

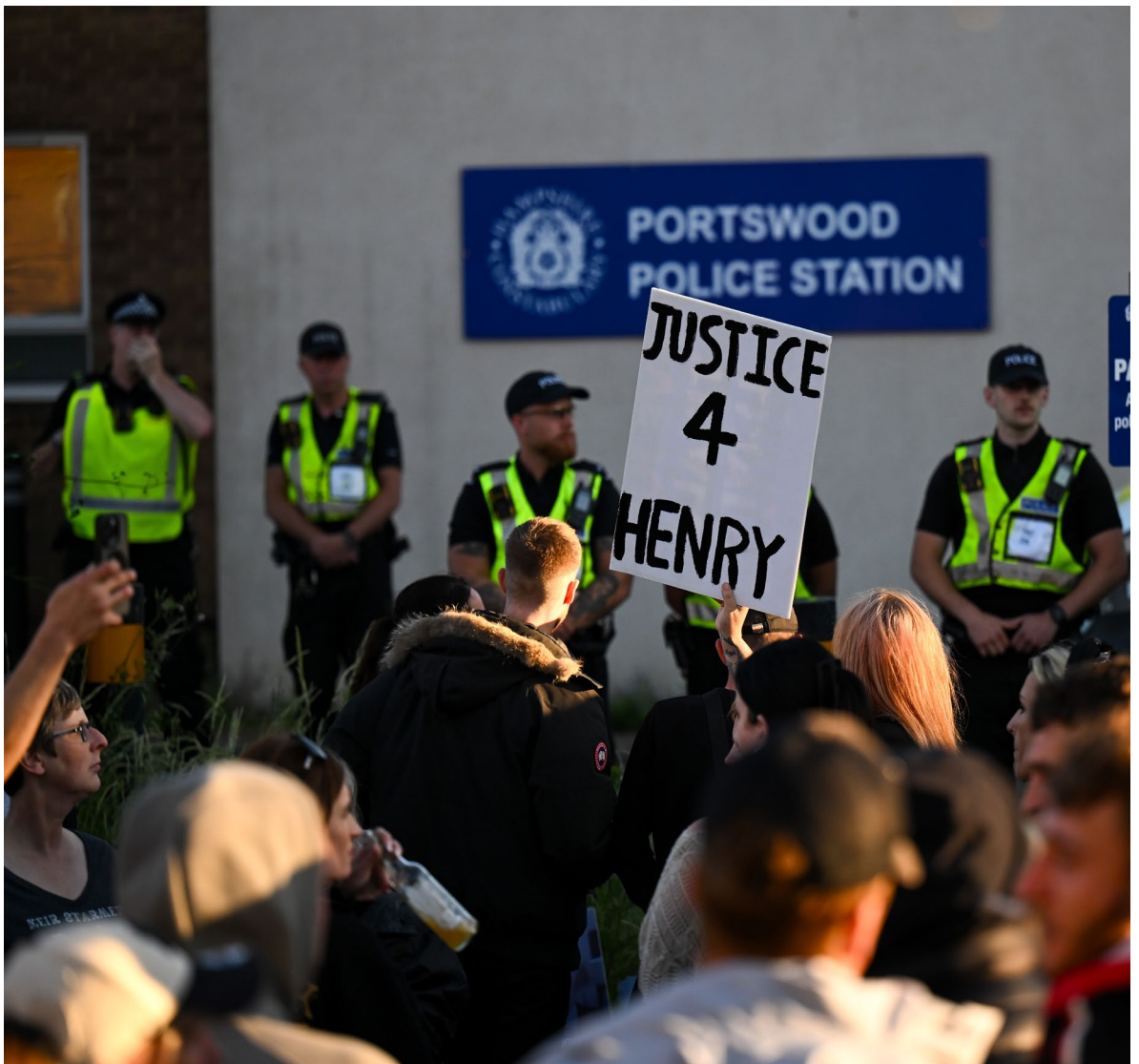
# Free Speech Union briefing

## With Fear and Favour:

### Britain's Policing Emergency

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# Foreword

*by Rick Prior*

On 8<sup>th</sup> October 2024, in a brief interview with GB News, I described a crisis of confidence I was seeing among the more than 30,000 Metropolitan Police officers I represented as their elected Police Federation chair. Many, I said, had become wary of dealing with black and minority ethnic members of the public because they were afraid of attracting a vexatious complaint of racism. This, I explained, might well trigger a protracted investigation by the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC), which might damage or end their careers. For daring to voice these sentiments, I was suspended the following day by Mukund Krishna, then the chief executive of the Police Federation of England and Wales.

I had paid into the Federation throughout my 28 years of service to protect me from precisely that kind of action, but I rapidly discovered I had no cover when the people coming after me were the Federation itself. Fortunately, my plight caught the attention of the Free Speech Union, which provided me with lawyers and funded my case. Thirteen months later, Mrs Justice Obi found in my favour on every ground, finding that my treatment had been unlawful – a disproportionate and unjustified interference with my right to free speech under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

It is not widely known that after being ousted, I was asked to join the Met's Policy Department, which tasked me with writing new guidelines on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). My own ongoing ordeal made me determined to produce a document that would create greater balance, and so restore the confidence of both officers and the public we serve.

This meant that alongside the usual pledges not to act in a discriminatory fashion, I added a measure I thought any impartial police service should support: to uphold freedom of expression within the law. I also included clauses designed to maintain impartiality by prohibiting overt association with political causes, such as the wearing of lanyards and badges issued by advocacy groups, and doing anything else to create the impression we

support their causes while wearing police uniform. I included a section on the Supreme Court's ruling that the Equality Act's definition of sex meant biological sex, stating that this had now to be implemented across the force.

