

Debate Pack

Number CDP 2022/0046

By Joe Ryan

1 March 2022

Reports of misogyny and sexual harassment in the Metropolitan Police

1	Background	2
2	Media	6
2.1	Press releases	6
2.2	News articles	6
2.3	Parliamentary material	8
2.4	Further reading	8

1

Background

This debate will mark the last 12 months of controversy over misconduct by officers in the Metropolitan Police. Specifically, to mark International Women's Day, the debate will examine reports of misogyny and sexual harassment across the force [a year on from the murder of Sarah Everard on 3 March 2021](#).

A series of highly public controversies have continued to put the Met under scrutiny across 2021 and early 2022. Allegations of systemic misogyny and sexual harassment were mostly focussed on specific investigations and reports including:

- The murder of Sarah Everard;
- the policing of the Sarah Everard vigil in Clapham Common;
- the murders of Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman;
- The murder of Sabina Nessa;
- the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) report into the behaviour of officers at Charing Cross police station;
- Reports of 600 allegations of sexual misconduct by Met officers;
- The resignation of Metropolitan Police Commissioner Cressida Dick.

Sarah Everard

Sarah Everard was the victim of kidnap, rape and murder by a serving Metropolitan Police officer. On Thursday 30 September 2021, [he was given a whole life sentence](#) meaning that he will never be released from prison.

After the officer was identified, charged and pled guilty to the charges against him, [media reports](#) indicated colleagues within the Met may have had concerns over the officer's attitude or conduct. Additionally, [the IOPC launched an inquiry](#) into messages sent on social media sites by officers during the Everard investigation. Notably, these included a "highly offensive" graphic from an officer who was later posted at the crime scene and [details of an interview given by Sarah Everard's killer under caution](#).

Upon the officer's conviction, [the Met Police issued a response](#) to the issues raised by the Sarah Everard's murder, including the perceived failure of the Metropolitan Police to protect women and girls. This included:

- [A review into the Met's culture and standards of behaviour](#);
- An examination into all ongoing investigations of sexual and domestic abuse allegations against Met Police officers and staff;
- The publication of [a new action plan for tackling violence against women and girls](#).

On 5 October 2021, [the Home Secretary commissioned a non-statutory public inquiry](#) into the issues raised by the Sarah Everard. In [commissioning the inquiry](#), she said:

“Recent tragic events have exposed unimaginable failures in policing.

It is abhorrent that a serving police officer was able to abuse his position of power, authority and trust to commit such a horrific crime.

The public have a right to know what failures enabled his continued employment as a police officer and an inquiry will give the independent oversight needed to ensure something like this can never happen again.”

[The Angiolini Inquiry](#) is ongoing and was last updated with [the publication of its website](#) on 2 February 2022.

The vigil for Sarah Everard

A group of women organised a vigil for Sarah Everard in Clapham Common, close to where Sarah was last seen, under the name [Reclaim These Streets](#). After the Met Police withdrew permission for the vigil to go ahead due to restrictions on public gatherings in force at the time to tackle Covid-19, [the group cancelled the official event](#). Despite this, a large crowd gathered in Clapham Common. Police were present at the event and, in the evening, began instructing attendees to go home. The ensuing clashes led to arrests which were documented and [widely circulated in the news and on social media](#).

Images of Met officers arresting women at the vigil led to [claims of “institutional sexism” at the Met](#). The Home Secretary commissioned a [report from HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service \(HMICFRS\)](#) into the vigil which was published on 30 March 2021. The report found that the police had acted appropriately during the vigil, doing their best “to peacefully disperse the crowd... [remaining] calm and professional when subjected to abuse and... not [acting] inappropriately or in a heavy-handed manner.”

Members of Reclaim These Streets applied for a judicial review of the decision to ban the vigil in the first place, [claiming that it breached human rights law](#). Lawyers for the claimants [made a statement](#) framing their argument as outlining that misogyny was preventing the police from fulfilling their obligations to uphold right human rights:

"At its heart this case is about the police accepting their responsibility under human rights law to facilitate peaceful protest, rather than their consistent attempts to silence and threaten women.

Women were robbed of their chance to come together in solidarity to mourn Sarah and to stand up to the epidemic of violence against women and girls."

Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman

Sisters Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman were stabbed to death in Fryent Country Park between on 6 June 2020. Their killer was [sentenced to 35 years in prison](#) on 28 October 2021. The sisters were reported missing by the family on 6 June, having not been seen since the day before.

The Met Police were found to have not properly investigated reports from the sisters' family that they were missing. Bibaa and Nicole were reported missing to the police by family members after being last seen on 5 June but this log was closed by the on-duty call handler. Family members found the bodies when the police did not investigate. The women's mother, Mina Smallman, also [claimed that](#) the officer the family spoke to made:

“inappropriate and manipulating assertions, which led to cancellation of the missing person's report.

