



**In the matter of the Police (Conduct) Regulations 2020
and in the matter of**

Former Police Officer Aspinall

**Decision of the Independent Chair Catherine Hankinson
8th September 2026**

Preliminary matters

1. I have today conducted an accelerated misconduct hearing at Unit A, Greater Manchester Police HQ and have given consideration to a number of allegations and a breach of the standards of professional behaviour as pertain to former Police Constable 16781 Michael Aspinall.
2. The Appropriate Authority was represented by Alistair Murray. Former PC Aspinall has chosen not to attend this hearing and has indeed resigned from Greater Manchester Police as of 1st September 2026. Former PC Aspinall is aware that this hearing is taking place and has had opportunity to attend so I am satisfied it is appropriate for me to continue in his absence.
3. *The allegations against PC Aspinall are that on 9 July 2026, at Preston Crown Court, he was convicted of three counts of attempted sexual communication with a child contrary to section 15A(1) of the Sexual Offences Act 2003. The offences took place in September 2024. It is contended that PC Aspinall's actions breach the following Standards of Professional Behaviour as set out in Regulation 5 and Schedule 2 of the Police (Conduct) Regulations 2020 (as amended) namely:*

- *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.*

The matters set out above are contended to amount to gross misconduct, in that they are so serious as to justify dismissal.

4. Former PC Aspinall has been convicted of sexual offences involving online conversations with a person who he believed to be a 12-year-old female. It is unacceptable for police officers, who are responsible for enforcing the law, to break the law themselves. Offences of this nature are particularly serious and involve a fundamental breach of the public's trust in police officers and inevitably bring the wider profession into disrepute.
5. Former PC Aspinall has not provided a response to the allegations and as such we have no indication as to whether he accepted the allegations alleged breached the standards of behaviour for Discreditable conduct. Nor did former PC Aspinall indicate if he accepted these allegations amounted to gross misconduct or not.
6. Having considered the evidence and the verbal submissions of the Appropriate Authority, I have determined it is appropriate for me to hear this case in that there are sufficient grounds as evidenced in the bundle that former PC Aspinall has breached the standards for professional behaviour.
7. I also conclude that the breaches alleged are proven and that they are so serious that they do indeed amount to gross misconduct.

Outcome

8. In coming to a determination as to the most appropriate outcome, I have considered the submissions of the Appropriate Authority as contained within the

bundle of evidence submitted to me prior to this hearing. I also heard verbal submissions by Mr Murray of the Appropriate Authority and have been provided with the former officer's record of service.

9. In determining the appropriate outcome, I have had regard to the relevant provisions of the College of Policing's guidance on outcomes in misconduct hearings. I do recognise that it does not automatically follow that where breaches of the code of conduct are found to be so serious as to justify dismissal, that dismissal can be the only sanction implied. Nevertheless, it remains very powerfully the case that the principal objective in the conduct of these hearings must be to preserve public confidence in and the reputation of the police service.
10. My approach has been to "adopt" the "3 stage approach" also referred to in the College of Policing's Guidance. Namely to assess the seriousness of the misconduct, to keep in mind the purpose of imposing sanctions and to choose the sanction that most appropriately fulfils that purpose bearing in mind the seriousness of the conduct in question.
11. I received written and verbal submissions from the Appropriate Authority that the appropriate disciplinary outcome in this case, had the officer not resigned would be dismissal without notice and the placing of his details onto the College of Policing's Barred List.
12. It is a matter of fact that former PC Aspinall has been convicted of a criminal offence.
13. So turning to assessing the seriousness in terms of culpability, harm, aggravating and mitigating factors I find the following:

14. Culpability: Culpability denotes the officer's blameworthiness and responsibility for his actions. In this case his actions were very clearly intentional, deliberate and targeted. He continued the communication even when it was made clear to him that he was speaking to a 12-year-old female. As referenced in the AA's opening note, the College of Policing guidance on outcomes (4.20) makes particular reference to sexual offences, saying 'they are particularly serious and likely to terminate an officer's career'. I find culpability to be HIGH.

15. Harm: In this case, no harm was actually caused to a victim. However, the College of Policing guidance at 4.68 reminds us that despite this, I must consider the risks attached to the officer's behaviour and the likelihood of harm occurring. Had the former officer been communicating with an actual 12-year old female, the harm would have been grave. There is also, rightly, a depth of concern in the minds of the public about sexual offending by people in positions of trust. The conviction is a matter of public record and will undoubtedly have a negative impact on the public's trust and confidence in Greater Manchester Police and the wider policing service. I find harm to be HIGH.

16. Aggravating factors, being those that worsen the actions of the former officer: They include:

- Malign intent – either sexual gratification or personal advantage
- Regular, repeated or sustained behaviour – the former officer communicated with underage females on three occasions over two days
- Continued behaviour after the officer realised, or should have realised, it was improper – in the evidence bundle, there is knowledge displayed by the officer that what he was doing was wrong and improper.
- Significant deviation from instructions – police officers are aware that to commit criminal offences is breaking the law and a serious breach of the Professional Standards of Behaviour

17. Mitigating factors are for the officer to put forward – I have not heard any as the officer or his representative have not attended today. In terms of personal mitigation, I have had regard to his record of service. This appears to show that he was a reasonable police officer, but this does not take away from the facts that he is convicted of attempted sexual communications with a child.
18. Throughout my considerations on outcome, I have kept in mind the threefold purpose of imposing outcomes in misconduct proceedings.
19. I am considering outcome for a former officer. Given that the finding is that the former officers actions amount to gross misconduct, and having assessed the seriousness as high, it is clear to me that there must follow a disciplinary sanction. Having regard to the College of Policing guidance on outcomes (3.30-3.33) it follows therefore that the appropriate outcome is that the former officer would have been dismissed without notice had he still been serving.
20. I also order that former PC Aspinall's name be added to the College of Policing barred list.
21. This concludes the hearing.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'C. Flaherty', is written on the page. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'C' and a long, sweeping underline.

ACO Catherine Hankinson

Greater Manchester Police Independent Chair