



Neutral Citation Number: [2026] EWHC 1808 (Admin)

Case No: AC-2026-LON-001517

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE
KING'S BENCH DIVISION
ADMINISTRATIVE COURT

Royal Courts of Justice
Strand, London, WC2A 2LL

Date: 16/07/2026

Before :

LORD JUSTICE WARBY

MRS JUSTICE HEATHER WILLIAMS DBE

Between :

The King (on the application of ELLEN ROOME)

Claimant

- and -

(1) THE SENIOR CORONER FOR GLOUCESTERSHIRE

**(2) TIKTOK INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES UK
LIMITED**

Defendants

Harry Lambert (instructed by **Mishcon de Reya**) for the **Claimant**
The First Defendant did not appear and was not represented
Anthony Jones (instructed by **Taylor Wessing**) for the **Second Defendant**

Hearing date: 16 July 2026

Judgment Approved by the court
for handing down
(subject to editorial corrections)

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Lord Justice Warby and Mrs Justice Heather Williams:-

Introduction

1. This is the judgment of the court on an application for an order under section 13(1)(b) of the Coroners Act 1998 for an inquest to be re-opened.
2. The Claimant, Ellen Roome, is the mother of Julian “Jools” Sweeney. He died on 13 April 2022 at the age of 14. At an inquest on 29 September 2022 the Assistant Coroner for Gloucestershire found that the medical cause of death was “1a Ligature suspension”. The Assistant Coroner recorded the following narrative conclusion:

“The deceased was found hanging by a cord around his neck in his bedroom. He was taken to Gloucestershire Royal Hospital where he died on 13 April 2022. The police confirmed that there was no third-party involvement. No suicide note was found. The deceased’s family could offer no explanation as to why the deceased might commit suicide.”
3. Ms Roome now seeks an order quashing the Record of Inquest and the findings and conclusions of the inquest, and a direction that a fresh investigation and inquest be held into Julian’s death. Her case is that a new inquest is necessary or desirable in the light of investigative insufficiencies and new evidence that has come to light, particularly, although not exclusively, in relation to the role of social media and of TikTok specifically, in the events leading to the deceased’s death. The Attorney-General’s fiat, authorising Ms Roome to make this application, was granted on 13 March 2026.
4. The First Defendant is the Senior Coroner for the Gloucestershire area (“the Coroner”). The Coroner does not oppose the application and has had no substantive involvement in these proceedings. The Second Defendant, TikTok Information Technologies UK Limited (“Tik Tok”), has been joined as a party on the basis that it is directly affected by the application and is likely to be an Interested Person at any fresh inquest. Tik Tok does not oppose the application but was represented at the hearing before us to explain its position.
5. At the hearing submissions were made by Mr Harry Lambert on behalf of Ms Roome, and by Mr Anthony Jones on behalf of Tik Tok. We are grateful for their help. For the reasons we shall now give, we have concluded that the application should be granted.

The factual background

Julian’s death and the inquest

6. Julian lived half of the time with Ms Roome, and her partner Barry Preece, and the rest of the time with his father, Matthew Sweeney, and his partner.
7. On 12 April 2022. Julian stayed the night with his father. His father last saw Julian at about 2.30 / 3.00pm on 13 April 2022 when he dropped him off. Julian seemed to be in good spirits at this time, and said to his father “see you tomorrow”. He spent the afternoon with his best friend, Monty Greaves, who describes Julian as behaving entirely normally whilst they were together. After spending time at Monty’s address,

the two boys walked to Julian's mother's home in Charlton Kings, arriving at about 6.00pm, as shown by the ring doorbell footage. Ms Roome and Mr Preece were out for the day. The doorbell footage shows that at 6.15pm Julian helped Norman Gregory, a decorator, carry a wardrobe out of his van and into the house. Monty and Julian had pizza and roasted marshmallows outside in the fire pit.

