

# Guidance for ethical and professional behaviour in policing

Code of Ethics guidance to help put the ethical policing principles into day-to-day practice.

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Effective policing is built on public trust and confidence. This depends on a policing profession that is ethical and professional in the way that it respects, listens, responds, improves and serves the public.

The College of Policing has developed a [statutory Code of Practice](#) to complement a non-statutory Code of Ethics. Together, they will support everyone in policing to provide ethical and professional policing services. The Code of Ethics includes ethical policing principles to support decision making, as well as guidance on ethical and professional behaviour.

By 'everyone in policing', we mean:

- police officers
- police staff
- police community support officers (PCSOs)
- those with designated powers
- members of the Special Constabulary
- police support volunteers and cadets
- police officers and staff on secondment or overseas deployment
- designated contract managers, contractors and staff employed by suppliers providing services on behalf of forces

For ease, the term 'staff' is used throughout this guidance to refer to the roles outlined.

## Purpose

Policing professionals are more likely to be judged as behaving ethically when their decisions and actions are lawful and consistent with the ethical policing principles.

The policing profession is committed to the highest standards of behaviour. This guidance provides guidance on ethical and professional behaviour for everyone in policing. This is what the public has a right to expect from us, and what we should expect from ourselves and each other. It contains advice on areas of policing that are important to maintaining public trust and legitimacy, as well as additional guidance where experience tells us we could benefit from it, in order to help us do the right thing. It also signposts guidance that is contained elsewhere but not always easily located.

The guidance does not – and cannot – cover every situation that someone working in policing might face, either in the course of their work or when not working. Nor does the guidance replace the need for common sense and professional judgement in how those working across a wide range of policing roles and responsibilities behave. However, the guidance will assist with building a positive workplace culture by spelling out what good policing looks like, and by promoting professional conduct and decision making.

For the avoidance of doubt, the Code of Ethics does not set the standards against which conduct should be assessed. Those standards are set by the Police Conduct Regulations and terms of employment.

Other guidance helps to ensure that assessments against the standards are consistent, including:

- [the statutory Home Office guidance](#)
- [College of Policing guidance on outcomes in police misconduct proceedings 2023](#)
- [Guidance Note 9 to the Police Staff Council England and Wales Handbook for staff employed under its provisions](#)

This guidance is not statutory and does not alter statutory provisions or replace terms of employment or appointment.

As professionals in policing, we will strive to follow this guidance.

## **Guidance on outcomes in police misconduct proceedings**

We aim to update the guidance on outcomes in police misconduct proceedings towards the end of 2025, following revised guidance issued by the Home Office.

Until then, supervisors and line managers should continue to use the 2023 guidance, in line with section 87 of the Police Act 1996.

## Being a member of the policing profession

We recognise that, as a result of being part of the policing profession, higher expectations are placed on us compared to the general public. As policing professionals, more attention is likely to be drawn to any misuse of our position or any failure to meet the expectations of our profession.

We uphold and promote the reputation of the police service by acting lawfully and in a way that demonstrates fairness and respect, policing with integrity, trust, confidence and legitimacy (in line with the [College of Policing leadership standards](#)).

### The public interest and trust

Our high expectations demand that we:

- think about how our actions might be interpreted or perceived by others when taking decisions
- act selflessly and in the public interest
- act in the knowledge that every interaction with the public may influence their own – and other people's – trust and confidence in policing
- act in a truthful, trustworthy and sincere manner
- do not knowingly make false, misleading or inaccurate oral or written statements, unless it is reasonable and proportionate to do so while pursuing a legitimate and lawful aim
- do not use our position to gain any personal advantage
- only use our police identification or warrant cards for policing purposes and avoid seeking a personal advantage or abusing our position (this does not apply to schemes designed to benefit the public sector or policing profession in general)
- neither solicit nor accept the offer of any gift, gratuity or hospitality that could compromise our impartiality (in accordance with force policies on gifts and gratuities)
- operate within our legal authority, in accordance with accepted good practice, and consistently with the ethical policing principles and this guidance
- do nothing, whether related to work or not, that damages the relationship of trust and confidence with the public
- ensure that our actions are consistent with what we say we will do
- ensure that our behaviour and language are not discriminatory, abusive, oppressive, harassing, bullying or victimising to the general public, our partners in providing services to the public or our policing colleagues – this includes when communicating digitally (including email, SMS and other

digital platforms) and when using social media, both inside and outside of work

- recognise when we may not have the expertise or knowledge needed and when issues should be referred, or advice should be sought, from line managers or those with specialist expertise

