



Complaints made to the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland

Quarterly Statistical Bulletin
Quarter 1 2023/24

Published July 2023

Introduction

The Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland provides an independent, impartial system for the assessment and investigation of complaints about the conduct of police officers in Northern Ireland.

A police complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by a member of the public about the service they have received.

This quarterly bulletin¹ presents statistics on the number of complaints received by the Ombudsman for the first quarter of 2023-2024 (April 2023 — June 2023).

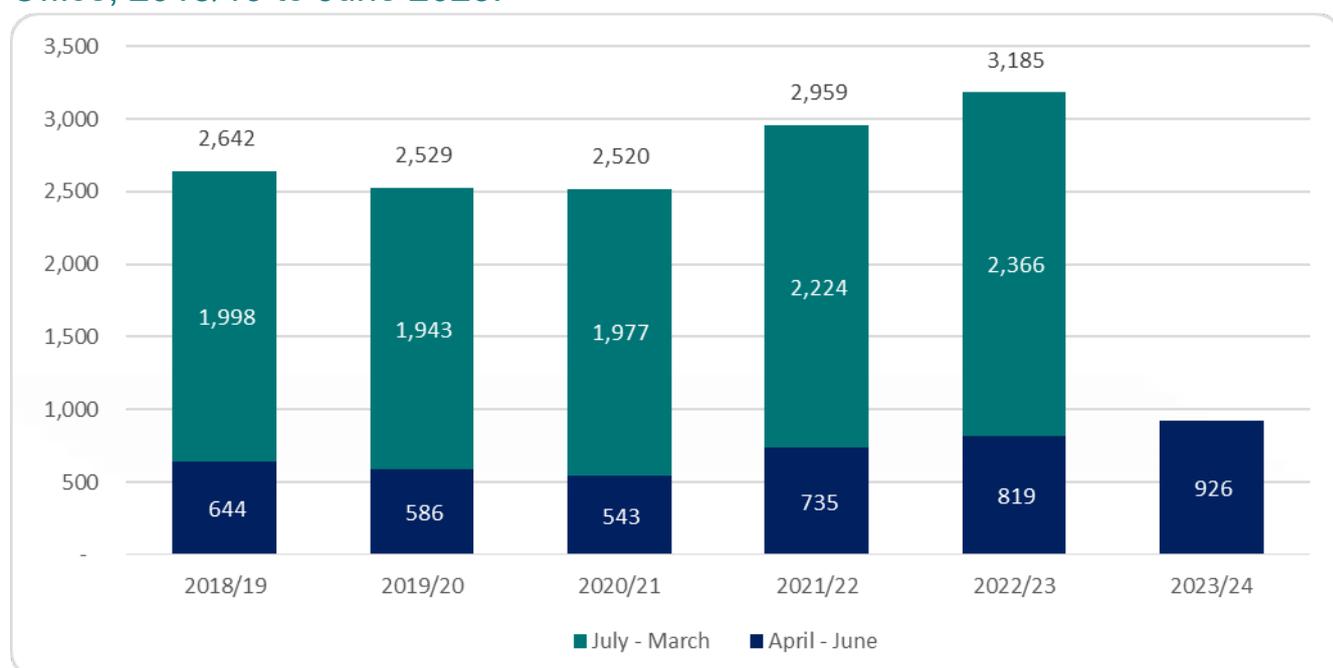
It also compares the level of complaints with previous years, helping to identify trends in the number and nature of the complaints received.

How many complaints did the Ombudsman receive?

Key Takeaways

- Between April 2023 and June 2023, the Ombudsman received 926 complaints.
- This was a rise of 13% compared to the same period in 2022-2023.
- This was also the highest number of complaints received in Quarter 1 when compared with the last five years.

Figure 1: Number of complaints received by the Police Ombudsman's Office, 2018/19 to June 2023.



¹ The statistics for 2023/24 are based on information extracted from the Police Ombudsman's Case Handling system (CHS) on 5th July 2023. Information for 2018/19 to 2022/23 is based on the annual snapshot taken on 7th April 2023.

