



Statistical Bulletin:

The Office of the Police Ombudsman for
Northern Ireland, 2022/23



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INTRODUCTION

This Statistical Bulletin presents information on complaints and allegations received by the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland in 2022/23, as well as showing trend information for the last five years.

It was produced independently by Statisticians from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) who are seconded to the Police Ombudsman's Office (the Office) and work alongside Police Ombudsman personnel. It has been produced in accordance with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

Why publish statistics?

The information presented in this bulletin has been produced to meet the needs of a variety of individuals and organisations who have a particular interest in the issue of police complaints.

The Police Ombudsman's Office uses these statistics to monitor trends in complaints and allegations received and how they were dealt with. It also uses this information to monitor performance against key performance indicators.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) has an interest in knowing about the trends and patterns in complaints made about their officers and use this information to help identify and address particular problems.

The Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB) use this material in developing an understanding of what aspects of police conduct are attracting public concern and whether these concerns are of substance.

The Police and Community Partnerships (PCSPs) also use the data to monitor police performance in their areas and to identify any particular concerns.

The general public have a right to know how both their police service and their police complaints service are performing.

Understanding the information in this bulletin

We hope this report will provide readers with a clear understanding of the trends and patterns in complaints and allegations received by the Police Ombudsman's Office over the last five years.

We have provided information on what we believe would be the main questions asked by readers: how many complaints and allegations have we received, what were they about and how were they resolved, for example.

Commentary has been provided throughout, which aims to provide some context and explanation or interpretation of the emerging trends.

However, a concise document like this can only ever provide part of that context. Other factors may be at play which cannot be reflected in this bulletin. Readers may also want to consider issues as varied as the levels of the police budget and the service it can provide, as well as the level of awareness of the police complaints system itself.

Similarly, making comparisons across geographical areas may not always be straightforward. Areas have different levels of population. Even that distinction can have further categories. Whether people travel to an area during normal office hours for their work or move into it in the evening to socialise can have an effect on the number of complaints we receive.

It is also difficult to make valid comparisons between the number of complaints and allegations received across Northern Ireland, England and Wales, and Scotland as each area operates a different system.

Terminology

For those with less knowledge of the Police Ombudsman's Office, we have provided an explanation of the police complaints process in the appendices of this bulletin. We have tried to keep the terminology used in this bulletin 'jargon' free, but where this has not been possible we have provided a glossary with an explanation of those terms.

Could we improve this bulletin?

From the wealth of detailed information within the Police Ombudsman's Office, we have tried to produce a bulletin that focuses on the key issues, which we believe, would be of interest to the public and the police. We have also tried to make that information as clear and easily understood as possible. Have we succeeded? We would be keen to hear any views you have on this bulletin.

If you wish to provide any feedback or comments on this publication, please see our contact details on the back page or email us via info@policeombudsman.org.

Conventions

Percentages in the tables and text are rounded to the nearest whole number, and thus may not always add up to 100.

A SUMMARY OF THE KEY TRENDS IN COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE POLICE

- The number of complaints received by the Police Ombudsman's Office during 2022/23 increased by 8% from the previous year. This is also the highest number of complaints received by the Office in the last five years.
- Criminal Investigation was the most common situation which gave rise to complaints, as it was in each of the last five years.
- Complaints have increased in seven of the 11 police districts and have decreased in four of the 11 police districts. The largest proportional increase was in Fermanagh & Omagh (G District) where the number of complaints increased by 49%. While, the largest proportional decrease was in Antrim & Newtownabbey district (L District) where complaints decreased by 12%.
- The most frequent allegations received during the year were allegations of Failure in Duty, of Oppressive Behaviour, and of Incivility.
- Just under half (47%) of complaints dealt with by the Police Ombudsman's Office were subject to a full investigation. In 13% of these complaints, the Office found evidence to substantiate all or part of the complaint or identified another concern during the investigation.
- On 10 occasions during the year, the Police Ombudsman recommended that the Director of Public Prosecutions should prosecute an officer.
- The Police Ombudsman recommended on 183 occasions that a police officer should receive a discipline or a performance action.

COMPLAINTS

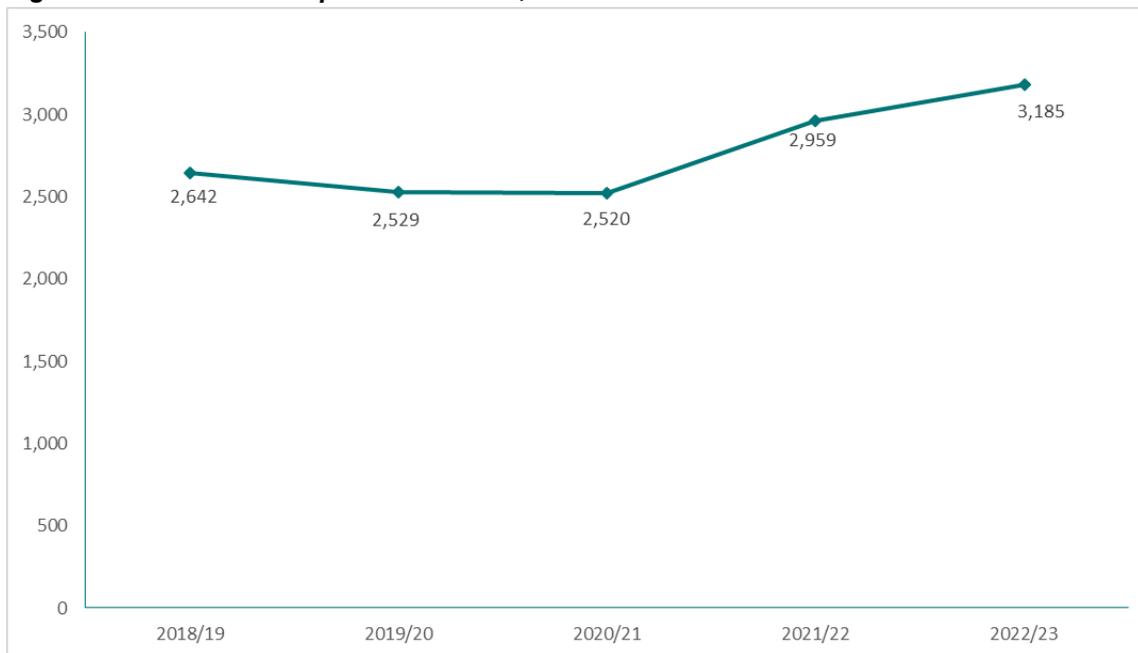
The volume of complaints and matters received

The number of complaints received and matters referred for independent investigations by the Police Ombudsman’s Office during 2022/23 was 3,185 (Figure 1, Table 5). This is an 8% increase from the previous year, 2021/22.

The number of complaints received in 2022/23 is the highest number of complaints since 2015/16, when 3,042 complaints were received that year - Please see accompanying spreadsheet for complaint counts since 2000/01.

For the purpose of clarity of reporting, this statistical bulletin will refer to all its incoming work by the term ‘complaints’.

