



Police Service
of Northern Ireland



Consultation on
Revised PSNI
**Code of
Ethics**
2025





Code of Ethics

Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Foreword by the Board Chair | 3 |
| About This Consultation | 4 |
| The Context | 4 |
| Further Consultation Information | 8 |
| Appendix 1: The Easy Read Version of the Consultation | 10 |
| Appendix 2: Consultation Response Form | 11 |
| Appendix 3: Revised Code of Ethics 2025 | 15 |

Foreword

Consultation On The Revised Code Of Ethics

The Northern Ireland Policing Board (the Board) is seeking your views to help revise and update the current PSNI Code of Ethics. This document explains the consultation process and provides context to help you understand how we have revised the current Code.



The Code of Ethics sets out standards of conduct and practice for police officers so they are aware of the rights and obligations arising from the Human Rights Act 1998.

The PSNI Code of Ethics was first issued in February 2003 and following a review, a second edition of the Code of Ethics was published in February 2008. Both the Board and PSNI agree that a new review is required to ensure that this Code of Ethics is fit for purpose for today's policing.

Over the course of the last year, the Board has worked with the Police Service of Northern Ireland to make revisions to the current Code.

So that you can make an informed and meaningful contribution to the updating of the Code of Ethics, this document tells you about what the Code of Ethics is and how it is used.

We want to hear your views on two key questions outlined within the Consultation Response Form. Your response will help us to shape the Code of Ethics for policing in Northern Ireland.

The consultation will run from 18 August 2025 to 10 November 2025. You can send us your response by email or post. Responses collected during this process will be analysed and the resulting report will assist in finalising the new Code of Ethics 2025.

We look forward to receiving your views. As a Board we are committed to providing effective independent oversight of policing, ensuring that the PSNI serves the public with high standards of professionalism and care.

Mukesh Sharma MBE DL

Chair | Northern Ireland Policing Board



About the Code of Ethics

What is the Code Of Ethics?

The Code of Ethics sets out standards of conduct and practice for police officers so they are aware of the rights and obligations arising under the Human Rights Act 1998.

Issuing a Code of Ethics is one of the key legislative responsibilities of the Board.

While police conduct, or misconduct, will be judged against the standards set out in the Code of Ethics, the Code is not merely a disciplinary tool. It is a comprehensive human rights document which draws upon the European Convention on Human Rights and other relevant human rights instruments.

The Context

Police Services are facing new challenges that include greater scrutiny, openness and transparency. In addition, new technology and social media are contributing to a complex policing operating environment.

This review seeks to address advances made recently on police misconduct processes, technology, and social media. It proposes adding a duty of candour to increase openness and transparency and additional changes to reflect the focus on victims as outlined within the new Policing Plan 2025-2030.

While police conduct, or misconduct, will be judged against the standards set out in the Code of Ethics, the Code is not merely a disciplinary tool. It is a comprehensive human rights document which draws upon the European Convention on Human Rights and other relevant human rights instruments. The Board believes that by carrying out their duties whilst paying strict attention to the ethical framework of the Code, the public can be sure that police officers have acted in a professional, effective and human rights compliant manner.

We wish to issue a revised Code of Ethics that will allow the Board and the PSNI to monitor the effectiveness of the Code by considering how officers are trained on the implications of it, by reviewing quantitative information on breaches of the Code of Ethics and by evaluating qualitative information on how the PSNI both investigates and addresses such breaches, including disciplinary action taken or procedural or policy changes made.

We will report on this annually in the Human Rights Annual Report and over the years the Board has made a number of recommendations around the effectiveness of the Code which have been implemented by PSNI.

We are seeking your views and this collective information will inform the Code of Ethics to secure for all the people of Northern Ireland an effective, efficient, impartial, representative and accountable police service which secures the confidence of the whole community.

Proposed changes

Following detailed discussions, the Board and the PSNI have agreed draft amendments to the current Code of Ethics. In summary, these include:

Introduction

- Updated text for the Foreword, Introduction and Preamble;

Article 1: Professional Duty

- **Article 1.5** - additional text added to reflect no adverse impact on an officer's career;
- **Article 1.7** - additional text added to reflect conflicts of interests;
- **Article 1.8** - rewording of Article to reflect officers will be supported if they report the behaviour of colleagues that has fallen below the standards expected and not supported if malicious or in bad faith. Also includes support for whistleblowers;
- **Article 1.9** - additional text added to reflect the importance of accuracy and the use of recording equipment;
- **Article 1.10** - additional text added to reflect behaviours of officers including in their personal life and personal relationships;
- **New Article 1.11** - added to ensure officers' own awareness and compliance with this Code and Service Procedures;
- **New Article 1.12** - added to include a Duty of Candour;
- **New Article 1.13** - added to reflect use of web based, mobile communications and social media.