## Doing our best

As policing professionals, we are expected to carry out our responsibilities in an honest and professional manner. This means demonstrating care, attention and diligence, as well as fulfilling our role to the best of our abilities at all times. We:

- always act diligently and efficiently by being conscientious and thorough in our work and in exercising our responsibilities
- promote a positive professional image of the police service at all times
- are conscious of the impact that our behaviour and decisions have on others
- take ownership for resolving problems
- demonstrate courage and resilience in dealing with difficult and potentially volatile situations
- act on our own initiative to address issues
- show a strong work ethic and demonstrate extra effort when required
- remain calm and professional under pressure, defusing conflict and being prepared to step forward and take control when required
- abide by all instructions, policies and procedures set by the police service, where we are reasonably expected to know these, unless we have – and are able to provide – a clear rationale for not doing so
- do not let fear of being criticised divert us from our professional duties
- prioritise the demands on our time and resources where necessary
- are punctual and maintain a professional appearance
- understand that we can seek advice and support from staff associations and trade unions

## Being open, honest and candid

We demonstrate candour through our 'duty to cooperate'. This is a responsibility to give appropriate and timely cooperation during investigations, inquiries and formal proceedings, participating openly and professionally when identified as a witness. This recognises that policing professionals and organisations are accountable and willing to learn from experience.

Our high expectations demand that we:

- are open and truthful in our dealings with the public and our colleagues
- are open and transparent in accounting for our decisions, providing an honest and truthful representation whenever answerable for our actions in policing
- always conduct ourselves with candour, participating openly and professionally when dealing with matters relating to policing, unless we are:
  - acting under a statutory legal authority or to meet a legitimate operational policing aim ([see examples of statutory authority](#))
  - subject to operational security requirements with colleagues, line management, partners and oversight bodies in the execution of legitimate duties
- recognise that for compassionate reasons, it may sometimes be necessary for policing professionals to withhold information – this action is appropriate where it is deemed, in a person's professional judgement, to be necessary
- are proactive with our openness and honesty with the public when a policing service to which they are entitled goes wrong and as a result they are adversely affected, by:
  - explaining the short- and long-term effects of what has happened
  - offering an apology without undue delay, expressing regret and appropriate remedy to put the matter right
  - explaining to those affected their entitlement to the police complaints system
- raise issues with line management, ensuring reflection to enable individual and organisational learning when something goes wrong and an immediate remedy is not possible and/or a reoccurrence is likely
- cooperate appropriately with investigations, inquiries and formal proceedings when asked to do so as a witness, being open and professional in the way we participate
- always support and encourage colleagues to be both open and candid, and to raise concerns appropriately
- manage all official documents and records in accordance with the [Code of Practice on police information and records management](#)

## Examples of statutory legal authority

In policing, there will be occasions when demonstrating candour, through the requirement to cooperate, will be limited by statutory legal authorities subject to existing laws relating to privacy, data protection and national security. This includes the following.

- Preventing the disclosure of relevant material in compliance with the [Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996](#).
- Subterfuge in approved firearms tactics or within a live crime-inaction kidnap and extortion investigation, where it is necessary to protect life and prevent suffering in meeting an obligation under [Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights \(PDF\)](#).

## Covert policing

- The police service operates on the basis of openness and transparency. This is essential to maintaining and enhancing a positive relationship between the policing profession and the community. To achieve legitimate policing aims, it is sometimes necessary to use covert tactics. This is recognised in law.
- Covert tactics must be appropriately authorised. Any deployments must be shown to be proportionate, lawful, accountable and necessary.
- Covert operatives who authorise or perform covert policing roles must keep in mind this guidance, as well as the ethical policing principles and [authorised professional practice \(APP\)](#), at all times.
- Covert operatives can be authorised to create a false legend and persona within an authorised covert policing operation.
- Covert operatives will comply with the [Undercover policing APP](#), which makes it clear that it is never acceptable for an undercover operative to have an intimate sexual relationship with those they are deployed to infiltrate and target or encounter during their deployment.
- Legitimate adoption of a 'neither confirm nor deny' response to protect covert policing tactics.