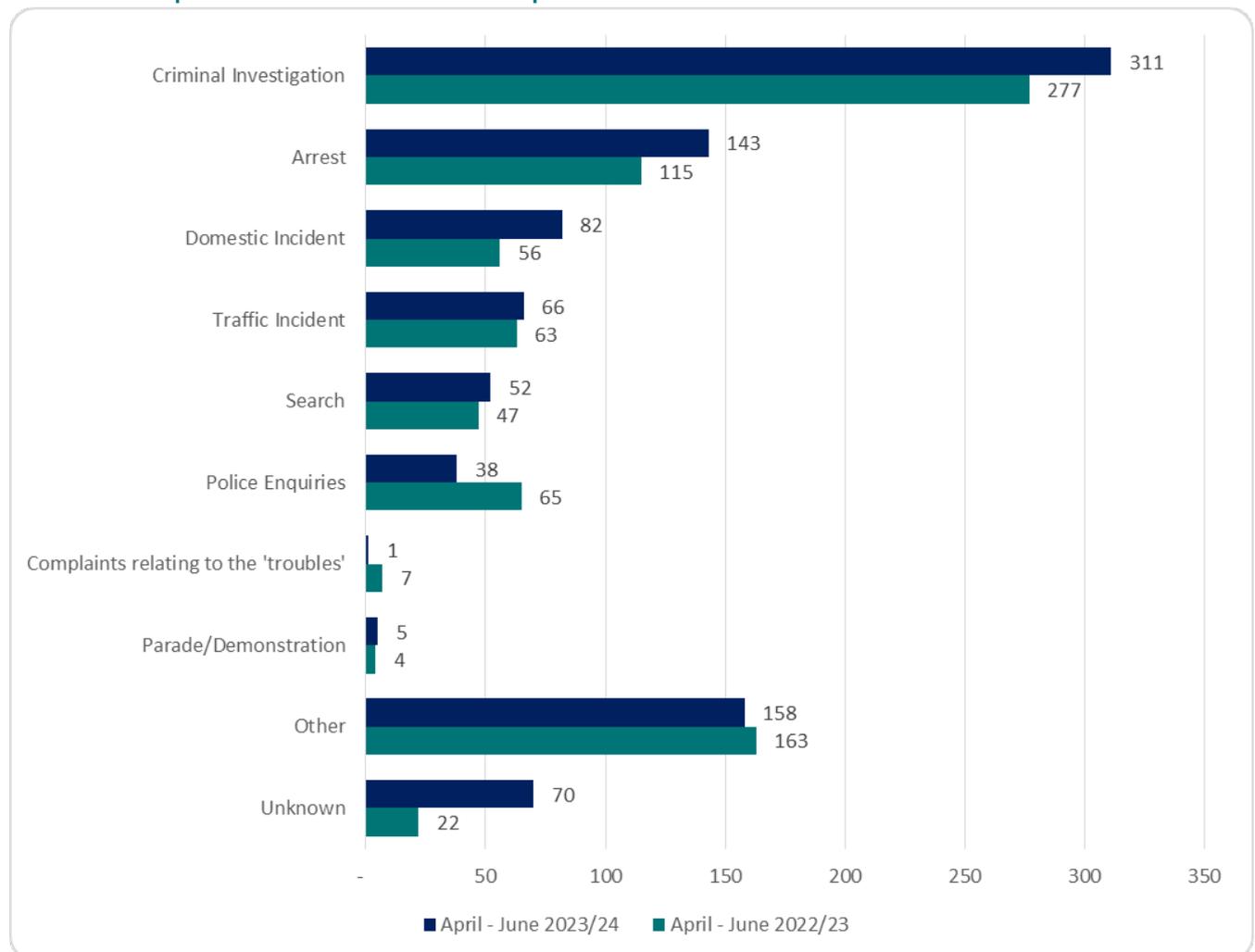
How did these complaints arise?

In order to try and get a better understanding of what sorts of interactions might give rise to complaints about the police or police conduct, the Police Ombudsman's Office collect information on the background or context to the complaint.

Key Takeaways

- 'Criminal investigation' was the most common main factor² underlying complaints during the first quarter of 2023/24. This accounted for 34% of complaints received during this time.
- Complaints arising from 'Police enquiries' had the largest percentage decrease³ so far in 2023/24 when compared with the same period last year.
- Complaints regarding 'Domestic incidents' had the largest percentage increase during this time.

