

**THE INQUIRIES ACT 2005
BEFORE THE RT. HON. LORD HUGHES**

PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO THE DEATH OF:

DAWN STURGESS

**SUBMISSIONS OF
THE CHIEF CONSTABLE OF WILTSHIRE POLICE
FOR THE DIRECTIONS HEARING on
25 March 2022**

Introduction

1. This matter is listed for a Directions Hearing on 25 March 2022. These submissions made on behalf of the Chief Constable of Wiltshire Police (“Wiltshire Police”) address items 1(a) (applications for Core Participant status), 1(b) (applications for funding), 1(c) (disclosure) and 1(d) (Restriction Order applications) as set out in the Directions dated 11 March 2022.

Public Inquiry

2. At CTI’s invitation, Wiltshire Police confirmed its consent to being designated as a Core Participant in the Inquiry for the purposes of r.5(1) of the Inquiry Rules 2006 in its written submissions dated 10 December 2021 (the “December submissions”) at [2].
3. For the avoidance of doubt, Wiltshire Police applies for designation as a Core Participant. It is submitted that all three of the matters to which the Chairman must give particular consideration in r.5(2)(a)-(c) are engaged with respect to Wiltshire Police. That is because, having regard to what was to be the scope of the Inquest, Wiltshire Police is the police force for the police area in which Ms Sturgess died and its officers had a role in the steps taken by UK authorities to ensure public safety following the poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal.

Funding

4. Wiltshire Police will not be applying for funding under s.40 of the Inquiries Act 2005.

Disclosure

5. At the time of the Pre-Inquest Review on 17 December 2021, and in accordance with the consistent police approach to police disclosure encouraged by Baroness Hallett, Wiltshire

Police had recently begun to follow the disclosure process as developed by Operation Verbasco (the disclosure operation being run by the Metropolitan Police Service (“MPS”) and Thames Valley Police (“TVP”)). That process is set out in the MPS and TVP’s joint written submission dated 8 September 2021 at [6].

6. Wiltshire Police’s December 2021 submissions set out the steps that had been undertaken since starting to follow the Op Verbasco process at [8]. Since then, the following considerable progress has been made:
 - a. Recruiting 14 out of the optimal 18 team members recommended by Op Verbasco. 6 members of the team are awaiting the necessary security clearance prior to taking up their roles (estimated to be completed within the next 6 to 8 weeks).
 - b. Continuing efforts to recruit the additional 4 members of staff, although this is challenging in the present recruitment market.
 - c. Obtaining (at an increased cost) fast tracked Developed Vetting (“DV”) for 5 members of the team, with a further 2 currently going through the DV process. DV status is vital to Wiltshire Police’s ability to put material into the NSA process (the stage of the Op Verbasco process conducted by the HMG Disclosure Team, prior to disclosure of the material by Wiltshire Police to STI for a relevance review).
 - d. Moving the entire operation from Swindon to secure office space in the CTP-SW estate and other premises at Wiltshire Police Headquarters in Devizes.
 - e. Purchasing standalone laptops to facilitate immediate work on scheduling material on the secure network.
 - f. Receiving 5 days of in-person ‘floorwalking’ and coaching from Op Verbasco with respect to their scheduling and categorisation processes.
 - g. Obtaining and undertaking 3 days of CT Holmes training.
 - h. Reading, summarising, scheduling and categorising 3,096 of the c.4,016 documents that were originally transferred to London for uploading to CT Holmes. All material has been categorised in accordance with the criteria set by Op Verbasco, which should assist with the efficiency of the NSA process and subsequent consideration of the material by STI. Of those documents scheduled by Wiltshire Police to date, the following categorisations have been applied:
 - (i) Category A – 2,386 (non-sensitive police material);
 - (ii) Category B – 130 (third party material);

