

IN THE COUNTY COURT AT PLYMOUTH

Case No: L00TQ030

The Law Courts,
Armada Way,
Plymouth,
Devon, PL1 2ER

Date of hearing: Monday, 11th August 2025

Before:

DISTRICT JUDGE JAMES

Between:

**CHIEF CONSTABLE OF DEVON &
CORNWALL POLICE
- and -
PATRICIA SHORTHOUSE**

Applicant

Respondent

MS CASEY-JOHNSON (Solicitor) appeared for the Applicant

MR SMETHURST (Solicitor) appeared for the Respondent

Approved Judgment

If this Transcript is to be reported or published, there is a requirement to ensure that no reporting restriction will be breached. This is particularly important in relation to any case involving a sexual offence, where the victim is guaranteed lifetime anonymity (Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 1992), or where an order has been made in relation to a young person.

This Transcript is Crown Copyright. It may not be reproduced in whole or in part other than in accordance with relevant licence or with the express consent of the Authority. All rights are reserved.

Digital Transcription by Marten Walsh Cherer Ltd.,
2nd Floor, Quality House, 6-9 Quality Court, Chancery Lane, London WC2A 1HP.
Telephone No: 020 7067 2900. DX 410 LDE
Email: info@martenwalshcherer.com
Web: www.martenwalshcherer.com

DISTRICT JUDGE JAMES:

1. This is an application for contempt of court arising, firstly, out of an arrest of Mrs Shorthouse on 2nd August 2025 and, prior to that, some matters that were due to be heard by His Honour Judge Mitchell at a hearing in October. Those relate to two allegations of breach relating to the dates of 2nd June 2025 and 7th July 2025.
2. By way of background, Mrs Shorthouse is subject to an injunction pursuant to the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. That order was made by District Judge Scott on 2nd July 2024 and continues in force until 2nd April 2026. It all relates to anti-social behaviour perpetrated by Mrs Shorthouse against her neighbours. This is not the first occasion that Mrs Shorthouse has found herself before this court for breaching that injunction. A very brief history is that she was before this court first in November 2024 for a breach that concerned a neighbour of hers by name of Anna Miles, for which she was given a four-day suspended sentence. She next came before the court in February 2025 for a further breach and then she failed to attend, resulting in that being dealt with at a later date along with a subsequent breach, when she was sentenced to 20 days' imprisonment. There was then a fourth breach and, on 6th May or thereabouts, she was sentenced to a period of 50 days, taking into account ten days spent on remand.
3. The breaches that I am concerned with are three in number. The first relates to 2nd June 2025 when Anna Miles and Judith Cole, neighbours of Mrs Shorthouse, were subject to obscene language. It describes in the statement how Mrs Shorthouse was particularly foul-mouthed and aggressive, using the phrase "You fucking cunts", and was angry and confrontational. The second is that on 7th July at around 7.00 pm Mrs Shorthouse was verbally abusive towards Ms Cole, saying words to the effect of, "You fucking cunt. Fuck off."
4. The final breach is on 2nd August 2025, again Judith Cole was the victim of the behaviour of Mrs Shorthouse, with Mrs Shorthouse saying words to the effect of "You are a fucking cunt. I adore my husband. You fucking cunt, ruining lives." This is repeated and persistent behaviour by Mrs Shorthouse which is blighting the lives of her neighbours.
5. Ms Cole in her most recent statement dated 2nd August says this about the effects:

"This is terrible and a complete living nightmare. I cannot go outside of my house for I am in fear of the relentless verbal abuse which would follow. Monday nights when the bins go out are the worst, as I fear any noise is her throwing rubbish, as this has happened so many times previously. Last night, I felt the behaviour was more targeted and threatening, and I am even more on edge. She stands in her doorway, drinking continuously, and chucks alcohol bottles in the bin. This has been going on for years and I do not know what else to do."
6. Mrs Shorthouse, your behaviour is wholly unacceptable and is extreme verbal abuse that is aimed at your neighbours and is causing their lives and their quiet enjoyment to be ruined.
7. In terms of dealing with this matter, I have had admissions from Mrs Shorthouse to the breaches that I have set out and I have a letter from Mrs Shorthouse dated 11th August

in which she apologises for her actions and gives some explanation of the difficulties that she has had. She suffers with alcohol dependency, and she is in a domestically abusive relationship with Mr Radford, whose property she resides at.