Figure 2: Comparison of the main factor behind complaints received between April to June 2022 and April to June 2023.



² The main complaint factor refers to the main situation giving rise to the complaint.

³ Percentage difference is only calculated when the base number is greater than 50

What were the complaints about?

A person who makes a complaint may be dissatisfied with different aspects of their interaction with the police. In such cases, we break the complaint down into allegations’.

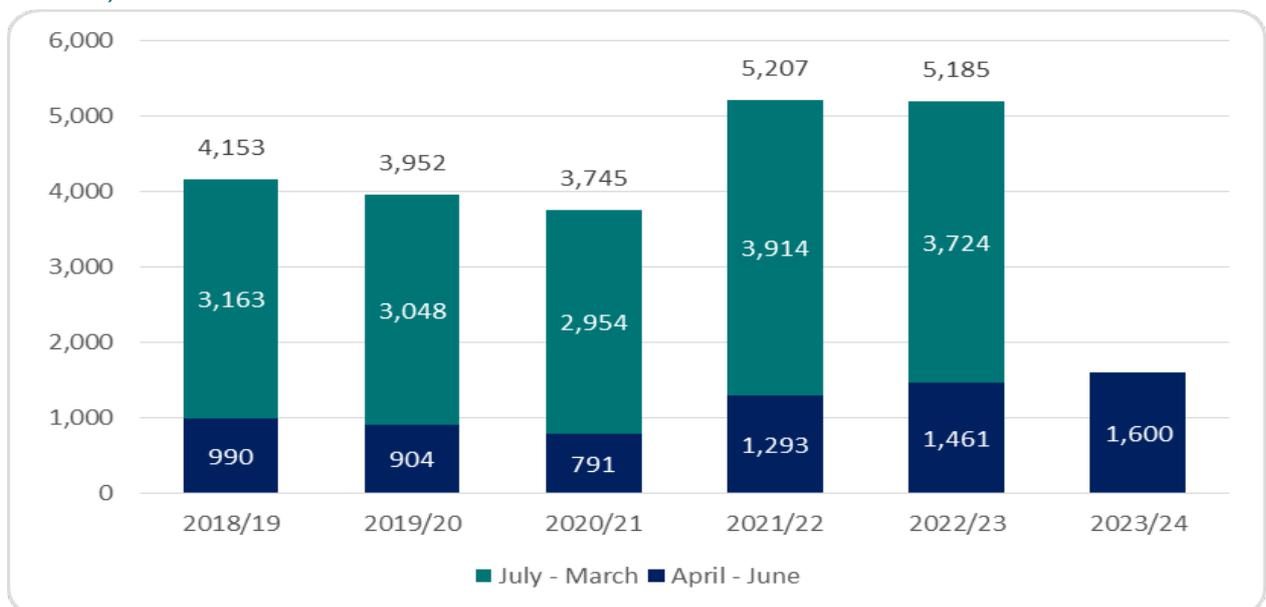
This helps to capture more detailed information about the complaint and often explains the root cause of the person’s concerns.

How many allegations did the Ombudsman receive?

Key Takeaways

- Between April 2023 and June 2023, the Ombudsman received 1,600 complaints.
- This was a rise of 10% compared to the same period in 2022-2023.
- This was also the highest number of allegations received in Quarter 1 when compared with the last five years.

Figure 3: Number of allegations received by the Police Ombudsman’s Office, 2018/19 to June 2023.

