

NBPA statement on Policy Exchange report on police staff networks

22nd September 2026

The National Black Police Association has noted the publication of Policy Exchange's report, "Mixed Messages? Police Impartiality & the National Association of Muslim Police."

While the report focuses primarily on the National Association of Muslim Police (NAMP), its recommendations extend to all police staff networks, including the National Black Police Association.

Policy Exchange's preferred recommendation is that police staff networks should be abolished. If they are retained, it proposes that their activities should be strictly limited to internal support, alongside significant restrictions on their funding, use of police resources, public activity and engagement with policing policy.

This is therefore not simply a debate about one staff network. It is a much wider debate about whether staff associations should have a legitimate voice in discussions about policing. A debate that has been running for several years. This is not the first time Policy Exchange has examined police staff networks.

Its 2023 Blurred Lines: Police Staff Networks – politics or policing? report called for greater and more consistent governance of staff networks. The current report explicitly describes Blurred Lines as its earlier systematic examination of the issue and argues that policing has failed to implement what Policy Exchange considers sufficient controls.

The position has therefore developed from greater governance and oversight in 2023 to the preferred abolition of staff networks in 2026.

The current report also specifically references the NBPA and reproduces our response to earlier proposed NPCC guidance. That response raised concern about a potential double standard in which police chiefs and the Police Federation could publicly comment on allegations of racism and Government policy, while minority staff associations could face restrictions on doing so.

Representation matters

There is another issue that cannot be separated from this debate: representation within policing's most senior decision-making structures.

Staff networks do not exist in a vacuum.

Where particular communities remain under-represented at the most senior levels of policing, including at Chief Constable and other strategic decision-making levels, there

is an obvious value in ensuring that decision-makers have access to a wide range of evidence, experience and perspectives.

The role of the NBPA is not to make decisions on behalf of chief officers.

Our role is to ensure that the information available to those making decisions is as broad, informed and representative as possible.

We provide access to evidence, lived experience and information gathered from our members and communities across policing. That enables decision-makers to understand how proposed policies, operational approaches and organisational decisions may affect different communities. That is not the same as determining policy. It is informing policy.

A police service that serves every community should seek to understand the experiences of every community. Staff networks can provide an important mechanism for ensuring that information reaches those responsible for making decisions.

Indeed, Policy Exchange's own report acknowledges that staff networks can provide “particular and possibly unfamiliar perspectives to senior Police decision makers” — although it argues that this should be subject to much greater restriction.

The NBPA believes those perspectives are particularly important where communities or groups remain under-represented within senior decision-making structures. Impartiality matters — but so does consistency.

The NBPA fully supports the principle that policing must operate fairly and impartially, according to law, evidence, risk and harm.

We also accept that staff networks must not make operational policing decisions or purport to speak on behalf of policing as a whole. But there is a fundamental distinction between determining policing policy and contributing to the debate about policing policy.

A representative organisation can provide evidence, challenge organisational practice, identify disproportionality, represent the lived experience of its members and advocate for reform without directing operational policing.

Indeed, the report itself acknowledges that HMICFRS considered it legitimate for national staff networks to provide advice to Government and policymakers based on their policing experience and lived experience, while drawing a distinction around publicly criticising Government policy. That distinction deserves proper consideration.

Who gets to challenge policing?

There must also be consistency in how impartiality is understood and applied.

If the argument is that organisations associated with policing should not publicly comment on contentious policing issues, then that principle should be considered consistently across the policing landscape.

That includes staff networks, the Police Federation and other staff associations, chief officers, serving and former senior police officers and other organisations that regularly seek to influence public debate about policing.

It should not be the case that some voices are regarded as legitimate participants in the debate while others are characterised as compromising impartiality simply because they challenge established approaches to race, equality or policing.

The role of the NBPA

The NBPA does not determine operational policing.

We do not direct chief constables or make decisions about how police powers are exercised.

Our role is to represent our members, identify and challenge racism and discrimination, highlight disproportionality, provide evidence and lived experience, gather information from across our membership and communities, and advocate for improvements in policing and outcomes for the communities we serve. We will continue to do that.

We will also continue to engage constructively with the NPCC, Government, policing bodies and other partners about appropriate governance and accountability for staff networks. But challenging racism is not incompatible with impartial policing. Nor should listening to those who experience discrimination be regarded as a threat to impartiality.

A police service that is genuinely impartial must be capable of hearing difficult evidence, challenging itself and responding to legitimate concerns. The question should not simply be whether staff networks are allowed to have a voice.

The question should be whether that voice is evidence-based, responsible, transparent and clearly distinguished from operational policing decisions.

The NBPA is committed to meeting that standard.

We will continue to speak up for our members, challenge disproportionality, provide information and perspectives that may otherwise be absent from decision-making, and work for a police service that truly reflects and serves the communities it protects.

One Voice. Strength in Unity.