

4.308 The review also found that compliance by the Metropolitan Police Service with national vetting standards had not been consistent. The Inquiry was told that, at the time of Couzens' vetting application, the Metropolitan Police Service was dealing with a backlog of vetting cases.⁴²⁶

4.309 As explained in paragraph 4.156, the national guidance on vetting (currently the Authorised Professional Practice) is only guidance, meaning that each Chief Constable can deviate from the standards set out in it based on their own risk appetite or the circumstances within their force.⁴²⁷ At the time Couzens was applying to the Metropolitan Police Service, force vetting managers were required to ensure that decisions made were consistent with the vetting guidance; if they deviated from

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it, their rationale had to be recorded and supported by the chief officer team.⁴²⁸ At that time, the Metropolitan Police Service had taken a decision to deviate from the requirement, as set out in the 2017 version of the Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting, to complete searches of material that is unrestricted, also known as ‘open source’, for every applicant in every case, unless the intelligence in a particular case suggested that an open-source search was necessary.⁴²⁹

- 4.310 **The Inquiry notes that, in line with the approved deviation in force at the time, the vetting officer did not conduct an open-source search on Couzens. And so, while the Inquiry agrees with the review report’s observation that “the Vetting Officer could have displayed a greater sense of curiosity regarding [Couzens’ statement that he did not subscribe to any social network site on the internet], bearing in mind that it is improbable that an individual has no presence on social media”,⁴³⁰ it does not find any evidence of a failure to apply policy or practice.**
- 4.311 **The Inquiry is satisfied that, even if an open-source check had been carried out following identification of the Police National Database entry regarding the allegation of indecent exposure in Kent in 2015, it is unlikely the vetting decision by the Metropolitan Police Service would have changed. If an allegation of indecent exposure was not enough to prompt hesitation in accepting the transfer of an officer from another force, it is difficult to see that an open-source check would have made any difference.**
- 4.312 The Inquiry was told that it had always been the ambition of the Metropolitan Police Service to remove all deviations from the Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting and ensure full compliance.⁴³¹ In any event, the series of recommendations on vetting made by His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services referred to in paragraph 4.319, as well as the issuance of the July 2023 edition of the Vetting Code of Practice and the forthcoming (at the time of writing) updated version of the Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting, reinforce the fact that the onus is on forces across England and Wales to revise procedures to ensure compliance with the most up-to-date vetting framework.
- 4.313 The Inquiry has seen a draft of the updated version of the Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting, which, at the time of writing, is due to be the subject of a public consultation in early 2024. At first sight, the introduction of annual vetting and integrity reviews, the new requirement for all transferees and rejoiners to be re-vetted (rather than being able to carry across a vetting clearance that is less than 12 months old), and the additional guidance to support the sharing of information on transferees are welcome developments.⁴³² The Inquiry will examine the new vetting framework in more detail in Part 2.

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Previous military service and vetting requirements

- 4.314 The current (2021) version of the Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting recommends that, as a matter of course, forces must also conduct a military or Ministry of Defence check on all applicants who have previously been employed within the Armed Forces.⁴³³ This reflects the wording in previous versions of the Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting (2017 and 2019), as well as in the 2010 Association of Chief Police Officers' guidance on vetting, which was in force at the time Couzens was recruited by the Civil Nuclear Constabulary.⁴³⁴ The wording is such that it is open to interpretation as to whether the check applies to service as a military reservist.
- 4.315 The Inquiry notes that the Metropolitan Police Service Vetting Standardisation Guide, which is currently in use, specifies that, if applicable, checks are to be carried out with the Ministry of Defence on any applicant who has previously been employed with any of the Armed Forces, including the Territorial Army/Army Reserve.⁴³⁵ **The Inquiry considers that the national guidance on vetting should be amended to make it clear that military and/or Ministry of Defence checks should be carried out on applicants who have served with the Armed Forces as reservists** (see Recommendation 8).

Reflections from senior leaders

- 4.316 The Inquiry heard from senior leaders of policing organisations about recruitment, vetting and maintaining standards. The Inquiry heard that, without quality recruitment, “the police are inheriting a real problem for the future”.⁴³⁶ One senior leader told the Inquiry that the push for rapid recruitment was happening at a time when public confidence was low, so “the people [policing is] attracting might be influenced by that”.⁴³⁷ Prioritising speed over quality was seen as problematic.⁴³⁸
- 4.317 To attract the right people into positions of power, senior leaders generally agreed that recruitment campaigns should reflect the core functions of police officers, namely engaging with local communities and solving local problems.⁴³⁹ Campaigns that are targeted towards a ‘hyper-masculine’, ‘action role’ are unrealistic, misleading, and attract recruits who may not be suited to the day-to-day realities of policing, namely preventing crime, detecting offenders and making a positive difference to the lives of local communities.⁴⁴⁰
- 4.318 Senior leaders acknowledged that increased recruitment must work in conjunction with continuous vetting and improved communication and information-sharing between recruitment, vetting and human resources teams, as well as between forces.⁴⁴¹ Generally, senior leaders agreed that there are problems with the current

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vetting process, not quite describing vetting units as “broken” but using terms such as “under pressure” and citing the fact that initial vetting at recruitment offers only a “snapshot” in time.⁴⁴² To gain a wider picture, best practice in areas such as record-keeping and properly recording the rationale for vetting decisions has already been introduced at some forces, including at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary.⁴⁴³

4.319 In 2023, His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services published reports into the effectiveness of vetting and counter-corruption arrangements in eight different forces.⁴⁴⁴ Some of the Inspectorate’s findings were that: vetting units must have sufficient staff to meet demand;⁴⁴⁵ forces have had to reprioritise vetting resources in the face of immediate demands, such as dealing with Police Uplift Programme recruits rather than vetting renewals;⁴⁴⁶ and, in cases where individuals have adverse information, vetting staff should provide a sufficient rationale for all vetting decisions and, if applicants are accepted, effective risk mitigation strategies must be established.⁴⁴⁷ These recommendations are not new and, in fact, some mirror the guidance set out in the most up-to-date (2021) version of the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting.⁴⁴⁸

4.320 In discussions with senior leaders of relevant organisations, the Inquiry was told that gaps in information-sharing between human resources, recruitment, professional standards and vetting teams – and, indeed, between forces themselves – were a significant barrier to capturing a clear picture of officers.⁴⁴⁹ The Inquiry heard from different sources, including senior leaders, that there are significant barriers to information-sharing. Some cite data privacy and protection laws as a reason not to share information.⁴⁵⁰ However, in a discussion with the Information Commissioner, John Edwards, the Inquiry was assured that data protection law recognises that there are legitimate reasons for information-sharing, particularly given the powers attributed to police officers.⁴⁵¹ Indeed, Mr Edwards suggested that data protection law is widely misunderstood and misconstrued, and highlighted a failure of training in this regard.⁴⁵²

4.321 In discussions with the Inquiry, one senior leader expressed sympathy with the argument that frequent vetting of officers could be a “waste of time and money”, but equally agreed that more vetting should be carried out where officers keep moving forces.⁴⁵³ Re-vetting existing officers as well as new recruits was resource-intensive, however.⁴⁵⁴ The main challenge was to ensure that vetting teams, line managers and Professional Standards Departments were joined up beyond the recruitment stage.⁴⁵⁵

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- 4.322 In a discussion with Sir Mark Rowley, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service, the Inquiry heard of initiatives undertaken by the Metropolitan Police Service to “clean house”. These include data washing⁴⁵⁶ the Police National Database and Police National Computer as a form of “ongoing re-vetting”, as well as reviewing cases where officers or staff have been accused of sexual offending and domestic violence and where the investigation has been closed and the officer or staff member is still in post.⁴⁵⁷ The Inquiry was told that, once the initial stages are complete, regular data washes on officers and staff (called ‘Continuous Integrity Screening’) can start. This is to prevent any Metropolitan Police Service officer being arrested for an incident outside London without their employer knowing.⁴⁵⁸
- 4.323 Commissioner Mark Rowley also spoke about Operation Onyx, which had been introduced to reassess professional standards investigations over the last ten years in cases where Metropolitan Police Service officers and staff had been accused of sexual offending and/or domestic violence, the investigation had been closed, and the employee had remained in the police service.⁴⁵⁹
- 4.324 A specialist unit in the Directorate of Professional Standards had also been established to investigate allegations of domestic and sexual abuse made against Metropolitan Police Service officers and staff. This initiative had already demonstrated the extent of the work required to improve the force; within the first ten months of being set up, the unit had received “600 reports”, which are being investigated by officers from conventional public protection work.⁴⁶⁰
- 4.325 The Inquiry was also told of a refreshed violence against women and girls action plan, being drafted with input from a number of key stakeholders.⁴⁶¹ In July 2023, Commissioner Mark Rowley announced that the Metropolitan Police Service would use counter-terrorism tactics to hunt down male sexual predators by proactively seeking evidence and building a case against them.⁴⁶²
- 4.326 While these initiatives are promising, the Inquiry considers that it will take time to see the effects on Metropolitan Police Service officers. Similar measures should also be considered by other forces in England and Wales.

456 As used in this Report, data washing refers to a process where existing data is cross-checked against different systems to identify errors or inconsistencies. The term can also be used to describe a process where data is reviewed, analysed and cleansed.

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Recommendations on recruitment and vetting

Recommendation 6: Review of indecent exposure allegations and other sexual offences recorded against serving police officers

By September 2024, the National Police Chiefs' Council, in collaboration with all force vetting units, and building on the results of the recent data-washing exercise, should conduct a review of the circumstances of all allegations of indecent exposure and other sexual offences recorded on the Police National Database and the Police National Computer against serving officers. This is to identify, investigate and ultimately remove those officers found to have committed sexual offences from all police forces.

Recommendation 7: In-person interviews and home visits

With immediate effect, the College of Policing, in collaboration with force recruitment, should ensure that every new candidate applying to become a police officer in any police force undergoes an in-person interview and home visit. This should be designed to provide a holistic picture of the candidate and a better understanding of the candidate's motivations for joining the police and their dedication to serving the public. In particular, this should include the following:

- a. An in-person interview with the candidate to ensure that face-to-face contact is made with the recruiting force before the vetting or onboarding of the candidate is progressed.
- b. A visit to the residence of all new candidates. This should be used as another opportunity, in advance of vetting enquiries, to engage with the candidate, relevant family members or other occupants of the residence, wherever possible.
- c. An integrity questionnaire, used as part of the in-person home visit, to explore fully the candidate's personal attitudes and values, including increased scrutiny of the candidate's motivations and suitability for joining the police.
- d. Corresponding guidance and training for home visits must be developed to ensure that the visits will enable a better sense of the candidate's character, rather than judge living arrangements or socio-economic status.

Recommendation 8: Recruitment and vetting policy, processes and practices

By June 2024, the College of Policing, in collaboration with force vetting units, should take further steps to prevent those unsuitable for policing from joining the policing profession. This should include further developing the Vetting Code of Practice, Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting and other guidance on recruitment and vetting practices in order to prevent those who commit sexually motivated crimes against women and those otherwise unsuitable for policing from holding the office of constable. In particular, recruitment and vetting policies, processes and practices must be developed in the following areas:

- a. Applicants should be required to undergo an assessment of their psychological suitability for the role (which is not just a questionnaire).
- b. There should be more robust use of the Police National Database during vetting, including as a tool to reveal unreported adverse information about applicants to ensure that potential risks are not missed. In particular, the Database should be used when individuals attempt to move between forces.
- c. Any individual identified as having a conviction or caution for a sexual offence should be rejected during police vetting. This should be clearly outlined in the Vetting Code of Practice and reflected in the Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting, which should consider all contact and non-contact sexual offences.
- d. The Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting should be amended to make it clear that military and/or Ministry of Defence checks should be carried out on all applicants who have served as military reservists.
- e. There should be a fundamental review of the link between debt, mental health, vulnerability to corruption and suitability to be a police officer, to inform vetting decisions. Detailed consideration should be given to the amount of unsecured personal debt held by officers, and rules should be amended to mandate officers to report any significant changes in debt to vetting teams. In addition, the rules should require applicants and officers to provide further insight into their finances, including any payday loans, when requested during the vetting process.
- f. There should be increased rigour in relation to checks for authorised firearms officers, to ensure that vetting standards are met, as well as the introduction of a psychological assessment and an appropriate process for seeking feedback from supervisors or line managers to determine suitability for the role.
- g. No police officer should be onboarded, even if only for initial training, before all vetting is complete. In addition, each officer's force vetting should be completed before their National Security Vetting is initiated. All force vetting information should be passed to National Security Vetting officers for consideration.

Recommendation 9: Professional rigour in decision-making

By March 2025, the College of Policing, in collaboration with force vetting units, should take steps to improve the quality and consistency of police vetting decision-making. This should include encouraging the use of greater professional rigour and curiosity when investigating lines of enquiry, in order to prevent those who commit sexually motivated crimes against women and those otherwise unsuitable for policing from joining the policing profession. These steps should include the following:

- a. Recruiting forces should be able to request that unresolved allegations discovered during vetting processes be reinvestigated.
- b. In collaboration with the National Police Chiefs' Council, a national vetting capability should be created, as an advisory function, to provide another layer of confidence in instances where complex vetting investigations and decisions are required. In such cases, forces should approach the national vetting function to seek proposed lines of enquiry and ensure that they are following an agreed, standardised approach when considering complex cases.
- c. Consideration should be given during vetting to any information or intelligence about police officers being reported missing, regardless of how quickly such reports were closed.
- d. Forces must ensure that force vetting units are complying with and practising Section 6.2 of the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting (2021), which states that force vetting units "must record the results of vetting enquiries; the rationale for refusing, suspending, withdrawing or granting clearance, including with restrictions; and where adverse information has been revealed and considered". This is to ensure that an audit trail is recorded, to give the force confidence in decisions made at the time and to allow future vetting officers to constructively scrutinise vetting enquiries and outcomes.

Recommendation 10: Vetting Code of Practice and transfers

With immediate effect, all recruiting forces should have regard to the new Vetting Code of Practice, which requires the parent force to provide all relevant information requested about the transferee to enable an effective assessment of risk by the force conducting a full re-vet of the transferee.

Recommendation 11: Information-sharing

By December 2024, the College of Policing, in collaboration with force vetting and recruitment units, should ensure that information-sharing practices, including data retention policies, are strengthened in order to prevent those who commit sexually motivated crimes against women and those otherwise unsuitable for policing from remaining in, or moving across, the policing profession. In particular, there should be a focus on the following information:

- a. Previous failures to achieve vetting should be recorded by all forces and flagged to recruiting forces. This should also trigger a re-vet with the current or recruiting force.
- b. A shared agreement should be made about the quality, relevant and necessary content, and sources of information that will be provided in a reference for a future force, also known as a 'shared referencing protocol', with directed questions that must be answered (for example, regarding any past disciplinary or honesty/integrity issues). Information to be shared as part of the protocol should be covered within the relevant forces' fair processing notices. The protocol should apply to all transfers and applications to police forces from individuals in the uniformed services, including:
 - the Ministry of Defence (including the Army, the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy as well as their respective reserve forces);
 - fire and rescue services;
 - HM Prison and Probation Service;
 - other police forces; and
 - relevant government agencies, such as Border Force or Immigration Enforcement.

This is to improve forces' access to – and ability to use – the totality of information they hold about officers in order to prevent, detect and deal with those likely to commit offences.

- c. As per Recommendation 8(b), there should be expanded access to and use of the Police National Database, including as a tool for revealing relevant uninvestigated adverse information about officers.
- d. Any adverse information or intelligence (developed or otherwise) should be passed by the current Professional Standards Directorate to the receiving Professional Standards Directorate for any officers transferring. No decisions on their appointment should be made until that intelligence has been reviewed, recorded and closed and the vetting units have had time to consider it. If the recruiting force identifies adverse information as a result of the vetting process, this should be shared with the current force for consideration and potential action.

Recommendation 12: Right to privacy

With immediate effect, police forces should convey to all existing and prospective officers and staff that they must be held to a higher standard of behaviour and accountability than members of the public, and that therefore their right to privacy can be fettered in certain circumstances. These circumstances include, but are not limited to: recruitment, vetting, aftercare, transfer, promotion, role change, returning to policing and maintaining standards. This is to ensure that members of the police are fully aware and accountable for the unique powers entrusted to them and the standards of professional behaviour they swear to uphold. Updated fair processing notices concerning changes to the processing of personal data should be provided prior to any new processing taking place, including data-sharing.

Recommendation 13: Aftercare

By December 2024, the College of Policing, in collaboration with all force vetting units, should develop a stronger approach to force vetting aftercare in order to monitor an individual effectively throughout their career with the police and be aware of any change in circumstances as soon as possible to ensure that potential risks/red flags are identified and assessed. In particular, that approach should include the following:

- a. Mandatory, randomised re-vetting should be introduced, as an additional layer to standardised vetting periods, for police officers and staff, akin to randomised drug-testing.
- b. In addition to police officers and staff being required to declare any material changes in their circumstances within a managed system, such as a human resources system, supervisors, or anyone with concerns relating to behaviour, welfare or performance, should report them to Professional Standards Departments at any point.
- c. Professional Standards Departments should systematically exchange relevant and necessary information with vetting and counter-corruption units to consider information disclosed by any individual, and any action necessary.

Chapter 5: Firearms

Introduction

- 5.1 As described in Chapter 1, just under a month before the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard, Wayne Couzens returned to his role of authorised firearms officer within the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command of the Metropolitan Police Service after a period of recuperative duties due to a hand injury. He was initially on sickness absence from mid-July to early August 2020 and was then placed on recuperative duties for a number of months, carrying out office-based work, predominantly from home.¹
- 5.2 On Tuesday 2 March 2021 – the day before Sarah’s murder – Couzens, carrying the standard-issue kit, was posted to a site within the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command’s footprint as one of a team of authorised firearms officers, and completed his full shift.² During that shift, he was heard discussing the dispute that he was having with the Metropolitan Police Service about his pay and was described as “clearly stressed” as the sum of money in dispute was significant (see Chapter 6 for more details), but his behaviour did not seem to give any further cause for concern.³
- 5.3 Although none of the offences for which Couzens has been convicted or is the alleged perpetrator involve the use of a firearm, the Inquiry felt it was important to review the training and assessment procedures for authorised firearms officers, who must be ready instantaneously, and in public, to deploy potentially lethal force, if required, in defence of both individuals and infrastructure.
- 5.4 For most of his working life, with the exception of his job as a panel beater, Couzens was responsible for handling firearms. As detailed elsewhere in this Report, he had an avid interest in military history (see paragraph 4.186), as well as an interest in firearms (see paragraph 1.20), and it seems reasonable to assume that these interests may have played a part in his career choices.
- 5.5 The Inquiry, in addition, sought to establish whether, at any time during his career, Couzens used a weapon inappropriately or displayed any other behaviour in connection with the use of firearms that could have been viewed as a ‘red flag’.
- 5.6 The Terms of Reference also require the Inquiry to consider Couzens’ overall conduct, including non-disciplinary matters and his performance and training. In order to be able to carry out that assessment, the Inquiry examined the role of authorised firearms officers in general, in the organisations where Couzens carried

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out such duties, to better understand how his conduct and performance would have been viewed, the training he would have received and the environments in which he was working.

- 5.7 Also of relevance is the vetting process for firearms roles and the process that was followed during his transfer from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary to the Metropolitan Police Service. While the recruitment and vetting of Couzens are considered in detail in Chapter 4, it is important to consider in this chapter the application and, in particular, the risk assessment processes for a firearms role, as well as any implications of the transfer between forces. It is noted at the outset that authorised firearms officers in Home Office police forces are not generally required to obtain higher levels of vetting clearance than non-firearms officers.
- 5.8 This chapter sets out the evidence that the Inquiry gathered about the application and training processes for the firearms roles in which Couzens served, as well as other relevant information, and examines the nature of the role of an authorised firearms officer (particularly within the Civil Nuclear Constabulary and the Metropolitan Police Service), the culture in a predominantly male environment where lethal force may need to be deployed, and the welfare support offered to officers and supervisors within that environment.

Territorial Army

- 5.9 Over several months in 2002, when Couzens was 29 years old, he completed his training for the Territorial Army, which included elements such as basic foot drills, battlefield first aid and light support weapons training. As part of infantry training, trainees were familiarised with the handling and maintenance of the SA80 5.56mm rifle, one of the standard combat weapons of the British Army. Along with carrying out safety procedures, trainees had to demonstrate their aptitude at:
- handling, aiming and firing the rifle;
 - firing effectively from alternative positions;
 - carrying out target indication; and
 - reacting to fire control orders.⁴
- 5.10 Couzens embarked upon the Territorial Army Combat Infantryman's Course in March 2003, and, as described in Chapter 1, passed it at the second attempt, achieving 'best shot' on the course.⁵
- 5.11 In mid-2004, he applied to join a unit of the Special Air Service (Reserve) but, after undergoing assessment and training, failed the selection course and returned to his original regiment in mid-2005.

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Civil Nuclear Constabulary

- 5.12 Couzens took up his employment with the Civil Nuclear Constabulary in March 2011, when he was 38 years old. All operational police officers serving with the Constabulary are authorised firearms officers. An authorised firearms officer is a police officer who has been selected, trained, accredited and authorised by their chief officer to carry a firearm operationally. According to College of Policing guidance, authorised firearms officers are considered as being deployed when they are required to conduct a specific task during which the possession of a firearm, with appropriate authorisation, is a required element.⁶
- 5.13 In the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, the recruitment process for operational officers therefore includes an extra step, as compared with the process for non-firearms officers recruited to other police forces, namely a firearms assessment, which is completed once candidates have passed the assessment centre stage.⁷ The Inquiry did not receive any information about the firearms assessment administered to Couzens, but did see the current description of the assessment on the Constabulary's website, which explains that it is designed to "test dexterity and ability to take instruction while handling firearms".⁸
- 5.14 While some candidates for authorised firearms officer roles at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary have no experience of handling firearms, the Inquiry notes that Couzens may have had a comparative advantage in the firearms assessment owing to his prior experience in the Territorial Army. The Inquiry was told by a senior officer at the Constabulary that "there [was] a strong connection" between the Constabulary and the military because of the similar roles performed, and therefore that "being comfortable with firearms [was] key" to the authorised firearms officer role and thus "attracts those with that interest".⁹

Initial Foundation Course

- 5.15 Couzens' offer of employment at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary was conditional on him passing the Initial Foundation Course, a 17-week residential course that is a prerequisite for all new authorised firearms officers.¹⁰ The Inquiry was provided with information about the content of the course that Couzens attended. Its aim was "to develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes and behaviour of student officers to enable them to enter a workplace environment under the guidance of a tutor constable".¹¹
- 5.16 The course, which combined practical and theoretical training and required a "substantial amount of self-directed study", was run by the Centre for Learning and Development and included the following topics: Civil Nuclear Constabulary induction; personal safety training; firearms; chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear incidents; first aid; legislation; police powers; airwave radios; fitness assessments and training; search; driving assessment; protective security; and

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counter terrorism.¹² Students were assessed continually and also had to undertake a series of knowledge evaluation tests, in each of which they were required to attain a minimum of 60 per cent.¹³ A pass in the Health and Safety at Work First Aid practical assessment was also required.¹⁴

- 5.17 The course materials made available to the Inquiry show that the course was split into two seven-week blocks, with firearms training taking place during the second block. The firearms elements of the Initial Foundation Course were designed to test simultaneously students' mental and physical aptitude to carry a firearm. A pass in all firearms training elements was required.¹⁵
- 5.18 The Inquiry saw and heard evidence that the Initial Foundation Course has changed slightly since Couzens participated in it. Now, the first four weeks are spent at the Centre for Learning and Development, where recruits undergo some basic training, such as learning about the legislation surrounding firearms and how to use the kit with which they have been issued. Recruits then begin the Firearms Phase 1 module, a four-week programme covering weapons handling, weapon function checks, shooting and cleaning elements, and including qualification shoots for various weapons. The recruits then return to the Centre for Learning and Development to undertake further skills training and undergo assessments. The final part of the Initial Foundation Course is the four-week Firearms Phase 2 module, which covers all remaining tactical elements and includes assessment against the National Police Firearms Training Curriculum.¹⁶
- 5.19 Recruits who pass the Initial Foundation Course qualify as authorised firearms officers. They are then deployed to their operational units, where they will serve the rest of their two-year probation period. At this stage, they undergo a further two weeks' local operational procedures training, during which time they are also assigned a mentor.¹⁷

Continuous training

- 5.20 Authorised firearms officers are required to undertake continuous training to maintain their firearms skills and qualifications. The Inquiry saw Couzens' firearms training records from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary. He appears to have undertaken qualification shoots every 3 months for his Glock 17 pistol and G36 carbine (assault rifle), and every 9 to 12 months for his Taser and grenade launcher. The records show that he passed all firearms qualification tests. He also undertook periodic development shoots for the Glock 17 pistol and the G36 carbine, as well as tactical refresher courses.¹⁸ When he was deployed to the Strategic Escort Group, he underwent some specialist training, which is described in paragraph 5.29.

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Initial deployments and performance

- 5.21 In July 2011, upon passing his Initial Foundation Course, Couzens was posted to Sellafield, which, as explained in Chapter 1, was not one of his preferred locations. The Inquiry heard evidence that, at that time, some officers were sent to Sellafield who had been unsuccessful in seeking deployment to a unit closer to home. Applicants would agree to a deployment to Sellafield in the hope of transferring, with some of them even believing that if they said that they had welfare concerns when they arrived in Sellafield, they would be moved to the unit of their choice.¹⁹
- 5.22 The Inquiry was told, however, that in Couzens' case, at an initial 'welcome' meeting with one of the senior officers at Sellafield, he stated that he was keen to remain at Sellafield, despite being asked to consider his choice carefully owing to the distance from his home.²⁰ In spite of this assertion upon his arrival, he applied successfully for a voluntary transfer to Dungeness and moved there on 1 April 2012.²¹ There were no recorded incidents involving Couzens during the short time he was at Sellafield, and he was described as "diligent", with his work being of a "good standard". He "se[t] an example to others by doing more than [was] expected".²²
- 5.23 At Dungeness, the job of the authorised firearms officer involved carrying a firearm and providing protection in one of the following ways: static security, based in a Portakabin and providing a timely response to any issue; patrolling the site, either on foot or in a vehicle; or patrolling off site, in what used to be known as an 'Echo' patrol. The work at Dungeness was described by witnesses as "quite mundane", more so than at other sites such as Sellafield or Dounreay, where there are specialisms such as training with police dogs and dynamic entry search teams, or in other units, such as the Strategic Escort Group²³ (see paragraphs 5.27 to 5.32 for more detail).
- 5.24 However, evidence provided to the Inquiry suggests that, while the Civil Nuclear Constabulary provided a specialist policing function at Dungeness, officers from the Constabulary were sometimes called to help out in the local community.²⁴ As Couzens had a background in Kent Police as a special constable, he had previous experience of many of the incidents that Civil Nuclear Constabulary officers were asked to help deal with, and the Inquiry heard from a witness that "he would always have an opinion or could at least impart his knowledge of how to deal with those kinds of situations correctly".²⁵

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5.25 While at Dungeness, Couzens was described as “personable”.²⁶ His interaction with other officers was good;²⁷ he was friendly and would engage in conversation.²⁸ He was also described as “keen”,²⁹ with a good work ethic.³⁰ At work he was professional,³¹ was always kitted out professionally, did as instructed and was reliable.³²

5.26 His ‘end of 24 months report’, completed at the end of his probationary period, had the following comments:

“Wayne has shown himself to be mature and confident when dealing with his colleagues the site workers and members of the public. Wayne shows a desire to learn and has an enquiring mind. He has grasped the fundamentals of being an officer in the CNC and he has proven himself to be a reliable and popular member of the team. Wayne has expressed a desire to seek promotion at an early stage which highlights his desire to progress within the force.

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Since Wayne has joined us at Dungeness he has been proactive in all aspects of the job. He has been involved in various incidents during which he has shown professionalism, confidence and courtesy throughout presenting the Constabulary with a first class image.

Wayne has a good knowledge and understanding of law and CNC [Civil Nuclear Constabulary] related procedures which he has continued to enhance on a regular basis and is going to be part-taking [sic] in the upcoming PC to PS [police constable to police sergeant] examination.

Wayne has completed his PDP [Probationer Development Programme] with quality evidence which he has taken time to research, ask questions and understand fully before putting words to paper. To date Wayne has had very minimal sickness leave, is punctual for work and presents himself in a professional manner.”³³

Strategic Escort Group

5.27 As indicated in Chapter 1, Couzens applied to join the Strategic Escort Group in January 2014,³⁴ then aged 41, and was deployed to it in July of that year.³⁵ The Group, which is responsible for transporting nuclear material, both within the UK and overseas, was described to the Inquiry by one senior Civil Nuclear Constabulary officer as a “high end, niche capability group of officers with specialist training”.³⁶

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The Inquiry was told that it was viewed as one of the best roles to go into at the Constabulary – one witness described it as the “Gucci role”³⁷ – offering some unique opportunities and training, as well as the possibility of travelling around the world. Periods and locations of deployment varied, with a single deployment sometimes lasting up to three months.³⁸

- 5.28 Witnesses told the Inquiry that officers deployed as part of the Strategic Escort Group needed higher levels of firearms skills, fitness and weapons discipline.³⁹ As part of the selection process – which also involved filling in an application form with detailed evidence of the applicant’s performance in a number of areas, including firearms, obtaining a declaration of suitability from their current line manager⁴⁰ and passing an assessment day – applicants had to successfully complete an advanced firearms qualification shoot.⁴¹ Once deployed, officers used different types of weapons from those issued as standard to officers at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary. The Inquiry also heard that, owing to the nature and requirements of the role, the Strategic Escort Group was largely male dominated.⁴² One Constabulary officer said that there were a couple of people who “might have been interested in the firearms aspect of it and liked to shoot different weapons”.⁴³
- 5.29 The Inquiry notes from Couzens’ training record that, while deployed to the Strategic Escort Group, he completed specialist training for road and marine escorts, including sea survival training. He also appears to have successfully completed additional Group-specific firearms qualification shoots using a G36 carbine automatic rifle, a Glock 17 pistol and a .50 calibre heavy machine gun.⁴⁴
- 5.30 The Inquiry understands that Couzens was deployed to the Road Escort Team within the Strategic Escort Group, which deals with material being moved within the UK, for instance when it is being transported from a site to the port at which a receiving ship is docked, or when it is being moved from site to site. The Road Escort Team often works in partnership with other police forces or government departments; its sole responsibility is to deal with any malicious attacks against the nuclear material.⁴⁵
- 5.31 Once Couzens joined the Strategic Escort Group, he was classed as a Group asset, but he returned to Dungeness between Group deployments to carry out regular authorised firearms officer shifts in his home unit. At the time Couzens joined the Strategic Escort Group, some other officers from his unit at Dungeness were also deployed to the Group. The Inquiry was told that the maximum number of officers permitted to join from any one unit was ten per cent of the total headcount, to avoid there being too much of an impact on the site when the Strategic Escort Group officers left on deployment.⁴⁶

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- 5.32 Aside from his training record, the Inquiry saw very little information about Couzens' activities at the Strategic Escort Group. The Inquiry heard evidence that, like some others in the Group, Couzens had "struggled with [his] fitness level",⁴⁷ and it appears from deployment records that he took part in only a handful of Group operations.⁴⁸ Despite accounts to the contrary given by Couzens himself, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary confirmed to the Inquiry that he was never deployed outside the UK.⁴⁹

Unintentional Taser discharge

- 5.33 In late July 2016, towards the end of his period with the Strategic Escort Group and while preparing to work a night shift in his home unit at Dungeness, Couzens unintentionally discharged his Taser in the armoury.⁵⁰ The incident occurred at around 7pm, during the procedure for the issue and return of Taser weapons for all officers coming on and off duty on that particular evening.⁵¹
- 5.34 In line with standard procedure, when Couzens came on shift he was asked if he was fit for duty, and he confirmed that he was. Couzens was then issued with his radio, which he scanned so that it could be registered with the site's own GPS. Again, as set out in the established procedure, Couzens was then given his Taser, which was placed on a bench so that he could pick it up himself. Once he had picked up the weapon, Couzens, in line with the guidance, was required to carry out function checks before loading the Taser.⁵²
- 5.35 To carry out those checks, Couzens had to turn 90 degrees and point the unloaded Taser towards a felt-covered board, which was designed to catch any unintentionally discharged barbs. The Inquiry was told, however, that something seemed "out of place" on the evening in question, and that Couzens "was carrying out steps out of the prescribed order".⁵³ He loaded the Taser, without carrying out the function checks first, and fired it. The barbs discharged into the felt-covered catcher board and were safely retained. The Inquiry heard that Couzens' body language showed that he instantly realised what he had done and he immediately handed back the Taser.⁵⁴
- 5.36 The duty inspector was contacted and made aware of the situation, and post-incident procedures were instituted in accordance with the guidance relating to unintentional discharge of a firearm: handwritten 'initial accounts' were taken from witnesses, including from Couzens.⁵⁵ The Taser was seized, boxed up with the cartridges, and passed to the investigating officer. The initial accounts were taken in the Dungeness base administrative facility, around five to six hours after the incident.⁵⁶

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- 5.37 Couzens' demeanour was described at the time as "relaxed and calm" and, after his initial account was taken, he is reported to have said something to the effect of "well they're not going to bloody sack me, are they? You know I've got nothing to worry about." The Inquiry was told that he appeared "measured, well balanced; he knew that he had made a mistake, but he didn't appear worried or flustered; he was just like 'it's one of those things, it's embarrassing' but he was relaxed". This response was regarded as rational: Couzens wasn't going to lose his job; he didn't think it was funny or amusing; it was embarrassing professionally.⁵⁷
- 5.38 As part of the investigation process, Couzens' firearms authority was removed. At the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, each authorised firearms officer is issued with a firearms card, which is their authority to carry certain weapons. The card links electronically to the Constabulary's Chronicle system, which shows which firearms that officer is authorised to use. Once the firearms authority was removed, Couzens would not have been able to access any firearms with his card until the authority was reinstated.⁵⁸
- 5.39 There was CCTV footage of the incident, which was seized by the investigating officer and found to be consistent with the accounts given.⁵⁹ Essentially, Couzens did not carry out a 'spark test' first to check that the Taser was working while unloaded. He picked up the Taser, loaded a cartridge onto the firing bay, turned it on, turned it off, turned it back on and then pulled the trigger, discharging the weapon. He should have done the spark test before he loaded the cartridge. The official incident report concludes that Couzens did not follow the approved arming procedure, which was relatively new, having been introduced only a few months earlier.⁶⁰ The report states that Couzens had failed to complete mandatory video training on the new arming procedure before its go-live date, and that he was therefore not fully aware of it.⁶¹ Since he sometimes had to be reminded to complete his online training modules,⁶² this was perhaps unsurprising.
- 5.40 Once the investigation was complete, the investigating officer recommended "unsatisfactory performance"⁶³ as the outcome. This entailed Couzens being given a performance improvement plan, which included a Taser development course. The plan was passed to a more senior officer to be ratified and was then provided to Couzens' unit commander for approval and implementation.⁶⁴
- 5.41 The Inquiry heard that the accidental discharge of a Taser, depending on the model, was not uncommon, although witnesses were keen to emphasise that it was not by any means an everyday occurrence.⁶⁵ The Inquiry asked officers from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary whether an unintentional Taser discharge on an officer's record would raise concerns. They indicated that it would depend on the facts of the discharge, the time of day, where it had happened and so on.⁶⁶

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- 5.42 The Inquiry saw evidence that, in the incident involving Couzens, the two Taser barbs hit the felt-covered catcher board as expected, meaning that he had pointed the Taser in a safe direction.⁶⁷ Supervisors from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary told the Inquiry that, if they knew that an officer had an unintentional discharge on their record, they would be more mindful of the officer's actions but said that it would not necessarily make them think that the officer was not fit to carry a firearm.⁶⁸ Unintentional Taser discharges can and do happen. As a supervisor at the Constabulary put it: "I take the view that there are only two kinds of officer; those that have had unintentional discharges, and those that are waiting to have one."⁶⁹

Conclusion 47

Wayne Couzens' accidental Taser discharge was not a missed opportunity to prevent his further offending.