Overall, I concluded that the Met should create "an inclusive, impartial and respectful environment that upholds the rights of all individuals, fosters diversity of thought and maintains public trust through neutrality. We aim to deliver fair, politically neutral and professional policing that serves and reflects our diverse communities."

A short time after I presented my document in a small room filled with grey-suited policy officials, a supervisor telephoned me to say, very politely, that "they" had decided I would be "better off" in a different department, where my skillset could be "better utilised". Needless to say, my policy document was never adopted. Thus the country's largest police force jettisoned a chance to bring itself into line with the law, and to lead by example. It seemed that the Met's senior management had been captured by the woke "mind virus", and that its resistance to change was insurmountable. This became apparent again in my next posting at the Culture, Diversity and Inclusion Directorate, which currently takes up the entire second floor of New Scotland Yard. I lasted there less than a week. My sin was to ask, very politely, why a civilian supervisor included her preferred pronouns in her official police email signature.

None of this surprised me. It has been clear to me that for more than a decade the Met has been pursuing equality of *outcome* between ethnic groups – referred to as 'equity' in the diversity training literature – rather than equality of *opportunity* and equal treatment under the law. I have seen it in the forced rotation of skilled firearms officers to manufacture "churn" and diversify armed policing, at great cost in lost skills. I saw it in 2022, when two very senior officers were found by a tribunal to have racially discriminated against a white inspector, by removing him from a selection process and inserting a less qualified black candidate instead, and by what took place in the wake of the death of George Floyd. That event, even though it occurred in another country over 4,000 miles away, meant this ideology shifted from policy back rooms to operational policing, with the main vehicle of its dissemination being the Race Action Plan. Even worse is the national [Police Anti-Racism Commitment](#) issued in March last year, clear evidence of two-tier policing, which baldly states that its goal of "producing equality of policing outcomes... does not mean

treating everyone ‘the same’ or being ‘colour blind’”.

I have seen this logic in action. One very senior officer told me the Met had what she termed a “disproportionality matrix”: a system to assess which “low-level” crimes are likely to bring the Met disproportionately into conflict with the Black community if and when the police enforce the law. I am convinced it was this that led the Met to withdraw its support for Transport for London to protect its revenue after the Croydon bus case, in which a PC was pursued through the courts for arresting a woman on suspicion of fare dodging. This abandonment of Peel’s principle of impartial service to the law, alongside the heavy-handed policing of so-called “hate speech”, is doing real damage to policing by consent.

This FSU briefing examines these developments in unprecedented detail. It shows they are not confined to the Met, and provides the context needed to make sense of the treatment of the murdered student Henry Nowak by Hampshire police. Henry’s family have asked that his death not be used to deepen division. But I believe the National Police Chiefs’ Council and the College of Policing have already done that, by decreeing that different sections of society should be policed differently to improve equality-of-outcome statistics.

I do not want to prejudge the IOPC’s inquiry. But it must look for the deeper reasons that explain why the officers arrested Nowak, a visibly dying murder victim, instead of his killer, who falsely accused him of a racial attack. When I saw the video of them handcuffing his limp, grey hands that night, I kept asking: “Why are you doing this? What threat are you mitigating?” Were they ticking off a mental checklist for an alleged hate crime, and giving only secondary thought to saving a life? I do not think they harboured any malice, but I suspect they could not escape what their training and their senior officers had instilled: the mantra that a racially-motivated incident must be recorded as such on the victim’s say-so, whatever the evidence in front of their own eyes.

The process that led to Henry’s death, handcuffed and on the ground, began with the murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993, and the subsequent report by Lord Justice Macpherson. As the former Labour Home Secretary Jack Straw said this week, Nowak’s murder demonstrates it is long past time to re-evaluate it.

*Rick Prior served for 30 years in the Metropolitan Police and was the*

*elected Chair of the Metropolitan Police Federation.*

Commenting on this Foreword, a Met spokesperson said: “As the public would expect, we police London without fear or favour and strive to serve all communities equally. As society and politics become more polarised, it is vital Policing remains impartial, and all operational decisions are grounded in legal principles.” Met sources denied the force uses a “disproportionality matrix” to determine its priorities.

## Executive summary

On the evening of 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2025, an 18 year-old finance student named Henry Nowak was stabbed to death on a residential street in Southampton. The man who killed him, 23 year-old Vickrum Digwa, then told the arriving police two lies, backed up by his brother: that Nowak had racially abused him, and had knocked the turban from his head. On the strength of those lies, the officers arrested and handcuffed the dying boy. Six months later, sentencing Digwa to life imprisonment, Judge William Mousley KC found that Henry had said and done nothing racist, but the false accusation “misled the attending police officers” and “influenced their decision not only to arrest and handcuff Henry but also to give subsequent emergency first aid in ignorance of the fact that he had a serious chest wound”.<sup>1</sup>

This briefing suggests reasons why that lie worked. It is not an attack on the two officers who handcuffed Henry Nowak; the judge expressly found they were doing their best, and were misled by “a convincing but wholly false narrative”. It describes the policy climate that made a false cry of racism the most powerful card a guilty man could play – a climate that has been building for more than 30 years. Its foundations lie in Sir William Macpherson’s report on the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993,<sup>2</sup> which accused the police of “institutional racism” and suggested that police should treat any incident as being racially motivated if its victim or anyone else claimed that it was, and became more intense in response to the moral stampede that followed the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020. This helped create new operational doctrines, which replaced the concept of colour-blind equality before the law with a search for equity of outcomes between ethnic groups as policing’s central goal. This briefing will reveal:

