



Meeting	Complaints and Conduct Committee
Date	4 September 2025
Location	Video Conference
Title of Paper	The Code of Ethics for Policing in Scotland
Presented By	ACC Lynn Ratcliff and Chief Superintendent Helen Harrison, Professional Standards Department
Recommendation to Members	For Discussion
Appendix Attached	Yes: Appendix A – Code of Ethics for Policing in Scotland Core Values

PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is to provide members of the SPA Complaints and Conduct Committee with an update in relation to Police Scotland's ongoing activity to develop the Code of Ethics for Policing in Scotland as will be required under the Police (Ethics, Conduct & Scrutiny) Scotland Act 2025. In doing so this paper aims to provide assurance to the committee and to seek agreement to progress with the preferred option to formal consultation with stakeholders, as required under the act.

Members are invited to discuss the content of this report.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Police (Ethics, Conduct & Scrutiny) Scotland Act 2025 (PECSS) was introduced as a Bill to the Scottish Parliament on 6 June 2023 to fulfil the Scottish Government's commitment to bring forward legislation to deliver Lady Elish Angiolini's recommendations which require legislation following her 'Independent Review of Police Complaints Handling, Investigations and Misconduct Issues'.
- 1.2 The Act covers a range of topics related to ethics and conduct for policing, as well as the functions and governance of the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner (PIRC) and supports independent scrutiny by PIRC and Scottish Police Authority (SPA).
- 1.3 The PECSS Act was granted Royal Assent on 4 March 2025 and various aspects come into force on 25 June 2025 including the sections relating to a statutory Code of Ethics for Policing in Scotland.

2. DEVELOPMENT OF A CODE OF ETHICS

- 2.1 Placing a Code of Ethics for Policing in Scotland into statute results in several obligations being placed on the Chief Constable, namely:
 - The Chief Constable must prepare a Code of Ethics for Police Scotland as soon as possible after the Act comes into force.
 - The Chief Constable must involve the Scottish Police Authority in the preparation of the Code.
 - The Code must have regard to a list of international policing principles, codes, and human rights considerations as contained within the bill.
 - The Chief Constable must publish the Code in a manner they consider appropriate.
 - The Chief Constable must lay the Code before Parliament.
 - The Chief Constable must take all steps they consider necessary to ensure that all officers and staff have read and understood the Code of Ethics and keep a record of same.
 - In preparing (and revising) the Code, the Chief Constable must consult with various parties as documented in the Bill.
 - The Chief Constable may review the Code of Ethics from time to time and must review it at least once every five years.

Options for Developing a Code of Ethics

- 2.2 In considering how best to develop a Code of Ethics for Policing in Scotland, it first must be recognised that, although not developed through any obligation placed on Police Scotland by legislation, Police Scotland does already have a Code of Ethics.
- 2.3 Police Scotland therefore considered the following options for how best to proceed, namely through either:
- a) adopting the current Code of Ethics,
 - b) developing an entirely new Code of Ethics, or
 - c) developing an updated Code of Ethics using the current Code as a base and refreshing some of the content.

- 2.4 In their Stage 1 Report on PECSS, published on 2 June 2024, the Scottish Parliament's Criminal Justice Committee recounted that:

"Section 2 of the Act seeks to put Police Scotland's existing Code of Ethics ("the Code") on a statutory footing. It confers a duty on the Chief Constable of Police Scotland, with the assistance of the SPA, to Prepare the code of Ethics."

- 2.5 In Police Scotland's response to the Criminal Justice Committee on 30 August 2024 and following publication of the Stage 1 Report in relation to the Code of Ethics being placed into statute, DCC Spiers reported:

"Police Scotland welcomes this position as this would place the current Code of Ethics on a statutory footing, embedding an established code within current practice whilst enabling planning and ongoing activity to ensure other aspects of the Bill were delivered, including developing and designing training for all officers, prior to any anticipated enactment of the legislation. We would then be committed to undertaking a review and progressing the statutory consultation and sharing of a future draft code over the proceeding five years."

Should the Committee's position be that a new Code of Ethics should be developed, consulted on, and revised prior to the Bill being introduced into legislation, I would highlight that suitable notice and significant application of resource would be required to enable those activities to be undertaken."

- 2.6 Benefits of retaining, but refreshing and updating the existing Code of Ethics to reflect the new Duty of Candour include:

- Our current Code of Ethics has been in place since 2013. It is well known throughout the organisation and is widely referenced in many Police Scotland documents and publications.
 - An extensive values and behaviours campaign has been delivered in the past two years based on the existing Code of Ethics.
 - The current Code of Ethics is embedded in various training materials and training courses for officer and staff.
- 2.7 The current Code of Ethics is central to the online mandatory training course “Upholding our Values” which was released to the organisation on 31 March 2024. This training course has enhanced every employee’s knowledge and understanding of the existing Code of Ethics prior to it being introduced into statute.
- 2.8 The Code of Ethics mirrors Police Scotland police staff Values and is also incorporated into the staff code of conduct. Therefore, all police officers and staff have been working with and have a knowledge of Police Scotland values and ethics, with which they all work to on a daily basis.
- 2.9 Police Scotland, taking all information into consideration, propose the introduction of the existing Code of Ethics with some amendments in relation to the new standard of professional behaviour Duty of Candour, which has been approved by the Force Executive following discussion at the Professionalism and Enabling Service Board.
- 2.10 Consideration was given to adding the Duty of Candour as a separate pillar within the Code of Ethics for Policing in Scotland. The Act places a statutory Duty of Candour on individual police constables and Police Scotland as an organisation. The individual Duty of Candour will only apply to those who hold the office of constable which has seen a new Standard of Professional Behaviour introduced. The Act does not place any Duty of Candour on members of staff as individuals. However, the Police Service should be candid and co-operative in proceedings, including all investigations. Following review, it was deemed the Duty of Candour would be more suited to be embedded into the current behavioural indicators under Integrity and has been included within the version being consulted upon.
- 2.11 The Act, within chapter 4A, paragraph 4. requires the undernoted codes and principles to be considered when developing a Code of

Ethics. The project team have reviewed the listed documentation making the assessment that the proposed Code of Ethics aligns appropriately.

- (a) the policing principles set out in section 32,
- (b) the standards of behaviour referred to in section 52(2)(a)(i),
- (c) the European Code of Police Ethics adopted as Recommendation Rec (2001)10 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the European Code of Police Ethics, by the Committee of Ministers on 19 September 2001 at the 765th meeting of the Ministers' deputies,
- (d) the United Nations' Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, adopted by General Assembly resolution 34/169 of 17 December 1979,
- (e) the United Nations' Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, adopted by the Eighth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, Havana, Cuba, 27 August to 7 September 1990,
- (f) Convention rights within the meaning of section 1 of the Human Rights Act 1998,
- (g) the rights and obligations set out in the schedule of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, and
- (h) such other human rights contained in any international convention, treaty or other international instrument ratified by the United Kingdom as the chief constable considers relevant.

2.12 Police Scotland's Legal Services have been consulted in respect of this and agree the proposed Code of Ethics for Policing in Scotland is compliant with the above.

2.13 Police Scotland have also taken cognisance of the "Seven Principles of Public Life", known as the Nolan principles its pillars being Accountability, Honesty, Integrity, Objectivity, Selflessness, Openness and Leadership. The project team reviewed and considered the principles and noted that despite the principles now being 30 years old all align well with the Code of Ethics and its pillars of Integrity, Fairness, Respect and the Human Rights.