- 5.43 The Inquiry finds that, although Couzens had failed to complete the relevant training on the new Taser, there is no evidence to suggest that there was anything sinister or unusual about this incident, indicative of him being unfit to serve as a firearms officer. This conclusion is supported by the fact that the Civil Nuclear Constabulary did not share a record of the incident with the Metropolitan Police Service Professional Standards Department when Couzens was applying to transfer.

Leaving the Civil Nuclear Constabulary

- 5.44 As indicated in Chapter 1, Couzens seems to have started thinking about leaving the Civil Nuclear Constabulary in mid-2016,⁷⁰ with the available evidence showing that he was looking to transfer to a Home Office force. In the run-up to his transfer from the Constabulary to the Metropolitan Police Service, Couzens repeatedly told colleagues that he wanted to move away from using firearms. A witness told the Inquiry that, as a firearms officer at the Constabulary, there was the constant risk of failing a medical or hearing test or "drop[ping] your Glock" (dropping your weapon).⁷¹ If an officer's authority to carry a firearm was removed, they would not be deployable, leaving their position at the Constabulary vulnerable.⁷²
- 5.45 It is clear from material available to the Inquiry that Couzens had concerns about his physical fitness and the demands of the authorised firearms officer role. On his application to the Metropolitan Police Service, he explained that he wanted to become a Home Office police officer because he wanted experience in general policing with a view to moving potentially into an investigatory role.⁷³

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Sickness absences from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary

- 5.46 As part of any transfer process, an officer's sickness and conduct record is reviewed by the recruiting force, and the Inquiry sought to establish what Couzens' sickness record and firearms authorisation record were like during his career at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary.
- 5.47 Records seen by the Inquiry indicate that, other than during the investigation for the unintentional Taser discharge allegation, Couzens had his firearms authorisation suspended three times during his time at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary due to periods of sickness absence:
- On 17 April 2014, when stationed at Dungeness: The authority to carry a firearm was reinstated on 11 August 2014.
 - On 13 July 2015, when working in the Strategic Escort Group: He had had shoulder surgery as a result of a sports injury and was initially estimated to be off duty for four to six weeks. The authority to carry a firearm was reinstated on 11 September 2015.⁷⁴
 - On 12 October 2015, having just resumed duties in the Strategic Escort Group: The suspension on this occasion was noted by his supervising inspector to be as a result of injuring his right (dominant) hand "operating a strimmer".⁷⁵ It was estimated that he would be off work for four weeks. The authority to carry a firearm was reinstated on 16 November 2015.⁷⁶ The Inquiry notes, however, that on 2 June 2018, in his medical history questionnaire when applying to the Metropolitan Police Service, Couzens referenced two periods of sickness absence, attributing the period from 4 July 2015 to 22 September 2015 to the shoulder surgery referred to above, and describing the period between 28 September 2015 and 12 November 2015 as "light duties to recover and physio after operation".⁷⁷

Metropolitan Police Service

Insight sessions

- 5.48 Couzens' motivations for applying to the Metropolitan Police Service are not entirely clear from the evidence seen by the Inquiry. While there was some evidence to suggest that the potential transfer was to move away from a firearms role,⁷⁸ other evidence given to the Inquiry suggests that, while still employed at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, he may still have been interested in such a role⁷⁹ and attended at least one so-called 'insight session' run by the firearms commands within the Metropolitan Police Service.⁸⁰ Those sessions were an opportunity for anyone

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interested in authorised firearms officer posts to find out more about the role and the application process, and, as one witness put it, “also to manage expectations of officers about the nature of the role”.⁸¹

- 5.49 Generally speaking, insight sessions were internal Metropolitan Police Service events that were held before an advertisement for expressions of interest in an authorised firearms officer post was published.⁸² Before Couzens’ transfer, however, there was at least one bespoke session for a cohort of officers from the Ministry of Defence Police and the Civil Nuclear Constabulary. A separate session known as an ‘expo’ was also held, the purpose of which was to “sell” firearms roles to interested Metropolitan Police Service officers.⁸³ These events were widely advertised and attended by a total of over 800 officers, comprising those from the Constabulary and other forces who were interested in transferring to the Metropolitan Police Service, as well as internal candidates.⁸⁴

Recruitment policy proposals for firearms officers

- 5.50 The Inquiry heard evidence that, around the time that Couzens was being recruited by the Metropolitan Police Service, there was significant tension between those with responsibility for overseeing recruitment into some firearms commands – including Royalty and Specialist Protection Command, Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command, and SCO19 (the Specialist Firearms Command) – and the Metropolitan Police Service senior leadership team. The latter was considering a proposal to allow authorised firearms officers from non-Home Office forces to transfer directly into Metropolitan Police Service firearms roles without the need to serve a full two-year probation on a borough command response team.⁸⁵
- 5.51 On 28 September 2018, a briefing paper entitled *Transferee Police Officers from Civil Nuclear Constabulary & Ministry of Defence Police*⁸⁶ was prepared by a senior officer⁸⁷ and submitted to the Metropolitan Police Service Management Board. The paper highlighted that there was an ongoing recruitment drive for transferee police constables, designed to address the need to meet the force recruitment target of 30,750 officers by April 2019. The paper noted that, at the time of writing, there was a shortfall of around 1,000 officers, further exacerbated by monthly retirements and resignations.⁸⁸
- 5.52 It also flagged that the process for transferring into the Metropolitan Police Service had been streamlined, reducing the time taken from application to hire to 8 weeks, and that, within the (then) current pipeline of officers who had applied to transfer to the Metropolitan Police Service, there were 15 officers from either the Civil Nuclear

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Constabulary or the Ministry of Defence Police with nationally accredited firearms qualifications who were keen to ensure that, upon transferring, they retained their firearms skills and were considered for posting into an appropriate firearms role commensurate with their training. The paper stated that that number was likely to increase because a new transferee campaign was due to go live shortly.⁸⁹

- 5.53 The paper sought Management Board direction on the employment offer that could be made to Civil Nuclear Constabulary and Ministry of Defence Police officers. This explicit direction was required because Constabulary officers, in particular, were not regarded as members of a police force within the definition set out in the Police Act 1996.⁹⁰ As such, the relevant College of Policing guidance⁹¹ set out that transferees from the Constabulary to a Home Office force had to be treated as new recruits for terms and conditions purposes and were required to undergo a two-year probationary period. Forces also needed to carry out a training skills analysis to ascertain if transferees had completed the necessary foundation training, with service with the Civil Nuclear Constabulary not recognisable for pay or annual leave entitlement purposes (although service with the Ministry of Defence Police was).⁹² This was clearly an issue for someone like Couzens, who had seven years' substantive service with the Constabulary and was therefore earning well above the probationary constable pay rate.
- 5.54 The paper suggested that advice from the Home Office afforded recruiting forces some flexibility to vary the starting salary for Civil Nuclear Constabulary transferees according to skills and experience, and that it was possible for the Metropolitan Police Service to offer Constabulary officers an appropriate salary upon transfer, particularly where the Metropolitan Police Service "currently ha[d] an acute need to recruit, train and retain firearms officers".⁹³
- 5.55 The paper highlighted the number of vacancies across the various firearms commands, suggesting that it would be beneficial for the Metropolitan Police Service to fill those vacancies by bringing in already-qualified authorised firearms officers from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, the Ministry of Defence Police and other Home Office forces.⁹⁴ This would also mean that it would be recruiting candidates who could progress from authorised firearms officers to armed response officers and/or specialist firearms officers. For Ministry of Defence Police and Constabulary officers, the paper anticipated that, if the Metropolitan Police Service were not able to both recognise firearms skills and honour existing pay points, the officers would not be likely to transfer.⁹⁵

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- 5.56 The proposal was therefore that Civil Nuclear Constabulary and Ministry of Defence Police officers transferring to the Metropolitan Police Service with no Home Office policing experience in the preceding five years would join the Metropolitan Police Service and:
- complete the Certificate in Knowledge of Policing;
 - complete the new recruit foundation course; and
 - go to a borough command where they would achieve Independent Patrol Status.⁹⁶
- 5.57 That would, it was proposed, give the officers relevant knowledge and experience of general policing duties and provide the Metropolitan Police Service with the necessary confidence that they had been trained to an acceptable standard. Upon successful completion of the above steps, the officers would then undergo Metropolitan Police Service-specific firearms training, building on their current firearms qualifications.⁹⁷
- 5.58 If the transferees passed the Metropolitan Police Service firearms training, they would be posted to a firearms role commensurate with their training and complete whatever remained of the two-year probationary period within the firearms command. During the probationary period, they would also complete three-week attachments to a frontline policing response team to further their general policing knowledge and skills. If the transferees did not pass the firearms course, they would be posted to frontline policing to complete the standard two-year probationary period.⁹⁸
- 5.59 The Inquiry was told that some of the initial proposals, at the time they were being developed, did not find favour with those who had operational and management responsibility for recruitment into the various firearms commands, which led to the tension alluded to in paragraph 5.50. The Inquiry heard evidence that a transformation programme team within the Metropolitan Police Service, tasked with delivering a strengthening of the armed capability, had, without consultation with the armed commands but in conjunction with force recruitment, visited a number of police forces throughout England to discuss the possibility of direct recruitment into those commands.⁹⁹
- 5.60 Those working in the armed commands believed that there were issues that had not been considered, including that officers from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary and the Ministry of Defence Police did not have the requisite public order policing skills, regular engagement with members of the public or the experience that authorised firearms officers in the Metropolitan Police Service needed.¹⁰⁰

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- 5.61 Further, it was suggested in evidence to the Inquiry that, during the period in question, there was no recruitment crisis to justify such a dramatic change in practice.¹⁰¹ The Inquiry was told that recruitment had actually increased and that there was a waiting list of internal candidates who had completed their probation and wished to undergo firearms training and move to the armed commands (Metropolitan Police Service rules mandated that officers could not train as authorised firearms officers until they had completed their two-year probation). This raised issues of fairness for the armed commands: how could they allow non-Metropolitan Police Service officers to take up firearms roles without disadvantaging other serving internal officers, some of whom had been waiting 12 months or more for their place on a firearms training course? Witnesses from within the Metropolitan Police Service felt that recruiting from outside the immediately available pool of existing internal candidates seemed like significant effort for little gain in view of the level of upskilling still required.¹⁰²
- 5.62 The Inquiry also heard that probation was an essential part of the recruitment journey: “[T]he whole point [of it was] to learn how to deal with people, to learn how to make effective arrests and how to complete appropriate paperwork.” Reducing this period may assist in ticking an administrative box in the short term but, it was suggested, it was surely “creating future problems if probationers have not grasped the basics”.¹⁰³
- 5.63 Over time, and as ultimately reflected in the proposals for the Metropolitan Police Service Management Board, which were approved in early October 2018, the terms of employment that would apply to Civil Nuclear Constabulary or Ministry of Defence Police officers transferring into the Metropolitan Police Service evolved. There would be a salary adjustment so that new transferees would keep their rate of pay, or close to it; and there would be an arrangement whereby they would still have to complete probation but could apply to train as firearms officers within the probation period as long as they had achieved Independent Patrol Status and their Certificate in Knowledge of Policing.¹⁰⁴ It should be noted, however, that this proposal was submitted after Couzens had been through the application and vetting procedure and joined the Metropolitan Police Service. This is important when considering the issue of the pay dispute he had with the Metropolitan Police Service, which is explored in detail in Chapter 6.
- 5.64 The Inquiry heard that, while Couzens was still serving with the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, there was some contact between Constabulary Strategic Escort Group officers and Metropolitan Police Service officers.¹⁰⁵ The Metropolitan Police Service officers were from some of the firearms commands, and the Constabulary officers wanted to discuss the recruitment process for the Metropolitan Police Service and, in particular, whether the Police Uplift Programme might make it possible for those from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary with firearms qualifications to be ‘fast tracked’ into the Metropolitan Police Service.¹⁰⁶

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Recruitment into the firearms commands at the Metropolitan Police Service

- 5.65 The internal recruitment process for the firearms commands was described to the Inquiry as “fairly lengthy and detailed”,¹⁰⁷ taking up to five months to complete. The Inquiry looked specifically at recruitment into the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command at the time Couzens was recruited in 2018.

Advertisement of vacancies

- 5.66 At that time, when a vacancy arose, the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command would send a Vacancy Management Authorisation Form to Human Resources outlining the role, rank, responsibilities and number of available positions. Human Resources would review the authorisation form and then send a reference number, required to create the advertisement, to the recruiting unit.¹⁰⁸
- 5.67 Prior to issuing an advertisement, an insight session would be held,¹⁰⁹ as described in paragraphs 5.48 to 5.49. The advertisement would then be posted on the World Careers Network, which is an internal Metropolitan Police Service network used to view available vacancies. It usually remained live for five or six weeks. Once applications were received, the recruitment process would be managed by Shared Services Connected Ltd, the outsourced recruitment provider, in conjunction with the recruiting manager/officer.¹¹⁰

Application process and sift

- 5.68 Once all applications were received, one of two forms would be sent by Shared Services Connected Ltd to the recruiting unit, depending on the status of the applicant. What is known as a ‘6614 form’ would be submitted if the applicant had never completed firearms training or if their training had taken place more than three years ago. If the applicant was up to date with their firearms training or if it had lapsed less than three years prior to the application, a ‘7305 form’ would be submitted, which is an internal form used for existing authorised firearms officers.¹¹¹
- 5.69 The first sift would then take place. This exercise, conducted by the recruiting unit:
- “[...] was designed simply to check that applicants had complied with the advert’s instructions. For example, if an applicant had exceeded the maximum line or word count their application would be rejected. If applicants had complied with the word limits, included all relevant information and signed the required declarations, their applications would be subject to a more thorough review to decide who would be invited to an assessment centre. During the sifting process, the recruiting unit would also look to identify potential roles for which an applicant might be suited, by identifying, for instance, whether they were a searcher, driver

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or a Taser officer. The type of role(s) they were matched to would affect their recruitment journey as the process differed slightly depending on the available roles and the commands in which they were located.”¹¹²

- 5.70 Once the recruiting team had identified those candidates who would progress to the next stage, the candidates would be issued with invitations for the next available assessment dates. While the Metropolitan Police Service guidance suggested giving a minimum of seven days’ notice before an interview or assessment centre, three to four weeks’ notice was usually provided for authorised firearms officer recruitment to ensure that candidates could be available. Owing to the number of applications usually received for firearms vacancies, 2 assessment sessions per day would be run with 12 candidates per session. Assessment centre invitations included instructions about location and required kit. Applicants were required to bring their officer safety kit with them to the assessment venue, but were given training CS spray and batons to use, rather than having to bring their own.¹¹³

Assessment centre

- 5.71 At the time Couzens was recruited, day one of an assessment centre would typically involve a brief classroom session to check registration details and to confirm that all individuals were fully operational, that is, that they were not carrying any injuries and that they were not engaged with Occupational Health for any reason.¹¹⁴
- 5.72 Once registration was complete, the candidates would move on to a job-related physical fitness test. This test is a key component of the recruitment and deployment of police officers and has different requirements depending on the nature of the role the officer will be carrying out. It is a multi-stage fitness test and requires participants to run (‘shuttle’) back and forth between 2 points, 15 metres apart; it is timed against a series of audio bleeps and the participant must ‘beat the bleep’ and complete the shuttle before they hear the sound. At the end of each level, the time between bleeps gets shorter, meaning the participant has to run faster. The standard needed for an authorised firearms officer is 7:6,¹¹⁵ which means running at least in time with the bleeps for 6 shuttles at level 7. The passing standard for operational police officers is 5:4.¹¹⁶
- 5.73 The assessment centre would continue with two emergency life support scenarios. These usually included dealing with an unresponsive casualty and a major injury. A firearms knowledge check would come next. The assessors did not expect candidates to be able to recite chapter and verse from firearms legislation, but they were required to have some knowledge of existing powers and procedures, including an awareness of how to deal with individuals with mental health concerns, cordon distances and powers in relation to the use of force. Knowledge check questions varied, testing the use of everyday arrest powers, as well as more specialist topics, such as dealing with terrorist incidents.¹¹⁷

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- 5.74 As part of the assessment centre, candidates were also expected to complete a number of scenarios designed to test their performance under pressure. In order to replicate real-life scenarios in terms of the likely physical demands on the officers during an incident, these sessions would begin with an intense circuit training warm-up. The scenarios varied and changed frequently to reduce the risk of candidates learning about them in advance, but tended to include different types of handcuffing, as well as a more detailed subject-handling task. The scenarios tested threat assessment skills, as well as use of the National Decision Model. The assessors were interested in observing whether candidates were able to interact with members of the public appropriately while demonstrating the expected level of professional competence.¹¹⁸
- 5.75 The Inquiry heard that it was very important to observe how candidates dealt with real-life scenarios. This is because there is a temptation during firearms training to automatically reach for a Taser or a gun; in the experience of the assessors, however, nine times out of ten it is “good, old fashioned policing skills and the ability to talk to people that resolves the situation without any use of force”.¹¹⁹ It was also important for candidates to demonstrate that they were fully up to speed with policing basics, such as handcuffing, officer safety and skills without a weapon. This ensured that candidates did not fail the firearms course due to a lack of knowledge of these very basic essentials.
- 5.76 Once the assessment centre and relevant firearms assessments had been completed, the candidates’ performance would be reviewed and graded by the trainers. Each individual element would be scored, including the firearms element. There was a minimum overall score, which required a consistent level of performance across all elements. This was to prevent anyone “limping over the threshold with the bare minimum”.¹²⁰
- 5.77 The Inquiry notes that, following feedback from trainers and recruiting officers, the firearms assessment centre has been adapted so that it now relies more heavily on evaluating officers’ performance under pressure, on the basis that that is more likely than competency-based interviews to provide an accurate indication of how individuals will perform in future.

Attendance management review

- 5.78 At this stage in the process, the recruiters would then conduct an attendance management review, which would involve looking at candidates’ sickness records. Since 2018, when Couzens was recruited, the policy has been that all sickness records dating back three years from the closing date for applications must be provided. If an individual had been with the Metropolitan Police Service for less than three years, the recruiters would expect to see all records for the duration of their employment. The maximum number of sick days allowed per annum is 18. It is the responsibility of the candidate’s line manager to sign off on (i.e. attest to the accuracy of) the sickness records.¹²¹

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Professional standards checks: Stage One – risk assessment

5.79 The details of those candidates who had passed all the stages set out in paragraphs 5.68 to 5.78 would be submitted to the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command's Professional Standards Department for 'Stage One' professional standards checks, which in essence took the form of a risk assessment. Dedicated Professional Standards Department staff members made the necessary enquiries and collated the results, which would then be passed to a professional standards inspector for review and decision. Stage One checks were the same for armed and unarmed officers.¹²²

5.80 At the time Couzens was applying to be an authorised firearms officer, the risk assessment followed a set format and was documented on a template. To conduct the risk assessment, the Professional Standards Management Support Unit would complete a search of Centurion (the professional standards recording system), which highlighted all the public complaints and conduct matters recorded against an officer. Each record would be reviewed, and the exact allegation(s) against the officer and the outcome(s) listed. Each record would be graded high/medium/low using agreed risk grading criteria.¹²³

5.81 The following were considered to be high risk:

- proven allegations, or allegations supported by substantial evidence, of discrimination;
- proven allegations, or allegations supported by substantial evidence, of perjury, attempts to pervert the course of justice, or fabrication of evidence or other dishonesty offences;
- proven allegations of excessive use of force, where such force posed a threat to life;
- a pattern of recent allegations based on similar facts that indicated any of the above;
- recent allegations of serious criminal offences; and
- recent allegations relating to alcohol or drug abuse (including the use of anabolic steroids and non-controlled drugs of concern, e.g. 'legal highs').¹²⁴

5.82 The following were considered to be medium risk:

- allegations of discrimination;
- allegations of perjury, attempts to pervert the course of justice, or fabrication of evidence or other dishonesty offences;
- allegations of excessive use of force, where there was a threat to life;

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- proven allegations of the excessive use of force, where there was no threat to life; and
- allegations of serious criminal offences.¹²⁵

5.83 The following were generally considered to be low risk, unless there were aggravating factors affecting the gravity (these include discriminatory motive, abuse of alcohol or drugs, abuse of authority, misuse of a warrant card, domestic violence, significant and recent patterns of activity):

- allegations of excessive use of force;
- incivility;
- damage to or mishandling of property; and
- road traffic offences.¹²⁶

5.84 Part of this stage of the process included confirmation of whether the applicant officer had previous service with another force (including non-Home Office forces such as the Ministry of Defence Police or the Civil Nuclear Constabulary). If an officer had served elsewhere, a request would be made for the respective force to supply the officer's service history. Details from this were included on the risk assessment.¹²⁷

5.85 There would also be a request through the Professional Standards Intelligence Bureau to conduct an intelligence search for the applicant officer. The Intelligence Bureau staff would conduct a search of *internal* databases to identify any adverse intelligence held on the officer that may not have resulted in conduct being recorded against them. The Inquiry notes that the 'red flag' behaviours that the Intelligence Bureau routinely identified included:

- violence and use of force (including domestic abuse);
- substance misuse (drugs/alcohol etc);
- weapons;
- mental health; and
- debt.¹²⁸

5.86 The product of the Intelligence Bureau search would not be included on the risk assessment form but would be sent separately to the reviewing officer in the respective command to inform decision-making.¹²⁹

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- 5.87 The decision of the reviewing officer would then be communicated to the recruiting team. No background detail was provided; recruiting officers were simply told whether a candidate was a 'pass', 'fail' or 'hold'.¹³⁰ The Inquiry heard that the Professional Standards Department inspectors were charged with reviewing a candidate's discipline record and assessing whether they had a suitable background to carry a firearm. Their role was not to assess whether they had the skills to become a good authorised firearms officer, as that was the decision of the firearms course instructor.¹³¹
- 5.88 It was recognised in evidence that authorising an officer to draw or fire a weapon is a significant responsibility, and one that could ultimately affect the reputation of the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command and the Metropolitan Police Service itself. There were guidance materials to inform the risk assessments, but ultimately, the Inquiry was told, the decision came down to whether the officer had a suitable background, meaning one that, if it were to become public, contained nothing that might embarrass the force. The Inquiry was told that authorised firearms officers were held to a higher standard in the risk assessment process than officers on a response team, for instance.¹³²
- 5.89 The risk assessment for an individual officer could be a number of pages long, particularly if they had been in post for several years. The assessments would be already highlighted and 'RAG rated' (marked as red, amber or green, depending on what they contained) before being passed to an inspector, but the Inquiry was told by one inspector that they did not rely on the RAG rating alone in making their decision. For example, even where there was no official finding on an officer's record, the inspector may have rejected a candidate if they had concerns, gleaned from different sources, about other issues that may carry too much risk, for example past complaints of assault, racism or sexism.¹³³
- 5.90 The Inquiry was told that another red flag could be an officer having received penalty points on their private driving licence for driving at excessive speed through a built-up area; this could demonstrate poor decision-making and suggest that the individual may not be suitable to carry and potentially use a firearm. A further example was given of a candidate posting inappropriate content on social media. As part of the Professional Standards Department risk assessment, the content of any public social media posts would be reviewed, as well as the date on which any material was posted.¹³⁴
- 5.91 The Inquiry was advised that the Professional Standards Department risk assessment did not detail the level of debt a candidate might have; this would only be known if the candidate had disclosed it during their career and, in that case, it should feature in the Intelligence Bureau checks. The Human Resources Team might flag if an officer was volunteering for an excessive amount of overtime, and in that case the officer's line manager could be tasked with finding out further information. If the officer in question was indeed in debt, their financial situation

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would then be monitored by their supervisor, but the Inquiry was also told that “debt is believed to be a way of life now and so it is viewed differently than how it used to be”.¹³⁵

Conclusion 48

To assess suitability to work as an authorised firearms officer, careful and proactive supervision is required, rather than a reliance on self-disclosure by officers about financial issues.

- 5.92 The Inquiry notes that this procedure relies on the Human Resources Team monitoring overtime allocations closely and highlighting to supervisors officers who may be at risk of ‘burnout’. Similarly, as described in Chapter 4, issues relating to debt and potential corruption risk often rely in the first instance on self-disclosure by the officer rather than proactive engagement by the supervisor.

Conclusion 49

The risk assessment carried out on Wayne Couzens by the Metropolitan Police Service when determining his suitability to be authorised to carry a firearm should have been more robust and not reliant on the vetting process.

- 5.93 The Inquiry was also told that the risk assessment process did not include any checks of information held on the Police National Database or of other intelligence sources. This is because it was assumed that those checks had been done as part of the force vetting procedures described in Chapter 4.¹³⁶ This is clearly a weakness in the process, given both the potential length of time between vetting renewals and the degree of discretion allowed for by the Authorised Professional Practice on Vetting in force at the time.
- 5.94 Another weakness, relating to information about officers’ performance, was highlighted by a person who gave evidence to the Inquiry as follows:

“[O]fficers move around to different boroughs and departments during their careers. Their discipline record moves with them, but other performance issues often do not, unless it is recorded on their most recent personal development report; supervisors change all the time, so there is no continuity. There is no mechanism to look back, which is fundamental when attempting to identify habits, trends and patterns. Without that, each time a supervisor deals with an incident, it is dismissed as a one-off event. They are not aware of any other times this particular officer has been dealt with for the same issue. The issues I am referring to fall outside of discipline procedure, which are held centrally, but matters that are considered a low level, but can still help identify trends and

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patterns of the officers' behaviour. [...] [A]s far as I am aware there was no plan for these issues to be recorded centrally, in order that they could then be handed on as the officer moved around the force."¹³⁷

- 5.95 In terms of the results of the professional standards checks influencing an application, the Inquiry was provided with an example where the checks revealed that an applicant had a widely known nickname. He also had a number of professional standards restrictions recorded against him, which gave rise to concerns about his interactions with women and therefore made him unsuitable for a firearms role.¹³⁸ It is difficult to see, given the evidence provided to this Inquiry, how this particular individual would be suitable for any role in policing.¹³⁹
- 5.96 If a candidate passed the Stage One professional standards checks, they would then be allocated to the relevant training courses. For candidates who failed the checks, the recruiting team would not have any further involvement; the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command Professional Standards Department would contact the candidate directly to explain that their application had not been successful. If a candidate was a 'hold', they would be told that their checks had not cleared but, for the sake of efficiency, they were nevertheless allocated to some training courses just in case the checks came back clear. For instance, they would not be allocated to firearms or Taser training but would be allowed to complete the ballistic emergency lifesaving course because they were still being deployed as an operational officer and enhanced lifesaving skills were regarded as an asset, regardless of role.¹⁴⁰

Tests prior to firearms training

- 5.97 The Inquiry was told that newly recruited authorised firearms officers had to complete a pre-firearms health screening, which is known as a 'one-stop shop' and involves hearing, eyesight and blood pressure checks, as well as a general fitness test and a medical assessment. As noted in paragraph 5.72, recruits also had to pass the fitness test to level 7:6 in order to progress to firearms training.¹⁴¹ There was no specific focus on mental health at the time of Couzens' application.
- 5.98 Once all of the relevant pre-firearms tests had been completed, each command's firearms training processes were slightly different, depending on the nature of the command and the weapons to be used.¹⁴²

Professional standards checks: Stage Two

- 5.99 The next stage in the process would be to request 'Stage Two' professional standards checks. This happened only after candidates had passed all relevant training courses and usually after they had been formally assigned to the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command but before they received a start date. The Stage Two check was intended to cover the period between the Stage

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One check and completion of training, to ensure that any more recent complaints did not fall through the cracks and were picked up and flagged before the individual joined the command.¹⁴³

Vetting of firearms officers

5.100 The Inquiry heard that, in addition to their force vetting, all authorised firearms officers were required to obtain National Security Vetting clearance at the Counter Terrorist Check level when they took up their roles.¹⁴⁴ As described in Chapter 4, this level of clearance is valid for ten years, with no requirement for refresher checks during the period. One witness told the Inquiry that they had completed a significant amount of police service, including over 25 years in armed policing, but after they had passed their initial firearms course at the beginning of their armed service, no further vetting would have been carried out if they hadn't moved force. The witness said:

“No one ever knew me personally or asked anything about my psychological welfare. If I didn't tell anybody anything, for example any major life changes, they just would not have known anything.”¹⁴⁵

5.101 Previously, the Vetting Team would email the Recruitment Team an electronic document detailing a candidate's vetting status. The current process, introduced after Couzens underwent vetting, involves the use of an online portal, which can be consulted to find out the live vetting status. Once vetting status has been checked and verified, new recruits are able to join an induction course.¹⁴⁶

Final pre-posting checks

5.102 The Inquiry was told that successful candidates would not be issued with their 'blue card' firearms authority immediately upon completion of their firearms training. Instead, they would be informed that they had passed and would be given a training card. As a failsafe, final checks would be undertaken to ensure that nothing of concern had arisen in the intervening period before new recruits were issued with their blue card.¹⁴⁷

Kit issued to authorised firearms officers

5.103 Newly recruited authorised firearms officers are issued with specific shirts and trousers, known as 'blues'. As well as firearms boots and training overalls, officers are issued with specialist kit, which costs around £2,000 per officer.¹⁴⁸

5.104 Each piece of kit and equipment is ordered via an electronic system and will be recorded as belonging to a specific officer. Only certain items have individual serial numbers. There are also certain items within the kit that are not branded or otherwise identifiable as Metropolitan Police Service uniform, such as jackets and

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shirts. The Inquiry was told that some officers do wear their thermal shirts, which are the same as those used by the British Army, when not on duty, for instance on their journeys to and from work, especially in inclement weather. These items would not necessarily identify the wearer as a police officer. Similarly, some officers also use their firearms rucksacks to carry their possessions to and from work, to avoid the need to carry more than one bag. Again, these are not necessarily identifiable as police or firearms kit. The Inquiry heard that the specific items of equipment carried on duty are all stored at the individual's workplace and should not be carried by the officer when off duty.¹⁴⁹

Obtaining firearms authorisation

5.105 The initial authority to carry firearms is obtained via the Authorised Firearms Officer Selection Application and Self-Assessment Form, known as the '6614 form'.¹⁵⁰ This form, once completed and signed off, is valid for one year,¹⁵¹ and the self-assessment must then be completed on an annual basis. There are a number of questions in the form that need to be answered with a significant level of detail.¹⁵² The questions (taken from the form completed by Couzens in 2019) include:

- "If you have other firearms experience, for example, with another International Law Enforcement Agency, or the Armed Services, please give details below. Include details of any tactical firearms training courses attended."
- "Why do you wish to become an authorised firearms officer at this time? (Please note it is not sufficient just to state that it is a requirement of the post you are applying for.)"¹⁵³

Mental health

5.106 The Inquiry was told, however, that there are potential weaknesses in this process. First, because the 6614 form requires officers to self-declare the evidence they provide, the process is entirely reliant on the officer being completely honest.¹⁵⁴ The health declaration part of the form asks applicants to check either the 'yes' or 'no' box against the following questions:

- "Are you currently taking any medication?"
- "Have you suffered at any time from clinical depression, mental illness, nervous breakdown/nervous disability, serious medical or psychological problems?"
- "Do you suffer, or have [you] ever suffered from any condition that may cause occasional and momentary loss of consciousness, for example, epilepsy, diabetes, heart conditions?"