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1 R v Vickrum Singh Digwa, sentencing remarks of HHJ William Mousley KC, 1 June 2026: <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Digwa-Final-Sentencing-Remarks.pdf>

2 <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7c2af540f0b645ba3c7202/4262.pdf>

- **Why Nowak’s killer reached for the race card as a master key – and it turned.** Peter Neyroud, who was formerly Chief Constable of Thames Valley and then the head of the National Policing Improvement Agency, the forerunner of the College of Policing, told me that Vickrum Digwa “knew perfectly well that in the current climate, if he pulled the racist incident card out ... he was going to get priority of being listened to”, buying him “a suitable diversion from what he’d actually done”. Digwa, Neyroud said, “went the extra mile” by claiming his turban had been knocked off, because “he knew perfectly well that that would suggest there had been a racially-aggravated offence”. The trial judge made the same finding.<sup>3</sup>
- **A doctrine that openly rejects treating people equally has come to govern policing.** The national Police Anti-Racism Commitment,<sup>4</sup> issued to all police forces in England and Wales in March 2025, defines “racial equity” as producing “equality of policing outcomes” and states in terms that this “does not mean treating everyone ‘the same’ or being ‘colour blind’”. Neyroud, now a professor at Cambridge University who specialises in the study of policing, told me this is “one of the most badly drafted paragraphs in a policy statement that I can ever remember having read”, and that its rejection of equal treatment “doesn’t seem to me to be consistent with the oath” every officer swears at the start of their career to act “without fear or favour”. If the police mean to change that core mission, he says, “then the oath should be changed”.
- **The Met rejected a free-speech and impartiality policy – and then embraced one that called impartiality a racial myth.** In 2025 senior officers asked Rick Prior, the former chair of the Metropolitan Police Federation and the author of this briefing’s foreword, to draft the force’s equality, diversity and inclusion policy. He produced one built on impartiality and free expression: his draft recognised free speech as “a fundamental right”, said the Met must “encourage diversity of thought”, and warned against “adopting contested ideologies that may undermine public confidence in the neutrality and impartiality” of the force.<sup>5</sup> The Met rejected it almost at once and moved him to another department. Meanwhile, it had commissioned a very different

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3 Author’s interview with Professor Peter Neyroud, 4 June 2026.

4 <https://www.npcc.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/our-work/race-action-plan/police-anti-racism-commitment.pdf>

5 Rick Prior, draft ‘MPS Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Policy: Upholding Fairness, Impartiality, and Respect for All’ (2024), supplied to the author.

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document – one that recasts neutrality, objectivity and even “evidence” as expressions of “whiteness” – a quality that supposedly embodies the oppression of minorities and racial discrimination.<sup>6</sup>

- **The Free Speech Union foresaw all this and its likely consequences in 2022 – and was ignored.** In its response to an official consultation on the College of Policing and NPCC’s Anti-Racism Plan, the FSU warned that embedding the principle of “anti-racism”, a core component of Critical Race Theory, in police training and policy would chill officers’ free speech, breed a climate of fear around dissent and conflict with the oath to police “without fear or favour”. Every one of those warnings has since come true. The FSU asked instead for a single, simple rule: that the police must not be racist to anyone. This would have been fairer, less divisive, and a great deal safer than the machinery built in its place.
- **Commenting on the treatment of Henry Nowak and the contents of this briefing, the FSU’s Director Lord Young said:** “The FSU has been raising the alarm about the ideological capture of the police for the last six years. Radical identity groups claiming to represent different minorities have had an outsized influence over the police since the publication of the Macpherson Report in 1999, but the long march through the College of Policing and NPCC became a gallop after Black Lives Matter.

“The upshot is that the police, in their desperation to live down the charge of being ‘institutionally racist’, have become racist in the other direction, discriminating against white people, particularly white working class men. If you do a deep dive into the policies and training courses adopted by police forces at the behest of the College of Policing and the NPCC, it’s a bottomless pit of anti-white racism.

“There’s no evidence the police were ‘institutionally racist’ in the first place. Correcting for this over-correction is now a matter of critical national importance or vast swathes of the British population will lose confidence in the police and policing by consent will collapse.”

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.met.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/force-content/met/about-us/london-race-action-plan/30-patterns-of-harm.pdf>

# 1. A boy on a driveway

Just after 11pm on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2025, Henry Nowak was walking back to his university accommodation in Portswood, Southampton. He was 18, a first-year student and the first in his family to go to university; the judge who later sentenced his killer described him as “a much-loved, kind, hard-working and ambitious young man ... careful and principled, full of humour, warmth and promise”.<sup>7</sup> On the same pavement, walking the other way, was Vickrum Digwa, 22, sober, and carrying a large dagger in a sheath on his belt. It was, the judge said, “a chance meeting”.

What happened in the next few minutes is now established by a jury’s verdict and the judge’s findings. Henry, who had seen the dagger, filmed Digwa on his phone and asked, perhaps cheekily, whether he was “a bad man”. Digwa – “someone who thought they were being disrespected”, the judge found — took the phone, and in the struggle that followed stabbed Henry in the chest, cutting a vein behind the collarbone. He also stabbed him in his groin and leg. Digwa, the judge said, “by contrast, had little, if any, injury”.