Article 2 Police Investigations

- **Article 2.3** - reworded to clarify and strengthen that officer's should not take advantage of a victim's apparent vulnerabilities;
- **New Article 2.5** - added to reflect active professional curiosity in investigations and unconscious and unintended bias including misogyny;
- **New Article 2.6** - added to clarify the use of covert tactics.

Article 3: Privacy and Confidentiality

- **Article 3.3** - additional text added to include a legitimate reason for the viewing of material held;

Article 4: Use of Force

- **Article 4.1** - additional text added to reflect de-escalation and any vulnerabilities of the individual;
- **Article 4.2** - additional text added to clarify the use of lethal force;
- **Article 4.6** - additional text added to reflect support offered to officers and staff.

Article 5: Detained Persons

- **Article 5.1** - additional text added to reflect Articles 3 and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights;
- **Article 5.2** - additional text added to reflect being cognizant of detained persons apparent vulnerabilities.

Article 6: Equality

- **Article 6.2** - additional text added to reflect gender identity;
- **New Article 6.3** - added to reflect misogynistic and other discriminatory behaviour.

Article 7: Integrity

- **Article 7.1** - additional text added to reflect inappropriate behaviour;
- **New Article 7.6** - added to reflect relationships with victims, witnesses etc.

Article 9: Fitness for Duty

- **Article 9.3** - additional text added to include the Corporate Appearance and Protective Equipment Standard (CAPES).

Article 10: Duty of Supervisors

- **Article 10.2** - rewording to reflect supervisors shall support, guide and encourage professional development;
- **Article 10.3** - rewording to reflect the role of supervisors in challenging and reporting behaviour in violation of this Code;
- **New Article 10.4** - added to reflect supervisors having a particular responsibility to secure, promote and maintain professional standards and integrity;
- **New Article 10.5** - added to reflect discharging of policing duties.

These changes are highted in red in the Revised Code of Ethics document at Appendix 3. We would like to hear your views of these proposed changes and if we have captured them all.



FURTHER CONSULTATION INFORMATION

This consultation will run from **18 August until 10 November 2025.**

There are two questions that we are seeking your views on.

1. **Do you agree with our changes to the current Code?**
2. **Are there any further changes or updates you would like to see to the current Code?**

We want to make the process of consultation on the Code of Ethics as accessible as possible, so there are a number of ways in which your views can be submitted.

CONSULTATION EVENT

We will be hosting a consultation event to take your views.

When: 29 October 2025, 12pm-2pm

Where: Online and in-person at the Board's offices, James House, The Gasworks, Belfast

To register your attendance, email coe@nipolicingboard.org.uk.

Please let us know if you have any access requirements.

SUBMIT YOUR VIEWS:

Email:

Please email us your Consultation Response Form to coe@nipolicingboard.org.uk

Post:

Code of Ethics Consultation

Performance Directorate, Northern Ireland Policing Board, James House Block D,
2-4 Cromac Avenue, The Gasworks, Belfast, BT7 2JA

If you require the consultation document in an alternative format or please contact the Board on 028 9040 8500 or email coe@nipolicingboard.org.uk

We aim to publish a response to the consultation within three months following the close of the consultation period.

Data Protection

Data collected during the course of the consultation process will be analysed and a summary report will be published. Any contact details or other information that will identify a respondent as a private individual will be removed prior to publication. All information will be handled in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Your information will not be shared outside the Board or PSNI.

You can read the [Board's Privacy Notice](#) on responding to consultation requests and surveys here.

What Rights Do You Have?

- You have the right to obtain confirmation that your data is being processed, and access to your personal data;
- You are entitled to have personal data rectified if it is inaccurate or incomplete;
- You have a right to have personal data erased and to prevent processing, in specific circumstances;
- You have the right to 'block' or suppress processing of personal data, in specific circumstances;
- You have the right to data portability, in specific circumstances;
- You have the right to object to the processing, in specific circumstances;
- You have rights in relation to automated decision making and profiling.
- A copy of the Board's Privacy Notice can be found here (Insert Link).

Respondents should also be aware that the Board and PSNI's obligations under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) may require that any responses not subject to specific exemptions under the Act be communicated to third parties on request.

If you have any concerns about how your personal data has been handled please contact the Board at Data.Protection@nipolicingboard.org.uk or for further information about confidentiality of responses please contact the Information Commissioner's Office.