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- “Are you currently or have [you] ever been a habitual user of addictive substances?”
- “Are you aware of any health matters not already covered by your previous answers [...] which may affect your ability to be an [authorised firearms officer]?”¹⁵⁵

5.107 The form does state clearly that a failure to be open and honest when completing the form “may represent a breach of the Codes of Conduct”,¹⁵⁶ but it is difficult to see how that failure might come to light without an intervening incident or event that might initiate a review of the applicant’s personal circumstances.

5.108 Second, witnesses advised the Inquiry that the mental resilience of officers is assessed during the selection process through testing under pressure in a range of difficult scenarios,¹⁵⁷ and also once successful candidates are on the job through regular interaction with their supervisors,¹⁵⁸ but it is clear from evidence given to the Inquiry that this does not always happen. The Inquiry was told by an officer with experience of assessing the 6614 form as part of the recruitment process that, if the form revealed anything obvious to suggest that an individual should not be supported for firearms training, the matter would be referred to Occupational Health. Any issues with mental health should also be picked up by the separate health screening questionnaire, which is submitted directly to Occupational Health by the candidate. The Occupational Health practitioner would discuss the questionnaire with the candidate and would probe further about their physical and mental health and background.¹⁵⁹

5.109 Once the 6614 form has been completed, and Occupational Health has signed off on the candidate, the candidate is still required to go through the full firearms training process. Only then can the candidate become an authorised firearms officer and eligible to hold a blue card.¹⁶⁰

5.110 The Inquiry saw evidence that a number of the firearms recruitment leads were of the view that the 6614 form is out of date and not fit for purpose, particularly because it includes a number of questions where, in their view, recruitment staff (who process completed applications) are not qualified to assess the answers. It was suggested to the Inquiry that it would make sense for Occupational Health to have a role in reviewing and assessing these forms as part of the recruitment process for firearms officers.¹⁶¹

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Conclusion 50

The Metropolitan Police Service did not carry out a formal psychological assessment of Wayne Couzens' suitability to be an authorised firearms officer. This was in accordance with policy at the time.

- 5.111 **Witnesses confirmed, therefore, that officers at the Metropolitan Police Service do not undergo formal psychological assessment before becoming authorised firearms officers, although they are tested rigorously during the assessment centres and firearms courses in a number of difficult situations reflecting what they might come across in their duties.** The Inquiry heard evidence from a witness who had firearms experience outside of the Metropolitan Police Service that this type of testing is carried out in other Home Office forces.¹⁶² It was advanced that there are benefits and disadvantages to such testing, as the witness put it:

“In my view the role needs someone who can go from being lethally violent to talking in a conversational manner in a split second. A lot of people cannot do that and so I think the role fits a certain type of person. We try and find the people who can use this skill in the right context.”¹⁶³

- 5.112 In addition, if someone is applying to be an authorised firearms officer for the first time, the 6614 form must be reviewed and signed off by various levels of line management, up to the operational command unit commander or their deputy. A substantive superintendent must also sign the form. While technically all line managers involved in the process must know the applicant and be able to verify the information provided,¹⁶⁴ the Inquiry heard that, in reality, 6614 forms are often signed off by a superintendent or chief superintendent who has never met the applicant.¹⁶⁵ The Inquiry also heard that, although they are senior in rank, these officers are not necessarily the most appropriate individuals to provide the sign-off, particularly as this signature is attesting to the fact that “this officer is suitable for firearms training”.¹⁶⁶

Continuous training

- 5.113 The one-stop shop described in paragraph 5.97 is an annual requirement, as is a one-day Taser refresher course.¹⁶⁷ In addition, officers are required to undergo firearms training, provided by the Metropolitan Police Specialist Training Centre, four times per year: two cycles are for (re)qualification and the other two are for development. Usually, the training consists of a half day's shooting and then a half day's tactical training. If an officer misses one of the quarterly courses for any reason, a catch-up session is usually available in a given week of the following

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quarter. If the officer also misses the catch-up session, they will be required to complete a five-day 'Back to Ops' course. If an officer fails to attend any of the quarterly courses, their authority to carry firearms will be withdrawn immediately.¹⁶⁸

5.114 Firearms operational command units must complete an annual check of firearms authority known as the '6620 process'. This involves asking officers to declare any complaints they might have received in the last year and to confirm that all mandatory refresher training has been completed.¹⁶⁹

5.115 Each team also completes a monthly check of all team members. This involves checking details of physical blue cards (the proof of an officer's firearms authority, which lists all the firearms that they are authorised to use) against the records held on the electronic management system to ensure that all information corresponds. The Inquiry understands that officers must have these checks completed at least 8 or 9 times in a 12-month period.¹⁷⁰

5.116 Training status is also shown on the electronic management system. This allows the individual in charge of allocating the firearms to officers at the start of the shift (the 'armourer') to be reassured that authorised firearms officers are completely up to date with the requisite training and are therefore still eligible to hold their blue card. If any training is out of date, a red warning appears on the system. The system also flashes red for seven days before and seven days after a planned training course. When this happens, the armourer will physically check the individual's blue card to ensure that all training dates entered on the card correspond with those shown on the system. If there are any discrepancies, the armourer will need to identify a supervisor from the relevant base and speak to them to double check the position. If there are any urgent issues, it is possible to remove an officer's access to buildings, including armouries, using the electronic system.¹⁷¹

Withdrawal of firearms authorisation

5.117 If a serving authorised firearms officer decides to self-declare that they feel unable to carry firearms for any reason, they must complete a Request to be Relieved from Firearms Duties and/or Withdrawal of Firearms Authorisation Process Form, known as a '6621'. The 6621 process is either prompted by an officer themselves or can be initiated by their line manager, depending on the circumstances. Significant reliance is therefore placed on the officer being candid about their fitness to carry a weapon, or on the supervisor having enough of an understanding of each officer under their command on any particular shift to identify if there is a problem.¹⁷²

5.118 As noted in paragraph 5.129, the supervisors spoken to by the Inquiry (it is acknowledged that the witnesses interviewed are not necessarily representative of all supervisors within the Metropolitan Police Service's firearms commands) did not undergo any specific training to be able to identify issues that might affect an officer's fitness to deploy on duty with a firearm.

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- 5.119 If an authorised firearms officer is relieved from duty owing to stress or to another welfare issue, or for any reason other than firearms classification failures, they are still required to keep up to date with all training and are issued with a 'white card'. A recent change in policy means that the issue of a white card cannot be authorised until there has been an Occupational Health referral.¹⁷³
- 5.120 Any relief from duties is usually for a short period due to welfare, health restrictions, disciplinary or personal reasons; the officer's firearms authority can only be reinstated by a superintendent.¹⁷⁴
- 5.121 The Inquiry explored with experienced officers whether armed officers had concerns about declaring issues that could result in the withdrawal of their blue card. Some witnesses indicated that in the past there had been a stigma attached to declaring any issues relating to mental health.¹⁷⁵ One witness told the Inquiry:
- “There was an incorrect assumption that anyone who suffered from mental health problems was seen as ‘weak’. I believe that this perception developed partly due to the predominantly male environment prevalent within the various firearms departments. Historically, I believe that there was an element of peer pressure around surrendering a blue card and being seen to be weak. I believe this has been addressed and there are now effective processes and support in place to help anyone who self-declares.”¹⁷⁶
- 5.122 **Overall, from the evidence given to the Inquiry, opinion was divided among officers (at both constable and supervisor rank) about whether withdrawal of firearms authority was seen as a judgement on the officer's capabilities more generally, or whether it was seen as part of the day in, day out, business-as-usual process for authorised firearms officers.¹⁷⁷ Therefore, in terms of the evidence provided in the context of this Inquiry, and in the knowledge that not all officers within the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command were interviewed, the Inquiry concludes this may simply reflect individual officers' perception of the process rather than any, more deep-seated, cultural mistrust.**
- 5.123 The Inquiry heard that this was less of an issue for those at armed response vehicle level, as withdrawal of a blue card is more common for those officers. This is because, given the nature of their role, these officers tend to be involved in more firearms incidents and, if such an incident occurs, an officer's blue card is withdrawn for at least 28 days, sometimes longer.¹⁷⁸

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Conclusion 51

The opportunities to earn overtime in the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command may have disincentivised Wayne Couzens from seeking support for his welfare.

- 5.124 The Inquiry also discussed with witnesses whether there may be a financial incentive for an officer not to declare any issue that might culminate in the withdrawal of their blue card, namely the prospect of not being able to earn overtime.¹⁷⁹ **The Inquiry believes that this may be particularly relevant in the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command, given the reliance on overtime to ensure a full complement of staff and the fact that the ability to earn overtime was an incentive for some to join the Command in the first place.**¹⁸⁰
- 5.125 If an officer failed a weapons classification shoot, it could sometimes take up to four weeks for a reauthorisation shoot to become available, which could cause issues for firearms commands operating on an overtime model that encourages efficiency. The Inquiry heard that the flexibility of an overtime model allows for appropriate planning for when less firearms cover is needed, for example when Parliament is in recess, but it also means the Command is running under optimum headcount at a reduced cost but with associated resourcing issues¹⁸¹ (see paragraphs 5.156 to 5.159 for a more detailed description of the overtime model at the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command).
- 5.126 The Inquiry was advised that the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command has a number of unarmed, ‘Taser only’ posts, meaning that officers still have the ability to earn overtime even without their blue card.¹⁸²

Welfare support

- 5.127 The Inquiry was told by a witness who was a supervisor that they had stopped armed officers from carrying firearms when they could see that the officers were “not themselves”.¹⁸³ The supervisor recognised that this was never a popular decision but believed that good managers were able to handle this situation appropriately. Significantly, the supervisor also recognised that many officers were likely to have issues in their personal lives that might affect their performance at work; on one occasion, the supervisor had removed an authorised firearms officer’s blue card following an argument that the officer had had with their spouse. The supervisor took the view that the key issue was whether or not an authorised firearms officer’s work was being affected, and that it was the responsibility of the supervisor to pick up on clues and determine if they were or were not fit to work. It may require

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someone to be a more “intrusive” manager to ensure that any officer attempting to mask some underlying issues was supported, and, according to the supervisor, much of that just came with experience.¹⁸⁴

- 5.128 Other examples given of the firearms authorisation being removed included when officers were subject to gross misconduct allegations (an automatic removal), when an officer had suffered a bereavement in particularly difficult circumstances, and when officers had failed fitness tests.¹⁸⁵ While these are examples of good practice, with supervisors actively managing their team and being alert to potential issues impacting on officers’ abilities to carry out their firearms role appropriately, the Inquiry heard that many officers were reluctant to declare any welfare or mental health concerns for fear of stigmatisation and/or loss of overtime payments through withdrawal of their authorisation.¹⁸⁶

Conclusion 52

Sergeants supervising Wayne Couzens as an authorised firearms officer were not trained to assess an officer’s state of mind or offer welfare support.

- 5.129 **The Inquiry was advised that sergeants in a firearms command do not receive any training on how to assess an officer’s state of mind or offer welfare support, yet the Inquiry was also told that sergeants “make or break the quality of policing on the streets”.¹⁸⁷ When an officer is promoted to the rank of sergeant, this is their first opportunity to line-manage staff. Sergeants take on the responsibility not only for their officers’ welfare, but also for monitoring their professional progress and for dealing with unprofessional conduct.¹⁸⁸**
- 5.130 Some officers may be attracted to this role mainly because of the increase in salary that promotion brings, rather than because they are seeking to take on supervisory responsibilities. Many officers continue to strive for further promotion and move on, rather than remaining as what might be described as a “career sergeant”.¹⁸⁹ The Inquiry was told that many of the decisions made by the Metropolitan Police Service rely for their implementation on sergeants cascading the relevant guidance down to constables.¹⁹⁰

Limited circumstances in which members of the public can possess a firearm lawfully

- 5.131 In the course of undertaking a review of the circumstances in which a police officer can become an authorised firearms officer, the Inquiry also considered the guidance and guidelines governing firearms licensing for members of the public. It is a rigorous and regimented regime. The commonly used and critical term for members

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of the public is ‘suitability’, meaning that chief officers should be satisfied that the individual can be permitted access to firearms without danger to public safety. For residents in Great Britain, the following apply:

- “Background checks are to be completed for every applicant who applies for either grant or renewal of a certificate or certification, unless checks were carried out within the last six months as part of continuous monitoring of existing certificate holders.”¹⁹¹
- “All applicants should be checked against the widest relevant databases to gather conviction, intelligence and counter terrorism data.”¹⁹²
- “A home visit must always be carried out before granting a certificate to a first-time applicant.”¹⁹³
- “Before granting a certificate to a first-time applicant, at least one of the applicant’s referees should be contacted. Referees may be contacted by telephone, email or home visit depending on the risk assessment. As a minimum, the referee should be made aware of the application, so that he or she has the opportunity to inform the police of any concerns. The referee may also be asked about any matter relating to the applicant’s suitability to possess firearms.”¹⁹⁴
- “Chief officers must consider information provided by a suitably qualified GMC [General Medical Council]-registered doctor for every person who applies for either the grant or renewal of a firearm or shotgun certificate, or to be registered as a firearms dealer, to assess any issues regarding medical suitability.”¹⁹⁵
- Medical conditions that could be relevant (although the list is non-exhaustive and doctors are asked to consider any other mental or physical condition that may affect the individual’s safe possession of a firearm or shotgun) include:
 - Acute Stress Reaction or an acute reaction to the stress caused by a trauma, including post-traumatic stress disorder;
 - suicidal thoughts or self-harm or harm to others;
 - depression or anxiety;
 - dementia;
 - mania, bipolar disorder or a psychotic illness;
 - a personality disorder;
 - a neurological condition: for example, Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson’s or Huntington’s disease, or epilepsy;
 - alcohol or drug abuse; and
 - any other mental or physical condition, or combination of conditions, which may affect the safe possession of firearms or shotguns.”¹⁹⁶

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- 5.132 Chief officers are also advised to consider conducting an open-source check of the applicant's social media presence and activity. The purpose of this is to establish whether the applicant is openly and repeatedly expressing views, or sympathising with views, which may suggest that their access to firearms would be inappropriate or unsafe. The individual's right to freedom of speech is to be respected, but the guidance makes it clear that, if there is any indication of a possible propensity to violence, illegality or emotional volatility, this should be considered by the police when determining whether the applicant is fit to hold a firearms certificate.¹⁹⁷
- 5.133 This check is intended to identify those who set out such views on open-source social media, and it may not capture those who are posting on social media more covertly, whether anonymously, under a pseudonym or on closed sites. Where there is a suspicion – through force intelligence or other sources, for example – of such conduct online, chief officers should consider whether it is appropriate to conduct a more thorough investigation of the applicant's online activity.¹⁹⁸
- 5.134 Other factors that chief officers are asked to take into account when assessing the suitability of a member of the public to hold a firearms licence include, but are not limited to:
- evidence relating to criminal proceedings that resulted in an acquittal;
 - evidence, including intelligence, of any criminal behaviour where no charges, conviction or other disposal resulted;
 - evidence of reckless behaviour, lack of self-control or restraint, or disregard for the safety of others;
 - relationship difficulties or other domestic turmoil; and
 - unmanaged debts, financial pressures, abnormal financial activity or unexplained sources of income.¹⁹⁹
- 5.135 The Inquiry compared the criteria to be met by a member of the public seeking a firearms certificate and by a Metropolitan Police Service officer seeking to become an authorised firearms officer. The Inquiry found that members of the public and Metropolitan Police Service officers are subject to largely similar checks (although the language used to describe them may be different) of their personal circumstances, including their medical history and their behaviour. The Inquiry, however, identified two key differences. First, members of the public, unlike Metropolitan Police Service officers, are required to undergo a home visit. This may be designed primarily to assess the arrangements for storage of the weapon but could still provide valuable information about an individual's suitability for an authorised firearms officer role (the Inquiry's view on home visits is set out in more detail in paragraph 4.110). Second, while the checks on members of the public are presumably carried out within a relatively short period of time following

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their application, the Metropolitan Police Service relies, for some of its checks, on information gathered during force vetting, which, for some applicants, may have been conducted up to nine years previously and may thus be extremely out of date.

Conclusion 53

Wayne Couzens' suitability assessment to become an authorised firearms officer at the Metropolitan Police Service may have been less rigorous than if he had applied for a firearms licence as a member of the public.

- 5.136 The Inquiry considers that, given the differences highlighted in paragraph 5.135, it is possible that some authorised firearms officers in the Metropolitan Police Service who are deployed on the streets of London with a range of weapons will have been subject to fewer checks on their suitability to carry a firearm than a member of the public, whose firearms use is likely to be much more limited.

Wayne Couzens' pathway to the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command at the Metropolitan Police Service

- 5.137 The Inquiry heard evidence that Couzens' decision to join the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command was a surprise given that, when he had applied to the Metropolitan Police Service, he had reportedly been set on taking a desk-based role. The job in the Command was not going to be sedentary and the decision to take it did not seem consistent with the concerns that Couzens had shared about his physical fitness.²⁰⁰
- 5.138 The Inquiry saw evidence that there was some confusion around how to treat Couzens when he transferred to the Metropolitan Police Service from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary.²⁰¹ This is linked, to an extent, with the confusion about the status of his service as a special constable with Kent Police, which contributed to the pay dispute described in more detail in Chapter 6. This led to him being placed on the wrong induction courses.
- 5.139 On 21 August 2018, Couzens was advised to attend the regular transferee course, as opposed to the full training that would usually be required for transferees from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary and other non-Home Office forces.²⁰² The difference in the courses reflects the fact that officers from the Constabulary were in effect probationers and required to undergo the full probationary training²⁰³ – in the same way as new recruits who had not previously worked in policing – rather than what might be seen as a 'policing refresher' course of much shorter duration for a serving officer from a Home Office force.

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- 5.140 Couzens was given a start date of 10 September 2018,²⁰⁴ as opposed to 26 September 2018, when other new recruits were due to start.²⁰⁵ This error was picked up by Human Resources, who advised that, since Couzens had given up his previous job on the basis of the offer made to join the Metropolitan Police Service, the original start date should be honoured. Human Resources further advised that Couzens should start on 10 September 2018, with the other officers on the four-day transferee course, and, as per the normal procedure, be attested, issued uniform, and have his DNA and fingerprints taken. He would then go to his borough command (but would not be deployable) until he joined the full Certificate in Knowledge of Policing course, on 26 September 2018, after which he would follow the normal new recruit pathway.²⁰⁶
- 5.141 It was confirmed to the Inquiry that Couzens was one of the 15 officers referred to in the September 2018 briefing paper entitled Transferee Police Officers from Civil Nuclear Constabulary & Ministry of Defence Police and referred to in paragraph 5.51. This may explain the confusion around his recruitment pathway, although at the time he was being recruited he had expressed a desire to move out of firearms and so was not, as far as the Inquiry can ascertain, initially recruited as an authorised firearms officer.²⁰⁷
- 5.142 Nevertheless, it is clear from documentary evidence made available to the Inquiry that, almost as soon as Couzens joined the Metropolitan Police Service, he was in regular contact by email with senior officers responsible for recruitment more generally, and firearms recruitment in particular, asking questions about his terms and conditions and seeking to expedite a move from general policing to a firearms role.²⁰⁸
- 5.143 For Couzens, who had been in the Metropolitan Police Service for less than two years at the time of his application to be an authorised firearms officer, and thus had not completed his probationary period, the Authorised Firearms Officer Selection Application and Self-Assessment 6614 form was circulated to a number of officers at both the Metropolitan Police Service and the Civil Nuclear Constabulary for sign-off. It was dated 20 February 2019 by Couzens, and in it, not only did he tick a box indicating that he did not have, and had not previously had, any financial difficulties, but he also stated specifically: “I transferred to the MPS [Metropolitan Police Service] with a view to carrying over my firearms qualifications and retain my [authorised firearms officer] status.”²⁰⁹
- 5.144 His 6614 form was signed off on 26 February 2019. The form indicates that he had only been known to the officer at the borough command who signed off his form for three months, but the form also indicates that that officer had sought the input of Couzens’ previous managers at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary. Every comment or input regarding Couzens’ suitability for a firearms role is based, therefore, on the observations or accounts of others, and each comes with the caveat “as far as I am aware”.²¹⁰

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Conclusion 54

The Metropolitan Police Service did not receive or request an independent assessment of Wayne Couzens' suitability to be an authorised firearms officer by someone within the force who had substantial experience of working with him.

5.145 The Inquiry finds that there was therefore no independent assessment by someone within the Metropolitan Police Service who had substantial experience of working with Couzens to determine his suitability to be an authorised firearms officer in the Metropolitan Police Service at the time of his application.

Professional standards checks: risk assessment

5.146 Couzens' application went through the Professional Standards Department risk assessment process, as detailed in paragraphs 5.79 to 5.96. He was assessed as low risk because:

- There were no complaints or conduct matters on his record.
- There was no information in the risk assessment process, other than from internal sources, about his financial situation; therefore, there were no red flags raised as he had not self-declared his debt levels or declared them to any supervisor.²¹¹

Conclusion 55

Those assessing Wayne Couzens' risk to be authorised as a firearms officer were not able to access information about the 2015 indecent exposure allegation. If they had, it is likely his application to be an authorised firearms officer would have been rejected.

5.147 There was no information available to those involved in the risk assessment process about the indecent exposure allegation from Kent in 2015 as there were no separate checks of the Police National Database as part of the risk assessment.²¹² The Inquiry was told categorically by those involved in recruitment that, had this information been available, Couzens' application to be an authorised firearms officer would likely have been rejected, and, in the case of an appeal against the rejection, the matter would have been referred back to the Bromley Professional Standards Unit for further enquiries/ investigations.²¹³

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- 5.148 Couzens had retained his National Security Vetting at the Security Check level from his time at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, so no further vetting was undertaken and he was allocated to an authorised firearms officer course, which he completed successfully.²¹⁴
- 5.149 He was posted to the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command in February 2020.²¹⁵ From information provided to the Inquiry, it is clear that, despite not having completed his full two years' probation, he was allowed to transfer because he had achieved Independent Patrol Status at Bromley Borough Command and had completed his Certificate in Knowledge of Policing, in line with the proposals in the 2018 briefing paper for recruitment of non-Home Office force firearms officers.²¹⁶ In accordance with that proposal, he should have had attachments back to a borough command for skills development, but the human resources system showed that he was a substantive rather than probationer constable when he transferred from Bromley.²¹⁷

Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command

- 5.150 The Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command is a large command unit of approximately 1,000 people, the majority of whom are the armed officers responsible for guarding embassies and Parliament.
- 5.151 The Inquiry was told in 2022 that the span of command for an inspector in the armed division of the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command is typically one inspector to over 100 constables. Although this is the second level of supervision (one rank above sergeant), there is still an expectation that, over a 12-month period, the inspecting ranks will have an active role in understanding their teams and the individuals within them.²¹⁸
- 5.152 The span for sergeants is closer to a span elsewhere in the Metropolitan Police Service, so on average about one sergeant to 13 constables, although this is still high compared with most supervisory structures.²¹⁹
- 5.153 Due to the number of sites that are within the Command's footprint, Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command officers are not typically part of settled teams and their routines vary.²²⁰
- 5.154 Officers will be on duty at a range of different sites at different times of day, potentially at three different sites, three times a day. Sergeants can for large parts of each shift be separate from the team, meaning that it is challenging to supervise or support them, or, by extension, assess welfare needs.²²¹

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5.155 The Inquiry was told that the way in which the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command undertakes a variety of functions on a daily basis at protected sites across London, and the nature of those deployments away from a police base,²²² means that there is not necessarily the ‘team’ ethos in the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command that is found in other areas of policing.²²³

The overtime model

5.156 Given the nature of parliamentary hours, terms and recess over holiday periods, the staffing model at the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command is based on two-thirds of the shifts being covered by permanent staff, with the remaining shifts covered by officers carrying out overtime. This is because it is more efficient to meet the varying demands and pressure with trained staff on an overtime model filling the vacant slots than to use additional staff, which has a resource implication.²²⁴

5.157 Some officers can be close to doubling their income through overtime; they become used to the money and get used to having that amount of additional income, even though it is made clear when they sign up to an authorised firearms officer role that overtime is not guaranteed.²²⁵ The Inquiry heard from some officers that the work is not what attracted them to the role, but rather the ability to earn additional money to put down a deposit for a house,²²⁶ or the fact that even with overtime, the hours are fixed as “you know what time you are going home”, the job is not particularly stressful and there is no report-writing.²²⁷

5.158 Overtime is worked on days that would otherwise have been rest days, so typically an officer in the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command will have 30 to 50 of their rest days a year cancelled. To put that into context, for those who normally work Monday to Friday, this would be the equivalent of having to work one day almost every weekend. As they have 12-hour shifts, officers are working almost 6 days a week, and while there are some extended periods of downtime, they spend a considerable amount of time at work,²²⁸ carrying significant additional weight in kit, in a physically demanding and mentally draining role.

5.159 The Inquiry was also told that many officers commuted into Central London as their salaries were not sufficient to allow them to stay closer to the base. Many, like Couzens, were therefore often away from home for 15 to 17 hours a day.²²⁹

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Operation Leven

- 5.160 A complete review of the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command, known as Operation Leven, was announced by Dame Cressida Dick, the then Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service, in October 2021 following the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard by Couzens, a serving officer from the Command, and the arrest and charge of a second officer from the Command, David Carrick, for multiple serious sexual offences (for which he has since been convicted).²³⁰
- 5.161 This internal review was conducted by a small team reporting to a project board chaired at chief officer level. The progress of the review was scrutinised by a group of independent members.
- 5.162 The information collected by the review has been made available to this Inquiry and it is not proposed to rehearse the findings in detail here. It is important to note, however, that in general terms, the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command was found to have an outdated operating model and unacceptably low female representation, with the working environment having poor facilities, unnecessarily heavy body armour and limited lateral development opportunities for staff. Taken together, these impacted negatively on the wellbeing of the workforce.

Conclusion 56

Gaps in the way information is recorded and shared meant red flags about Wayne Couzens' unsuitability to join the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command were missed.

- 5.163 **The Inquiry finds that the fragmented approach to the gathering and sharing of information about officers where conduct has not resulted in formal, documented action being taken creates a gap in the Metropolitan Police Service's knowledge of officers who are transferring into the firearms commands.**
- 5.164 **The Inquiry further finds that, in Couzens' case, the professional standards risk assessment process was undermined in two significant ways because:**
- **it proceeded on the assumption that another part of the organisation, namely force vetting, would have identified information from the Police National Database that might have been of relevance when appointing Couzens into a firearms role; and**
 - **debt was referenced in the risk assessment template as a 'red flag', yet under this process too much reliance was placed on self-disclosure, with the most likely source of information about Couzens' levels of debt being Couzens himself.**

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5.165 The Inquiry also finds that the management span and role of the sergeants in the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command was such that, in general, other than an initial chat with an officer at the start of the shift to check whether there were any issues that would prevent them from deploying on duty with a firearm, there was little opportunity to get to know staff and really understand if there were pressures affecting their mental or, indeed, physical health.

Chapter 6: Finances

Introduction

- 6.1 The Inquiry's review of the information about Wayne Couzens considered during his recruitment and vetting at all the forces he served with, as well as of the evidence given to the Inquiry by various witnesses, reveals a picture of an individual who, for most if not all of his adult life, was not fully in control of his finances.¹ From the perspective of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference, this is a particularly significant finding, given that, as set out in Chapter 4 of this Report, the review of an individual's finances is a vital part of the vetting and re-vetting process for police officers, and can identify potential risks and/or red flags.
- 6.2 In the early stages of the Metropolitan Police Service's investigation into the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard (Operation Temora), as soon as a suspect – Couzens – was identified, a financial investigation was undertaken by investigators accredited by the National Crime Agency.² The investigation was tasked with preparing a standard financial analysis going back six years (to 2014).³
- 6.3 The financial investigation indicated that Couzens' financial position was "very poor".⁴ He had a number of payday loans, which the investigators felt should have been disclosed to the Metropolitan Police Service as they were indicative of financial difficulties.⁵ As it was described to the Inquiry by one witness:
- "Wages would come in and then go straight out, and so he was almost constantly overdrawn. There was excessive spending on all sorts of things, such as eating out and coffees. One way to describe it would be as living above his means, or a 'shopaholic'".⁶
- 6.4 Taking the analysis from the financial investigation as a starting point, the Inquiry gathered more evidence about Couzens' financial affairs. The Inquiry considered the financial history of Couzens available to it for the period from 1989 until 2021 (including salaried income, non-salaried income, outgoings and spending, loans, debt management and residential status, including rent/mortgage payments). The Inquiry's examination of the evidence took a chronological approach, organised around employment history, and sought to identify trends.

1 The extent and depth of this study has been restricted by limitations in access to accurate data. For example, Couzens' accounts of his residences and employment in primary evidence are unreliable and inaccurate when compared with official records. The Inquiry also encountered significant gaps in data and sources of financial information before 2018, and did not have access to financial data demonstrating, for example, any necessary spending on his family, petrol, etc.

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- 6.5 This evidence is relevant to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference in the context of understanding police force vetting procedures and how an applicant's financial history at the time they apply to a police force is taken into account by that force. In accordance with the various iterations of force vetting guidance, financial vulnerability is something that officers and forces should be alive to for the duration of an officer's career. In this case, Couzens' credit history and financial situation dating back to before he joined the police until the point when he committed the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard are considered to be relevant to the Inquiry's work.

Conclusion 57

Wayne Couzens' spending was often excessive and impulsive, and he used loans and credit cards to manage his debt.

- 6.6 The Inquiry considers that significant financial vulnerability can create pressures that may affect an individual's ability to discharge the duties of a police officer. **It is clear from the evidence available that Couzens had instances of excessive, impulsive spending. He sought to manage his levels of debt through a series of loans, payday loans and credit cards.** The Inquiry's detailed findings on matters relating to Couzens' finances are set out in the paragraphs below.

Finances prior to joining the police

Panel beater (as early as 1989 to 2011)

- 6.7 The Inquiry was not able to pinpoint the exact date on which Couzens commenced paid employment, owing to inconsistencies in the information he and his referees provided in various application forms. But based on the information available to it, the Inquiry believes that, at some point between 1989 and 1991, Couzens started working as a panel beater at the family business.⁷ The Inquiry has not seen any salary records for this period, but notes that, in 2011, while still working for the family business, Couzens self-reported his salary as being £23,000 per year.⁸

Conclusion 58

Wayne Couzens' financial difficulties started well before he joined the police.

- 6.8 Given the passage of time and relevant retention periods for financial information, it is not necessary under the Inquiry's Terms of Reference to make detailed findings about Couzens' spending habits during this period. The Inquiry, however, saw evidence that a County Court Judgment was made against him in 1995 in respect of a car financing debt of £1,938.⁹ Couzens declared this judgment, which was settled

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in 1998, when he applied to join the Civil Nuclear Constabulary,¹⁰ but did not declare it on his recruitment vetting form when applying to the Metropolitan Police Service¹¹ (although arguably this was not required, as the relevant question on the Metropolitan Police Service form was ambiguous and could have been read as requiring only a declaration of the previous six years' financial details). In the particulars of the Individual Voluntary Arrangement that he entered into in 2007 (see paragraphs 6.15 to 6.16 for more detail), Couzens also noted that he had "incurred credit" in the amount of around £1,000 for a holiday in 2005.¹² **The existence of these matters suggests that Couzens' financial difficulties started well before he joined the police.**

Army reservist (2002 to 2008)

- 6.9 While Couzens was working as a panel beater, he also volunteered with the Territorial Army. He self-reported varying dates for his service as a reservist,¹³ but official records made available to the Inquiry confirm that he enlisted on 17 April 2002 and was discharged on 16 April 2008, after having failed to attend training for several months and to return his kit¹⁴ (see paragraph 4.84).
- 6.10 The Inquiry was told that reservists were entitled to receive a tax-free 'bounty' (lump sum payment). The bounty was contingent on meeting certain minimum training requirements and was paid annually on 1 April¹⁵ (see also Chapter 1, footnote 53). Although the Inquiry did not see any record of the payments made to Couzens, the Inquiry received information from the Ministry of Defence explaining that, as at 1 April 2007, the recommended Volunteer Reserve Force bounty payable in the fifth year of service (Couzens would have completed his fifth year in 2007) was £1,556.¹⁶ Reservists were also entitled to a 'taxable recompense' (or daily rate) when on training manoeuvres, which, as at 1 April 2007, was between £31.92 and £61.77 for privates, depending on their level.¹⁷ The Inquiry heard from witnesses that Couzens was present at various training weekends and therefore considers it reasonable to presume that he would have qualified to receive these payments.¹⁸
- 6.11 As explained in Chapter 4, Couzens' debt to the Territorial Army – incurred as a result of his failure to return his kit – was not mentioned in the reference provided for him by the Territorial Army as part of his application to join Kent Police as a regular officer in 2008. This is not surprising, as Ministry of Defence policy at the time did not require this level of detail to be provided. The policy was to provide a note of dates of service, and was clear that any additional information about the applicant should be provided by their employer. As also noted in Chapter 4, the Inquiry was told that, had the information about Couzens' failure to return his kit and the ensuing

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debt been available when he was applying to join Kent Police as a regular officer in 2008, it would have been “classed as dishonesty” and would have caused concern to those involved in the vetting process.¹⁹

Second-hand car sales business (2004 to 2005)

Conclusion 59

If more information about the particulars of Wayne Couzens’ Individual Voluntary Arrangement had been made available by him during the vetting process for the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, it is likely to have reinforced the assessment of an individual who was vulnerable financially.

