



Rules vague in Everard file access case – tribunal Free 311224

Description



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There is a “huge amount” of subjectivity about when it is appropriate for a police officer to access information, a lawyer defending an officer accused of viewing confidential information regarding Sarah Everard’s case has told a tribunal.

Ms Everard, 33, was kidnapped, raped and murdered in 2021 by Met officer Wayne Couzens as she walked home from a friend’s house in Clapham, south London.

Four serving officers and three who have resigned were found to have accessed the information, allegedly without proper policing purpose.

As a result, each of the seven has been charged with gross misconduct.

It is alleged that each of the seven individuals inappropriately accessed files relating to Ms Everard’s case between 5 and 15 March 2021, some on multiple occasions.

The officers included four serving officers, PC Myles McHugh, PC Clare Tett, Det Con Tyrone Ward, and Sgt Mark Harper.

The three who resigned are former Sgt Robert Butters, Hannah Rebbeck, who was a trainee constable and Akinwale Ajose-Adeogun, a former inspector.

On Tuesday, the tribunal heard evidence from Det Sgt Vicky Bailey, who compiled a report on the case, including on whether it was appropriate for officers to access the information.

She was asked when an officer would have a “policing purpose” to access information relating to a case.

She said the circumstances would be where the officer needed the information to fulfil their role.

Former inspector Mr Ajose-Adeogun is the most senior officer accused of gross misconduct.

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‘Quite reasonable’

He accessed files relating to Couzens’s custody in Wandsworth between 10 and 12 March 2021, while he was working as a custody support inspector in Croydon, south London.

Ms Bailey said it was “quite reasonable” that detainees from Wandsworth would start to be sent to custody suites in outer London once inner London began to fill up.

“Wandsworth detainees will sometimes end up in Croydon,” she said.

However, she queried why Mr Ajose-Adeogun would look at Wandsworth in particular, and not other nearby police custody suites.

Michael Rawlinson, defending Mr Ajose-Adeogun, said there was a “huge degree” of subjectivity as to what constitutes “policing purpose” and that it is up to officers to use their “personal judgment”.

He asked Ms Bailey if there was a central document that outlined what policing purpose meant for custody officers.

“Not that I am aware of,” she said.

Mr Rawlinson said that there was a “disconnect” between best practice and what happens on the ground.

“In a busy custody environment, a custody officer has to make quick decisions about what information is going to help them most.”

Ms Bailey agreed that a custody officer has to use their personal judgment as to what constitutes a policing purpose.

The tribunal continues.

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