Northern Ireland Information Commissioner's Office

3rd Floor, 14 Cromac Place Belfast BT7 2JB

Tel: 028 9027 8757 or 0303 123 1114

Email: ni@ico.org.uk

Website: www.ico.org.uk



Appendix 1

Easy Read Version of the Consultation

The Board must legally develop a Code of Ethics for the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) which sets out standards of conduct and practice for police officers so they are aware of the rights and obligations arising under the Human Rights Act 1998.

All serving police officers within PSNI are required to comply with the Code of Ethics. Where an allegation of misconduct against a police officer is made, the standards against which the officer will be measured are those contained within the Code of Ethics.

Before we finalise this revised Code of Ethics we want to consider the views of everyone.

This document allows you to give your views on the Revised Code of Ethics.

We want to hear from you on or before 10 November 2025.

Why Is It Important?

It is important to create a police service that members of the public feel they can have confidence and trust in. The Code of Ethics is for police conduct or misconduct and police officers are expected to meet the standards of the Code. By reviewing the Code the public can be sure that police officers are held to the standards of the Code which requires them to act in an effective and human rights compliant manner.

Consultation Questions

- 1. Do you agree with our changes to the current code?**
- 2. Are there any further changes or updates you would like to see to the current code?**

APPENDIX 2: DRAFT REVISED PSNI CODE OF ETHICS

Consultation Response Form

Please indicate if you are responding as:

☐

A member of the public

Complete form below &
'Communications Consent' section☐

On behalf of an organisation

Complete 'Organisation' &
'Communications Consent' section

Other (please specify)

Complete 'Other' and 'Communications Consent' section

If a member of the public: (All optional; please tick just one box per category.)

Name:

Age:

☐

0-11

☐

12-17

☐

18-29

☐

30-39

☐

40-49

☐

50-59

☐

60+

☐

Prefer not to say

Ethnicity:

☐

White

☐

White/Traveller

☐

Black African Caribbean

☐

Asian

☐

Chinese

☐

Mixed

☐

Prefer not to say

Gender:

☐

Male

☐

Female

☐

Other

☐

Prefer not to say

Disability:

☐

Yes

☐

No

☐

Prefer not to say

Community Background:

☐

Catholic

☐

Mixed Catholic / Protestant

☐

Protestant

☐

Other

☐

Prefer not to say

Sexual Orientation:

My sexual orientation is towards someone:

☐

Heterosexual or straight

☐

Other

☐

Gay or Lesbian

☐

Bisexual

☐

Prefer not to say

Council Area:

☐

Antrim & Newtownabbey

☐

Ards & North Down

☐

Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon

☐

Belfast City

☐

Causeway Coast & Glens

☐

Derry & Strabane

☐

Fermanagh & Omagh

☐

Lisburn & Castlereagh

☐

Mid & East Antrim

☐

Mid Ulster

☐

Newry, Mourne & Down



CONSULTATION RESPONSE FORM

If organisation:

Organisation's name (required)

Your name (optional):

If other: (Please specify)

Communications Consent (optional):

If you wish to be added to the Board Communication emails please tick the box below and provide your email to confirm.

Yes

☐

Email:

Please note by replying yes we will use your contact details to provide information on the role and work of the Board and PCSPs. Our privacy notice can be found at www.nipolicingboard.org.uk



Question 1: Do You Agree With Our Changes To The Current Code?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Please state the reason(s) for your answer



Question 2:
Are There Any Further Changes Or Updates You Would Like To See To the current Code?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Please state the reason(s) for your answer



Police Service
of Northern Ireland



Draft Revised PSNI

Code of Ethics

2025



Police Service
of Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland
PolicingBoard

Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Chair's Foreword | 17 |
| Chief Constable's Introduction | 19 |
| Preamble | 21 |
| Article 1: Professional Duty | 23 |
| Article 2: Police Investigations | 26 |
| Article 3: Privacy and Confidentiality | 27 |
| Article 4: Use of Force | 28 |
| Article 5: Detained Persons | 30 |
| Article 6: Equality | 31 |
| Article 7: Integrity | 32 |
| Article 8: Property | 33 |
| Article 9: Fitness for Duty | 33 |
| Article 10: Duty of Supervisors | 34 |

Foreword

By the Chair of the Northern Ireland Policing Board

The Board's overarching aim is to secure for all the people of Northern Ireland an effective, efficient, impartial, representative and accountable police service which secures the confidence of the whole community. The Code of Ethics is a vital component in securing that aim and the Board will continue to monitor its promotion, enforcement and effectiveness.