- 6.12 In the particulars of the 2007 Individual Voluntary Arrangement (see paragraphs 6.15 to 6.16), Couzens made reference to a short stint, during 2004 and 2005, as the owner of a second-hand car sales business. He described how he used credit to buy cars and carry out repairs, explaining that the business failed and left him with “a lot of debt”. He did not specify the amount of the debt.²⁰ The Inquiry believes that Couzens ran this business alongside his employment as a panel beater (or between periods of employment)²¹ and his voluntary service with the Territorial Army. The Inquiry has not seen any evidence that the business was declared to the Civil Nuclear Constabulary in his application and, in fact, his reference from the family business dated 9 February 2011 described him as “being employed as a full time member of staff on permanent contract [...] for the last 20 years”.²² **Had this information been available to the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, and Thames Valley Police as the force carrying out the vetting functions, it is likely to have reinforced the assessment of an individual who was vulnerable financially.**

Property transactions

- 6.13 The Inquiry analysed various sources of evidence about Couzens’ living arrangements during this period. The Inquiry understands that, between 1999 and 2004, Couzens purchased and sold property on two occasions,²³ receiving financial help from his family to assist with the purchase of one of the properties.²⁴ By 2004, however, he did not appear to own any property and was living in rented accommodation.²⁵

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Finances while working for the police

Special constable, Kent Special Constabulary (2006 to 2010)

- 6.14 As a special constable with Kent Special Constabulary, Couzens was not paid a salary, but his expenses (for instance for travel, calculated by mileage) would have been reimbursed by Kent Special Constabulary upon submission of a claim.²⁶
- 6.15 It was during his period of service as a special constable, in February 2007, that Couzens appears to have entered into his Individual Voluntary Arrangement.²⁷ In his 2011 application for Developed Vetting, submitted as part of the recruitment process for the Civil Nuclear Constabulary (discussed further in Chapter 4), Couzens said that he had approached an Individual Voluntary Arrangement company, at the recommendation of the Citizens Advice Bureau, because the potential for him to earn overtime had reduced.²⁸ In the proposal for the Individual Voluntary Arrangement, Couzens stated that he had considered a debt management programme as a solution to his financial difficulties, but had received professional advice and decided that a formal Individual Voluntary Arrangement was the “most appropriate course of action”.²⁹ He declared, in accordance with this process:

“[I]t is clear that I am insolvent in that I am unable to pay my debts as and when they fall due and my liabilities, including prospective and contingent liabilities, exceed my assets.”³⁰

- 6.16 The proposal makes it clear that, for Couzens, the alternative to the Individual Voluntary Arrangement was a petition for bankruptcy.³¹ Couzens proposed that he would pay £250 per month for a period of five years in order to fully settle all claims from his creditors.³² The Inquiry has seen a court-registered receipts and payment account document,³³ as well as the record of the Individual Voluntary Arrangement on the 2011 Experian credit report obtained as part of the 2011 Developed Vetting process³⁴ (see footnote 38), and therefore presumes that the Individual Voluntary Arrangement proposal was ultimately accepted and registered with the court. The documentation available to the Inquiry does not reveal the total amount of Couzens’ debt or the number or identity of his creditors, but the court-registered receipts and payment account document does show that, by early March 2011, he had made payments totalling £12,258.50, with £5,012.53 of that amount distributed to creditors and the remainder allocated to various fees and charges.³⁵

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Finances at the time of becoming a full-time police officer (mid-February 2011)

6.17 In mid-February 2011, as part of the force vetting process for the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, an Experian credit check was conducted on Couzens,³⁶ as discussed in Chapter 4. The check revealed that, from July 1999 to the time of the check, he had had a total of 12 accounts registered in his name at his various home addresses for current accounts, loans, credit cards and communications products (presumably mobile phones).^{37,38} At the time the report was created, six of the accounts were labelled as ‘default’,³⁹ four were labelled as ‘settled’ and the remaining two were marked ‘active’. The accounts listed are as follows, with, where known, the relevant balances:

- Default:
 - February 2000 to January 2007: current balance satisfied; default balance £414 (credit card);
 - October 2004 to August 2006: current balance £5,733; default balance £6,216 (loan);
 - June 2005 to January 2007: current balance £418; default balance £544 (communications);
 - August 2005 to June 2006: current balance £2,430; default balance £3,646 (loan);
 - July 2006 to March 2007: current balance £5,261; default balance £6,705 (loan); and
 - December 2006 to March 2007: current balance £730; default balance £733 (current account).
- Settled:
 - July 1999 to June 2009: credit limit of £1,000 (credit card);
 - March 2001 to April 2005 (communications);
 - December 2004 to September 2005 (communications); and
 - June 2005 to July 2006: £106 × 36 months (loan).

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³⁸ The Experian report run as part of the 2011 Developed Vetting process listed two additional items of financial information that do not appear on the report run for the force vetting checks: a public information record that mentions the Individual Voluntary Arrangement (containing its date and case number, but no information on the amount) and a communications account that started in November 2003 and is recorded as being settled in May 2005.

³⁹ A default balance is where the borrower has not kept up to date with agreed payments, resulting in the lender in most circumstances closing the relevant account. This can affect the borrower's credit rating and make it more difficult for them to borrow money in the future, as they may be seen as a higher risk.

- Active:
 - start date March 2006 (current account); and
 - start date April 2008 (communications).⁴⁰

Conclusion 60

It is likely that Wayne Couzens entered into the 2007 Individual Voluntary Arrangement in order to increase his chances of passing force vetting. It is also likely that he was unaware of the relevant vetting guidance stipulating that an Individual Voluntary Arrangement should have been a barrier to clearance.

- 6.18 Although it is impossible to know for certain from the information available to it, the Inquiry considers it probable that, given the dates listed in paragraph 6.17 and the differences between the settled and default balances, the February 2007 Individual Voluntary Arrangement was being used to settle some or all of the debts associated with the accounts in default listed in paragraph 6.17. The Inquiry further considers it likely that, by entering into the Individual Voluntary Arrangement, Couzens was seeking to improve his chances of passing force vetting to become a full-time police officer. The Inquiry also considers, however, that Couzens was unaware of the terms of the vetting guidance in place at the time, on the basis that he was so forthcoming about such an arrangement, which should, on any reading of the relevant guidance, have prevented him from obtaining vetting clearance.

Conclusion 61

Wayne Couzens may have consciously chosen an Individual Voluntary Arrangement over bankruptcy as a way of demonstrating that he was taking a responsible attitude to his debts, and because he believed that bankruptcy would preclude him from employment with the police.

- 6.19 The Inquiry considers that it is plausible, therefore, that Couzens consciously chose an Individual Voluntary Arrangement over bankruptcy because he believed that, when considered by a vetting officer, an Individual Voluntary Arrangement would show that he was taking a responsible attitude to his debts and making at least some effort to pay them off. The Inquiry notes, however, that he failed vetting when he applied to join Kent Police as a regular officer in 2008, shortly after he entered into the arrangement (records seen by the Inquiry state that he failed financial vetting),⁴¹ but that he obtained vetting clearance

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when applying to join the Civil Nuclear Constabulary in 2011, despite the recommendation from Thames Valley Police to the contrary (see Chapter 4 for more detail).⁴²

Property transactions

- 6.20 The Inquiry's analysis shows that in November 2009 Couzens moved into a home that he did not purchase.⁴³ That property was sold in May 2011.⁴⁴

Civil Nuclear Constabulary (March 2011 to September 2018)

- 6.21 The Inquiry had access to more plentiful financial information covering the period of Couzens' employment with the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, particularly from 2014 onwards. This included bank statements and other information about bank accounts, which provided insight into loans taken out, loan repayments and unsalaried forms of income. There was also information about his annual salary from 2014 until 2018. Most notably, the Inquiry's analysis of the available evidence suggests that, between April 2013 and September 2018, Couzens obtained credit on around 40 occasions.⁴⁵
- 6.22 From the evidence the Inquiry has seen in relation to Couzens' assets and liabilities and his household income, it appears that, in March 2011, when vetting enquiries were made as part of the application process for the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, Couzens was living within his means.⁴⁶
- 6.23 His salary increased significantly once he joined the Civil Nuclear Constabulary in 2011. The Inquiry did not have access to any further salary information from before 2014, but was provided with information showing that Couzens' gross pay from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary for the tax years 2014/15 to 2018/19 was as follows:
- 2014/15: £33,138.89;
 - 2015/16: £30,904.78 (the dip in salary during this tax year is likely to be attributable to Couzens having worked less overtime owing to illness/injury for a cumulative total of around three months);⁴⁷
 - 2016/17: £38,365.00;
 - 2017/18: £45,211.00; and
 - 2018/19: £19,585.00⁴⁸ (the lower amount reflects the fact that he left the Civil Nuclear Constabulary in 2018).

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6.24 As indicated above, Couzens appears to have obtained a significant amount of credit, in different forms, while serving at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary. Key transactions have been identified as follows:

- In the 2014/15 tax year, he took out around £18,000 in loans, including a loan in the amount of £400 from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary Welfare Fund⁴⁹ and over £1,100 in high-interest short-term (payday) loans.⁵⁰ The largest loan, in the amount of £13,500, was obtained from a company that provided peer-to-peer lending;⁵¹ the day after that loan was credited to his bank account, Couzens made a single payment of £13,000.50 to a motor finance company specialising in used cars.⁵² He also entered into a credit agreement with a communications supplier.⁵³
- In the 2015/16 tax year, he took out around £1,000 in loans,⁵⁴ including a further £400 from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary Welfare Fund⁵⁵ and £500 in a high-interest short-term loan.⁵⁶ He also entered into a credit agreement with a communications supplier.⁵⁷
- In the 2016/17 tax year, he took out over £4,600 in loans,⁵⁸ including £530 from the Police Mutual Association,⁵⁹ another £500 from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary Welfare Fund⁶⁰ and £1,100 in high-interest short-term loans.⁶¹ He also entered into two further credit agreements with communications suppliers.⁶²
- In the 2017/18 tax year, he entered into two credit agreements with communications suppliers,⁶³ took out a personal loan for £6,000⁶⁴ and entered into a hire purchase agreement with a motor finance company.⁶⁵ He also obtained a mortgage equity release of over £20,000.⁶⁶

6.25 With the exception of the sum used for motor finance, the Inquiry has not seen any evidence indicating the purpose of these loans, other than an indication that some of the money borrowed in 2017/18 may have been used to finance improvements to Couzens' property.⁶⁷ In the absence of such evidence, the Inquiry's assumption is that the loans were used to pay off existing debt or facilitate further spending.⁶⁸

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Loans from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary Welfare Fund

- 6.26 The Inquiry was told that the Civil Nuclear Constabulary Welfare Fund, from which Couzens obtained three loans, was established in 2005.⁶⁹ Membership of the Fund is limited to current police officers and staff employed by the Civil Nuclear Police Authority.⁷⁰ Membership fees are paid monthly to the Fund via payroll deductions, and the current fee is (at the time of writing) £4 per month.⁷¹
- 6.27 Since January 2011, the Fund has been a separate legal entity to the Civil Nuclear Constabulary. It is a company limited by guarantee and managed by a board of directors taken from volunteers from within the membership of the Fund. The company is managed in accordance with rules based on charity/not-for-profit organisation guidelines, set out in the company's articles of association and by-laws.⁷²
- 6.28 The stated purpose of the Fund is to afford financial assistance to members in several specified circumstances, including the member's death or the death of the member's partner or, if separated or unattached, their nominated next of kin. In recent years, this provision has been extended to include the dependent children of members. The Fund also offers discretionary grants, assistance in the event of retirement due to ill health and financial support in cases of severe financial hardship. In exceptional circumstances of extreme financial distress, members can also apply for a modest fixed-term (non-standard) loan.⁷³
- 6.29 Annex 1 to the Fund's by-laws sets out the table of agreed values, percentages and limitations for the various payments and loans available through the Fund.⁷⁴ During the period of Couzens' employment at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, the sanctioned (standard) loan value increased, with effect from 1 February 2016, from £400 to £500. The administration charge remained constant at five per cent. There is no annual percentage rate interest charged on loans provided to members.⁷⁵
- 6.30 All members are permitted to hold one standard loan of a fixed amount (currently up to £500), which is repayable over 12 months via deduction from salary. No member may obtain a fresh loan until the previous loan is repaid in full. The standard loan is not means tested and is available to all subscribing members. There is no requirement for the member to provide any financial disclosure or statement and information about the purpose of the loan is not sought. Any outstanding loan amount is repayable on leaving Civil Nuclear Constabulary employment.⁷⁶ The Inquiry was told that, according to records still available,⁷⁷ Couzens received two welfare loans from the Fund and made repayments throughout his employment.⁷⁸

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77 Under data protection legislation, retention periods for loan records are for six financial years plus the current financial year.

78 [***] Data from the financial investigation shows that Couzens received three loans from the Fund; this discrepancy is likely due to some earlier data not having been retained by the Fund in line with applicable data retention periods.

- 6.31 The Civil Nuclear Constabulary has confirmed to the Inquiry that the Vetting Team is not notified automatically of any loans granted by the Welfare Fund or of any salary advances. The annual Security Appraisal Form (see paragraphs 4.219 to 4.220 for more detail) does, however, require disclosure of any significant financial changes or debt management orders entered into during the appraisal period. Any disclosure may then trigger an Experian credit check to consider the individual's suitability to continue holding vetting clearance.⁷⁹

Property transactions

- 6.32 In July 2011, once he had joined the Civil Nuclear Constabulary and completed his initial training, Couzens was posted to Sellafield, in Cumbria. The Inquiry's analysis revealed that he lived in what is presumed to be rented accommodation in Cumbria⁸⁰ during this posting, while his family remained in Kent (see also paragraph 1.47). In early 2014, Couzens jointly purchased a property in Kent.⁸¹ It appears from financial records made available to the Inquiry that Couzens made monthly mortgage payments.⁸² That property was sold in June 2016 for more than the purchase price⁸³ and Couzens then jointly purchased a less expensive house elsewhere in Kent.⁸⁴ The financial records seen by the Inquiry indicate that, as of August 2016, Couzens' monthly mortgage payments decreased.⁸⁵ The Inquiry heard evidence that these property transactions were because there had been a miscalculation which changed the mortgage position.⁸⁶

Preparations for applying to transfer to the Metropolitan Police Service

- 6.33 Couzens applied to transfer to the Metropolitan Police Service in May 2018. As indicated in paragraph 6.24, in the lead-up to his application to the Metropolitan Police Service, Couzens' current account was credited with £6,000 from a personal loan (January 2018) and funds from a mortgage equity release amounting to over £20,000 (February 2018). The Inquiry has also seen an Experian search from July 2018, presumably run as part of Couzens' vetting for the Metropolitan Police Service, as well as an Equifax report from March 2021, run during the initial Metropolitan Police Service investigation into Sarah Everard's disappearance, which both show that, in late 2017 and early 2018, Couzens settled loans, ended communications contracts and closed bank accounts.⁸⁷ The Inquiry notes, however, that, although Couzens' current account did remain in the black for longer periods between early 2018 and the end of 2020, usually only dipping into the red for a couple of days at the end of each pay period, the credit received in January and February 2018 had all been spent by May of that year.⁸⁸

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- 6.34 In mid-June 2018, just over two weeks after he had submitted his vetting application form to the Metropolitan Police Service, Couzens opened two new bank accounts: a current account with Bank 1⁸⁹ and a credit card with Bank 2.⁹⁰ Within a short period of time, both had negative balances.⁹¹ Couzens passed force vetting in the late summer of 2018 and started work at the Metropolitan Police Service in September 2018.

Conclusion 62

Wayne Couzens engaged in deliberate deception to ensure that he passed the financial checks that were a part of the application and vetting process at the Metropolitan Police Service.

- 6.35 It follows from the foregoing that, at the time of his transfer application to the Metropolitan Police Service, Couzens was by all appearances more stable financially, as he was servicing his debt and reliance on his overdraft had waned. The financial investigation concluded that a “degree of pre-planning” was evident in Couzens’ financial activity in the run-up to his application, since he had arranged an equity release against his mortgaged property, as well as a loan.⁹² This activity placed his bank account in credit and he was able to control the account’s performance in order to give the appearance of solvency during the application and vetting period.⁹³ The significant change to his financial profile was described to the Inquiry as “a red flag”.⁹⁴
- 6.36 **The Inquiry is persuaded by the evidence that this pattern of contract termination, equity and credit release, and loan repayments in early 2018 represents a deliberate attempt at deception by Couzens, designed to ensure that he passed the financial checks that he must have known, from his prior experience, would be part of the application and vetting process for the Metropolitan Police Service.**
- 6.37 According to the vetting documents seen by the Inquiry, the financial checks carried out by the Metropolitan Police Service when Couzens transferred from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary – checks based primarily on creditworthiness and which did not include a detailed review of bank statements to assess monthly income and expenditure – did not result in any adverse findings,⁹⁵ presumably because no accounts were in default. As explained in paragraph 6.25, however, Couzens’ spending in the run-up to his transfer application seems to have been funded by a series of loans. But the Inquiry was told by a witness from Metropolitan Police Service Vetting that red flags in financial vetting related to the extent of any debt and how it was managed, as well as to patterns of defaulting or outstanding balances increasing.⁹⁶ The Inquiry infers from this witness evidence that, even if information

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about day-to-day spending patterns like those seen by the Inquiry had been considered during the recruitment vetting process, such patterns would not have been cause for concern.

Metropolitan Police Service (September 2018 to March 2021)

- 6.38 The Inquiry has seen evidence that, although, as a transferee from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, Couzens should have started his employment with the Metropolitan Police Service on pay point 1 (£27,831),⁹⁷ his actual salary on joining the Metropolitan Police Service was set at pay point 5 (£33,267).⁹⁸ This situation ultimately led to a pay dispute between Couzens and the Metropolitan Police Service, which is discussed in more detail in paragraphs 6.48 to 6.59. Couzens' base salary was supplemented by two London allowances and London weighting amounting to over £6,000 per year,⁹⁹ as well as overtime payments depending on the number of hours he worked.¹⁰⁰ As indicated in Chapter 1, during the recruitment process to the Metropolitan Police Service, Couzens explicitly enquired about his salary to ascertain whether it would be significantly less than he had been earning at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary and thus whether it was worth his while to transfer.¹⁰¹
- 6.39 In January 2019, Couzens opened a new current account with Bank 3¹⁰² and obtained a credit account with an online payment platform.¹⁰³ In February and March 2019, he received £4,250 from what appear to be two motorbike-related sales.¹⁰⁴ In March 2019, he took out a loan for £5,000 with a high-interest loan provider¹⁰⁵ and then, a couple of days later, made a vehicle finance repayment of £4,166.27.¹⁰⁶
- 6.40 By March 2019, Couzens' income was £35,741.¹⁰⁷ In June 2019, Couzens purchased, for less than £10,000, a plot of land in Hoad's Wood, close to where Sarah Everard's body was discovered.¹⁰⁸
- 6.41 Although, as indicated in paragraph 6.33, Couzens' main current account appeared more stable from early 2018 onwards, when data from all the accounts to which the Inquiry had access is considered, it emerges that, during the 2018/19 and 2019/20 tax years, the debits on Couzens' accounts exceeded the credits by £18,581.22 and £2,293.64, respectively.¹⁰⁹ This finding supports the point made in paragraph 6.34, showing that, in reality, the relative financial stability achieved in early to mid-2018 was short-lived, and had been reliant on the equity release from his mortgage and the £6,000 loan.

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6.42 Evidence made available to the Inquiry shows that Couzens’ finances started to become obviously unstable again in 2020. Information taken from financial records from that year show the following items of note:

- In January he took out a loan for £7,500.¹¹⁰
- Two cash deposits totalling £2,750 were made to his current account with Bank 3 in July and November (£2,550 and £200 respectively).¹¹¹
- A payment of £2,000 from a jeweller based in Kent was deposited into Couzens’ personal account in September.¹¹² This payment is marked in the relevant bank statement as “REFUND”,¹¹³ but the Inquiry can find no corresponding purchase from the same jeweller in any of the available financial information.¹¹⁴
- Couzens obtained two further loans from short-term high-interest providers in September (£500) and November (£40.53).¹¹⁵
- In September, he made a payment of £19.99 to a membership organisation that helps its customers to “manage and improve their credit reports and score as well as accessing alternative credit providers that can provide loans or other credit even though you may not have perfect credit rating or history”.¹¹⁶
- In October, he closed his main current account, transferring the residual balance of £26.11 to his Bank 3 account.¹¹⁷

6.43 On 2 March 2020, Couzens began a 12-month mortgage payment holiday, which would have reduced his monthly outgoings.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, as the year progressed, he still appears to have been struggling to control his spending. To take a representative example, in the 30 days between 19 June 2020, when Couzens’ June salary (£2,259.32) was paid into his main account,¹¹⁹ and 20 July 2020, when he received his next monthly salary payment,¹²⁰ combined debits across his accounts amounted to £6,323.37. Of this amount, debits in respect of loan repayments, including a vehicle finance payment, amounted to £720.76. Taking into account other credits to his accounts during that period amounting to £3,285.93, his expenditure exceeded his income by £778.12.¹²¹ In August 2020, Couzens made contact with a debt management company about a repayment plan for his unsecured debt,¹²² which, at that time, was estimated by the company to be £26,629.¹²³ He formally entered into a debt management plan in September 2020,¹²⁴

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and made the first agreed monthly payment of £235.68 on 20 October 2020.¹²⁵ A financial statement issued by the debt management company in March 2023 clearly indicates that the debt management plan was in Couzens' name alone.¹²⁶

- 6.44 As explained in Chapter 4, under both the force vetting and National Security Vetting regimes, clearance holders are required to report any changes in personal circumstances. The national guidance in force at the time Couzens was employed by the Metropolitan Police Service explicitly lists participation in a debt management plan as the type of change in circumstances that would warrant a report.¹²⁷ To the Inquiry's knowledge, however, Couzens made no such report to the Metropolitan Police Service when he entered into his plan. Comment is made elsewhere in this Report (see paragraph 4.293) that an aftercare system that relies on individuals (or their line managers) proactively declaring matters of interest presents a risk, as it may lead to important information being missed.
- 6.45 In the early autumn of 2020, even as he was negotiating the debt management plan, Couzens continued to spend money. In September 2020, records show that he made over 30 separate purchases via online shopping platforms amounting to just over £1,680.¹²⁸ In November 2020, Couzens' Bank 3 account was credited with £250, from a relative's account, for "overdraft cover".¹²⁹ That payment took his account into credit, but the next day, after another bout of spending, he was again overdrawn.¹³⁰
- 6.46 Some of the online marketplace purchases made in October 2020 (described in more detail in Chapter 3) occurred while Couzens was working mainly from home on recuperative duties. The Inquiry also notes that Couzens initiated the majority of these transactions on 20 October,¹³¹ which is the date on which his monthly salary was paid.¹³²
- 6.47 Evidence from the financial investigation by the Metropolitan Police Service conducted after Couzens' arrest for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard confirms that, from examination of the income and expenditure declared by Couzens in his debt management plan, there was nothing to indicate that there would be any difficulty in meeting monthly financial commitments.¹³³ As highlighted in paragraphs 6.45 to 6.46, however, the investigation also found that "Mr Couzens spends excessively on eating out and shopping online". According to the investigation, this was "often to the detriment of satisfying household expenditure which it appears that he covers by applying for and taking short-term payday loans".¹³⁴

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Pay dispute with the Metropolitan Police Service

- 6.48 On 18 September 2020, Couzens contacted the Metropolitan Police Service outsourced human resources service provider, Shared Services Connected Ltd (SSCL), to enquire why he had not received his yearly salary increment. In response, a member of staff informed him by email that, having looked into his query, they had discovered that he had been placed on a higher pay point than he should have been when he joined the force and had in fact been overpaid. He was told that corrective action would be taken and that the Payroll Department would be in contact regarding the overpayment.¹³⁵ The Inquiry saw evidence showing that Couzens pushed back against this decision, suggesting that he was going to seek advice.¹³⁶
- 6.49 SSCL and the Metropolitan Police Service Human Resources Team immediately looked into his case in more detail. It emerged that two errors had been made when he joined the force, resulting in him having been placed on the higher pay point.¹³⁷ The Inquiry has seen the evidence supporting this conclusion. According to the College of Policing guidance in force at the time,¹³⁸ service with an organisation that was not regarded as a police force within the definition established in the Police Act 1996 (see paragraph 5.53) would not count for pay purposes. SSCL correctly applied this guidance to Couzens' service with the Civil Nuclear Constabulary and did not count it when calculating his starting salary. However, the first error appears to have occurred when SSCL misinterpreted Couzens' earlier service with Kent Special Constabulary as past service as a *regular officer* with a Home Office police force.¹³⁹ This meant that Couzens, whose starting base salary should have been £27,831 (pay point 1),¹⁴⁰ was incorrectly informed by SSCL, when he wrote to seek confirmation of his salary prior to joining the Metropolitan Police Service, that he would be receiving a starting base salary of £31,245 (pay point 3).¹⁴¹ This initial mistake was then further compounded by what appears to have been a data entry error, with SSCL recording his starting salary as £33,267 (pay point 5).¹⁴²
- 6.50 The Inquiry sought to understand whether the timing of the briefing paper entitled *Transferee Police Officers from Civil Nuclear Constabulary & Ministry of Defence Police*¹⁴³ (discussed in more detail in Chapter 5) could have contributed to the confusion over Couzens' salary.
- 6.51 In fact, according to evidence submitted to the Inquiry, the proposals for recognition – for pay purposes – of years of service by Civil Nuclear Constabulary officers upon transfer to the Metropolitan Police Service were put forward on 28 September 2018,¹⁴⁴ after Couzens had joined the force, and were not accepted by senior leadership until October 2018.¹⁴⁵

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Conclusion 63

Two errors were made by Shared Services Connected Ltd when calculating Wayne Couzens' salary, resulting in him being paid significantly more than he should have been by the Metropolitan Police Service.

- 6.52 **The Inquiry concludes, therefore, that the salary information provided to Couzens in August 2018, when he sought confirmation of his salary, was incorrect, and that this initial mistake was compounded by a further error that placed him on an even higher pay point to which he was not entitled.**
- 6.53 The Metropolitan Police Service pay guidance for officers, available on its intranet, states:
- “It is your responsibility to check that your pay is correct. You should also inform HR Contact Centre (HRCC) if you are receiving the incorrect pay or notice some unusual activity in relation to your pay.”¹⁴⁶
- 6.54 The Inquiry observes, however, that at no point during the two years that Couzens had served before the pay dispute arose did he alert Human Resources to the fact that, since joining the Metropolitan Police Service, he had been receiving a higher salary than the one he had been told he would be getting. It cannot be ascertained whether this was because he had not noticed the discrepancy – since his monthly salary payments were equal to, or more than, what he had been receiving at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary – or because he had noticed but chose to stay silent.
- 6.55 As far as the recovery of overpayments is concerned, the same Metropolitan Police Service pay guidance for officers, available on its intranet, indicates that, as the Metropolitan Police Service is a publicly funded organisation, it “has an obligation to recover all overpayments of salary”.¹⁴⁷ The guidance also explains that it is “legally able to pursue overpayments back 6 years”.¹⁴⁸ Officers are advised to report the anomalies immediately and “not to spend the amount that is being queried to avoid any financial detriment incurred”.¹⁴⁹ The Metropolitan Police Service is “obliged under Government accounting guidelines to recover any overpayments made to officers and staff”.¹⁵⁰
- 6.56 Couzens sought advice and support in relation to the pay dispute in early December 2020.¹⁵¹ The Inquiry was told that Couzens explained¹⁵² that he was “disappointed that his pay progression had not happened in the way that he was expecting and that he wanted some support”.¹⁵³ Couzens further explained that he would not have

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accepted the job with the Metropolitan Police Service if he had known that he would be paid at pay point 1, since he would have been agreeing to a reduction in his overall salary of around £10,000, as well as the addition of a long commute.¹⁵⁴

- 6.57 The Inquiry was also told that, at the time, his adviser concluded that, based on the supporting evidence provided, Couzens “did have a case with reasonable prospects of success” and that he was “quite within his rights to challenge” his employer’s position.¹⁵⁵ It was clear from the supporting evidence produced by Couzens that he had been “promised various things upon his transfer from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary to the Metropolitan Police Service” that had not materialised.¹⁵⁶ This included the fact that he would not be required to complete two years’ probation (a situation similar to the original proposal to the senior leadership team in order to recruit qualified firearms officers) and that he would not start his career in the Metropolitan Police Service at the lowest pay point on the scale. That was why his adviser accepted the case and made an application for legal funding. The Inquiry was told that the application for legal funding was approved and a solicitor appointed, who agreed to investigate further.¹⁵⁷
- 6.58 In January 2021, the Pay and Reward Team at the Metropolitan Police Service wrote to Couzens’ adviser to propose a compromise solution to the pay dispute whereby, going forward, Couzens would be placed on the correct, lower pay point but, in recognition of the administrative errors made when he was onboarded, the historical overpayments, which amounted to almost £15,000, would not be recovered.¹⁵⁸ The Inquiry was told that this solution was communicated to Couzens later that same month,¹⁵⁹ but it has not seen any record of the dispute having been formally resolved.

Conclusion 64

The fact that errors in Wayne Couzens’ pay were not discovered earlier may have been due to a lack of oversight and governance controls.

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- 6.59 **While acknowledging Couzens' obligation to alert the Metropolitan Police Service to the discrepancy in his salary (assuming he had noticed), the Inquiry questions why the errors made by the Metropolitan Police Service in calculating Couzens' pay when he joined the force were not discovered earlier through routine compliance checks. This may be indicative of a lack of oversight and governance controls, which, in this case, resulted in a situation that caused stress to Couzens, who, through no one's fault but his own, was struggling financially and likely anticipating further significant financial pressure in March 2021, when his mortgage payment holiday would end.¹⁶⁰**
- 6.60 Against the backdrop of the apparently unresolved pay dispute, Couzens' financial situation appears to have become even more precarious in the first quarter of 2021. Although he was making his debt management payments as scheduled,¹⁶¹ his Bank 3 account was only in credit for a week or two following pay day;¹⁶² his Bank 1 account had been frozen in December 2020 with a negative balance of over £700;¹⁶³ and, by early March 2021, his Bank 2 credit card had a negative balance of around £3,500¹⁶⁴ and his online credit account had a negative balance of around £1,500.¹⁶⁵ Further, the mortgage payment holiday that had begun in March 2020 was due to end in March 2021, meaning that, going forward, Couzens would once more be responsible for monthly mortgage payments.

Overall financial picture

- 6.61 Couzens ended the six-year period from the 2014/15 tax year to the 2020/21 tax year with a financial deficit, even though, as indicated in paragraph 6.47, expert analysis of available income and expenditure figures did not identify anything to indicate that he would have struggled to meet his monthly financial commitments. Moreover, this deficit remained despite Couzens having, over this period, gained over £50,000 in additional income as a result of a mortgage equity release and profit from the sale of a property, and as a result of the mortgage holiday.
- 6.62 Figure 2 provides a clearer overview of Couzens' financial situation over the six-year period.

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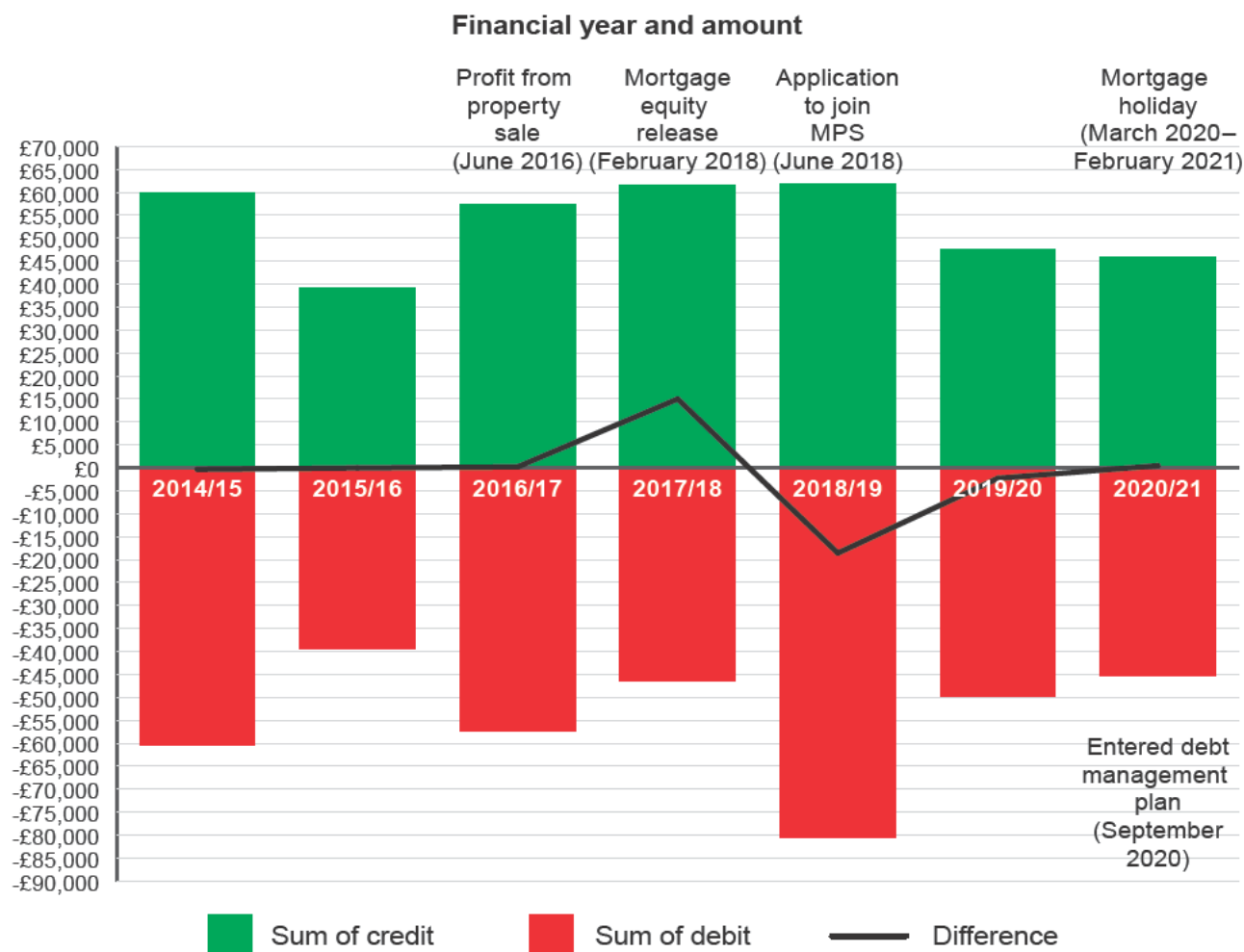
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Figure 2: Overview of turnover for Wayne Couzens' combined accounts, by financial year**Conclusion 65**

Wayne Couzens appears to have been under unprecedented financial pressure at the time of the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard.

