EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM TO

THE POLICE (AMENDMENT) (RECRUITMENT STANDARDS) REGULATIONS 2026

2026 No. 154

1. Introduction

1.1 This Explanatory Memorandum has been prepared by the Home Office and is laid before Parliament in accordance with the Police Act 1996.

2. Declaration

2.1 Sarah Jones MP, Minister of State for Policing and Crime confirms that this Explanatory Memorandum meets the required standard.

2.2 Peter Spreadbury, Deputy Director for Police Workforce and Professionalism Unit, at the Home Office, confirms that this Explanatory Memorandum meets the required standard.

3. Contact

3.1 Nadia Shakir at the Home Office, can be contacted by email at the following address with any queries regarding the instrument: nadia.shakir@homeoffice.gov.uk. Alternatively, the department can be contacted by telephone: 0044 7717609252.

Part One: Explanation, and context, of the Instrument

4. Overview of the Instrument

What does the legislation do?

4.1 This instrument will place the College of Policing's end-to-end recruitment standard for police constables on a statutory footing. This means all police forces in England and Wales will be required to apply the same nationally consistent recruitment process from start to finish, from application through to appointment.

4.2 This instrument will ensure that all police forces in England and Wales follow a consistent and rigorous recruitment process when appointing police constables. The amendments are needed to address current variation in recruitment practices across forces, which can lead to inefficiencies, duplicated processes, and inconsistent candidate experiences. Embedding these stages in legislation will improve fairness, enhance public confidence in police recruitment, and help ensure a high-quality pipeline of officers

Where does the legislation extend to, and apply?

4.3 The extent of this instrument (that is, the jurisdiction(s) which the instrument forms part of the law of) is England and Wales.

4.4 The territorial application of this instrument (that is, where the instrument produces a practical effect) is England and Wales.

5. Policy Context

What is being done and why?

5.1 This instrument will embed the College of Policing's existing end-to-end recruitment process into the Police Regulations 2003, ensuring that every police force in England and Wales applies the same nationally consistent process for recruiting police constables. Most forces are already following the College's guidance, and support from the College of Policing is already in place. Placing the process on a statutory footing will ensure consistent compliance across all forces.

5.2 Over recent years, high-profile cases of police misconduct have raised public concern about the rigour and consistency of police recruitment and suitability of individuals who enter the workforce. While many of these cases relate to officers recruited over twenty years ago, they have led to increased scrutiny of how new officers are selected and assessed. The Government is committed to restoring public confidence in policing by ensuring that all forces recruit to the same high standards of professionalism and integrity.

5.3 The College of Policing is an arm's length body with responsibility for setting professional standards for policing. It has already developed and implemented the end-to-end recruitment standard, which sets out the stages of the recruitment process. This includes the national application form, the national sift, the online assessment process and the post-assessment in-force interview. Mandating these elements through legislation will formalise and secure their consistent use across all forces, ensuring that every recruit is subject to a robust and transparent process.

5.4 A consistent, rigorous and transparent recruitment process helps ensure that all new police constables meet nationally agreed standards of professionalism, integrity and suitability for the role. The end-to-end recruitment standard will also provide consistency and confidence if a candidate were to transfer from one police force to another, as they will be coming through a commonly used standard. While recruitment alone cannot address all the underlying causes of police misconduct, strengthening the entry standards for policing is an important part of the wider programme of reforms aimed at restoring trust and ensuring high-quality policing. To support these changes, the Government will also be legislating to introduce new police vetting standards which, among other things, will strengthen obligations on forces to conduct certain checks, helping to ensure consistency in these standards nationally.

What was the previous policy, how is this different?

5.5 Previously, the College of Policing provided guidance on the end-to-end recruitment process and compliance was at the discretion of forces. This led to some variation in how candidates were assessed, with differing levels of rigour and local interpretation of national standards.

5.6 Under this instrument, the consistent use of the recruitment process will be mandated across all forces. All police forces in England and Wales will be required to use the national application form, national sift, online assessment process, and post-assessment in-force interview, as set or approved by the College of Policing. The instrument will ensure consistent implementation, improved fairness, and greater public confidence in the recruitment of police constables.

5.7 Candidates entering through any pathway for the rank of police constable will be required to complete the same nationally mandated recruitment and assessment stages, as set out in this instrument.