Then came Digwa’s lie. As Henry tried to crawl away Digwa filmed him, and when his own brother arrived and asked whether racism had been involved, Digwa, in the judge’s words, “falsely claim[ed] that Henry had called you a ‘Paki’”. He had not. “I am sure,” the judge said, “that Henry had said nothing racist. You are the only person to make that claim and it is completely at odds with his previous character.”<sup>8</sup> While his brother told the emergency operator that no weapon was present, Digwa had his mother carry the dagger away. In a police van two days later, secretly recorded, the brothers agreed to pretend he had acted in self-defence – and Digwa let slip that if there were any cameras on that stretch of road, the defence would be impossible. He knew he was guilty. He had decided to cover it up. And the instrument he chose was a false accusation of

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<sup>7</sup> Digwa sentencing remarks, paras 1–9: <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Digwa-Final-Sentencing-Remarks.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., paras 13–21: <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Digwa-Final-Sentencing-Remarks.pdf>

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racism.

While Henry was still alive, it worked. The officers who arrived, the judge found, “honestly believed that there were reasonable grounds for suspecting Henry had committed an offence and arrested him”, handcuffing him “for about a minute before his condition further deteriorated and the arresting officer began CPR”.<sup>9</sup> On the body-worn footage later released, Henry can be heard saying he had been stabbed and could not breathe; an officer is heard to reply that he did not think he had been.

The judge did not make those officers into villains, saying that the scene was dark and Henry was wearing a dark top, so his wounds “would not have been obvious”. In his own courtroom experience, he had come across cases in which an arrested person would “sometimes feign injury in the hope they may be released”, while the officer’s “genuine shock” on discovering the chest wound “tends to show that he was doing his best in a very difficult situation”.<sup>10</sup> But the incident begs an obvious question: why did a false cry of racism work so well? Why was it, of all the things a suspect might say, a claim that led the police to deal with Henry’s attack in accordance with the killer’s narrative?

I put that question to Cambridge University’s Professor Peter Neyroud, who before joining the academy rose through the ranks of the Hampshire police, going on successively to become a senior investigating officer dealing with the most serious crimes, Chief Constable of Thames Valley, and then the head of the National Policing Improvement Agency that preceded the College of Policing. He told me he has a signed copy of Macpherson’s report on the Lawrence case on his shelf, and he has been a key policing adviser to successive governments. His answer was unhesitating. Digwa, he said, “knew perfectly well that in the current climate, if he pulled the racist incident card out ... he was going to get priority of being listened to”, and that it “would be a suitable diversion from what he’d actually done”. This gave him valuable “time to dispose of the weapon”. Digwa, he went on, “went the extra mile by ... claiming that his turban had been knocked off ... he knew perfectly well that that was going to be a [racially] aggravated offence. He must have done. He wouldn’t have said that otherwise.”

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., para 27: <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Digwa-Final-Sentencing-Remarks.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., para 27: <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Digwa-Final-Sentencing-Remarks.pdf>

Neyroud made the darkest possible comparison. The officers, he said, “having been called to what they thought was a racist incident”, instead found “a young man slumped ... late in the evening”, and “it took them too long to work out what was actually going on”. This was “so similar to what the officers did with Stephen Lawrence and his friend Duwayne Brooks in 1993” – when they initially treated the black murder victim’s black friend Brooks as a suspect, and so lost crucial time when they should have been hunting for the white perpetrators. The symmetry is almost unbearable. The reforms that Stephen Lawrence’s murder produced, which were intended to stop the police mistaking a victim for a suspect, had by 2025 become part of the machinery that led the police to do just that to Henry Nowak.

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## 2. Macpherson's legacy, and how it became toxic

To understand how that machinery was built, we must begin in 1999. The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, chaired by the retired High Court judge Sir William Macpherson, was Britain's reckoning with a real disgrace: the Metropolitan Police's prejudiced and incompetent investigation into the racist murder of a black teenager. Two ideas came out of it. Both were defensible then. Both have since been stretched into shapes their author never intended.

The first was a new definition of a racist incident: "any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person", which Macpherson recommended be adopted by every police force and public body in the land.<sup>11</sup> At the time, says Peter Neyroud, this was a largely positive advance. As a Hampshire officer in the years before Lawrence was murdered, he had researched how the police recorded racist incidents, and he had helped the Commission for Racial Equality draft new guidelines that tried to ensure "the racist element was recognised properly". The problem then, he told me, was real: "There was no doubt at all that the police were not recording things when they were told there had been a racist incident", and the mechanisms for victims to report them "were poor and inadequate".

So far, so necessary. But Macpherson went further, and here Neyroud parts company with him. The report, he said, made "that critical turnkey change": henceforth, it would not be only officers or victims who might suggest an incident was racist, so that "if anybody else says it's a racist incident, you have to record it as such". That, he told me, was "a pivotal moment", and one he never accepted: "I always had difficulties with that approach, because it seemed to me to run in the face of what the police should be about, which is the ability to make judgments about what should

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<sup>11</sup> House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 'The Macpherson Report: Twenty-two years on' (2021), HC 139, recording the perception-based definition and its purpose: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5802/cmselect/cmhaff/139/13906.htm>

and should not be treated as a criminal offence.”

Macpherson’s report was meant to help stop the police turning a victim into a suspect by believing the other side’s story. But by 2025, the policies derived from it had shifted to the point where because Digwa said he had been racially abused, the officers felt obliged to believe him without making further inquiries.

