

Ethics Committees

An explicit commitment to integrity is absolutely essential to the legitimacy of policing. **Our behaviour, actions and decisions must always consider public interest. We value public trust and confidence in policing as an institution, and to earn this we need to be open to scrutiny and transparent.** We recognise also that professional ethics is far broader than integrity alone. It incorporates the requirement to give an account of one's judgments, acts and omissions. In simple terms it is not only about doing the right deed but also about doing it for the right reason.

In recent years the actions of a small number of Police Officers has led to a heightened focus on the integrity of police officers and of police forces. The Service has led the response, ensuring that it has investigated and dealt with many of the specific issues and will continue to do so. National policies and guidance documents have been produced to ensure consistency in a number of areas, including gifts, hospitality and secondary employment and the College of Policing published the Code of Ethics.

One of the measures taken by a number of forces, to be more transparent and demonstrate their commitment to integrity, is the introduction of Ethics Committees. The remit of an Ethics Committee is to **promote the highest standards of ethical conduct, providing a focus for education into ethical issues, a source of support for others and ensuring compliance with organisational values.**

The development of Ethics committees was undertaken by a 'Proof of Concept' group consisting of eight forces: Cleveland, Durham, Essex, GMP, Northamptonshire, South Yorkshire, Staffordshire and Wiltshire. In her capacity as National lead for Professional Ethics and Professional Standards, CC Cheer led on this work.

Ethics Committees offer an opportunity for the Police Service to develop a structured environment in which to discuss and debate some of the most difficult and contentious issues we face. They have the potential to improve and strengthen the delivery of policing services to the public and to be seen to be taking the recent integrity challenges seriously. Ethics Committees are advisory groups and not decision making bodies; and will examine current as well as historic matters. They may be asked, in certain circumstances, to advise on live operations or events, or examine a decision maker's application of the National Decision Model (NDM). Their remit is to discuss and provide advice about ethical issues not just to scrutinise the application of policy and procedure. The Committees add value and provide something in addition to the current audit and scrutiny processes.

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ETHICS COMMITTEES - TERMS OF REFERENCE

Purpose

The Ethics Committees are responsible for enhancing trust and confidence in the ethical governance and actions of Cleveland Police and the Office of The Police and Crime Commissioner. Responsibility is both internal and external in focus and may include representation from strategic partners. They will discharge responsibilities by;

- Promoting the highest standards of ethical conduct.
- Provide a focus for education into ethical issues.
- A source of support to others.
- Ensure compliance with organisational values.

Objectives

To effectively discharge their function Ethics Committees will consider the following:

Policy and Procedure

- Provide advice to those engaged in the development or review of force policy and procedure.
- Ensure policy and procedure reflects the stated values of the force and police service.

Decision Making

- Review the decision making of others.
- Provide 'live' support to decision makers.

Leadership

- Set the ethical standards expected of all leaders.
- Support and if necessary challenge the ethical conduct of leaders.

Culture

- Develop organisational values.
- Promote the purpose and adoption of value based action and decision making throughout the force.
- Ensure force values support the diverse nature of the policing environment.

Conduct

- Support those engaged in or affected by misconduct investigation, especially those who challenge conduct (whistle-blower).
- Ensure investigations are conducted ethically and in compliance with relevant process and force values.
- Consider potential ethical conflict in relation to matters such as procurement, hospitality, allowances/expenses and personal association.

People

- Staff performance in upholding the values of the force and police service.
- Inter-personal relations, for example behaviour that may fall short of the conduct threshold but indicate a failure to afford an individual dignity or equality in treatment.

This is not a prescriptive list of objectives. It may be appropriate for the committees to adopt a flexible approach to the level of support and challenge undertaken and the breadth of responsibility to meet the fluid policing environment.

It is not envisaged that all relevant matters will be referred to the committees, there should however be a mechanism by which referrals can be made.

Framework

The framework for delivery should be structured so as to support decision makers and leaders on ethical issues. Whilst they should not be viewed as having the power to direct or regulate, the committees will be expected to advise and act as fierce advocates for the public. The following should be considered;

Operational

This will be achieved through an internal ethics board (use of the term board differentiates between operational and strategic groups). This may not necessarily be a stand-alone entity and it may be appropriate if it were to be a sub-set of a relevant existing group e.g. Integrity and Transparency. Leadership should however be at a senior level e.g. Chief Constable/Deputy Chief Constable.

The ethics board should be representative of the force structure including representation from the Office of the PCC. If the board is derived from members of an existing group, additional independent members will be sought.

The Chair will be responsible for determining the agenda. Submission of agenda items will be through the force corporate meeting framework or in some cases an individual may identify or request potential agenda items. Where possible requests will be supported by a written submission, which will include reference to the Code of Ethics, the 'force ethical decision making matrix' and any other supporting material. The confidential reporting system may also be used to raise concerns regarding the ethical conduct of others. In such cases the Head of Professional Standards will refer the matter to the Chair for consideration.

A quorum will be 5 members (inclusive of the Chair). The Chair may exclude from whole or part of the meeting any member considered to be closely associated with the agenda item(s).

The board will follow the force corporate meeting framework, however it will be expected to present a report of findings and any recommendations made.

Meetings should be frequent (quarterly) and follow an agreed published timetable. Urgent or operational matters can be addressed by delegated members.

Strategic

The strategic committee must have the ability to challenge Chief Officers/PCC. A degree of independence from the force is therefore very desirable. How this will work in practice will be influenced by local environmental issues. It may be appropriate to seek involvement from such areas as; Higher Education (University), Health, College of Policing, Legal/Financial/Audit, Independent Volunteers. The committee should where possible be representative of the diverse nature of the local policing environment. It may not be appropriate to involve political figures or institutions.

The strategic committee need to meet less frequently. It may be desirable to only remit those matters directly relating to Chief Officers/PCC and those where there has been significant public disclosure or interest.