- 6.63 The Inquiry concludes from the foregoing analysis that Couzens struggled to manage his finances for most of his adult life. At the time of Sarah Everard's abduction, rape and murder, however, he appears to have been under unprecedented financial pressure, which had begun to accumulate during his time at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary and continued to escalate after he joined the Metropolitan Police Service. The scale of his debts, combined with the prospect of a pay cut and salary recovery action as a result of Metropolitan Police Service administrative errors, as well as the imminent resumption of his mortgage payments, are likely, in the Inquiry's view, to have caused a great deal of strain. It appears that his response to that situation was to engage in further spending, thereby creating a vicious cycle. The Inquiry

also notes the correlation between this period of increasing financial pressure and the escalation of Couzens' sexual offending, which is explored further in Chapter 3.

Conclusion 66

At key moments of scrutiny, Wayne Couzens was able to present with a 'veneer of solvency'. It is a matter of concern that the vetting and aftercare process did not reveal the longevity or extent of his indebtedness.

- 6.64 Despite this apparent lack of control over his finances in the months leading up to his crimes, the Inquiry finds that, at key moments of scrutiny, Couzens was able to present with a 'veneer of solvency'. In 2011, when he underwent vetting for the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, he could demonstrate that he had taken active steps – via the 2007 Individual Voluntary Arrangement – to manage his earlier debts (even though, as explained in Chapter 4, the guidance in force at the time was clear that applicants with active Individual Voluntary Arrangements should be refused clearance). Later, in the run-up to his application to the Metropolitan Police Service in 2018, Couzens manipulated his finances so that his unsecured debts and overdrafts were reduced, resulting in no findings of note from his creditworthiness check and the grant of clearance. It is a matter of concern that the vetting process did not reveal the longevity and extent of his indebtedness.

Conclusion 67

Financial difficulties can create a risk to mental health, which may affect individuals' ability to perform their professional duties. This risk was not explicitly considered during Wayne Couzens' vetting.

- 6.65 The Inquiry heard in witness evidence that, from a vetting perspective, financial difficulties are a risk insofar as they can signal vulnerability, meaning that an individual may be more susceptible to bribery or corruption.¹⁶⁶ While this is certainly true, the Inquiry takes the view that financial difficulties can also create another risk, which was not explicitly considered during the force vetting or National Security Vetting processes for Couzens, namely the risk that they may cause or contribute to stress, which may affect individuals' mental health to the extent that their ability to perform their duties may be compromised.¹⁶⁷ The Inquiry understands that the current vetting decision framework for National Security Vetting does now include a risk factor related to financial stress.¹⁶⁸

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¹⁶⁷ [***] The mental health charity Mind lists worries about money and managing debt as causes of stress, and also recognises that there is a link between stress and mental health.

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Chapter 7: Workplace culture

“I, of do solemnly and sincerely declare and affirm that I will well and truly serve the King in the office of constable, with fairness, integrity, diligence and impartiality, upholding fundamental human rights and according equal respect to all people; and that I will, to the best of my power, cause the peace to be kept and preserved and prevent all offences against people and property; and that while I continue to hold the said office I will to the best of my skill and knowledge discharge all the duties thereof faithfully according to law.”

Declaration made by all police constables at the start of their service¹

Introduction

7.1 In the early stages of this Inquiry, the often repeated theory used to explain the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard by a serving constable of the Metropolitan Police Service was one that cast Wayne Couzens as a ‘bad apple’, an individual who uniquely tarnished the force’s reputation.² Since then, Baroness Casey of Blackstock has taken a wrecking ball to the ‘bad apple’ theory.³ Her view has been reinforced by the imprisonment of a second police officer⁴ from the same unit as Couzens – the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command – for multiple rapes and serious sexual offences against 11 women.⁵

7.2 With time, the ‘bad apple’ theory has been recognised as false. While giving evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee in April 2022 and answering the question, “Is it the culture of the Met that is the problem?”, Sir Stephen House, then Acting Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service, admitted:

“It is not a few bad apples. You cannot simply say that Wayne Couzens and a couple of other people have done something wrong. I would suggest that that has been the spearhead of the problem, but there is a wider issue within the organisation, which we acknowledge and we are dealing with.”⁶

7.3 Equally as concerning as the torrent of revelations regarding allegations and findings of misconduct and criminality committed against women by police officers across England and Wales⁷ is the misconduct and toxic cultures that the Inquiry saw exposed within other male-dominated organisations, including the London Fire Brigade.⁸

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4 Former police constable David Carrick.

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- 7.4 Media analysis commissioned by the Inquiry reveals that police misconduct has become an increasingly high-profile topic in media reporting. Between 2020 and 2021, the number of articles that addressed police misconduct increased by 380 per cent. Across a wider four-year period, from 2019 to 2022, there was a 607 per cent increase in the number of articles on this topic: 2022 had the most articles. There has also been a recorded shift in the type of misconduct being reported by the media. In 2019, high-profile reports of misconduct focused on stories of racism and homophobia within policing, police misuse of force, and criticism for poor investigation standards. By October 2021, the most prominent stories were multiple cases of abuse of position for a sexual purpose. This continued in 2022, with reports of misogyny and concerns regarding institutional culture also being brought to the fore.⁹
- 7.5 One of the most shocking aspects of Couzens' attack was the abuse of his position as a police officer. As was narrated during the sentencing hearing: "He stopped and handcuffed Sarah Everard on the roadside."¹⁰ He used his policing skills and knowledge, as well as police kit and, in all likelihood, his warrant card.¹¹ Yet, like every other police constable, he had, on his appointment, made a solemn declaration in the presence of a justice of the peace (reproduced at the beginning of this chapter), declaring his intention to be a power for good.
- 7.6 Sentencing Couzens, Lord Justice Fulford reminded the court of "the confidence that the public are entitled to have in the police forces of England and Wales". He said: "It is critical that every subject in this country can trust police officers when they encounter them and submit to their authority, which they are entitled to believe is being exercised in good faith."¹²
- 7.7 The policing principles and standards of professional behaviour are detailed later in this chapter. They are relevant to the Inquiry's exploration of missed opportunities, particularly whether Couzens' colleagues had reason to speak up about his behaviour and, if so, whether they did. To answer these questions, the Inquiry examined the culture of each workplace with which Couzens was associated, to assess what was considered an acceptable standard of behaviour and determine attitudes towards challenging inappropriate behaviour.
- 7.8 Public service through the office of police constable should be regarded as a privilege – a position that is emphasised by the new College of Policing ethical policing principles, published in January 2024. The new principles state: "Everyone in policing holds a privileged position in society that depends on the consent of the public. Our mission, to help keep the public safe, relies on us having public acceptance and cooperation."¹³ Society consents to some of its members exercising police powers and trusts those police officers to display the highest standards of professional behaviour. In return, a police officer's right to a private life is fettered, to the extent that they are under a duty to be guided by the Code of Ethics "at all times – whether at work or away from work, online or offline".¹⁴ They are expected to

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demonstrate high standards, even when in conversation with similarly minded colleagues over secure channels, such as a private WhatsApp group.¹⁵ This topic is addressed later in this chapter (see paragraphs 7.130 to 7.156).

- 7.9 Couzens spent his working life (both paid and voluntary roles) in environments that were overwhelmingly dominated by men, where women were very much in a minority. Such is true of the motor repair industry, the Armed Forces and the police service. This Inquiry explored the potential influence that workplace culture had on Couzens by attempting to answer the following questions: Was he [Couzens] the product of his working environment? Was his offending invigorated or enabled in any way by the culture at work? Baroness Casey suggested the answer to the second question might be ‘yes’. Describing the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command, she said:

“The culture in PaDP [the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command] is one where officers feel unhappy, unloved and bored, and where they are left isolated and unwatched by those above them. It is a dark corner of the Met where poor behaviours can easily flourish and are both ‘harder to spot and harder to stop’.”¹⁶

Conclusion 68

Police officers’ perceptions of the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command varied and were informed by their personal experience.

- 7.10 While the Inquiry heard evidence from some police officers confirming the dysfunctional environment portrayed by Baroness Casey, it was also presented with a mixture of alternative accounts, suggesting other officers’ more nuanced experience and the absence of a single culture. **Overall, the Inquiry concluded that, within the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command, individual police officers’ perceptions varied according to their personal experience and the attitudes of colleagues with whom they came into contact.** How the Inquiry reached this conclusion, and the evidence on which it is based, is detailed later in this chapter (see paragraphs 7.90 to 7.129).
- 7.11 This chapter analyses the information provided to the Inquiry by those with experience of the specific workplaces with which Couzens was connected. They include current and former officers, who gave evidence about the culture, quality of supervision and welfare support in the various workplaces. The Inquiry obtained expert evidence to better understand the relevant issues, including the potential impact on individuals of the prevailing culture. The subject of police culture across England and Wales will be explored in more detail in Part 2 of this Inquiry.

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Early working life

7.12 As set out in Chapter 1, Couzens' working life started at his family's garage, where he worked as a panel beater. The workforce was almost entirely male.¹⁷ A witness, who was familiar with the garage in the mid-1990s, spoke about the prevailing culture. He recalled it being of its time, with "Page 3 calendars pinned to the wall". In his view, however, "there was nothing I would have classed as pornographic [...]. It was not uncommon for a group of male mechanics to display Page 3 pictures or calendars".¹⁸

7.13 This evidence corroborates what the Inquiry understands to be Couzens' own position on the availability of pornography in the garage.¹⁹ While not uncommon at that time, and not considered pornographic by the witness referred to in paragraph 7.12, the Inquiry heard from forensic clinical psychologist Dr Adrian West about the potential impact of such material. He said:

"The behavioural science literature informs us that exposure to pornography at a young age not only introduces children to sexual behaviour, but it also depicts women (falsely) as subordinate and eager to submit to the sexual needs of (hyper male) men. Such exposure can also influence the development of distorted attitudes and beliefs that endorse sexual aggression against women."²⁰

7.14 Although Couzens sometimes left the garage to work in other sectors, including, the Inquiry was told, the construction sector (another male-dominated industry) (see paragraph 1.10), he tended to return to the garage,²¹ where, the Inquiry presumes, he could be certain of steady work and regular remuneration.

Armed Forces

7.15 In 2002, Couzens joined the Territorial Army as a member of a regiment based in Kent (see also paragraphs 1.20 to 1.26).

7.16 Couzens attended exercises, learned fieldcraft skills and "how to be comfortable operating outdoors, practising violence and using ammunitions".²² A witness described how:

"On occasion we were also used as part of the infantry team, carrying out platoon attacks. This involved simulations of fixing the enemy and killing them through rifle fire, with a bayonet charge at the end."²³

7.17 The Inquiry heard:

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“[T]he infantry at the time had a male-only policy. At some locations there were females, but they carried out specialist jobs, such as medics, clerks or cooks [...] My platoon was exclusively made up of infantry soldiers and, at our location, there were no women at all.”²⁴

Organisational culture

- 7.18 The Inquiry was told that the culture of the Territorial Army at the time when Couzens was a reservist was “macho”,²⁵ with an emphasis on physical activity rather than feelings or emotions. The Inquiry was told that it was not uncommon for violence to occur outside formal exercises, “with two people who had a problem going outside and throwing a few punches at each other”.²⁶ The overriding mission of the military at that time was to “close with and kill the enemy in any and all environments”.²⁷
- 7.19 Dr Eduardo A. Vasquez, Senior Lecturer in Forensic Psychology at the University of Kent, who provided expert evidence to the Inquiry, referred to the potential impact on Couzens of dehumanisation. He told the Inquiry that “the tendency to sexually objectify women may have dehumanised them, leading to decreased empathy towards them, thereby increasing the risk of perpetrating violence”.²⁸
- 7.20 A witness reflected on the values and standards of the Territorial Army at the time when Couzens was a reservist. He said:
- “[T]hese values and standards focused very much on being honest and loyal, having courage and looking out for your friends. There was nothing about sexual misconduct [...] and no advice given about inappropriate relationships, misogyny, overt sexual behaviour or homophobic language; all of this was commonplace at the time.”²⁹
- 7.21 The Inquiry heard from a female witness who had been involved in Territorial Army recruitment. Her recollection of its culture was similar to the previous witness’s (see paragraph 7.20). She described an environment that was “very male, very masculine and macho”, “a boys’ club”.³⁰ She recalled an incentive programme that rewarded with a bonus both the reservist and any new recruit they introduced. She explained: “This contributed to a laddish-style culture, with young men introducing their friends, or joining up together after attending local recruitment drives in the local high street.”³¹
- 7.22 The same female witness said that local Army Reserve centres were “not an attractive work environment for a woman”. She was also of the opinion that units requiring specialist personnel, such as medics, had “a different gender balance and these were made up of professional people, so had a completely different feel in

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terms of culture”.³² “The infantry units”, such as the one to which Couzens belonged, “were more problematic and culturally clung onto a lot of the military traditions in quite a negative, masculine way.”³³

- 7.23 The Inquiry heard that the mobilisation of reservists to serve in Iraq and Afghanistan had brought about a significant change in culture after 2003. This led to a more professional approach:

“[...] particularly once those soldiers [...] knew what it meant to lose members of their units in those conflicts. It [the Territorial Army] became a very different organisation. More support was forthcoming and there was more infrastructure around these units than there had been previously, with the units more linked and similar to each other.”³⁴

- 7.24 Despite such changes in culture, the Inquiry heard from a witness who continued to regularly encounter sexual harassment, owing to what she described as “a culture of misogyny”.³⁵ At alcohol-fuelled dinners with military personnel, she experienced inappropriate comments about her physical appearance, as well as non-consensual touching under and over her clothing. She described how, on one occasion, when alone with a senior officer, he had spread his legs and offered to undo his trousers, implying that she should take part in sexual activity with him.³⁶ The witness told the Inquiry that she eventually learned to deal with such conduct, by firmly and physically rejecting advances³⁷ or confirming in advance of events that she would not be seated next to certain individuals.³⁸

- 7.25 The female witness reflected on the reasons why, in her view, such behaviour remains prevalent in the military today. She suggested that the fact that the majority of the workforce is male is a strong contributory factor, leading to a more “male-dominated” culture.³⁹ In her view, the balance of leadership between men and women needs to be more equal, with an increased proportion of women in leadership roles.⁴⁰ This will take time to achieve and require more women at junior entry levels to populate the more senior roles. She believes that there needs to be:

“[...] a lot of modernisation in terms of making women feel welcome. There are centuries-old traditions in the service and this is used as [a] reason for avoiding changes in practices which are precious to men, but which may not be particularly welcomed by women. An example is the military dinner culture, with the heavy drinking which accompanies it. Women go along with it because it is easier to be part of the club than the alternative.”⁴¹

- 7.26 Thinking about the pace of change, the witness reflected:

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“[W]hile things have changed, I don’t know how much. I do not know, if I walked into a Territorial Army Centre [...] now, how different it would really be, particularly into an infantry unit. There is still the mahogany furniture environment and 1950s architecture. Has it really changed? I’m not that convinced, sadly.”⁴²

- 7.27 The Inquiry heard of two examples of Couzens behaving inappropriately during his time in the Territorial Army. The allegations related to him sharing extreme pornography with colleagues⁴³ and intimidating a young woman in an attempt to obtain her contact details.⁴⁴ These incidents are described in more detail in Chapter 3.

Police forces

- 7.28 As described in Chapter 1, Couzens started his career as a police officer in 2006, serving as a volunteer with Kent Special Constabulary.⁴⁵ In 2011, he joined the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, qualifying as an authorised firearms officer.⁴⁶ In 2018, he transferred to the Metropolitan Police Service,⁴⁷ where he remained until his arrest in connection with the disappearance of Sarah Everard on 9 March 2021. In the days leading up to his arrest, Couzens worked his final shifts as an armed officer in the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command.⁴⁸

Code of Ethics⁴⁹

- 7.29 The standards of behaviour expected of police officers are extremely high in order to maintain the trust and confidence of the communities they serve. All police officers, regardless of whether they are a member of the Special Constabulary or of a regular police service, are expected to abide by the nine policing principles set out in the Code of Ethics 2014⁵⁰ (the Code). These principles are based on the Seven Principles of Public Life (known as the ‘Nolan Principles’) applicable to all public office-holders.⁵¹ Dame Shirley Pearce, the then Chair of the College of Policing, explained in her foreword to the Code: “The principles must be more than words on a page and must become embedded in the way police professionals think and behave.”⁵²
- 7.30 The Code does not only apply to police officers. On the contrary, it is expected that “every person working in policing”⁵³ will adopt the Code, including all those “on a permanent, temporary, full-time, part-time, casual, consultancy, contractual

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49 Unless otherwise specified, references to the Code of Ethics in this chapter and elsewhere in this Report are to the 2014 version, which was in place for most of Couzens’ policing career. At the time of writing this Report, the 2014 Code of Ethics was in the process of being replaced with the 2024 Code of Ethics, which consists of two parts: the ethical policing principles and guidance for ethical and professional behaviour in policing.

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or voluntary basis”.⁵⁴ Furthermore, as already set out in this Report, and importantly, the Code applies not only when individuals are on duty, but “at all times – whether at work or away from work, online or offline”.⁵⁵

Policing principles⁵⁶

Accountability

You are answerable for your decisions, actions and omissions.

Fairness

You treat people fairly.

Honesty

You are truthful and trustworthy.

Integrity

You always do the right thing.

Leadership

You lead by good example.

Objectivity

You make choices on evidence and your best professional judgement.

Openness

You are open and transparent in your actions and decisions.

Respect

You treat everyone with respect.

Selflessness

You act in the public interest.

- 7.31 According to the National Decision Model (see Figure 1 in Chapter 4), published by the College of Policing, the policing principles set out in the Code include two principles that are not part of the Nolan Principles. These are ‘fairness’ and ‘respect’. The Code explains that “research has shown these to be crucial to maintaining and enhancing public confidence in policing”.⁵⁷
- 7.32 In addition to the policing principles, the Code also sets out ten standards of professional behaviour that “reflect the expectations that the College of Policing

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and the public have of the behaviour of those working in policing”.⁵⁸ The standards are based on the wording used in The Police (Conduct) Regulations 2020, which are applied in misconduct proceedings against police officers and police staff.⁵⁹

Standards of professional behaviour⁶⁰

1. Honesty and integrity

I will be honest and act with integrity at all times, and will not compromise or abuse my position.

2. Authority, respect and courtesy

I will act with self-control and tolerance, treating members of the public and colleagues with respect and courtesy.

I will use my powers and authority lawfully and proportionately, and will respect the rights of all individuals.

3. Equality and diversity

I will act with fairness and impartiality. I will not discriminate unlawfully or unfairly.

4. Use of force

I will only use force as part of my role and responsibilities, and only to the extent that it is necessary, proportionate and reasonable in all the circumstances.

5. Orders and instructions

I will, as a police officer, give and carry out lawful orders only, and will abide by police regulations. I will give reasonable instructions only, and will follow all reasonable instructions.

6. Duties and responsibilities

I will be diligent in the exercise of my duties and responsibilities.

7. Confidentiality

I will treat information with respect, and access or disclose it only in the proper course of my duties.

8. Fitness for work

I will ensure, when on duty or at work, that I am fit to carry out my responsibilities.

9. Conduct

I will behave in a manner, whether on or off duty, which does not bring discredit on the police service or undermine public confidence in policing.

10. Challenging and reporting improper behaviour

I will report, challenge or take action against the conduct of colleagues which has fallen below the standards of professional behaviour.

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- 7.33 Not all breaches of the Code are treated with the same level of seriousness. Nor will they attract the same penalty. Breaches that are relatively minor may require local management action, for example by a line manager. More serious breaches may amount to gross misconduct and justify formal assessment and investigation, which can result in an officer or staff member's dismissal without notice.⁶¹ As well as there being a duty to comply with the Code, the onus is on "[a]ll officers, staff and, particularly, supervisors and managers [...] to act where a concern is raised about any behaviour, level of performance or conduct which may amount to a breach of the Code".⁶²
- 7.34 All officers receive training on the Code. Couzens was no exception.⁶³
- 7.35 As indicated in paragraph 7.8, the Inquiry notes that new College of Policing ethical policing principles were published in January 2024, as part of a wider Code of Ethics launch. The new principles are designed "to help people in policing do the right things, in the right way, for the right reasons".⁶⁴

Kent Special Constabulary

- 7.36 As described in Chapter 1, while Couzens was still volunteering with the Territorial Army, he applied for another voluntary role, as a special constable with Kent Police. Despite a previous rejection by Kent Police when he applied to be a full-time regular police officer, Couzens' application to join Kent Special Constabulary was successful and he joined in 2006.⁶⁵ As a special constable, Couzens wore the same uniform, carried the same kit and enjoyed the same powers, including the power of arrest, as a regular police officer.⁶⁶ In general, the special constables were on duty at weekends and deployed to a range of incidents involving "crowd management" and alcohol-related public disorder, vehicle stops and domestic abuse allegations.⁶⁷

Organisational culture

- 7.37 The Inquiry heard evidence about working as a special constable in Kent Special Constabulary in the early 2000s. Most special constables were young when they joined and had positive experiences. A typical assessment was: "I enjoyed being a special constable. I was quite young and it was quite exciting to get involved in that sort of thing."⁶⁸ The Inquiry also heard that those who volunteered at a more senior grade were equally enthusiastic. "Specials [special constables] in Kent had an active policing role alongside the regular force, which I loved."⁶⁹
- 7.38 The Inquiry formed the impression that the volunteer special constables were mainly young people who felt that they were making a positive difference and, in many cases, enjoyed working and socialising together as a group. A female former special constable recalled:

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“We had quite a nice little team. I remember that we all used to get a minibus and all go out on shift together; then have the same breaks and have dinner together. Everyone was quite friendly and helpful to the new joiners.”⁷⁰

7.39 Another female witness described her satisfaction at resolving situations calmly rather than making arrests.⁷¹ A third, referring to her colleagues in Kent Special Constabulary, told the Inquiry: “Nobody was ever rude to me or derogatory. It was nice working with them and some were very supportive.”⁷²

7.40 Other witnesses said:

- “You would primarily be out in the evenings and at weekends, always doing something different, meeting people you would never meet in the normal walks of life and undertaking tasks that you would never normally do. No money could ever buy that experience.”⁷³
- “Everyone got on really quite well and looked out for each other.”⁷⁴
- “The prevailing culture [...] was to do a good job, making sure that we got good results and zero criticism.”⁷⁵

7.41 While those who volunteered with Kent Special Constabulary seemed confident that the special constables made a positive contribution to local policing, others, with experience of the regular police service, questioned the volunteer officers’ level of training, knowledge and suitability for independent patrolling. A serving officer with Kent Police said:

“The administrative side of the Specials was not that great. It was possible to miss weeks of training and no one would pick up on it or challenge you. Looking back now, it seems strange as we had warrant cards so I would have expected more checks to be completed and a higher degree of supervision.”⁷⁶

7.42 A police officer who worked closely with Kent Special Constabulary expressed their concerns in the following terms:

“I preferred special officers to go on patrol with a regular officer as opposed to other special officers. I disliked having special officers going out as a team, as I saw this as ‘the blind leading the blind’ [...] One of my pet hates was special officers going out on patrol together on a Friday or Saturday night in a minibus, although this would depend on which officers were on patrol.”⁷⁷

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- 7.43 Nevertheless, the same officer recognised that “the vast majority of recruits joined with a view to becoming a regular officer. This therefore put pressure on them and they were keen to impress.”⁷⁸ A witness confirmed this. They said: “The Specials was certainly seen as a stepping stone to the regular force.”⁷⁹
- 7.44 The Inquiry also heard some criticism of the promotion process within Kent Special Constabulary. Members of the Special Constabulary, including Couzens, who was promoted to section officer⁸⁰ – the Special Constabulary’s equivalent of sergeant⁸¹ – could achieve a higher grade without passing exams or demonstrating the skills or knowledge required of their counterparts in Kent Police. (This situation was normal across policing at the time.) The Inquiry was told:
- “I do not wish to be derogatory but there is a risk that regular officers, for example a PC, may presume that inspectors in the Specials are more knowledgeable than they actually are and might follow what they say, even if it is incorrect.”⁸²
- 7.45 The Inquiry sought information from witnesses about the gender balance among special constables. Witnesses’ estimates varied between “quite equal”,⁸³ “probably equal”⁸⁴ and “predominantly male”.⁸⁵ The Inquiry was told: “On reflection, there were quite a few females in the group and I do not remember it being very male dominated.”⁸⁶ This was regarded as “quite surprising for the time”.⁸⁷ Another witness said: “[T]here was a fairly even mix of males and females in my intake [...] At the time, a focus on diversity was becoming increasingly important and there was diversity within the group.”⁸⁸
- 7.46 In general, the Inquiry heard little evidence of an unhealthy culture within Kent Special Constabulary at the time when Couzens was a member. Numbers of male and female special officers were, by all accounts, reasonably balanced. Although male officers were in the majority, most of those who spoke to the Inquiry did not appear to perceive the gender balance negatively.
- 7.47 On the whole, the Inquiry heard little evidence of a ‘macho’ or ‘laddish’ culture in Kent Special Constabulary. A regular officer, who worked closely with special constables, said:
- “In my experience, they were all willing to learn and met the expectation that people would be treated respectfully and that there would be full inclusivity. As far as I am aware this was always the case and no one raised any concerns with me to the contrary.”⁸⁹

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- 7.48 At least two witnesses confirmed explicitly to the Inquiry that “laddishness”⁹⁰ was not something they had encountered. One of these witnesses observed that they felt that the Special Constabulary had “an embracing culture”.⁹¹ This same witness told the Inquiry: “In terms of the culture now, everyone is respectful to others. As the number of police officers has decreased, everyone needs to work as a team. Kent Police has a family feel to it.”⁹²
- 7.49 Most women who spoke to the Inquiry shared a positive attitude about their experience as special constables. There was some dissent, however, with evidence of a female witness being made to feel uncomfortable by her male colleagues’ sexual jokes.⁹³ There were also incidents of sexual harassment that went unreported⁹⁴ and, it would appear, were not noticed by those who were not affected. Couzens was one example of such an alleged offender, although the alleged incidents occurred when off duty.⁹⁵ The difficulties for victims of challenging inappropriate behaviour are dealt with later in this chapter.
- 7.50 As referred to in Chapter 1, colleagues’ perceptions of Couzens were generally positive. The Inquiry received no evidence of him behaving improperly when he was on duty as a special constable or of him using derogatory or misogynistic language. The Inquiry saw evidence that suggests these generally positive perceptions were shared by female colleagues. One said: “I feel a bit sick admitting it, but he was a genuinely lovely guy.”⁹⁶ Another said: “[H]e was no different to anyone else. He got on with the job and there was nothing out of the ordinary about him. He never caused me any issues and I never had any reason to think badly of him.”⁹⁷ Others described him as “a phenomenal officer, [...] very level headed, calm, taking everything in his stride and being eager to learn [...] [a] valued member of the team”,⁹⁸ and said that he was “generally proficient in what he was doing as a Special Constable, and he was able to take control of situations; in my opinion that was his military side coming through.”⁹⁹ The Inquiry heard that Couzens “performed well” and was “quite authoritative”.¹⁰⁰

Conclusion 69

By the time Wayne Couzens resigned from Kent Special Constabulary, he already had a history of abusive and potentially criminal sexual activity against women.

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- 7.51 Despite the favourable light in which Couzens was generally perceived by witnesses from Kent Special Constabulary, and the absence of any suggestion that he behaved badly towards women while on duty, the Inquiry concludes and is satisfied that, by the time Couzens resigned from Kent Special Constabulary, he already had a history of abusive and potentially criminal sexual activity, as detailed in Chapter 3 of this Report. These behaviours ranged from intimidation, sexual touching, sharing unsolicited photographs of his penis and showing extreme pornography, to an alleged very serious sexual assault against a child barely into her teens. All behaviours involved either the exploitation of vulnerable female victims or, in the case of the pornography, testing colleagues' boundaries. The fact that the Inquiry heard no evidence of Couzens behaving improperly on duty as a special constable leads to the conclusion that he had the ability to control and compartmentalise his behaviour, deliberately concealing his sexual tendencies when he considered it appropriate to do so.

Civil Nuclear Constabulary

- 7.52 As described in Chapter 1, Couzens took up his employment with the Civil Nuclear Constabulary in March 2011.¹⁰¹ Further details of his training and deployment as an authorised firearms officer can be found in Chapter 5.

Organisational culture

- 7.53 In contrast to Kent Police, in the Civil Nuclear Constabulary day-to-day interaction with the public is limited.¹⁰² In the Constabulary, officers' shifts are not spent responding to crimes in the community, assisting individuals suffering a mental health crisis or investigating missing persons. One officer identified a strong connection between the Civil Nuclear Constabulary and the military. He suggested links, including being comfortable around firearms and the "desire for a uniformed lifestyle, with similar culture and disciplines, which are different to mainstream policing".¹⁰³
- 7.54 As Simon Chesterman, Chief Constable of the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, explained to the Inquiry:
- "We have a large number of armed officers who spend much of their time behind the wire on licensed nuclear sites where the measure of our success is the absence of armed incidents. The often mundane nature of the role presents a risk in terms of our culture, and we take this very seriously."¹⁰⁴
- 7.55 The Inquiry heard of the potential for a negative culture within the Constabulary. Explaining this, a witness said that there is "no overall CNC [Civil Nuclear Constabulary] culture".¹⁰⁵ At the Sellafield site, for example, officers are grouped into four sections:

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“[...] and each has its own cultural issues. There are over 100 officers in each section and invariably, with 100 people in a group, the group can become a breeding ground for poor behaviour. This is how radicalisation happens in any form; these issues can germinate and grow and it is the senior officer’s responsibility to address this.”¹⁰⁶

7.56 While the identification of Couzens as Sarah Everard’s killer sent considerable shockwaves throughout the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, the publication of discriminatory and offensive WhatsApp chat between Couzens and fellow former Constabulary officers only increased the level of embarrassment and discomfort (the WhatsApp issue is dealt with separately in paragraphs 7.130 to 7.156). Officers were having to revisit their previously held views of the Constabulary. A supervisor admitted to the Inquiry that, in relation to misogyny and sexism, he had “always believed, possibly naively in hindsight, that the Civil Nuclear Constabulary was a healthy organisation”.¹⁰⁷

7.57 The Civil Nuclear Constabulary appeared keen to improve its image and for the Inquiry to know what was happening to facilitate this. An officer with supervisory responsibility told the Inquiry:

“A huge amount is being done from a force perspective and this is from the top down, with the Chief Constable driving the agenda on this quite publicly. We are reinforcing the Code of Ethics at every given opportunity and have relaunched it within the Constabulary.”¹⁰⁸

7.58 Addressing the WhatsApp case, the same officer said: “The Chief Constable also authors regular blogs about being careful in relation to conversations on WhatsApp; if it is not something you would say to the Chief Constable then don’t say it.”¹⁰⁹

7.59 The proportion of women to men was far lower in the Civil Nuclear Constabulary compared with Kent Special Constabulary. Several witnesses were keen to inform the Inquiry that the Civil Nuclear Constabulary has the highest percentage of female authorised firearms officers within any police force in England and Wales, and perhaps as many as ten per cent.¹¹⁰ With female officers in the minority, there were extremely limited opportunities for the Inquiry to gain a female perspective of working as an authorised firearms officer in the Civil Nuclear Constabulary. However, the Inquiry did see evidence that suggested the female officer experience was “positive” and “the best job”, dispelling any perception of the Constabulary being an “old boys’ club”.¹¹¹

7.60 Chapter 1 sets out the evidence that the Inquiry received about Couzens’ time with the Civil Nuclear Constabulary. Overall, the Inquiry found that he presented as a reliable police officer and team player. The overwhelming response of colleagues to Couzens’ crimes was one of intense shock, which an officer expressed as follows:

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“I think you go through the several stages of grief, first this total shock factor that he could do it, then disgust, and then the anger. This is a guy who was working closely with us, he was working alongside us wearing the same uniform. There’s the disgust that he could even do something like that and there was then survivor’s guilt; if I had seen anything, could I have done something for Sarah Everard, but there was literally nothing to raise a concern about Wayne.”¹¹²

- 7.61 The Terms of Reference for this Inquiry required an overall timeline of Couzens’ career and relevant incidents, including allegations of criminal behaviour and/or misconduct, to be established. To ascertain the extent to which any issues relating to his behaviour – particularly in relation to women – were known and raised by colleagues (including professional standards and senior leaders), it was necessary to examine the culture of each workplace in which Couzens was employed, or from which he operated, to identify any missed opportunities and/or red flags.