Macpherson’s second legacy was the phrase that has overshadowed policing ever since: “institutional racism”, which he defined as “the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin”.<sup>12</sup> By moving the test of racism from individual intent and actions towards organisational outcomes, that definition laid the foundation for much that followed – above all, the idea that an unequal outcome is itself evidence of racism. Macpherson, Neyroud says, “was very careful to say why he made that judgement”: he identified specific failings, such as failing to deal with racist incidents, and “gave the police service a way to not be institutionally racist by paying attention to those things”.

However, Neyroud told me that this definition fell victim to concept creep. Instead of, for example, citing racial disparities in the use of stop and search, critics of the police claimed that institutional racism was baked into policing to the point where the service had “no way out of it”, consigning it to “a perpetual bad boy room”. Needless to say, within the service, this has long been the source of bitter resentment.

Neyroud’s views were supported in 2021 by the then-government’s Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, chaired by the black educationist Lord Sewell. His central finding was that disparity is not the same as discrimination. “Very few” of the disparities it found, the Commission reported, “are directly to do with racism”; geography, family, class, culture and religion mattered more, and “too often ‘racism’ is the catch-all explanation”.<sup>13</sup> The term “institutional racism”, it argued, should be reserved for cases where “deep-seated racism can be proven on a systemic level” and not used “as a general catch-all phrase”. Neyroud calls the Sewell

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12 Macpherson’s definition, as quoted in the foreword and glossary of the Police Race Action Plan: Improving policing for Black people (NPCC/College of Policing, 2022).

13 Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities: The Report (March 2021), summary and conclusions: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-report-of-the-commission-on-race-and-ethnic-disparities>

report “one of the most impactful ... that I’ve read in the last five years”, adding that it is “very unpopular with the activists, for the good reason that it was informed by common sense and evidence”. However, by the time it was issued, events more than 4,000 miles away were acting to ensure it was largely ignored.

### 3. The summer that changed everything: the death of George Floyd

George Floyd was murdered by a Minneapolis police officer on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2020, and the video depicting it circled the world. It is still unclear why anyone thought it had any relevance to policing in Britain. But two years later, the national Police Race Action Plan devised by the College of Policing and the NPCC opened its foreword with an account of Floyd's death.<sup>14</sup> The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary – the force whose officers would later handcuff Henry Nowak – says the same in its own plan: the murder of George Floyd “was a pivotal moment for policing in the UK, driving the need for real change”.<sup>15</sup>

Neyroud is scathing about this unnecessary import. “We have to keep reminding ourselves,” he told me, that Floyd's killing “was not an event that happened in the United Kingdom”. “The history of race relations in the United States,” he went on, “is very, very different from the history of race relations in the United Kingdom ... to drag and drop from one to the other [was] a serious problem.” At the time, he said, “a few quiet voices were trying very hard to point out that difference, and were not heard. Why choose America? Why not choose China? Why not choose France?” The answer, he says, is simply that “a lot of the activist voices are coming” from the American debate.

Thus a specific, foreign, emotionally overwhelming event was allowed to redefine how the police in Britain should relate to the public they serve, with policies being drawn up in a climate that rewarded visible activism and punished the faintest hint of scepticism.

Between 2022 and 2025, the perception rule derived from Macpherson's

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14 Police Race Action Plan: Improving policing for Black people (NPCC and College of Policing, 2022), Foreword.

15 Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary, Race Action Plan 2024–2026: <https://www.hampshire.police.uk/police-forces/hampshire-constabulary/areas/au/about-us/race-action-plan-2024-2026/>

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report and the post-Floyd fervour were poured into official documents and set hard, although they'd already been embedded in the official definition of a 'noncrime hate incident': the national Police Race Action Plan of 2022; the Police Anti-Racism Commitment of 2025; and the local plans that implement them, including the Hampshire Race Action Plan 2024–2026, the document that the officers who attended Henry Nowak felt they had to comply with. If we read them with that night in mind, four features stand out.

### ***“Not racist is not enough”***

Each document insists that merely refraining from racism will no longer do. The national plan is blunt: “Only being ‘not racist’ is not enough. It requires a much more active approach and mind-set.”<sup>16</sup> The 2025 Commitment repeats it almost word for word. This sounds unimpeachable until you consider what it is asking of the constable at the scene. An officer trained to treat a complaint of racism not as a neutral report to be weighed in the balance but as a summons to act will lean in to the accusation rather than question it. That is the opposite of the impartiality the law demands of state actors, and it is the first reason a racial allegation – however wild – is given the benefit of the doubt.

### ***“Equity,” or the abolition of equal treatment***

The single most revealing passage in the whole plethora of policies is the definition of “racial equity” in the 2025 document, and it could hardly be plainer. Equity, it says, means “producing equality of policing outcomes for people from different ethnic groups ... with understanding that these will be racialised”. And then, lest anyone miss the point: “It does not mean treating everyone ‘the same’ or being ‘colour blind’ (racial equality).”<sup>17</sup> When I read that paragraph aloud to Peter Neyroud, his response was immediate. It was, he said, “one of the most badly drafted paragraphs in a policy statement that I can ever remember having read ... it makes so little sense in real English that I wonder how many ... frontline officers and members of the public who read it actually understand what it’s supposed to mean.”

But his deeper objection is that it runs counter to British policing’s founding principles: “Every officer, me included, has to swear an oath, pledging to treat every citizen in accordance with the law, without fear or favour, malice

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16 Police Race Action Plan (2022), Foreword and 'Building an anti-racist police service'.