8. Monty left the address at about 8.45pm and he describes Julian saying to him "see you tomorrow Mont" as he did so. The doorbell footage shows Julian and Monty laughing and joking together. At about 9.50pm Julian messaged a friend asking him if he wanted to play the video game Call of Duty.
9. At about 10.13pm Ms Roome and Mr Preece returned home. Ms Roome went upstairs to Julian's bedroom and discovered to her horror that he was hanging from a cord around his neck with his tongue sticking out. With Mr Preece's assistance they managed to get the knot undone. At this stage Julian was still breathing and he vomited. Mr Preece carried out CPR. An ambulance crew attended at 10.32 pm and police officers arrived shortly afterwards. Julian's father also came to the address. Julian was pronounced dead at 11.13pm. Julian's parents told the police that Julian had appeared to be his normal self and that he had not raised any problems with them. There had been an issue about him not wanting to attend school on certain days, but he was generally a happy boy with a wide circle of friends. There had been no signs of any mental health issues. A letter to the Coroner's Officer from Julian's GP confirmed that there was no reference to mental health issues or suicidal ideation in Julian's medical records.
10. The post-mortem report identified the medical cause of death as "1(a) Ligature suspension". A toxicology report indicated that there was no evidence of alcohol or drugs consumption.
11. The coroner was provided with a report dated 12 September 2022 from DS Craddock, the Senior Investigating Officer ("SIO"). This summarised the inquiries that had been made of Julian's school and of Monty Graves, Sophie Clay, Julian's former girlfriend, and Jack Denley, another of his friends. The report gave an account of Julian's movements on the day of his death. DS Craddock indicated that she had manually examined Julian's iPhone. His iPad and computer had also been reviewed. We will return to this subject but, in summary, DS Craddock indicated that nothing of note had been found. Her report also referred to a drawing Julian had made in one of his schoolbooks on 7 April 2022 showing a noose, which he had shown to Sophie. DS Craddock observed that it was difficult to know the reason Julian's death had occurred. There had been short one-off conversations spread over time with Julian's friends that had suggested he was unhappy with himself and he had occasionally made reference to self-harm / suicide but due to how he had presented the rest of the time no-one who knew Julian was hugely concerned about this. The officer also noted that Ms Roome and Julian's friends had indicated that he had a reckless side, and she wondered if this could have been an act gone wrong.
12. The inquest lasted less than 30 minutes. All of the evidence was read under rule 23 of The Coroners (Inquests) Rules 2013.

Developments since the inquest

13. The inquest took place just over five months after Julian's death, at a stage when, Ms Roome has explained, she felt barely able to function. However, as time went on, she became increasingly concerned that her son's death had not been fully investigated and that unanswered questions remained. She sold her business and resolved to focus upon pursuing this. We will summarise the main developments that ensued.
14. Correspondence with the SIO led to a report dated 6 August 2025 describing the extent to which the contents of the deceased's electronic devices had been examined prior to her report to the Coroner. The SIO had conducted a manual review of his mobile phone. She is not a digital forensic expert and had received no training in the forensic examination of digital devices. Her review was limited to what she could access through normal user functions, such as messages, photographs, call logs, and visible app activity. Although a download was generated, she did not rely upon the Computerised Device Analysis and Acquisition Platform ("CDAAP") due to issues with its performance. The SIO listed the areas of the phone she reviewed, observing that it had not been proportionate or feasible to review the contents in full.
15. In relation to social media, she had reviewed data relating to TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. At the time she was only aware of one TikTok account. She looked through some of the saved TikTok videos. Although she submitted a data request to TikTok, this was declined without a court order, which she was unable to obtain as she was not investigating an indictable offence. She reviewed messages on Instagram for the 13 months prior to Julian's death. Snap Chat was logged out and so she was not able to review anything on this platform. Julian's iPad was reviewed by another officer using CDAAP. Audio, images, and videos were not viewable via CDAAP as there was an issue with the virus protection. The SIO manually reviewed some of this content, but as there appeared to be a similar number of photos and videos to those on the iPhone, she assumed the two were linked and so did not look at these on the iPad. DS Craddock also listed the data that was extracted from the computer tower by CDAAP; nothing of concern was noted.
16. The SIO considered that her examination of the electronic devices encompassed what was reasonable and feasible at the time, but she accepted that there could be material that had not been reviewed by the police, particularly in relation to social media, as it had not been possible to access Julian's social media data without a court order, which she was unable to do. She indicated that she supported Ms Roome's attempts to obtain this material.
17. Ms Roome commissioned reports dated 18 and 24 November 2025 from Fedora Investigations ("the Fedora Reports"). The Fedora Reports, written by a former SIO in the Metropolitan Police National Crime Squad and Serious Organised Crime Agency were highly critical of the original investigation. They contained a number of specific findings of relevance, including the following:
 - (1) Julian's bedroom was never properly secured, and no retrospective investigations were undertaken to establish the scene that Ms Roome faced when she entered the room, in particular as to the precise locations and position of all of the communication devices within the bedroom as well as the state of those devices.