The Policing Board is required to issue a Code of Ethics setting out standards of conduct and practice for police officers so they are aware of the rights and obligations arising under the Human Rights Act 1998. The PSNI Code of Ethics was first issued in February 2003 and following a review, a second edition of the Code of Ethics was published in February 2008. Both the Board and the PSNI agree that a new review is required to ensure that this Code of Ethics is fit for purpose for today's policing. Therefore, this review has focused on including advances made recently on police misconduct process and in new technology and social media. It proposes adding a duty of candour to increase openness and transparency and additional changes to reflect the focus on victims as outlined within the new Policing Plan for the 2025 to 2030 period.

While police conduct, or misconduct, will be judged against the standards set out in the Code of Ethics 2025, the Code is not merely a disciplinary tool. It is a comprehensive human rights document which draws upon the European Convention on Human Rights and other relevant human rights instruments. The Board believes that by carrying out their duties whilst paying strict attention to the ethical framework of the Code, the public can be sure that police officers have acted in an honourable, effective and human rights compliant manner. In doing so, they have the right to expect the full support of their colleagues and senior officers in the PSNI, the Board and other professionals in the criminal justice system with whom they work closely. Moreover, a police service that demonstrates through the actions of its officers that it is impartial and that it has the protection of human rights as its core value, can secure the respect, support and help of local communities and is likely to be able to tackle crime and keep people safe more effectively.



Police Service
of Northern Ireland



The Code of Ethics is undoubtedly one of the success stories in advancing the human rights agenda within the PSNI. It has attracted national and international attention, with the College of Policing in England and Wales and Police Scotland both drawing learning from the PSNI when devising their respective Code of Ethics. The Board monitors the effectiveness of the Code by considering how officers are trained on the implications of it, by reviewing quantitative information on breaches of the Code of Ethics and by evaluating qualitative information on how the PSNI both investigates and addresses such breaches, including disciplinary action taken or procedural or policy changes made. The Board reports upon this annually in the Human Rights Annual Report and over the years the Board has made a number of recommendations around the effectiveness of the Code which have been implemented by PSNI.

Policing Board Chair

Introduction

By the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland

It is with great pride that I introduce the **2025 Code of Ethics** for the Police Service of Northern Ireland. This new Code replaces the 2008 version, reflecting the evolving challenges of modern policing and reaffirming our unwavering commitment to the highest standards of integrity, professionalism, and public service.

The role of policing in Northern Ireland has continued to develop in response to societal change, emerging threats, and growing public expectations. The **2025 Code of Ethics** is not just a set of rules—it is a reflection of our collective values, guiding every police officer in serving our communities with fairness, respect, and accountability making us a service that everyone can be proud of.

This updated Code has been shaped through consultation, ensuring it is fit for purpose in an era where transparency, human rights, and ethical leadership are paramount. It reinforces our commitment to **ethical decision-making, respect for human rights, diversity and inclusion**, and the **highest levels of professionalism** in all our interactions.

We recognise that trust and confidence in policing are hard-earned and must be continuously upheld. That is why this Code sets out clear principles to guide our behaviour—not just in times of certainty, but also in the complex and dynamic situations we face daily.

Our commitment to ethical policing extends beyond this Code. The **Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Action Plan** and the **Race and Ethnicity Action Plan** are just two of our plans integral to our mission to create a policing service that protects all members of our society, particularly those who are most vulnerable. These initiatives demonstrate our proactive stance in addressing inequality, enhancing community safety, and fostering a culture of inclusivity and respect.

At the same time, I want to assure officers and staff that this Code is not about penalising those who make genuine mistakes in the course of their duties. Policing is complex, often requiring quick decisions in challenging situations.



Police Service
of Northern Ireland



While we expect the highest ethical standards, we also recognise that honest errors should be opportunities for learning and growth rather than undue punishment. Fairness, support, and accountability must go hand in hand to ensure we maintain a culture of continuous improvement and professional development.

As Chief Constable, I expect every officer and staff member to **embrace this Code**, making it the foundation of their professional practice. By doing so, we will continue to build and strengthen relationships with the communities we serve, ensuring that policing in Northern Ireland remains a beacon of integrity, fairness, and justice.

I encourage all members of the service to **read, reflect, and apply** this Code in everything they do. It is only through our collective commitment to these principles that we can uphold the proud traditions of the Police Service of Northern Ireland and safeguard the trust placed in us by the public.