## Business interest and associations

Our high expectations demand that we:

- are actively aware of, and identify when, associations with – or advocacy for – any groups or individuals create a conflict of interest or risk to our police work and responsibilities, consequently affecting our ability to discharge our policing duties effectively and impartially

- take steps to mitigate any conflict of interest and notify associations where required in line with policy
- ensure that any business interest we have is reported, is authorised and does not conflict with our police work and responsibilities
- seek clarification on what a conflict of interest is if we are unsure
- report changes in our personal circumstances that could have an impact on our vetting status (including notifiable associations)

## Additional professional requirements for police officers only

The actions or associations of police officers can bring discredit and disrepute to the police service and could constitute misconduct. As police officers, we:

- recognise that we must abide by paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 of [The Police Regulations 2003](#), which limits our involvement in politics
- know that being subject to any of the following measures could bring discredit on our police service, may affect our vetting status and may result in action being taken for misconduct, depending on the circumstances of the particular matter:
  - arrest
  - any legal processing in connection with an allegation of criminal conduct
  - a summons for an offence
  - a penalty notice for disorder
  - an endorsable fixed penalty notice for a road traffic offence
  - a charge or caution for an offence by any law enforcement agency
  - a conviction, sentence or condition imposed by any court, whether criminal or civil (excluding matrimonial proceedings, but including non-molestation orders or occupation orders) – ‘conditions imposed by any court’ would include, for example, orders to deal with anti-social behaviour, a restraining order or a bind-over
  - any legal proceedings taken against us for debt recovery, or any other adverse financial judgments
  - any known criminal conviction against a member of our immediate family or a close friend, so that appropriate safeguards can be put in place

We will report, as soon as reasonably practical, any occasion – whether in the UK or elsewhere – when we are subject to any of the measures listed above. When we are in doubt as to whether to make such a report, we understand that it is best to seek advice.

## **Additional professional requirements for police staff, volunteers and others working in policing (not police officers)**

As police professionals, we know that being subject to any of the measures listed above could bring discredit on our police service, may affect our vetting status and may result in disciplinary action being taken, depending on the circumstances of the particular matter. For these reasons:

- we will report any caution or conviction against us for a criminal offence
- we must report all convictions, sentences and conditions imposed on us by any court, whether criminal or civil, as soon as reasonably practical
- we may be required to disclose other legal matters affecting us for legitimate policing purposes, such as vetting, depending on the nature of our particular role

When we are in doubt as to whether to make such a report, we understand that it is best to seek advice.

## **Confidentiality**

We understand the importance of managing information that comes into our possession through our police work. We understand that we have the responsibility to share some information when it is needed and to protect other information from misuse. As a result, we will protect:

- police information from being accessed or accessible to unauthorised recipients, either on-duty or off-duty
- police information in line with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the [\*\*Code of Practice on police information and records management\*\*](#)
- personal data, with the understanding that by accessing such data without authorisation, we could be committing a criminal offence, regardless of whether we then disclose that personal data
- police information and not 'gossip' to colleagues who do not need to know it for a policing or welfare purpose, or to anyone – including friends and family – who could contribute to the misuse of police information

- police information that might prejudice investigations, operations or policing tactics
- our own personal and professional information because we recognise that it might increase our vulnerability to harassment, corruption and blackmail ([see APP on undercover policing](#))
- the quality of the data that we enter on to police systems

## Fairness and respect

As policing professionals, we are expected to understand our role in acknowledging and responding to our diverse society, and to treat all people and their property with fairness, dignity and respect, in accordance with their needs. We:

- embrace diversity with acceptance and understanding, and actively challenge any discriminatory behaviour
- recognise when systems, policies or processes appear to be failing communities or leading to unfair outcomes, for members of the public or for colleagues, and bring this to the attention of our leaders or line managers
- are courteous, polite and considerate, demonstrating empathy and compassion, while acknowledging that we are all different in the extent to which we are able to recognise emotions in others
- recognise that our contact may be the first and only time a person interacts with the police, and that we are ambassadors for our profession
- deal with people as individuals with sensitivity, respect and dignity
- recognise that the needs and perspectives of different individuals or groups may be very different to our own, and try to understand these differences and respond appropriately
- treat people fairly and without prejudice, regardless of their background or circumstances
- treat all victims of crime and disorder with care and empathy, and in compliance with the [Victims' Code of Practice](#)
- establish, take account of and respond to the particular needs of witnesses, providing all possible protection and support
- recognise that some people and groups we come into contact with may be vulnerable in particular ways – in other words, unable to take care of or protect themselves or others from harm or exploitation, as a result of their situation or circumstances – and therefore may require additional support and help recognise that some vulnerable people will seek a supportive relationship that extends beyond professional boundaries and that we must report this to our line managers