- (2) Julian's electronic devices were not examined by trained forensic analysts.
 - (3) On 6 April 2022, Julian was messaged on Instagram by "John Smitt". This person claimed to be "Sophie" and asked Julian to help her set up an Instagram account on her new phone by copying and sending a link that would be sent to him. Julian contacted Sophie to check if she had sent this message, but she did not reply until later that afternoon, confirming she had not sent it.
 - (4) No usage of Julian's Instagram account could be found after the interaction with "John Smitt" on 6 April 2022. This suggested that Julian may have clicked on the link he was sent, with the effect that he was immediately locked out of his account. It was possible, although unknown, that the takeover of his account was then followed by blackmail threats. Fedora identified various "red flags" with the John Smitt account and Mr Lambert's recent skeleton argument states the account was operated by a West African organised crime gang.
 - (5) Fedora's examination indicated that at approximately 7.15pm on 13 April 2022, Julian made contact via Snapchat with a user known as Honey (who was a friend of his and also in a Snapchat group of which he was a member).
 - (6) One artefact recovered from the deceased's iPad for 8.16pm on 13 April 2022 indicated a location event at a geolocation approximately 1.6 – 1.7 miles from the deceased's address.
18. By letter dated 28 November 2025, the Assistant Chief Constable of Gloucestershire Constabulary indicated that a new SIO would be appointed to review the full case material held by the constabulary and also the Fedora report for any new lines of enquiry.
19. Ms Roome's witness statement dated 5 December 2025 sets out a number of her specific concerns, including:
- (1) Police had not spoken to Norman Gregory, the decorator, who had chatted with her son during the afternoon before he died or to Ross Goodhall, a painter who was working at the house on 13 April 2022 and would likely have been the last adult to see Julian alive. Mr Goodhall left the address at around 6.30pm.
 - (2) When she went through her son's phone, Ms Roome found a message he had sent to his friend Will Dobson at 9.12pm on 13 April 2022 that read, "was w her all day too". The police had not spoken with Will, nor examined the content of his phone to clarify the wider context of this conversation.
 - (3) When she had found her son in his bedroom, Ms Roome recalls that he was in a position where he could still stand and reach the floor. This did not make sense if he was trying to take his own life. She thought he must have leant into the cord knowing that he could stand up straight again when he needed to but then lost consciousness so that his body weight caused him to hang. Ms Roome had not been asked to provide a statement to the Coroner for the inquest.
 - (4) A remark that DS Craddock had made to her in the aftermath of her son's death suggested that there were unresolved questions to be asked of Sophie Clay.

Although the deceased and Sophie had been chatting on Snap Chat on 13 April 2022, Sophie had not saved the messages as she usually did.

- (5) As a result of her communications with TikTok, Ms Roome had managed to obtain some limited data, which showed that Julian had a very high volume of TikTok use, at around 30 logins per day. The data also indicated that a number of the links he had clicked on were no longer available to view. Ms Roome's understanding was that this was likely to be because TikTok had taken down the content as there was something inappropriate about it.
 - (6) Ms Roome suggested that her son may have been attempting the blackout challenge, a dangerous social media trend that encourages participants to intentionally choke themselves or restrict their breathing until they lose consciousness.
20. Ms Roome, represented by US lawyers acting on a conditional fee agreement, has brought a claim for wrongful death and other torts against two Tik Tok companies in the Superior Court of the State of Delaware ("the Delaware Claim"). In the Delaware Claim it is alleged that manipulative and dangerous design features of TikTok played a part in causing Julian's death. We are told that a motion to dismiss has been filed by the defendants to the Delaware Claim.

The course of these proceedings

21. Following the grant of the Attorney General's fiat, a Part 8 claim form was issued in the King's Bench Division on 17 March 2026. By Master Eastman's order dated 30 March 2026, the claim was transferred to the Administrative Court. The Defendants were served with the claim form and the accompanying materials within the prescribed six-week period.
22. The Coroner filed an Acknowledgement of Service on 17 April 2026 indicating neutrality. Tik Tok filed its Acknowledgement of Service on 22 April 2026. It has confirmed that it does not oppose the relief sought.
23. Tik Tok filed a witness statement dated 6 May 2026, made by Katie Chandler, a partner at Taylor Wessing. Ms Chandler states that TikTok was not contacted by the Coroner in relation to the original inquest. She confirms that Ms Roome identified two additional TikTok accounts that she believes to have been associated with her son and conveyed this information to TikTok in April 2024. Ms Chandler sets out TikTok's data retention policy and states that, in accordance with that policy, certain categories of behavioural data were deleted in respect of the deceased's accounts before the company was notified of his death. Other categories of data have been retained. Ms Chandler gives a non-exhaustive indication of this data, namely lists of liked videos and, where the video has not been deleted, the videos themselves; and login records, including login and logout IP addresses. As we have mentioned, Tik Tok was represented at the hearing before us.