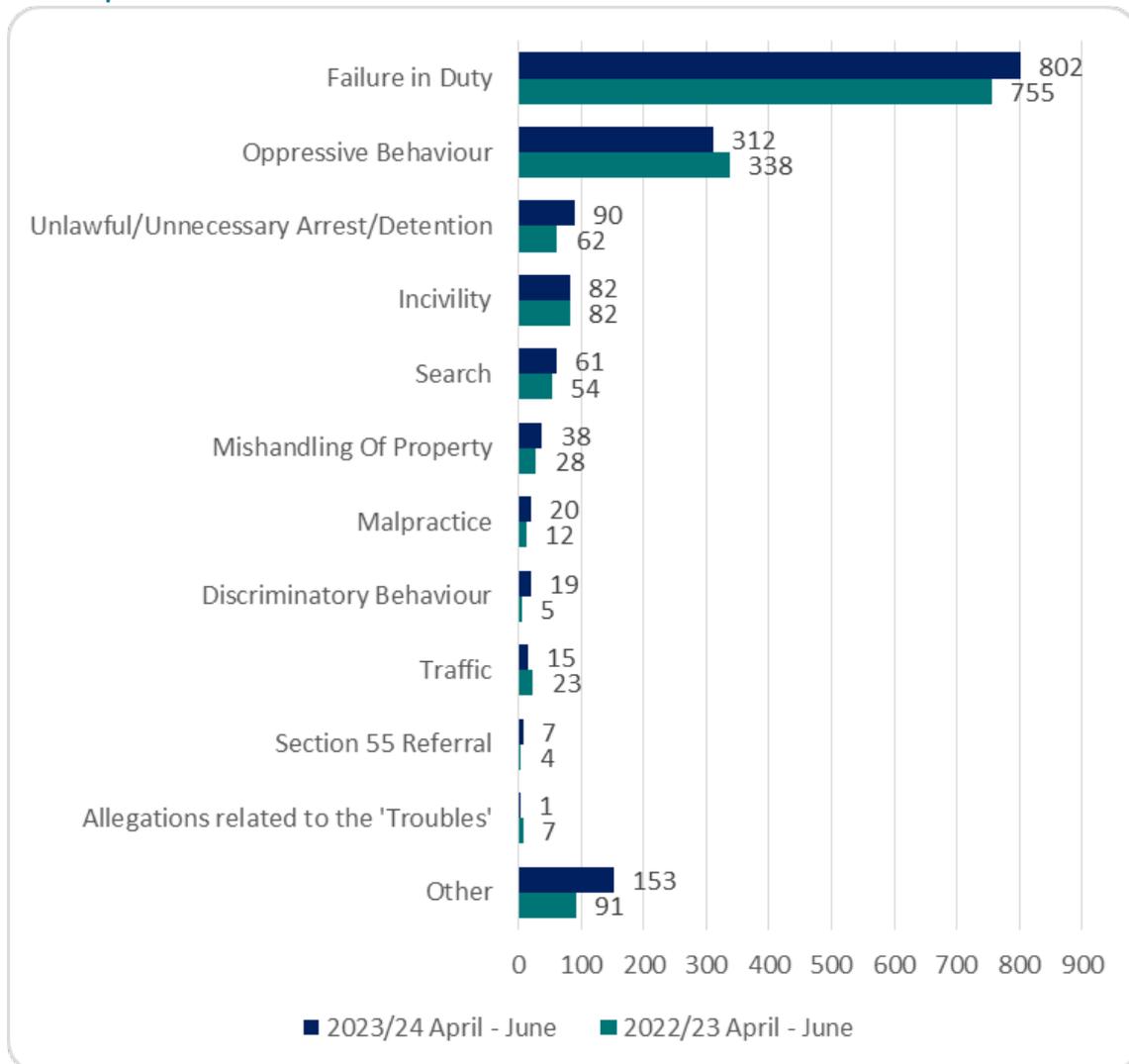


What were the allegations?

Key Takeaways

- The most common allegation received between April and June 2023 was 'failure in duty', accounting for half of all allegations received.
- Allegations about 'Unlawful/Unnecessary Arrest/Detention' had the largest percentage increase⁴ (45%) when compared to last year.
- The top 5 allegations were:
 - Failure in duty: 802 allegations (50%)
 - Oppressive behaviour: 312 allegations (20%)
 - Unlawful/Unnecessary Arrest/Detention: 90 allegations (6%)
 - Incivility: 82 allegations (5%)
 - Search: 61 allegations (4%)

Figure 4: Comparison of the allegations received between April to June 2022 and April to June 2023.



