



Discussion at: Joint Independent Ethics Committee (JIEC)

JIEC Date: 11/03/2026

Subject/ Dilemma: **Digital alteration of images**

Report of: West Yorkshire Police

Presenter: A/Detective Seargent Kelly North

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To get independent advice and opinion from the Joint Independent Ethics Committee Members to inform and influence decision making.
- 1.2 For JIEC Members to highlight areas of focus for the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Chief Constable to consider.

2. SUMMARY

2.1 Background

2.1.1 Request to use images

The LGBTQ+ Network were seeking to use an image for the cover photo of the Networks Viva Engage page, which although an internal platform, could be subject to a freedom of information request.

2.1.2 Smith v CC of Northumbria Police (see Supporting Documents)

This case was judicial review of the decision of the CC of Northumbria Police Force to authorise officers to actively participate in Newcastle Pride. The decision was that participation in the specific circumstance had been unlawful.

2.2.2 WYP interpretation

As it relates to this issue my understanding is that images cannot be used which show active participation by officers in pride events or officers displaying any pride/rainbow accessories. Although it should be noted this is not the matter before the committee, and is provided for context only.

2.2 Issues

The images put forward by the LGBTQ+ Network to the Corporate Communications Team were images of officers at Leeds Pride in 2024. A number of these images were rejected because they showed officers actively

participating in pride. Others because officers were wearing rainbow epaulettes and or rainbow lanyards.

Corporate Communications selected one of the images and digitally removed the rainbow epaulettes (see Attached images) to make the image acceptable for use. The LGBT Network did not feel it was appropriate to edit an image in this way and it became clear that there was no specific guidance on the alteration of images.

It is a fact of modern life that images are altered, but the way in which they are altered can perhaps present an ethical dilemma.

2.3 Views

2.3.1 The LGBTQ+ Network committee

The committee did not feel it was appropriate to edit an image in this way and that to do so was a distortion of past events.

2.3.2 Corporate Communications

The views of WYP Corporate Comms Head of Corporate Communications: I agree with the other comments and do not feel it is appropriate to alter images which reflect how we operated at a point in time.

I don't think the team did this in any way to try and deceive, more to preserve the use of an image that people like and is widely requested for use. We also have very few images we can use for LGBTQ+ initiatives. That said, and despite the good intent, altering images like this is misleading.

I've asked that the images are retired, both internally and externally, and we are going to send a photographer to Leeds Pride this year (2026) to capture some new images of officers engaging with attendees. I have also provided clear guidance to my team that images should not be digitally altered unless in exceptional circumstances (perhaps if there was an error with a new image).

2.3.3 Community Views

The views of members of the community were sought, and the overwhelming view was that images should not be altered in this way.

The following are quotes from community members.

'I don't wear rainbows to tell you about my sexuality, but rather to tell you that you, your family etc are safe with me'. He added 'Other protected characteristics are (mostly) visible, so inclusion can (mostly) be seen – we don't have that for queer community representation.'

'altering photos capturing historical moments is wrong in itself, but made significantly worse when it's to erase someone's expression of identity'

‘the photo captures a moment in time and it’s deceitful to alter in any way’

3. KEY QUESTIONS/ SPECIFIC AREAS OF FOCUS FOR THE COMMITTEE

- 3.1 Should there be clear guidance on the alteration of digital images?
- 3.2 Is it appropriate or acceptable to use images of police officers which have been altered to erase rainbow accessories such as lanyards, epaulettes pin badges etc?
- 3.3 Would the advice remain the same regardless of whether the image is to be shared/used externally or internally?
- 3.4 Would the advice remain the same regardless of the nature of the alterations? Cropping an image for example removes something but does not change the nature of it. Should there be limits on what is acceptable to edit and what is not?

4. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

- 4.1 **Appendix A**
Smith v CC of Northumbria Police
[R \(Smith\) v Chief Constable of Northumbria Police](#)
- 4.2 **Appendix B**
Original Image
- 4.3 **Appendix C**
Edited Image

Original Image	Edited Image
	

5. DISCUSSION SUMMARY

- Members agreed there should be clear guidance on what would be acceptable regarding any alteration, including cropping, where this changes the context of the image.
- The guidance would provide a single point of reference for consistency of application. Guidance should include:
 - Confirmation from the people in the image that changes can be made.
 - That the context of the image must not be changed, to aid this, undertake consultation with the person(s) in the image or other people present at the time.
 - Additional care and sensitivity should be applied when an alteration includes a change relating to a protected characteristic under the Equality Act.
 - Highlight the associated risks to public trust and confidence.
- Members recommended utilising staff networks as consultation bodies when drafting guidance, particularly around guidance for protected characteristics.
- Altered images pose a high risk to public trust and confidence. There was a great deal of media around the negative impact of deep-fake images, and altering just one image without disclosure could trigger a feeling of mistrust from the public who may raise questions on the integrity and transparency of the broader policing service. The potential impact on getting just one image wrong is high.
- Approved alterations should be declared so that the public know when an image has been altered.
- Members felt the guidance should be the same for images both used internally and externally. This would cover any eventuality should an internal image be made accessible in the public domain, or should it be made available through freedom of information request.
- A different approach may be necessary for images altered to protect officers from potentially becoming more vulnerable, although caution to any editing should be applied and clear guidance on what alterations could be made would be required.
- Specific to the case brought to the committee, Members said it was not appropriate to use images of police officers or staff which had been altered to remove rainbow accessories, such as lanyards and epaulettes. This would provide misrepresentation and conversely to the intention, could lead to the public questioning impartiality.