Figure 1: Number of complaints received, 2018/19 to 2022/23



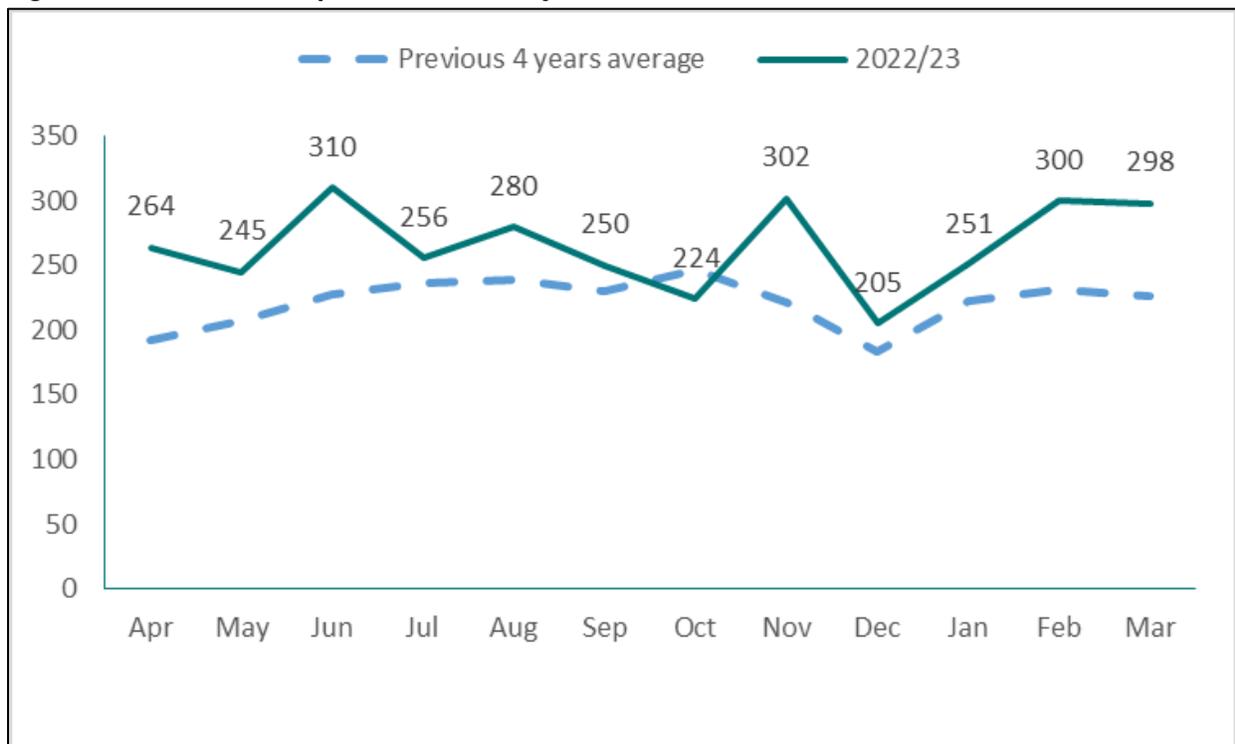
During 2022/23, the vast majority of complaints (96%) were from members of the public. In addition, 1% were matters referred to the Office for an independent investigation from the PSNI or from another organisation¹ or matters in which the Police Ombudsman has initiated an own motion investigation. A further 3% were classified as ‘Other’. These are mostly comprised of notifications from police which did not result in an investigation (Table 6).

¹ Public Prosecution Service (PPS), Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB) or the Department of Justice (DOJ).

Complaints received each month

During 2022/23, the Office received between 205 and 310 complaints each month. For all months, except October 2022 the number of complaints received was higher than the monthly average for the previous four years. The seasonality trend that the Office typically receives more complaints in the summer months than in the winter months is evident this year with the Office receiving 90 more complaints over the summer period than the winter period (Figure 2, Table 7).

Figure 2: Number of complaints received by month, 2018/19 to 2022/23



Who people were complaining about

The Police Ombudsman's Office has the remit to investigate complaints about officials from a number of bodies. These include police officers within the PSNI and police officers with the Northern Ireland Airport Constabulary and Belfast Harbour Police. The remit was extended, for serious incidents only, to include certain Home Office officials in 2014/15 and National Crime Agency Officials from 20th May 2015.

During 2022/23, the vast majority of complaints received (99%) were about the PSNI, this includes both police officers and 'designated civilians' within the Service (Tables 1 and 8).

Table 1: Complaints received by organisation, 2022/23

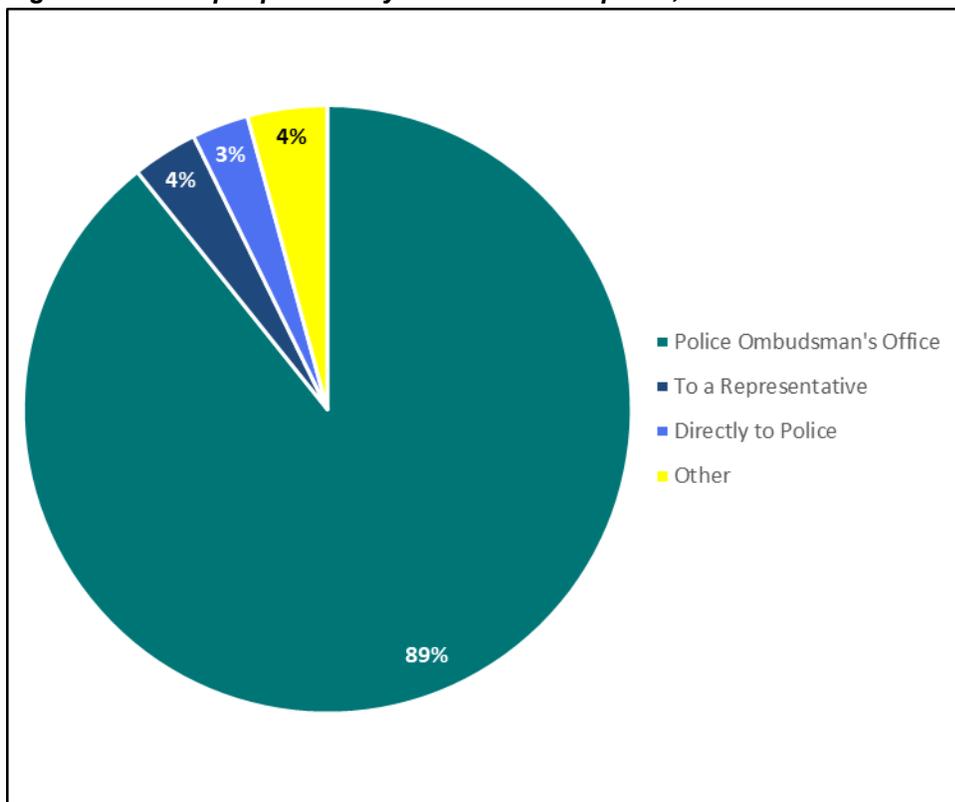
Organisation	No. of complaints received
PSNI	3,146
NI Airport Constabulary	3
UK Border Force & Immigration Enforcement	2
Ministry of Defence Police	1
Other / Unknown	33
Total	3,185

Where people initially made their complaints

Although the Police Ombudsman's Office is the only body which can by law deal with complaints about the conduct of police officers, people do not always make their complaints directly to the Office. Sometimes their complaint is made in the first instance to the PSNI itself or to someone such as a solicitor or a political representative.

Almost nine in every ten complaints (89%) received during 2022/23 were made directly to the Office without the use of an intermediary (Figure 3, Table 9).

Figure 3: Where people initially made their complaint, 2022/23



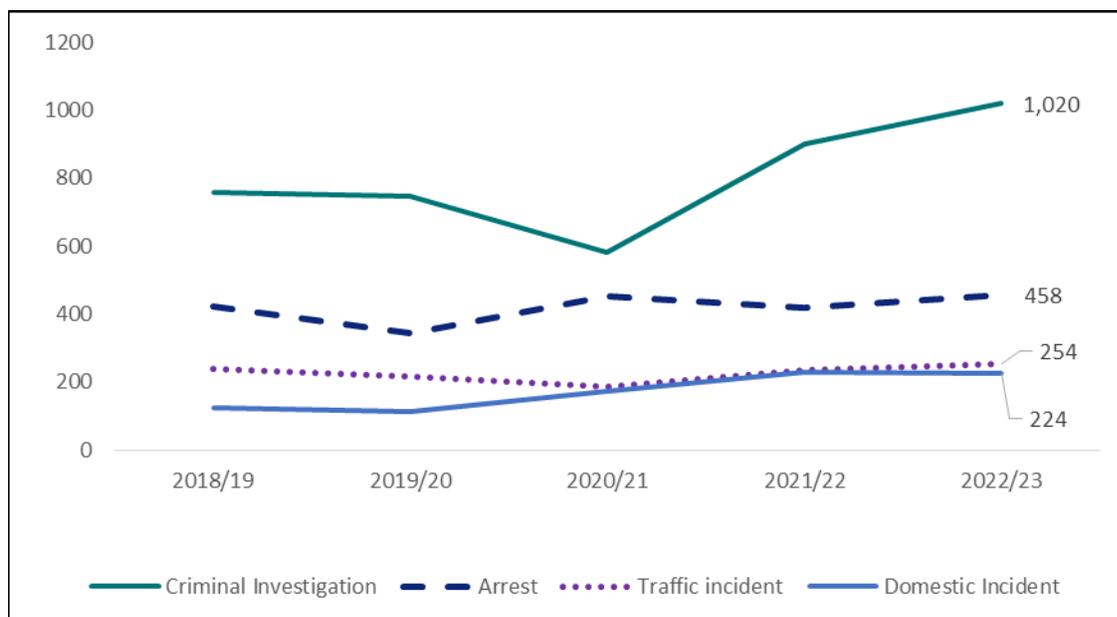
Over the last five years, the proportion of complaints made directly to the Office has increased, from 77% in 2018/19 to 89% in 2022/23. Whilst the proportion received via a representative and via the police decreased.