3 CONSULTATION

- 3.1 Following consideration and agreement in relation to the Code of Ethics by the Complaints and Conduct Committee, the PECSS project team will commence Police Scotland's formal consultation, engaging with all the organisations and personnel listed with the Act (Schedule 2ZA). The project team will in doing so consult with all the mandatory associations and unions. Consulting on the proposed code will allow relevant stakeholders the opportunity to provide support for, observations and opinions on the code.
- 3.2 The project team will collate all the responses from the consultees. On receipt of the feedback Police Scotland will fully consider the replies with regards to any recommendations or suggested amendments.
- 3.3 Following full consideration of all responses, the Chief Constable will as per the requirements of the Act lay before the Scottish Parliament the final Code of Ethics for Policing in Scotland along with a summary of all responses to the consultation. This will include where replies have been received that have not been implemented the reasons why.
- 3.4 Police Scotland have previously advocated they would consider a commitment to the first review of the Code of Ethics for Policing in Scotland after three years as opposed to the five years as contained in the Act and this remains its position.

4 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 In conclusion Police Scotland would seek to progress option c), namely

"c) developing an updated Code of Ethics using the current Code as a base and refreshing some of the content."

The appendix below outlines an updated code of ethics and is proposed for discussion with the Authority and then if agreed, for consultation in accordance with the requirements of the Act. The code has been presented in word document format, but the graphical presentation would be subject to development once agreed.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no financial implications in this report.

6. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no personnel implications in this report.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no legal implications in this report.

8. REPUTATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no reputational implications in this report.

9. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no social implications in this report.

10. COMMUNITY IMPACT

10.1 There are no community implications in this report.

11. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no equalities implications in this report.

12. ENVIRONMENT IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are no environmental implications in this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are invited to discuss the content of this report.

The Code of Ethics for Policing in Scotland

This Code of Ethics for Policing in Scotland sets out the standards we expect of all individuals who contribute to policing in Scotland. This is neither a discipline code nor an unattainable aspirational tool. Rather this Code is a practical set of measures, which reflect the values of the Police Scotland.

We are all responsible for delivering a professional policing service to all people across the country. This Code sets out both what the public can expect from you and what you should expect from one another.

Integrity

- I recognise my role in policing as being a symbol of public faith and trust and the obligation this places upon me to act with integrity, fairness and respect.
- I shall behave in a way which reflects the values of policing in Scotland.
- I understand I am personally responsible for my own actions and will appropriately exercise my discretion.
- I shall act as a positive role model in delivering a professional, impartial service, placing service to communities before my personal aims.
- I will not accept any gift or gratuity that could, or could be perceived to, compromise my impartiality.
- I shall avoid all behaviour, which is or may be reasonably considered as abusive, bullying, harassing or victimising.
- I will demonstrate and promote good conduct and I will challenge the conduct of colleagues where I reasonably believe they have fallen below the standards set out in this Code.
- I shall act in accordance with the Duty of Candour and will be open and truthful in my dealings and do so without favour to my own interests or the interests of the police service.
- I will demonstrate candid behaviour and participate in proceedings including all investigations openly, promptly, co-operatively and professionally.

Fairness

- I will act with courage and composure and shall face all challenges with self-control, tolerance and impartiality.
- I will promote a positive wellbeing within the community and service and ensure that all people have fair and equal access to police services according to their needs.
- I shall maintain an open attitude and continue to improve my understanding and awareness of cultural, social and community issues.
- I will carry out my duties in a fair manner, guided by the principles of impartiality and non-discrimination.

Respect

- I take pride in working as part of a team dedicated to protecting people.
- I will show respect for all people and their beliefs, values, cultures and individual needs.
- I will have respect for all human dignity as I understand my attitude and the way I behave contribute to the consent communities have for policing.
- I will respect and uphold the law in order to maintain public confidence and, by enhancing my personal knowledge and experience, contribute to the professional development of policing.
- I shall treat all people, including detained people, in a humane and dignified manner.
- I shall ensure that my relationships with colleagues is based on mutual respect and understanding and shall, therefore, conduct all communications on that basis.

