

IN THE MATTER OF THE POLICE (CONDUCT) REGULATIONS 2020

IN THE MATTER OF FORMER POLICE SERGEANT 5703 JAMES FLORENCE

Accelerated Misconduct Hearing on 3 March 2026

by

Chief Constable Jeremy Vaughan

Decision on Outcome

Former PS 5703 James Florence has resigned as a police officer. It follows that he is no longer a serving police officer. Therefore, this Accelerated Misconduct Hearing, held under Part 5 of the Police (Conduct) Regulations 2020, is concerned with a former officer and I direct that the Regulations be amended to the extent required for a former officer.

Former PS Florence has not attended the hearing today but is represented by his Police Federation Representative, Mr Danny Ahearn.

The facts are not in dispute.

On 11 September 2025, whilst he was a serving police officer, former PS Florence made checks on police computer systems in relation to two members of the public and in relation to the address of a property. On each occasion the checks made were unauthorised and were not for a lawful police purpose.

As a consequence of his unlawful actions former PS Florence was arrested on 26 November 2025 by officers from South Wales Police's Anti-Corruption Unit in relation to criminal offences contrary to section 170 of the Data Protection Act 2018 and section 1 (1) and (3) of the Computer Misuse Act 1990. During interview former PS Florence fully admitted that he made the checks. Former PS Florence resigned as a police officer a short time after.

On 16 January 2026 former PS Florence was the subject of a caution for a criminal offence under section 1 (1) and (3) of the Computer Misuse Act 1990 in that on 11 September 2025

at Bridgend he caused a computer to perform a function with intent to secure unauthorised access to a program or data held in a computer or to enable any such access to be so secured.

The Appropriate Authority contends that the admitted actions of former PS Florence are a breach of the Standards of Professional Behaviour relating to:

Standard 1 – Honesty and Integrity (Integrity only), that: *“Police officers are honest, act with integrity and do not compromise or abuse their position”*;

Standard 7 – Confidentiality, that *“Police officers will treat information with respect, and access or disclose it only in the proper course of their duties”*; and

Standard 9: Discreditable Conduct, namely that: *“Police Officers behave in a manner which does not discredit the Police Service or undermine public confidence in it, whether on or off duty. Police Officers report any action taken against them for a criminal offence, any conditions imposed on them by a court or receipt of any penalty notice.”*

The Appropriate Authority’s position is that PS Florence’s behaviour, individually or collectively, amounts to gross misconduct, that is, the breaches of the Standards of Professional Behaviour are so serious, as to justify dismissal.

In his written response in accordance with Regulation 54, former PS Florence has admitted that he has breached the Standards of Professional Behaviour as alleged and that his conduct amounts to gross misconduct.

On the balance of probabilities, I have no hesitation in finding the allegations proven. I am also satisfied that the former officer’s conduct, individually or collectively, amounts to gross misconduct.

Outcome

Having found gross misconduct, I must impose disciplinary action on the former officer, and I have no hesitation on doing so. The disciplinary action can only be that former PS Florence would have been dismissed if he had not ceased to be a member of a police force. It has not been suggested on behalf of former PS Florence that there are any exceptional circumstances, and in any event, I find that there are none. My decision on Outcome is that I am satisfied that former PS Florence would have been immediately dismissed had he not resigned.

In reaching my decision, I have fully considered the College of Policing Guidance on Outcomes in Police Misconduct Proceedings which has formed the basis for my conclusion. I have tested the seriousness of the allegations and the purpose of imposing a sanction, which I have to consider in deciding an outcome. I have given due consideration to culpability, harm, any aggravating factors, and any mitigating factors as set out in the Guidance.

In assessing the seriousness of the conduct, I recognise that the more culpable or blameworthy the behaviour in question, the more serious the misconduct and the more severe the likely outcome. The former officer held a position of trust and responsibility and has breached that trust, and this increases culpability. The conduct is intentional and deliberate, and this too increases culpability. It is entirely unacceptable for police officers, who are responsible for enforcing the law, to break the law themselves.

It is both a public expectation and a legal requirement that information obtained during the course of policing duties should be treated in the strictest confidence, properly protected, and used for legitimate police purposes. Personal reasons for accessing confidential police information is not acceptable. If an officer accesses personal information not available to the general public, there should always be a specific and proper policing purpose for doing so. Accessing confidential police information without a legitimate policing purpose is an abuse of an officer's position. There can be no doubt that former PS Florence's criminal caution has an adverse impact on public confidence in policing.

The harm caused by the former officer's actions is reputational harm and affects the police service and the public confidence in the service as a whole. A factor of the greatest

importance is the impact of the misconduct in the standing and reputation of the profession as a whole. I am satisfied that former PS Florence has caused damage to that reputation.

Aggravating factors are those tending to worsen the circumstance of the case, in relation to either the officer's culpability or harm caused. I have found that there are a number of aggravating factors present. The conduct was premeditated, intentional and deliberate. Former PS Florence continued his behaviour after he realised or should have realised that that it was improper. His actions are a significant deviation from the instructions, orders and policy and the general law of the land. In my judgment, these are all aggravating factors.

Mitigating factors are those factors which reduce the seriousness of the misconduct and lower the level of capability and harm. I am mindful that the former officer has resigned and by doing so, I acknowledge that he has taken at least some responsibility for his actions. I give former PS Florence some small credit for that.

I have reminded myself of the threefold purpose of the outcomes in police misconduct proceedings which is to maintain public confidence in policing and the reputation of the police service; to uphold high standards in policing and to deter misconduct; and finally to protect the public.

In terms of personal mitigation, former PS Florence has not provided any personal mitigation. However, I recognise that due to the nature and purpose of disciplinary proceedings, the weight of personal mitigation will necessarily be limited, particularly where serious misconduct has been proven as it has been in this case.

In the circumstances, there is only one possible outcome which I am able to impose, and I have absolutely no hesitation in doing so. Therefore, my decision on Outcome is that I am absolutely satisfied that the misconduct is so serious that former PS Florence would have been immediately dismissed had he not resigned. No other outcome is justified or appropriate.

Police officers, in the course of their duties, have access to very private and personal information, often acquired when a member of the public are at their most vulnerable. In holding that information, police officers must be trusted to the ends of the earth. If police officers cannot be trusted then, naturally, members of the public are less likely to make disclosure and support police investigations. That access to information puts police officers into a position of authority, and they should never abuse that authority.

The behaviour of former PS Florence is totally unacceptable. There is no room in South Wales Police for this type of behaviour. The Standards of Professional Behaviour apply the moment you walk through the door. Police officers should be trusted to the ends of the earth. The public rightly expect our officers to uphold the highest professional standards, and former PS Florence has failed to do so.

The vast majority of the Police officers, staff and volunteers, who work for South Wales Police conduct themselves impeccably and work tirelessly to protect the public, those very few who choose to breach the standards expected of them undermine the public's trust in policing.

In accordance with the Police (Conduct) Regulations 2020 the Findings and Outcome from this hearing will be referred to the College of Policing in order for former PS 5703 James Florence to be placed on the Police Barred List.