

References and Testimonials

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Policy Statement

Summary

This policy details the procedures to be followed when individuals are requested to give a reference or any other statement of credibility or good character, and when employment references for former and existing West Yorkshire Police officers and staff are requested.

The aims of this policy procedure are to secure the reputation of policing and so not to influence others outside of the organisation in accordance with the Code of Ethics, and to explain when it is permitted and how references can be provided.

Scope

This policy applies to all police officers and police staff.

The term *staff* in this policy describes both police officers, special constables and police staff.

Giving a Personal Reference or Testimonial

Force stationery

- West Yorkshire Police stationery or electronic correspondence must only be used for official references as detailed below.
 - Individuals must not use West Yorkshire Police letter headed stationery or electronic correspondence, using a West Yorkshire Police address, for any personal reference or testimonial.
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Providing a personal reference

- Individuals must not, as a member of staff within West Yorkshire Police, write, sign, or give any personal testimonial of character, personal reference or other recommendation.
- A personal reference or testimonial is a verbal or written communication that concerns:
 - An application for employment;
 - Immigration status;
 - Applications for citizenship;
 - The issue of a licence, other than a driving licence (e.g. firearms or alcohol);
 - Child custody issues; or
 - Any other statement of credibility or good character (other than in court proceedings under certain circumstances – see Witness statements and evidence in court).

Exceptions

The only exceptions are:

- If the individual's profession has no bearing on the matter and is not referred to in the testimonial or reference; and
 - References given under developed vetting procedures.
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Witness statements and evidence in court

If an individual is called by any party at a criminal or civil court, to give evidence of fact regarding a person's character and they are not a witness to an actual incident or crime, then:

- Their attendance will be in their own time;
- Their line manager will, however, facilitate their request for annual leave/ time off if it falls on a working day;
- They must give full consideration to what factual evidence they can give;
- They must not attend in uniform. However, if they are returning to work they must be ready for deployment as soon as they are released from court, i.e. able to deal with any incident that arises in or around the court buildings;
- Where an officer is providing a character witness statement or is in attendance at court, they must do this impartially referring to themselves personally as Mr, Mrs, Ms and not by occupation, i.e. PC; and
- Any Criminal Justice Act statement that they provide as a character witness will not be on West Yorkshire Police stationery.

There is an obvious particular risk in police officers and stating their occupation as those persons reading the statement may assume a trust and confidence in the information provided above that of other character statements. Officers must not place themselves in a position where their impartiality and credibility could be challenged. Any officer or staff wishing to submit a character statement must seek guidance from the Professional Standards Directorate (PSD) to ensure that:

- There is no prejudice to the criminal investigation; and
- The statement does not expressly or impliedly reveal that the person giving the witness statement is a police officer or member of staff. Where it is not possible to provide the statement without reference to the fact the individual is a police officer/staff member, then the statement must clearly identify that the views expressed are personal and that this is not the view of the Force.

There is no requirement to share the content of the statement with PSD, however should information be provided to PSD which evidences that Force policy has not been adhered to, then misconduct proceedings will be considered.

Employer References

Existing or previous employees

- To avoid the potential that misleading or inaccurate information is unintentionally provided to prospective employers, WYP will not supply references to external employers for existing or previous staff, however, will provide factual information to include the following:
 - Details of a person's role title;
 - Start date; and
 - End date.
 - WYP, at the discretion of PSD and where it felt necessary under our duty to a prospective employer, may choose to provide the reasons for where an employee is dismissed. This standard information will be provided by People Services where requested.
 - Where an existing employee requires a financial reference, they must contact Pay Section.
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Officers transferring to another Force

- Where an officer is transferring to another Force, WYP will provide the necessary documentation to the reviewing Force.
 - This information will be provided by People Services.
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Certificates

- Police officers who retire after a normal period of service will be given a Certificate of Loyal Service or Certificate of Service, as appropriate.
 - Police staff who leave the organisation after any period of service will be eligible to receive a Certificate of Service.
 - Police staff who retire after 15 years' service will be given a Certificate of Loyal Service, if appropriate.
 - The issuing of certificates is subject to PSD approval and may be withheld where an individual is subject to investigation.
 - For further information please refer to the Medals, Awards and Commendations policy.
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Passports and Identity Photographs

Principles

- It is accepted practice that staff are asked to verify 'the true likeness' of a passport photograph on the photograph and the application form.
- There is no issue with this, as individuals are not giving a character witness. They are merely stating that the photograph is a true likeness of the person submitting the passport application.

- However, individuals must comply with the conditions set out on the passport application form and must have personally known the individual for at least two years.
 - Individuals who provide this service must do so freely. This must not be for financial gain. Individuals are not permitted to charge a fee.
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Providing a Character Reference

Internal discipline procedures

- Individuals may be asked to provide a character reference for a member of staff who is facing an internal discipline hearing. Whether or not individuals give such a reference is a matter for them.
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Limitations

- Individuals must only give character references (in writing initially) on issues that:
- They are qualified to comment on;
 - Are based on evidence or fact; and
 - Do not involve confidentiality relating to a third party.
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Further advice

- Further advice can be obtained from:
- The Police Federation
 - The Superintendents' Association
 - Trade Unions
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Actions when Staff Leave the Force

People Services

- Where a request for an employer's reference is received, People Services will write to the requestor providing confirmation of an employee's, or ex-employee's, service/employment details only.
- This will include:
 - The dates they started and terminated (if applicable);
 - Their employment;
 - Their role title; and
 - Where instructed by the Professional Standards Department, where it is felt appropriate under our duty to a prospective employer, where an employee was dismissed the reasons for dismissal.
- Where a request for information has been received from another Force in respect of a transferee, People Services will undertake to provide this information in a timely manner.

Foreign Pension Entitlements

Principles

- Foreign pension entitlement enquiries may be referred to the West Yorkshire Police Overseas Registration Office via People Services, who will validate the entitlements of persons in this category.
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Additional Information

Compliance

This policy complies with the following legislation, policy and guidance:

- Data Protection Act 2018
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**Further
Information**

Further guidance in relation to this policy can be sought from:

- People Services
 - Professional Standards Department
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