The legal framework

24. Section 13(1) of the Coroners Act 1988 provides, so far as relevant:

“This section applies where, on an application by or under the authority of the Attorney-General, the High Court is satisfied as respects a coroner...either...

(a) ...

(b) Where an inquest has been held by him, that (whether by reason of fraud, rejection of evidence, irregularity of proceedings, insufficiency of inquiry, the discovery of new facts or evidence or otherwise) it is necessary or desirable in the interests of justice that another inquest should be held.”

25. In these circumstances, section 13(2) vests the High Court with the jurisdiction to quash an earlier inquest and to order that another inquest should be held.

26. The right approach to the test laid down by section 13(1)(b) was identified by Lord Judge, LCJ in the Hillsborough case, *Her Majesty’s Attorney General v Her Majesty’s Coroner of South Yorkshire (West) & Her Majesty’s Coroner of West Yorkshire (West)* [2012] EWHC 3783 (Admin) [10] as follows:

“...The single question is whether the interests of justice make a further inquest either necessary or desirable. The interests of justice, as they arise in the coronial process, are undefined, but, dealing with it broadly, it seems to us elementary that the emergence of fresh evidence which may reasonably lead to the conclusion that the substantial truth about how an individual met his death was not revealed at the first inquest, will normally make it both desirable and necessary in the interests of justice for a fresh inquest to be ordered...What is more, it is not a pre-condition for a further inquest that this court should anticipate that a different verdict to the one already reached will be returned. If a different verdict is likely, then the interests of justice will make it necessary for a fresh inquest to be ordered, but even when significant fresh evidence may serve to confirm the correctness of the earlier verdict, it may sometimes nevertheless be desirable for the full extent of the evidence which tends to confirm the correctness of the verdict to be publicly revealed ...”

27. The statutory test is in the alternative; if the interests of justice indicate that a fresh inquest is *either* necessary *or* desirable, then it will be ordered: *Vaughan v HM Senior Coroner for Gwent* [2020] EWHC 3670 (Admin) [10].

28. As Simler LJ (as she then was) noted in *R (Mays) v HM Senior Coroner for Kingston Upon Hull & East Riding of Yorkshire* [2021] EWHC 3604 (Admin) [23], “new facts or evidence” has been held to encompass both evidence that was not available at the time of the original inquest, and evidence that was available and not provided but which would have been both relevant and admissible.

29. The Court will always give considerable weight to the views of the family of the deceased: *Vaughan* [10].

Submissions

30. On behalf of Ms Roome, Mr Lambert identified two key strands to the application. First, insufficiency of inquiry. Mr Lambert did not criticise the Assistant Coroner who conducted the original inquest. But he did point out that the inquest was brief, and he emphasised that this reflected the limited material the police provided to the Coroner. The deceased's mobile telephone was not forensically analysed, and the potential role of social media was not investigated beyond a partial manual search of the phone. The Fedora Reports have identified significant failings in the original police investigation and lines of enquiry that were never pursued. Gloucestershire Police have agreed to review the case and to consider potential new lines of enquiry.
31. Secondly, the discovery of new evidence including the "John Smitt" message indicating a possible attempt at extortion or "sextortion" in the days before Julian's death. The TikTok data obtained by Ms Roome is indicative of overuse or addiction and it is noteworthy that a significant proportion of the links that the deceased accessed have since been removed.
32. Mr Lambert submitted that a different conclusion may well be reached if a new inquest is held.
33. For Tik Tok, Mr Jones made clear that his client saw the force of the application and did not oppose it. But he took the opportunity to make written submissions on four matters to ensure, as he put it, that we reached our decision "on a properly-informed basis". Mr Jones (i) drew attention to the Tik Tok data retention policies explained by Ms Chandler; (ii) reiterated the point made by Ms Chandler, that behavioural data relating to Julian's accounts had been deleted in the ordinary course of business before Ms Roome first asked for access to those accounts in 2024; (iii) provided us with information, not contained in Ms Chandler's statement, about Tik Tok's harmful content policies; and (iv) addressed certain allegations against Tik Tok contained in Mr Lambert's skeleton argument for the hearing which he described as "extraneous and unsubstantiated".

