IN THE MATTER OF THE POLICE CONDUCT REGULATIONS 2020

AND IN THE MATTER OF AN ACCELERATED MISCONDUCT HEARING

RE. FORMER PC 755 CALLUM SMITH

Determination of Chief Constable Ivan Balhatchet

1. This is my determination in the accelerated misconduct proceedings relating to PC 755 Callum Smith

2. The Appropriate Authority was represented by Ms Veale. The Former Officer, not in attendance, was represented by his Federation Representative, Mr Rands.

3. I note that the Former Officer has absented himself from this hearing due to his anxiety. There is no discourtesy intended in his decision to not attend, and his interests are protected by his representation.

Allegations

4. The allegations are set out in the Regulation 51 notice found separately to the hearing bundle. In summary, The AA alleges that PC Smith sent three text messages to a phone number concerned in the supply of sex workers across two occasions: 21 June 2025 and 19 August 2025.

5. My task is to:

   a) first, determining the facts, based upon what is admitted by the Former Officer or proven on the balance of probabilities;

   b) second, determining whether on the basis of those facts the Former Officer has breached the Standards of Professional Behaviour alleged;

   c) third, deciding whether the breaches found amount to gross misconduct or not.

d) The fourth (dependent on the findings under (b) and (c) above), deciding what the outcome should be), is considered at stage 2.

6. These allegations came to the attention of the AA after 28 May 2025. As per the interpretation at regulation 67 of The Police (Conduct, Performance and Complaints and Misconduct) (Amendment) Regulations 2025, the amended Police (Conduct) Regulations 2020 apply.

Burden and standard of proof

7. The burden of proof is on the Appropriate Authority to prove that the Former Officer behaved in the manner alleged and that in doing so, he breached the Standards of Professional Behaviour. The standard of proof is on the balance of probabilities. The Appropriate Authority must further satisfy me that the manner of the breach is of such a nature or degree that it amounts to gross misconduct.

Former Officer's Response

8. The Former Officer has provided a Regulation 54 response in which he accepts the facts of the allegation and accepts that they amount to gross misconduct. No further details are given on the Regulation 54 Notice, although I have regard to the prepared statement that the Former Officer gave when he was interviewed in relation to these allegations on 17 June 2026, and I will come to that account in due course.

Stage 1

9. I have taken into account the Investigating Officer's Report, read all the relevant documents and statements and have confirmed that all parties had access to the same information. I have heard submissions from counsel for the Appropriate Authority and on behalf of Former PC Smith.

Factual Findings

10. The Former Officer joined Northamptonshire Police as a police officer on 6 November 2023. Before becoming a police officer, he had worked for the Force

as a civilian member of staff in the control room. At the time of the matters before me, he was serving as a response officer in Northampton.

11. As part of his training, the Former Officer received instruction on the Code of Ethics and the Standards of Professional Behaviour. His learning history records completion of the Modern Slavery learning package on 14 December 2023. The modern slavery training addressed modern slavery and sexual exploitation. He also completed online Code of Ethics learning modules in May 2024, July 2024, and March 2025.

12. These matters came to light during Operation HILT, a criminal investigation by Northamptonshire Police into suspected illegal brothels operating within the county. On 13 February 2026, DC Liam Bates, the officer in charge of that investigation, contacted the Counter Corruption Unit after examination of a mobile device belonging to the principal suspect identified telephone numbers stored as “Police”. That raised a concern that the communications might involve serving police officers and required further investigation. A comparison with the Force’s Human Resources and vetting records identified one of the numbers as belonging to the Former Officer. Communications data linked that number to a telephone number advertised on the Secret Hostess website, which advertised adult sexual services. Analysis identified contact on 21 June 2025 and 19 August 2025, although the content of the messages was not available from that data.

13. It is not in dispute that the Former Officer sent the messages alleged, or that he knew that the number he was sending the messages to was concerned in the supply of sex workers. That much is admitted in his prepared statement. I find that it was he who sent the messages on 21 June 2025 and 19 August 2025. To be specific, I find that he messaged the number on 3 occasions,

    a) 21 June 2025: 19:03:34.

    b) 19 August 2025: 20:21:55 and

    c) 19 August 2025: 20:23:40.

14. On 21 June 2025, the Former Officer sent a text message to the advertised number. The communications evidence records no reply on that occasion. On 19 August 2025, he sent a further message to that number and received two

replies. He then sent another message and received two further replies. The communications data establishes the contact, but does not disclose the wording of the messages. The only evidence of the contents of these messages comes from the Former Officer's prepared statement in which he says that the replies in August offered sexual services.