Human Rights

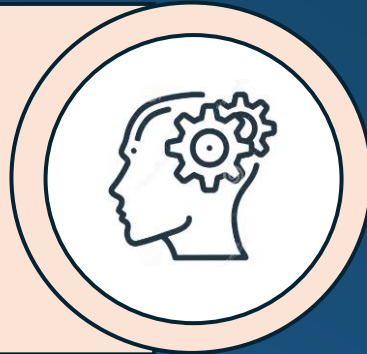
- I shall ensure my actions and policing operations respect the human rights of all people and officers whilst understanding that I will also enjoy these same human rights.
- I will not undertake high-risk activities or use force other than where strictly necessary in order to attain a legitimate objective and only after I have balanced all the competing priorities I am aware of. (Article 2)
- I will not encourage, instigate or tolerate any act of torture or inhuman or degrading treatment under any circumstance nor will I stand by and allow others to do the same. I understand that the humane treatment of prisoners is an essential element of policing and that the dignity of all those I am trusted to care for remains my responsibility. (Article 3)

- I understand that people have an equal right to liberty and security. Accordingly, I will not deprive any person of that liberty, except in accordance with the law. (Article 5)
- I will investigate crimes objectively and be sensitive to the particular needs of affected individuals whilst following the principle that everyone who is the subject of criminal investigation is innocent until found guilty by a court. (Article 6)
- In carrying out my duties I shall respect everyone's fundamental rights. I will only interfere with privacy or family life when I am legally authorized to do so. (Article 8)
- I will respect individual freedoms of thought, conscience or religion, expression, peaceful assembly, movement and the peaceful enjoyment of possessions. (Articles 9,10,11)

Code of Ethics for Policing in Scotland

Core Values

Integrity



Fairness



Respect



Human Rights



Code of Ethics for Policing in Scotland

Our Code of Ethics sets out the standards of those who contribute to policing in Scotland.



This is not a discipline code. It is what we aspire to be.



This code is a practical set of measures. It reflects the values of the Police Service of Scotland.



We are all responsible for delivering a professional policing service to all people across the country.



This code sets out what the public can expect from us and what we should expect from one another.



Integrity



Integrity in Policing:

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- ❖ I understand I am personally responsible for my own actions and will appropriately exercise my discretion.
- ❖ I shall act as a positive role model in delivering a professional, impartial service, placing service to communities before my personal aims.
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- ❖ I shall avoid all behaviour, which is or may be reasonably considered as abusive, bullying, harassing or victimising.
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- ❖ I will demonstrate candid behaviour and participate in proceedings including all investigations openly, promptly, co-operatively and professionally.

Fairness



Fairness in Policing:

- ❖ I will act with courage and composure. I shall face all challenges with self-control, tolerance and impartiality.
- ❖ I will promote a positive wellbeing within the community and service. I will make sure that all people have fair and equal access to police services according to their needs.
- ❖ I shall maintain an open attitude. I shall continue to improve my understanding and awareness of cultural, social and community issues.
- ❖ I will carry out my duties in a fair manner. I will be guided by the principles of impartiality and non-discrimination.



**POLICE
SCOTLAND**
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Respect



Respect in Policing:

- ❖ I take pride in working as part of a team dedicated to protecting people.
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PECSS

Police (Ethics, Conduct & Scrutiny) (Scotland) Act 2025

Human Rights



Upholding **Human Rights** in Policing:

- ❖ I shall ensure my actions and policing operations respect the human rights of all people and officers whilst understanding that I will also enjoy these same human rights.
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- ❖ I will respect individual freedoms of thought, conscience or religion, expression, peaceful assembly, movement and the peaceful enjoyment of possessions. (Articles 9, 10, 11)

Code of Ethics for Policing in Scotland

To keep everyone in Police Scotland up-to-date with the changes brought about by PECSS, including the training requirements for all police officers, special constables and members of police staff, a new micro-site has been created on that intranet. Click on the link below to access:

[Police Ethics Conduct and Scrutiny Scotland Act 2025](#)

Any questions can be directed to: PSDEthicsConductScrutiny@Scotland.police.uk



Police (Ethics, Conduct & Scrutiny) (Scotland) Act 2025