



Keeping You Safe



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Introduction

In early 2018 elections took place for your Police Federation representatives. You may have a representative you are already familiar with or perhaps someone completely new. No individual rep is able to advise you on all matters, but the Federation is a network of knowledge and experience and in most cases we can support or advise you on the best way forward.



The majority of police officers rarely directly require the advisory services of a fed rep, but occasionally things go wrong. Occasionally we may succumb to human frailty. Occasionally, police officers do bad things. The Police Federation's role is not to defend wrongdoing but we are here to defend fairness. This leaflet is intended to provide you with some basic initial advice and highlight common misconduct pitfalls, raise standards of behaviour, and help you to avoid situations which can lead to resignation or dismissal, with all of the stress this entails for officers and their families.

I'd like to thank Greater Manchester Police Federation's Lance Thomas and Mike Peake for their valuable contribution to the advice in this leaflet.

Inspector David Blundell

PFEW National Board member

Standards of professional behaviour

The latest version of the police code of conduct appears in the police misconduct regulations 2012. Misconduct generally falls into two categories; misconduct for which the maximum penalty can be a final written warning, valid for 18 months, and gross misconduct which may lead to dismissal. However a matter is dealt with, investigations and enquiries can take years, but usually months, never weeks.

Risk areas

The following areas are where we seem to see the most call for our services:

- Misuse of warrant cards
- Incivility or Impoliteness
- Use of force
- Data protection
- Notifiable association
- Business interests
- Social media – mobile phones
- Financial threat
- Relationships – vulnerable people

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Warrant cards

Police warrant cards are used to identify police officers in the course of their official duties. If you leave home in anticipation that you need to identify yourself as a police officer, to exercise some power, or gain access to a police building or rail travel you are entitled to, then take your warrant card. If you leave home in anticipation, that you are not going on duty, and will be drinking, then leave it at home.

Incivility or impoliteness

This is the most common area of conduct we tend to deal with. Matters usually start with a public complaint, but can be initiated by another member of the police. Many complaints are of course vexatious, and are made because people want to get back at the officer who has dealt with them. However, often people simply want an explanation, or even just an apology. Usually a timely apology will diffuse a situation, and prevent a great deal of stress in the future.

Use of force

The use of force is the second largest area we find ourselves providing assistance. As police officers, the application of force is often necessary. The strength of force used is often a subjective matter, and what may appear reasonable at the time, may seem unreasonable later. Protect yourself, and fully document any force you have used and why. This should include how you felt at the time. There is no shame in saying that you were frightened or intimidated.

Body Worn Video

This is a very helpful and necessary piece of equipment. Please remember this records everything you say and is subject to disclosure.





Data protection

We (the police) hold all sorts of information, which we use to process into intelligence, to assist us with our policing objectives. Officers must not access information if it is not for a policing need. The public are sensitive to the way we hold and use information. When it is believed that officers have abused the trust placed in them, when it comes to personal data, is usually considered as gross misconduct. Officers must be sure that any checks against computer systems are legitimate – in any doubt, they should consult a supervisor for advice. Please be aware of the change to data protection regulations, in particular the use of personal information which gives the public more say in how their data is used. All organisations, including forces, have to abide by data protection laws set-out by the Information Commissioner's Office.

Notifiable associations

Apart from their families, police officers will often meet and socialise with friends and friends of friends. Whilst we must not use police systems to vet associates, we may well learn that some associates may be or have been active criminals. Sometimes we will associate with former police officers or members of police staff in any law enforcement agency who resign during misconduct processes, are required to resign or are dismissed by a properly constituted panel (in certain agreed cases). Police officers must notify their force of any such associations. This is for the protection of officers themselves, and the force. Other instances may include individuals who are members of the British National Party (BNP) (or any similar organisation that encourages discrimination against any group with protected characteristics), private investigators, journalists and any individual who seeks information that could potentially undermine the operational effectiveness or integrity of the police.



Emails

Every email you send or reply to is information subject to disclosure which you may have to later explain at a hearing or in court. Never send an email in anger – think twice and read everything carefully before you send or reply to emails.

Social media

The proliferation of social media platforms in recent years has led to virtually everyone with access to a computer, smart phone or tablet having a social media profile to some extent. There are however some risks involved with this. Insidious individuals can obtain information from your profile - and your associated profiles, to build a picture of who you are, where you live, and how you spend your time off duty. Information can be obtained from photographs, including where and when the picture was taken. Facial imaging software can be used to identify others in the picture. Take great care when establishing how open your profile is, and the information contained within it. Make sure you also check your contacts profiles, to ensure there are no adverse links to you. Make sure that there is no information which may put you or your family at risk, or disclose any information about police operations.

Business interests

Many officers will quite legitimately have business interests. These may include property which is let or involvement in a spouse or partner's business. Officers must advise their force of such an interest.

Financial threat

As our pay in real terms has decreased in relation to the cost of living, more officers are finding themselves in financial difficulty. Difficulties may include bankruptcy, and payday loans. Situations can be embarrassing and stressful. Early confidential discussions with your federation representative may prove helpful.



Relationships with vulnerable people

Police officers must be professional at all times. There are times when we have dealings with individuals through the course of our work, who may be considered as vulnerable. These may include victims or witnesses, or even suspects. On occasions officers may pursue less than professional relationships with individuals, but there is every likelihood that things will go wrong, potentially leading to a loss of public confidence and officers could well find themselves facing allegations of misconduct in a public office. There have been some recent high profile cases where officers have engaged in close relationships and have gone to prison as a result. Do not provide your private telephone number to individuals, and do not form links on social media with them.

Federation advice

If you are faced with a situation in which you find yourself considering whether you need federation advice, then you probably do. The earlier you seek advice, the more opportunity there is for your representative to assist. Even if you think you may be served with a notice of investigation, contact your rep. Your rep can advise you of procedures and consider how you should respond.