We're also of the view that his unprofessional comments about the picnic suggests racial profiling, misogyny or classism.”

[An IOPC report](#) into the police's failure to investigate the missing person's report found “failings in the service provided, for which we have now advised the MPS to apologise to the family.” Mrs Smallman was reported saying that the police apology was “too hollow.”

Several officers were also found to have taken and shared photos of the sisters' bodies through a private WhatsApp group. [The IOPC once again investigated](#) the officers in question. [Two officers](#) were fired, charged and subsequently jailed for taking and sharing the photos, while [six further officers](#) faced misconduct investigations for viewing and not reporting the photos. Again, Mrs Smallman commented on how this impacted the reputation of the Metropolitan Police:

“If ever we needed an example of how toxic it has become, those police officers felt so safe, so untouchable, that they felt they could take photographs of dead black girls and send them on.

It speaks volumes of the ethos that runs through the Metropolitan Police.”

Sabina Nessa

Sabina Nessa was found dead in Cator Park on 18 September 2021. A [man has accepted responsibility](#) and recently [pled guilty to her murder](#).

No specific allegations of police misconduct were reported in this case. However, Sabina's murder led to more commentary on the perceived lack of protection for women and [the need to tackle misogyny](#). Police advice to women to keep themselves safe was [criticised as ineffective](#) and vigils held in the wake of Sabina's murder [continued to emphasise tackling violence against women and girls](#).

Media also highlighted differences in awareness between Sabina Nessa's and Sarah Everard's murders, highlighting that there [seemed to be less coverage of violence against women of colour](#).

Charing Cross Police Station

The IOPC conducted a series of investigations into the behaviour of several groups of Metropolitan Police officers, who were all predominantly based at Charing Cross police station. These investigations were brought together as Operation Hotton. The [IOPC reported its findings](#) in January 2022 and detailed a variety of proven cases of misconduct and gross misconduct by officers.

The report detailed [records of messages between officers](#) that included misogynist, racist, anti-Semitic and other discriminatory language. Reports also appeared alleging that officers [harassed activists](#) and [had sex with people they had taken into custody](#).

[Operation Hotton made 15 recommendations](#) addressing racism and misogyny in the Met Police as well as training to tackle bullying and harassment and the use of social media.

The [police issued an official statement](#) condemning the behaviour of the officers and claiming that it did not reflect the wider values of the force. The then Commissioner Dame Cressida Dick [condemned the behaviour publicly](#) as did [the Home Secretary](#).

Further accusations and resignation of Cressida Dick

More allegations of sexual assault and misconduct against Metropolitan Police officers have been highly publicised, these include:

- [An officer currently on trial for up to 29 sexual offences, including rape;](#)
- [A former officer charged with rape, attempted rape and indecent assault during an incident in 2004;](#)
- [Compensation paid to Dr Konstancja Duff after Met officers were recorded using "sexist, derogatory" language about her during a strip search while in police custody in 2013;](#)
- [750 officers being accused of sexual misconduct since 2011](#)

The Metropolitan Police have published their [plan to rebuild trust in the police](#) on their website. In December, they [published an update on their progress](#), adding further priorities to focus improvement. Further details of the police's action were published in [a letter from Dame Cressida Dick](#) to Mayor of London Sadiq Khan on 4 February 2022.

On 10 February 2022, [Dame Cressida Dick stood down](#) as the Commissioner for the Metropolitan Police, citing the Mayor "no longer [having] sufficient confidence in my leadership" as the reason for her departure.

2

Media

2.1

Press releases

Mayor of London - [Mayoral statement on Met Commissioner](#) - 10 February 2022

Independent Office for Police Conduct - [IOPC recommendations to tackle Met culture after investigation uncovers bullying and harassment in the ranks](#) - 01 February 2022 (for full report see Section 4 of this Debate Pack)

End Violence Against Women Coalition - [IOPC finds cultural issues of misogyny and racism in the Met Police](#) - 01 February 2022

Rape Crisis - [Calls to address misogyny and racism in the Metropolitan police](#) - 01 February 2022

Liberty - [Liberty Responds to IOPC Report on Misogyny and Bullying in the Metropolitan Police](#) - 01 February 2022

End Violence Against Women Coalition - [Almost half of women have less trust in police following Sarah Everard murder](#) - 18 November 2021

Police Federation - [Britain's police forces have many heroes, but we need to change our culture](#) - 31 October 2021

Independent Office for Police Conduct - [There must be nowhere to hide for police who abuse their position for a sexual purpose](#) - 25 October 2021

Home Office - [Inquiry launched into issues raised by Couzens' conviction](#) - 05 October 2021

