

Home Affairs Committee

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From the Committee Chair

Sir Mark Sedwill,
Cabinet Secretary,
Cabinet Office,
70 Whitehall,
Westminster,
London SW1A 2AS

6 September 2019

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

Association of the police with political activity

As you will be aware, the Prime Minister gave a speech yesterday at the West Yorkshire Police training facilities at Carr Gate near Wakefield. I am writing regarding the extended participation of police students and officers in an event at which a speech was made which contained considerable political content unrelated to police recruitment.

Subsequent to these events, West Yorkshire Police Chief Constable John Robins has stated: "It was the understanding of West Yorkshire Police that any involvement of our officers was solely about police officer recruitment. We had no prior knowledge that the speech would be broadened to other issues until it was delivered".¹

These other issues included references made by the Prime Minister, in front of a formal backdrop of police students, to calling a general election and a choice for the public between himself and the Leader of the Opposition.

As you will be aware, there is clear guidance prohibiting the involvement of the police in politics. Ministers and MPs routinely meet police officers in their normal work, but police guidance is clear on the need for impartiality and the avoidance of any interaction that could be used to show support for or opposition to a candidate, a political party, or a position.

Paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 of The Police Regulations 2003 provides that a member of a police force shall at all times abstain from any activity which is likely to interfere with the impartial discharge of their duties or which is likely to give rise to the impression amongst

¹ <https://www.westyorkshire.police.uk/news-appeals/statement-west-yorkshire-chief-constable-john-robins-yesterdays-ministerial-visit>

members of the public that it may so interfere; and in particular a member of a police force shall not take any active part in politics.²

There is also guidance setting out general principles concerning any contact with candidates in a pre-election period which, while an election has not been declared, may be of some relevance in the current circumstances. Guidance issued by the Association of Chief Police Officers with the College of Policing in 2015 sets out these considerations for police contact with candidates. They include:

- Does the activity or contact appear to (or actually) favour one candidate against another, whether in terms of information or public profile?
- During the pre-election period, is any activity by the police likely to affect or influence the outcome of the election?
- Would the request compromise the conduct of normal business?
- Officers must avoid any action which is, or might reasonably be perceived as being, supportive of or oppositional to any party, candidate or opinion; and
- Officers must avoid putting themselves in a position or situation which could be used by a candidate to support their campaign.³

Ministers should respect the impartiality of the police and not ask them to do anything which would go against their guidance or put their impartiality under question.

In this light, the extraordinary participation of West Yorkshire Police recruits and officers in an ostensibly political event raises serious concerns. We therefore request your urgent response to the following questions:

(1) Can you confirm the understanding reported by West Yorkshire Police⁴ that, in addition to launching the police recruitment campaign with a formal backdrop of police students and officers, the arrangements made with West Yorkshire Police were that the Prime Minister would deliver a 10-minute speech to the media without police students and officers present?

(2) Which Government Ministers and senior officials were involved in overseeing the organisation and management of the event, and what was the involvement of the Prime Minister's Office and the Cabinet Office?

(3) Chief Constable Robins has stated that "Minutes before the speech, we were told that the NPAS visit and subsequent brief to a small media pool had been cancelled. I was therefore disappointed to see my police officers as a backdrop to the part of the speech that was not

² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2003/527/schedule/1/made>

³ <http://library.college.police.uk/docs/college-of-policing/pre-election-guidelines-2015.pdf> para 5.1

⁴ <https://www.westyorkshire.police.uk/news-appeals/statement-west-yorkshire-chief-constable-john-robins-yesterdays-ministerial-visit>

related to recruitment”.⁵ When was the decision made to retain police students and officers as the backdrop to the Prime Minister’s political remarks, on what basis and by whom?

(4) At what point did you become aware that the format of the event had changed, was that change authorised by the Cabinet Office and would you recommend the authorisation of such a format in future?

(5) Are you satisfied that the Ministerial Code and relevant guidance concerning the impartiality of the police was consulted and followed in the organisation and management of the event?

(6) What disruption occurred to the conduct of normal business, and how many officer work hours and training hours were lost as a result of the extended participation of police students and officers in the event?

Given the urgency of this matter, I would be grateful for your response by **Monday 9 September**.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yvette Cooper', written in a cursive style.

Yvette Cooper MP

cc. Rt Hon. Priti Patel MP, Home Secretary

Sir Bernard Jenkin MP, Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee

Chief Constable John Robins QPM, West Yorkshire Police

⁵ <https://www.westyorkshire.police.uk/news-appeals/statement-west-yorkshire-chief-constable-john-robins-yesterdays-ministerial-visit>