Situations that gave rise to complaints

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.

Criminal investigations were the most common situations giving rise to complaints during 2022/23, followed by arrests, traffic related incidents and domestic incidents (Figure 4, Table 10).

Figure 4: Complaints arising, 2018/19 to 2022/23
Complaints Arising from Criminal Investigation, Arrest, Traffic Related Incidents & Domestic Incident



During 2021/22, the Office received 1,020 complaints arising from a criminal investigation. This accounts for 32% of all complaints received. The number of complaints made following a criminal investigation has increased by 13% this year.

There were 458 complaints arising from arrests during 2022/23. The number of complaints made following an arrest increased by 9% from 2021/22.

There were 254 complaints made following a traffic related incident during 2022/23. The number of complaints made following a traffic related offence has increased by 8% this year.

There were 224 complaints arising from domestic incidents (such as neighbourhood disputes) received during 2022/23. They have decreased by 3% since the previous year.

Police searches resulted in 203 complaints. This is a 26% increase from the previous year.

There were 149 complaints arising from police enquiries. This is a 20% decrease from the previous year.

The number of complaints made to the Office connected to events during the period known as 'the Troubles' and which required consideration by its Historical Investigations Directorate has decreased this year from 46 during 2021/22 to 17 during 2022/23. This reduction sees the

number of complaints received related to ‘the Troubles’ return to figures closer to number of complaints received each year between 2018/19 to 2020/21 following a large increase in complaints received in 2021/22.

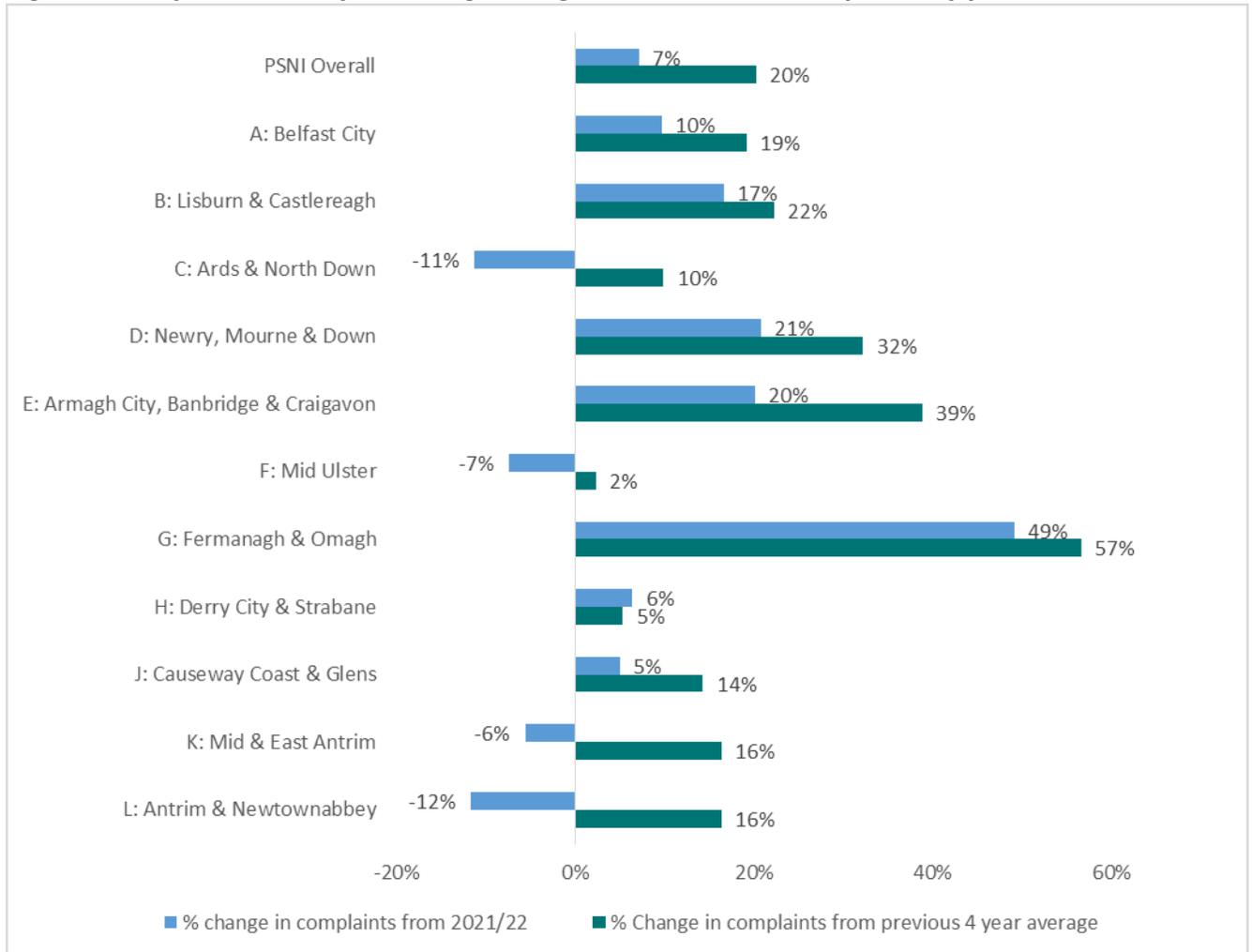
During 2022/23, there were 34 complaints arising from how the police dealt with domestic violence incidents. This is a slight increase compared to the number of complaints in the previous year.

Complaints arising from parades or demonstrations fluctuate year on year. During 2022/23, there were 12 complaints.

Complaints received by police district^{2,3}

Seven of the 11 police districts in Northern Ireland had an increase in complaints during this year, when compared with 2021/22 (Figure 5, Table 11).

Figure 5: One-year and four-year average change in the number of complaints by police district



The above chart shows that complaints at police district level have increased against the four year average, however, four of the 11 police districts show a decrease in complaints when compared to last year. The data in the chart reflects the fact that 2022/23 had the highest number of complaints in the last five years. The paragraphs below examine each police district in more detail, they are in alphabetical order of the police district name (i.e. A district to L district).

² This is only for complaints made about the PSNI and does not include any other organisations.

³ This is the location where the incident complained about occurred which may be different from the district that the officer is assigned to.

We would remind the reader that making comparisons between policing districts is something to be done with caution. Policing districts are not identical and differ on issues such as population numbers, policing numbers, the level of public interaction with police and even issues such as whether they have a vibrant night-time economy.

Belfast City District (A District) received the largest number of complaints, 916 during 2022/23. It accounts for more than one quarter (29%) of all complaints received by the Office. Complaints from this district increased by 10% from last year and have increased by 19% from the four year average.

Complaints in Lisburn & Castlereagh City (B District) have increased by 17% from last year to 140 complaints. This is a 22% increase from the four year average.

In Ards & North Down (C District) complaints decreased by 11% to 195 complaints. This is still a 10% increase from the four year average.

Complaints from Newry, Mourne & Down (D District) increased by 21% during 2022/23 to 198 complaints. This is also a 32% increase when compared to the four year average.

The number of complaints from Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (E District) increased by 20% from 2021/22. They have increased by 39% when compared to the four year average.

In Mid Ulster (F District) complaints have decreased by 7% compared to 2021/22, but have increased by 2% compared to the four year average.

Complaints from Fermanagh & Omagh (G District) have increased by 49% from the previous year. The 2022/23 figure of 179 complaints is an increase of 57% when compared to the 4 year average. This is the district with the largest percentage increase when compared to both last year and the four year average.

The 200 complaints received in Derry City & Strabane (H District) shows an increase of 6% this year and a 5% increase compared to the four year average.

Complaints from Causeway Coast & Glens (J District) have increased by 5% from last year. This is also a 14% increase compared to the four year average.

In Mid & East Antrim (K District) complaints have decreased by 6% this year. Complaints from this police district have, however, increased by 16% compared to the four year average.

Complaints for Antrim & Newtownabbey (L District) have decreased by 12% from last year. This is still equivalent to a 16% increase when compared to the four year average.