15. The Former Officer was interviewed in relation to these allegations on 17 June 2026. He gave a prepared statement and then answered "no comment" to each question asked. At 00:04:22 in the interview transcript, he read the following prepared statement.:

*"I am PC Callum SMITH. I confirm that I am the user owner of telephone number 07*** ***694.*

*On the 21ST OF JUNE 2025, I was off duty at home browsing the internet. I came across number 07*** ***859 and sent a text message to it. I did not reply.*

*On the 19TH OF AUGUST 2025 I was off duty at home and browsing the internet. I came across number 07*** ***589 and sent a text message to it. I received two replies.*

I sent a further message on the 19TH OF AUGUST 2025 and I received two further replies. I believe the two replies were similar both times. I do not recall the details of the messages but they were offering a sexual service.

I did not retain messages and deleted them.

I have never visited or arranged a visit for a paid sexual service.

I understand now that there are individuals behind such services who may be vulnerable. I am embarrassed that I was curious to even text this number and signed by myself today."

16. I have considered that account alongside the communications evidence and the duty rota. The rota indicates that the Former Officer was not at work on either 21 June 2025 or 19 August 2025. I therefore find that he was off duty on both occasions.

17. After reading his statement, the Former Officer answered "no comment" to further questions. He did not explain exactly what he was browsing on the internet.

18. I find that the contact was deliberate rather than accidental: the Former Officer accepted that he chose to send the messages. He contacted the number on two separate dates and, in August, sent a further message after receiving replies. I have taken account of his explanation that he was curious. I find that he received offers of a sexual service.

19. I have considered the banking documents provided during the investigation: the redacted NatWest statements covering June and August 2025 and the redacted screenshots of statements from an unnamed bank for those months. Those documents do not support a finding that the Former Officer used sex workers. They identify no specific payment to the advertised service on or about either relevant date. The investigator's observation that payment might have been made from cash previously withdrawn does not establish that any such payment occurred. I make no finding of payment for sexual services from these documents.

20. The Former Officer expressly denied ever visiting or arranging a visit for a paid sexual service. Neither the communications evidence nor the banking documents provide a sufficient basis to find that he arranged an appointment, attended premises, met a sex worker, paid for sexual services or received such services. I therefore make no finding that the Former Officer did physically engage the services of any sex worker.

21. My findings are confined to the deliberate, off-duty communications described above, the receipt of messages offering a sexual service, and the Former Officer's admitted deletion of the messages.

Breach of standards

22. Those facts being proven, I move to assess whether those facts constitute a breach of the professional standards.

23. I find that the Former Officer's actions breached the standards as alleged by the Appropriate Authority:

Discreditable Conduct: Police officers behave in a manner which does not discredit the police service or undermine public confidence in it, whether on or off duty.

24. Were the public to be made aware that the Former Officer had been engaging or attempting to engage in communication with sex workers with the only plausible purpose being for the arrangement of sexual services, their trust and confidence in the force and the police service as a whole would be significantly damaged.

25. I do also take notice of the National Police Chief Council (NPCC) guidance on the use of sex workers within policing which states,

"When police officers or staff make use of services offered by sex workers there is an obvious significant risk that this is highly likely to undermine public trust. For that reason, police officers and staff should not procure or attempt to procure physically provided commercial sexual services or other services. To do so would compromise their professional position."

"This curtailment of activity in the private lives of our workforce is necessary to address the risk posed to undermining public confidence and to individual employees themselves. It is very unlikely that an officer or staff member would be able to adequately assess the vulnerability or welfare of the sex worker, including the identification of human trafficking/CSE indicators. This may in turn lead to criminal allegations under S.53A of the Sexual Offences Act."

"The sex work industry has many well documented close links to organised criminality. Officers and staff may well be placed in the position of being expected to turn a blind eye' to other criminality such as drug taking and the unlicensed service of alcohol."

26. Taking those factors into account, the only conclusion is that the Former Officer's behaviour was breached the Professional Standards as alleged.

Severity of breach

27. I remind myself of the relevant sections of the College of Policing Document 'Guidance on Outcomes in Police Misconduct Proceedings'. I remind myself also

of the definition of gross misconduct: “a breach of the Standards of Professional Behaviour that is so serious as to justify dismissal”

28. It is important to mention again, the highest possible regard and expectations that the public has of its public servants, the trust which is placed in those servants, and the clear requirement to tackle and eliminate wrongdoing, and unprofessional behaviour within the service. Those standards are expected even when an officer is not on duty.

29. Conduct that goes against these crucial, standards is – in my view – so serious, and has such adverse implications for the service, that it would always be justifiable, proportionate, necessary and ethical to consider dismissal as an appropriate sanction.

30. Taking into account the National Police Chief Council (NPCC) guidance I have outlined above, it is clear that engaging sex workers is incompatible with being a police officer. Those working are at risk of being exploited, and those using their services are at risk of committing sexual offences. The damage that could be caused to police confidence if it were known that police officers engage with organisations offering sex workers is such as to justify dismissal. For that reason, I find that this is gross misconduct.

Stage 2

31. Having now heard submissions on outcome, have considered the Former Officer’s antecedents, I am ready to deliver my findings on outcome.

