Date: 10 January 2024
Subject: Correspondence with the CNC Chief Constable over Sellafield claims

1. Introduction:

Following the December 2023 revelations in The Guardian alleging misconduct amongst some officers of the Civil Nuclear Constabulary and a ‘toxic work culture’ amongst police and civilian staff employed at the Sellafield nuclear complex, the Chair of the UK/Ireland Nuclear Free Local Authorities wrote to the Chief Constable outlining our concerns and offering him an ‘opportunity’ to respond. The letter sent 3 January and the response of 8 January are reproduced below.

For further background please also refer to our previous related media release: https://www.nuclearpolicy.info/news/nflas-call-upon-nuke-cops-chief-to-issue-statement-on-toxic-sellafield-allegations/

2. The letter sent to Chief Constable Simon Chesterman on 3rd January 2024 read:

Chief Constable / Chief Executive Officer
Simon Chesterman OBE, QPM,
Civil Nuclear Constabulary,

Dear Chief Constable,

Happy New Year. I am writing to you as Chair of the UK/Ireland Nuclear Free Local Authorities.

Whilst I recognise that the Civil Nuclear Constabulary (CNC) is presently performing valuable work in maintaining the physical security of nuclear facilities and nuclear materials in transit from attack or theft by terrorists, criminals, and (potentially) external state actors, I was disturbed to read the recent allegations made in The Guardian newspaper on 6 December 2023.

These concerned the use of sexist, racist and homophobic language by CNC officers in at least two social media groups towards fellow officers and workers at Sellafield, at least one politician, and one media commentator.

Some members of the civilian workforce were also implicated in this offensive behaviour, with the newspaper implying that a toxic workplace culture exists at Sellafield.

https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/dec/06/uk-nuclear-police-workers-whatsapp-jokes

Regrettably, these are but the latest revelations indicating that the CNC has ‘a problem’.

Following the conviction of a former officer Wayne Couzens for the harrowing murder of Sarah Everard, the Guardian published in July 2021 that Couzens had been reported to Kent Police for an alleged indecent exposure to a woman in 2015, whilst he was serving with the CNC at Dungeness Nuclear Power Station and living in Deal. There appeared to be a ‘failure to communicate’ between the forces with the CNC stating that ‘nothing was reported to them suggesting any problem with his (Couzen’s) behaviour or conduct’.

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In a response to a Freedom of Information request no 2022 012, dated 16 February 2022, the CNC correspondent stated that of the 96 recent recruits who passed the force’s vetting process, 21 had since been subject to disciplinary action – over one in five – that seems an incredibly high percentage. I can find no figures for the 2023 intake.

In October 2022, the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) publicly announced it had started a criminal investigation into the conduct of five serving CNC officers, one former CNC officer now serving in another force, and one former CNC officer, linked to social media messages; worryingly the IOPC conceded that ‘a significant number of those messages to be of a discriminatory, derogatory or pornographic nature’ shared in a WhatsApp group.

These individuals had been informed they were being investigated for potential offences under the Communications Act by sending grossly offensive messages, and under investigation for gross misconduct as police officers.

In November 2022, the IOPC issued a further statement that nine CNC officers were now subject to two investigations of ‘allegedly engaging in conversations of a racist, misogynistic, ableist and offensive nature’ in potential breaches of conduct amounting to gross misconduct. It is to the credit of the CNC that the force asked the IOPC to investigate.

In June 2023, the IOPC reported that in December 2022, an independently chaired disciplinary panel found that six serving police officers from three forces, including one from the CNC, to have committed gross misconduct for participating inappropriately with social media groups. The officers had been investigated following evidence found after a forensic examination of the mobile phone owned by Wayne Couzens.

Furthermore, in a response to FOI request no 2023 174, dated 23 November 2023, it was indicated that twenty-seven officers, including one Superintendent, were subject to disciplinary action in the preceding five years, of which six were ‘dismissed without notice’ and twelve received a ‘final written warning’; clearly then these were no minor infractions.

As the UK remains a parliamentary democracy, policing in the UK is based upon the expectation that it will be conducted by consent, with officers acting in a lawful, professional, and impartial way, with any force’s actions being subject to accountability and challenge, where appropriate, by elected members, legitimate media outlets, and the public.

