



Annual Statistical Bulletin:

The Office of the Police Ombudsman  
for Northern Ireland, 2019/20



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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 2019/20, 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 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 against 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](mailto: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.

## Covid-19 Impact

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic the Office closed in mid-March 2020 to all but essential work, in line with Government advice. The impact on the limited access to the Office is that not all the data quality checks that are normally carried out before publishing this report have been conducted this year and some of the information included in this report are not yet available. Any sections in this report which have either not been updated or where the data may be of a lower quality than previous years have been clearly marked, for open and transparency reasons. All published results are deemed to be of sufficient quality for publication.

## A SUMMARY OF THE KEY TRENDS IN COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE POLICE

- The number of complaints received by the Police Ombudsman's Office during 2019/20 decreased by 5% from the previous year. Some of this decrease will be a direct impact of the lockdown restrictions placed on the country during March 2020.
- Criminal Investigation was the most common situation which gave rise to complaints, as it was in each of the last five years.
- Complaints have decreased in 5 of the 11 police districts. The largest decrease was in Lisburn and Castlereagh City district (B District) where they decreased by 14%. While, the largest increases were in Antrim and Newtownabbey district (L District) and Fermanagh and Omagh district (G District) where both increased by 14%.
- The most frequent allegations received during the year were allegations of Failure in Duty, of Oppressive Behaviour, and of Incivility.
- More than two fifths (42%) 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 20 occasions during the year, the Police Ombudsman recommended that the Director of Public Prosecutions should prosecute an officer.
- The Police Ombudsman recommended on 152 occasions that a police officer should receive a discipline or a performance action.



# COMPLAINTS

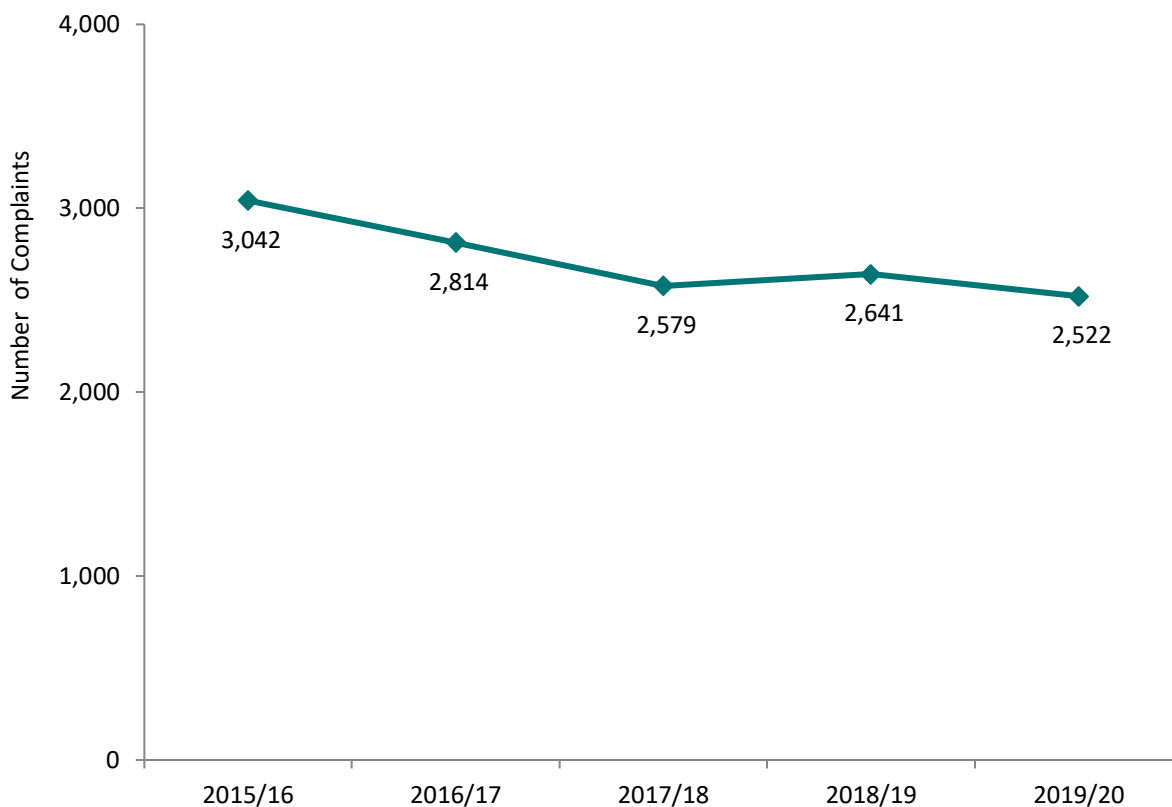
## The volume of complaints and matters received