- act to protect vulnerable people and groups from behaviour that is abusive, harassing, bullying, intimidating, exploitative or victimising
- avoid any behaviour that could cause unreasonable distress or harm, including any behaviour that might interfere with our colleagues' ability to carry out their duties
- use appropriate language and behaviour in our dealings with the public and our colleagues
- consider our personal views, values or beliefs, so that they do not affect our professional relationships or the service we provide
- play an active role in recognising and eliminating unlawful discrimination, and in promoting equality of opportunity and good relations between all people
- are aware of – and challenge – the influence that biases (such as stereotypes, 'group think' or partiality) can have on our actions and decisions, and ensure that we act with impartiality

## Respecting the public

As policing professionals, we show a real belief in, and commitment to, service to the public, focusing on what matters to the public and will best serve their interests (for example, through the [Police Race Action Plan](#)). We:

- accept and value our duty to engage the public in a manner that is respectful and fair in developing policing priorities, policies and decisions, and in putting them into effect
- understand the expectations, changing needs and concerns of different communities, and do what is necessary and proportionate to address them
- build public confidence by talking and listening with people in local communities to explore their viewpoints and break down barriers between these communities and the police understand the impact and benefits of policing for different communities, and identify the best way to provide services to them
- take a proactive approach to opposing discrimination to help adequately support victims, encourage reporting and prevent future incidents

## Relationships

While the vast majority of professional relationships are entirely appropriate, we recognise the need to ensure that any professional relationship we have with the public or colleagues maintains acceptable boundaries (see guidance on [appropriate personal relationships and behaviours in the workplace \(PDF\)](#) and [maintaining a professional boundary between police and members](#)

## [of the public \(PDF\)](#)).

We recognise the need to manage our relationships with the public because of the existence of a power imbalance. This occurs because policing professionals may:

- have considerable discretion over the lawful use of policing powers
- have access to sensitive knowledge about people
- be working with individuals where the possibility of statutory intervention is present (for example, the compulsory admission of someone who is mentally ill)
- be making significant decisions regarding people's access to policing services

We also understand that individuals may not be – or may feel they are not – free to choose whether they engage with us, they may feel under compulsion to do so, or they may be in a vulnerable state (for example, distressed or confused). We acknowledge that this power imbalance should not be regarded negatively, but as a fundamental factor in such relationships. We:

- respect personal and professional boundaries, so as to maintain the integrity and rights of those we come into contact with
- do not use our professional position to pursue a sexual or improper emotional relationship with a member of the public
- do not engage in sexual conduct or other inappropriate behaviour when on duty
- recognise that a person's vulnerability and experience of trauma may have an impact on whether any relationship could ever be proper in the circumstances
- only contact victims, witnesses or other members of the public regarding a policing matter using work devices – personal devices should only be used in exceptional circumstances
- discuss with a line manager or other police professional any doubts about whether a relationship, or a given action within it, is unacceptable or inappropriate

## Human rights

As policing professionals, we are expected to respect and protect human dignity and uphold human rights. We:

- recognise our duty to respect and protect human rights, and understand that by acting on this duty, we help build a safe and strong society

- know and understand the legal framework relating to human rights where it is appropriate to our role
- respect all people and their individual beliefs, values, cultures and needs equally and impartially
- make decisions about human rights according to the principles of proportionality, legality, accountability, necessity, non-discrimination and humanity

## Cooperation

As policing professionals, we are expected to work cooperatively to get things done, to help and support others, and to be committed to developing positive working relationships. We:

- work in partnership with other agencies to provide the best possible overall service to the public
- work cooperatively, willingly giving help and support to colleagues, people and our communities
- are approachable and committed to developing positive working relationships
- explain things as well as we can, focusing on the key points and talking to people using language they understand
- listen carefully and ask questions to clarify understanding, expressing our own views positively and constructively

## Wellness and wellbeing

As policing professionals, we are expected to take all necessary steps to ensure that we are physically, mentally and emotionally fit to carry out our policing roles and responsibilities, and to do what we can to support our colleagues to do the same. We:

