

# Draft Operating Principles for National Staff Support Networks

| Security Classification                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
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| <b>Authors:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Antony Evans, Robert Hardware and Fiona Merkin                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. National Staff Support Networks (NSSL's) are a key strategic asset in delivering a truly diverse workforce, in developing an inclusive workplace, and helping to deliver an effective service to our communities. Their contribution and insight is highly valued and essential to help shape our culture and support positive change across policing. NSSL's provide a link between our workforce, enabling a safe space for discussion and support for their members in local network branches and within our communities.
- 1.2. The National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) works closely with all NSSL's and values the highly effective engagement and joint working that has been undertaken in collaboration with networks leadership and their members. It is recognised that NSSL's are made up of staff and officers within policing (including volunteers), providing a safe space for colleagues to seek support, acting as a critical friend, with a broad range of membership providing an authentic lived experience.
- 1.3. NSSL's are distinct from the statutory associations, such as the Police Federation, Police Superintendents' Association and unions representing police staff, which operate within policing. NSSL's are likely to be in a position to provide signposting to their members in the event

they should require the services of the appropriate statutory body(ies), for example in the event of misconduct proceedings against one of their members or an employment dispute where legal advice may be required. Whilst it may be appropriate for pastoral support to be provided to members in such circumstances care should be taken to ensure that NSSN's do not adopt the role of statutory representative or legal advisor given the potential legal risks to the individual and other members of the Network. It is recognised that due to concerns of cultural competence or experiences of discrimination, harassment, or victimisation members may lack confidence in their force's internal mechanisms or statutory staff associations and as such seek support and advice from their respective NSSN. This is an important role in providing support for members however care needs to be taken in ensuring the NSSN does not seek to become the sole representative for the member outside of any statutory or legal framework.

- 1.4. NSSN's should consider how they align with the [Policing Vision 2030](#) and Joint College of Policing and NPCC [National policing culture and inclusion strategy 2025 to 2030 | College of Policing](#) as well as local force policies and procedures. It is an important key responsibility for NSSN's to be involved in the delivery, informing, supporting, and shaping of strategic outcomes for policing when consulted.
- 1.5. In the pursuit of strengthening the role of NSSN's in improving policing services for the public, the NPCC have established a portfolio for NSSN's responsible for providing support, guidance, and governance arrangements for nationally recognised NSSN's, to ensure these are reflective of policing and working for policing. Recognising there have been a number of publications that affect how Staff Networks are supported and utilised, in particular the HMICFRS Inspection into Activism and Impartiality in Policing (September, 2024), it is the intention of these guiding principles to outline the framework on how this will be achieved.

## 2. Constitution and operating principles

To ensure clarity of any NSSN's structure, arrangements, and governance, each NSSN must have a clearly defined constitution which outlines the principles of how they operate, with the constitution being readily accessible. Whilst each NSSN will have their own format and structure for how they detail their constitution, these should include details on the following points:

### 2.1. **Vision, aims and objectives**

- 2.1.1 Each network should have a clear vision, aims, and objectives upon which its operation is based and be broadly consistent with the aim of the NPCC to "set direction in policing and drive progress for the public".

### 2.2. **Roles and responsibilities**

- 2.2.1. Executive leadership roles of the NSSN should be detailed. These roles should have clearly defined profiles and responsibilities to allow the membership to hold executive members to account and to understand the internal structure of the NSSN.

- 2.2.2. Depending on the role being undertaken within an NSSN and the status of that NSSN (i.e. charitable organisation) it may be necessary for an individual to submit a formal Business Interest Notification to their home force before undertaking any such role. This will be for the individual to discuss with their respective force, but consideration of these roles does need to be reflected in the constitution for awareness of any such requirement.

### 2.3. **Governance arrangements**

- 2.3.1 Internal and external governance arrangements for the NSSN should be clearly set out including how the Network operates with any local branches, other Networks, Forces, and the NPCC. These arrangements should be detailed so members understand how the structures of the NSSN work and how any points to be raised on behalf of the membership (or individual members) will be communicated.

### 2.4. **Membership of the network**

- 2.4.1. As detailed in the NPCC Staff Network Definition, membership of the network should be open to all police officers, staff, and volunteers. Whilst this is a requirement of any NSSN it is recognised the importance of each NSSN to be able to appropriately reflect and support members who are from any minority group and/or protected characteristic that the NSSN is primarily in place to represent. It is therefore recognised that there may be differing levels of membership (such as associated members and affiliated members), with differing levels of access, voting rights, and/or responsibilities. Where this is part of the NSSN membership arrangements then this is to be clearly detailed.
- 2.4.2. Arrangements for membership should be clear, whether through individual direct membership of the NSSN or through a local affiliated network or association who are then supporting membership to the NSSN. Where anyone seeks to be a member of an NSSN, and this is refused, then it is a requirement for this to be rationalised to the individual by the appropriate representative of the NSSN on behalf of the NSSN.
- 2.4.3. Where membership of the network extends to former officers and staff, volunteers, and members of the public, this needs to be clearly detailed and arrangements in place to manage information sharing and vetting where required. Any vetting requirements are the responsibility of the NSSN to identify and facilitate.
- 2.4.4. Each NSSN must have arrangements for securely holding details of their members and for any information management and security relating to them.