Chief Constable
Police Service of Northern Ireland

Preamble

- A Policing is an honorable profession that plays an important part in the maintenance of a just and fair society. The people of Northern Ireland have the right to expect the Police Service to protect their human rights by safeguarding the rule of law and providing a professional Police Service.
- B Police officers are required to respect and obey the law at all times and will be held personally responsible and accountable for their own acts or omissions.
- C Effective policing requires the co-operation of the public. Police officers, when carrying out their duties in accordance with the provisions of this Code, have the right to expect the respect and support of the public and elected representatives.
- D Public confidence in the Police Service is closely related to the attitude and behaviour of officers towards members of the public, in particular their respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals as enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights.
- E Police officers have the same right to respect for their human rights and fundamental freedoms and to work in an environment free of harassment or discrimination in any form.
- F This Code of Ethics is intended;
1. to lay down standards of conduct and practice for police officers; and
 2. to make police officers aware of the rights and obligations under the Human Rights Act 1998 and the European Convention on Human Rights.
- G The standards in this Code are to be applied to;
1. relationships between police officers and the general public, sections of the public and particular individuals;
 2. relationships between police officers and other professionals in the criminal justice system;
 3. relationships between individual police officers and their colleagues; and
 4. relationships between individual police officers and the Police Service.

- H The statutory authority for the Code of Ethics can be found in section 52 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000. The contents of the Code are drawn from a number of sources including;
1. the Police Service attestation set out in section 38(1) of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000;
 2. the European Convention on Human Rights;
 3. other relevant human rights instruments including;
 - a) the United Nations Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials;
 - b) the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials; and
 - c) the European Police Code of Ethics; and
 - d) the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- I Police officers are required at all times, to carry out their duties in accordance with the provisions of the Code of Ethics. In the event that a Police Service Instruction, policy or procedure conflicts with the provisions of the Code of Ethics, officers are required to comply with the provisions of this Code.
- J Any conduct, whether on or off duty, which brings or is likely to bring discredit on the Police Service may be investigated in order to establish whether or not a breach of the Code has occurred. A breach of the Code may result, in appropriate circumstances in a criminal or disciplinary Investigation, either by the Office of the Police Ombudsman or the Police Service.
- K Where police officers are investigated for a breach of this Code, whether by the Office of the Police Ombudsman or the Police Service, they have the right to expect that the investigation will be conducted in a prompt, thorough, impartial and careful manner.
- L This Code shall be applied in any investigation, hearing or decision relating to misconduct in a reasonable and objective manner. Due regard shall be given to the degree of negligence or deliberate fault of an officer and the nature and circumstances of the officer's misconduct. A lack of deliberate fault, intention or premeditation shall be given consideration and balanced against other factors.



Article 1:

Professional Duty

1.1 Police officers have a duty under section 32 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000:

- a. to protect life and property;
- b. to preserve order;
- c. to prevent the commission of offences; and
- d. where an offence has been committed, to take measures to bring the offender to justice;

When carrying out these duties, police officers shall obey and uphold the law, protect human dignity and uphold the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all persons as enshrined in the Human Rights Act 1998, the European Convention on Human Rights and other relevant international human rights instruments.

(Sourced from: Section 32(1) Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000; Article 2 United Nations Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials; Article 1 European Code of Police Ethics.)

1.2 Police officers shall, as far as is practicable, carry out their functions in cooperation with, and with the aim of securing the support of, the local community.

(Sourced from: Section 32(5) Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000.)

1.3 Police officers shall carry out their duties in accordance with the Police Service attestation set out in section 38(1) of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000, which states:

“I hereby do solemnly and sincerely and truly declare and affirm that I will faithfully discharge the duties of the office of constable, with fairness, integrity, diligence and impartiality, upholding fundamental human rights and according equal respect to all individuals and their traditions and beliefs; and that while I continue to hold the said office I will to the best of my skill and knowledge discharge all the duties thereof according to law.”

- 1.4** Police officers shall not subject any person to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. No circumstances whatsoever may be invoked as a justification for torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

(Sourced from: Article 5 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Article 3 European Convention of Human Rights; Principle 6 United Nations Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment.)

- 1.5** The Police Service is a disciplined body. Unless there is good and sufficient cause to do otherwise, police officers shall obey all lawful orders and abide by the provisions of Police Service Policy and **Procedures**. They shall refrain from carrying out any orders they know, or ought to know, are unlawful. No disciplinary action shall be taken against a police officer who refuses to carry out an unlawful order **and it shall have no adverse impact on the officer's career in policing.**

(Sourced from: Paragraph A(4) and A(7) Council of Europe Declaration on the Police.)

- 1.6** Police officers shall not take any active part in politics.

(Sourced from: Schedule 1, regulation 6 Police Service of Northern Ireland Regulations 2005.)