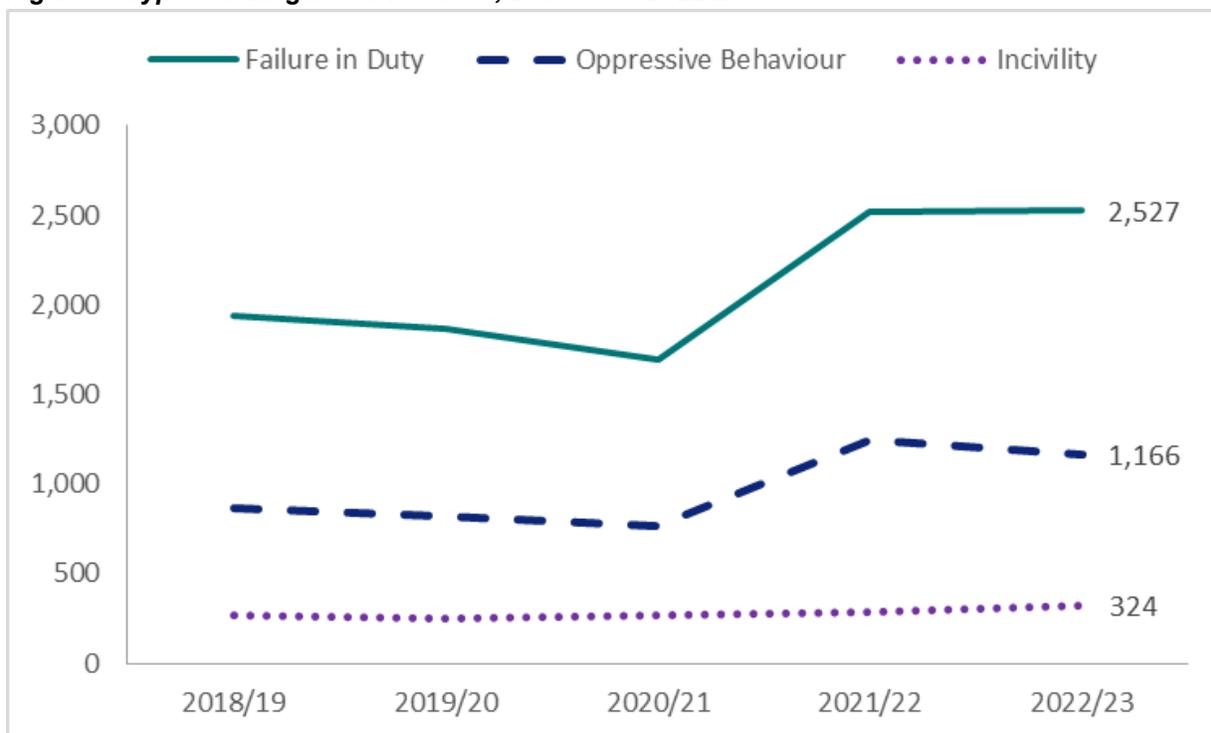
ALLEGATIONS

A person who makes a complaint may express a number of different concerns about the exchange they have had with a police officer. The Police Ombudsman’s Office will record this as one complaint broken down into a number of ‘allegations’.

During 2022/23, the Police Ombudsman’s Office received 5,185 allegations (Table 12). This is almost the same number of allegations received in 2021/22.

The most frequent allegations received during the year were allegations of a Failure in Duty, of Oppressive Behaviour, and of Incivility (Figure 6, Table 13).

Figure 6: Types of allegations received, 2018/19 to 2022/23



Failure in Duty allegations

During 2022/23, 2,527 allegations received by the Police Ombudsman’s Office alleged a Failure in Duty by a police officer. This equates to 49% of all allegations received in the year and is a very small increase on the number received in 2021/22.

More than half (52%) of the Failure in Duty allegations received in 2022/23 related to the conduct of police investigations or police response to incidents (Table 14). This is the same trend as in each of the last five years.

The second most frequently reported Failure in Duty allegations were about failures in contact; such as failing to provide updates, failing to return telephone calls and failing to reply to correspondence. These allegations account for 12% of all the Failure in Duty allegations.

Oppressive Behaviour allegations

There were 1,166 Oppressive Behaviour allegations received during 2022/23. This is a 6% reduction in the number received during 2021/22.

More than half (56%) of the Oppressive Behaviour allegations received during 2022/23 alleged oppressive conduct by an officer/s not involving an assault.

Allegations of serious non sexual assaults and sexual assaults accounted for 4% of all the Oppressive Behaviour allegations received (Table 15).

Incivility allegations

During 2022/23, there were 324 Incivility allegations received. This was a 13% increase from the previous year.

More than half of Incivility allegations were about an officer being uncivil whilst on the telephone (31%) or being uncivil at a domestic residence (23%) (Table 16).

Other allegations⁴

The number of allegations decreased across all other allegation types in 2022/23 with the exception of Mishandling of Property & Unlawful/Unnecessary Arrest/Detention (Table 13).

⁴ A further breakdown of allegations is available on the Police Ombudsman's website in the accompanying Excel tables.

Allegations regarding the use of police equipment

Allegations about the use of police equipment accounted for 2% of all the allegations received during 2022/23 (Table 17). This was lower than in the previous two years. It should be noted that a contributing factor to the higher numbers in 2020/21 and 2021/22 was the number of automatic referrals around the use of Spit and Bite Guards. These were introduced in March 2020 and automatically referred by PSNI during parts of 2020/21 and 2021/22 as part of the Police Ombudsman's review around the implementation and usage of them.

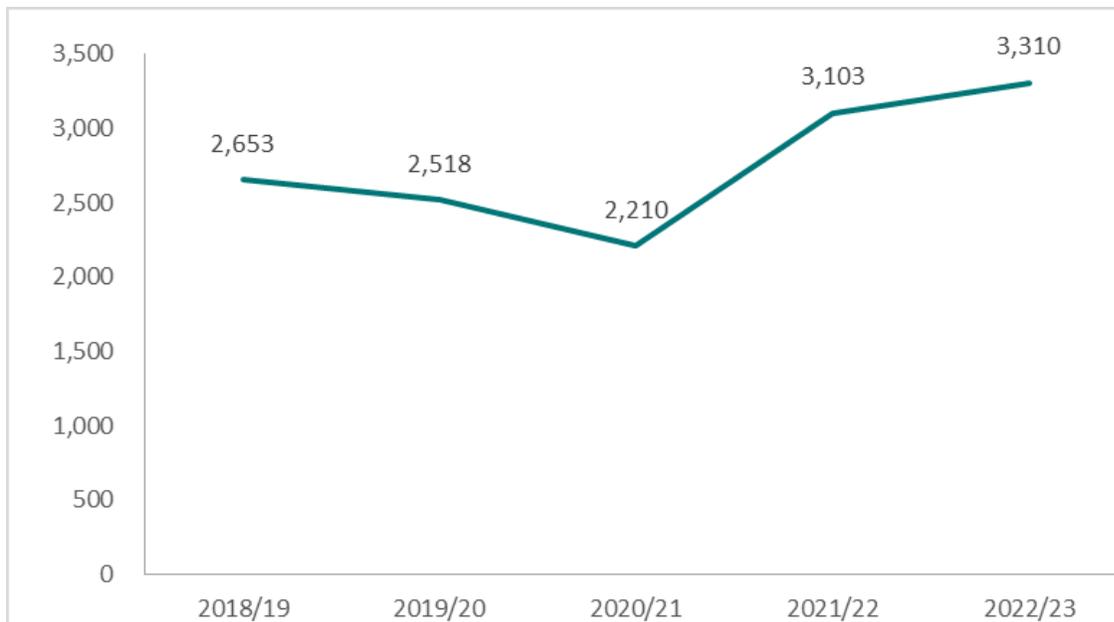
During 2022/23, allegations about the use of Handcuffs accounted for 48% of all allegations concerning police equipment.

COMPLAINT CLOSURES

The Police Ombudsman’s Office closes complaints once it has reached a view on the matter involved, when the complainant and the police officer have reached a level of agreement on the contested matter or when the person who made the complaint no longer wishes to engage with the process.

The Office closed 3,310 complaints during 2022/23 (Figure 7, Table 18). This is a 7% increase from the previous year. It is also the highest number of complaints closed by the Office in the last five years.

Figure 7: Number of complaints closed by year, 2018/19 to 2022/23



The number of complaints being closed by the Office has increased this year continuing the trend which started last year. This reflects the increase in the number of complaints received over the same time period.

Types of complaint closures

There are four main stages as to when complaints will be closed (Table 2). These are Complaints closed following initial assessment, following initial inquiries, resolved informally & following a full investigation. Complaints closed that relate to the 'Troubles' are totalled separately regardless of the stage that they were closed.