17 Police Anti-Racism Commitment (2025), 'Our commitment to racial equity means...'

or ill will.” He knows the oath intimately: he was responsible for the 1990s redraft that added a commitment to uphold human rights – including freedom of speech, as defined by Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. And Neyroud is clear that the new doctrine cannot be squared with it: “what’s in that doesn’t seem to me to be consistent with the oath, and ... if we’re going to change the core mission of the police, then the oath should be changed.” He returned, as he said he always did as a serving officer, to first principles: “The idea of equality before the law ... is an incredibly important part of our criminal justice system.” A national doctrine that has been written down that states in terms that treating people the same is *not* the goal of modern, ‘anti-racist’ policing, and has thus quietly licensed treating the two people involved in a violent encounter differently according to their skin colour. One need impute no malice to the officers in Southampton to see how that might affect the instinct of a constable arriving at a crime scene.

***“Explain or reform”, and the cost of using force on the wrong person***

The national plan orders every force to adopt an “explain or reform” approach: where a racial disparity in the use of powers “cannot be explained, the expectation is that it should be changed”, so that disparities are treated “as problems in themselves, regardless of their causes”.<sup>18</sup> The Hampshire plan repeats the same formula, promising to police the public in a way that “explains or reforms any disproportionality”.<sup>19</sup> Translate that out of management prose and into the calculation of an officer on the street, and you find an asymmetrical jeopardy. Lay hands on an ethnic-minority suspect and you generate a statistic your force must “explain or reform” – your body-worn footage pulled, your judgement second-guessed. Laying hands on a white suspect attracts much less scrutiny.

Neyroud confirms this changes behaviour, given that “professional standards departments are now looking at the proportionality of stop and search and arrest powers exercised by individual officers, and pulling out those who apparently stop black people disproportionately”. There is an old idea in the academic literature on policing that says police culture is immutable and fixed, but this, he says, should be dismissed: “This idea that policing doesn’t change in response to its context is not right. It does.

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18 Police Race Action Plan (2022), Commitment 2 and Workstream 2 (‘Not over-policed’).

19 Hampshire Race Action Plan 2024–2026, goal B (‘Respected’): <https://www.hampshire.police.uk/police-forces/hampshire-constabulary/areas/au/about-us/race-action-plan-2024-2026/>

It changes remarkably rapidly.” A service that changes rapidly in response to incentives is a service whose officers will, at speed and under pressure, make the lower-jeopardy choice – and in Southampton, the lower-jeopardy choice was to restrain the white man the minority complainant was pointing at.

***“Protect all our communities — but especially these”***

Hampshire’s plan is the document that actually governed officers’ behaviour that night, and it merits close study. “We will protect all of our communities,” it says – then adds, in the very next sentence: “We will pursue offenders and deal with offences that cause the most harm to our ethnic minority communities.”<sup>20</sup> Hampshire, Neyroud points out, is not in any way egregious, let alone unique. Equity of outcome is a national doctrine, and its effects are ubiquitous. But a plan that promises to protect “all” communities in one breath and names only “ethnic minority communities” in the next has built a hierarchy of victims – and an officer who has absorbed it will, faced with a person of colour claiming to be the victim of a racial assault, be oriented to see him as the person to protect and the other as the offender to pursue.

***The document the Met embraced – and the one it threw away***

Nothing illustrates the displacement of impartiality more starkly than two documents the Metropolitan Police handled in the same period. The first is one it commissioned and published on its website: *30 Patterns of Harm*, a review by the consultant Dr Shereen Daniels, which was issued in July 2025.<sup>21</sup> It is a remarkable document, derived directly from Critical Race Theory. It defines “whiteness” not as a skin colour but as “a way of thinking, organising and maintaining power ... a logic”, one that “sets the defaults – what counts as credible, safe, professional, or objective”. It holds that “neutrality,” too, “reflects dominant norms, particularly whiteness, in how risk, credibility, professionalism, and even ‘evidence’ are defined”. And it is candid about its own method, which it presents as a virtue: “There are no case studies. No citations designed to reassure sceptics. No toolkit at the end. These are not gaps. They are deliberate refusals.” Its authority

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<sup>20</sup> Hampshire Race Action Plan 2024–2026, goal D (‘Protected’): <https://www.hampshire.police.uk/police-forces/hampshire-constabulary/areas/au/about-us/race-action-plan-2024-2026/>

<sup>21</sup> Metropolitan Police, ‘Metropolitan Police publishes Dr Shereen Daniels’ independently commissioned report into racism in the Met’ (Nov 2025): <https://news.met.police.uk/news/metropolitan-police-publishes-dr-shereen-daniels-independently-commissioned-report-into-racism-in-the-met-503047>

rests instead on what it calls “Black intellectual history” and “deep, often painful experience”.

A retired senior officer who read the report and shared his assessment with me, was blunt: this, he said, “is anti-science ... the typical method of the activists ... the very reverse of good science”. It is possible, he pointed out, to do honest qualitative research that draws on people’s experience – “but you have to pay respect to sample sizes and bias and good methods”, and this “just dismisses all of that”. He made a further point that goes to the heart of this briefing. A doctrine that treats “whiteness” as a single homogeneous logic, never troubled to ask white people – of wildly different histories, his own family among them – how they felt about being so described. A framework that flattens white people into one undifferentiated category is precisely the framework that, on a Southampton street, could not see a white teenager as a possible victim. And a document that brands “neutrality” and “evidence” as expressions of racial power has, at the level of theory, disarmed the very faculty the Nowak officers needed: the impartial weighing of who was injured and who was telling the truth.