Conclusion 70

There is insufficient evidence to draw broad conclusions about the culture at the Civil Nuclear Constabulary when Wayne Couzens worked there. Couzens’ contributions to the WhatsApp group with other former Civil Nuclear Constabulary officers provided an indication of an unhealthy culture between those officers, in which they felt comfortable sharing obscene, derogatory and discriminatory comments of an extreme nature.

- 7.62 **Having considered the available evidence, the Inquiry decided that it could not reach an overall conclusion about the culture within the Civil Nuclear Constabulary at the time when Couzens was a serving officer. The Inquiry was also very conscious that the Constabulary’s image had been tarnished as a result of Couzens’ criminality and the publication of the toxic WhatsApp chat in which he engaged with other former Civil Nuclear Constabulary officers. Although the chat only started after the officers had left the Constabulary, it strongly suggests an unhealthy culture between those officers, in which they felt comfortable sharing obscene, derogatory and discriminatory comments of an extreme nature. To counter this, the Constabulary was keen to highlight the positive steps it is taking to redress the negative publicity it has received.**
- 7.63 As discussed in Chapter 3, in which the Inquiry examines Couzens’ sexual activity and offending, the Inquiry was provided with evidence in support of an allegation that he exposed his erect penis in June 2015, in Dover, while driving a car of which he was then the registered keeper. This incident is alleged to have happened when he was a serving officer in the Civil Nuclear Constabulary.¹¹³ Prior to that, on one occasion in 2013, he was reported missing from his home in the early hours of the morning.¹¹⁴ As also referred to in Chapter 3, the Inquiry considers his actions on that occasion were unusual and bore some similarity to the time when he abducted Sarah Everard. Not only did he disappear from his home for several hours for no

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obvious reason, but the vehicle he was driving was not his own.¹¹⁵ **The existence of the 2015 indecent exposure allegation and the 2013 missing person incident suggest to the Inquiry that Couzens successfully hid an established tendency towards sexual wrongdoing and/or dishonesty from his colleagues in the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, just as he had in Kent Special Constabulary.**

Metropolitan Police Service

7.64 As detailed in Chapter 1, Couzens transferred from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary to the Metropolitan Police Service in 2018¹¹⁶ and was initially based at the Bromley Basic Command Unit.¹¹⁷ From there, he transferred to the Emergency Response Team B in Bromley¹¹⁸ in February 2019.¹¹⁹ One year later, having passed the relevant firearms and other training, he joined the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command as an authorised firearms officer.¹²⁰

7.65 It was while Couzens was a serving police officer in the Metropolitan Police Service that he committed the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard, as well as the three indecent exposure offences for which he has been convicted and sentenced. He pleaded not guilty to three further allegations of indecent exposure (one pre-dating his service in the Metropolitan Police Service) and was also interviewed, but not charged, for another indecent exposure allegation. The Inquiry's Terms of Reference required it to examine the extent to which issues relating to Couzens' behaviour, particularly in relation to women, were known and raised by colleagues. This chapter therefore addresses the culture of the units in which he served and whether there were any barriers to reporting inappropriate behaviour. During the course of its work, the Inquiry witnessed the publication of numerous reports and reviews examining culture within the Metropolitan Police Service. These include Operation Hotton,¹²¹ the independent review by Baroness Casey,¹²² Operation Leven¹²³ and Operation Argens.¹²⁴

7.66 Operation Hotton comprised nine linked investigations by the Independent Office for Police Conduct involving serving police officers, mainly of the rank of police constable, and predominantly based at Charing Cross Police Station in London. This identified "multiple concerning behavioural themes about the attitudes and behaviour of police officers". These themes included:

- “• bullying and aggressive behaviour
- 'banter' used to excuse oppressive and offensive behaviours
- discrimination
- toxic masculinity, misogyny and sexual harassment
- challenging and reporting improper conduct.”¹²⁵

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7.67 Operation Hotton also found:

“several structural issues relating to working practices that helped enable the troubling behaviour to go unchecked:

- nature of work
- shift patterns
- isolation
- supervision
- acting up/unofficial promotions”.¹²⁶

7.68 Furthermore, there was “[a]n underlying culture [that] allowed conduct issues to permeate and behavioural problems [to go] unchallenged”.¹²⁷ The Independent Office for Police Conduct said of its findings:

“Policing in the United Kingdom is by consent, which means the trust and confidence that the public has in the police service is critical. The behaviours we uncovered risked causing serious damage to that relationship.”¹²⁸

7.69 In February 2022, the then Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service, Dame Cressida Dick, asked Baroness Casey to undertake a review into the standards of behaviour and internal culture of the police service. Baroness Casey’s interim findings¹²⁹ focused on how the Metropolitan Police Service handles misconduct, and exposed a catalogue of areas requiring improvement. They included taking too long to resolve misconduct cases; a lack of confidence in the misconduct process among officers and staff; the prevalence of ‘no case to answer’ outcomes in response to allegations relating to racism, sexual misconduct and other discriminatory behaviour; and a situation where officers with repeated allegations against them escape being disciplined.¹³⁰

7.70 In her final report, Baroness Casey turned the spotlight on police culture. Discussing the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command, where Couzens was a serving officer at the time he murdered Sarah Everard, she found “low morale” and “overtime dependency” in an environment where “‘banter’ and a bullying culture were not challenged”.¹³¹ Referring specifically to Couzens and David Carrick, Baroness Casey remarked:

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“The Review is also concerned that, despite well-founded public outrage and horror at the crimes of two serving officers [from the Command] against women, there has not been to date a thorough enough investigation to determine if there is an underlying management or conduct problem, particularly with misogyny, in [the Command].”¹³²

- 7.71 The Metropolitan Police Service commissioned an internal review, named Operation Leven,¹³³ to look into culture, standards and supervision at the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command (see also paragraphs 5.160 to 5.162). This, too, revealed dysfunction in the form of “a command where unhealthy cultures can thrive”.¹³⁴ Recommendations for improving the culture included reducing the dependence on overtime, improving supervision levels and improving gender representation.¹³⁵
- 7.72 Meanwhile, another Independent Office for Police Conduct investigation, Operation Argens,¹³⁶ resulted in the prosecution of three police officers for improper use of a public communications network, contrary to Section 127(1) of the Communications Act 2003. This case – which resulted in the conviction and imposition of prison terms for two officers (although at the time of writing an appeal is pending),¹³⁷ with the third found not guilty – involved the sharing of offensive and derogatory comments via a WhatsApp group that included Couzens, whose contributions were deeply offensive and obscene to victims of domestic abuse and other vulnerable members of the public. The same Independent Office for Police Conduct investigation also resulted in six police officers, including the three who were the subject of the criminal prosecution, facing police misconduct proceedings.¹³⁸ All were either dismissed from the police service or would have been had they not already resigned. This case is described in more detail in paragraphs 7.130 to 7.156.
- 7.73 The Inquiry acknowledges the work undertaken by these various reviews and investigations, and their findings and outcomes. Nevertheless, it recognises that, due to the size of the Metropolitan Police Service and the many different departments that make up this vast organisation, one person’s experience of its culture can be very different from another’s. The Inquiry, therefore, carried out its own examination and gathered evidence about the culture of the Metropolitan Police Service teams in which Couzens worked. Its findings are described in the following paragraphs.

Organisational culture – Bromley postings

- 7.74 As described in Chapter 1, Couzens applied to transfer to the Metropolitan Police Service in May 2018. In September of that year, he was posted to the Bromley Basic Command Unit. By late February 2019, Couzens had completed the requisite training and was thereafter deployed to the Emergency Response Team B in Bromley. The Inquiry examined the prevailing culture of the Team.

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- 7.75 In contrast to the role of the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, the role of the Emergency Response Team is to respond to emergency calls from the public. This involves officers having significant contact with members of the local community, sometimes in highly charged and traumatic circumstances. An officer summed up what it was like to be part of a response team: “[It was] exciting [...] the work was fast paced, with a variety of tasks, with good days and bad days and more general excitement and public interface.”¹³⁹
- 7.76 Several officers commented on there being a team mentality in the Bromley Emergency Response Team. As well as working together, officers enjoyed spending time together outside work. The Inquiry heard from an officer that “the social side of the team at Bromley was one of the best things about it”.¹⁴⁰ This included “team drinks or team away days”.¹⁴¹
- 7.77 A male officer acknowledged the existence of a “blue” and “dark” sense of humour, which he explained was a coping mechanism.¹⁴² This was confirmed by a female officer posted to the Emergency Response Team, who said that dark humour was used “to help us deal with the stress of the job and the trauma that we can witness as police officers”.¹⁴³
- 7.78 References to ‘dark humour’ rang potential alarm bells for the Inquiry. In the view of the Independent Office for Police Conduct, this type of humour or ‘banter’, as it is commonly known, is “too often” used to “excuse unacceptable behaviour”,¹⁴⁴ for instance against women and other minority groups within the police service (an example of such behaviour, involving WhatsApp, is discussed in paragraphs 7.130 to 7.156). It is also difficult to challenge, as Baroness Casey identified, noting: “Women’s attempts to report inappropriate, or even criminal, behaviour were seen as ‘rocking the boat’ and that the women themselves were being a ‘troublemaker’ as opposed to being dealt with as examples of systemic misogyny.”¹⁴⁵
- 7.79 The Inquiry heard that not all the humour or ‘banter’ was harmless. The make-up of the Emergency Response Team was “quite male-dominated”¹⁴⁶ and the “school-like”¹⁴⁷ ‘banter’ “could make a female feel uncomfortable”.¹⁴⁸ A witness told the Inquiry: “I am quite thick-skinned, so do not let things upset me as much as perhaps they should.”¹⁴⁹ Also, “most of the time people do not mean things in the way it comes out”.¹⁵⁰ Some female officers would “join in” with the ‘banter’, “in order to feel more accepted and included”.¹⁵¹

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- 7.80 Witnesses' experiences of male officers behaving badly towards female officers varied. The Inquiry heard from an officer who had "not experienced this type of behaviour nor anything that has made me feel uncomfortable".¹⁵² With reference to misogyny at work, another officer¹⁵³ commented: "[A]lthough I have not personally been affected, I am aware of other women who have been and so I do believe that it exists." It was suggested that a gender imbalance, whereby female officers were outnumbered by male officers, was an issue within the Emergency Response Team.¹⁵⁴
- 7.81 Baroness Casey, too, emphasised the disproportionate number of male police officers compared with female police officers in the Metropolitan Police Service. She found:
- "In December 2022, female officers comprised 31% of Met officers compared with 51.5% of the population. While falling short of female representation in the general population, this is nevertheless an improvement of 7 percentage points since April 2012 when female officers made up less than a quarter (24%) of all Met officers."¹⁵⁵
- Women, she also noted, "remain underrepresented in all supervisory and management roles". They are "least represented at Sergeant, Inspector, Chief Inspector and Superintendent levels".¹⁵⁶
- 7.82 One female police officer told the Inquiry that it had been a relief to move from the Emergency Response Team to a smaller office-based team, albeit still male-dominated. She told the Inquiry that "everyone is very respectful" and commented that the "culture [in the smaller office-based team] is much more relaxed; less 'school playground' and more like being treated as an adult".¹⁵⁷ This officer was not the only one to express such an opinion. Another female former member of the Emergency Response Team believed that she was:
- "[...] treated less favourably than other colleagues both because I was a female in the team and also because I dared to speak out against the culture. As this was the first team I worked in, I assumed that this was the culture of the police in general, but have since learned that this is not the case."¹⁵⁸
- 7.83 The Inquiry recognises that the issue is a complex one: individuals apply different standards and not everyone views 'banter' as offensive. In its report on Operation Hotton, the Independent Office for Police Conduct "found evidence of messages exchanged between police officers that were often highly sexualised and/or violent and discriminatory [but which] were generally described as 'banter' by police officers in their defence".¹⁵⁹ The Independent Office for Police Conduct recommended that the Metropolitan Police Service:

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“[...] should review and ensure its current training and guidance on bullying and harassment adequately covers when remarks that may be viewed by some as ‘friendly’ banter can create an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for others, and therefore be seen as ‘ignorant’ or ‘malicious’ banter by others.”¹⁶⁰

- 7.84 The Inquiry heard about a WhatsApp group, which comprised members of the Emergency Response Team. An officer explained that its purpose was to “facilitate communication between the response team members”, both professionally and personally.¹⁶¹ The WhatsApp group could, for example, be used to “share pictures of missing persons [...] Or we would post a note [...] if a number of us were going out for a drink”.¹⁶² It was confirmed that the group was used by members of the Team when “out having a few drinks and a good time”.¹⁶³ An officer had seen ‘banter’ and would have spoken to the Professional Standards Department “if it was something serious that I did not think was correct”.¹⁶⁴ In relation to photographs posted by members of the WhatsApp group, the Inquiry heard that there was “nothing untoward or out of the ordinary”.¹⁶⁵ **The Inquiry found no evidence to suggest that the Emergency Response Team WhatsApp group was a forum for inappropriate or offensive comments of a type exposed in other such groups in the Metropolitan Police Service, such as those identified by the Independent Office for Police Conduct in its Operation Hotton Learning Report.**
- 7.85 In Chapter 1, the Inquiry referred to the largely positive descriptions of Couzens provided by witnesses who worked with or supervised him during his time with the Emergency Response Team in Bromley. The Inquiry heard some evidence that Couzens had occasionally socialised with colleagues. One police officer recalled Couzens joining them for one or two drinks¹⁶⁶ on a Friday.¹⁶⁷ Others did not recall Couzens joining social events, other than his own leaving do,¹⁶⁸ suggesting he had not drawn attention to himself or been the centre of attention. None of the colleagues spoken to by the Inquiry described his behaviour as anything other than appropriate. One police officer, speaking about ‘banter’, was adamant that Couzens “did not join in with any of these jokes. He seemed to keep quiet during any sort of embarrassing banter and would only join in and have a laugh about other more innocuous topics.”¹⁶⁹
- 7.86 Couzens’ former colleagues at Bromley, like those from other organisations where he had worked, were left questioning their own judgement when news of his crimes circulated. They wondered whether they had missed indicators or red flags. A former colleague told the Inquiry:

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“Even in hindsight I cannot think of anything Wayne did which led me to believe he had a negative disposition towards women. There are other officers who behave inappropriately, in terms of banter and involving themselves in the [school playground] culture I have described, but Wayne was not one of them. He is not someone I would have suspected of being capable of his later actions.”¹⁷⁰

- 7.87 A supervisor, who based their assessment of Couzens on four encounters with him, expressed the views of many when they told the Inquiry:

“I am a good judge of character, as are others in the team, and no police officer likes to be seen to be wrong about someone. Where PC Couzens was concerned there was nothing which raised concerns. Nothing would have led me to monitor his behaviour, go out on patrol with him, speak to his supervisor, or take any of the other options open to me if alarms bells had rung in any way at all. There were just no signs.”¹⁷¹

- 7.88 The same view was expressed by a second supervisor, who told the Inquiry:

“Looking back, there was nothing that would have made me think that Wayne had a ‘dark’ side or anything that perturbed me.”¹⁷²

Conclusion 71

Wayne Couzens was selective about when and to whom he revealed views and opinions that were at odds with the Code of Ethics and which fell below the high standards of professional behaviour expected of those who serve in the police.

- 7.89 The Inquiry received no evidence of Couzens behaving inappropriately, either on duty or when socialising with colleagues from the Emergency Response Team of the Metropolitan Police Service. In particular, there was no evidence that he had conducted himself inappropriately on the Emergency Response Team WhatsApp group. The Inquiry is, however, satisfied that Couzens, while serving in the Emergency Response Team at Bromley, was a member of another WhatsApp group that shared inappropriate and offensive messages. This is based on evidence from the Independent Office for Police Conduct’s Operation Argens; evidence presented by the prosecution to the court during the criminal prosecution of three former members of the Civil Nuclear Constabulary; and that presented by the appropriate authority against six former Civil Nuclear Constabulary officers during their misconduct hearing (see paragraphs 7.130 to 7.156). The Inquiry therefore concludes that Couzens was selective about when and to whom he revealed views and opinions that were at odds with the Code of Ethics and which fell below the high standards of professional behaviour expected of those who serve in the police. As in his

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previous career with Kent Special Constabulary and the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, Couzens successfully hid such tendencies, including potentially criminal conduct, from his colleagues.

Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command

7.90 As detailed in Chapter 1, Couzens joined the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command of the Metropolitan Police Service as an authorised firearms officer in February 2020, after completing the relevant training and meeting other requirements. The Inquiry heard evidence about the role of the Command's authorised firearms officers and concluded that it is entirely different from life as an officer in the Emergency Response Team. Rather than responding to a constant flow of unforeseen and unrelated incidents involving the public at large, which is the responsibility of the Emergency Response Team, the working day of an authorised firearms officer consists of:

“99% boredom, 1% sheer terror [...] because nothing might happen, day in day out, and then the officer has to switch back ‘on’ in a split second. The actual role is akin to security patrol work, rather than emergency response work, and is generally not exciting.”¹⁷³

7.91 The Inquiry learned that most shifts are predictable and repetitive, with officers providing static guarding at high-profile sites. Having previously been an authorised firearms officer in the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, this was the type of role with which Couzens was familiar. Other differences between the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command and the Emergency Response Team include the far greater size of the Command in terms of personnel¹⁷⁴ and the gender balance, with women generally comprising between three and four per cent of authorised firearms officers in the Command¹⁷⁵ compared with around a third of officers in the Emergency Response Team.¹⁷⁶

Organisational culture

7.92 A police constable who was based in the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command described their day as follows:

“I typically commence my 12-hour shift [early]; generally I have three breaks during the shift, two consisting of one hour and another of two hours or sometimes [...] two, two hour breaks within a twelve hour shift. I work four or five days and then I have four or five days off. Once I am posted to a shift, that is my post for the day. For example, I might be posted to [location] at the beginning of my shift and I would not then be posted to another location that day.”¹⁷⁷

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- 7.93 In addition to their formal shift pattern, officers serving in the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command regularly work overtime.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, the smooth running of the Command relies on officers' willingness to do this, and the availability of overtime is, for many officers, part of what attracts them to this posting. However, an over-dependency on overtime was identified by some witnesses as having a negative impact on officers' lives. This, one officer explained, happened when it became essential "to fund their lifestyle" and they found themselves bound to the Command to "fund their car, mortgage and other things".¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, rest days were regularly cancelled by the organisation to satisfy resource requirements, with officers instructed to cancel personal arrangements and report for duty.¹⁸⁰ (The overtime model used in the Command is described in more detail in paragraphs 5.156 to 5.159.)
- 7.94 An officer who had occasionally acted as duty officer in the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command described it as a "dull environment" and commented on the "psychological impact" of always being prepared for an emergency.¹⁸¹ Another officer described shifts as an authorised firearms officer as "monotonous and boring".¹⁸² The Inquiry heard it was "the same" every day, with nothing changing. It was also "really physically demanding"¹⁸³ due to the weight of the kit¹⁸⁴ and the discomfort of standing outside in weather conditions¹⁸⁵ ranging from extreme cold to intense heat.
- 7.95 The Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command was viewed in a variety of ways by those who had experience of working in it. While some considered there to be a team culture, others did not. One male officer told the Inquiry: "It's a privilege going to work every day with them [my team] because we all look after each other."¹⁸⁶ Another officer explained that it is where "some of my closest friendships have developed".¹⁸⁷ But a third officer (also male) said: "In other roles, the team has bonded more and I have made friends who I see outside of work and go to the football, or go for a pint with. This is not the case at the PaDP [Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command]."¹⁸⁸ And a fourth officer added:
- "Normally teams on the police force are quite 'gelled' together. You go out for drinks, have BBQs together and have a bond. You are generally friends and you know other peoples' families. The PaDP on the other hand is a unique command because there is little continuity in the people you work with. I might be assigned to a post with someone for six to 12 hours and then I might not work with that person for another three months."¹⁸⁹

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7.96 The Inquiry also saw evidence of what it was like for female officers to be posted to the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command and, in some cases, being the only woman on a team. The Inquiry saw evidence that it was “isolating and lonely [...] It was a culture shock to go from a team where everyone is working together, to wondering where everybody has gone [...] When I eventually settled in, I really enjoyed working with most people in the team.”¹⁹⁰ There was evidence that “[b]eing the only female in a team can be a bit uncomfortable, as sometimes you just want to talk to another woman”.¹⁹¹ Evidence shows that this sentiment was shared by another officer.¹⁹² One officer had observed a tendency for male officers to go silent as a female officer approached. This was described as “a culture of keep a person at arm’s length until we know a little bit about you or can trust your character”.¹⁹³ Officers admitted being “a bit worried” when a female officer joined the Command.¹⁹⁴

7.97 The Inquiry saw evidence that recalling this type of experience was distressing and:

“[...] painful for me to recall it in this way. In hindsight, to be told ‘oh like yeah we were worried about a female joining’, is upsetting and I wonder how that would make other people feel. I probably put on a brave face for the first six months and had that hard approach of ‘I won’t be broken’.”¹⁹⁵

7.98 The Inquiry saw evidence that it was “easier for men when they are in a collective group like this; it’s almost like a pack mentality, and that’s easier than being on your own”.¹⁹⁶

7.99 Male officers were asked about the treatment of female colleagues in the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command. A male officer said:

“I have not seen any bad attitudes towards women in my department and I certainly would not stand for anything if I did hear it [...] I would personally love there to be more women in the department as we should do more for equal opportunities.”¹⁹⁷

7.100 Another male officer noted: “Although the PaDP [Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command] and other units I have worked in have been male-oriented, I do not recall there being any derogatory conversation about women or people of a different ethnic origin.”¹⁹⁸ A female officer told the Inquiry that she had “never experienced a culture of misogyny or poor treatment of women” in the Command.¹⁹⁹ Neither, she said, was there a “‘macho’ culture. There were a lot of older men who have families.”²⁰⁰

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7.101 Opinions differed on whether officers would make remarks about female members of the public. A male officer told the Inquiry that he had not observed this type of behaviour in the Command:

“We work quite closely with members of the public and, unlike in other places where I have worked in the past, I have not witnessed anyone commenting when an attractive female walks past. I think that these days people are much more aware that we are out in uniform; we are outside in public, often based in prominent or important places and we need to be professional at all times.”²⁰¹

7.102 This impression contrasts with that of another male officer, who suggested that it was not unusual for comments to be made about “a group of females passing a post”.²⁰² This was confirmed by a different officer, who said that “it would not be uncommon for male officers to call out women that they saw on the street as attractive or somebody they would like to have sex with”. In this officer’s opinion, “when boys or men are together [...] they become something different or they say things that they wouldn’t say if they were around more women, or maybe one to one with a woman”.²⁰³ Another officer considered this to be a “Met-wide issue” and not unique to the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command. However, they also believed that the majority of their male colleagues would not engage in derogatory comments.²⁰⁴

7.103 The Inquiry heard the Command described as having a “lads’ culture, with them [the male officers] just trying to get a laugh out of each other or impress each other in some way”.²⁰⁵ An officer “just found it really boring. I wasn’t offended or amused.”²⁰⁶ According to another witness, conversations about women were not limited to when male officers were out on patrol: “When I’ve been in the office it’s normal to hear officers talk about women, how they look and what they’re wearing, in a derogatory way, although I have noticed that has stopped more recently.”²⁰⁷

7.104 A male officer was of the opinion that attitudes towards women in the police mirror those across society. He said:

“I think that in all of society there is still legacy misogyny, and attitudes that people have grown up with which means there can be silly jokes that aren’t right any more, because society has moved on; for example, jokes about women being in kitchens.”²⁰⁸

7.105 Another male officer from the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command told the Inquiry that it was through Operation Signa that he had become aware of current problems faced by women in the Metropolitan Police Service.²⁰⁹ Operation Signa, launched in 2021, is an internal programme that is led by the Metropolitan Police Service Network of Women to increase confidence among those reporting

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sexual harassment and unacceptable conduct.²¹⁰ Listening to female officers, the witness said: “I realised that, unless you are part of a group of people who condone that behaviour, or who are experiencing it, then you are not aware that there is a problem.”²¹¹ There was a “locker room culture”²¹² in the Command, which he attributed to the scarcity of women. Anecdotally he had learned of female colleagues being embarrassed by a male colleague with whom they had been on shift by “talking loudly about a woman as she has walked past”.²¹³ However: “Most of the men were in relationships and would talk about their partners glowingly and respectfully.”²¹⁴

- 7.106 The Inquiry sought the reasons for there being so few women in the Command. A male officer said: “A lot of the female officers I have spoken to want to be out doing things each day and they do not want to just stand for 12 hours a day.”²¹⁵ This was confirmed by other evidence seen by the Inquiry: “I did not enjoy my time in PaDP [the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command]. This was because of the nature of the job, rather than being a woman in a predominantly male culture.”²¹⁶ The Inquiry also saw evidence of female officers being “asked to try and recruit more women”. However, they “did not feel as comfortable doing that because [...] there were clear reasons why women do not do that role”.²¹⁷
- 7.107 Some officers suggested that the nature of the authorised firearms officer role in the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command, including standing inactive in post for hours at a time, influenced the culture of the Command. An officer told the Inquiry: “At the PaDP, I have found that because, thankfully, nothing serious ever really happens, people tend to make a mountain out of trivial things. For example, a last minute change of post would upset some people or make them angry.”²¹⁸
- 7.108 Baroness Casey identified in her report the reputation of the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command as “a place in which people regularly ‘moan and complain’ and are ‘miserable’”.²¹⁹ This corresponds with the findings of this Inquiry, which heard about the “negativity. People would stand there and moan all day.”²²⁰ Having heard details of the complaints made by some officers, the Inquiry considered some of their ‘moans’ to be justified. Objections to mouse-infested break rooms²²¹ and inadequate clothing, which officers supplemented with their own protective items, such as boots²²² and gloves,²²³ seemed valid. Officers also felt undervalued by those in charge, citing as an example the proposed removal of a shelter – indispensable to those on patrol in extreme weather – at the Palace of Westminster,²²⁴ as part of a refurbishment. The Inquiry notes from the final

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Operation Leven report that, following a workplace inspection commissioned in June 2022, some improvements to the facilities have been made across both Metropolitan Police Service and parliamentary locations, although the improvements remain “partial and piecemeal”.²²⁵

- 7.109 It was also suggested that rank is viewed as particularly important in the Command. A former officer contrasted it with the Armed Response Unit SO19. At this unit:

“[...] due to the life-or-death nature of the work, everyone is on the same team and pulls together much more effectively, even if a PC is giving an instruction to a more senior officer. This is not the case in the PaDP [Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command] unit, which is more hierarchical and where this would not be tolerated.”²²⁶

- 7.110 The same attitude was remarked upon by others from the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command, including a witness who observed how differently police staff were treated compared with officers:

“In the PaDP, the difference between officers and staff is also much more obvious than elsewhere in the Met. I think that’s because some of the officers carry firearms in PaDP and they think they are superior, with all their kit like action men. There is even a noticeable difference between armed officers and unarmed officers, with the unarmed officers almost being treated like staff.”²²⁷

- 7.111 According to witnesses, the use of nicknames was common within the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command, as well as more widely across the Metropolitan Police Service. Couzens, for example, was known as “Papa Wayne”,²²⁸ due to being something of a father figure, and “‘Sicknote’, a joke we used when someone in the team has not come into work for some time”.²²⁹ This latter was at the time when Couzens was on non-operational duties due to an injury, which is described in more detail in paragraphs 1.76 to 1.78. While many of the names were innocuous, shortened versions of officers’ own given names, others were, without question in the view of this Inquiry, inappropriate and offensive. They included nicknames for female officers²³⁰ directly referencing their physical sexual characteristics, and nicknames for male officers suggesting that they were sexual offenders.²³¹ However, the Inquiry received no evidence to support the media report that Couzens was referred to by his colleagues as ‘The Rapist’.²³²

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7.112 The Inquiry was interested in whether WhatsApp groups were common in the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command. It heard from a male officer of a WhatsApp group which, having started by being open to all, had transformed to:

“[...] a Sergeants’ only group [...] because it was descending into a deluge of, ‘oh, shall we go for a drink or something’, or someone putting up a meme, and it wasn’t constructive. It no longer met the purposes for which it was started, so it was moved into something that was only going to be work-based.”²³³

7.113 Another officer recalled being in a WhatsApp group with colleagues in the Command: “The main topics of conversation related to how we would spend, or more accurately waste, the extra money we had earned working overtime.”²³⁴ A male officer said: “There were no lewd exchanges or references to sex. If there had been I would have left the group.”²³⁵

7.114 The Inquiry did not receive any evidence of inappropriate or offensive comments of the type revealed by the Independent Office for Police Conduct in Operations Hutton and Argens, referred to in paragraph 7.65, having been made in WhatsApp groups involving officers from the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command.

7.115 As referred to in Chapter 1, perceptions of Couzens by his colleagues in the Command were largely positive. No colleague had anticipated his potential for extreme criminality:

“He was the older guy in our team and my younger colleagues and I saw him as our work Dad. I felt we could rely on him. This is why it was so shocking when I found out what he did. It was unbelievable.”²³⁶

7.116 More than one colleague expressed the view that there were no missed warning signs. One told the Inquiry:

“I have tried to think of anything that I could have done differently and whether there was anything in Wayne’s behaviour that should have been a red flag. I have been unable to think of anything, and in fact he was bottom of the list of people that I would have suspected of committing such a crime.”²³⁷

7.117 Couzens’ colleagues from the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command seemed genuinely shocked by the crimes he had gone on to commit. One said: “I now think that there must be two versions of Wayne. The version that I thought I knew, and the version that I do not recognise, who is capable of committing these crimes.”²³⁸ There was no suggestion from anyone that Couzens had had a reputation for sexual or other misconduct at work.

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7.118 Dr West considered how Couzens had managed to deceive his colleagues. He described him as:

“[...] deceptive and secretive in the way he kept his sexually deviant activity hidden and separate from his very unremarkable outside-facing demeanour. The public ordinarily looks for serious offenders to be ‘monsters’ but, by compartmentalising his sexual deviance, Wayne Couzens operated in plain sight.”²³⁹

7.119 Dr West continued:

“It is this type of behaviour that social psychologists call impression management, where people try and present in a certain way depending on the demands of the situation. [The Metropolitan Police Service was] deceived by Wayne Couzens’ impression management; he was anything but unremarkable.”²⁴⁰

7.120 Couzens’ “impression management” is illustrated by the following description, showing how he was regarded by a supervisor:

“[He was] really polite. He did his job, didn’t question anything and went where he was supposed to go. Shifts were allocated to him and he had no complaints. He was very unassuming and competent at his job and around firearms. Due to his previous experience as a firearms officer I had fewer concerns about him than I would have had with any other new recruit.”²⁴¹

7.121 Looking back on this positive perception of Couzens, the same supervisor explained:

“This is the part which the team finds most difficult, as we failed to spot that anything was amiss [...] after having planned the abduction and murder, PC Couzens came to work, in close contact with colleagues, knowing what he was going to do.”²⁴²

7.122 The same supervisor described the day he learned of Couzens’ crimes as “the worst day of my career”.²⁴³

7.123 When making its assessment of the culture within the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command, the Inquiry considered a range of sources, including the findings of Baroness Casey and Operation Leven, in addition to evidence provided by officers and supervisors from the Command who spoke to the Inquiry. While the Inquiry heard evidence of the dysfunctional environment that Baroness Casey and Operation Leven portrayed, it was also presented with a range of depictions, suggesting that not all officers shared the same experience.

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- 7.124 While some women felt uncomfortable and unwelcome in the Command due to the 'laddish' 'schoolyard' 'banter', a suspicion of female entrants and the proliferation of offensive nicknames,²⁴⁴ others presented a more nuanced response. Some said that they had not encountered any form of misogyny and had been treated well by their male colleagues. They told the Inquiry that they had not heard name-calling or inappropriate 'banter'.²⁴⁵ The Inquiry saw evidence of a team's positive attitude towards a female colleague. They were "really supportive. They're family men."²⁴⁶
- 7.125 Even individuals' reactions to the same conduct differed widely. For example, the Inquiry saw evidence that women reacted differently to inappropriate personal remarks directed at them. While one "just brushed it off" and it did not affect her,²⁴⁷ another was emotionally affected and it negatively impacted on time spent with her family.²⁴⁸
- 7.126 **Overall, the Inquiry concluded that there was no single culture within the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command. Individual officers' perceptions were influenced by personal experience and the attitudes of colleagues with whom they came into contact. Their past experience in other parts of the Metropolitan Police Service was also relevant, as evidenced by a female officer who described the culture in the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command as "amazing" compared with the response team where she had worked previously.²⁴⁹ Supervisors were also influential in setting the tone of the Command, with officers who described their sergeant and inspector as "very supportive"²⁵⁰ more likely to speak in positive terms of their experience. Others, who described supervision as "terrible"²⁵¹ and some sergeants as "lazy",²⁵² were more likely to be dissatisfied and feel undervalued.**
- 7.127 Professor Lesley McMillan, Professor of Criminology and Sociology at Glasgow Caledonian University, who gave evidence to the Inquiry, supported this concept of an organisation where different sub-cultures exist and members' experience differs. She told the Inquiry:

"While there are norms and values that prevail in police culture, such as loyalty to fellow officers, respect for hierarchy, a culture of masculinity, and a suspicion toward the general public, police culture cannot be talked about as if it is a monolith and there is a tendency to oversimplify police culture as the cause and effect of poor behaviour. It is likely that there are in fact police cultures which may vary across rank, role, specialisation and force."²⁵³

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7.128 Professor McMillan further explained:

“It is important to note that not all officers will be part of these problematic aspects of police culture, and others will find their forces and immediate work colleagues supportive. People can be in and out of groups and navigate aspects of organisational culture differently. As such it is not surprising that not all officers knew of the behaviours among some officers and disclosures suggest those not part of particular sub-cultures may not be aware of it at all or may find it difficult to comprehend or accept that such behaviour exists.”²⁵⁴

7.129 Couzens was not someone who was identified by his colleagues as having conducted himself inappropriately on duty. Yet, as his convictions for indecently exposing himself in November 2020 and February 2021 demonstrate, while serving with the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command, Couzens was guilty of sexual offences, indecently exposing himself in circumstances that were premeditated, before abducting, raping and murdering Sarah Everard in a carefully planned exercise, during which he drew upon his experience in the police.

