



Police & Crime Commissioner for Cleveland
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Cleveland Independent External Ethics Committee Minutes

Date: Wednesday 11th March

Time: 16:00 – 18:30

Venue: Cleveland Police Central HQ / MS Teams

Attendees:

Name	Role
Dave Smith	Chair
Craig Marshal	Vice Chair
Neal Gillson	Cleveland Police
Elise Pout	OPCC
Tony Jester	Independent Member
Shirley Johnston	Independent Member
Sarah Johnston	Independent Member
Khan Hanif	Independent Member
Tresor Bukasa	Independent Member
Sean Craggs	Cleveland Police

Apologies:

Name	Role
Gerard Wraith	Cleveland Police

Apologies not received:

Tony Traynor	Independent Member
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No.	Discussed	
1	Welcome & Introduction The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. It was explained that the meeting was being recorded to facilitate the minute taking.	
2	Apologies for Absence It was noted that independent member T.T will be removed from the committee after multiple failed attempts to make contact. Memberships are reviewed if members do not attend three meetings without any contact.	
3	Declarations of Conflicts of Interest No conflicts of interest declared. The chair explained that meetings remain strictly confidential until minutes are approved and published and there is an increased importance due to the review of redacted vetting decisions.	
4	Minutes from meeting 3rd December 2025 Panel agreed previous minutes from the 3rd of December were accurate.	
5	Ethical Dilemma 1 – Political Roles in Policing The committee discussed the exploration of what restrictions can and should be placed on those seeking to be involved in a political role alongside their police role for both staff and officers. Currently, Police Officers cannot be involved in any political activity, however staff can be involved if they are not in a politically restricted role. Those wishing to be involved in a political role must submit a business interest to the Professional Standards Department. The decision maker for this has requested guidance from the committee on what would be acceptable/not acceptable. Two guidance documents were discussed with the committee. One of the documents included, which is currently followed by the force, is guidance from the Police Staff Council – Joint Circular 83, stating staff should not be prohibited from campaigning, supporting candidates, or being active in political parties. However, officers and those staff in a politically restricted role cannot be involved with a political party. The second document discussed by vetting manager SC was the College of Policing Vetting APP (Authorised Professional Practice) which lists political campaigning as a prohibited activity for both officers and staff during the vetting process. It was explained that this	

	is now statutory under vetting Code of Practice 2023. The case in question is related to a person participating in an activity affiliated to a political party, this activity is litter picking while representing a political party, which does not fall into any of the categories stated as prohibited. SC is going to reach out to the individual to discuss in more detail. The chair addressed the idea of it falling under one of the categories if the person were to wear branded clothing which could be seen to be promoting the political party. The committee agreed that there is a clear conflict between the two documents, with one stating staff cannot be prohibited and the other saying they are prohibited. Police Officers are completed prohibited from being involved in political activity, but clarity is still needed around staff roles. A question was raised around Freemasons, it was noted that police officers can be Freemasons, but they are now required to declare this if they work in the Met. Committee recommendations: • Clarification required on guidelines are there are clear conflicting guidelines with both vetting APP and the Police Staff Council. • Review by the committee once further clarification has been received.	
6	Matters Arising/Updates <u>Vetting Decisions</u> The vetting manager from the force has provided two randomly selected applications where vetting has been declined, both of which have been redacted to hide personal details. The first vetting decision reviewed by the committee was an application for Police Constable being declined due to significant financial vulnerabilities. The committee agreed this was a thorough, detailed investigation and that the decision made to decline the application was absolutely the correct one. It was also noted that the speed of completion was excellent, only taking 2 months from application to finish. It was also noted that the force only has six outstanding vetting applications, none of them being over a week old. The second application reviewed was declined over the candidate's previous involvement in a physical assault for which they were cautioned but not charged. The assault happened over 20 years ago which raised questions with the committee around proportionality. It	

was noted the severity of the assault was extremely serious and that there was no evidence of reform from this individual. Some members felt this decision harsh given the time elapsed and no further incidents recorded, although the majority agreed the seriousness of the offence and lack of mitigating evidence justified this decision.