- 1.7** Police officers shall notify the Chief Constable of their membership of any organisation, **conflict of interest or declarable association** which might reasonably be regarded as affecting their ability to discharge their duties effectively and impartially in accordance with Police Service policies on Conflicts of Interest (including Notifiable Memberships) **and Declarable Associations. Where in doubt an officer should make a declaration.**

(Sourced from: Section 51 Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000).

- 1.8** **Police officers will be supported if they report the behaviour of any colleague which they believe has fallen below the standards expected. They will not be supported, and may be subject to misconduct procedures, if a report is found to be malicious or otherwise made in bad faith. The police service will not tolerate discrimination or victimisation or any disadvantageous treatment against anyone who makes a report of unprofessional behaviour or wrongdoing.**

Police officers must never ignore unethical or unprofessional behaviour irrespective of rank, grade or role. The PSNI will support whistle-blowers.

(Sourced from: Article 8 United Nations Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials.)

- 1.9** Police officers shall ensure that accurate records are kept of their duties as required by relevant Codes of Practice and Police Service policy and procedure. This is particularly important when police officers are using their powers and in relation to people who are detained. Police officers shall not make any false, misleading or inaccurate oral or written statement or entry in any record or document made, kept or required for police purposes. Nor shall they omit to make any oral or written statement or entry in any such record or document. They shall not alter, deface, erase, conceal or destroy any record or document that should be or needs to be retained for official police purposes. The use of recording equipment, when available, should be used and considered in accordance with service instructions, when police officers are using their powers in their interactions with members of the public. Recordings of intimate searches are exempt.
- 1.10** Whether on or off duty, and including in their personal life and personal relationships, police officers shall not behave in a way that is likely to bring discredit upon the Police Service.
- 1.11** Police officers have a positive obligation to ensure their own individual awareness and compliance with these Codes and all Service Procedures along with ensuring mandatory accreditations are up to date.
- 1.12** Police officers have a Duty of Candour and shall at all times act in accordance with their duty to assist court proceedings, official inquiries and investigations with transparency and frankness. Police officers should build and maintain the confidence of the public they serve by being open and transparent and should communicate the reasons for the decisions and actions they take.
- 1.13** Police officers shall be mindful of the risks of using web-based or mobile communications, social networking sites or other social media. Police officers shall use social media responsibly and ensure that nothing is published that is discriminatory, abusive, oppressive, harassing, bullying, victimising, offensive or otherwise incompatible with their role as a professional police officer. Police officers should note that this provision also applies to their private messages and group chats.

Article 2:

Police Investigations

- 2.1** Police investigations shall, as a minimum, be based upon reasonable suspicion of an actual or possible offence or crime. They shall be conducted in a prompt, thorough, impartial and careful manner so as to ensure accountability and responsibility in accordance with the law.
- 2.2** Police officers shall follow the principle that everyone who is the subject of a criminal investigation shall be presumed innocent until found guilty by a court.
- 2.3** Police officers shall treat all victims of crime and disorder with sensitivity and respect their dignity. Police officers shall consider any particular needs, vulnerabilities and concerns which victims may have. **Police officers should not take advantage of a victim's apparent vulnerabilities, for example, by establishing an improper personal relationship.** Subject to the rules governing confidentiality, victims shall be updated on the progress of any relevant investigations in accordance with Police Service policy and procedure.

(Note: The term 'victims' includes the relatives of a deceased person where the circumstances of the death are being investigated by the police.)

- 2.4** Police officers shall take account of the particular needs of witnesses and shall be guided by Police Service policy and procedure for their protection and support, in particular, where the intimidation of witnesses is a risk.

(Sourced from: Article 4 United Nations Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power;

*Article 1 United Nations Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials;
Paragraphs 47, 48 and 51 of The European Code of Police Ethics.)*

- 2.5** **Police officers shall approach every investigation with an open mind and with an active professional curiosity. Police officers should be aware that everyone has their own preconceptions and, occasionally, unconscious and unintended misogyny, racism, homophobia or other bias which can prevent thorough and effective investigations.**
- 2.6** **Police officers shall use covert tactics only where appropriately and lawfully authorised**



Police Service
of Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland
Policing Board

Article 3:

Privacy and Confidentiality

- 3.1** Police officers shall gather, retain, use and disclose information or data in accordance with the right to respect for private and family life contained in Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights and shall comply with all relevant legislation and Police Service policy and procedure governing the gathering, retention, use and disclosure of information or data.

(Note: Relevant legislation includes the Data Protection Act 1998, the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and associated regulations.)