The number of complaints received and matters referred for independent investigations by the Police Ombudsman’s Office during 2019/20 was 2,522 (Figure 1, Table 5). This is a 5% decrease from the previous year, 2018/19. Some of this decrease will be a direct impact of introduction of the ‘lockdown’ enforced by the Government in response to the COVID-19 disease.

The decrease is also a continuation in the downward trend in complaints received over the last number of years.

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, 2015/16 to 2019/20**



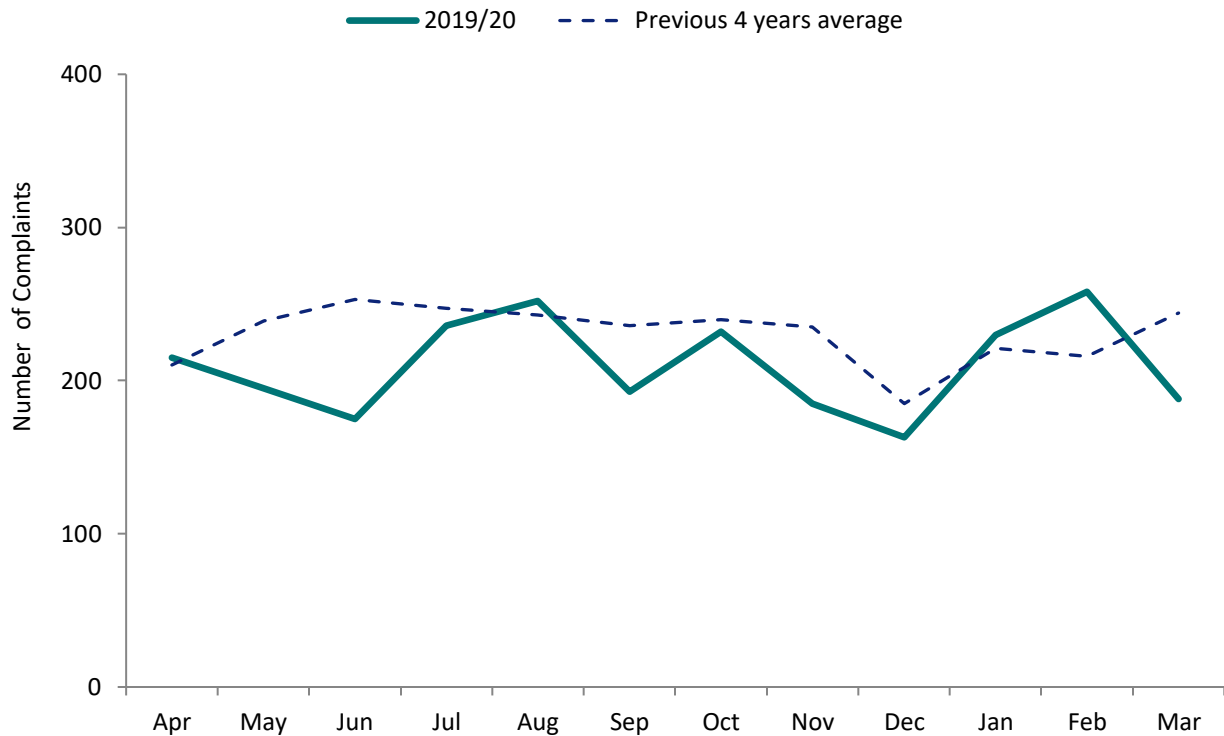
During 2019/20, the vast majority of complaints (94%) were from members of the public. A further 5% were notifications from police which did not result in an investigation, 1% were matters referred to the Office for an independent investigation from the PSNI or from another

organisation<sup>1</sup> or matters in which the Police Ombudsman exercised their power to initiate investigations. (Table 6).

## Complaints received each month

During 2019/20, the Office received between 163 and 258 complaints each month. For all months except April, August, January and February the number of complaints received was fewer 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, the Office received 150 more complaints over the summer period than the winter period (Figure 2, Table 7).