Aside from dealing with site stakeholder groups, peaceful activists protesting nuclear trains or plants, and site visitors, the CNC has historically had limited interaction with the wider society outside of the nuclear community, as most officers patrol secure facilities that are often geographically isolated and inaccessible.
However, the conduct of every CNC officer will be of paramount importance in the future as, under the provisions of the Energy Security Act of 2023, the role of the CNC will now be expanded. Now the force is empowered to:

- Provide armed guarding services to other facilities that provide ‘vital services’ or ‘to deliver other protective policing services in response to [any] emerging threat’ (by amending Section 55 of the 2004 Energy Act).

- Support territorial police forces at the request of their respective Chief Constables (again by amending Section 55 of the 2004 Energy Act). These could be requests for the CNC’s specialist support as an armed police service or for additional capacity in officer numbers for unarmed service.

- Exert cross-border territorial enforcement powers, as are available to the territorial forces of the UK and the British Transport Police.

Unlike other police services, the CNC is unique in being routinely armed.

Consequently, armed CNC officers may soon be seen engaged in guarding other critical infrastructure sites in the UK, and potentially policing civil demonstrations and protests. Many officers and many members of the public are frankly concerned at the prospect of the UK moving to a police service that is routinely armed. The bearing of arms by any officers retaining any prejudice towards elected members, reporters, and the public could represent in a charged situation a potential tragedy, as we witnessed with the death of Jean Charles de Menezes; nor does the CNC appear currently very accountable or challengeable with the Police Authority comprising mostly members from a police or nuclear industry background.

Given the gravity of the historic and recent disclosures, and your future remit, we are therefore surprised and disappointed that the CNC has issued no apparent statement to the media or on its website recognising or refuting the validity of any of these allegations, nor more importantly outlining what specific action the force is taking from the top down to ensure that:

1. the conduct and language of officers remains professional, impartial, and irreproachable at all times, both on and off-duty, including in exchanging messages and images through social media.

2. an appropriate workplace culture is promoted and maintained through training, appraisals, and supervision.

3. individual officers exhibiting ‘toxic culture or language’ are promptly and effectively disciplined, and whistleblowing actively encouraged.

**Chief Constable, I am writing to you to offer you that opportunity.** The NFLAs would welcome any positive commentary you can offer on the actions you and your senior colleagues are, and will be, taking as this would provide some reassurance to our members and supporters as to what they might expect of the future conduct of CNC officers (and whether there might be further plans to improve public accountability) considering the force’s expanded remit.

I shall look forward to your reply and thank you for your consideration of this matter. Please direct any response in the first instance via email to our NFLA Secretary Richard Outram at richard.outram@manchester.gov.uk

Yours sincerely,
Councillor Lawrence O’Neill,
Chair, UK/Ireland NFLA Steering Committee

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**3 –A401 (NB287) – Developments and NFLA Progress Report – December 2023**
3. The reply received from the Chief Constable dated 8 January reads:

CIVIL NUCLEAR CONSTABULARY

Chief Constable Simon Chesterman OBE QPM
Civl Nuclear Constablury
Culham Science Centre
Abingdon
OX14 3DB

Councillor Lawrence O’Neill,
Chair of the UK/Ireland NFLA Steering Committee

8th January 2024

In response to letter from the UK/Ireland Nuclear Free Local Authorities

Dear Councillor O’Neill,

Thank you for your letter dated 3 January 2024 and the opportunity to inform you of the actions taken by the CNC regarding the recent Guardian article and other cultural issues that have come to light since the conviction of Wayne Couzens, which in itself was a watershed moment for UK policing, as you recognise in your letter.

With regards to the Guardian article, I did issue a statement to the paper at the time of publication, which was included in their article, as follows:

“I was disappointed to hear that the Guardian says it has evidence of officers being involved in a group sending unacceptable and offensive messages.”

“Without seeing the evidence, it is difficult to comment, and I would urge the matter be reported at the earliest opportunity so this can be investigated fully and referred to the IOPC if necessary. If anyone with information comes forward, we will deal with the matter with due sensitivity and with their wishes in mind.”

“I have made it clear that anyone holding misogynistic, racist, homophobic, or other unacceptable views, or who carries out behaviour that breaches our standards of professional conduct, has no place in the CNC. To ensure that officers and staff holding these views are rooted out, we have expanded our professional standards and vetting departments so we know we have the right people to investigate and deal with any wrongdoing. I am committed to ensuring the CNC is an inclusive and respectful place for all.”

We have urged the journalist to provide us with evidence of the groups and have also written to the Editor of the paper and their legal team asking for corroboration of their claims. We have pointed out that criminal offences may have been committed by the people allegedly sending these messages and, if serving police officers are responsible, it makes it even more imperative that there is a full investigation.

The Guardian is claiming journalistic integrity and the need to protect their sources as the reason for not supplying any evidence of the groups, the members or the content shared.