- 3.2** Police officers shall exercise powers of search and surveillance only when it is lawful, necessary and proportionate to do so.
- 3.3** Information or data of a personal or confidential nature in the possession or control of police officers shall be kept confidential, unless the performance of duty, compliance with legislation or the needs of justice require otherwise. **Police officers shall not view any material held by the PSNI unless they have a legitimate reason for doing so and it is in the course of their duties.**

(Sourced from: Article 4 United Nations Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials.)

- 3.4** Police officers shall not gather, retain, use or disclose information or data of a personal or confidential nature for personal benefit. They shall comply with Police Service policy governing contact with the media.



Article 4:

Use of Force

4.1 Police officers, in carrying out their duties, shall as far as possible apply non-physical methods and attempt to de-escalate the situation before resorting to any use of force. Any use of force shall be reasonable and proportionate in the circumstances and shall reflect a graduated and flexible response to the threat and shall take into account any vulnerabilities of the individual. Police officers may use force only if other means remain ineffective or have no realistic chance of achieving the intended result. No use of force must be used as a punishment, no matter what the provocation is.

(Sourced from: Article 4 United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.)

4.2 Police officers responsible for the planning and control of operations where the use of force is a possibility shall so far as possible plan and control them to minimise recourse to the use of force, in particular, potentially lethal force. Lethal force must only be used where it is absolutely necessary. Consideration shall be given during the planning of an operation to the need for medical assistance to be available.

(Sourced from: European Court of Human Rights: McCann -v- UK (1995) 21 EHRR para. 194.)

4.3 Whenever it is necessary for police officers to resort to the lawful use of force or firearms, they shall:

- a) exercise restraint in such use and act in proportion to the seriousness of the offence and the legitimate object to be achieved;
- b) minimise damage and injury, and respect and preserve human life;
- c) ensure that assistance and medical aid are secured to any injured person at the earliest possible opportunity;
- d) ensure that relatives or close friends of the injured or affected person are notified at the earliest possible opportunity;
- e) report the incident promptly to their supervisors;
- f) comply with Police Service policy, procedure and guidance.

(Sourced from: Article 5(A) - (C), Article 6 United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.)



Police Service
of Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland
Policing Board

- 4.4** A police officer shall discharge a firearm only where the officer honestly believes it is absolutely necessary to do so in order to save life or prevent serious injury, unless the discharge is for training purposes or the destruction of animals.

(Sourced from: European Court of Human Rights: Andronicou and Constantinou -v- Cyprus (1997) 25 EHRR; Article 9

United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.)

- 4.5** Before police officers resort to the use of firearms, they shall identify themselves and give a clear warning of their intent to use firearms, with sufficient time for the warnings to be observed, unless to do so:

- a) would unduly place any person at a risk of death or serious injury; or
- b) would be clearly inappropriate or pointless in the circumstances of the incident.

(Sourced from: Article 10 United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.)

- 4.6** Police supervisors shall ensure that Post Incident or Wellbeing Volunteer Peer Support is offered to police officers and staff who have been involved in an Incident that has had or may have had an emotional or psychological impact on them or involved the discharge of a firearm.

(Influenced by: Article 21 United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.)



Article 5:

Detained Persons

- 5.1** Police officers shall ensure that all detained persons for whom they have responsibility are treated in a humane and dignified manner. Arrest and detention shall only be carried out in accordance with the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights, relevant legislation and associated Codes of Practice.

(Sourced from: Principles 1 and 2 United Nations Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment;

Articles 3, 5, 6, 8 and 14 European Convention on Human Rights; Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 and its Codes of Practice C-E; Section 99 and Schedule 8 Terrorism Act 2000.)

- 5.2** In their dealings with detained persons, police officers shall, as far as possible, **apply non-physical** methods before resorting to any use of force. Where force is required, such use of force shall be **reasonable and proportionate** in the circumstances, **shall be cognizant of apparent vulnerabilities** and shall be lawful, proportionate and necessary for the maintenance of security and order; to prevent escape, injury, damage to property or the destruction of evidence; or where the detained person resists the taking of items or samples for criminal justice purposes as authorised by law.

(Sourced from: Articles 5 and 8 European Convention on Human Rights; Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 and its Codes of Practice C-E.)

- 5.3** Police officers shall take every reasonable step to protect the health and safety of detained persons and shall take immediate action to secure medical assistance for such persons where required.

(Sourced from: Article 6 United Nations Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials.)



Police Service
of Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland
Policing Board

Article 6:

Equality

6.1 Police officers shall act with fairness, self-control, tolerance and impartiality.

They shall use appropriate language and behaviour in their dealings with members of the public, groups from within the public and their colleagues. They shall give equal respect to all individuals and their traditions, beliefs and lifestyles provided that such are compatible with the rule of law.