### 2.5. **Election arrangements**

- 2.5.1. Election arrangements should be set out in the constitution for all executive positions within the network. These should be clear and transparent and made accessible for reference by both candidates and voting network members along with the eligibility criteria of candidates.
- 2.5.2. Voting rights and other rights available to members for engagement in the business of the NSSN should be explicitly stated.

- 2.5.3. Details of how any internal conflict and/or potential votes of no confidence will operate within the network will need to be clearly defined, additionally, how any local network can become affiliated to them or equally disenfranchise should the need arise.

**2.6. Conduct**

- 2.6.1. Whilst expectations of police staff and officer conduct is clearly defined within the service, the role of NSSN's in representing members and ensuring trust and confidence in the personal and strategic role they have means there is an expectation of exemplary conduct by those performing roles within them. The expectations regarding conduct of members needs to be clearly detailed and aligned to the principles and guidance set out in the Code of Ethics, Competency Values Framework, and Standards of Professional Behaviour.
- 2.6.2. Any individual holding an elected role, or seeking to be elected to a role, within an NSSN who is subject of a misconduct investigation must inform their home force's Professional Standards Department (PSD) of this position or their intention to seek such a position. This will enable assessment of whether it is appropriate for them to continue to hold this role, or seek to attain such a role, during this period. If an investigation results in restrictions being placed on the individual by PSD or their force Executive, and those restrictions impact their ability to fulfil their NSSN responsibilities, then there is a need for the NSSN to have a process for reviewing individual circumstances during this period. Where any individual is subject to such an investigation (with or without any restrictions having been placed on them) there is a requirement for them to disclose this to the NSSN, with the NSSN having a clear process for how any such disclosures are to be made and how they will subsequently be handled. This needs to be clearly detailed and cognisant of how any impact on trust and confidence will be mitigated.
- 2.6.3. Whilst being representative of an NSSN there remains a requirement for staff and officers to comply with their Force's policies and procedures including, but not limited to, policies in respect of gifts and hospitality, declarable associations, and use of social media. This needs to be appropriately reflected in the constitution to ensure awareness of these requirements.

**2.7. Communications**

- 2.7.1. Consideration must be made for any written or oral communication as a representative of an NSSN and how it could impact on the perception of policing by the public. Whilst there will be occasions where it is necessary to comment on matters, such communication should be considered so as not to seek to bring policing into disrepute. This is not to limit concerns being raised or issues identified but to ensure that there is a constructive and supportive element with regards the NSSN and with due consideration that the NSSN is reflecting from within policing. All communications and social media engagement conducted on behalf of the NSSN must be consistent with the expected conduct of NSSN members, Authorised Professional Practice ([Media and communications | College of Policing](#)), and local force policy.
- 2.7.2. Whilst there may be a desire to engage publicly regarding issues, consideration needs to be given to whether this would be the most constructive approach or whether there is a means

of other engagement that should be approached in the first instance. Where this is felt to not be working then escalation processes that exist within local force areas and the National Police Chiefs Council should be explored, especially given the role and access NSSN's have in supporting developments of the police service on behalf of members and the communities represented.

2.7.3. Where guest speakers or subject matter experts are invited to work with an NSSN or speak at an event it needs to be considered that this is reflective of the NSSN, and policing, and the invitation that has been afforded to them. Whilst guest speakers will be invited to share their views and lived experiences it does need to be considered how they will reflect as having been supported by the NSSN and as part of policing. Any request for a guest speaker needs to be cognisant of what the aims/objectives are with a clear discussion before the input on what is to be presented and to ensure the engagement and content is appropriate.

2.7.4. NSSN owned or run websites, including content posted on social media platforms, should have robust arrangements for moderation in place and such communication must be subject to the same level of transparency and accountability as any other form of police activity.

## **2.8. Funding and resources**

2.8.1. Funding arrangements for the NSSN must be clearly described within the constitution.

2.8.2. Where NSSN's are offered sponsorship consideration must be given to the appropriateness of that party to ensure that financial ties do not bring policing into disrepute. Any sponsor needs to be reputable and that any such arrangements fall in line with policy and procedure regarding procurement, hospitality, and any potential notifiable associations.

2.8.3. All NSSN's must ensure the necessary governance arrangements for finance are complied with. NSSN's operating as registered charities must comply with the Charity Commission for England and Wales annual reporting rules.

