# West Mercia Police criticised for breaching sexual abuse survivor’s confidentiality and attempting victim shaming



West Mercia Police have faced severe criticism after admitting to a serious breach of confidentiality involving Heidi Clutterbuck, a woman who alleged she was sexually abused by her late brother. In a distressing turn of events, a police detective erroneously revealed Clutterbuck's identity to a witness during the investigation into her claims. This breach, which occurred in 2015, has been characterised as a negligent act by the police, raising questions about their treatment of sexual abuse survivors.

Clutterbuck has spent nearly a decade grappling with the repercussions of this breach, enduring a protracted legal struggle that has cost her around £193,000. While West Mercia Police recently acknowledged their liability in this case, their legal representatives are attempting to argue that her subsequent decision to speak publicly about her experiences should diminish her compensation claim. This argument has been perceived by many as an attempt at “victim shaming,” underscoring the systemic issues that persist within the force regarding how it handles allegations of sexual abuse.

Clutterbuck has been vocal about her distress following the breach. “I was so scared, and I was so scared [for] my young children,” she recounted, describing how she learned of the officer's error via a late-night Facebook message. Her distress escalated into anger as she sought a resolution, only to encounter a dismissive attitude from the police. “I became the enemy of them. Well, you know, that’s my perception of it,” she stated. This chilling narrative highlights not only the inadequacies in the police response but also raises broader concerns about how such institutions engage with victims of abuse.

In recent years, a series of inquiries, including one regarding child sexual exploitation in Telford, have shown a disturbing pattern of failures by the West Mercia Police. In those cases, reports indicated systemic neglect and an institutional failure to act on abuse allegations, with authorities even being accused of avoiding investigations due to fears of inflaming racial tensions. These findings call into question whether the current leadership within West Mercia Police can adequately support victims or if fundamental changes are necessary.

Adding to the evidence of institutional shortcomings, reports from HM Inspectorate of Constabulary have consistently highlighted weaknesses in West Mercia Police’s handling of child protection cases. A particular report from 2015 described police investigations as "poorly planned" and inadequately supported, while a subsequent 2023 revisit found ongoing issues in victim support, including a lack of timely updates and poorly managed investigation plans.

The implications of Clutterbuck’s case extend beyond her personal experience; they reflect a wider culture within the police force that has often disregarded the voices of abuse victims. Maria Mulla, Clutterbuck’s barrister, emphasised the significance of maintaining anonymity for survivors, stating that the police's actions had unjustly stripped Clutterbuck of her “right to absolute anonymity,” a right entrenched in law. The impact this has on the willingness of other victims to come forward cannot be overstated; Breech cases can deter survivors from pursuing justice, fearing that their stories will be mishandled or trivialised.

Clutterbuck’s response to the breach has been to advocate for greater accountability and transparency within the police force. She initiated a petition in 2016, urging for reform and demanding that those responsible for failings be held accountable. Her efforts illustrate a profound desire not only for personal justice but also for systemic change that can better protect future survivors of abuse.

West Mercia Police, responding to ongoing scrutiny, have yet to adequately address the broader ramifications of their practices despite their admission of liability. The public’s demand for accountability grows louder, as does the need for a police force that can offer genuine support and trust to those it vows to protect. Without transformative changes to existing practices and attitudes, the cycle of negligence may continue, leaving vulnerable victims feeling victimised anew by the very institutions designed to safeguard them.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/26/west-mercia-police-accused-of-shaming-alleged-victim-of-child-sexual-abuse> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/26/west-mercia-police-accused-of-shaming-alleged-victim-of-child-sexual-abuse> - In May 2025, West Mercia Police admitted to negligently breaching the anonymity of Heidi Clutterbuck, a 53-year-old woman who alleged she was sexually abused by her late brother. The police detective revealed her identity to a witness in 2015. After years of legal battles costing Clutterbuck £193,000, the force formally admitted liability. However, police lawyers argue that her subsequent public campaigning, including speaking at the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and sharing her experiences on social media, should reduce her compensation claim. Clutterbuck expressed that the police's actions have been dismissive and have caused her significant distress.
3. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/telford-child-asian-west-mercia-police-children-b2121485.html> - An inquiry revealed that over 30 years, more than a thousand children in Telford were sexually exploited amid significant police and council failings. The report highlighted that authorities were aware of the exploitation but failed to act, partly due to fears of inflaming racial tensions. The inquiry criticized the police for not investigating cases involving Asian men, leading to prolonged abuse. Both the council and police have apologized to the victims and are working on implementing the inquiry's recommendations. ([the-independent.com](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/telford-child-asian-west-mercia-police-children-b2121485.html?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-31530372> - A 2015 inspection by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary criticized West Mercia Police for 'poorly planned' and 'unnecessarily prolonged' child protection investigations. The report also found the force's response to child sexual exploitation to be 'weak'. Recommendations included improving collaboration with other agencies and reducing the number of children detained in police custody overnight. The police acknowledged the shortcomings and committed to implementing the recommendations. ([bbc.co.uk](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-31530372?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/publication-html/west-mercia-police-revisit-service-to-victims-cause-of-concern/> - In October 2023, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services revisited West Mercia Police and identified ongoing concerns regarding their service to victims. The report highlighted issues such as poorly planned investigations and insufficient support for victims. Recommendations included ensuring investigation plans are created with supervisory oversight and that victims are regularly updated in line with the Victims’ Code. The force was urged to act on these recommendations promptly. ([hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk](https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/publication-html/west-mercia-police-revisit-service-to-victims-cause-of-concern/?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-shropshire-61983584> - An inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Telford found that for decades, authorities ignored signs of abuse, blamed victims, and failed to investigate cases due to 'nervousness about race'. The report criticized West Mercia Police and the council for scaling down specialist child sexual exploitation teams to save money, leading to prolonged abuse. The police and council have apologized and are working on implementing the inquiry's recommendations. ([bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-shropshire-61983584?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.change.org/p/independent-police-complaints-commission-police-and-crime-commissioner-west-mercia-and-gloucestershire-police-police-failing-victims-of-sexual-crime> - In January 2016, Heidi Clutterbuck initiated a petition calling for accountability from the Independent Police Complaints Commission and the Police and Crime Commissioner of West Mercia and Gloucestershire Police. The petition highlighted her experiences of institutional failings and the need for real learning and change within the police force to better support victims of sexual crime. Clutterbuck emphasized the importance of making individuals and management accountable for their actions. ([change.org](https://www.change.org/p/independent-police-complaints-commission-police-and-crime-commissioner-west-mercia-and-gloucestershire-police-police-failing-victims-of-sexual-crime?utm_source=openai))