⁴ Percentage difference is only calculated when the base number is greater than 50

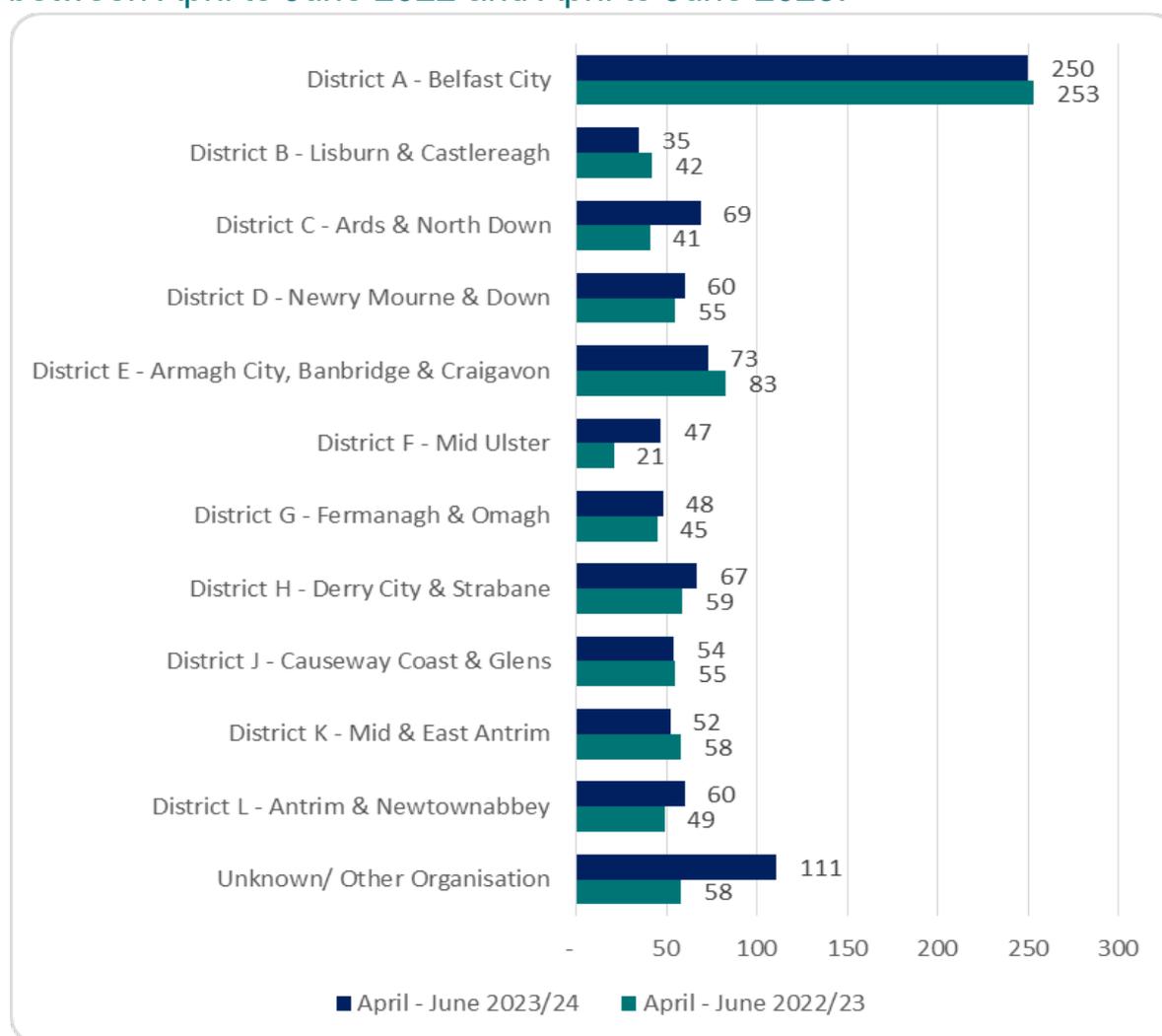
Where did the complaints happen?

When a complaint is received we use the location of the incident that led to the complaint to allocate the complaint to a specific Police district.

Key Takeaways

- Between April and June 2023, the number of complaints increased in six of the 11 districts, when compared to the same period last year.
- 27% of the complaints received were linked to District A – Belfast City.

Figure 5: Comparison of the complaints received in each police district between April to June 2022 and April to June 2023.



Were there any Officers who attracted multiple complaints?

There were 14 PSNI officers who attracted three or more complaints that were formally investigated or dealt with by way of Informal Resolution between July 2022 and June 2023 (Table 1).