The second document never saw the light of day. In the summer of 2025, at the same time Daniels was finishing her work, senior officers at the Met asked Rick Prior, the ousted chair of the Metropolitan Police Federation and the author of this briefing’s foreword, to draft the force’s equality, diversity and inclusion policy. He produced one whose subtitle, “Upholding Fairness, Impartiality, and Respect for All”, made clear its very different intellectual basis. Prior’s document recognised “freedom of expression as a fundamental right”; it committed the Met to “encourage diversity of thought” through “open, respectful debate”; it insisted the force must be “demonstrably impartial and neutral”; and, most pointedly, it pledged to “avoid adopting contested ideologies that may undermine public confidence in the neutrality and impartiality of the MPS”.<sup>22</sup> The Met rejected it almost at once, Prior says, and moved him to another department. Set the two documents beside each other and the institution’s preference is laid bare. Offered a policy built on impartiality and free speech by one of its own senior representatives, the Met turned it down. Offered a review that recasts impartiality itself as a racial myth and whiteness as a form of original sin, it welcomed it.

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<sup>22</sup> Rick Prior, draft ‘MPS Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Policy’ (2024), supplied to the author.

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## 4. We have seen this before

The reflex on display in Southampton – the perception of a complainant overriding the judgement of the officer in front of them – is not a one-off. I have spent weeks going through the Free Speech Union’s casework, and the same pattern recurs, applied to speech and conduct of every kind: gender, religion, immigration, ordinary politics. That breadth is the point. A single subjective method, in which the complainant defines the offence, is now run against opinion across the board.

Consider first the cases where the victim, or the person raising the alarm, was turned into the suspect. West Yorkshire Police arrested an autistic teenage girl after a remark she made about an officer was treated as homophobic – a perception-of-hostility test, applied without judgement, criminalising a child’s words. The same force logged a lightly-scuffed Quran brought into a Wakefield school as a non-crime hate incident and dispatched a senior officer to reassure the community, while the autistic boy who had caused “offence”, whose family received death threats, was left to fend for himself.<sup>23</sup> Protective attention flowing towards the perceived ‘victim’ or ‘victims’ and away from the person actually in danger: that is the Nowak pattern, rehearsed in advance.

Then there is the question of whose accusation gets heard. After a two-year battle funded by the Free Speech Union, Police Scotland apologised without reservation to the Conservative MSP Murdo Fraser in December 2025 for recording a hate incident against him over a gender-critical post, the police watchdog having found the force acted unreasonably.<sup>24,25</sup> Fraser’s real complaint was the asymmetry: a high-profile speech about the whiteness of Scotland’s institutions by Humza Yousaf had drawn no such

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23 Both cases are documented in the FSU briefing *The Urgent Need to Teach the Police About Free Speech* (Carrie Clark, March 2023), and in the FSU’s policing casework.

24 FSU, on the PIRC finding that Police Scotland acted unreasonably: <https://freespeechunion.org/police-handling-of-msp-trans-cat-tweet-row-unreasonable/>

25 The Christian Institute, ‘Police Scotland apologises to MSP over non-crime hate incident’ (Dec 2025): <https://www.christian.org.uk/news/police-scotland-apologises-to-msp-over-non-crime-hate-incident/>

record, while his one-liner about gender did. Some accusations are heard; others are not. The pattern is not random.

But the cases that explain *why* a constable finds it safer to believe a racial accusation than to doubt one are the cases of the officers who dared to doubt. Rick Prior was suspended after telling GB News in 2024 that his Federation members were pulling back from proactive policing for fear of being branded racist. Richard Cooke, his West Midlands counterpart, was suspended, ordered onto a diversity course and barred from re-election for disputing online that his force was institutionally racist. In January 2026 the High Court ruled both suspensions were unlawful breaches of their right to free expression, and the Federation later dropped its appeal.<sup>26,27</sup> Prior's words read in hindsight like a prophecy of Nowak's treatment. The two cases exemplify what the anti-racist action plans imply: that a police officer who questions the institutional-racism orthodoxy puts their career at risk.

How embedded has the orthodoxy become? We need look no further than Baroness Casey's 2023 review of the Met, in which she claimed that officers who responded to the claim that Black Lives Matter by saying "all lives matter" should be seen as evidence of reprehensible "hostility".<sup>28</sup> "How can it be racist to say, well, wait a minute, all lives matter?" Neyroud asks. "It can't be racist. That cannot be racist." When a proposition as anodyne as "all lives matter" can be logged as a marker of racism, the collapse of impartiality this briefing describes is not hypothetical, but has become the dominant culture.

The anxiety to display the right posture on race and religion has led forces into making surprising choices about who should educate their officers. Take Muslim Engagement and Development, or MEND. Sir William Shawcross, in his government-commissioned review of the Prevent counter-extremism programme, found that MEND had "a well-established track record of working alongside extremists," and Michael Gove when Communities Secretary named it in the Commons as a group of "Islamist

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26 R (Prior) v PFEW [2026] EWHC 124 (Admin), judgment of 26 January 2026: <https://caselaw.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ewhc/admin/2026/124>

27 FSU, 'Free speech victory as High Court rules Police Federation unlawfully treated PC Prior and PC Cooke': <https://freespeechunion.org/cooke-prior-high-court-victory.html>

28 Baroness Casey Review, Final Report (March 2023), Chapter 9, recording officer testimony on workplace culture.

orientation.”<sup>29</sup> None of this stopped MEND being invited to deliver “Islamophobia” training to British Transport Police in November 2023, and to South Wales Police the following February, the latter under a programme the force branded “Diversity Matters/Inclusion wins.”<sup>30</sup>

MEND has said it rejects the extremist label. Nevertheless, two police forces were willing to hand the instruction of their officers to a body their government’s terrorism reviewer condemned, in the name of “anti-racism” and the inclusion agenda that the race plans embody.