5.8 The College of Policing monitors and reports on national implementation of all stages of the end-to-end recruitment standard through a dedicated implementation function. This includes reporting via the Professional Committee, which is a committee of the College board of directors. The Professional Committee oversees national standard setting for the police profession on behalf of the board and supports the College's wider strategic objectives. The vast majority of Home Office police forces have implemented all stages of the end-to-end recruitment standard and so the regulatory change will not have a material impact on their in-force processes. However, for forces that are not yet fully aligned, the amendments will require implementation of the remaining elements of the standard to ensure consistent national application. In practice, this is expected to result in a single operational change for the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), which will be required to adopt the national sift process. While this represents a change for the MPS, the force has already secured internal approval to move to the national sift and is planning to implement this in 2026. As a result, the instrument is expected to formalise an existing transition and any additional costs are expected to be negligible.

6. Legislative and Legal Context

How has the law changed?

6.1 These Regulations amend Regulation 10 of the Police Regulations 2003, which currently sets out eligibility requirements for appointment as a police officer. The amendment inserts new provisions to embed the College of Policing's end-to-end recruitment standard into legislation.

6.2 The new provisions require that, before appointment, all candidates for the rank of police constable must have successfully completed each stage of the College's nationally prescribed recruitment standard: the national application form, the national sift, the online assessment process, and the post-assessment in-force interview.

6.3 This change moves these elements from College of Policing guidance into secondary legislation, ensuring that all police forces in England and Wales apply the same recruitment standard.

Why was this approach taken to change the law?

6.4 This is the only effective approach to ensure that the College of Policing's end-to-end recruitment standard is applied consistently and uniformly across all police forces in England and Wales. To date, police forces have been required to have regard to the College of Policing's standards on recruitment. Embedding the requirement in the Police Regulations 2003 provides a clear and enforceable legal basis, ensuring all forces follow the same nationally prescribed recruitment process.

6.5 Alternative options, such as continuing to rely on non-statutory guidance, were considered less effective because they did not place a statutory obligation on forces. Amending the existing Regulations (Regulation 10 of the Police Regulations 2003) therefore represents the most proportionate and direct means of achieving the policy objective of securing consistent, rigorous, and transparent recruitment standards across policing. This is now considered critical to maintaining public confidence in the police, particularly in light of recent high-profile cases.

7. Consultation

Summary of consultation outcome and methodology

7.1 A full public consultation was not undertaken. The instrument relates to operational recruitment processes within police forces and does not concern matters of pay, hours or leave, for which there would be a statutory requirement to consult. There is no statutory requirement to consult on this instrument beyond approval by the College of Policing.

7.2 Targeted engagement was undertaken with key stakeholders to note and provide comment on the proposed amendment to Regulation 10 of the Police Regulations 2003 to place the College of Policing's end-to-end recruitment standard for police constables on a statutory footing. Nine stakeholders returned a direct response; these responses have been collated and considered accordingly.

7.3 The proposal was shared between 31 July 2025 and 11 September 2025 with key policing stakeholders, including the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) Police Forum, the National Crime Agency, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), NPCC Workforce Coordination Committee, Learning & Development and Pay & Conditions Portfolio lead, the Police Federation of England and Wales, the Police Superintendents' Association, and College of Policing Professional Committee (including a Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) representative and Police Staff Council Trade Union representatives). Engagement took place as part of a targeted engagement process led by the College of Policing.

7.4 Nine stakeholders provided responses. The majority raised no objections to the proposed change. Issues raised included governance and consultation arrangements for future changes to recruitment standards, the rigour and integrity of online assessments, equality impacts, and whether the proposal should apply to officers transferring between forces.

7.5 As a result of the targeted engagement, the instrument was amended to include an explicit exemption for transferees, reflecting the original policy intent. Other points raised were addressed through assurances and clarification regarding existing governance arrangements, assessment safeguards and the ongoing use and review of equality impact assessments. No further changes to the instrument were required.

7.6 The College of Policing is committed to transparent, effective, and purposeful engagement with its partners in policing; this principle underpins the regulatory-related governance structure within the College of Policing and is embedded in the terms of reference for Professional Committee and the College Board. The College of Policing also has a clear responsibility in legislation. Therefore, any significant or material amendment to policies or processes as part of the end-to-end recruitment standard would be subject to further engagement with the service.

8. Applicable Guidance

8.1 As part of the end-to-end recruitment process, candidates for appointment at the rank of police constable will need to have successfully completed eligibility checks, the national application form, the national sift, the online assessment process, and the post-assessment in-force in-person interview.

8.2 The Competency and Values Framework (CVF)[1] sets out the behaviours expected in policing. For the standard in-force interview question bank, the criteria is set at level 1.