- consider our own mental health and wellbeing and that of our colleagues, to the best of our ability
- support an open and safe environment in which people have confidence to talk to peers or managers to seek advice or signposting to support for welfare issues
- ensure that when we believe we are unfit to undertake our role or are impaired for duty, we declare this to the appropriate person as soon as practicable
- report financial difficulties in line with policy and access welfare support to mitigate this
- are prepared to do what we can to address personal matters when they have an impact on our ability to discharge our professional responsibilities, seeking appropriate support when this is needed

- are aware of the support for ourselves and our peers that is available in our force and from [Oscar Kilo](#)
- do not make ourselves unfit or impaired for work as a result of the misuse of substances – this includes the use of ‘legal highs’
- when absent from work on account of sickness, do not engage in activities that could impair our return to work

## Line manager considerations

As supervisors, managers and leaders of the policing profession, we:

- will emphasise the importance of staff looking after and maintaining their wellbeing personally and professionally
- will encourage an open and safe environment in which people have confidence to talk to peers or managers to seek advice or signposting to support for welfare and wellbeing issues
- understand that personal medical and financial information is sensitive and treat it confidentially, only sharing if necessary
- may refer individuals to occupational health where there are concerns about an individual’s health and the impact it may have on their ability to perform their role
- recognise that some people may be reticent to share personal information for understandable reasons
- support staff who disclose information about their welfare or wellbeing, and while they are trying to resolve matters
- ensure that support is provided to those under investigation for misconduct and for staff who have reported misconduct

## Social media and instant messaging

We recognise that there are benefits and dangers associated with using any platform of web-based or mobile communications, social networking sites and all other types of social media.

Recognising the potential risks of using social media, we will ensure that:

- we think about how others may perceive our social media activities, whether at work or at home
- we use social media responsibly, safely, positively and appropriately, knowing the value it can create for community engagement

- we do not post any discriminatory, abusive, oppressive, harassing, bullying, victimising or offensive material, or post material that is otherwise incompatible with the ethical policing principles, whether on-duty or off-duty
- we do not post any material that could undermine the reputation of policing or might run the risk of damaging public trust and confidence in our profession
- our membership of any social media group does not undermine the reputation of the profession
- we recognise that information posted online or in private chats can be shared publicly
- we do not disclose information that places ourselves, colleagues or operational tactics at risk

We recognise that using social media, even when it is out of work and in our private lives, may still breach regulations or the terms of our employment if it discredits the police service as a whole or undermines public confidence in it.

## Decision making

As policing professionals, we are expected to comply with legislation and to take the ethical policing principles and human rights into account when making decisions relating to our roles and responsibilities. We will use the [national decision model \(NDM\)](#), supported by the [ethical policing principles](#), as frameworks to assist us in making decisions.

We accept that making well-thought-out decisions can be challenging in any circumstances but can be even more difficult in the policing environment, where there is often an element of uncertainty ( [see the APP on Risk](#)). This may be because:

- some of the necessary information may be missing, time may be limited or the situation may be high-risk
- there may be a lack of control over some of the factors present in the situation
- there is no guarantee that our decisions will produce the outcome hoped for

The inherent uncertainty surrounding decisions is often affected by things such as ambiguity, multiple views of a particular problem, numerous possible intervention points, limited time and resources, and multiple possible solutions.

Despite these challenges, most of the decisions that we make, and most of the actions we take, are successful. Similarly, it shouldn't necessarily be assumed that harm resulting from a decision was due to poor decision making. Adverse outcomes can result from decisions made in the right ways

and with the best of intentions.

We understand that making decisions in uncertain conditions is a core professional requirement of many policing professionals. We cannot perform our mandate to serve and protect the public and bring offenders to justice if we are afraid to make decisions. The fact that there will always be the risk of being criticised and blamed in court or inquiries must not stop us from making a decision in the first place. We:

- ensure that we consider the ethical policing principles when making decisions
- gather, verify and assess all appropriate and available information at the time to gain an accurate understanding of situations
- consider what we are trying to achieve and a range of possible options, evaluating evidence and seeking advice where appropriate
- make clear, timely and justifiable decisions, reviewing these as necessary
- identify and assess the likely risks, costs and benefits of different options, and think about the wider consequences of decisions
- exercise discretion and apply professional judgement, ensuring that actions and decisions are in the public interest and proportionate, lawful and necessary
- keep in mind whether our decisions are likely to reflect well on the policing profession
- recognise that policing action or inaction may have an impact on public confidence
- act and take decisions objectively, using the best available evidence and without prejudice
- explain the rationale for our decisions to those affected by them
- review and reflect on our decisions, in line with the NDM, ensuring that we identify learning opportunities

