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| <b>Discussion at:</b>    | Joint Independent Ethics Committee (JIEC) |
| <b>JIEC Date:</b>        | 27 November 2024                          |
| <b>Subject/ Dilemma:</b> | <b>Personal Identity vs. Impartiality</b> |

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| <b>Report of:</b> | West Yorkshire Police                                    |
| <b>Presenter:</b> | Siobhan Brown, Head of Diversity, Equality and Inclusion |

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## 1. PURPOSE

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- 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

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- 2.1 The basis of British policing, underpinned by the Peelian principles, highlights how policing by consent can provide a foundation of public cooperation and respect. A core element of this is that the police reflect the community they serve, that the police are the public and the public are the police. Often this phrase is used to highlight the importance of representation within the workforce for communities, both for visible and non-visible differences.

Following on from these principles, there is an ongoing discussion relating to how police officers and staff can be open, honest and candid with their identity whilst also considering wider public interest and trust, specifically how our actions may be interpreted or perceived by others.

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

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- 3.1 At what point does personal identity conflict with impartiality for colleagues who work in policing (both while on duty and off)? For example, displaying or wearing items relating to personal identity, including social media posts.

Should a policy be written to clarify how police officers and staff should balance public interest and trust, specifically how actions may be perceived or interpreted by others, when these actions relate to their personal identity?

Should any relevant policy be created by both external and internal stakeholders, and if so, who may these be?

Should any relevant policy be created with a developmental perspective as default, and identify interventions for learning, rather than conduct unless there are reasons to rationalise a deliberate or careless approach?

3.2 Members discussed the topic at length. Discussion summary:

- i. Individuals being able to share their identity at work is important, demonstrating that policing represents the communities it serves.
- ii. Public facing roles could have separate considerations to non-public facing roles. The discussion focussed on public facing roles.
- iii. There is recognition that any decision on sharing or not sharing personal identity; including any policy position, has the potential to cause offence.
- iv. There are circumstances where visible identity could cause an inflammatory reaction, such as policing a demonstration. This could increase the vulnerability of a particular officer.
- v. Consideration should be given to potential risk of personal identity impacting a case and informing a legal argument against the officer.
- vi. Visual personal identity could be interpreted by the public as giving favourable treatment. Public servants should be impartial.
- vii. Public facing roles are subject to photography and filming from members of the public. Personal identity shared in the context of the current environment is a snapshot in time. Consideration should be given to the revisiting or resurfacing of digital content without that context.
- viii. Personal identity can be transient. Beliefs and values can change with life experiences. Policing should be transparently consistent.
- ix. Being visually impartial creates greater opportunity to connect with a wider spectrum of people when in moments of crisis.
- x. Historically, policing has visually looked the same with uniform and defined dress codes. Modern policing is seeing more diversity, greater representation and this should not be lost.
- xi. It is recognised that some people don't trust any police officer, even if they share aligned personal identity traits. It is the personal connection which influences levels of trust; 'can this officer relate to me'.
- xii. Emphasis from leaders should be on professionalism, with officers and staff applying skills and experiences to connect with people; such as bringing lived experiences to help solve a problem, speaking different languages, or sharing elements of personal identity when shared experiences will help to generate a positive outcome for the victim.
- xiii. Sharing of personal identity to connect with people should be curtailed with the overriding responsibility to serve and protect. There are circumstances where sharing personal identity in an attempt to connect with someone may have an unexpected detrimental impact.
- xiv. Members gave an example of a West Yorkshire Officer who had been perceived to impose their beliefs on a victim. Colleagues need to

understand where the line is between personally held beliefs and being independently professional.

- xv. Opportunity for learning and reflection with supervision should be made available to front line roles to aid continuous improvement.
- xvi. The duty to serve and protect the public should override the autonomy of an individual being able to share their identity.
- xvii. Officers and staff should rely on professional skills and emotional intelligence to serve and represent the public.
- xviii. Members noted that they could not advise on a policy for this, as each situation would need to be looked at in its own merit; they felt that officers should be professional at all times.
- xix. Any decision should have an ongoing communication strategy to aid inclusivity, including activity such as recruitment.