Table 2: Complaint closures, 2022/23

Complaint Closures	2022/23
Total Complaints Closed	3,310
Complaints closed following initial assessment	644
Not a matter for the Police Ombudsman	422
Call in/Call out - No Further action or Notification only	102
Other (Initial Assessment)	120
Complaints closed following initial inquiries	858
Complainant did not fully engage	681
Ill-founded	25
Withdrawn	115
Other (Initial Inquiries)	37
Complaints resolved informally	234
Complaints closed that relate to the 'Troubles'	31
Complaints closed following a full investigation	1,543
Complaint substantiated or an issue of concern	204
Not substantiated and no issue of concern identified	1,339

Just under two in ten (19%) complaints closed during 2022/23 were closed after the initial assessment. These complaints tend to be closed fairly quickly, and often involve issues which were either not a matter for the Police Ombudsman's Office or they were notifications from the PSNI which did not meet the threshold for a full investigation.

A larger proportion of complaints (26%) were closed following initial inquiries. Initial inquiries involves getting more information from the complainant, looking for evidence regarding the matter complained about or making initial contact with the police officer(s) involved. Complaints closed at this stage are normally those where the complainant ceases to engage with the Office.

Complaints that were informally resolved accounted for 7% of all complaints closed. This is an alternative way to resolve less serious complaints such as those alleging rudeness or incivility.

Just under half (47%) of complaints closed were fully investigated. This is when a Police Ombudsman's Investigator or Complaint's Officer reaches a conclusion on at least one of the allegations in the complaint. The Office found evidence to substantiate all or part of the complaint or identified another concern during the investigation in 13% of these fully investigated complaints during 2022/23.

Trends in the types of complaint closures

The proportion of complaints being closed within each of the four stages have remained fairly stable over the last five years with only a few notable changes (Table 18).

There has been a decrease in the proportion of complaints being closed as ill-founded and an increase in the proportion of complaints being closed as not substantiated since 2018/19. This is due to a change within the Office on how complaints are processed.

Note: Following representation from key stakeholders and in order to make the reporting clearer, it has been decided to report our closures at complaint level. To do this, each of the closures within a complaint have been ranked, and the closure with the highest ranking used as the most representative of the overall complaint closure.

The highest ranking closure is also used to determine at which stage in the complaints process the complaint was closed: after initial assessment, initial inquiries, informal resolution, or following a full investigation. While this method will provide a clear and largely accurate picture in the majority of cases, there will be a few instances when this will not be the case. These discrepancies will only occur between initial assessment and initial inquiries stages.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO PPS AND POLICE

Public Prosecution Service (PPS)

Where the Police Ombudsman investigates a matter and identifies that a criminal offence may have been committed, legislation requires that the matter is reported to the PPS. A file will be sent to the PPS that sets out the information that has been established and makes a recommendation as to whether or not the police officer/staff member should face a criminal charge. Irrespective of the Police Ombudsman's recommendation, it will be for the PPS to decide if an officer should be prosecuted.

During 2022/23, the Office sent 173 recommendations to the PPS. The Police Ombudsman recommended that the Director of Public Prosecutions should prosecute an officer or staff member on 10 occasions (Tables 3 & 19).

Table 3: Number of prosecution and no prosecution recommendations made by the Police Ombudsman for an officer/staff member to the PPS, 2022/23

Prosecution for an officer/staff member	2022/23
Recommended	10
Not Recommended	163

Over the last five years, the number of recommendations made to the PPS for prosecution has fluctuated, ranging from five recommendations in 2020/21 to 28 during 2021/22 (Table 19). The numbers made this year are more similar to 2018/29.

Recommendations made to the Chief Constable or Chief Officer

Following the conclusion of any criminal proceedings or investigations that relate to misconduct matters, the Police Ombudsman may make a recommendation to the Chief Constable or the Chief Officer, who will consider whether action should be taken against the police officer/staff member who were the subject of the complaint.

During 2022/23, the Police Ombudsman's Office made 183 recommendations that an officer or staff member should receive either a discipline or a performance action (Table 4). Almost two thirds (64%) of these recommendations were for performance action.

Table 4: Number of recommendations made by the Police Ombudsman for an officer/staff member to receive a discipline or performance action, 2022/23

Discipline or Performance Actions (Regulations Introduced in June 2016⁵)	183
Performance	118
Misconduct Meeting	48
Misconduct Hearing	17

The number of recommendations for a discipline or performance action the Police Ombudsman has made for an officer/staff member has in general fluctuated over the last five years (Table 20a and 20b).

Due to a change in the regulations for discipline in June 2016 it is difficult to make a five year comparison on the types of disciplines recommended over the last five years.

⁵ The Police (Performance and Attendance) Regulations (NI) 2016 and The Police (Conduct) Regulations (NI) 2016 came into force on 1 June 2016

Policy recommendations made to the PSNI

The Police Ombudsman's Office forwarded a total of 49 policy recommendations to Police during 2022/23. These were made up of 11 at a strategic level, 31 at an operational level and seven areas for minor improvement

This is the second highest number of policy recommendations that the Office has made in the last five years (Table 21).

Four policy recommendations were accepted. One related to the use of Body Worn Video (BWV) and three to Service Instructions in respect of lost property, bail checks and wanted persons.

Two recommendations concerning Downlink equipment and joint training between Air Support and PSNI driver Training were deemed by police to be in place already.

One recommendation in relation to completion of bail log records was considered to be a duplicate of a recommendation previously made.

A response is awaited in respect of the remaining 42 policy recommendations. These include recommendations around the handling and dissemination of intelligence, seizure of drugs within custody suites, training for all custody staff, training for call handlers, completion of search records, completion of collision report forms, the use of body worn video, oversight of complex investigations within Public Protection Branch and the use of dedicated and specially trained community/diversity officers to work with Belfast Multi Cultural Association (BMCA) and other groups/communities.

INFORMAL RESOLUTION

Complaints made that are of a less serious nature, usually about incivility or certain types of failure in duties, may be considered for Informal Resolution. This involves an officer/staff member speaking to both the officer(s)/staff member(s) complained about and the complainant with a view of reaching a satisfactory resolution. Prior to proceeding with this process the consent of the complainant must be obtained.

During 2022/23, 15% of complaints received were considered to be suitable for Informal Resolution and of these 69% of the persons making the complaint agreed for it to be dealt with through Informal Resolution (Table 22).

During 2022/23, 231 complaints reached a successful conclusion through the informal resolution process (Table 23) which is two thirds (67%) of all complaints reaching a conclusion from this process.

PSNI OFFICERS

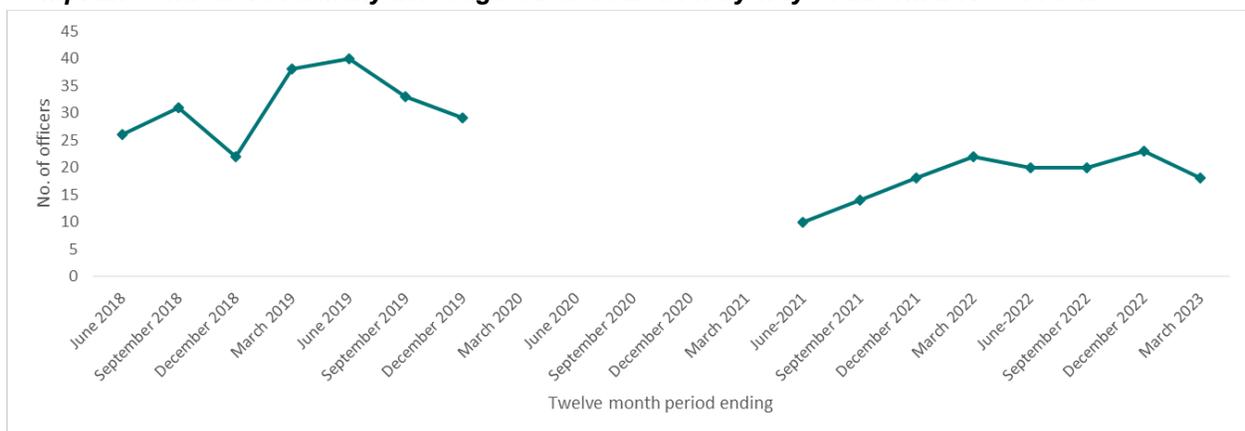
The information on the number of officers with multiple complaints is produced from quarterly snapshots of the CHS system. During 2020/21 these quarterly snapshots were not produced as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result this information has not been updated between March 2020 and March 2021.

In 2022/23, 40% of the complaints recorded by the Police Ombudsman’s Office had an identified officer associated with them. The other complaints which do not identify an officer tend to be those which have been closed at an early stage, such as those which were not a matter for the Police Ombudsman to investigate and those where the complainant did not fully engage.