We remain in the position where a trusted newspaper has stated they have evidence of our officers allegedly committing serious wrongdoing and yet the CNC has no way of knowing who they are or ensuring they face the consequences of their actions. Because of this we are unable to refute or confirm the allegations or take further action however we will continue to pursue other avenues of investigation to try and determine whether these groups exist and if CNC employees are members.
Since becoming Chief Constable of the CNC in 2019, I have recognised that the organisation, along with the wider police service, has work to do to address elements of our culture and live up to our core value of Inclusivity.

When Wayne Couzens, by then a serving Metropolitan Police Service officer, was arrested our work was accelerated and a great deal has been achieved over the last few years, including:

- Completion of three employee surveys, with a focus on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion; action plans and working groups were developed to deliver the findings.
- The force has been reaccredited by Investors in People.
- Completion of two independent reviews of our Culture, one by Deloitte and one by Angela O’Connor, an independent HR Consultant.
- We held Senior Leaders Forums concentrating on misogyny and organisational culture.
- We formally requested to be inspected by His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) as part of their Vetting and Misogyny in policing inspection.
- We take an active part in the national Violence Against Women and Girls Working Group.
- We have refreshed and relaunched our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy.
- We have reviewed and refreshed our internal support networks for EDI.
- We have reviewed and relaunched our induction programme with greater emphasis on EDI and culture.
- We have created a training programme for first line supervisors with focus on EDI, culture and expected standards of conduct.
- We commissioned an independent review of our Professional Standards Department and implemented the recommendations, which included a significant uplift in resources.
- We reviewed and enhanced our vetting capacity and capability.
- We have consolidated the recommendations and learning from staff surveys, IOPC investigations, HMICFRS reports, cultural reviews etc into a five themed cultural action plan.
- We contributed to the Angiolini Inquiry Part 1 and registered our interest in submitting evidence to Part 2.
- At national level I have established a strategic EDI in armed policing working group covering 49 police forces and agencies.
- Since its inception we have reflected one of our organisational values, Inclusion, in our three-year strategy and have a specific goal focusing on people, culture, EDI and standards.
- We have an ongoing comprehensive communications strategy focusing on EDI, culture and expected standards of behaviour.
- We have created and embedded a comprehensive social media strategy.
- We are in the process of developing a prevention strategy to enhance professional standards.
- We have created and launched the ‘Proud to Protect – Raising the Bar’ campaign to all officers and staff making it clear what is expected on them.
- I have personally updated Ministers and officials from our Government department, the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.
- I have also briefed our IOPC Commissioner, on several occasions. Their response has been that our approach is “progressive and refreshing”.

You can find out about the work we have done to improve our culture on our website, where there are links to our EDI Strategy, Gender Responsive Policing Strategy and more. This is also replicated on our CNC Jobs website so new recruits can find out more about the culture of the organisation they are joining.

This list is by no means exhaustive but I hope it shows you and your colleagues that we take every allegation of wrongdoing seriously and have publicly committed to confronting and dealing with any employees who share misogynistic, racist, homophobic, or other unacceptable views, or behave in a
manner which breaches our standards of professional conduct. I am personally committed to ensuring the CNC is an inclusive and respectful place for all.

Thank you for the opportunity to demonstrate the steps that the CNC is taking to improve our culture, and if I can provide any further detail or clarity, please do get back in touch.

Yours Sincerely,

Simon Chesterman, Chief Constable, OBE, QPM

The links in the Chief Constable’s letter are:

https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/civil-nuclear-constabulary/about/equality-and-diversity

https://www.cnc.jobs/life-at-cnc/

Within these are additional specific links:

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy


The Gender Responsive Policing Strategy


HMICFRS Inspection

The Civil Nuclear Constabulary requested to be one of the eight forces who took part in His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) review of vetting, misconduct, and misogyny in the police service, which was commissioned by the Home Office. Their report was published in November 2022 and was highly critical of the police service as a whole, making a total of 43 recommendations across five areas.

The report clearly shows that police vetting, misconduct and misogyny are an issue across the police service, and we continue to work with our national and Home Office counterparts, including the HMICFRS, College of Policing and National Police Chief’s Council to ensure lessons are learnt from the report and vetting and misconduct practices are tightened across the board. We have already taken steps since the inspection took place and are determined to raise standards, both in vetting and misconduct, and ensure any officers with sexist or misogynistic views are rooted out. They have no place at the CNC or in UK policing.


Richard Outram, Secretary, NFLAs 10 Jan 2024