- (iii) Category C – 610 (sensitive police material).
 - i. These 3,096 documents were uploaded to CT Holmes (registered, scanned, read and indexed) by members of Op Verbasco, which enabled Wiltshire Police to schedule them in readiness for putting them into the NSA process.
 - j. Transferring c.300 documents to London for uploading to CT Holmes by members of Op Verbasco. Going forward, the uploading will be undertaken by Wiltshire Police because it will, in due course, have its own CT Holmes terminals. These terminals were requested in October/ November 2021 - it understood that they will be installed at Wiltshire Police HQ within the next 6 to 8 weeks.
 - k. Continuing with document retrieval from the documents preserved for the purposes of the Inquest / Inquiry. 2,000 documents have been identified and are waiting for upload to CT Holmes once the terminals are installed. It is estimated that there are a further c.10,000 documents held by Wiltshire Police to be retrieved and uploaded.
7. Despite the progress made by Wiltshire Police since following Op Verbasco's process set out above, for reasons outside Wiltshire Police's control it has not yet been able to put material into the NSA process for review by the HMG Disclosure Team. This is a mandatory part of the Op Verbasco process which requires all users to be DV'd and to have access to, and an account on, specific terminals (not located in Wiltshire). Wiltshire Police has applied for the necessary access / accounts and it is anticipated this will be provided within the next 6 to 8 weeks. As set out above, Wiltshire Police has already obtained, and is continuing to obtain, DV for its staff in anticipation of being able to start putting material into the NSA process.
8. Even before it started to follow Op Verbasco's process, Wiltshire Police had been approaching its disclosure exercise by separating material into tranches. The handling of material has been prioritised based on that which is likely to be of greater relevance / interest to the Inquest / Inquiry. Wiltshire Police's aim remains that (so far as the Op Verbasco process that is now being followed allows) material will be disclosed to STI in tranches, with the material which is likely to be of greater relevance / interest to the Inquiry arriving first. This approach has been discussed with STI. The tranches identified by Wiltshire Police are as follows:

- a. Wiltshire Police response (including Strategic and Tactical Coordination group minutes and Casualty Bureau deployment policy and documents);
 - b. Media and Communications;
 - c. Investigatory material (covering the first 24 hours of Operation Fairline and 4 days of Operation Fortis);
 - d. Advisory and intelligence;
 - e. Planning and Logistics (relating to cordons and finance of the operations);
 - f. Other material (Officers' PNBs/ Daybooks) .
9. It is unfortunately not possible to state when Wiltshire Police will begin disclosing material to STI for a relevance review. Wiltshire Police should be able to start putting its material into the NSA process within the next 6 to 8 weeks (when it is anticipated that the necessary access / accounts will be provided). As the NSA process is undertaken by the HMG Disclosure Team, Wiltshire Police is unable to say how long it will take for its material to go through that process and be ready for disclosure to STI.
10. Committed to assisting the Inquiry, Wiltshire Police is doing everything within its control to progress its material through the Op Verbasco process such that it is disclosed to STI as quickly as possible. While the delays inherent in Wiltshire Police following that process are regrettable, Wiltshire Police has been advised (and agrees) that it is necessary to do so in order to provide disclosure to the Inquiry in a way that does not harm national security.
11. The progress made to date has been possible in no small part due to the significant assistance and support provided by Operation Verbasco, for which Wiltshire Police is grateful. Wiltshire Police is also grateful for the constructive dialogue it has had with STI and which is ongoing.

Restriction Orders

12. With respect to documents, Wiltshire Police anticipates that it *may* need to make applications for Restriction Orders pursuant to s.19 of the Inquiries Act 2005 with respect to documents and/or parts of documents (i.e. redactions). It may be that applications will be made with respect to those documents by other Core Participants, supported by Wiltshire Police. This will become clearer once the disclosure process is more advanced.

13. With respect to witnesses, of the Wiltshire Police officers / staff identified to date as potential witnesses, there is one officer with respect to whom Wiltshire Police anticipates making applications for a Restriction Order. In outline, the application would be for anonymity / special measures based on the sensitive nature of the officer's role.
14. Wiltshire Police intends to make Restriction Order applications in line with the process to be adopted by Op Verbasco in order to assist the Inquiry in having a streamlined approach to such applications.

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