Most of the officers (85%) identified within complaints in 2022/23 were Constables, while fewer complaints were received about officers of higher ranks (Table 24). This is a similar profile to that of the composition of officers within the police service.

Information on officers identified within a complaint is shared with the Legacy & Justice Department within the PSNI. The PSNI initiate management intervention when an officer receives three or more complaints that were either formally investigated or dealt with by way of Informal Resolution in the previous 12 months.

**Figure 8: Officers that received three or more complaints, 2018/19 to 2022/23
Complaints that were formally investigated or dealt with by way of Informal Resolution**



Note: During the course of an investigation, officers associated with the complaint can vary; as evidence is gathered more officers can be linked to the complaint and some may be removed. For this reason, to allow direct comparison across time, the information that was reported at the end of each quarter is not updated.

APPENDIX 1: STATISTICAL TABLES

Table 5: Complaints received, 2018/19 to 2022/23

Year	Complaints
2018/19	2,642
2019/20	2,529
2020/21	2,520
2021/22	2,959
2022/23	3,185

Table 6: Complaints and matters, 2018/19 to 2022/23

Complaints/Other Matters	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Complaints from members of the public	2,507	2,373	2,280	2,794	3,050
Matters referred to the Office	14	2	5	21	12
Matters the Police Ombudsman has chosen to investigate	7	11	9	13	15
Other	114	143	226	131	108
Total	2,642	2,529	2,520	2,959	3,185

Table 7: Complaints received by month, 2018/19 to 2022/23

Month Complaint Received	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
April	205	215	135	211	264
May	213	195	186	237	245
June	226	176	222	287	310
July	243	236	207	258	256
August	226	252	229	248	280
September	187	192	290	251	250
October	252	234	232	270	224
November	230	185	221	249	302
December	169	163	211	188	205
January	243	230	151	268	251
February	208	259	207	248	300
March	240	192	229	244	298
Total	2,642	2,529	2,520	2,959	3,185

Table 8: Complaints received by organisation, 2018/19 to 2022/23

Organisation	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)	2,613	2,496	2,489	2,898	3,146
Northern Ireland Airport Constabulary	0	2	1	1	3
UK Border Force & Immigration Enforcement	1	0	0	0	2
Ministry of Defence Police	0	0	0	4	1
Harbour Police	6	0	1	6	0
National Crime Agency	3	1	3	1	0
Other / Unknown	19	30	26	49	33
Total	2,642	2,529	2,520	2,959	3,185

Table 9: Complaints received by where the initial complaint was made, 2018/19 to 2022/23

Source of complaints	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Directly with Police Ombudsman's Office	2,043	2,086	2,079	2,485	2,843
Via Representative	313	183	124	197	111
Directly with the Police	151	104	77	112	96
Other (includes referrals)	135	156	240	165	135
Total	2,642	2,529	2,520	2,959	3,185

Table 10: Main situations giving rise to complaints, 2018/19 to 2022/23

Main Situation	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Criminal Investigation	757	746	581	902	1,020
Arrest	422	342	451	420	458
Traffic incident	239	216	188	236	254
Domestic Incident	125	113	173	230	224
Search	191	146	184	161	203
Police Enquiries	151	160	144	187	149
Domestic Violence	32	39	28	29	34
Complaints relating to the 'Troubles'	26	22	21	46	17
Parade/Demonstrations	13	31	40	20	12
Police enforcing COVID19 restrictions	N/A	1	53	37	3
Other	549	588	579	615	682
Unknown	137	125	78	76	129
Total	2,642	2,529	2,520	2,959	3,185

Table 11: Complaints received by police district, 2018/19 to 2022/23

Police District	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
A: Belfast City	737	718	784	835	916
B: Lisburn & Castlereagh	119	103	116	120	140
C: Ards & North Down	169	154	167	220	195
D: Newry, Mourne & Down	142	150	143	164	198
E: Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	219	203	215	259	311
F: Mid Ulster	108	119	127	135	125
G: Fermanagh & Omagh	112	129	96	120	179
H: Derry City & Strabane	186	179	207	188	200
J: Causeway Coast & Glens	201	210	180	221	232
K: Mid & East Antrim	165	166	185	230	217
L: Antrim & Newtownabbey	149	173	146	230	203
Other organisation/ Unknown	335	225	154	237	269
Total	2,642	2,529	2,520	2,959	3,185

Table 12: Number of allegations received, 2018/19 to 2022/23

Year	Allegations
2018/19	4,153
2019/20	3,952
2020/21	3,745
2021/22	5,207
2022/23	5,185

Table 13: Types of allegations⁶, 2018/19 to 2022/23

Types of Allegations	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Failure in Duty	1,940	1,869	1,692	2,516	2,527
Oppressive Behaviour	862	819	764	1,244	1,166
Incivility	267	246	267	286	324
Unlawful/Unnecessary Arrest/Detention	208	159	106	207	234
Police Searches	207	160	171	194	193
Mishandling of Property	97	99	82	106	108
Traffic	49	39	30	60	59
Malpractice	42	41	57	46	43
Discriminatory Behaviour	46	37	33	55	34
Section 55 Referral	23	13	13	34	27
Allegations relating to the 'Troubles'	25	21	19	45	18
Other	387	449	511	414	452
Total	4,153	3,952	3,745	5,207	5,185

⁶ A full breakdown of allegation sub types is available in the accompanying Excel spreadsheet

Table 14: Failure in Duty allegations, 2018/19 to 2022/23

Failure in Duty Allegations	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Conduct of police investigations / incident response	1,078	1,004	871	1,279	1,320
Failure in contact	272	264	177	336	295
Failure in record management	142	171	131	263	260
Failure in duty of care	60	92	126	141	149
Conduct in custody suite	101	97	128	124	141
Failure to act impartially	57	67	61	114	109
Other failure in duty	230	174	198	259	253
Total	1,940	1,869	1,692	2,516	2,527

Table 15: Oppressive Behaviour allegations, 2018/19 to 2022/23

Oppressive Behaviour Allegations	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Oppressive Conduct (OC Not Involving Assault)	386	436	365	706	653
Other Assault	328	254	244	348	334
Harassment (Series of Like Incidents)	102	76	124	139	131
Sexual Assault	29	29	19	40	37
Serious non-sexual assault	17	24	12	11	11
Total	862	819	764	1,244	1,166

Table 16: Incivility allegations, 2018/19 to 2022/23

Incivility Allegations	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Incivility By Officer On The Telephone	65	67	67	90	99
Incivility At Domestic Residence	67	65	68	71	73
Incivility At Police Station	26	24	24	24	32
Incivility When Stopped For A Traffic Offence	28	25	34	24	29
Incivility To Person Under 18 Years	5	4	4	5	1
Other incivility	76	61	70	72	90
Total	267	246	267	286	324

Table 17: Allegations regarding the use of police equipment, 2018/19 to 2022/23

Police equipment	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Handcuffs	57	37	10	61	55
Spit and bite guards	N/A	N/A	97	45	5
Taser	15	24	24	22	9
CS / PAVA spray	22	17	17	19	26
Baton	14	5	9	8	6
AEP/Baton Round/Riot Gun	2	5	6	9	5
Misuse/Discharge Firearm	5	6	4	5	5
Other	1	1	4	2	4
No weapon used	4,037	3,857	3,574	5,036	5,070
Total	4,153	3,952	3,745	5,207	5,185

Table 18: Complaint closures, 2018/19 to 2022/23

Complaint Closures	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Total Complaints Closed	2,653	2,518	2,210	3,103	3,310
Complaints closed following initial assessment	423	496	481	583	644
Not a matter for the Police Ombudsman	282	307	205	353	422
Call in/Call out - No Further action or Notification only	108	147	221	142	102
Other (Initial Assessment)	33	42	55	88	120
Complaints closed following initial inquiries	988	773	685	920	858
Complainant did not fully engage	667	654	536	774	681
Ill-founded	217	19	7	21	25
Withdrawn	92	80	115	101	115
Other (Initial Inquiries)	12	20	27	24	37
Complaints resolved informally	214	191	127	279	234
Complaints closed that relate to the 'Troubles'	26	9	3	49	31
History Complaint	26	9	3	49	31
Complaints closed following a full investigation	1,002	1,049	914	1,272	1,543
Complaint substantiated or an issue of concern	210	135	106	143	204
Not substantiated and no issue of concern identified	792	914	808	1,129	1,339

Table 19: Occasions Police Ombudsman recommended prosecution/no prosecution⁷ for an officer/staff member, 2018/19 to 2022/23

Recommendations to PPS	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Criminal Charges recommended	8	21	5	28	10
No Criminal Charges recommended	202	194	73	134	163
Total	210	215	78	162	173

Table 20a: Occasions Police Ombudsman recommended a discipline or performance action⁸ for an officer/staff member, 2018/19

Discipline Sanctions (Prior to 2016 Regulations)	2018/19
Modification of Designation	0
Training/Ops/Supervision	2
Management Discussion	0
Advice & Guidance	1
Superintendent's Written Warning	3
Formal discipline proceedings	4
Total	10

Table 20b: Occasions Police Ombudsman recommended⁹ a discipline or performance action for an officer/staff member, 2018/19 to 2022/23

Regulations Introduced June 2016)	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Performance	55	57	36	107	118
Misconduct Meeting	71	87	26	51	48
Misconduct Hearing	1	9	6	13	17
Total	127	153	68	171	183

⁷ This is the number of times a file was sent to the PPS recommending that either an officer or staff member should be prosecuted or not prosecuted. If multiple complaints are received about the same incident the recommendation will only be counted once.

⁸ Disciplinary Regulations (pre 6th November 2000); a Code of Conduct (6th November 2000 to 13th March 2003); and a Code of Ethics (since 14th March 2003).

⁹ This is the number of times a discipline or performance recommendations was sent to the PSNI or another organisation for an officer or staff member. Where more than one complaint was received about the same incident the recommendation is only counted once.

Table 21: Outcome of policy recommendations made, 2018/19 to 2022/23

Policy recommendations made to PSNI	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Accepted (Full/Partial)	5	15	0	32	4
Already in Place	6	2	1	5	2
Alternative solution	0	4	1	3	0
No Longer Applicable	0	0	0	0	0
Not Accepted (Rejected)	0	1	1	1	0
Duplicate	0	0	0	0	1
Still under consideration	0	2	4	9	42
Total	11	24	7	50	49

Table 22: Complaints suitable for Informal Resolution (IR) with consent obtained, 2018/19 to 2022/23

IR Complaints Received	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number of Complaints	2,642	2,529	2,520	2,959	3,185
Complaints suitable for IR	471	386	320	601	493
Consent for IR obtained	319	268	213	397	340
Consent for IR not obtained	152	118	107	204	153

Table 23: Outcome of Informal Resolution process, 2018/19 to 2022/23

IR Resolved	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Successful	214	178	120	277	231
Failed	100	66	50	97	109
Withdrawn	8	6	5	3	4
Total	322	250	175	377	344

Table 24: Rank of officer in the PSNI complained about, 2017/18 to 2021/22

Rank	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Designated Civilian	79	40	20	35	25
Constable	1,738	1,460	1,241	1,733	1,712
Sergeant	230	226	159	208	220
Inspector and Above	50	49	49	52	60

Table 25: Number of officers with three or more complaints that were formally investigated or dealt with by way of Informal Resolution, 2018/19 to 2022/23¹⁰

Twelve-month period ending	Number of officers
June 2018	26
September 2018	31
December 2018	22
March 2019	38
June 2019	40
September 2019	33
December 2019	29
June 2021	10
September 2021	14
December 2021	18
March 2022	22
June 2022	20
September 2022	20
December 2022	23
March 2023	18

¹⁰ The information from March 2020 to March 2021 is not available. This is due to the Office partially closing on three separate occasions as part of the 'lockdown' restrictions in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

APPENDIX 2: UNDERSTANDING THE COMPLAINTS PROCESS

To help understand the information in this report, we have provided this short summary of the police complaints service in Northern Ireland and how it works.

What we do

The Police Ombudsman's Office provides for the independent and impartial investigation of complaints about the police in Northern Ireland. The Police Ombudsman is committed to providing a police complaints service in the way they think is best suited to secure the confidence of the public and the police. The Police Ombudsman believes that for such confidence to be forthcoming, it is essential that people are informed about the nature of the work the Office carries out.

The Police Ombudsman has the remit to investigate the conduct of officers within the following organisations which operate in Northern Ireland:

- Police Service of Northern Ireland including Designated Civilians
- Belfast Harbour Police
- Belfast International Airport Police
- National Crime Agency (NCA) officers in Northern Ireland
- Certain Home Office staff using police functions in Northern Ireland
- Ministry of Defence Police in Northern Ireland

The Office deals primarily with complaints made by members of the public about the conduct of police officers. It also deals with matters referred to it by the PSNI Chief Constable. The following are incidents that the Chief Constable is required to refer to the Police Ombudsman:

- Any fatal road traffic collisions involving police officers
- Any death which may have occurred as a result of the actions of a police officer
- Any other serious allegation

It also deals with matters referred to it by the NIPB, the DoJ and the PPS.

The Police Ombudsman also has the power to initiate an investigation without a complaint having been made if it appears to them to be desirable and in the public interest.

In most circumstances the Police Ombudsman can only investigate incidents which have occurred in the previous 12 months. However, there is no time limit on the investigation of grave matters, or where exceptional circumstances exist. Many of the investigations the Office is undertaking into incidents which happened between 1968 and 1998 (the period known as the Troubles) are matters the Police Ombudsman viewed as grave or exceptional.

The Police Ombudsman does not investigate complaints about officers whose conduct has been the subject of disciplinary or criminal proceedings; or complaints about off-duty police officers, unless the fact that they are a police officer is relevant to the complaint. The Office also does not investigate matters relating to the direction and control of the police service by the Chief Constable.

How we deal with complaints

All complaints are recorded on our Case Handling System, even where they are later determined to be outside the remit of the Office.

A complaint from a member of the public will invariably include a number of allegations. For example, if a person alleges a police officer pushed them *and* was rude to them, it would be recorded as one complaint with two allegations on the system.

Once a complaint has been received, it will become subject of an initial assessment. This will involve logging it onto our system and making an assessment as to whether the matter is something the Police Ombudsman's Office can deal with and if so, how best to do so.

If the complaint is something we deal with, the Office will consider if the matter can be resolved informally rather than being sent straight for investigation. Before we decide to take the Informal Resolution approach, the person who made the complaint must agree. If this proves unsuccessful, the Police Ombudsman will refer the complaint for investigation.

When a matter is suitable for investigation, a complaints officer or an investigation officer will set about making the initial inquiries necessary before an investigation commences. This will involve getting more information from the complainant, such as an official statement of complaint.

When a formal investigation has been completed, if the evidence indicates that police officers may have committed a criminal offence or breached the police Code of Ethics, the Police Ombudsman can recommend that they are prosecuted and/or disciplined.

Where the Police Ombudsman considers that a criminal offence may have been committed by a member of the police, they must send a copy of the investigation report to the PPS, making appropriate recommendations. The PPS then decides whether or not to prosecute the police officer under investigation.

If the Police Ombudsman decides that no criminal offence has been committed, they are required to consider whether it is appropriate to recommend disciplinary proceedings. If the Chief Constable is unwilling to administer the recommended discipline, the Police Ombudsman may, direct them to do so.

APPENDIX 3: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

This glossary has been designed to assist users of our statistical information to understand the terms which we use to describe data contained in the statistical bulletin. The terms are listed in alphabetical order.

Advice and Guidance

This is an informal discipline sanction for officers.

Allegation

Each complaint can be broken down into one or more allegations. These are all the individual behaviours or issues being complained about. For example, if a person alleges a police officer pushed them *and* was rude to them, it would be recorded as one complaint with two allegations on the system.

Call in/Call out (no further action)

These are situations where the Police Ombudsman's Office is 'called in' to consider an incident but determines at an early stage that there is no requirement for any further investigation.

Conduct in custody suite

This is a Failure in Duty allegation category. It includes incidents where the complainant was denied access to legal advice or medical attention while they were detained in custody. In addition it covers instances where it is alleged the officer did not inform the detained person of their rights and entitlements, or the officer did not keep accurate custody records.

Conduct of police investigations / incident response

This is a Failure in Duty allegation category and includes allegations where the complainant has alleged that the unsatisfactory conduct of either ongoing or completed police investigations, including the inappropriate disclosure of information. Also included would be allegations that the police failed to carry out any investigation into an incident or were excessively slow to respond to an incident.

Complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by or on behalf of a member of the public about a member of the police service or an officer of another service over which the Office has jurisdiction.

For the purpose of clarity of reporting, the term complaints refer to complaints made by members of the public, matters referred to the Office from other organisation, and matters that the Police Ombudsman has decided to investigate.

Failure in contact

This is a Failure in Duty allegation. It includes incidents where the complainant has alleged a police officer; failed to keep arranged appointments, return telephone calls, or reply to correspondence. It also includes incidents when an officer failed to keep the complainant updated with progress of an investigation or police enquiries.

Failure in duty of care

This is a Failure in Duty allegation. Where it is alleged that the police officer failed to take appropriate action to ensure the safety or well-being of the complainant or third party for whom they have responsibility.

Failure in record management

This is a Failure in Duty allegation. It involves a failure of police to keep accurate, complete or up to date police records. It also includes the failure of officers to provide information or documentation relating to the complainant or a third party.

Failure to act impartially

This is a Failure in Duty allegation. The complainant alleges an officer failed to adopt an independent approach and/or failed to act in a fair and impartial manner.

Historical Investigation

This is an investigation (potentially criminal and /or misconduct) into the actions of police where the allegation(s) made are considered Grave or Exceptional, "Troubles" related (1969-1998) and predates the establishment of the Good Friday Agreement, 10 April 1998.

Ill-founded

This is a type of complaint closure. These are cases where it became clear during initial inquiries that an allegation was without bases or foundation.

Incivility

This is a category within allegations. It refers to allegations such as the police officer being rude, showing a lack of respect, being abrupt or displaying a general lack of sensitivity.

Informally resolved (Informal Resolution)

This is a process offered to complainants who have made less serious allegations, e.g. rudeness or incivility. It involves a senior police officer speaking to both the officer(s) involved and the complainant with a view to reaching a satisfactory resolution of the complaint. It requires that a record of the outcome has been obtained from police confirming that the matter has been resolved.

Malpractice

These allegations can include any allegation in relation to perjury, other allegations of falsehood, any allegation that evidence was obtained in an irregular manner or under duress and allegations of concealment or tampering with evidence.

Management Discussion:

Management Discussion is an informal discipline sanction. It involves a discussion between the officer concerned and a more senior officer regarding the allegation.

Misconduct Hearing

This is a discipline action under the Police (Conduct) Regulations (NI) 2016 and came into force on 1 June 2016. It is a meeting where the officer may be dealt with by a disciplinary action up to and including a final written warning.

Misconduct Meeting

This is a discipline action under the Police (Conduct) Regulations (NI) 2016 and came into force on 1 June 2016. It is a hearing where the officer may be dealt with by a disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

Mishandling of property

This allegation category includes any allegation involving theft or loss of property (including money), unreasonable retention of property, damage to property, failure to account for money or property and improper disposal of property.

Oppressive Behaviour

This is an allegation type and includes situations where the complainant alleged that the officer has behaved in an oppressive manner. They can include allegations of oppressive conduct, harassment, and assault, including sexual assault.

Performance

A recommendation to initiate unsatisfactory performance procedures for an officer.

Residual matters

A small number of residual matters are included in the number of allegations (usually 1-2% of allegations each year). A residual matter is one identified by the Office's Investigator, which has not been previously complained of by the complainant. Examples include failure to complete notebook records, anomalies in custody record, and failure to supervise situations adequately.

Section 55 referral

Not all matters the Police Ombudsman deals with come to us as complaints from members of the public. Certain public bodies, including the PSNI, the Policing Board, the Department of Justice and the Public prosecution Service can refer matters to us for consideration. This is done under section 55 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998.

Superintendent's Written Warning

This is a formal written warning from a police officer's Superintendent.

APPENDIX 4: DATA AVAILABILITY AND QUALITY

Statistical information on complaints and allegations is derived from the CHS, an integrated and comprehensive ICT system that covers all key aspects of receiving and processing a complaint. It captures data about the complainant, the complained against parties, the incident and allegations made. Data can be downloaded and exported to a number of commonly used software packages for analysis (Excel, Access, SPSS¹¹). In addition the Office uses the DI Diver reporting tool and the CHS has a number of management reports run directly from a menu on the system.

The data used for this publication was extracted from the CHS on the 7th April 2023, and thus includes all information recorded on the system up to the 6th April 2023.

Changes made to the CHS during 2018/19

Two changes were made to the CHS during 2018/19 that may affect some of the results and comparisons provided in this report.

Firstly, the Office improved the recording practices of notifications from the PSNI. These are incidents that police officers have notified the On-Call team about but they do not meet the threshold for the Chief Constable to refer the incident for an independent investigation or the threshold for the Police Ombudsman to use their power to call themselves into the incident and complete an investigation.

Secondly, is how information about ‘designated civilians’ within the police are recorded on the CHS. In previous, years they had a separate category and were not considered to be complaints about the PSNI and thus in the details neither the complaints nor allegations were assigned to a Police District. Since the beginning of 2018/19, complaints about ‘designated civilians’ were recorded as a complaint about the PSNI and thus both complaints and allegations received will be assigned against a Police District. This may also impact upon some of the discipline recommendations made to the PSNI. This change was made to reflect the change in employment terms of the ‘designated civilian’, on the 7th September 2017 they became direct employees of the PSNI while, previously they were employed via a contract provider.

Data quality

CHS data quality is considered to be high. The system has been designed to limit the incidence of inaccurate data through the use of measures such as logical validation checks, drop down menus for data input and a minimum of free text input. The Police Ombudsman has a dedicated team who assure the quality of CHS content. All data input is completely auditable and allows for an effective quality control procedure to review and,

¹¹ SPSS is a statistical software package developed for use by social scientists.

where necessary, amend key data for the purposes of accurate reporting. When considered necessary, focused data cleansing exercises of key fields are also conducted. Additionally, complete audits of fields with small numbers associated are conducted.

As stated above, substantial validation and quality control procedures are in place to ensure that the data derived from CHS are of high quality. However, there is still the possibility of a small number of errors arising from data input, missing data, failure to update data and errors in communication. The Police Ombudsman estimates that the level of this error is so small that it has no impact on the quality of statistical reporting. However, where errors are identified, corrections are made to reports as soon as practicable. Further details are set out in the Police Ombudsman [statement of revision and errors strategy](#) .

Revisions

The statistics included in this bulletin are taken from a live system and may be subject to future revisions. This means that total number of complaints and allegations may change slightly between those published in previous bulletins.

Revisions can be made for a number of reasons but are mainly due to more information coming to light during the natural course of the Office's work, and the system being updated accordingly. This includes the identification of residual matters; allegations identified by the Investigator that were not previously complained about by the member of the public, such as, the failure of a police officer to complete their notebook, anomalies in custody records or failure to supervise adequately. They typically account for fewer than 2% of all allegations (approximately between 60 to 100 residual allegations annually).

The tables below shows the scale of revisions made between statistics in this bulletin and those in the previous bulletin in June 2022. It demonstrates that the revisions have little impact on the overall trends presented in this bulletin.

Table 26: Revisions made to the number of complaints received between this publication and the previous publication in June 2022.

Financial Year	Previously Published Figures (June 22)	Current Published Figures (June 23)	Scale of Revision (number)	Scale of Revision
2018/19	2,642	2,642	0	0.00%
2019/20	2,529	2,529	0	0.00%
2020/21	2,519	2,520	1	0.04%
2021/22	2,950	2,959	9	0.31%

Table 27: Revisions made to the number of allegations received between this publication and the previous publication in June 2022.

Financial Year	Previously Published Figures (June 22)	Current Published Figures (June 23)	Scale of Revision (number)	Scale of Revision
2018/19	4,152	4,153	1	0.02%
2019/20	3,952	3,952	0	0.00%
2020/21	3,741	3,745	4	0.11%
2021/22	5,151	5,207	56	1.09%

The Office's full strategy for revisions and errors can be found within the publications section of the [Office's website](#).

Data limitations

Because of the nature of some of the highly sensitive material handled by the Police Ombudsman in the investigation of cases, a small proportion of cases will have only limited information available on the CHS. On balance, the Police Ombudsman considers that the assurance of the privacy of the information and individuals associated with this small number of sensitive cases outweighs the need for full access to the data. In practice, the number of cases is so small that the restriction has no impact on the quality of statistical reporting.

Publication

This is an annual statistical bulletin, and publishes information in accordance with the obligation for the Police Ombudsman's Office to report performance on a financial year basis.

As the statistics were taken from a 'live' case handling system, the figures in this bulletin supersede those previously published.

The next annual statistical report is due to be published in June 2024. The exact date will be announced on the website at least four weeks prior to publication.

In addition to the annual bulletin, quarterly updates are published throughout the year. They provide top level information on the number of complaints and allegations received; they are published on the 4th Thursday in the month following the end of the quarter.

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Website: www.policeombudsman.org