WhatsApp groups – Operation Argens – The sharing of inappropriate and offensive messages

7.130 The policing principles and the standards of professional behaviour are of critical importance in maintaining public trust and confidence in the police. High standards are expected of police officers both at work and away from work, including in terms of communications, whether online or offline (see paragraphs 7.29 to 7.35).

7.131 A mobile phone was among the items seized when Couzens was arrested on 9 March 2021. Forensic examination and the downloading of the phone’s contents disclosed evidence of a WhatsApp group to which he and other former Civil Nuclear Constabulary officers belonged.²⁵⁵ Due to the inappropriate, offensive and discriminatory content of the chat revealed by the download, the matter was referred to the Independent Office for Police Conduct for investigation.²⁵⁶ That investigation, named Operation Argens, looked at comments made between March and October 2019 on a group chat known as ‘Bottles & Stoppers’ and ‘Atkin’s puppets’,²⁵⁷ and identified six officers who had possibly committed a criminal offence or whose behaviour would justify disciplinary proceedings.²⁵⁸ Although Couzens was named on the Metropolitan Police Service referral to the Independent Office for Police Conduct, he was not served a notice of investigation due to his dismissal from the Metropolitan Police Service and the criminal offences he had been charged with relating to the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard.²⁵⁹

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- 7.132 The evidence suggests that the WhatsApp group was used by the former officers from the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, following their transfer to the Metropolitan Police Service, to communicate with each other during their training.²⁶⁰ Topics covered in the abuse engaged in by the group included race and ethnicity; women; rape, sexual offences, domestic abuse and victims of crime; and disability.²⁶¹
- 7.133 Three of the officers who were served with a notification of investigation were subsequently charged with offences of making improper use of a public communications network.²⁶² Two of these officers were found guilty after trial and sentenced to a term of imprisonment of 12 weeks.²⁶³ Both have appealed their conviction²⁶⁴ and, at the time of writing this Report, their appeal is still outstanding.
- 7.134 Couzens' rota and shifts on the Civil Nuclear Constabulary's Strategic Escort Group revealed that he was often deployed with these defendants.²⁶⁵ Although he was not named during the criminal trial, Couzens' contributions to the group chat were identified for the benefit of the Inquiry. They include the following exchange, which took place on 21 June 2019:
- “21:33:13 Wayne Couzens Mate they aren't gonna ditch you with your skill sets, unless you finger a DV [domestic violence] victim!
- 21:33:39 [Another officer] – Oh, [...] in that case you're probably fucked.
- 21:37:01 [...] That's alright, DV victims love it [...] that's why they are repeat victims more often than not.
- 21:37:38 [...] No, they just don't listen!”²⁶⁶
- 7.135 In his defence, one defendant referred to his comment as “quite obviously sarcastic” and “poor taste of humour”.²⁶⁷ Another said that his comment was a reference to a punchline from a joke on the internet.²⁶⁸ The District Judge was not persuaded by their arguments. She recorded in her written judgment:

“Applying the standards of an open and just multiracial society, I have no doubt that victims of domestic abuse would be grossly offended by these comments, especially when one has regard to the context in which they were made. Firstly, the Defendants sent these messages at a time when they were police officers who had made a commitment to protect victims of domestic abuse. Secondly, the ‘joke’ begins with an unknown officer [Couzens] talking about police officers sexually assaulting those victims and implying that [...] has already committed such an offence. Thirdly, [...] reaction to this was, instead of disputing or resiling from such a disgusting suggestion, to light-heartedly respond that ‘DV victims love it’.

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Both his and [...] comments clearly imply that victims of domestic assaults are effectively responsible for any pattern of abuse to which they are subject. For police officers to find it funny to promulgate these negative stereotypes which are held towards vulnerable members of our society and which are partly responsible for the well-known under-reporting of sexual crimes in this country is, frankly, sickening. It is certainly beyond the pale and, accordingly, grossly offensive.”²⁶⁹

7.136 On 29 June 2019, some of the group turned their attention to race and ethnicity:

“11:05:46 [...] Got a bus through hounslow [...] what a fucking Somali shit hole. Great. There goes pussy patrol [...] more like fgm [female genital mutilation] patrol

11:08:04 [...] [...] feltham is worse! I went there the other week and I felt like a spot on a domino!

11:08:40 [Another officer] Filthy Feltham

11:10:25 [...] Walking through to hounslow central, it was like walking along a dulux colour code

11:10:44 [...] Not even the shops were in English.

11:11:02 [...] Yeah, all shades of brown!?

11:11:28 [...] Yep and I think I [sic] was one yellow. But he was lost cos he asked me for directions

11:11:29 [...] Hounslow twinned with Baghdad

11:14:37 [...] You know when it's getting near to the end of night shift in Hounslow because you can hear the call to prayer

11:31:16 Wayne Couzens You can add Peckham to that list. I was on VCTF [Violent Crime Task Force] the other shift in Peckham, another Somalia village!!!!”²⁷⁰

7.137 In her judgment, the District Judge described this exchange as a conversation that “demonstrates a deeply racist [her emphasis] attitude on the part of both [...] and [...]”.²⁷¹ The Code of Ethics provides for a duty “to act where a concern is raised about any behaviour”;²⁷² Couzens endorsed the sentiments expressed by his colleagues by contributing an additional comment to the thread.

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7.138 The District Judge continued:

“I wish to stress that there is no place for such beliefs amongst the police service in England and Wales and, applying the standards of an open and just multiracial society, it is without doubt grossly offensive for an officer to speak about the people and the areas for which they are responsible in such terms.”²⁷³

Conclusion 72

The contributions of Wayne Couzens’ colleagues to the WhatsApp group that featured in the Independent Office for Police Conduct’s investigation, known as Operation Argens, amounted to serious offences, and some resulted in prison sentences.

7.139 The Inquiry considers that the sentences of 12 weeks’ imprisonment clearly reflect the seriousness with which the District Judge viewed the offending and sends out a strong message to others that such conduct does not simply amount to a joke in poor taste but is potentially criminal.

7.140 Separately, and following the trial of three of its members for criminal offences, all six members of the WhatsApp group (with the exception of the seventh member, namely Couzens) were the subject of a police misconduct hearing. In response to the formal notices served on them, some of the group’s members relied upon “humour” and “venting”²⁷⁴ as justification for the messages. The Misconduct Panel rejected this argument, finding that:

“[I]n general terms the panel considered that many of the messages did not amount to venting, dark/shock humour, jokes or jokes in poor taste but were on any view sexist, racist, homophobic, ableist, offensive and abusive. The messages would have been obviously inappropriate to those that read them. The Panel considered that assertions that it amounted to venting or dark humour etc were made in an attempt to offer some form of explanation in relation to messages that would have been truly inappropriate and arguably offensive if posted by an ordinary member of the public, let alone experienced police officers who had been extensively trained in relation to the Code of Ethics.”²⁷⁵

7.141 In the view of the Misconduct Panel, some of the messages were “truly shocking”.²⁷⁶ The Panel was “frankly stunned that such offensiveness had come from individuals who worked as officers in the Metropolitan Police Service, even making allowances for the fact that it came from a private WhatsApp group”.²⁷⁷

7.142 While the Misconduct Panel made it clear that it had dealt with each member of the group individually, it was the Panel’s conclusion, in relation to those members still serving as police officers, that the breaches of the standards of professional

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behaviour were incompatible with continued service as a police officer and the appropriate outcome was dismissal without notice.²⁷⁸ In relation to those members who had resigned as serving police officers, the outcome of disciplinary action was appropriate. Had they still been members of a police force, the lowest possible sanction would have been dismissal without notice.²⁷⁹

- 7.143 The Misconduct Panel's written decision sets out the law relating to the officers' rights under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.²⁸⁰ The extent of the right to privacy to be enjoyed by police officers was previously set out in a Scottish case involving officers from the Police Service of Scotland.²⁸¹ This case considered whether the Police Service of Scotland, the officers' employer, was entitled to rely upon WhatsApp messages, sent in a personal capacity, for the purposes of misconduct proceedings. The messages had come to the force's attention during the investigation of a serious sexual offence, where one of the chat's participants, a serving police officer, was a suspect in a criminal investigation.²⁸²
- 7.144 At the initial hearing in the Outer House of the Court of Session,²⁸³ the presiding judge determined that a reasonable person having regard to the content of the messages under consideration would be entitled to conclude that they were sexist and degrading, racist, anti-Semitic, homophobic and mocking of disability, and included a flagrant disregard for police procedures by posting crime scene photos of current investigations.²⁸⁴
- 7.145 The Police Service of Scotland relied upon the WhatsApp messages to bring misconduct proceedings against the officers for breaching the standards of professional behaviour as set out in Schedule 1 to The Police Service of Scotland (Conduct) Regulations 2014.²⁸⁵
- 7.146 In the subsequent appeal brought before the Inner House, the officers argued that the use of private WhatsApp messages, as a basis for misconduct proceedings, was unlawful and breached their rights under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.²⁸⁶

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280 [***] Article 8: "1. Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence. 2. There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others."

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283 [***] The Court of Session is Scotland's supreme civil court and is divided into the Outer House and the Inner House. The Outer House mostly hears civil cases when they first come to court. The Inner House is primarily the appeal court, reviewing decisions mostly from the Outer House of the Court of Session but occasionally from sheriff courts, tribunals and other bodies.

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- 7.147 The court considered that, while the general characteristics of WhatsApp were such that an ordinary member of the public using it could have a reasonable expectation of privacy, police officers, as holders of a public office, by virtue of which they have accepted certain restrictions on their private life, could be distinguished when considering the extent of such expectation.²⁸⁷
- 7.148 Counsel for the police officers sought to argue that there had to be a “private zone” for police officers, for informal discussion between friends.²⁸⁸ The court agreed with counsel for the Police Service of Scotland, however, who submitted that police officers are not in the position of mere employees; they are holders of a public office who are subject to a strict regulatory framework that is essential for the preservation of public confidence and the proper discharge of their duties as police officers.²⁸⁹
- 7.149 The court concluded that there is a very clear, specific public interest in the maintenance of a properly regulated police force and its importance to the retention of public confidence and the proper discharge of police duties.²⁹⁰ Some of the WhatsApp messages show a mindset that calls into question the public’s right to be treated fairly – for example, depending on their race, religion or sexuality. That officers hold these views is likely to weaken the confidence of the public and put public safety at risk.²⁹¹
- 7.150 Consequently, the court found that the content of these messages could be used by the Police Service of Scotland, as employer, in the context of misconduct proceedings.²⁹² In the trial of Couzens’ police colleagues in England, the court followed this Scottish decision. The Inquiry’s recommendation on information-sharing (Recommendation 11), set out in Chapter 4, addresses this issue by seeking to ensure that police officers understand that, in certain circumstances, their privacy can be fettered.

Conclusion 73

One of Wayne Couzens’ comments to colleagues in the WhatsApp group is not only grossly offensive but also, viewed in the light of his later crimes, chilling.

- 7.151 Returning to Couzens’ use of WhatsApp, the Inquiry received evidence of a further inappropriate and offensive comment made by him. In a group chat on 21 March 2019, and in response to comments by officers who helped a woman who appeared drunk, Couzens made the following comment: “Did you finger her to see if she was ok?”²⁹³ This reference to a drunk woman demonstrates a wholesale absence of respect that is compounded by Couzens questioning, not for the first time, whether a fellow officer has performed a non-consensual sexual act upon a vulnerable

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member of the public (see paragraph 7.134). **The Inquiry finds such a comment to be not only grossly offensive and criminal but also, in the light of Couzens' later crimes, chilling.**

7.152 Referring to the content of the WhatsApp group messages, a senior officer serving with the Metropolitan Police Service, who gave evidence to the Inquiry, posed the question: "If they cannot talk about their colleagues and the communities they are working in with respect, how are they going to behave when they are actually out dealing with those people?"²⁹⁴

7.153 This inappropriate and offensive WhatsApp group chat by Couzens and his former Civil Nuclear Constabulary colleagues is far from an isolated incident. More examples were revealed during the period of this Inquiry. One instance, while not involving Couzens personally, arose directly from his being charged and appearing in court. In this incident, the communications channel was the social messaging platform 'Signal' and the participants were drawn from a group that included serving police officers from various police forces, as well as civilians.²⁹⁵ The conduct reported to the Independent Office for Police Conduct for investigation concerned the posting of matters emanating from the defence put forward on behalf of Couzens at his first court hearing, which were subject to reporting restrictions.²⁹⁶ These were accompanied by what the Independent Office for Police Conduct described as "cynical and sarcastic"²⁹⁷ replies. The Independent Office for Police Conduct also noted that "the tone and content of the messages made clear it was gossip".²⁹⁸ The alleged misconduct came to light when a member of the group reported his concerns.²⁹⁹

7.154 In a separate case, also referred to the Independent Office for Police Conduct, two officers were subject to a misconduct meeting in relation to an offensive meme that was shared on WhatsApp at the height of the investigation into the disappearance of Sarah Everard.³⁰⁰ It had been reported to the police by members of the group.³⁰¹ Both officers received a final written warning.³⁰²

7.155 The Inquiry notes that the offensive WhatsApp messages sent by Couzens are significant because they represent the only known evidence of him participating with police colleagues in conduct that breaches the standards of professional behaviour. In Chapter 2 of this Report, the Inquiry addresses how, had these messages been challenged at the time by a member of the group, Couzens' behaviour could have come under the spotlight and potentially been identified as misconduct, which might have led to disruption of his later criminal activity.

7.156 In Part 2 of this Inquiry, which is under way, the Inquiry is tasked with examining police culture throughout England and Wales.³⁰³

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Challenging inappropriate behaviour

- 7.157 The Inquiry received limited evidence that Couzens behaved inappropriately in the workplace (membership of the WhatsApp group is an obvious example). However, witnesses provided considerable evidence that inappropriate and poor behaviour was a serious problem within the policing environment. The Inquiry considered this to be relevant to issues set out in its Terms of Reference, especially in relation to Couzens' behaviour towards women, what was known and whether his colleagues should have spoken out. As a result, the wider question of how inappropriate and poor behaviour should be challenged became a matter of some importance. The Inquiry considered the processes and procedures available for challenging such behaviour and complainants' confidence in them.
- 7.158 The standards of professional behaviour, with which all police officers and staff are expected to comply, are set out earlier in this chapter. The tenth standard includes a requirement to challenge and report improper behaviour, committing officers and staff to "report, challenge or take action against the conduct of colleagues which has fallen below the standards of professional behaviour".³⁰⁴
- 7.159 While this standard may appear to be straightforward, for many complainants it carries with it so great a degree of uncertainty as to make it wholly impractical. In the view of the Inquiry, questions such as the following are understandable: 'Who can I complain to?',³⁰⁵ 'Will my supervisor support me?',³⁰⁶ 'How will a complaint impact my career?',³⁰⁷ 'Will I be ostracised by my colleagues?',³⁰⁸ and 'Will I be labelled a complainer?'.³⁰⁹ Many on the receiving end of poor behaviour never reach a point where they feel confident to report it.³¹⁰ Merely contemplating how such a complaint could play out may be a sufficient deterrent.
- 7.160 For officers or staff who have made a formal complaint, or know someone who has, the outcome can be devastating, culminating in the complainant feeling that they were the one under investigation or who had done something wrong, especially if they had been moved to another department or in some other way been treated unfavourably and unsympathetically.³¹¹
- 7.161 Barriers to reporting poor and inappropriate behaviour in a workplace setting are not confined to the police. In Chapter 3 of this Report, the Inquiry describes an incident when Couzens, who was serving in the Territorial Army, intimidated a young woman and made her feel "deeply uncomfortable".³¹² She had not reported the incident at the time and described the barriers to reporting as follows:

"There were certainly no women I could have spoken to. The organisation did not have anyone carrying out that type of role, to my knowledge. It was a very male environment and I absolutely felt that, had I complained, I would have been told

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‘oh stupid girl, he’s just having a joke with you’, or a response of that nature. Human resources-wise, consultants were brought in to organise contracts, but there was no employer assistance helpline, for example. It felt like there was nowhere I could go.”³¹³

7.162 This witness’s response to the experience is not unusual and she was not the only victim of Couzens whose youth and relative inexperience prevented her making a complaint about him. The Inquiry saw evidence of alleged sexual harassment by Couzens when he served as a volunteer section officer in Kent Special Constabulary. The evidence suggests that his position of authority was one factor that influenced the decision not to report him. Other factors included feeling embarrassed and not wanting to ‘make waves’.³¹⁴

7.163 The Inquiry saw evidence of alleged sexual harassment involving another special constable where the perpetrator was a colleague (not Couzens). Reasons for not reporting the colleague’s alleged behaviour included not wanting to appear “a troublemaker, complaining or unprofessional”.³¹⁵ Had such a person been available, this officer would have preferred “to report to someone detached and independent from their unit or colleagues”.³¹⁶ The Inquiry found that how they were perceived by supervisors and others, as well as the impact on their future within the organisation, were common barriers to reporting for young female victims within a male-dominated environment.

7.164 Most witnesses connected to Kent Special Constabulary told the Inquiry that they had not had any occasion to challenge poor behaviour by their colleagues. An officer in Kent Special Constabulary, who had been promoted to a supervisory role, said:

“I never witnessed anything untoward that I felt uncomfortable about or I would be unhappy about. If I had I would have spoken up and said ‘what you doing?’.”³¹⁷

7.165 It is perhaps not surprising that an officer who has gained promotion to a more senior grade should feel confident to speak out. Promotion, however, does not guarantee greater understanding of the feelings of others, including their discomfort or embarrassment or lack of self-esteem. Being empathetic and non-judgemental – useful skills when dealing with victims’ disclosure – are not automatically available to all those in positions of power and supervision.

7.166 Asked what they would do if faced with poor behaviour, an officer from Bromley Emergency Response Team suggested:

“If it was something serious that I did not think was correct, then I would have gone to speak to the Department of Professional Standards and would have called the sergeant.”³¹⁸

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7.167 An officer from the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command said:

“If someone did say something that I wanted to challenge, then I would take that person to one side and talk to them face to face, but otherwise it would need escalating to a supervisor.”³¹⁹

7.168 This type of confident response, not based on personal experience, was fairly typical among male officers who, as far as the Inquiry was aware, had never been in the position of having to decide whether to make a complaint.

7.169 Conversely, several female officers from the Metropolitan Police Service spoke from personal experience about complaints they had made, both informally and formally. One told the Inquiry that she had challenged a colleague face to face after he had made inappropriate comments and harassed her, including sexually. When his behaviour continued, she felt forced to make a formal complaint, which resulted in a misconduct hearing. Although she was pleased that some of her allegations were found proven, she described the whole experience as “horrendous”.³²⁰ She was denied any form of support, including from a family member or trusted supporter. The officer told the Inquiry: “With the benefit of hindsight, it was such a traumatic experience that I would never pursue another complaint and I would tell other female officers not to do it if they asked for my advice.”³²¹ She felt that there was a need for the complaints process to be more transparent and clearly explained.³²²

7.170 It appeared to the Inquiry that this witness’s experience was not unusual. There was general dissatisfaction over the handling of complaints. Female officers who had achieved promotion to a higher rank reported being subject to misogyny, especially early in their careers, when they were police constables.³²³ The Inquiry heard that promotion to a higher rank provided the opportunity “to not tolerate any of that”.³²⁴

7.171 The Inquiry asked a female officer how those made uncomfortable by inappropriate ‘banter’ might deal with the situation. She said she was sure that “many would not admit to this for fear of being singled out further”.³²⁵ This is consistent with the finding by the Independent Office for Police Conduct: that colleagues who reported bad behaviour “were ostracised, harassed and humiliated”.³²⁶

7.172 The same female officer reflected on how supervisors respond to ‘banter’ and whether they could be relied upon to handle the situation effectively. She said:

“[T]his varies and largely depends on which sergeants are on shift. When I first joined the response team in [...], I recall that there were some acting sergeants who still wanted to behave like the PCs [constables], involving themselves in

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unprofessional ‘banter’. Some more experienced sergeants would not ‘bat an eyelid’ at what was being said, whilst others would stay away from it and not want any involvement.”³²⁷

More recently she had found that “the behaviour had changed slightly, in that sergeants were less likely to become involved in these conversations”.³²⁸

7.173 A female officer told the Inquiry she was confident that she would “stand up and challenge inappropriate behaviour if I saw it”,³²⁹ although she had no experience of doing so. She was optimistic for the future. She said: “With all the coverage there has been in the media about this sort of thing, I think that young recruits now would be ever more willing to stand up and confront bad behaviour.”³³⁰ Another female officer agreed, telling the Inquiry: “[T]he new recruits that I have met are not afraid to say when they feel uncomfortable about something.”³³¹ If this is the experience of new recruits more widely, then this is encouraging.

7.174 The Inquiry heard a range of opinions on whether officers posted to the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command would be confident challenging colleagues’ inappropriate behaviour. Again, there was a tendency for male officers to be confident that they would have no problem reporting the inappropriate behaviour. One male officer told the Inquiry: “Inappropriate behaviour would be challenged straightaway and I would speak to a supervisor about it, because it should not happen.”³³² Another male officer said: “I personally would be very confident in reporting inappropriate language because it is something I think is very damaging.”³³³

7.175 Reflecting on his experience of the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command and of the Metropolitan Police Service more generally, a male witness was less certain about challenging colleagues. He said:

“In terms of the culture of the police, relationships between officers are built on light-hearted insults or banter, as part of the camaraderie of the unit. There is often no malice intended. If these light-hearted insults crossed the line into being actually offensive, my view is that no one would challenge this, the reason being that it may lead to that person being singled out and not trusted. As a result, people develop a hard shell to protect themselves and put up with this situation.”³³⁴

7.176 A female officer said that, in her experience: “There was a culture of not bothering to mention things to the sergeant because you’re better off doing it yourself. Basically, the supervisors wanted an easy life and didn’t want to get involved and sort things out.”³³⁵

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Conclusions on culture in the workplace

7.177 One of the lessons from this Inquiry is the need for police forces to be prepared to challenge their own perceptions of individuals in their workforce and avoid complacent assumptions. Couzens, in his working life as a police officer, largely presented as professional, competent and reliable. Many of his colleagues described him as the last one they would have expected to be guilty of such awful crimes. In the view of Dr Vasquez, who gave evidence to the Inquiry:

“Wayne Couzens’ impulsivity is a complex phenomenon because he had sufficient self-control to create a positive image of himself to others and maintain a high level of secrecy over much of his deviant and criminal tendencies.”³³⁶

7.178 Dr Vasquez also considered it relevant that:

“Wayne Couzens was exposed for a number of years to individuals and work-related cultures that are high in masculinity and sexism, and this may have contributed to the development and internalising of attitudes and norms hostile to women.”³³⁷

7.179 There was, Dr Vasquez suggested, “the possibility that prejudiced and biased norms led to ignoring or missing warning signs about the danger that Wayne Couzens posed because they may have been minimised or considered normal for males”.³³⁸

7.180 In the view of the Inquiry, organisations need to examine their own workplace culture and identify the ease with which abusers can target colleagues without fear of reprisal. This applies especially to victimised women who work within male-dominated hierarchical organisations, including the police and military. There needs to be recognition of how being young, inexperienced and concerned for their future careers makes women vulnerable and less likely to report poor and inappropriate behaviour by men, who tend either to be more experienced or in a position of authority and often have the protection of being part of the dominant group. Other barriers to reporting include being labelled troublemakers, being ostracised and the risk of further victimisation.

7.181 Having confidence in their supervisors and in available reporting systems is vital if complaints are to be made. Addressing this issue, Dr Vasquez commented:

“In addition to fear of retaliation, complaints against inappropriate attitudes or comments by members of the force may also be suppressed for fear that such negative attitudes may be shared or supported by those in charge, leading to little or no disciplinary action. This phenomenon may be more likely when sexism and prejudice/discrimination are perceived as common in the force or when popular or influential officers express these attitudes without apparent fear of punishment.”³³⁹

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7.182 While police officers should be firmly reminded of their duty to challenge and report improper behaviour,³⁴⁰ and of the serious consequences of not doing so, reporting processes need to be clearer and more effective. The College of Policing's new *Code of Practice for Ethical Policing*, presented to Parliament in December 2023³⁴¹ and directed at chief officers, is designed to prove a useful tool in this regard. The new Code of Practice sets out actions expected of chief officers "to ensure that they lead an ethical culture, where staff are supported and directed to use the ethical policing principles in decision-making and to demonstrate professional behaviour. It also describes what needs to be done to proactively and positively identify – and respond to – misconduct and corruption when it occurs."³⁴² In relation to challenging unprofessional behaviour, this will include:

- Developing a culture where staff feel empowered and encouraged to challenge or report behaviour, performance or service provision that falls below expectations. [...]
- Ensuring support for staff to proactively and robustly challenge or report such behaviour, to create a culture of zero tolerance."³⁴³

7.183 In addition, the Inquiry considers that there needs to be a recognition that, in terms of reporting poor behaviour, a one-size-fits-all approach is not adequate. Dedicated reporting processes that provide confidence to women who experience poor behaviour are a necessity not a 'nice to have' if levels of reporting are to be increased.

7.184 As Professor McMillan told the Inquiry: "[O]rganisations have a duty to provide multiple routes to reporting and disclosure, including anonymous reporting, and to foster a culture that allows disclosure, investigation and appropriate sanction where misconduct is proven."³⁴⁴

7.185 Explaining why this is not currently a reality, Professor McMillan told the Inquiry:

"This can be due to a number of reasons, that include: few or poor routes to raise complaints; lack of support for those raising a complaint; dismissing or normalising poor behaviour e.g. as a 'misunderstanding' rather than misconduct; lack of an organisational culture that responsabilises [sic] others to raise issues of concern about others; poor investigation practices when misconduct is reported; or failure to apply adequate sanctions."³⁴⁵

7.186 This Inquiry is conscious that discrimination in the workplace is not restricted to women. Undoubtedly, it applies to other under-represented groups, some of whom may benefit from reporting channels tailored to their specific needs. This will be explored in more detail in Part 2 of this Inquiry.

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- 7.187 As set out at the beginning of this chapter, as part of its identification and exploration of missed opportunities, the Inquiry considered the culture of each workplace with which Couzens was associated, what was considered acceptable behaviour within the workplace and attitudes towards challenging poor behaviour. The Inquiry posed two questions: Firstly, was Couzens the product of his working environment? Secondly, was his offending invigorated or enabled in any way by the culture at work?

Conclusion 74

Wayne Couzens was abusing women long before he joined the police and is likely to have victimised more women than have reported such allegations against him.

Conclusion 75

Although Wayne Couzens was not wholly a product of his working environments, those environments did nothing to discourage his misogynistic view of women and meant that, as long as he presented himself as professional, his deviant behaviour outside of work could flourish.

- 7.188 In relation to the first question, **the Inquiry has seen evidence that Couzens' alleged abusive sexual behaviour pre-dates his career as a police officer or an Army volunteer. Furthermore, based on the widely accepted evidence that sexual offences are under-reported (dealt with elsewhere in this Report, see Chapter 3), the offences and alleged incidents of which the Inquiry has been made aware are likely to be the tip of an iceberg, with other incidents left unreported. While the source of Couzens' sexual offences and activities is not rooted in his working environment, the Inquiry considers that the male-dominated environment, in which some men openly demonstrated an entitled misogynistic attitude towards female colleagues, will have done nothing to reduce his perception of women as objects to be used and exploited for his own sexual gratification. Although not wholly a product of the environments in which he worked, the workplace was, for Couzens, one in which he felt comfortable, meaning that, providing he caused no trouble and presented himself as professional and reliable, his deviant behaviour outside of work could flourish.**
- 7.189 In response to the second question, **the Inquiry saw no evidence that Couzens' colleagues knew of and directly encouraged his offending or other relevant sexual activity. There is, however, evidence of a WhatsApp group in which Couzens' deeply offensive and misogynistic views, relating to the sexual abuse of female victims of domestic violence and other vulnerable members of the public, were treated as acceptable and went unchallenged. The Inquiry also considers that the alleged incidents of indecent exposure (some involving masturbation) went unchecked by police officers responsible for investigating them.**

7.190 Dr Vasquez considered the impact of an organisation’s culture on its individual members. He said:

“One concerning issue is whether, or to what degree, the negative (e.g., sexist, misogynistic, or racist) norms and attitudes in the police cause problematic or criminal behaviour in members of the force. Indeed, we do not know if such attitudes influenced Wayne Couzens’ criminal acts or not (e.g., he may have [been] at risk from them, regardless of his environment). However, research shows that individuals can learn and internalise prejudiced norms in social settings under some circumstances. Thus, there is the possibility the institutional prejudice and bias influenced Wayne Couzens’ offences, but at the very least, they did not suppress them.”³⁴⁶

Reflections from senior leaders

7.191 Senior leaders of policing organisations told the Inquiry about their views on the culture that exists within policing. Some former and current senior leaders maintained, in the Inquiry’s view, an overly optimistic perception of their forces. One former senior leader, whose tenure extended beyond the murder of Sarah Everard, told the Inquiry: “I hope that banter of a sexist and misogynistic nature did not exist [...] although I do accept that people use humour sometimes when under stress.”³⁴⁷ The Inquiry was also told that “the Met had already done a huge amount of work in terms of culture, diversity, inclusion and equality, and as a result, a lot of improvements had already been made” prior to the murder of Sarah Everard.³⁴⁸

7.192 Senior leaders described certain problematic aspects of police culture, including “groupthink” and group culture, that may act as barriers to the promotion of ethical values and standards.³⁴⁹ This is particularly relevant when considering the organisational culture and structure of the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command, which senior leaders described as simultaneously specialist and “macho”. The Inquiry was told of the general problems associated with some “specialist” teams, where negative attitudes may flourish “behind closed doors”.³⁵⁰ Senior leaders noted that specialist teams are “encouraged to believe that they are elite and invincible and are not managed and supervised appropriately”³⁵¹ and, without new supervision or “regular turnover of staff”,³⁵² “unacceptable behaviour and language gain momentum”.³⁵³ Along similar lines, the Inquiry was told by senior leaders about the existence of “macho” and “testosterone”-fuelled cultures that are prevalent in certain areas of the police, particularly firearms.³⁵⁴

7.193 Senior leaders of policing organisations also described the significant impact of social media and its effect on police culture. In particular, they referred to the contents of certain WhatsApp groups. They suggested that online interactions make

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it more difficult to identify officers with unacceptable and inappropriate behaviour, as those “who hold misogynistic views”³⁵⁵ and “loathsome attitudes”³⁵⁶ can “discuss these with like-minded colleagues” behind closed doors through “digital means”.³⁵⁷ The Inquiry was also told how social media has “amplified” racist and sexist bullying, which has the power to “humiliate, control and ruin someone’s life”.³⁵⁸ Furthermore, senior leaders highlighted that strong supervision and “well led” teams generally do not engage in social media activity³⁵⁹ and described the challenges faced by supervisors to counter and confront the inappropriate use of social media.³⁶⁰

- 7.194 Senior leaders agreed on the importance of supervision and “intrusive leadership” to set standards and intervene early.³⁶¹ Those who spoke to the Inquiry pointed to supervisors and leadership as key to improving policing culture.³⁶²
- 7.195 Senior leaders told the Inquiry of the crucial role that supervisors, as well as senior policing leadership, play in setting the tone and the cultural standard. One explained that “it is incumbent on police forces to [...] enable a culture of calling out bad behaviour from the top down”.³⁶³
- 7.196 The Inquiry was told of the enormous burden of responsibilities and tasks required of supervisors to monitor officers, reinforce “appropriate standards”³⁶⁴ and pick up on issues or behaviours to identify any risks within their teams.³⁶⁵ This is alongside their administrative duties, such as organising staffing levels, illness and daily cover, and allocation of equipment. Senior leaders agreed that, because of their expanding duties, “supervisors have been taken away from supervising on the street and have become more desk-bound”.³⁶⁶ The Inquiry was also told that this is compounded by increased pressure on the ratios of supervisors to supervisees due to funding cuts and the limited numbers of experienced supervisors.
- 7.197 Sir Mark Rowley, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service, told the Inquiry that it is “unfair to criticise people if they have not been given the skills, confidence and competence to carry out their role effectively”.³⁶⁷ To support supervisors to perform their many duties, particularly in ensuring adherence to a positive workplace culture, the Training and Human Resources Teams of the Metropolitan Police Service were working to develop a model whereby, over the next two years, sergeants would receive ten days’ leadership training.³⁶⁸ The Inquiry was told that, in April 2023, the Metropolitan Police Service had launched an in-person First Line Leaders Programme³⁶⁹ to support staff with supervisory responsibilities to

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develop core leadership skills, as well as skills in operational areas such as supervising investigations, violence against women and girls, and working with local communities.³⁷⁰

7.198 Commissioner Mark Rowley also told the Inquiry about Operation Signa,³⁷¹ which aims to encourage officers and staff of the Metropolitan Police Service to intervene and challenge inappropriate behaviour, with a particular focus on supervisors responding to complaints. In general, senior leaders told the Inquiry of the importance of the significant role of supervisors and leaders in improving confidence to report inappropriate behaviour. Operation Signa includes improvements to leadership training, so that “matters [are taken] seriously and escalated towards resolution”.³⁷²

7.199 In discussions with senior leaders of policing organisations about the existence of unacceptable and inappropriate attitudes within the police, the Inquiry was told repeatedly about the increasing numbers of women as part of the uplift programme, namely that 40–45 per cent of new recruits are women.³⁷³ Senior leaders clearly see the recruitment of more women, as well as other individuals from diverse backgrounds, as a positive sign to effect a positive cultural shift and challenge misogyny and sexism in the workplace. As one senior leader said: “[A] healthy workplace is a diverse workplace.”³⁷⁴ Another senior leader said that “behaviours and cultures have significantly improved and I think that’s borne out by there being more women in policing now”.³⁷⁵ While it is important that more women are present and active in police forces, the onus to effect cultural change should not be placed on female officers and staff. Due to entrenched cultural attitudes and practices, it is not guaranteed that the presence of more women will necessarily remove or even dilute misogynist attitudes within policing. Furthermore, few senior leaders mentioned the low retention rates for existing female officers and what is being done to retain women in policing or to support their career progression through the ranks. The Inquiry’s recommendation on recruitment and retention of women in the workforce (Recommendation 16) is set out in the section below.