8. I heard from Mr Smethurst by way of mitigation on behalf of Mrs Patricia Shorthouse. He explained that she is somebody who is articulate, intelligent, with a degree of insight into her behaviour; that she used to be a very different person to that which she has become; and that she has declined following her divorce in 2014. She is in an entirely toxic relationship, and her mental health has been detrimentally affected by her alcohol use.
9. In dealing with this matter, the Court of Appeal in *Lovett v. Wigan* [2022] EWCA Civ 1631 set out certain key principles. These are as follows:

"The objectives underlying penalties for contempt are different from those in crime, at least in the sense of the relative significance of punishment as compared to ensuring future compliance with the order."

It goes on to set out the objectives for breaching an anti-social behaviour injunction, which are: ensuring future compliance with the order, punishment, and rehabilitation. It explains later in the judgment that:

"Custody should be reserved for the most serious breaches, and for less serious cases where other methods of securing compliance with the order have failed",

and that

"A custodial sentence should never be imposed if an alternative course is sufficient and appropriate. If the court decides to impose a term of imprisonment, that term should always be the shortest term which will achieve the purpose for which it is being imposed."

10. In considering the Civil Justice Council Guidelines, which are the relevant guidelines following that Court of Appeal decision, both the police and Mr Smethurst on behalf of Mrs Shorthouse agree that the correct category within the guidance is Culpability B and Harm Category 2. That gives a starting point of one month and a category range of between: adjourned consideration and three months. In this case, there are some mitigating features on the part of Mrs Shorthouse. She has, in relation to the August breach, admitted the breach at a very early stage. She has not been quite so early in terms of her admissions in relation to the June and July matters. She also has ill health, although that seems to arise predominantly from her alcohol use, and she is the victim, I am told, of a domestically abusive relationship.
11. However, there are a series of aggravating features that are also present. In particular, Mrs Shorthouse is repeatedly back before the courts. She was released in relation to the matters in June and July only on 29th July, and it took her just a few short days before she was breaching the order again on 2nd August. There is, in my judgment, no sentence other than custody that meets the circumstances of this case, and I have three allegations that I need to deal with. I accept the B2 category as the correct one and, in respect of the three breaches that I have, in respect of the first, which is the matter on 2nd June

2025, I impose a sentence of one month's custody; in respect of the second matter – 7th July 2025 – I impose a sentence of one month in custody; and in relation to the third matter, 2nd August 2025, I impose a sentence of two months in custody.

12. Just giving some brief further explanation in relation to those, it does not seem to me that it could possibly be said that this case falls below the starting point in respect of the two earlier allegations of breach. In respect of the third, that is particularly aggravated by the fact that Mrs Shorthouse had only briefly been released from custody. This is not, as Mr Smethurst says, an arithmetical task. It is not a case of the court simply increasing the sentence on each occasion that Mrs Shorthouse appears before it. Those are the sentences that are appropriate to the circumstances of the case and to the situation that Mrs Shorthouse is causing for her neighbours.
13. That comes to a total of four months. I then reduce that to allow for the admissions by Mrs Shorthouse, and I reduce it to 84 days. I further reduce it by a further 14 days to reflect the time that Mrs Shorthouse has already spent in custody in respect of these matters. That means the ultimate sentence that I impose is one of ten weeks, of which Mrs Shorthouse will serve half.
14. Mrs Shorthouse, in addition to that, I have considered whether or not to extend your injunction to exclude you from Shakespeare Close and other areas in the locality. I have not in the end decided to do so today. I have not done so because it was raised by me from the Bench for the first time today. It may well be that what follows in due course is an application to extend that injunction. It may be that you are given one final chance on your release, but certainly let me make this much clear. If you find yourself back before me on another committal application following your release with a breach proven, whether or not you have had a warning in advance or not, I shall most likely be excluding you from Shakespeare Close and the locality. So you have the warning now. This has got to stop. The suffering and the distress that you are causing your neighbours must come to an end and you must learn to comply with the injunction that remains in place for their protection. That is the sentence that I therefore order.

(This judgment has been approved by the Judge.)