## **2.9. Time allocation**

2.9.1. Given the magnitude of any formal role associated with NSSN's it will first and foremost be required for individuals volunteering to undertake an executive role to ensure they have the personal capacity, resilience, and time to be able to commit to the requirements of the role. This is a personal decision to be made when committing to the role, understanding that circumstances may well change over time.

2.9.2. Any time to be allocated to individuals for NSSN responsibilities during rostered working hours is to be with the express agreement of the individual's Chief Officer team. It is advisable that support to undertake such roles is sought from any individual's Chief Officer team ahead of any application or notice of intent to stand for election to an NSSN role.

2.9.3. When agreeing a suitable time allocation all parties should consider and agree a mutually realistic benchmark for the demand on the NSSN in terms of supporting its members, as well

as taking part in national initiatives to inform policy, or support local policing, balanced against the requirements of their substantive policing role.

#### **2.10. Complaints process**

2.10.1. Any recognised NSSN must have a clearly defined internal complaints procedure set out in their constitution and a process for escalation. This should cover how complaints from members relating to the network are dealt with, with a view to achieving internal resolution wherever possible. For example, this may include the key point of contact for raising complaints and what mechanisms will be available to do so in an appropriate and competent way. A process should be in place to escalate complaints. Where complaints cannot be resolved through the NSSN's internal complaints procedure they should be referred to the relevant local professional standards department and/or the NPCC NSSN portfolio lead.

2.10.2. Similarly, there is a requirement for any recognised NSSN to have a clearly defined external complaints procedure.

#### **2.11. Data protection, IT security, and legal arrangements**

2.11.1. While the constitution outlines the composition of the membership, it is essential to clearly define how information will be managed - particularly in relation to obligations under GDPR and the handling of police information in line with document classification levels.

2.11.2. Membership of the NSSN does **not** automatically grant access to all information, especially when official police documents are shared for review or discussion. Access must be determined on the individual's vetting status and the sensitivity of the information.

2.11.3. The NSSN must ensure it understands the vetting levels and current policing status of its members. Before sharing any documentation, the NSSN must confirm with the document owner whether the information can be shared with the full membership or only with specific individuals who meet the necessary clearance requirements. It is also the NSSN's responsibility to ensure that document owners are aware of the membership composition so they can make informed decisions about appropriate access and distribution.

2.11.4. NSSN's must be aware of and compliant with all obligations under Data Protection Legislation and all other relevant legislation when handling, processing, and storing their members' personal data.

2.11.5. NSSN's should be aware of any obligations under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and have processes in place to handle any queries in compliance with the Act.

2.11.6. Each NSSN must specify within their constitution the Data Protection controller(s) for the personal data processed by the network and the information asset owner for the wider data it holds or uses.

2.11.7. Any IT infrastructure or website aligned to the NSSN should have the appropriate level of security to ensure the protection of all content, resources, and the data of its members.

Where the IT arrangements or website are hosted away from the NSSN (i.e. on a police force system) it is the responsibility of the NSSN to ensure this is with the express permission of the force and in line with force policies and procedures.

### **3. NPCC National Staff Networks Portfolio Structure**

- 3.1. All recognised NSSN's will be invited to be members of the NPCC Staff Support Networks portfolio board which will meet quarterly to provide additional support for all NSSN's, consistency in engagement, sharing of good practice, greater recognition of intersectionality, and opportunities for collaboration, enabling the combined efforts of multiple networks on issues of shared concern.
- 3.2. Each recognised NSSN will be asked to produce an annual plan setting out their aims and objectives providing progress updates to the NPCC Staff Support Networks portfolio board meetings as appropriate.
- 3.3. Any identified risks, issues, and successes should be updated within the NPCC Staff Support Networks portfolio board for direct reporting into the NPCC Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion (DEI) Coordination Committee to enable the committee to note and/or escalate as appropriate.

### **4. New staff networks**

- 4.1. For any new Staff Support Network seeking to become nationally recognised, they must meet the criteria set out in the National Staff Network definition document and be able to meet the requirements detailed within these operating principles.
- 4.2. Consideration should be given to any information that supports the need and purpose for the network, providing an evidence-based rationale for approval to be a nationally recognised Staff Support Network.
- 4.3. A business case is to be submitted by any Staff Support Network seeking to become nationally recognised to the NPCC NSSN Portfolio Board for review and recommendation (or otherwise) to the NPCC DEI Coordination Committee for final determination. Any business case will need to include evidence of the need for separate national recognition and purpose, which protected characteristic they represent under the Equality Act 2010, their maturity as a network, and how its objectives are broadly consistent with the NPCC aim to 'set direction in policing and drive progress for the public'.
- 4.4. Any emerging network must not duplicate the purpose of an existing national staff network.