**Figure 2: Number of complaints received by month, 2015/16 to 2019/20**



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

## 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. More recently, the remit was extended, for serious incidents only, to include certain Home Office officials in 2014/15 and National Crime Agency Officials from 20<sup>th</sup> May 2015.

During 2019/20, the vast majority of complaints received (99%) continue to be about PSNI officers, this includes both police officers and 'designated civilians' within the Service (Tables 1 and 8).

**Table 1: Complaints received by organisation, 2019/20**

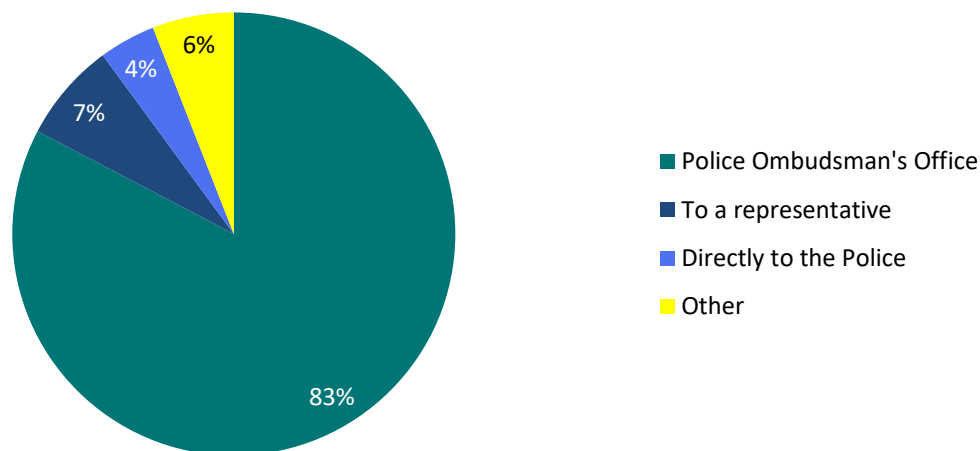
	No. of complaints received
PSNI	2,490
Harbour Police	0
NI Airport Constabulary	2
Certain Home Office officials	1
Ministry of Defence Police	0
National Crime Agency	1
Other / Unknown	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,522</b>

## 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.

More than four fifths (83%) of the complaints received during 2019/20 were made directly to the Office without the use of an intermediary (Figure 3, Table 9).