Table 1: Officers with three or more complaints that were formally investigated or dealt with by Informal Resolution, twelve month period ending June 2023,

Twelve month period ending	Number of officers with 3+ complaints formally investigated or dealt with by Informal Resolution
June 2023	14

Additional Information

Data Use

The information presented in this document has been produced to meet the needs of our key users who need timely information on the number of complaints and allegations received by the Police Ombudsman's Office. The main users of this quarterly bulletin are the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland (PONI or the Office), the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB). This statistical update is the outcome of consultation with these users, it gives them access to information that they can use to form discussions at their regular meetings.

Understanding the Statistics

The number of complaints received by the Police Ombudsman's Office includes complaints made by members of the public relating to the conduct of PSNI officers or those employed by other organisations under the Office's remit⁵. The number of complaints also includes those matters that have been referred to the Police Ombudsman's Office from other organisations⁶, and any matter that the Police Ombudsman has decided is in the public interest to investigate.

There are a number of factors that may influence whether or not a person makes a complaint to the Police Ombudsman. It is important when drawing conclusions from the statistics not to take a simplistic view but to consider the following factors:

- The number and nature of police operations conducted;
- The performance of police officers;
- The level of interaction between the public and the police;
- The awareness of the Police Ombudsman's Office, knowledge of how to make a complaint, and public confidence in the Office;
- The size of the police service;
- Changes to the PSNI's or the Offices' procedures;
- The level of crime;
- The number of public order incidents; and
- Population demographics.

Each complaint the Police Ombudsman's Office receives is made up of one or more allegations. The allegation describes the types of behaviours being complained about or the separate issues making up the complaint. For example, a person may make a complaint stating a police officer had pushed them *and* was rude. This would be recorded as one complaint with two allegations. The number of allegations received also includes a small number of residual matters, these are matters of concern identified during an investigation that were not originally detailed in the complaint, typically these account for around 1% to 2% of the allegations received.

Care should be taken when comparing the number of complaints or allegations received at police district level as some of the differences between districts may reflect variations in

⁵ The Office's remit extends to: Police Service of Northern Ireland including Designated Civilians, the Belfast Harbour Police, The Belfast International Airport Police, the Ministry of Defence Police, the National Crime Agency, 'serious' complaints regarding mutual aid police officers from Great Britain and 'serious' complaints regarding certain Home Office employees (immigration officers, designated customs officials and custom revenue officials).

⁶ The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), Public Prosecution Service (PPS), Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB) and the Department of Justice (DOJ).

their composition, such as the degree of urbanization, level of deprivation and the balance between the resident population, day-time population and the night-time economy. It is also important to note that the system is live and data may therefore be subject to future revisions.

Further information

A more detailed break-down of the types of complaints and allegations received by the Police Ombudsman's Office over the last five years, as well as presenting information on the outcomes of complaints, is presented in the 'Annual Statistical Bulletin of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland'. This is available on the Office's [website](#).

An additional geographic breakdown of the types of complaints and allegations received by the Police Ombudsman in previous years is available on the [NISRA Data Portal](#).

If you would like information on other statistics published by the Police Ombudsman's Office please see the statistics and research page on the Police Ombudsman's [website](#).

Publication

The Police Ombudsman's Office will publish information in year on a quarterly basis. Where possible, this information will be published on the Police Ombudsman's website at 9:30am on the fourth Thursday of the month following the end of the quarter. In some instances however it may be necessary to publish the bulletin earlier or later in the quarter. A more detailed publication will be published at the end of the financial year concentrating on the trends in the number of complaints and allegations received over the last five years.

The second quarterly update of 2023/24 is due to be published on Thursday 26th October 2023 and it will include statistics up to the 30th September 2023.

User Feedback

We continuously welcome your feedback or comments on the statistics released. If you would like to forward your views or to receive notifications of statistical releases please email your contact details to info@Policeombudsman.org further contact details are available on the back page of this bulletin.

Additional copies of this and other publications are available from:

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Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland
New Cathedral Buildings
11 Church Street
Belfast
BT1 1PG**

**Telephone: 028 9082 8634
Witness Appeal Line: 0800 0327 880
Email: info@policeombudsman.org**

These publications and other information about the work of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland are also available on the Internet at:

Website: www.policeombudsman.org