Mayor of London - [Statement on inquiry into the Couzens' case and wider police culture](#) - 05 October 2021

Metropolitan Police - [Commissioner's statement after Wayne Couzens' given whole-life term for murder of Sarah Everard](#) - 30 September 2021

2.2

News articles

Spectator - [The Met is still failing women after the murder of Sarah Everard](#) - 03 March 2022

Independent - [Sarah Everard murder was 'a watershed moment for women's safety that was wasted'](#) - 28 February 2022

Hickman & Rose Solicitors - [Blog: Met sexism scandals expose a 'we know best' attitude which risks betraying the force's fundamental principles](#) - 24 February 2022

Guardian - [Misogyny in Met played key role in downfall of Cressida Dick](#) - 11 February 2022

The Conversation - [Misogyny in police forces: understanding and fixing 'cop culture'](#) - 07 February 2022

UnHerd- [Cressida Dick has failed women](#) - 07 February 2022

Times - [Sue Fish: 'It's not just the odd deviant. There is a toxic culture of sexism in policing'](#) - 05 February 2022

The New Statesman - [The Met is institutionally misogynistic. No "banter" or "bad apple" excuses can hide that](#) - 04 February 2022

Guardian - [Met police misogyny: the rot runs even deeper than thought](#) - 01 February 2022

BBC - [Met Police: Misogyny, racism, bullying, sex harassment discovered](#) - 01 February 2022

Independent - [Met Police officers who shared photos of murdered sisters on WhatsApp jailed](#) - 06 December 2021

Independent - [Police watchdog raises concern over 'canteen culture' WhatsApp groups where officers share racist and sexist messages](#) - 07 November 2021

The Crime Report - [Can Police Face Up to Sexism?](#) - 27 October 2021

iNews - [Sarah Everard's killer is in jail, but the misogyny that enabled him still thrives in the Met, ex-officers say](#) - 14 October 2021

Left Foot Forward - [EXCLUSIVE: Overwhelming majority of women say police are sexist](#) - 05 October 2021

BBC - [Sarah Everard murder: Inquiry into failures over Wayne Couzens' police career](#) - 05 October 2021

Observer - [The Observer view on institutional misogyny in the Metropolitan police](#) - 03 October 2021

Observer - [The Metropolitan police canteen culture that shielded Sarah Everard's killer](#) - 02 October 2021

Times - [Sarah Everard murder: Killer and police shared abusive messages](#) - 01 October 2021

Guardian - [‘London streets are safe for women,’ say Met after Sabina Nessa killing](#) 23 September 2021

2.3

Parliamentary material

Ministerial statements

[The policing of the Clapham Common vigil for Sarah Everard](#)

Member: Kit Malthouse

24 May 2021 | Written statements | House of Commons | HCWS48

Debates

[IOPC Report on Metropolitan Police Officers' Conduct: Charing Cross Police Station](#) , HC Deb 2 February 2022 cc301-11

[Sexual Misconduct in the Police](#), HL Deb 26 October 2021 cc653-6

[Sexual Misconduct in the Police](#) , HC Deb 20 October 2021 cc773-84

[Policing and Prevention of Violence against Women](#) , HL Deb 16 March 2021 cc182-93

[Policing and Prevention of Violence against Women](#) , HC Deb 15 March 2021 cc25-47

2.4

Further reading

Home Office - [Angiolini Inquiry part 1: terms of reference](#) - Last updated 02 February 2022

Independent Office for Police Conduct - [Operation Hotton: Learning report](#) - 1 February 2022

Disclaimer

The Commons Library does not intend the information in our research publications and briefings to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. We have published it to support the work of MPs. You should not rely upon it as legal or professional advice, or as a substitute for it. We do not accept any liability whatsoever for any errors, omissions or misstatements contained herein. You should consult a suitably qualified professional if you require specific advice or information. Read our briefing [‘Legal help: where to go and how to pay’](#) for further information about sources of legal advice and help. This information is provided subject to the conditions of the Open Parliament Licence.

Feedback

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@parliament.uk. Please note that authors are not always able to engage in discussions with members of the public who express opinions about the content of our research, although we will carefully consider and correct any factual errors.

You can read our feedback and complaints policy and our editorial policy at commonslibrary.parliament.uk. If you have general questions about the work of the House of Commons email hcenquiries@parliament.uk.

The House of Commons Library is a research and information service based in the UK Parliament. Our impartial analysis, statistical research and resources help MPs and their staff scrutinise legislation, develop policy, and support constituents.

Our published material is available to everyone on commonslibrary.parliament.uk.

Get our latest research delivered straight to your inbox. Subscribe at commonslibrary.parliament.uk/subscribe or scan the code below:



 commonslibrary.parliament.uk

 [@commonslibrary](https://twitter.com/commonslibrary)