**Figure 3: Where people initially made their complaint, 2019/20**



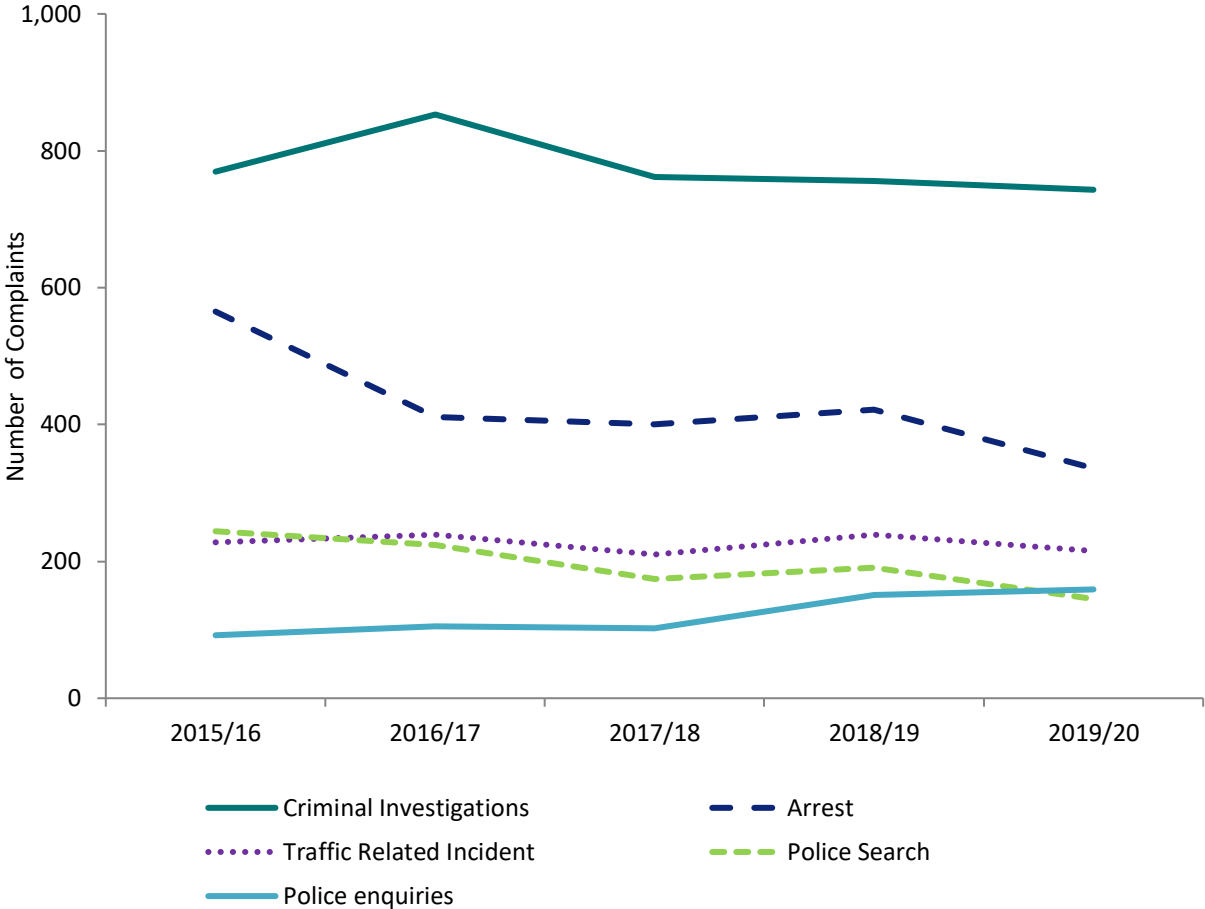
Over the last five years, the proportion of complaints made directly to the Office has increased, from 68% in 2015/16 to 83% in 2019/20. Whilst the proportion received via a representative and via the police decreased. The decrease in the proportion of complaints made via a representative nearly halved since last year, decreased from 12% in 2018/19 to 7% in 2019/20.

### 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 2019/20, followed by arrests, traffic related incidents, police conducting enquiries and police searches (Figure 4, Table 10).

**Figure 4: Complaints arising from Criminal Investigations, Arrests, Traffic Related Incidents & Police Searches, 2015/16 to 2019/20**



During 2019/20, the Office received around 740 complaints arising from a criminal investigation. This accounts for 29% of all complaints received. The number of complaints made following a criminal investigation has remained fairly stable in three of the last five years and has decreased from a high of more than 850 during 2016/17.

There were 336 complaints arising from arrests during 2019/20. The number of complaints made following an arrest decreased by 20% from 2018/19 and has decreased by more than 40% since 2015/16.

More than 210 complaints were made following a traffic related incident during 2019/20. In general, they have remained fairly stable over the last five years.

Complaints following situations where police made enquires but no investigation took place have increased by 5% since last year, to 159 complaints. This is more complaints than in each of the previous four years.

During 2019/20, 145 complaints were received following a police search. This is almost a decrease by one quarter (24%) from the previous year and a 41% decrease since 2015/16.

Around 110 complaints arising from domestic incidents (such as neighbourhood disputes) were received during 2019/20. They have decreased by 26% since 2015/16 and by 10% 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 for the fourth consecutive year. These complaints have decreased from a high of 98 during 2015/16 to 23 during 2019/20.

