

Suspended top police officer makes sex discrimination claim

6:39pm Monday 11th March 2013

By Graeme Hetherington

A SUSPENDED police officer is taking his case to an employment tribunal claiming he was overlooked for the top job despite facing allegations of gross misconduct.

Derek Bonnard is believed to have submitted the claim maintaining that it was sexual discrimination that stopped him getting the Chief Constable post at Cleveland Police.

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The 50-year-old has been suspended from duty since August 2011 when he was arrested as part of an ongoing investigation into corruption at the force and some people associated with the former Cleveland Police Authority.

The Deputy Chief Constable's disciplinary hearing got underway today (Monday, March 11) after he was unsuccessful in having the case adjourned during legal argument last week.

Mr Bonnard is facing seven gross misconduct charges during the disciplinary hearing, which is being chaired by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Police.

So far the cost of the disciplinary hearings involving former Chief Constable Sean Price and Mr Bonnard is estimated to be around £500,000.

The ongoing criminal investigation, Operation Sacristy, has so far cost the taxpayer £3m, most of which is being covered by the government.

The latest revelation to involve the force has seen Mr Bonnard submit papers at an employment tribunal in Newcastle after Jacqui Cheer was appointed in February after spending 18 months as the force's temporary chief constable.

When the decision was made to appoint Mrs Cheer, who had impressed the new Police and Crime Commissioner, Barry Coppinger, it was revealed that she was the only person to formally apply for the £140,000-a-year post.

A Cleveland Police spokeswoman confirmed that Mr Bonnard had submitted his claim.

She said: "We can confirm papers have been lodged by Mr Bonnard regarding an Employment Tribunal. The Force intends to defend this matter robustly."

Mr Bonnard, who was unavailable for comment, was arrested along with the force's former chief constable Sean Price, in August 2011.

Mr Price was sacked after he was found guilty of gross misconduct at a separate hearing last year.

He remains on bail as Operation Sacristy - a wide-ranging investigation into alleged corruption at Cleveland Police - continues.

Mr Bonnard has been released from bail and told he will not face criminal charges.

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