



Dealing with Complaints against the Police

The Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland is Dr Michael Maguire.

The Police Ombudsman's Office provides an independent and impartial service for dealing with complaints against the police.

We look at evidence to decide whether police officers have acted properly or not.

We also investigate complaints against some, but not all, civilian employees of the police. This includes employees performing custody or escort duties for the police.

Our decisions are made entirely independently of the police, government and complainants.

You do not have to pay to complain to us.

The Police Ombudsman deals with complaints against:

- The Police Service of Northern Ireland
- The Serious Organised Crime Agency
- The Belfast Harbour Police
- The Larne Harbour Police
- The Belfast International Airport Police
- The Ministry of Defence Police in Northern Ireland

We investigate complaints about how police officers and employees do their jobs. This includes complaints about the use of excessive force, that officers have failed to conduct proper enquiries, that officers or staff have been rude or offensive, or have acted inappropriately in other ways.

How to make a complaint

You can make a complaint:

- by phone on **0845 601 2931** (charged at local rate)
- by email – **complaints@policeombudsman.org**
- via our website – **www.policeombudsman.org**
- in writing to the address on the back cover of this leaflet
- by calling at our office between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday
- by fax on **028 9082 8659**
- by textphone, for people with hearing impairment, on **028 9082 8756**

Providing information about your complaint

Please try to give us as much information as you can about the incident you are complaining about, including such things as:

- the day, time, date and exact location of the incident
- the name, shoulder number and a physical description of the officer(s) or employee involved
- the name, address and telephone number(s) of any witnesses
- the registration numbers of any vehicles involved in the incident
- any other helpful or relevant evidence, such as photographs or audio or video footage.

Don't worry if you can provide only some of this information. We will try to find whatever information we feel is relevant to your complaint.

You must make your complaint within one year of the incident you are concerned about.

In special circumstances, the Police Ombudsman can decide to investigate a complaint about something that happened more than a year before it was reported to us. This happens when the Police Ombudsman believes the complaint to be grave or exceptional.

What will we do with your complaint?

We will arrange to take details of your complaint and then decide how to deal with it.

We will tell you who is dealing with your complaint and give you as much information as we can at every stage of the complaints process. We will treat complainants and police officers fairly and equally.

If your complaint is about a less serious matter we may ask for your consent to refer it to the police for them to deal with. If you agree, the police will then contact you to discuss your complaint and try to reach a solution. We will check how the police have dealt with your complaint.

If we launch a formal investigation into your complaint we will gather evidence about what happened. This will include witness statements, and might include police records, video footage, police radio transmissions, medical records, forensic evidence and other information.

We will deal with your complaint as quickly as we can, but some complaints are very complicated and may involve many other people, such as witnesses, doctors or forensic staff. This may mean that it will take some time to investigate your complaint.

After you have made a complaint we may need to come back to you for further information. If we do so, we can only proceed with an investigation with your continuing co-operation.

What we cannot do

There are some complaints we cannot deal with.

We cannot:

- Investigate complaints about an off-duty police officer, unless the fact he or she works for the police is relevant e.g. if they produce their warrant card or tell you they are a police officer.
- Investigate complaints about off-duty police employees.
- Investigate complaints about operational matters such as how many police officers are assigned to your area, the way police prioritise their work, or how they manage their operations.
- Investigate complaints about traffic wardens
- Investigate complaints about retired police officers or employees, unless it is alleged that they broke the law while working for the police.

Telling you what happened to your complaint

The Police Ombudsman can reach a number of different decisions on your complaint, depending on the available evidence.

He might:

- Recommend that a police officer or employee is prosecuted
- Recommend that a police officer or employee should be disciplined
- Recommend that a police officer or employee should receive further training
- Make recommendations to the police to improve the ways in which they work
- Decide that there is insufficient evidence to uphold your complaint

Recommendations for prosecution are made to the Public Prosecution Service. It is for the Director of Public Prosecutions to decide whether to prosecute. If the Director decides to prosecute, we will explain to you how this process works.

Recommendations for disciplinary action are made to the Chief Constable. If a decision is taken to discipline an officer or employee, we will explain this process to you.

Whatever the outcome, we will write to you when we have finished dealing with your complaint to explain the Police Ombudsman's decision.

We value your views

We are continually striving to improve the service we provide. You can help us by completing and returning the satisfaction questionnaire which we will send you at the end of the complaints process. The views of those who use the service provided by the Office are extremely important to us and have in the past led to improvements in the service we deliver.

If you are unhappy with the service we provide

If you wish to make a complaint about the service you received, you should write to Customer Complaints at the address on the back cover of this leaflet. We will look into your complaint and send you a written reply.

If you believe our response does not properly address your concerns, the letter you will receive will explain how you can appeal the decision.





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Additional copies of this and other publications are available from the Information Directorate at the address above.

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



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