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POLICEMAN CLEARED OF CHILD RAPE

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Suspended officer now faces daunting task of rebuilding his life

A YOUNG police officer suspended after serious sex allegations has been given the chance to rebuild his career after being cleared at court.

Richard Atkins, 26, of Raglan Precinct, Caterham was cleared last Thursday of raping and sexually abusing a teenager when she was a child.

Mr Atkins, who has been a constable for three years with the Metropolitan Police based at Sutton, was acquitted by a Crown Court jury of one charge of rape, two of indecent assault and two of indecency with a child.

He had denied all the five alleged

offences which were said to have taken place between 1995 and 1998, maintaining he was the target of false accusations by an attention-seeking teenager.

The girl, now aged 19, cannot be named for legal reasons.

Sobbing in the court, she told jurors that she had been raped and forced to endure three years of sexual abuse from the age of six at the hands of the defendant when he was a teen.

But the defendant's counsel told the trial that Mr Atkins was the victim of a "pack of lies" told by a

teenage attention-seeker with a fondness for alcohol.

At the three-day trial, jurors were told that the defendant would visit the girl's home in the Caterham area and offer her chocolate if she would massage him.

The girl also made other allegations against the defendant involving alleged masturbation, oral sex and rape.

Alleging that she had felt too ashamed to tell her mum what had been going on, she said she finally confided in friend, and then Mr Atkins was arrested.

But Heather Stangoe, defending, dismissed the evidence as "fabrication."

She said the girl had recounted different versions of events to different people while under the influence of alcohol.

Cross-examining the defendant, Miss Stangoe said: "It's all a tissue of lies."

"You are making this up as you go along."

The girl retorted that she had tried to "bury" her experiences.

But Miss Stangoe said: "But you haven't been burying it."

"You've been telling your friends about this since you were 12."

"Is it because you need attention?"

The girl replied: "No."

After the trial, Mr Atkins' father Roger - who lives at the Raglan Precinct address - declined to comment, except to say that his son no longer lived there.

Meanwhile the girl's mother told the Advertiser: "My daughter has been through a lot."

"She had to go over and over the allegations in court which really took it out of her."