



POLICE ETHICS

Date: November 25, 2021

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KEY EVENTS

On November 25, 2021, Chief Cst. Richard Lewis from Cleveland Police (United Kingdom) presented *Police Ethics* at the 2021 CASIS West Coast Security Conference. The presentation was followed by a question and answer period. The key points discussed were police ethics in the United Kingdom (UK), the role of the National Police Ethics Committee, and public involvement to maintain a trusting relationship between the public and law enforcement.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Presentation

Policing culture influences the ethics and behavior of its officers when they are out policing the community. Chief Cst. Lewis presented on the role of the National Police Ethics Committee in addressing ethics in policing so that public trust is maintained.

Question Period

During the question and answer period, Chief Cst. Lewis spoke of vetting strategies to weed out corrupt officers and extremist views within the law enforcement workplace, building trust with minority communities, and the role of ethics in the conversation around defunding the police.

BACKGROUND

Presentation

Lately, police ethics has been a prominent topic of conversation across the world. Chief Cst. Lewis mentioned the murders of George Floyd in the United States of

America and Sarah Everard in England as cases that have had a profound effect on police ethics in the UK. These types of cases affect how the public views the police, and therefore, it is important for ethics committees to review current policies and guidelines to see how law enforcement agencies can be more ethical. In light of these types of cases and considering the direct involvement of the police with the public, the expectations are vast, so it is important to understand the role of a police officer when discussing ethics. One of the first steps towards change is looking inwards as police officers ask difficult questions regarding following ethical guidelines and lawful actions. Chief Cst. Lewis mentioned ethical leadership, decision making, and standards and behaviours as traits contributing to the policing culture. It is no longer only about whether police officers' actions are lawful but rather whether they are ethical.

Additionally, to develop an ethical policing culture, it is up to all police officers of all ranks to be good leaders and practice it when policing. Decision-making is an area where ethics play a big role. For example, whether specific actions by police officers were warranted and ethical in certain circumstances. Chief Cst. Lewis talked about how the UK utilizes a three-tiered structure for ethics. There is local, regional, and the National Police Ethics Committee. The national committee is made up of members external to law enforcement and cognitively diverse. For example, they include academia and people who work in different areas, such as a surgeon. However, the discussions at the local and regional levels will feed up to the National Police Ethics Committee, but the committee does not make decisions on behalf of the local and regional departments. Instead, they pose questions that the local and regional sections must answer and be satisfied to their standards.

Further, Chief Cst. Lewis explained that when the National Police Ethics Committee was developed, it was thought that ethical dilemmas would be brought up to the committee. However, the committee has been primarily proactive conducting consultations regarding ethics in policing and is hoping to reveal the Code of Ethics in the UK in 24 months. This is a great step, but in order for it to work, it must be read and embedded within the staff. For example, the staff understands what it means to be ethical and the role of ethics in police decision-making. Additionally, different events that occur feed into the code of ethics and, therefore, the code of ethics may need to be adapted to reflect changes. Hence, developing communication strategies with the public is important because it is an understanding that it is reciprocal as it allows for the public to engage with the National Police Ethics Committee. Chief Cst. Lewis stated that the key national ethics themes for this year include digital and data ethics, mental

health, ethical leadership, and national uplift programme and ethical implications. The UK is committed to an increase of 20,000 police officers in the coming years, and ethics has been embedded into training to ensure that the diversity of the community is reflected during the hiring process. Likewise, digital data is moving at a quicker pace than law itself and has become a focus in ethics as well. In conclusion, ethical dilemmas in the UK are rich, diverse, and national in scale, and the National Police Ethics Committee looks to be ahead of the game.

Question Period

Chief Cst. Lewis discussed proactive vetting to weed out corruption and extremist views in law enforcement organizations in the UK. Social media is used as a tool in the UK, but no system is perfect. As for corrupt officers, there is a triangulation of information that is picked up so that it can initiate an ethical discussion. Additionally, to maintain public confidence, trust among minority communities and following a bottom-up approach are vital. It allows for a relationship to be built between the police and the community, but it also provides an opportunity for the community to share their cultural backgrounds and experiences that in return may provide ways to alter policing services to meet the needs of communities. This is also important when the discussion around ethics and defunding the police arise. If there is a way for the public to be aware of the funding that each policing area receives, it may increase transparency and trust among the public.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

Presentation

- Police ethics has been a topic of focus lately, and cases such as George Floyd and Sarah Everard have impacted police ethics in the UK.
- An ethical policing culture develops inwards by asking the difficult question first in order for it to be reflected on the outside in communities.
- It is no longer only about whether police officers' actions are lawful but rather whether they are ethical.
- In the UK, key national ethics themes for this year include digital and data ethics, mental health, ethical leadership, and national uplift programme and ethical implications.
- The National Police Ethics Committee looks to engage with the public when developing strategies.

Question Period

- Proactive vetting is used to assist in weeding out corruption and extremist views within law enforcement in the UK.
- Building trust among minority communities is vital for policing agencies.
- Ethics plays a role in the conversation revolving around defunding the police.



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Published by the Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare and Simon Fraser University

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