Conclusions and reasons

34. We are satisfied that for both the reasons relied on by Ms Roome, it is desirable in the interests of justice for a new inquest to be held. In the circumstances we do not need to decide whether a new inquest is also "necessary".
35. As we have explained, it is not a pre-condition for the grant of a further inquest that this Court finds the original Coroner to be at fault, or that the Court anticipates that a different verdict to the one already reached will be returned. In the present case it is simply not possible to know at this stage whether the same conclusion will be reached after appropriate investigations have been undertaken and the evidence heard. However, it is now clear that there are various potentially relevant lines of enquiry relating to the circumstances of Julian's death that had not been explored at the time of the 2022 inquest. In the main, these matters have come to light as a result of the tireless investigations undertaken by Ms Roome.

36. Some of the points raised in Mr Lambert's skeleton argument appeared to us to be little more than assertion, verging on speculation. He did not find it necessary to develop all those points at the hearing. For our part, we will focus on the matters that have persuaded us to grant this application. However, we emphasise that the role of this Court is simply to decide whether the section 13(1)(b) test is met. It will be for whichever coroner conducts the new inquest to determine its scope and the evidence the coroner wishes to receive. We also emphasise that only some of these further lines of enquiry are related to Tik Tok.
37. In concluding that that the section 13(1)(b) test is met we have taken account of the cumulative effect of the aspects we will go on to summarise, albeit we are conscious that they do not necessarily all point in the same direction. The potential impact of this material falls to be considered in circumstances where, as we have explained, there is limited evidence that Julian was unhappy, let alone suicidal, at the time of his death. As we have described, he was apparently making plans to see his best friend the next day and trying to arrange to play a computer game with another friend on the evening of his death.
38. The points that we highlight are the following:
 - (1) The limited extent to which Julian's electronic devices were examined by police, in a context where he spent much of his time accessing social media, viewing videos and messaging with his friends. As we have described, no forensic examination was undertaken and the manual review that was undertaken was far from comprehensive.
 - (2) The police did not have the benefit of any data from the social media companies. The evidence makes clear that some such data exists, which was not examined by the police investigation and may be relevant to the questions to be addressed by an inquest. Mr Lambert has said that the Online Safety Act 2023 and the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025, both enacted since Julian's death, will give the Coroner the power, if necessary, to order TikTok and/or other social media companies to provide her with disclosure. We have noted the provisions of s 101 of the 2023 Act but do not need to rule on that question. We note that coroners in any event have statutory powers to require organisations to produce evidence relevant to a coronial investigation. We also note the contents of Ms Chandler's witness statement, but it will be for the Coroner, rather than this Court, to determine the specifics of what can and what should be obtained from Tik Tok.
 - (3) Ms Roome's enquiries have revealed that her son had two additional TikTok accounts which were not examined at all during the earlier investigation, as the police were not aware of them.
 - (4) Data which Ms Roome has obtained from TikTok indicates that her son was a very high user of TikTok, which itself raises questions as to the influence this may have had upon him. Furthermore, there are currently question marks over the content of the TikTok videos Julian accessed which have subsequently been removed from the platform.
 - (5) The new evidence indicating that an apparently fraudulent approach was made to Julian by "John Smitt", and that he may have clicked on the link that was sent

to him and subsequently been locked out of his Instagram account. This raises questions as to what else may have happened to Julian as a result of clicking on the link.

- (6) The individuals to whom we have referred, who had contact with Julian on the day of his death but to whom the police did not speak at all or may have questioned in insufficient detail. To avoid any misunderstanding, we stress that these are people who we consider should be spoken to as potential witnesses, to see whether they have any or any further relevant information to provide.
 - (7) The data discovered by Fedora which may indicate that Julian left his house at around 8.16pm on the evening of his death, for reasons that are currently unclear.
 - (8) Ms Roome's account of the position in which she found her son, which was not before the Assistant Coroner in September 2022.
39. We also bear in mind the understandable and, we add, reasonable wish of the family for a fresh and more comprehensive inquest, to explore and reach conclusions upon the questions we have identified and quite possibly others. For these reasons, we allow the Part 8 claim, quash the Record of Inquest and the findings and conclusions of the 29 September 2022 inquest; and we direct that a fresh investigation and inquest be held into the death of the deceased. The parties are agreed that there should be no order as to costs.