



Independent Office
for Police Conduct

Swyddfa Annibynnol
Ymddygiad yr Heddlu

Martin Jelley
Chief Constable
National Police Chiefs Council Lead,
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Via email

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13th April 2021

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Dear Martin,

I am very clear that the vast majority of police officers come to work and serve their communities well. I am however, writing to you to share my concerns about a small but increasing number of worrying incidents of police conduct involving the use of social media.

The Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) has seen a number of cases involving allegations of police officers sharing inappropriate images or content on social media which do not reflect the high standards of behaviour expected of them. This has included sharing of content, which is racist, misogynistic or homophobic.

As you know, only the most serious cases come to the IOPC for investigation and it is likely there are other similar cases being dealt with locally which we are not aware of.

I am concerned that the cases we are seeing may be indicative of broader cultural issues within some police forces. This is concerning and highlights a potential lack of awareness amongst some police officers that sharing inappropriate content can be a breach of the standards of professional behaviour which can amount to misconduct or even a criminal offence.

It is also of concern to me that we have been investigating an increasing number of cases where police officers have abused their position for sexual purpose and contacted vulnerable people using social media.

Given the police uplift programme will significantly increase the number of new probationers and the proportion of more inexperienced officers, it is even more important these issues are addressed so the right behaviours are supported from the outset.

I know you will share my concerns about these cases and will already be looking at ways to address them. We have a collective responsibility to challenge a culture where some police officers may believe that inappropriate content shared on social media, or through any other forums, is acceptable.

I am therefore asking the National Police Chiefs Council to consider what mechanisms could be strengthened or need to be put in place at a national level to ensure there is sufficient scrutiny of this issue to maintain public confidence in policing.

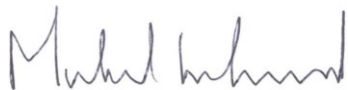
It is worrying that many of our investigations have begun by looking at the conduct of one officer but were then broadened to include the actions of others because inappropriate content was shared widely. Officers involved have ranged from the very experienced to probationers and I remain concerned that they may believe they can act with impunity because their views are shared on private social media channels.

More positively, these matters have often come to light because police officers called out their colleagues and reported their concerns as they are duty bound to do. This is encouraging and a sign of a healthy culture with strong values and integrity.

On this aspect, I would welcome your views on whether the police service could also do more to encourage officers to report concerns and to ensure they are appropriately supported when they do so.

I look forward to your response and support on this important topic.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Michael Lockwood', with a stylized, cursive script.

Michael Lockwood
Director General
Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC)