

Annual Report on
Complainant Satisfaction
with services provided by the
Police Ombudsman's Office in
Northern Ireland
2015/16

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Main Findings of 2015/16:

- The majority of complainants, who had spoken to a member of staff, felt staff treated them with respect, treated them fairly, were easy to understand and were knowledgeable.
- Complainants were most likely to be satisfied with the length of time taken to respond after the incident was reported to the Office, how clearly the process was explained to them and how easy the correspondence was to understand than for other aspects of the complaints process.
- More than half (57%) of respondents said they understood the reason we gave for reaching the final decision about their complaint, and of these, almost four fifths accepted this decision.
- Just over half (53%) of respondents felt that the Office dealt with their complaint independently (i.e. free from influence of others).
- Respondents were just as likely to be satisfied or dissatisfied with the service they received from the Office.
- Almost six out of ten respondents (59%) said they would contact the Office again if they had a new complaint.

Introduction

This is an Official Statistics publication. Official Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They undergo regular validation checks to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference.

The Police Ombudsman's Office is required by law to provide an independent and impartial police complaints system which secures the confidence of both the public and the police.

This report presents the results of the complainant satisfaction survey which was carried out during 2015/16. It includes information from those complainants whose complaints were closed¹ during the reporting year. This year, 2,612 questionnaires were issued and 421 were returned representing a 16% response rate.

The questionnaire was amended at the start of 2015/16 in an effort to simplify the way in which the questions were asked and reduce the number of possible responses. This was also done to ensure that the questions were aligned with the Office's Service Charter. The Office aims to maintain or improve performances measured against the Service Charter by surveying complainants and police officers subject of complaint and in particular measure attitudes to independence, 'accountability, respectfulness and professionalism.

Due to the changes² with the questionnaire comparisons with previous years can only be made for certain questions. Trend data is provided for the last five years.

¹ See Appendix 2: Additional Information

² See Appendix 3: Questionnaire for details of changes

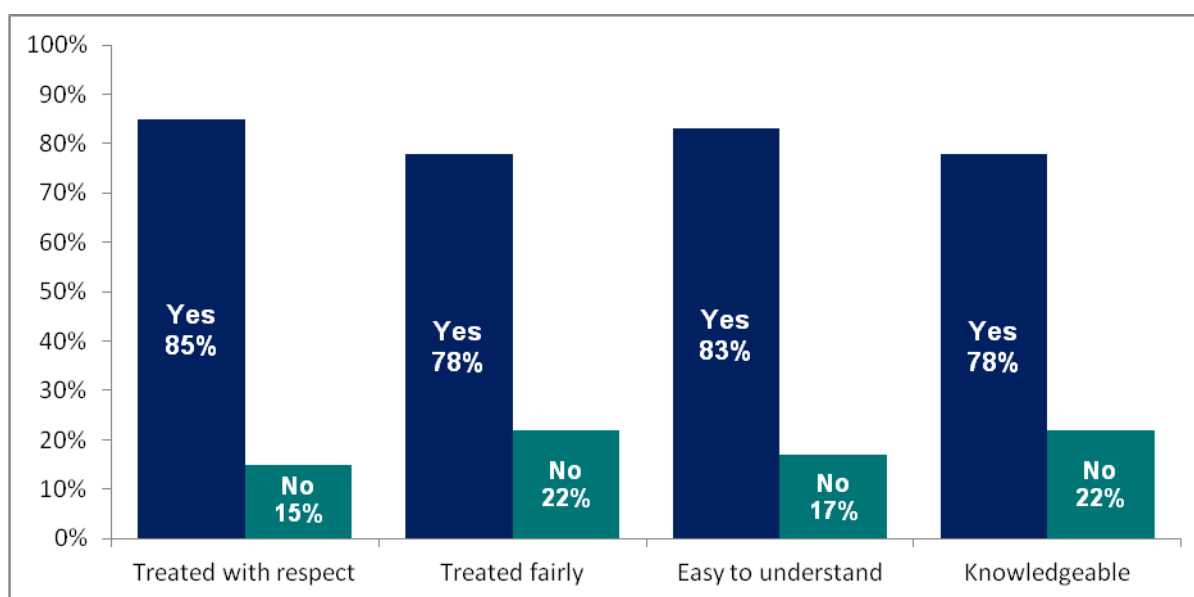
Results

Perception of Ombudsman staff

During 2015/16, 88% of complainants said that they had spoken to a member of staff from the Office. Of these:

- 85% felt they were treated with respect,
- 78% felt they were treated fairly,
- 83% felt staff were easy to understand and
- 78% felt staff were knowledgeable (Figure 1, Table 1).

Figure 1: Complainant perception of Ombudsman staff, 2015/16



Comparisons cannot be made between the results obtained this year for 'treated with respect' and 'treated fairly' as these were new questions added to section two of the questionnaire³. Comparisons can be made however for 'easy to understand' and 'knowledgeable'. Results for these aspects show that complainant's perceptions of staff have not changed over the last five years (Table 2).

Target 1:

The Office aims to:

'maintain a level of 70% of complainants to feel that they have been dealt with fairly by the Office'.

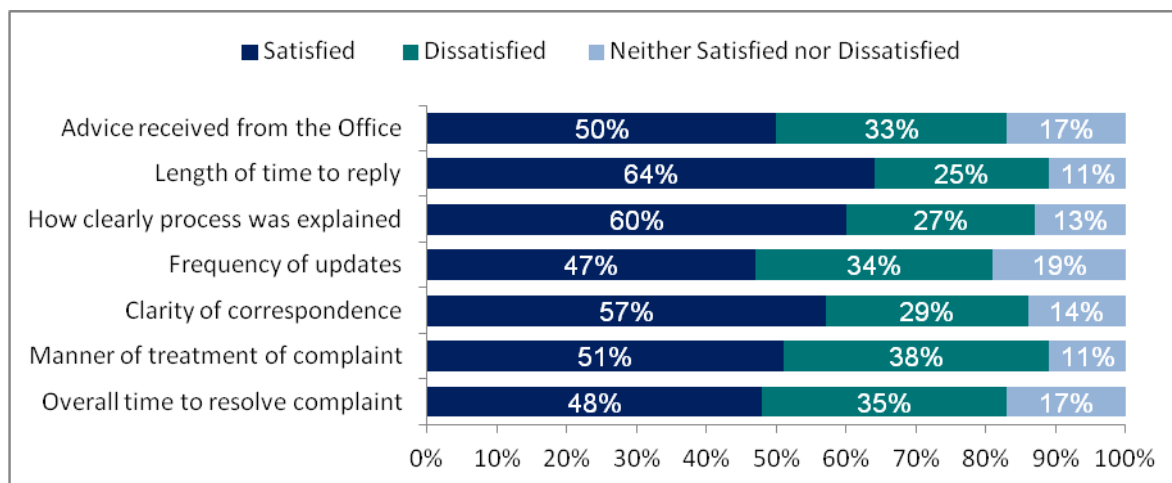
In 2015/16, the Office met and exceeded this target as 78% of complainants felt that they were treated fairly by the Office.

³ See Appendix 3: Questionnaire for details of changes

Level of satisfaction with aspects of the complaints process

In 2015/16, complainants were most likely to be satisfied with the length of time taken to respond after the incident was reported to the Office, how clearly the process was explained to them and the clarity of correspondence. Complainants were least likely to be satisfied with the frequency of progress updates and the overall outcome of their complaint (Figure 2, Table 3).

Figure 2: Complainant satisfaction with aspects of the complaints process, 2015/16



Results show, that for those aspects that can be compared⁴ (Tables 4 to 8):

- A greater proportion of respondents were less satisfied with the advice they received from the Office in 2015/16 when compared to the previous four years. Conversely dissatisfaction levels increased in 2015/16.
- Respondents were just as satisfied with the length of time taken to reply after the incident was first reported in 2015/16 as they were last year; however satisfaction levels have decreased compared to earlier years.
- Similar levels of satisfaction have been recorded over the last five years for how clearly the complaints process was explained to complainants.
- A greater proportion of respondents were less satisfied with the frequency of updates in 2015/16 when compared with 2012/13 and 2014/15. In 2015/16, dissatisfaction levels increased for this aspect of the complaints process compared with other years.
- Similar levels of satisfaction have been recorded over the last five years for the overall time taken to resolve the complaint.

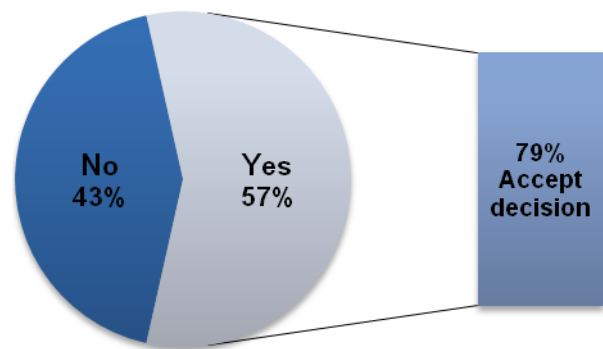
⁴ See Appendix 3: Questionnaire for details of changes

Final decision

In 2015/16, complainants were asked, for the first time, if they understood and accepted the reasons the Office gave for reaching the final decision about their complaints.

Almost three fifths of respondents understood the reason given for reaching the final decision and, of those, almost eight out of ten respondents accepted why we reached that decision (Figure 3, Table 9).

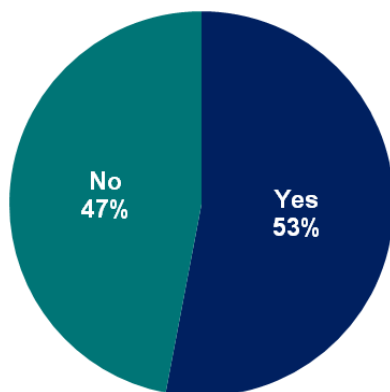
Figure 3: Understanding and accepting the reasons for final decision



Dealing with complaints independently

In 2015/16, complainants were also asked, for the first time, if they felt that we dealt with their complaint independently (i.e. free from influence from others)?

Figure 4: Dealing with complaints independently



Results show that respondents were almost equally likely to agree with this statement as they were to disagree with it (Figure 4, Table 11).

Level of satisfaction with the service received

In 2015/16, respondents were just as likely to be satisfied with the service they received from the Office as they were to be dissatisfied (Figure 5, Table 12).

The overall satisfaction level remained virtually unchanged between 2011/12 and 2014/15. This year however, the proportion of respondents who were satisfied with the service they received has decreased⁵ (Figure 6, Table 13).

Figure 5: Overall satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the service received from the Office, 2015/16

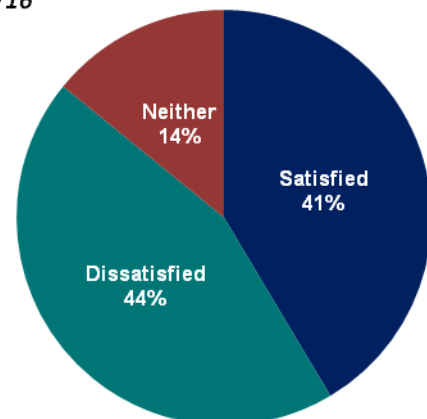
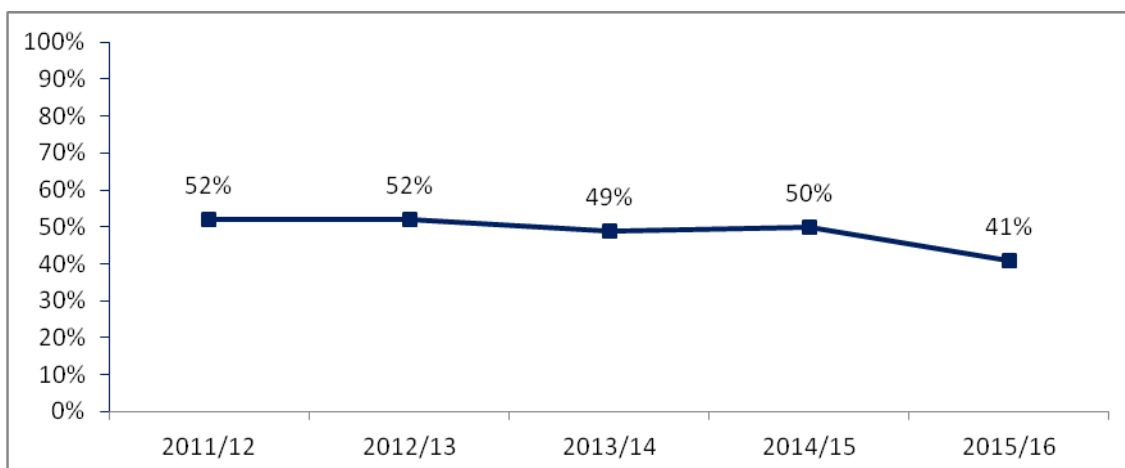


Figure 6: Overall satisfaction with the service provided, 2011/12 to 2015/16



Target 2:

The Office has made a commitment to have:

‘at least 60% of complainants to be satisfied with the service they receive’.

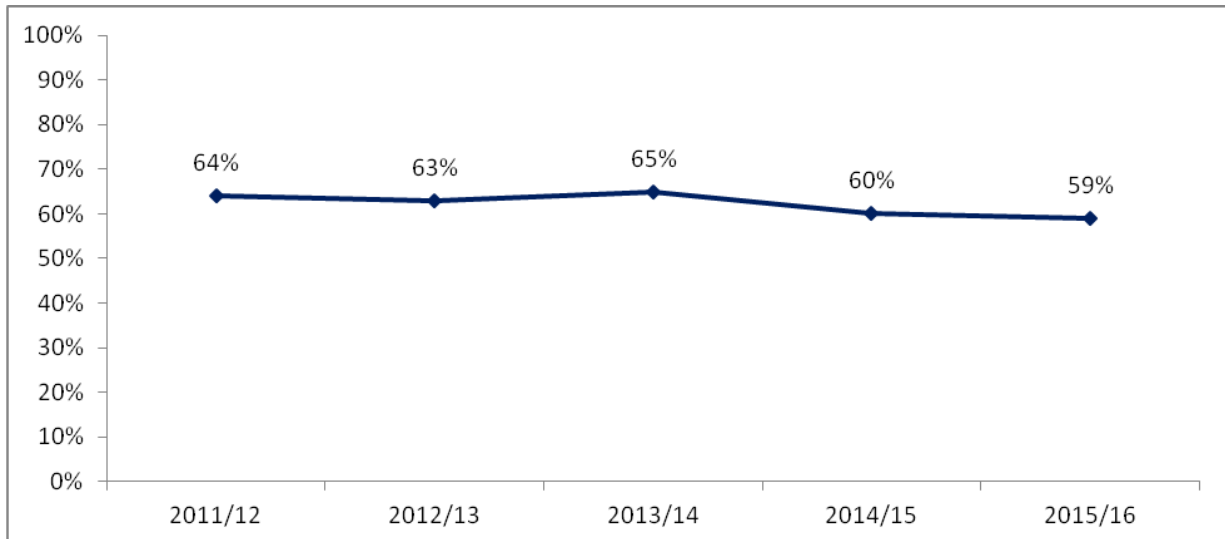
In 2015/16, the Office failed to meet this target as 41% of complainants were satisfied with the service received.

⁵ Changes to the questionnaire may impact on the responses made – see Appendix 2, Additional Information

Contact the Office again

In 2015/16, 59% of complainants said they would contact the Office again if they had a new complaint about the police. This proportion is similar to the levels seen over the last five years (Figure 6, Table 14).

Figure 6: Complainants who would contact the Office again, 2011/12 to 2015/16



Appendix 1: Results Tables

Table 1: Perception of Ombudsman staff, 2015/16

	Yes	No
Treated with respect	85%	15%
Treated fairly	78%	22%
Easy to understand	83%	17%
Knowledgeable	78%	22%

Note: question asked to complainants who had spoken to a member of staff

Table 2: Perception of Ombudsman staff, 2011/12 to 2015/16

	Easy to Understand	Knowledgeable
2011/12	90%	83%
2012/13	91%	80%
2013/14	88%	80%
2014/15	85%	77%
2015/16	83%	78%

Note: question asked to complainants who had spoken to a member of staff

Table 3: Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with aspects of the complaints process, 2015/16

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
Advice received from the Office	50%	33%	17%
Length of time to reply	64%	25%	11%
Clarity of explanation	60%	27%	13%
Frequency of updates	47%	34%	19%
Clarity of correspondence	57%	29%	14%
Manner of treatment of complaint	51%	38%	11%
Overall time to resolve complaint	48%	35%	17%

Table 4: Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with advice received from the Office, 2011/12 to 2015/16

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
2011/12	61%	21%	18%
2012/13	59%	27%	14%
2013/14	60%	22%	18%
2014/15	57%	24%	19%
2015/16	50%	33%	17%

Table 5: Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with length of time to reply after initially making complaint, 2011/12 to 2015/16

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
2011/12	72%	16%	12%
2012/13	71%	17%	11%
2013/14	69%	19%	12%
2014/15	67%	21%	12%
2015/16	64%	25%	11%

Table 6: Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with how clearly the process was explained, 2011/12 to 2015/16

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
2011/12	63%	19%	18%
2012/13	66%	21%	14%
2013/14	60%	23%	17%
2014/15	62%	22%	16%
2015/16	60%	27%	13%

Table 7: Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with frequency of progress updates, 2011/12 to 2015/16

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
2011/12	55%	25%	20%
2012/13	58%	26%	16%
2013/14	54%	27%	19%
2014/15	59%	26%	15%
2015/16	47%	34%	19%

Table 8: Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the overall time to resolve the complaint, 2011/12 to 2015/16

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
2011/12	53%	32%	16%
2012/13	51%	31%	18%
2013/14	50%	34%	17%
2014/15	50%	35%	16%
2015/16	48%	35%	17%

Table 9: Understand the final decision, 2015/16

	Yes	No
Understand the reasons for final decision	57%	43%

Table 10: Accept the final decision, 2015/16

	Yes	No
Acceptance of final decision	79%	21%

Note: Asked of those who understood the reasons for the final decision

Table 11: Dealing with the complaint independently, 2015/16

	Yes	No
Dealt with complaint independently	53%	47%

Table 12: Overall satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the service received from the Office, 2015/16

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
Overall satisfaction/dissatisfaction	41%	44%	14%

Table 13: Satisfaction with the service provided, 2002/03 to 2015/16

Year	% Satisfied
2002/03	56%
2003/04	67%
2004/05	58%
2005/06	58%
2006/07	63%
2007/08	57%
2008/09	59%
2009/10	65%
2010/11	59%
2011/12	52%
2012/13	52%
2013/14	50%
2014/15	50%
2015/16	41%

Table 14: Contact the Office again, 2004/05 to 2015/16

Year	Yes	No
2004/05	75%	25%
2005/06	70%	30%
2006/07	76%	24%
2007/08	73%	27%
2008/09	69%	31%
2009/10	71%	29%
2010/11	69%	31%
2011/12	64%	36%
2012/13	63%	37%
2013/14	65%	35%
2014/15	60%	40%
2015/16	59%	41%

Appendix 2: Additional Information

Data use:

The information that is collected from the survey is used to monitor and evaluate the service provided to people who have made a complaint to the Ombudsman's Office and identify any issues that arise in a timely manner. The data are also used by this Office to comply with the targets identified in the Office's business plan detailed in the 'Annual Report and Accounts Report, 2015/16', which is available on the Office's website (www.policeombudsman.org). The data may also be used to answer enquiries from the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Department of Justice, Parliament and the public.

Data quality:

The survey forms are issued by the Research and Statistics Team of the Office following closure of a complaint. Once the information from the forms has been transferred to an electronic file approximately 10% of the data entries are validated by a supervisor on a regular basis.

Understanding the statistics:

Questionnaires are normally issued to all complainants when their complaint is closed. However, in some cases forms were not issued, for example when it is impossible to identify the complainant (i.e. the Complaints Officer has recorded the complainant as anonymous), because the complainant's address is not recorded or if only an email address is available. Forms were also not issued in the following circumstances:

- Case has been closed 'Duplicate or Repetitive',
- Complaints where it is known the complainant has died,
- Section 55 referrals or OPONI call ins (non complaint matters) and
- Complaints made by or on behalf of organisations.

In other cases the complainant contacts the Office to ask to be excluded from future surveys. Whilst Office staff aim to persuade the complainant by explaining the background to the survey in some cases the complainant still wishes to be excluded. In 2015/16, juvenile complainants were surveyed although up to this point they had been excluded from the survey.

The rationale for amending the complainant satisfaction questionnaire in 2015/16 was detailed in the introduction section of this report. Comparisons could not be made between this year and previous years for all of the questions asked but where possible five year trend data was provided. Along with the changes made to the questions asked another key change was the reduction of the Likert scale from five possible responses to three responses. These changes may or may not have had an impact on the results obtained this year, however this will not be apparent, if at all, until more data is obtained for future years.

Conventions:

Figures provided in the tables may not add up to 100% due to the effect of rounding. Figures may also be subject to minor revision and these will be notified in accordance with our revisions policy. The revisions policy can be accessed at www.policeombudsman.org.

Statistical significance tests have been carried out on the findings and differences are only reported where they have been found to be statistically significant at the 5% ($p < 0.05$) level of probability (two tailed). This means that for any observed result that is found to be statistically significant one can be 95% confident that this has not happened by chance.

Further information:

The data used in this report is available in the accompanying excel spreadsheet. Additional information showing trends in responses over time will be made available in June 2016 and will be published on the Office's website.

Appendix 3: Questionnaire

Complainant Satisfaction Form (V2)

IN CONFIDENCE

Please take this opportunity to tell us about the service you received.

1. Did you speak to a member of staff?

Yes ☐ (Please go to question 2)

No ☐ (Please go to question 3)

2. If yes (i.e. you did speak to a member of staff), did you think they...

	Yes	No
treated you with respect	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
treated you fairly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
were easy to understand	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
were knowledgeable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Number of characteristics reduced from ten to four.

3. Were you satisfied or dissatisfied with each of the following aspects of service?

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied Nor Dissatisfied
the advice you received from the Office	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
the length of time we took to reply after you initially made your complaint	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
how clearly we explained the process to you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
how often you were told about the progress of your complaint	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
the clarity of our correspondence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
the manner in which we treated your complaint	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
the overall time taken to resolve your complaint	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Likert scale reduced from five response options to three options.
- Number of aspects reduced from eight to seven.
- Two aspects changed

PLEASE TURN OVER

Thinking about the final closure letter you received...

4. Did you understand the reasons we gave for reaching our final decision about your complaint?

Yes ☐

No ☐

- Questions 4 & 5 added.

5. Did you accept why we reached this decision?

Yes ☐

No ☐

6. Do you think that we dealt with your complaint independently?
(i.e. free from influence from others)

Yes ☐

No ☐

- Question 6 added.

7. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the service you received?

Satisfied ☐

Dissatisfied ☐

Neither Satisfied
nor Dissatisfied

- Likert scale reduced from five response options to three options.

8. Would you contact us again if you had a new complaint about the police?

Yes ☐

No ☐

9. If you have any further comments about the service you received please detail them below.

Thank you for completing this form



Additional copies of this and other publications are available from:

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

Website: <http://www.policeombudsman.org>