

PSNI Code of Ethics Review 2025 - Consultation Response

Q.1: Do you agree with our changes to the current Code?

The Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime welcomes the revision of the PSNI Code of Ethics, and the opportunity to provide feedback through a victim-focused lens. This review is timely and offers the chance to review the Code of Ethics considering developments in justice and across wider society since the last update in 2008. The Commission is cognisant of the ever-changing environment that the PSNI are operating within, as well as their commitment to being victim-focused in their approach under the Policing Plan 2025-2030.

It is the view of the Commissioner that the proposed changes strengthen the Code in a number of areas and clarify the expected professional standards and responsibilities for all Police officers and staff members.

The Code of Ethics provides a vital foundational document which unambiguously outlines what the public, including victims of crime, have the right to expect from the police service. This is particularly important at a time when faith and confidence in policing, and the criminal justice system in general, has been damaged by systemic issues such as delay, under-resourcing, police failings in high-profile investigations, and exposés into the conduct of officers which fly in the face of the standards expected of them as defenders of public safety.

To meet the Policing Plan strategic outcome of being victim focused, it is crucial that this review aligns police conduct and accountability with standards outlined in the Victim Charter for Northern Ireland. These standards not only act as the foundation for police conduct and practice but can provide reassurance and confidence to victims of crime as to what they can expect when they engage with PSNI. It would be valuable if the Policing Plan commitment to be more victim focused, and the obligations of police to meet Victim Charter entitlements, had more prominence in the Code.

Finally, the Commissioner Designate welcomes the inclusion of gender identity as a category under Article 6.2. This ensures that all protected characteristics are represented in the Code and reinforces that, regardless of any ongoing debate over legal definitions, the PSNI remains steadfast in its support for trans and non-binary members of our community.

Q2: Are there any further changes or updates you would like to see to the current Code?

The Commissioner Designate would welcome a number of additions and amendments to ensure the Code of Ethics is fully fit for purpose and instils confidence in victims of crime who engage with the PSNI.

- Reference to the NI Victim and Witness Charters, and the obligations of the PSNI to uphold the entitlements therein, should be embedded throughout the document. This should be accompanied by a strengthening of language surrounding obligations to victims and witnesses within the Code. There is currently no reference to the obligation of police officers, and the PSNI more broadly, to adhere to victim rights as set out in the Victim Charter for Northern Ireland. Reference to the NI Victim Charter and Witness Charter should be included under point H of the Preamble and again under point 2.3 and 2.4 of the consultation document. This is particularly relevant for needs assessment and support purposes for victims with cognitive conditions, disabilities or from certain backgrounds to ensure no barriers are preventing their rights under the Charter from being met / delivered.
- The Code of Ethics should clearly reflect the statutory duty under the Victim Charter to ensure that victims are updated on key developments in the case in a way that is understandable to them. This obligation should inform how victims are communicated with and updated, at all times recognising that the system can be confusing, stressful and traumatic for victims.
- At point 2.3 of the document, the language should be strengthened to note officers' obligations to undertake a needs assessment of a victim in line with their Charter obligations. We recommend the word 'should' be replaced with 'must' in the proposed additional text at 2.3 of the Code. The same applies at 6.3 and 7.6, where the word 'shall' should be replaced with 'must'.
- The Commissioner Designate would also welcome the inclusion of reference to the obligations under the Victim and Witness Charter to ensure that victims and witnesses are interviewed as few times as possible and only when necessary, as well as the duty to refer them to support services in accordance with PSNI policies.
- There is a need to ensure that broader operational practices, training programmes and culture actively support the embedding of this Code across the PSNI. We welcome the addition of point 1.8, that 'Police officers will be supported if they report the behaviour of any colleague which they believe has fallen below the standards expected.' This provision will only be effective if the support structures for officers making such a complaint are clearly laid out in other operational policies and are understood and adhered to all staff.

- The reference at 2.5 to police officers approaching every investigation with an open mind and active professional curiosity is a welcome addition. Given current evidenced levels of societal bias, this obligation must be supported by mandatory training and management support across the organisation to ensure it is a reality of police practice across the organisation.
- While the Commissioner Designate supports the need to protect privacy and confidentiality as outlined in Article 3, it is also the case that this review presents an opportunity to strengthen the PSNI's safeguarding responsibilities. Specifically, it should highlight the importance of proactively sharing relevant information with recognised partners—following PSNI's policies and procedures—to inform effective risk assessments and enable timely responses to vulnerabilities or safeguarding concerns.
- Under Article 10 – Duty of Supervisors, the Commission recommends including a specific obligation for supervisors to provide appropriate support to any staff member who has reported a colleague. This would help ensure that individuals who raise concerns are not left isolated and are supported throughout the process, reinforcing a culture of accountability and trust within the organisation.