## Use of discretion

Police discretion is necessary but must be used wisely. When using our discretion, we:

- use our training, skills and knowledge about policing
- are aware of the influence that biases (such as stereotypes or 'group think') can have on our actions and decisions
- consider what we are trying to achieve and the potential effects of our decisions
- ensure that we have a rationale for, and are able to explain, our use of discretion

## Use of policing powers

As policing professionals, we are expected to use our policing powers only as part of our role and responsibilities and to the extent that is proportionate, lawful, necessary and reasonable in all the circumstances at the time. The ethical policing principles can help us to make such decisions. We will use our powers legitimately and safely, using communication to de-escalate a given situation as a primary tactic where possible. We:

- recognise that we may be held accountable for the use of our powers through internal review or external scrutiny
- have to consider the impact of our use of powers on trust and confidence among different communities
- maintain our professional knowledge and any accreditation so that we comply with our legal responsibilities to the best of our ability ([see the section of the Code of Practice for Ethical Policing on continuing professional development](#))
- are prepared to explain the reasons for our actions as fully as possible, as they may not always be understood by others, including the public
- consider whether a particular decision, action or omission might result in members of the public losing trust and confidence in the policing profession
- recognise some vulnerabilities may require different communication and de-escalation approaches

## Recognising the opportunity to learn

We understand that the public interest is best served when we continually improve our service and performance. Self-awareness, self-challenge and reflection can be used to achieve this. As a policing profession, we understand that:

- there is an opportunity to learn from our actions, whether they are successful or not
- we learn best when we are accountable, open and transparent about our actions and decisions, and when we demonstrate candour, even when this makes us feel uncomfortable
- it is our responsibility to improve our own performance and to do what we can to help our peers and organisations do the same
- giving each other constructive feedback on how we are doing at work is one of the most powerful ways of helping ourselves and each other to improve

- by being open, frank and transparent, we will maintain the trust and confidence of the public and colleagues alike
- a reflective and candid approach will enable us as individuals and the organisation to continuously improve our service to the public, sharing our knowledge and learning to benefit the development of others
- where it becomes apparent that there is a shortcoming in our knowledge, we will bring this to the attention of our line manager

## Line manager considerations

As line managers, we understand the need for us to create a culture across teams and the organisation as a whole that supports and encourages candour, and to create an environment where people are able to learn. We:

- ensure that our own decisions are consistent with the ethical policing principles, with a clear alignment between what we say and what we do
- acknowledge the achievements of individuals and teams by recognising and rewarding good work
- give honest and constructive feedback to help people understand their strengths and weaknesses
- coach and guide team members, identifying and addressing areas for development
- support lawful and reasonable decisions made by our staff
- take steps to encourage and recognise good performance
- role model best practice on inclusion in the workforce, recognising our own and our colleagues' biases, as well as how to challenge them
- are aware of, and reflect on, personal biases and how they practically affect our role
- recognise when people are becoming demotivated and provide encouragement and support

## Challenging unprofessional behaviour

As policing professionals, we have a positive obligation for challenging or reporting behaviour that is unprofessional. We:

- act as role models for professional behaviour
- actively challenge all forms of discriminatory behaviour affecting individuals with protected characteristics ([see section 4 of the Equality Act 2010](#))

- have responsibility to question the conduct of colleagues, at any level (irrespective of the person's rank, grade or role), that we believe falls below the expected standards and, if necessary, we challenge, report or take action against such conduct
- report our concerns to a line manager, a force's reporting mechanism or another appropriate channel if we feel that:
  - we cannot question or challenge a colleague directly
  - a proportionate response to the unprofessional behaviour requires escalating to the attention of a supervisor or manager
- know that there is the option to report concerns through force confidential reporting lines, and that 'whistleblowers' will be provided legal protections set out in the [Employment Rights Act 1996](#)
- understand that if we fail to take action when we see or hear of unprofessional behaviour, we would be failing in our duty and may be complicit
- help to create an inclusive and supportive environment where we feel able to challenge poor behaviour
- listen to, and support, anyone who reports any concern about the behaviour of someone working in policing that they believe has fallen below expectations
- do not tolerate discrimination, victimisation or any disadvantageous treatment against anyone who makes a report of unprofessional behaviour or wrongdoing
- understand that the service will not tolerate reports that are found to be malicious or otherwise made in bad faith, and that such reports may lead to disciplinary procedures

