

PRESS RELEASE

Avon and Somerset Police apologises and compensates a vulnerable adult following unlawful force

In September 2022, a 45 year old woman, whose name is withheld for her protection, was arrested in Weston-super-Mere by Avon & Somerset officers on the basis of a report by an individual who was known to police and who had made around 30 spurious allegations against her in a long standing campaign of hate crime and harassment. The woman has diagnoses of autism, PTSD, ADHD and an auditory processing disorder. Officers were aware of her vulnerabilities and had in their possession a document explaining how she should be dealt with and, in particular, that she would find restraint overwhelmingly distressing.

Three police officers attended the woman's address on 27 September 2022. On opening the door she was informed that she was under arrest. The officers grabbed her and forced entry into her home. She was pushed face down on to her stairs and painfully and forcefully restrained by two officers. She describes being terrified to the point of hallucination. At one point, an officer injured her nose causing it to bleed profusely. She was taken to Bridgwater Police Station and placed in a cell, where she became extremely distressed. She told staff through the intercom that she needed urgent help. In response, she was told to "stop sulking". No one came to check on her for 11 minutes after her request for help.

She was finally taken to hospital and was assessed to have concussion symptoms. She was taken back to Bridgwater Police Station and released, having spent more than 24 hours in custody. The allegation against her was subsequently dropped.

Avon and Somerset Police have now acknowledged that officers entered the woman's home without lawful authority and that that she was subject to disproportionate levels of force. They have paid her significant damages and apologised, saying *"Officers failed to follow internal guidance... and more should have been done to consider your neurodiversity and disability by implementing reasonable adjustments. We accept that unreasonable force was used during your arrest. We are sorry that you were treated in this way and we apologise unreservedly"*.

The woman's response to these events is *"The way I was treated by the police was unacceptable. I experienced such high levels of distress that my mental health has since deteriorated. I've spent four years fighting for justice and accountability. Finally, I have received an apology but I am still waiting for the outcome of the officers' misconduct cases. Whilst I welcome the apology from Avon & Somerset Police, it is actions and not words that make the difference. Lessons need to be learned, and positive change must take place."*

She was represented by Molly Cox of Bhatt Murphy solicitors, who said this: *"This was an appalling experience for anyone to endure, but for a person with disabilities, who had been the victim of harassment, it was profoundly traumatic. It was also entirely avoidable - there is a wealth of policy and guidance available to police as to the reasonable adjustments disabled people are entitled to expect, as well as guidance specific to our client. For this*

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to have been ignored here raises on-going concerns about how Avon & Somerset police treat vulnerable people.”

NOTES TO EDITORS

For further information or request for comment please contact **Carolynn Gallwey** at Bhatt Murphy on 020 7729 1115 or c.gallwey@bhattmurphy.co.uk