32. The AA submit that the appropriate outcome in this case is dismissal without notice.

33. I remind myself again of the purpose of these proceedings set out at paragraph 2.3 of the Guidance on Outcome.

34. I note that per the interpretation at regulation 67 of The Police (Conduct, Performance and Complaints and Misconduct) (Amendment) Regulations 2025, the amended Police (Conduct) Regulations 2020 apply. As such, the appropriate outcome is one of dismissal without notice unless there are exceptional circumstances that apply. I am advised that, in the absence of caselaw or

guidance as to the meaning of this phrase in this context, I may give it its ordinary meaning. However, my approach to deciding outcome will still take the form of considering the least severe sanction first, before moving up to more severe.

Seriousness

35. I must have regard to,

a) The Former Officer's culpability for the misconduct

b) The harm caused by the misconduct

c) The existence of any aggravating factors

d) The existence of any mitigating factors

Culpability

36. I take into account paragraphs 4.59 – 4.53 of the Guidance on Outcomes in relation to "misconduct involving a vulnerable person". Specifically, at paragraph 4.53, it states,

"Decide whether a person could be considered vulnerable in a given situation and whether the officer recognised or should have recognised this, taking account of all the circumstances."

37. It is clear to me that the Former Officer ought to have known that there was a very real risk that those he would be engaging with would be vulnerable, particularly in the circumstances in which he would be seeking to meet them.

38. I take into account paragraphs 4.60-4.62 of the Guidance on Outcomes in relation to "Violence against women and girls". The term 'violence against women and girls' refers to acts of violence *or abuse* that are known to disproportionately affect women and girls. I have not found that the Former Officer did physically engage sex workers, but he made contact with a number offering their services on multiple occasions. It is of course well known that many people involved in sex work are exploited and vulnerable. Those people, although not exclusively, are disproportionately women and girls.

39. As stated at 4.61 *"It is imperative that policing makes it clear that misconduct of this nature is wholly unacceptable, setting a clear expectation as to the seriousness to which these matters are treated."*

40. As set out in my factual findings, the Former Officer undertook the College of Policing Modern Slavery learning package on 14 November 2023. If not already aware, that package would have informed him of the existence of exploitation of sex workers.

41. Notwithstanding the obvious risks of engaging with an industry in which women and girls are exploited, the Former Officer repeatedly and deliberately contacted the phone number in question. For those reasons, I find the Former Officer's culpability to be high.

Harm

42. I have not made findings that the Former Officer did in fact physically engage the services of sex workers. However, I must also have regard to how such behaviour would be, perceived by the public, whether or not the behaviour was known about at the time, even in circumstances where the Former Officer did not follow through with his behaviour.

43. One role the police must play in society is to support the vulnerable. The harm that would be caused if the public were to know that a police officer was considering, on multiple occasions, engaging the services of vulnerable women and girls for their own sexual gratification is high.

44. As stated at paragraph 4.61 of the Guidance on Outcomes

"Policing has come under national scrutiny through high-profile cases where there has been a failing to prevent or protect women and girls from abuse and violence, and/or violence has been perpetrated by those serving the police."

45. For that reason, the harm in this case is high.

Aggravating factors

46. Turning to the aggravating factors, I am compelled to agree with counsel for the Appropriate Authority that many apply in this case.

a) The Former Officer took deliberate steps in acquiring this number and purposefully messaging it.

b) He engaged in this behaviour for his own sexual gratification, notwithstanding that there is no evidence he followed through with the physical engaging of sex workers.

c) The behaviour was not a one-off, but repeated on two dates two months apart.

d) The Former Officer had received specific training which highlighted the vulnerabilities of those who are involved in sex work, and other criminality often involved such as the risk of organised crime being involved.

e) Finally, there is clear guidance issued by the National Police Chiefs' Council. The Former Officer had every opportunity to access the readily available "Sex Work National Police Guidance" if he was in any doubt as to whether police officers should engage with sex workers.

Mitigating factors

47. No mitigation has been advanced by the Former Officer in respect of these matters, and I have not been able to identify any from the papers in this case.

Conclusion

48. The only appropriate sanction in this case is that the Former Officer would have been dismissed had he not already resigned. No other sanction would be adequate to uphold public confidence in policing and maintain the high standards that I expect of officers. To be clear, I would have made that finding even if the "presumption" of dismissal without notice did not apply.

49. As a consequence, I indicate that the Former Officer's details should be included within the Police Barred List, per Regulation 3(2) of the Police Barred List and Police Advisory List Regulations 2017.

50. I am aware of the Former Officer's right to appeal in accordance with the Police Appeals Tribunals Rules 2020. The Former Officer should provide any intention to appeal to the appropriate authority within 10 working days of the receipt of this determination.

51. The Former Officer will receive the written notice of the outcome before the end of five working days.