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29 Sir William Shawcross, Independent Review of Prevent (2023); and the statement of the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, House of Commons, March 2024.

30 The Jewish Chronicle, 'Police trained on 'Islamophobia' by jihadist backers' (Feb 2024): <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk/police-trained-on-islamophobia-by-jihadist-backers-ftd6r447>

## 5. The warnings nobody wanted

None of this had to be learned from a dead teenager. When the College of Policing and the NPCC consulted on the national anti-racism plan in 2022, the Free Speech Union wrote back, at length and on the record. We did not argue for a police force that tolerated racism; we argued for the opposite. What we warned against was the machinery the plan proposed – and almost everything we warned of has since come to pass.



We said the duty to report “any inappropriate behaviour” would “generate an atmosphere of fear that any opinion expressed around race, no matter how well-intentioned, could be jumped on”. We said it would reach into private and off-duty conversation. We asked whether the compulsory “anti-racism” training recommended by the plan would be “free of contentious social theories” or would “contain elements of Critical Race Theory”, a creed with which, we noted, the very word “anti-racism” has long been associated.

We also said “explain or reform” rested on the “questionable” assumption that unequal outcomes between different ethnic groups are “primarily caused by racial discrimination”. And we asked the question now hanging over the whole affair: “whether the Police need to be ‘anti-racist’ as opposed to simply non-racist”, warning that to be “anti-racist” is “to take on an activist role – which is at odds with their oath to police without fear or favour”.<sup>31</sup> That was three years before Peter Neyroud, from the opposite end of the policing establishment, told me the same doctrine could not be reconciled with the oath. The table below sets each of our warnings against what has since happened.

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<sup>31</sup> Free Speech Union, response to the Police Race Action Plan public consultation (2022).

FSU Warning (2022)	What has happened since	Verdict
The reporting duty would create “an atmosphere of fear” and self-censorship among officers around race.	Rick Prior and Richard Cooke suspended for questioning the institutional racism line; both suspensions ruled unlawful by the High Court. Officers penalised internally for declining to endorse “anti-racism” statements.	
The duty would reach private and off-duty conversation.	Hate-incident records and police visits arising from pub conversations and a domestic rows overheard through walls (FSU casework).	
“Anti-racism” training would carry Critical Race Theory and become a vehicle for contentious views.	The plans’ texts embed the structural-outcome premise; the Met’s ‘30 Patterns of Harm’ recasts neutrality, objectivity and “evidence” as expressions of “whiteness”.	
“Explain or reform” assumes outcome disparities are caused by discrimination – a contested premise.	Confirmed on the face of the plans: disparity treated as “a problem in and of itself, regardless of ... causes” – the opposite of the Sewell Commission’s finding that “very few” disparities are “directly to do with racism”.	

FSU Warning (2022)	What has happened since	Verdict
<p>“Anti-racist” rather than “non-racist” turns the police into activists, at odds with their oath to act without fear or favour.</p>	<p>Endorsed from inside the establishment: a former chief constable told the author the “equity” doctrine “doesn’t seem ... consistent with the oath”. Illustrated, in a violent-crime response, by the Nowak handcuffing.</p>	
<p>Scrap the plan; replace it with a short statement that the police must not be racist, and a pledge to root out any racism found internally.</p>	<p>Not done. The activist programme went ahead; the climate it built is now the subject of national outcry, an IOPC inquiry, and helps to explain the death of Henry Nowak.</p>	

*The “verdict” column is the FSU’s own assessment of how far each 2022 warning has come true, not a court finding except where a judgment is named in the text.*

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## 6. The simpler, fairer rule we threw away

Strip away the documents, the litigation and the consultancy reports, and what remains is a boy on a driveway, a lie, and a pair of handcuffs that went on the wrong man. Henry Nowak's killer told the police he was the victim of a racial attack, and the police treated the man he stabbed as the criminal. The judge said the officers were misled, and this briefing has sought to explain why the lie was so easy to tell and so certain to be believed. It has shown that for more than 25 years, British policing has been taught to treat an accusation of racism as the most serious charge that can be levelled, and a murderer, who had read nothing of Critical Race Theory but understood the culture perfectly, used that lesson to buy himself time over the body of his victim.

Macpherson gave the police a perception test built to stop victims being turned into offenders, and the reflex it bred turned a victim into an offender in to the eyes of the officer who attended to him. The death of George Floyd made them need to be seen as actively anti-racist rather than merely fair. And the race action plans turned that urgency into rules: a duty of proactive "anti-racism", a concept of "equity" that openly rejects treating people the same, an "explain or reform" regime that makes using force on a minority suspect the riskier choice, and a pledge to prioritise "the offences that cause the most harm to our ethnic minority communities". Not one of those rules tells an officer to let a boy die in handcuffs. Together, they spawned the cast of mind that could not distinguish a victim from a suspect.

The Free Speech Union warned this would come to pass if the police embraced Critical Race Theory and was ignored. We argued that all that was needed was "a short statement on the importance of the Police not being racist, accompanied by a commitment to robustly tackle any racism found internally" and a return to common sense policing, rooted in the

judgement and experience of rank-and-file officers.<sup>32</sup> The treatment of Henry Nowak and his murderer by police demonstrates we were right. We repeat that recommendation now.

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<sup>32</sup> Free Speech Union, response to the Police Race Action Plan consultation (2022), final recommendation.

