

An inspection into activism and impartiality in policing (September 2024)

Report: [An inspection into activism and impartiality in policing](#)

Response from: Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Hampshire and Isle of Wight

We welcome the HMICFRS (His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services) inspection report on activism and impartiality in policing. The report addresses an important and timely issue, exploring how police forces balance the right to lawful activism with the need to maintain impartiality and public trust.

As society evolves, police forces face increasing pressure to navigate complex political and social landscapes, while ensuring that their actions are fair, neutral, and in line with their duty to serve the public without bias. This report sheds light on the current challenges and provides valuable recommendations to safeguard the integrity of policing in the face of activism.

Key Observations:

- 1. Commitment to Impartiality:** The report confirms that police forces across the country are committed to maintaining impartiality in their operations. Officers and staff are aware of the importance of upholding their professional obligations to remain neutral, particularly when engaging with activism or public demonstrations. This is vital to ensure public confidence in policing as a fair and unbiased institution.
- 2. Challenges in a Changing Landscape:** The report highlights the challenges presented by the increasing prevalence and visibility of activism, both online and in physical spaces. Police forces must manage tensions between protecting the public's right to protest and ensuring that policing remains impartial, especially when protests address controversial or politically charged issues. These challenges are exacerbated by the rise of social media, where perceptions of bias or favouritism can quickly spread.
- 3. Risks of Perceived Bias:** The report acknowledges that police involvement in certain public engagements—such as attending activism-related events or showing solidarity with particular causes—can create a perception of bias, even when none is intended. This perception undermines public confidence, especially if it appears that officers are aligning with specific political or social movements. It is crucial for the police to not only act impartially, but to be seen to do so in order to maintain trust across all communities.
- 4. Guidance and Training:** The HMICFRS report emphasises the need for clearer guidance and training for officers regarding their conduct in relation to activism. While many officers demonstrate professionalism, there is room for improvement in understanding how to navigate activism-related scenarios without risking perceptions of partiality. We agree with the report's call for strengthened training to ensure that officers can consistently balance the right to protest with their duty to remain neutral.
- 5. Public Confidence and Accountability:** Public trust in policing is founded on transparency, fairness, and accountability. The report highlights the need for police forces to clearly communicate their impartial stance when responding to protests or activism-related

incidents. By being transparent in their actions and decision-making processes, forces can reassure the public that their responses are driven by public safety and the rule of law, not by political or social agendas.

Looking Ahead:

We are committed to addressing the findings and recommendations in the HMICFRS report to ensure that impartiality remains a cornerstone of policing. As activism continues to play a prominent role in society, it is essential that the police maintain public confidence by acting without bias and by upholding the rights of all individuals, regardless of their views or affiliations.

Key actions moving forward include:

- **Enhanced Training and Clear Guidance:** We will work to improve the guidance provided to officers and staff on handling activism-related incidents. This will include updated training programs focused on maintaining impartiality while upholding the rights to peaceful protest and free expression.
- **Managing Perceptions of Bias:** We recognise that perceptions of bias can damage public confidence, even when no actual bias exists. To mitigate this, we will ensure that officers are more mindful of their actions and appearances in the public sphere. Clear communication and transparency in the decision-making processes will help reassure the public that policing is acting impartially.
- **Community Engagement and Public Dialogue:** Strengthening our engagement with local communities will be key to building and maintaining trust. We will continue to foster open dialogue with diverse community groups to better understand their concerns and perspectives, ensuring that policing remains responsive to the needs of all.
- **Balancing Rights and Duties:** Protecting the public's right to protest is a fundamental duty, but this must be balanced with maintaining public order and safeguarding impartiality. We will refine our strategies to ensure that both these priorities are respected, particularly in situations where tensions are high.

My Chief Constable and I are committed to taking action on these findings to ensure that policing remains impartial, trusted, and effective in serving all members of the public, regardless of political, social, or ideological affiliations, and that we utilise community engagement to address the challenges posed by activism and to preserve public trust and confidence in local policing and the policing response to such events when they take place.

Donna Jones
Police and Crime Commissioner, Hampshire and Isle of Wight

Response from: Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary

Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary recognise the significance of the Activism and Impartiality inspection published in September 2024 by HMICFRS.

HIOWC will always work to ensure we conduct ourselves with impartiality and without bias in the delivery of all aspects of our work, whether delivered by police staff or police officers. We undertake

to ensure independence, integrity and accord equal respect to all people, and this ethos is underpinned by our Code of Ethics.

A critical element within our three priorities set out by the Chief Constable; the relentless pursuit of criminals, excellence in neighbourhood policing and putting victims first, is to ensure that we are always working towards improving public trust and confidence in our service and that we proactively engage with our communities to ensure their voice is heard. That we do this by applying the range of relevant legislation effectively and by ethical use of our police powers. Furthermore we will be clear on our roles and responsibilities, not only under the Equality Act 2010 but in ensuring we have clear delineation of these roles and responsibilities between ourselves and the political bodies that work closely with us to make communities safer.

