



Chief Constables England and Wales
Copied to Police and Crime Commissioners England and Wales
By email

1 September 2023

Dear all,

Policing is one of the toughest jobs that we, as a country, ask of any of our public servants. And that's why I want to start by thanking you, and your officers, for the incredible hard work and dedication that you display in your roles day in, day out, and often in the most challenging of circumstances.

The whole nation was able to see the commitment and professionalism of officers from across the country during the Coronation celebrations.

You should be incredibly proud, as I know I was, when attending the annual Police Bravery Awards to hear the stories of everyday heroism from your teams. In recognition of your hard work and the unique role officers play in ensuring our safety I was pleased the government recently accepted the Pay Review Recommendation to award all officers a 7% pay increase.

I admire you and your officers for working hard every day to protect the British people.

I am an ardent supporter of the police and the jobs you do every day, which is why I remain focussed on removing unnecessary bureaucracy and other obstacles that stop you from doing the best for your communities. For example, recently we have reformed the Home Office Counting Rules for crime to reduce back-office paperwork, which the NPCC estimate will save 443,000 hours of police time, and we have rolled out nationally Right Care, Right Person so that police are not attending as many mental health call-outs, which could save an estimated 1 million hours. I intend to go further – working with you – to alleviate the burdens on police time.

But my role is also to challenge the police and constantly push for improvement. Like you, I am acutely aware of the impact of some of the egregious cases of misconduct in forces and the need to rapidly rebuild trust in policing.

A really important aspect of rebuilding confidence is to demonstrate that policing is proportionate when it comes to equality. I want forces to be fair and supportive environments where harassment and bullying have no place, where officers are relentlessly focussed on preventing crime and catching criminals, and colleagues are rewarded on merit, excellence, and service. Positive discrimination contrary to the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 is of course unlawful. Fundamentally, if someone

possesses the right skills and qualities for a career in policing, they are welcome - regardless of their sex, ethnicity or background.

Collectively there is a job to do to improve public confidence in policing. The police need to be respected, not brought into disrepute. I will always support you where there is a proper focus on fighting crime, catching criminals, and keeping the public safe, and as you continue to drive forward a common-sense approach. As you will be aware, your responsibility is to make sure that your people understand the rules, conduct themselves appropriately and that you have knowledge of what is happening in your force. I know that there is a difficult balance for you to strike in carrying out these duties in a changing society, where viewpoints can become polarised. While some of these challenges fall to you, as police leaders, I am clear that the whole policing system must come together to help you succeed in your mission and address any structural and systemic barriers.

I am concerned that confidence in policing has been affected by perceptions that the police have in recent years been seen, on occasion, to be taking a political stance. As His Majesty's Chief Inspector wrote earlier this year: 'The police must uphold the law as it is written. They aren't there to champion social change or take sides. This includes a requirement to preserve all rights, including the right to free speech.' I couldn't agree more with his words, and this is also why I recently made changes to the guidance on non-crime hate incidents.

Recently, there have been cases when we have seen officers attending members of the public's properties over perceived offence taken at gender-critical views on social media; failing to take action against threats of violence made by trans activists directed at biological women; attempting to enforce non-existent blasphemy laws in the name of 'community cohesion'; dancing and fraternising with political marchers; waving the "Progress flag" (which symbolises highly contested ideologies) or painting police cars in its colours; siding with the highly political Black Lives Matter movement by taking the knee; apologising for being 'institutionally racist' which is an unhelpful and inaccurate term; or encouraging the uptake of highly contested ideologies like critical race theory, gender ideology, or eco-extremism, as useful frameworks for policing. In all of these examples, public confidence was damaged by the sight of a supposedly apolitical police force siding with one group over another in a currently contentious area of public debate. In all of these examples, the public's respect for policing was eroded.

Operational independence is fundamental, and you are empowered to decide how you deliver this vital public service. I would like to remind forces that flying flags requires careful consideration. Many flags, including the "Progress flag" are likely to require express consent from the relevant planning authority. At the same time, officers should not be wearing or waving badges or flags that undermine their oath of impartiality or which may lead members of the public to question their impartiality. I would also like to remind forces that holding lawful opinions, even if those opinions may offend others, is not a criminal offence. In addition, I would suggest that officers be mindful of language around contested matters. For example, it can be grossly insulting to those women who are victims of rape, not to mention inaccurate, to refer to a rapist, who is not female, as "she" or "her". And lastly, it is worth remembering that silent prayer, in itself, is not unlawful.

I hope that a more careful approach can be taken towards community engagement including the use of Independent Advisory Groups. Your constructive engagement with communities and minority groups is a vital part of your work and I support your efforts.

However, the police's fundamental role is to mediate the delicate relationships in our multi-racial, multi-faith society without falling into the trap of partisanship.

Further, policies should not be driven by activist lobby groups and full transparency about whom the police are taking advice from – in the form of 'Independent Advisory Groups' - will assist in this regard. At the Home Office, we review Diversity and Inclusion policies and practices on an ongoing basis to ensure they represent value for money. For example, I made the decision recently to cease all activity with Stonewall at the Home Office, including membership of their Diversity Champions Scheme.

I was grateful to CC Swann for her update at the National Policing Board on the use of police resource and the activities of Staff Networks. However, I remain concerned that some individuals and groups are crossing the line into campaigning. It is important for public confidence that taxpayers' money is spent judiciously. Staff networks are not intended to lobby on matters of public policy, nor should they subscribe to politically contested ideas. As you yourselves understand, policing should be without fear or favour and at all times with a seriousness that the office demands.

The NPCC is clear that all local groups and local branches – such as Staff Networks- operate under the oversight of the respective Chief Constables. As leaders, it is important that you have a full understanding of which groups are active in your forces and that we take collective action to ensure they are operating in a way that is consistent with the duty on all representatives of the police to focus on the core purpose of policing.

I ask that you keep these matters in your force under constant scrutiny and take appropriate action to address them, in line with Police Regulations 2003. This is common sense policing, what the public rightly expects and how we will restore confidence.

These are complex matters, and I appreciate that you are all working hard to find the right balance. That is why I have asked His Majesty's Chief Inspector to look in more depth at these issues and will consider any recommendations that he makes in this regard.

I know that when we all pull in the same direction, we can achieve the best outcomes for the public.

Thanking you, again, for all your service and your focus on rebuilding trust, driving excellence and serving the British people.

Yours sincerely,



Rt Hon Suella Braverman KC MP