

INQUIRY INTO THE DEATH OF DAWN STURGESS

JOINT SUBMISSIONS OF THE METROPOLITAN POLICE SERVICE AND THAMES VALLEY POLICE FOR THE PRELIMINARY INQUIRY HEARING ON 15 JULY 2022

INTRODUCTION

1. These joint submissions are filed on behalf of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis (“MPS”) and the Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police (“TVP”) in advance of an OPEN directions hearing to be held on 15 July 2022. Together, the two police forces are responsible for Op Verbasco.
2. In this document we respond to matters raised in the helpful submissions of Counsel to the Inquiry (“CTI”) dated 22 June 2022.
3. As recognised by CTI in their submissions, Op Verbasco has complied with §§2, 5 and 6 of the Chair’s directions of 4 April 2022.

DISCLOSURE PROCESS

4. Op Verbasco welcomes the Inquiry’s recognition at §11 that the Inquiry Legal Team (“ILT”) and Core Participants (“CPs”) have undertaken substantial work in respect of disclosure since the last hearing. In light of what the ILT accurately calls “*the unusual sensitivities of the material involved*” it is inevitably a labour-intensive process which necessitates careful and attentive work.
5. CTI identify at §§16ff. that the process of a preliminary security review by HMG before documents are seen by the ILT is time consuming. The request for a preliminary security review was not made by Op Verbasco and it is accordingly neutral on whether such a review should take place. Op Verbasco will continue to progress documents expeditiously through whatever process the Chair directs.
6. At §18, CTI have asked Op Verbasco to provide statistics relating to the time that documents have taken to pass through the preliminary security review process. Operation Verbasco

understands that the time taken by each batch of documents is variable because of a multitude of factors: the length of each document; the number of serious security sensitivities that arise; the number of departments whose input is required; the extent to which other material and databases need to be interrogated in order to understand the security sensitivity; the other pressures on resources at that time. Accordingly, we are providing average figures.

- a. To date, the mean average time taken for Category A documents to pass through the preliminary security review has been **58 days**.
 - b. The equivalent figure for Category C documents is **147 days**. This reflects the difference in security sensitivity between the two categories.
7. Op Verbasco and the ILT have worked together to find ways to speed up the disclosure process. In particular, the teams have agreed categories of material which should initially be prioritised to be seen by the Inquiry. This agreement, reached last week, has already had an effect on the documents which Op Verbasco has processed. It will ensure that CPs first get the documents which the ILT considers to be the most important. Op Verbasco, with the agreement of the ILT, intends to put a regular number of documents into the security review process every fortnight. Although Op Verbasco has proposed a figure to the ILT and HMG, as to how many documents should enter the security review process every two weeks, discussions continue with HMG as to what is workable.

RESTRICTION ORDER APPLICATION IN RESPECT OF NAMES

8. Op Verbasco has made an application for the names of CTP staff to be replaced with ciphers throughout documents which are disclosed to CPs and for those ciphers to be used throughout the course of the Inquiry. The application is made in CLOSED and OPEN written submissions, and supported by OPEN and CLOSED Damage Assessments and the witness statement of Assistant Commissioner of Specialist Operations, Matt Jukes (“ACSO”).
9. In respect to a Note of questions raised by CTI dated 10 June 2022, Op Verbasco served OPEN and CLOSED Notes dated 27 June 2022.
10. Op Verbasco continues to rely on those documents. The application is not repeated in this document. In response to the submissions of CTI at §26 that it may be convenient for the

application, and that of HMG, to be deferred, Op Verbasco has no submissions and is neutral. Whilst the application is pending, Op Verbasco intends to redact and cipher its documents in the way it proposes in the application.

11. There is just one matter in respect of which Op Verbasco wishes to clarify its position.
12. In the submissions of CTI at §27(f), CTI state that there is disagreement between the ILT and Op Verbasco as to the form in which documents should be served on the Inquiry (cf. our OPEN written submissions in support of the application at §28(b)). We believe there is no such quarrel. Our proposal in §28 is that (a) we prepare ciphered documents for disclosure to CPs and (b) we provide copies of any documents, without ciphers, which the Inquiry wishes to review; if the Inquiry wishes to view all documents without ciphers, Op Verbasco of course has no objection.

CONCLUSION

13. Op Verbasco will continue to work closely with the ILT and HMG to ensure CPs get access to the most useful documents, and that the hearings of this Inquiry may commence, as soon as possible.

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