8.3 Public-facing guidance in relation to the stages of the end-to-end recruitment standard is published on the College website. For reference, this includes guidance for eligibility criteria[2], the national sift[3], the online assessment process[4] and the underpinning Competency and Values Framework (CVF)[5]. There is further guidance on the Joining the police website (including for the national application form[6]).

8.4 With continued support from the College of Policing, all 43 police forces should be able to embed all stages of the end-to-end recruitment standard by 16 March 2026.

Part Two: Impact and the Better Regulation Framework

9. Impact Assessment

9.1 A full Impact Assessment has not been prepared for this instrument because this measure is not a regulatory provision and the costs of the measure are expected to be negligible nationally.

9.2 It is expected that this would result in negligible costs and benefits nationally as the majority of police forces are either already compliant with the requirements of the regulations once enacted, or in the process of moving towards practices that would be compliant.

9.3 The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) does not currently use the national sift process and will be required to adopt it. The MPS has indicated that it already has approval to move from its current sift system to the national sift. The MPS is planning to implement the national sift and any additional costs are expected to be in line with those incurred by other forces.

9.4 The instrument is not expected to have a significant impact on individuals or recruitment timescales. The recruitment stages being mandated are already widely in use and are delivered nationally by the College of Policing. Applicants will continue to follow a single, nationally consistent recruitment process.

9.5 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is submitted with this memorandum and will be published alongside the Explanatory Memorandum on the legislation.gov.uk website.

9.6 The assessment found no adverse impact for the majority of groups, including age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, sexual orientation, and socio-economic background.

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[1]College of Policing, 'Competency and values framework (CVF)', 8 May 2024, https://www.college.police.uk/career-learning/competency-and-values-framework

[2] College of Policing, 'Police Constable pre-employment guidance', April 2024, https://assets.college.police.uk/s3fs-public/2024-04/police-constable-pre-employment-guidance.pdf?v=1713343080

[3] College of Policing, 'National Sift Candidate Guidance', updated 28 April 2025, https://www.college.police.uk/career-learning/joining-police/online-assessment-process/national-sift-candidate-guidance

[4] College of Policing, 'Online assessment process candidate guide', April 2023, https://www.college.police.uk/career-learning/joining-police/online-assessment-process/online-assessments-candidate-guide

[5] College of Policing, 'Competency and values framework (CVF)', 8 May 2024, https://www.college.police.uk/career-learning/competency-and-values-framework

[6] Joining the Police, 'What's involved in the application form', Application Process, Get Ready to Apply, https://www.joiningthepolice.co.uk/application-process/get-ready-to-apply/whats-involved-in-the-application-form

9.7 The EIA indicates that the end-to-end recruitment standard, as embedded in this instrument, is not expected to disadvantage any group.

Impact on businesses, charities and voluntary bodies

9.8 There is no, or no significant, impact on businesses, charities or voluntary bodies because the Regulations relate solely to police recruitment processes within police forces.

9.9 The legislation does not impact small or micro businesses.

9.10 There is no significant impact on the public sector, as the majority of police forces are already operating in line with the College of Policing's end-to-end recruitment standard. The amendments place existing practice on a statutory footing to ensure full and consistent compliance, with only one adjustment expected for the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), which does not currently use the national sift process, as set out above.

10. Monitoring and review

What is the approach to monitoring and reviewing this legislation?

10.1 The approach to monitoring this legislation is that the College (specifically the Staff and Regulatory Officer) will undertake, as standard, an annual review of any regulatory change. The College will also continue to support Home Office forces as part of a continuous improvement function, rather than the current national development and implementation function.

10.2 Furthermore, since the national development and implementation of the end-to-end recruitment standard in 2020, the College has consistently gathered (and shared) outcome data in relation to all protected characteristics and other diversity-related factors, such as socio-economic status, for example. To date, the data demonstrates good and improving outcomes across all protected characteristics. This data is used to continuously and proactively improve all stages of the end-to-end recruitment standard. The equality impact assessment in relation to the national development and implementation of the end-to-end recruitment standard will also continue to be reviewed and updated as necessary and appropriate, and at least at any future developmental stage. There is an assessment (at this stage) of no adverse impact in relation to the protected characteristics.

10.3 The instrument does not include a statutory review clause.

Part Three: Statements and Matters of Particular Interest to Parliament

11. Matters of special interest to Parliament

11.1 None

12. European Convention on Human Rights

12.1 As the instrument is subject to negative procedure and does not amend primary legislation, no statement is required.

13. The Relevant European Union Acts

13.1 This instrument is not made under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, the European Union (Future Relationship) Act 2020 or the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023 ("relevant European Union Acts").