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Anonymity justified by acquittal?

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A service Surrey Police officer who allegedly ‘harassed two female colleagues’ has been cleared of misconduct. The hearing’s chairperson said they had looked into allegations that a police constable carried out a series of acts of harassment against two female officers but misconduct thresholds had not been proven, or were not reached.

The police officer, who has not been named and is referred to as “PC X”, escaped sanctions after the five day hearing which took place last week at the force’s Guildford HQ.

[Image is illustration only – it is not the officer in question.]

PC X was accused of “shouting” at an officer during the first coronavirus lockdown, and attempted to hug another officer twice despite being warned about his behaviour.

Summing up, chairperson Eileen Herlihy said that on July 3, 2020, PC X got involved in a work-place argument that continued at the female officer’s desk. Describing the altercation, which was said to have lasted a matter of seconds, the chairperson said: “He shouted at her” and approached “ her in an intimidating manner” and that his actions were said to cause “intimidation and embarrassment” over a matter of “police policy”.

The argument was said to have started before she was at her desk but that the tone was “abrupt” and “brusque”. He then “placed himself close to her face” and “she had to put her hands up to create some space”. After the argument the pair continued their day as normal. The woman’s initial reaction was that it “was not a big deal but felt embarrassed”.

The chairperson said that it was “not the officers intention to intimidate” and that there was no evidence the PC made any reference to her gender or sex. It was a “genuine disagreement between colleagues that led to an argument”.

The other two matters related to attempts to hug the same woman. The first incident was said to have occurred on January 13, 2020. The panel heard two conflicting reports about the exact details surrounding the PC asking a female colleague for a hug outside their office. The dispute was over the timings of when he went in to hug her, and that he didn’t stop when she pulled away.

The female PC said she regarded him as having a “reputation” as being “over friendly”, “creepy and uncomfortable”. Two months later when she was alone inside the office he again asked her for a hug. He put out his arms and she said no before walking away. He had already been warned about his behaviour.

The panel found he had failed to treat her with respect and courtesy but the chairperson said there was no motive of sexual gratification.

The panel found two of the allegations unproven; the argument and outdoor hug. The third, in the office, was proven but “but fell short of the threshold required for formal disciplinary action”.

Surrey Police Headquarters in Mount Browne, near Guildford, hosted the police misconduct procedure between Monday, June 12, and Friday, June 16.

The male PC can not be named after his identity was protected by the committee chairperson to protect his welfare.

The hearing was brought by the Professional Standards Department as it felt there were cases to answer over potential breaches of authority, respect and courtesy, equality and diversity.

A spokesperson for Surrey Police said “thresholds for referral to disciplinary proceedings are necessarily set lower than that necessary to prove the misconduct, to ensure transparency in the police disciplinary regime.”

During the course of the hearing, an application to withdraw certain allegations against the PC were also agreed.

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