## Line manager considerations

If we are a supervisor or manager, we will:

- act as role models of professional behaviour
- support our staff to carry out their professional duties correctly
- challenge and address any unprofessional behaviour and report it in line with force policies
- assess, take positive action or otherwise appropriately escalate any report of unprofessional behaviour or wrongdoing made by someone for whom we are responsible
- take an active and proportionate approach to addressing and reporting unprofessional behaviour
- encourage and support staff to challenge or report behaviour or service provision that falls below expectations

# When behaviour does not meet expectations

The police service operates on the basis of openness and transparency and is reliant on the trust and confidence of the public.

There may be occasions when behaviour does not meet our high expectations, which has the potential to damage our relationship with the public and our colleagues.

We know that taking action to address unprofessional behaviour is an essential part of maintaining and enhancing a positive relationship between the policing profession and the community.

We understand that:

- the action taken must be timely and proportionate to the severity and impact of the actual, suspected or alleged unprofessional behaviour
- early intervention will often provide the best opportunity for success
- different procedures exist according to the type of alleged behaviour or misconduct and each case must be considered individually
- allegations of misconduct will be dealt with in accordance with the terms of our appointment or employment (see also the [Home Office guidance, Conduct, efficiency and effectiveness: Statutory guidance on professional standards, performance and integrity in policing](#) and [Guidance Note 9 to the Police Staff Council England and Wales Handbook](#))
- relatively minor failures in professionalism may be simply and effectively dealt with through challenging our peers or team, normal day-to-day line management and learning through reflecting on what has happened
- the most significant failures, when assessed against our terms of appointment or employment, may require formal disciplinary action by our force or organisation (see the [Employment Rights Act 1996](#) and the [Home Office guidance, Conduct, efficiency and effectiveness: Statutory guidance on professional standards, performance and integrity in policing](#))
- disciplinary procedures (formal and informal) should be applied in a non-discriminatory manner, with due regard being paid to the need to handle allegations fairly, consistently, sensitively, confidentially and in a timely manner

## Line manager considerations

As supervisors, managers and leaders of the policing profession, we are expected to hold staff responsible and accountable for their actions and to reduce opportunities for unprofessional behaviour. We do this through role modelling, clear direction and expectations, appropriate supervision and dealing with issues as they arise and before they escalate. The use of feedback, reflective practice or formal performance and disciplinary processes (as appropriate) may be used to address any unprofessional behaviour.

We recognise that conduct such as neglect of duties or laziness may be due to a lack of professionalism and commitment to ethical behaviour. It can stem from the failure to hold individuals to account, arising, for example, when there is undue tolerance and a failure to confront. This is unfair and demotivating to all other staff and can, in turn, lead to the erosion of trust and respect, and to a lowering of other individuals' performance.

We know that the use of learning through reflection by our staff can help them to develop and that a 'blame culture' may inhibit the openness needed.

We recognise that more serious failures may require action by a line manager, whom we expect to exercise professional judgement and take into account the principle of proportionality in determining how to deal effectively with alleged unprofessional behaviour ([see the College of Policing leadership standards](#)). We will seek advice from professional standards for matters that appear especially serious.

As line managers, we will act positively and unwaveringly when shortcomings, wrongdoing or concerns are raised, taking positive action that is commensurate with the seriousness of the unprofessional behaviour. We will:

- judge actions and decisions by the quality of the decision making, not solely by the outcome
- consider whether decisions were consistent with those of policing professionals of similar rank, role or experience taken in the same circumstances
- help staff identify and critically reflect on honest mistakes or errors of judgement
- identify and challenge unprofessional behaviour (for example, neglect of duties, slackness, dishonesty, lack of commitment) and take appropriate action
- use the relevant policies, procedures or regulations (as appropriate) to address behaviour when it is inconsistent with the Code of Ethics
- ensure that support is provided to those under investigation for misconduct and for staff who have reported misconduct

# Tags

Code of Ethics