(Sourced from: Section 38 Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000.)

6.2 In carrying out their duties police officers shall treat all persons or classes of persons equally regardless of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, disability, age, sexual orientation, **gender identity**, marital or family status, property, birth or any other status.

Any difference in treatment **must** be required to be justified and proportionate.

(Sourced from: Article 14 European Convention on Human Rights, Sections 75 and 76 Northern Ireland Act 1998.) (Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 as amended.)

6.3 Police officers shall not communicate with each other and with others by using misogynistic and other discriminatory behaviour and language including online or other private and public platforms.



Article 7:

Integrity

7.1 Police officers shall act with integrity towards **all persons** so that confidence in the Police Service is secured and maintained. They shall avoid all forms of behaviour that may reasonably be perceived to be abuse, harassment, bullying, victimisation or **inappropriate behaviour**.

7.2 Police officers shall at all times respect and obey the law and maintain the standards stated in this Code.

They shall to the best of their ability respect and support their colleagues in the execution of their lawful duties.

7.3 Police officers shall at all times prevent and oppose any violation of this Code. They shall report all violations or potential violations of the Code, as well as any violations which they reasonably believe are about to occur.

(Sourced from: Article 8 United Nations Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials.)

7.4 Police officers shall report to the Chief Constable any legal proceedings initiated against them, whether in relation to a criminal or motoring offence or a civil action.

7.5 Police officers shall not commit any act of corruption or dishonesty. They shall oppose and report all such acts coming to their attention and shall be supported by their colleagues and senior officers in doing so.

(Sourced from: Article 7 United Nations Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials.)

7.6 Police officers shall not establish or continue a sexual or emotional relationship with any victim, witness, suspect, detained person or defendant if they first come in contact with that person during the course of their duty as a police officer. Police officers shall also act professionally in any interaction with any victim, witness, suspect, detained person or defendant whilst off duty. A police officer shall record any such interaction when they next report for duty.



Article 8:

Property

- 8.1** Police officers shall ensure that property, monies or equipment entrusted to them in their role as police officers are handled and maintained as required by law and Police Service policy.
- 8.2** Police officers shall ensure that any gift or gratuity that they personally accept complies with, and has been authorised according to, Police Service policy.

Article 9:

Fitness for Duty

- 9.1** Police officers shall be fit to carry out their responsibilities when on call, commencing duty or on duty. Police officers shall not be unfit or impaired when reporting for or while on duty as a result of drinking alcohol, using a drug for non-medical purposes, intentionally misusing a prescription drug or solvent or substance abuse.
- 9.2** Police officers on duty shall not, without proper authority, consume alcohol.
- 9.3** Police officers shall attend work promptly when rostered for duty. Unless on duties that dictate otherwise, officers shall be clean and tidy when on duty whether in uniform or in plain clothes and presented in accordance with the Corporate Appearance and Protective Equipment Standard (CAPES).



Police Service
of Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland
Policing Board

Article 10:

Duty of Supervisors

- 10.1** Supervisors shall be the primary promoters and positive agents of good conduct in relation to accepting and working within the spirit of the Code of Ethics. They shall be role models for delivering a truly professional, impartial and effective Police Service.
- 10.2** They shall ensure that the individuals for whom they are responsible are supported, guided on the professional performance of their duties and encouraged to further their professional development.
- 10.3** Supervisors shall ensure that their staff carry out their professional duties correctly. They shall challenge and address any behaviour that is in violation of this Code, reporting violations where appropriate.
- 10.4** Supervisors have a particular responsibility to secure, promote and maintain professional standards and integrity through the provision of advice and guidance, or other remedial or appropriate action.
- 10.5** Supervisors shall be accountable for the discharging of policing duties within their units consistent with their positions of leadership, management and seniority.



Police Service
of Northern Ireland



Scan here to find
out more about
the Code of Ethics
Consultation



Northern Ireland Policing Board

James House
Block D, 2 – 4 Cromac Avenue
The Gasworks
Belfast, BT7 2JA



028 9040 8500



information@nipolicingboard.org.uk



www.nipolicingboard.org.uk



policingboard



@nipolicingboard



nipolicingboard



Northernirelandpolicingboard

DOCUMENT TITLE

The Northern Ireland Policing Board
and Police Service of Northern Ireland
Consultation on Revised PSNI
Code of Ethics

ONLINE FORMAT

This document is available in PDF format from our website.

PUBLISHED AUGUST 2025

This document may also be made available upon request in alternative formats or languages. Requests should be made to the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

DISCLAIMER

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this document, the Northern Ireland Policing Board will not be held liable for any inaccuracies that may be contained within.