Recommendations on workplace culture

Recommendation 14: Positive culture and elimination of misconduct or criminality often excused as ‘banter’

With immediate effect, every police force should commit publicly to being an anti-sexist, anti-misogynistic, anti-racist organisation in order to address, understand and eradicate sexism, racism and misogyny, contributing to a wider positive culture to remove all forms of discrimination from the profession. This includes properly addressing – and taking steps to root out – so-called ‘banter’ that often veils or excuses malign or toxic behaviour in police ranks.

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Recommendation 15: Reporting by police officers and staff of harassment, sexual offences and inappropriate behaviour committed by fellow officers

With immediate effect, all police forces should take action to understand and confront the barriers that police officers and staff face when reporting sexual offences committed by a person that they work with or in the workplace. This is in order to encourage victims, who are also police officers or police staff, to come forward and submit complaints, as well as to identify and remove those who are not fit for service. To do this, forces should:

- a. ensure, when a complaint is made, that sufficient and appropriate resources are dedicated to supporting the complainant, including maintaining anonymity where needed or requested, and ensuring an investigation is carried out as appropriate;
- b. address cultural barriers to reporting, such as re-victimising complainants by labelling or treating them as ‘troublemakers’; and
- c. provide dedicated reporting processes for women in police forces who experience inappropriate behaviour related to their gender.

Recommendation 16: Recruitment and retention of women in police forces

By September 2024, the College of Policing and the National Police Chiefs’ Council should review and examine the conditions of female officers and staff in order to encourage more women to join the police and progress in policing careers. To ensure success, this should include a review of:

- a. working conditions that do not address the realities of modern working lives, including families where both parents are officers and share caring responsibilities;
- b. processes, training and refreshers for officers returning from parental leave; and
- c. kit, equipment and facilities designed largely by and for men.

Appendix A: Victim Personal Statements

Susan Everard (Sarah's mother)



Sarah is gone and I am broken hearted. She was my precious little girl, our youngest child. The feeling of loss is so great it is visceral. And with the sorrow come waves of panic at not being able to see her again. I can never talk to her, never hold her again, and never more be a part of her life. We have kept her dressing gown – it still smells of her and I hug that instead of her.

Sarah died in horrendous circumstances. I am tormented at the thought of what she endured. I play it out in my mind. I go through the terrible sequence of events. I wonder when she realized she was in mortal danger; I wonder what her murderer said to her. When he strangled her, for how long was she conscious, knowing she would die? It is torture to think of it. Sarah was handcuffed, unable to defend herself and there was no one to rescue her. She spent her last hours on this earth with the very worst of humanity.

She lost her life because Wayne Couzens wanted to satisfy his perverted desires. It is a ridiculous reason, it is nonsensical; how could he value a human life so cheaply? I cannot comprehend it. I am incandescent with rage at the thought of it. He treated my daughter as if she was nothing and disposed of her as if she was rubbish.

If Sarah had died because of an illness, she would have been cared for. We could have looked after her and been with her. If she had died because of an accident, people would have tried to help – there would have been kindness. But there is no comfort to be had, there is no consoling thought in the way Sarah died. In her last hours she was faced with brutality and terror, alone with someone intent on doing her harm. The thought of it is unbearable. I am haunted by the horror of it.

When Sarah went missing we suffered days of agony, not knowing where she was or what had happened to her. Then, when Sarah's burnt remains were found, we spent two terrible days waiting for tests to show how she had died, fearing she had been set alight before she was dead – the thought was appalling.

Burning her body was the final insult, it meant we could never again see her sweet face and never say goodbye.

Our lives will never be the same. We should be a family of five, but now we are four. Her death leaves a yawning chasm in our lives that cannot be filled. I yearn for her. I remember all the lovely things about her: she was caring, she was funny. She was clever, but she was good at practical things too. She was a beautiful dancer. She was a wonderful daughter. She was always there to listen, to advise, or simply to share the minutiae of the day. And she was also a strongly principled young woman who knew right from wrong and who lived by those values. She was a good person. She had purpose to her life.

My outlook on life has changed since Sarah died: I am more cautious; I worry more about our other children. I crave the familiarity and security of home; the wider world has lost its appeal. It is too painful to contemplate a future without Sarah, so I just live in the here and now. I think of Sarah all the time, but the mornings and evenings are particularly painful.

In the morning I wake up to the awful reality that Sarah is gone. In the evenings, at the time she was abducted, I let out a silent scream: Don't get in the car, Sarah. Don't believe him. Run! I am repulsed by the thought of Wayne Couzens and what he did to Sarah. I am outraged that he masqueraded as a policeman in order to get what he wanted.

Sarah wanted to get married and have children, now all that has gone. He took her life and stole her future and we will never have the joy of sharing that future with her. Each day dawns and I think, Sarah should be here, leading her life and embracing new experiences. She had so many years ahead of her.

I don't know how anyone could be so cruel as to take my daughter's life. What I do know is that Sarah will never be forgotten and is remembered with boundless love.

I cling on to memories of Sarah, I hold them tight to keep them safe. The other night, I dreamt that Sarah appeared at home. In my dream I held her and could feel her physically. Jeremy was there, we were comforting her, saying "it's alright Sarah, it's alright". I would give anything to hold her once more; I hope I dream that dream again.

Jeremy Everard (Sarah's father)¹



The impact of what you have done will never end. The horrendous murder of my daughter, Sarah, is in my mind all the time and will be for the rest of my life.

A father wants to look after his children and fix everything and you have deliberately and with premeditation stopped my ability to do that.

Sarah was handcuffed and unable to defend herself. This preys on my mind all the time. There is no redemption for what you have done, for taking Sarah away from us.

You burnt our daughter's body – you further tortured us – so that we could not see her again. We did not know whether you had burnt her alive or dead. You stopped us seeing Sarah for one last time and stopped me from giving my daughter one last kiss goodbye.

Her body fell apart when she was moved. Her brain and neck bones were removed for months by the pathologist and her body was difficult to preserve so we had to use the services of a specialist embalmer to enable a dignified burial.

All my family want is Sarah back with us. No punishment that you receive will ever compare to the pain and torture that you have inflicted on us.

You murdered our daughter and forever broke the hearts of her mother, father, brother, sister, family and her friends.

¹ As delivered in court.

Sarah had so much to look forward to and because of YOU this is now gone forever. She was saving to buy a house and looking forward to marriage and children. We were looking forward to having grandchildren. We loved being a part of Sarah's world and expected her to have a full and happy life. The closest we can get to her now is to visit her grave every day.

Katie Everard (Sarah's sister)

You treated Sarah as if she was nothing. Placed more emphasis on satisfying your sick disgusting perversions than on a life. Her life. You disposed of my sister's body as if it was rubbish. Fly-tipped her as if she meant nothing. She meant everything. We couldn't even see her, she was so badly burnt. Her brain was removed from her skull to check for trauma and cause of death – I still don't know if they put her brain back in her head or whether it is lying next to her body in her coffin.

Shards of her kneecap were returned to us to be placed with her body – shards that you knocked when moving her burnt body from the fridge you had used to hide her and conceal the fire. We are still missing her hyoid bone from her throat, which is being checked to see the force you used to strangle her, to determine how long she may have survived. We know it was broken. Her burnt body still had her necklace and one earring in her ear – the other had fallen from her ear because it had burnt off.

You hear from the police that it takes around 2 minutes to strangle someone. And around 8–10 seconds for them to lose consciousness. At first there is a sense of relief at hearing that your sister might only have been aware of what was happening for 8–10 seconds. But have you put your hands around your neck and tried pushing hard? 8–10 seconds now seems a long time.

You used your warrant card to trick my sister into your car. She sat in a car handcuffed for hours. What could she have thought she had done wrong? What lies did you tell her? When did she realise that she wasn't going to survive the night?

I'm constantly replaying in my head – did you rape her, then kill her? Did you kill her while raping her? You get small nuggets of information and that thought process starts again. Your semen and blood were found in your car. So this suggests you raped her in the car. You find out you may have used a belt to strangle her. New horrendous images forming.

You stopped to get a Lucozade and water at a petrol station. Was she still alive at this point? Bound in your car? I am horrified by your ability to flit between what you did and normal everyday actions. Your casual demeanour on CCTV was very upsetting and shocking to see.

We had to go to the flat and pack up Sarah's whole life – washing left hanging up, half sewn outfits, deliveries waiting to be returned, packages waiting at the door ready to be opened. All signs of a life waiting to be lived – chores to be done, ready for her to return and continue when she got home. But she never got home because a predator – you – was on the loose. Prowling the streets for hours looking for his prey.

You can't comprehend what you are being told when it is happening because it is so horrific. Some sort of sick waking nightmare. You can't imagine anyone could do such a thing.

You are waiting to hear anything from the police. Every bit you get is different. You hear her body has been found. Then you find out she has been burnt. So badly burnt you can't see her. Can't see her again to say goodbye. The first thought you have in your head after despair and shock is – was she dead before you burnt her? Imagine that even having to

be a thought. You find out no soot was found in her lungs which suggests she was burnt after you murdered her. Imagine being relieved to hear your sister was dead before she was burnt.

I replay it continuously round in my head. What you may have said to her, what she may have said back, when she realised she was in grave danger and was not going to survive. Hoping my sister was unconscious and drugged, but we know that was not the case – no drugs found in her body, no trauma to the head. Burst blood vessels in her brain from your strangulation. Which meant she was conscious when you were doing these unfathomable things to her. My only hope is that she was in a state of shock and that she wasn't aware of the disgusting things being done to her by a monster. When you forced yourself upon and raped her. When you put your hands around her neck and strangled her.

It disgusts me that you were the last person to touch her perfect body and violate her in the way you did. The last person to see her alive and speak to her. How scared she must have been. The last moment of her life not with loved ones, but frightening and fighting for her life. I hate to think of her being so scared and alone and that in her last moments she had no one with her. No kindness. I hate that I wasn't there to save her. To stop you. I find it hard to believe she is not just living her own life and am sick at the thought that her last moments on this earth alive were so horrific.

How dare you take her from me? Take away her hopes and dreams. Her life. Children that were never born. Generations that will never exist. Her future no longer exists. The future I was supposed to live with my sister no longer exists. You have ruined so many lives.

Sarah is the very best person with so many people who love and cherish her. I want to speak to her and hug her and hear her laugh and go out for dinners and drinks and dancing. All those conversations we can never have. There were so many things I wanted to share with her – trips abroad, being each other's bridesmaid, meeting her babies and being an Aunty, growing old together and see who got the most wrinkles. We weren't even halfway through our journey and you took it all away.

I feel like I live in a make-believe world. As if nothing is real. I have to pretend because the thought of not having Sarah forever is too hard to bear. A lifetime now seems a very long time.

I should never have to write a eulogy for or bury my little sister. There is no punishment you could receive that will ever compare to the pain you have caused us. We can never get Sarah back. The last moments of Sarah's life play on my mind constantly. I am so disgusted and appalled. It terrifies me that you have such disregard for a person's life. You have taken from me the most precious person. And I can never get her back.

Appendix B: Methodology

B.1 This appendix describes how the Angiolini Inquiry was set up and carried out its work. It covers the following:

- establishing the Inquiry;
- evidence-gathering and investigation;
- Maxwellisation; and
- timescales.

Establishing the Inquiry

Background

B.2 On 30 September 2021, Wayne Couzens, a serving officer with the Metropolitan Police Service, was sentenced to life imprisonment with a whole-life order for the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard. In his sentencing remarks, Lord Justice Fulford stated that Couzens “used his position as a police officer to enable this to happen” and described how Couzens’ crimes have “very considerably added to the sense of insecurity that many have living in our cities, perhaps particularly women, when travelling by themselves and especially at night”.¹

B.3 On 22 November 2021, the then Home Secretary, the Rt Hon. Priti Patel MP, addressed Couzens’ crimes and sentencing, announcing to Parliament that she was “launching an independent inquiry” and confirming “that the Right Honourable Dame Elish Angiolini QC has agreed to be the Chair of that inquiry”.² This was the first announcement confirming that the Angiolini Inquiry would be established.

Scope

B.4 In her announcement on 22 November 2021, the then Home Secretary confirmed that the Inquiry would be made up of two parts, with Part 1 to establish how Couzens “was able to serve as a police officer for so long and seek to establish a definitive account of his conduct [...] and [...] also [...] to understand the extent to which his behaviour rang alarm bells with his colleagues”.³ The Terms of Reference for Part 2 of the Inquiry were to be set out after the publication of the Part 1 Report

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and were intended to “consider the broader implications for policing and the protection of women arising from Part 1”.⁴ The Terms of Reference for Part 2 of the Inquiry were published on 11 May 2023,⁵ and it is under way.

- B.5 The Angiolini Inquiry was commissioned as an independent, non-statutory inquiry. At the time, the then Home Secretary described how the non-statutory Inquiry was designed to give Sarah’s family “closure as quickly as possible”, explaining that “statutory inquiries can be long-running, with limited flexibility” and that “recommendations are not made for a number of years”.⁶
- B.6 The then Home Secretary confirmed, however, that she would not rule out converting the Inquiry to a statutory footing if required.⁷ The Inquiry has been able to fulfil the Terms of Reference for Part 1 successfully while operating on a non-statutory basis. This was outlined in a letter to the Home Secretary in June 2022, highlighting that the Inquiry had to date “benefited from positive cooperation from many individuals and organisations, which [...] greatly facilitated our task”.⁸

Defining the Terms of Reference

- B.7 The Terms of Reference for Part 1 of the Inquiry were published on 10 January 2022.⁹ They were drafted by the Home Office, in consultation with the Chair of the Inquiry, Sarah Everard’s parents, and relevant policing organisations.
- B.8 The Terms of Reference outlined the Inquiry’s investigative scope, which sought to establish a comprehensive account of the career and overall conduct of the killer of Sarah Everard, to identify any missed opportunities, and to make recommendations based on the findings.

Data privacy

- B.9 Due to the nature of the Terms of Reference, the Inquiry expected to receive personal data, including sensitive personal data. Therefore, a necessary framework for receiving and processing this data had to be put in place, which included a clear Privacy Policy and Disclosure Protocol.
- B.10 A copy of the Privacy Policy was given and explained to any witness providing information to the Inquiry, as well as to organisations disclosing documents. A copy of both the Privacy Policy and Disclosure Protocol were published on the Inquiry’s website (www.angiolini.independent-inquiry.uk).

The Inquiry team and support

Inquiry Secretariat

- B.11 The Inquiry comprises a Secretariat of civil servants, as well as legal investigators.

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External support

- B.12 The Inquiry is provided with legal support by a team of solicitors from Eversheds Sutherland. Eversheds Sutherland's Technology Team also contributes by providing bespoke, secure technology platforms to store and analyse the Inquiry's evidence.
- B.13 A group of expert individuals was also appointed to provide advice to the Inquiry, referred to as the Inquiry's 'Reference Group'. Each person was selected on the basis that they had expertise relevant to the Terms of Reference for Part 1. To maintain the independent nature of the Inquiry, each person was selected with the knowledge that they had never worked for any of the organisations disclosing evidence to the Inquiry or the sponsoring department, the Home Office. The Reference Group members were as follows:
- Zoë Billingham CBE, formerly Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services;
 - Sir Stephen Lander KCB, formerly Director General of MI5 and Chair of the Serious Organised Crime Agency;
 - Sir Iain Livingstone QPM, former Chief Constable of Police Scotland; and
 - Andrea Simon, Director, End Violence Against Women Coalition.
- B.14 Finally, the Inquiry was supported by media monitoring and communications specialists.
- B.15 All third-party providers to the Inquiry were procured via the appropriate government processes and evaluated by members of the Inquiry Secretariat and independent civil servants.
- B.16 During the Inquiry, information has been shared with the public via the Inquiry's website (see paragraph B.10), which contains information about the Inquiry team, the background to the Inquiry's work, and copies of the Terms of Reference and other key policies and protocols.

Evidence-gathering and investigation

Requesting documents

- B.17 To establish a sound evidence base, the Inquiry wrote to a number of organisations to request documents relevant to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference for Part 1. This included requesting and analysing documentation held electronically and in hard copy, such as:
- audio recordings;
 - statements;
 - internal and external email communications;

- manuscript notes;
- meeting notes and minutes;
- memoranda;
- pocket notebooks;
- policy documents;
- reports;
- social media communications and data;
- spreadsheets;
- video footage;
- crime reporting data; and
- personnel records and data.

B.18 The requested documentation was disclosed to the Inquiry via a secure, online file-sharing platform.

Disclosing organisations

B.19 The Inquiry received documents relevant to the Terms of Reference for Part 1 from a number of organisations, including:

- Cabinet Office;
- Civil Nuclear Constabulary;
- Civil Nuclear Constabulary Welfare Fund;
- College of Policing;
- Crown Prosecution Service;
- His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS);
- Home Office;
- Independent Office for Police Conduct;
- Kent Police;
- Metropolitan Police Service;

- Ministry of Defence;
- National Police Chiefs' Council;
- Office for Nuclear Regulation;
- Thames Valley Police; and
- United Kingdom Security Vetting.

B.20 The disclosing organisations were overwhelmingly supportive of the Inquiry's aims, disclosing over 100,000 pages of key policy documents, witness statements, personnel files and other documentation to inform the Inquiry's findings. Some of these documents dated back over 20 years and detailed many aspects of Couzens' career and overall conduct from a range of sources.

B.21 The Inquiry was, and continues to be, grateful to disclosing organisations for their support to the Inquiry by disclosing relevant and necessary documentation as part of the evidence-gathering process. However, the Inquiry did face certain challenges when procuring contextual data, as described below.

Availability of contextual data

B.22 To support the Inquiry's findings, the team conducted desk-based research using publicly available information to understand the context of policing. Data sets were taken from:

- College of Policing and Crown Prosecution Service data summaries;
- GOV.UK;
- HMICFRS data tables;
- Office for National Statistics;
- published Freedom of Information Act requests and responses; and
- other publicly available sources.

B.23 When reviewing the data sets, the Inquiry experienced some challenges with determining the reliability of data. For example, there were inconsistencies in the way certain data was captured by forces, which made it difficult for the Inquiry to compare and contrast the data and therefore determine its accuracy.

B.24 In assessing and contextualising the policing landscape, if the data is not produced consistently and in a comparable way, forces' understanding of the nature, extent and frequency of Violence Against Women and Girls offences, misconduct and cultural issues is considerably limited.

Witness evidence

- B.25 In addition to disclosure from organisations, the other crucial evidence considered was that provided by witnesses.
- B.26 Witnesses provided evidence by participating in interviews with the Chair and/or senior members of the Inquiry team. The interviews took place in person, virtually or over the telephone. The interviews were recorded, with each witness's permission, and the evidence formally summarised in the form of a witness statement for witnesses to agree.
- B.27 In all correspondence, the Inquiry gave assurances that, as a general rule, individual witnesses would not be named in the Report. People who gave evidence to the Inquiry were directed to the Privacy Notice and reminded that the Inquiry can pseudonymise or anonymise personal data and/or redact it. Witnesses were notified that individuals may be referred to by job title or role. Witnesses were also informed of limited exceptions to this, for example where individuals hold an accountable role in an organisation or where the identity of an individual is relevant and necessary to fulfil the Terms of Reference.
- B.28 As part of the engagement with witnesses, steps were taken to ensure that all witnesses were safeguarded and supported before, during and after any interview. This meant adapting the interview environment to support accessibility and mental wellbeing, where required. Witnesses were given the chance to decide the format of their interviews and provided with opportunities to discuss with the Inquiry Secretariat how the Inquiry intended to use their evidence. In some circumstances, where witnesses found it too difficult to review their evidence when prepared in witness statement form, the Inquiry agreed to use their recorded interview as its formal evidence base.
- B.29 All witnesses who engaged with the Inquiry were offered free and confidential support provided by an external, independent service. The Inquiry signposted the support service to anyone involved in the Inquiry, regardless of the extent of their engagement.
- B.30 During the evidence-gathering phase, the Inquiry was informed that the ongoing media coverage and interest were distressing to some witnesses. The Inquiry therefore made efforts to ensure that witnesses were fully supported, and further assurances were provided, as necessary, around the Inquiry's efforts to ensure their anonymity.

Witness statistics

- B.31 Over the course of Part 1, the Inquiry has met and interviewed 144 witnesses, including current and former police officers, police staff, individuals with knowledge of National Security Vetting, individuals employed by policing organisations, current and former senior leaders of police forces and policing and other relevant organisations, and members of the public.
- B.32 The Inquiry was greatly supported by these witnesses, who provided information relevant to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference, significantly adding to the material

provided via the disclosure process. The Inquiry was, and continues to be, deeply grateful to the witnesses who took the time to provide key information, and sometimes further documents, to the Inquiry.

B.33 Although overall feedback about the witness engagement process was overwhelmingly positive, understandably some witnesses found it extremely difficult and distressing to discuss sensitive topics and share their experiences with the Inquiry. Occasionally, this meant that witnesses chose to cease their communication with the Inquiry.¹⁰ Where individuals found it too difficult to engage with the process, this was respected by the Inquiry. Similarly, there were a number of witnesses with whom the Inquiry had contact, or attempted to contact, and for various reasons these witnesses did not provide evidence to the Inquiry. The details are as follows:

- 79 witnesses who were considered by the Inquiry but ultimately not required to attend an interview for the Chair to fulfil the Terms of Reference;
- 15 witnesses who did not attend the interview or respond to contact; and
- 6 witnesses who declined to provide evidence.

B.34 Despite not being able to obtain evidence from all witnesses contacted, the Inquiry was still able to fulfil the Terms of Reference through evidence gathered from the witness interviews conducted and documents disclosed by organisations.

B.35 Of the 144 witnesses who gave evidence, 21 were senior leaders and former senior leaders of relevant organisations. These witnesses were interviewed by senior members of the Inquiry team to discuss their views on the current state of policing and any changes being contemplated or already implemented since Sarah Everard was abducted, raped and murdered by Couzens. These discussions contributed to the development of the Part 1 recommendations.

B.36 The Inquiry also gave Couzens the opportunity to submit a statement in relation to Part 1 of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference, but he declined to do so.

B.37 In relation to those individuals providing evidence to the Inquiry, it has been critical that they felt able to give open and transparent evidence. Therefore, unless individual witnesses held, or hold, positions where there is, or was, an expectation of public accountability, which would particularly be the case for those in senior and/or leadership positions, they have been anonymised as outlined in the Privacy Notice.

Expert witnesses

B.38 The Inquiry also commissioned expert witnesses as part of the Inquiry's evidence-gathering phase. The experts commissioned were:

- Professor Michael Goodman, Professor of Intelligence and International Affairs at King's College, University of London;

¹⁰ Less than two per cent of witnesses chose to disengage from the process, doing so after providing their evidence in an interview.

- Dr Dan Lomas, formerly Lecturer in Intelligence and Security Studies at Brunel University London; now Assistant Professor of International Relations at the University of Nottingham;
- Dr Eduardo A. Vasquez, Senior Lecturer in Forensic Psychology at the University of Kent;
- Professor Lesley McMillan FRSE, Professor of Criminology and Sociology at Glasgow Caledonian University; and
- Professor Elizabeth Gilchrist, a forensic psychologist registered with the Health and Care Professions Council and Professor of Psychological Therapies at the University of Edinburgh.

B.39 Each expert was commissioned to produce evidence in the form of a written report. These were considered by the Inquiry when reaching its findings and making recommendations. A witness with expertise in sexual offending, Dr Adrian West, forensic clinical psychologist, also provided evidence to the Inquiry.

Wider research

B.40 Another strand of the evidence-gathering stage was to understand the wider context in which the Terms of Reference for Part 1 sit. The Inquiry analysed relevant policies and guidance in place when Couzens was working, including, but not limited to, recruitment, vetting and conduct. This research also served to verify evidence provided in witness statements.

Media and communications analysis

B.41 The Inquiry was also provided with research and analysis conducted by media monitoring and communications specialists. This was carried out using a wide range of public media outlets and social media channels.

B.42 The purpose of this research and analysis was to support the Inquiry in providing possible lines of enquiry that were explored with witnesses. Furthermore, it provided additional context to the Terms of Reference for Part 1 that the Inquiry considered while making its recommendations.

Maxwellisation

B.43 Maxwellisation is the process by which an individual or organisation is notified of potential criticism/s that the Inquiry is minded to make in its report/s, in order to provide them with a fair and reasonable opportunity to respond in advance of the report being finalised and published. It is a legal process that the Inquiry is required to follow.

B.44 In this Inquiry, as part of the Maxwellisation process, 13 organisations and 19 individuals were notified of potential criticisms that the Inquiry was proposing to make in its Report, with 26 responses received. All responses were considered carefully and taken into account by the Inquiry when finalising its conclusions and this Report.

Timescales

- B.45 The Inquiry team has always been committed to completing Part 1 of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference at pace, in order to provide answers to the Everard family as quickly as possible, in line with the commitment provided by the then Home Secretary.¹¹ However, the progress of the Inquiry's work has been impacted by developments outwith its control.
- B.46 Shortly after the Inquiry was established, in March 2022, the Crown Prosecution Service authorised four charges of indecent exposure against Couzens.¹² Two further charges of indecent exposure were brought against Couzens in August 2022.¹³ Misconduct proceedings relating to some of these offences were also ongoing. More information on these matters can be found in Chapter 3.
- B.47 These matters were relevant to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference for Part 1 and therefore, until they were disposed of and were no longer sub judice, the Inquiry was prevented from taking evidence from certain witnesses who were involved with the ongoing criminal and/or misconduct proceedings.
- B.48 In March 2023, the criminal proceedings concluded. The misconduct proceedings concluded in May 2023. At that stage, the Inquiry was able to contact all outstanding witnesses relevant to Part 1 and seek their evidence.
- B.49 While this prevented the Inquiry from finalising this Report as quickly as was originally intended, it was important that all relevant evidence was gathered, to ensure that the Report was complete and delivered comprehensive recommendations.
- B.50 An important aspect of the Part 1 Terms of Reference was that the findings from Part 1 would inform the Secretary of State for the Home Department's consideration of what further, broader, issues arise for policing and the protection of women and should be considered in Part 2 of the Inquiry. Due to the delay to the completion of Part 1, as outlined above, it was agreed by the then Home Secretary that it was "of vital importance that we are not prevented from making progress to address broader matters of public concern arising from this and other recent tragic cases".¹⁴ It was therefore agreed that Part 2 of the Inquiry would proceed without waiting for Part 1 to conclude¹⁵ and, as indicated above, the Terms of Reference for Part 2 were published by the Home Secretary on 11 May 2023.
- B.51 The Terms of Reference for Part 2 provide that "[s]hould the Inquiry's Part 1 Report, when published, indicate further areas which necessitate examination in Part 2, these will be considered for inclusion in the terms of reference for Part 2 by the Secretary of State for the Home Department".¹⁶

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- B.52 The Inquiry has considered its findings in this Report, and the recommendations made, and is confident that the scope of the Part 2 Terms of Reference will enable the issues arising to be fully examined, without a need for the Part 2 Terms of Reference to be expanded.
- B.53 In addition to fulfilling the Terms of Reference for Part 2, the Inquiry was further commissioned in February 2023 to consider the case of David Carrick,¹⁷ a former officer with the Metropolitan Police Service convicted of 49 offences committed against women, most of them rape or serious sexual assault.¹⁸ The Inquiry's findings on this case will be published separately.

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Appendix C: Glossary of terms

Aftercare: In both force vetting and National Security Vetting contexts, aftercare is the term used to describe the ongoing management of personnel security. Its purpose is to investigate and monitor anything of continuing security concern, between periods of normal review, which could affect an individual holding force vetting or National Security Vetting clearance.

Authorised firearms officer: An authorised firearms officer is a police officer who has been selected, trained, accredited and authorised by their chief officer to carry firearms operationally.

Civil Nuclear Constabulary: The Civil Nuclear Constabulary is the armed police force in charge of protecting civil nuclear facilities and nuclear materials, whether on site or in transit. It is governed by the Civil Nuclear Police Authority.

Court of Session: The Court of Session is Scotland's supreme civil court and is divided into the Outer House and the Inner House.

‘Cyberflashing’: ‘Cyberflashing’ is the commonly used name for an offence under the Online Safety Act 2023, whereby a person intentionally sends (electronically or otherwise) or gives a photograph or film of any person's genitals to another person, either: (a) intending that the recipient will see the genitals and be caused alarm, distress or humiliation; or (b) for the purpose of obtaining sexual gratification where the sender is reckless as to whether the recipient will be caused alarm, distress or humiliation. It is also used to describe an offence under the Communications Act 2003 where a communications network has been used improperly to send a message that is grossly offensive, indecent or obscene.

Data washing: As used in this Report, data washing refers to a process where existing data is cross-checked against different systems to identify errors or inconsistencies. The term can also be used to describe a process where data is reviewed, analysed and cleansed.

Default balance: A default balance is where the borrower has not kept up to date with agreed payments, resulting in the lender in most circumstances closing the relevant account. This can affect the borrower's credit rating and make it more difficult for them to borrow money in the future, as they may be seen as a higher risk.

Home Office forces: As described in this Report, Home Office forces are the 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales (as opposed to the national police forces, namely the British Transport Police, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary and the Ministry of Defence Police, which have different funding and accountability arrangements).

Image categories: When assessing the seriousness of offences involving the possession of indecent images of children, the Sentencing Council's guidelines set out three categories of images: Category A – images involving penetrative sexual activity; Category B – images involving non-penetrative sexual activity; and Category C – indecent images not falling within categories A or B.

Individual Voluntary Arrangement: This is a formal, albeit voluntary, debt repayment plan, concluded under the terms of the Insolvency Act 1986, to manage debts owed to a variety of creditors.

Inner House: One of two parts of the Scottish Court of Session, the Inner House is primarily the appeal court, reviewing decisions mostly from the Outer House of the Court of Session but occasionally from sheriff courts, tribunals and other bodies.

Kent Special Constabulary: The Special Constabulary is a force of warranted, uniformed volunteer police officers who directly supplement the regular police service. Special constables are warranted constables, with all the powers of a regular police officer. In Kent, the minimum commitment for special constables is 16 hours of operational policing per month.

'Lie on the file': A presiding judge in a case can take a decision to let a case 'lie on the file', which means that there is no verdict in that specific case. The case is in effect dormant and can only be revived and proceeded with in exceptional circumstances.

My Investigation Support Team: A team within the Metropolitan Police Service that is responsible for taking on and progressing non-urgent investigations following a police appointment.

Outer House: One of two parts of the Scottish Court of Session, the Outer House mostly hears civil cases when they first come to court.

Police National Computer: This is a national policing information system. It is the main database of criminal records in the UK and is used by frontline police officers and other UK law enforcement organisations to access real-time information of national and local significance.

Police National Database: This is a national intelligence-sharing system used for the purpose of preventing and detecting crime. It makes police intelligence available to licensed users in police forces and other organisations.

RAG ratings: RAG (red, amber, green) ratings are generally used to identify and assess levels of risk.

Recuperative duties: The Police Regulations 2003 define 'recuperative duties' as "duties falling short of full deployment, undertaken by a police officer following an injury, accident, illness or medical incident, during which the officer adapts to and prepares for a return to full duties and the full hours for which they are paid, and is assessed to determine whether he or she is capable of making such a return".

STORM: Kent Police's computer system.

Summary-only offence: This refers to an offence where the prosecution can only be dealt with in the magistrates' court in England and Wales.

Territorial Army: The Territorial Army, now known as the Army Reserve, is the British Army's reserve force. Reservists serve in their spare time and are paid to train in the evening or at the weekend. Reservists are paid a daily rate for their service and also receive a tax-free bonus, or 'bounty', on top of their pay, provided that they meet their minimum training commitment (currently usually 19 or 27 days) and pass their annual military training tests.

'Triable-either-way': This means that the prosecution of a particular offence can be dealt with either on indictment (in the Crown Court) or summarily (in the magistrates' court) in England and Wales.

Triable on indictment: This means that the prosecution of a particular offence can only be dealt with in the Crown Court in England and Wales.

Victim Personal Statement: Victims, or their bereaved close relatives, have the right to explain in their own words how a crime has affected them, whether that is physically, emotionally or in any other way. This explanation, called a Victim Personal Statement, is considered by the judge or magistrate when determining what sentence the defendant should receive.

Witness statement: This is obtained by the police as part of a criminal investigation. It is the written or video-recorded account by a victim or witness of what they saw, heard or know about a crime.

Appendix D: List of abbreviations

ANPR	Automatic Number Plate Recognition
CCTV	closed-circuit television
CRIS	Crime Reporting Information System
GPS	Global Positioning System
HMICFRS	His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services
PNC	Police National Computer
PND	Police National Database
RAG	'red, amber, green' rating
SSCL	Shared Services Connected Ltd