The force welcomes the recognition by the inspectorate that this is a complex area with wider systemic issues that must be addressed at a national level, as born out in the recommendations made. We understand some of the recommendations are legislative in nature and therefore may take some time to make significant change. Notwithstanding, in the intervening time period the force will strive towards continuous improvement ensuring impartiality is enshrined within our policies and processes and ensuring we remain not only accountable but also appropriately independent, operating without fear or favour and without improper political interference.

One of the ways in which we will be ensuring a robust approach to activism and impartiality is through our newly developed Culture and Legitimacy Improvement Strategy which will focus on four key pillars:

1. To foster long term culture of trust, integrity, fairness and respect
2. Strengthen leadership at each level
3. Empower a culture of self-development and learning
4. Increase trust and confidence in policing within the communities of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

Oversight of this critical work is through our Legitimacy Board which is chaired by Chief Constable Scott Chilton and attended by representatives from the Strategic and Youth Independent Advisory Groups and a non-executive director. The remit of this board is to ensure that the force builds trust and confidence with its communities through the transparency and scrutiny of our service delivery. The key strands include; serving the public ethically and in accordance with the law, to ensure we are exercising our statutory duties under the Equality Act and that we have oversight measures that demonstrate a commitment to continuous learning and improvement.

Sam De Reya
Deputy Chief Constable, Hampshire and Isle of Wight

Recommendations:

Recommendation 9: Within six months of the College of Policing updating its engagement and communication authorised professional practice, forces should update their policies to reflect the College of Policing advice on communicating about politicised and contentious issues.

OPCC response: I will ask my Chief Constable to update me when this is actioned and the policy reflects the College of Policing advice on communicating about politicised and contentious issues.

Recommendation 10: By 31 March 2025, chief constables should give clear direction to their workforce about wearing and displaying visible representations. They should make sure that they clearly communicate such policies to the workforce and that they enforce the policy. Chief constables should regularly review these policies to respond to new causes that arise. The National Police Chiefs' Council should support chief constables in achieving a consistent approach.

OPCC response: I will ensure that the relevant policy/policies are reviewed and are enforced within HIOWC around wearing and displaying visible representations by 31 March 2025.

Recommendation 12: By 31 July 2025, chief constables should make sure that those personnel responsible for completing equality impact assessments are appropriately trained to do so. Chief constables should also make sure there are effective governance measures in place to improve the quality of these assessments and make sure they are completed when required.

OPCC response: I will seek assurances from my Chief Constable that he is confident that the training and processes are in place to ensure those responsible for completing equality impact assessments are appropriately trained to do so and that there are effective governance measures in place to improve the quality of these assessments and make sure they are completed when required.

Recommendation 13: By 31 March 2025, all chief constables should audit their policies that include or relate to the Equality Act 2010. They should make sure there is an effective process for regularly reviewing and updating policies and have appropriate governance arrangements in place.

OPCC response: I will ask my Chief Constable to update me when this is actioned and that there is an effective process for regularly reviewing and updating policies, and appropriate governance arrangements in place.

Recommendation 16: By 31 March 2025, forces should update and implement their policies and guidance for non-crime hate incidents to provide clear direction to officers and staff for the assessment and recording of, and response to, these incidents.

OPCC response: I will ask my Chief Constable to update me when this is actioned, ensuring clear direction is given to officers and staff for the assessment and recording of, and response to, non-crime hate incidents.

Recommendation 17: By 31 March 2025, forces should make sure their recording processes for hate related incidents allow them to analyse data relating to hate crimes and non-crime hate incidents.

OPCC response: I will ensure my Chief Constable has put the necessary processes in place to ensure the force recording of hate related incidents allow them to analyse data relating to hate crimes and non-crime hate incidents.

Recommendation 18: By 31 March 2025, chief constables should make sure their force has an effective and efficient process for assessing and reviewing hate incidents.

OPCC Response: I will ensure my Chief Constable has put the necessary processes in place to ensure the force has an effective and efficient process for assessing and reviewing hate incidents.

Recommendation 20: By 31 March 2025, forces should make sure they clearly define in policies the requirements for recording personal data for non-crime hate incidents. If the force approach differs from 'Non-Crime Hate Incidents: Code of Practice on the Recording and Retention of Personal Data', the force should record the rationale for this.

OPCC response: I will ask my Chief Constable to update me the approach adopted by HIOWC around the recording personal data for non-crime hate incidents, and if necessary any rationale that may be required.

Recommendation 22: By 31 March 2025, all forces should make sure they have a robust assessment process for allocating funding and giving support to their networks. They should prioritise funding and support based on local need.

OPCC response: : I will ask my Chief Constable to update me the assessment process for allocating funding and giving support to local networks, while prioritise funding and support based on local need.