The Head of Professional Standards has request review of two declined vetting decisions from a group with the same protected characteristics to see if the committee can identify and issues. These will be reviewed at the next meeting.

Review of BWV Policy

New guidance from the NPCC on BWV has been shared with the committee. The force will closely mirror this guidance when drafting the new policy including firmer expectations for officers to record by default during any meaningful interaction with the public unless there is legitimate reason not to. It was discussed that clear instructions are required when officers should record, when they should pause recording and how footage should be managed and retained.

There was broad agreement that BWV is essential for transparency and public confidence, and that it protects both officers and members of the public during disputes or complaints. Several members of the committee felt that a “record unless there is a clear reason not to” approach is preferable, as failing to record often creates more problems than recording does. It was highlighted that redaction processes already exist to protect privacy in sensitive cases.

Some concerns were raised about situations where victims disclose sensitive information, such as sexual offences. It was clarified that national guidance allows officers to pause recording during the initial disclosure stage if it helps the victim feel more comfortable, but recording should resume as soon as it is appropriate for evidential purposes.

The Committee discussed concerns with officers not always activating their cameras and important footage being deleted because it had not been marked for retention. Members noted that many complaints arise after footage retention deadlines have passed and supported clearer expectations and better training to ensure officers understand when footage must be preserved.

Overall, the Committee supported updating the policy and emphasised the need for clearer, simpler rules so officers know exactly when to record and how to manage footage. It was confirmed that once a draft of the revised policy is developed, it will be brought back to the Committee for review.

7	Ethical Dilemma 2 – Social Media Policy The committee discussed the exploration of current stance of the Force’s social media policy in which it states police officers cannot post or publish any images or videos of themselves while on duty/in uniform or by re-posting corporate communication posts of themselves, on their own personal social media accounts. In practice, however, many officers already share such content informally, often without realising it breaches policy. This has led to inconsistency, confusion and, in some cases, unnecessary disciplinary conversations. The revised policy aims to provide more realistic guidance that balances officers’ personal use of social media with the need to protect confidentiality, professionalism, and public trust. The Committee agreed that harmless, non-operational content—such as graduation photos or positive community engagement—should not be unnecessarily restricted, but clear boundaries are needed to prevent posts that could undermine professionalism or reveal sensitive information. Members also noted the risks of officers being targeted through online content, even when posts are shared privately. A discussion was had around further training that could be put in place to ensure officers understand privacy settings, online risks, and what content is inappropriate. The Committee also agreed that “influencer-style” posting connected to policing should not be permitted. It was advised that future vetting will include checks of officers’ public online activity, reinforcing the need for clear and consistent standards. The Committee supported modernising the policy and will review the draft once completed.	
9	AOB <u>Police Reform White Paper</u> The white paper has been shared with the committee for information and to enable them to read it in their own time. It was noted that this paper will reflect the changes that will take place for all Forces and OPCC’s across the UK. <u>Hate Crimes</u> It was brought to the attention of the chair that there are concerns with the national approach to recording hate crime, noting that incidents are logged as a hate crime based on the perception of the	

	victim or witness. Members discussed how this perception-based system can inflate statistics and create a misleading public impression of rising hate crime, as recorded incidents may not reflect proven motivation. The Committee agreed that while supporting victims is essential, the current process risks blurring the distinction between reported perceptions and evidenced offences. Members felt clearer national communication may be needed to explain how such figures are derived. The Chair confirmed that the Committee's concerns would be formally minuted and shared for further consideration.	
11	Date for next meeting: Wednesday 10th June 16:00 – 18:30 Cleveland Police HQ / Teams <i>Panel members are reminded to attend in person if possible to enable a photograph to be taken of the committee.</i>	