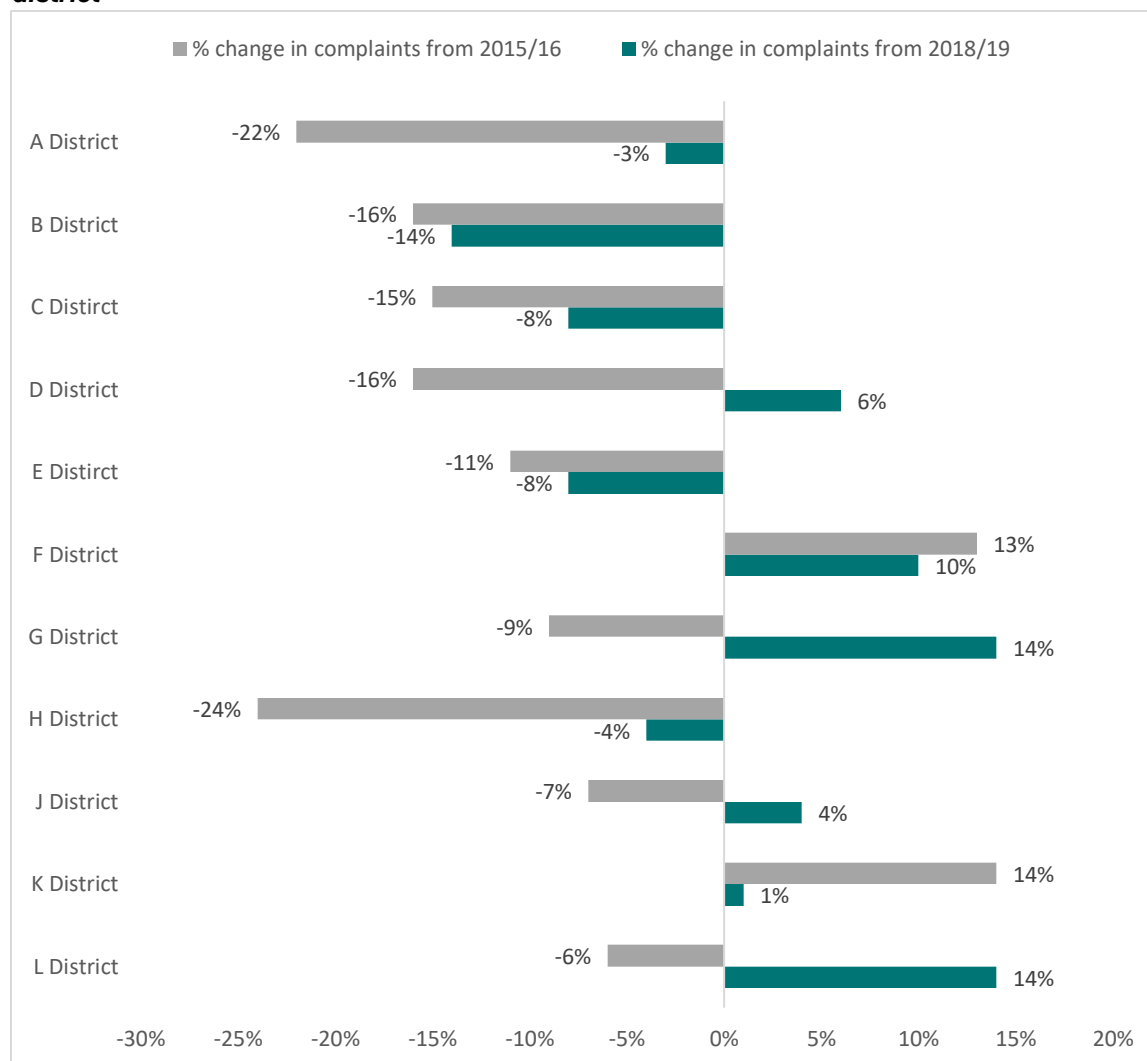
During 2019/20, there were around 40 complaints arising from how the police dealt with domestic violence incidents. This is seven more complaints than last year.

Complaints arising from parades or demonstrations fluctuate year on year. During 2019/20, there were 31 complaints, around 20 of these complaints were in relation to the policing of the Apprentice Boys parade in the Derry City and Strabane police district on the 10<sup>th</sup> August 2019.

## Complaints received by police district<sup>2,3</sup>

Five of the 11 policing districts in Northern Ireland had a decrease in complains during this year, when compared with 2018/19. In the remaining six districts the numbers increased from the previous year (Figure 5, Table 11).

**Figure 5: One-year and five-year percentage change in the number of complaints by police district**



The above chart shows that complaints at police district level in general have been decreasing over the last five years, as more of the grey bars are pointing left than right (showing

<sup>2</sup> This is only for complaints made against the PSNI and does not include any other organisations such as NCA, certain Home Office officials.

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

decreases). However, this trend is not consistent across all districts as two police districts have had an increase in complaints since 2015/16. 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).

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, around 715 during 2019/20. It accounts for more than one quarter (28%) of all complaints received by the Office. Complaints from this district decreased by 3% from last year and have decreased by 22% from five years ago.

Complaints in Lisburn & Castlereagh City (B District) have decreased by 14% from last year to 102 complaints. This is the lowest number of complaints for this district in the last five years.

In Ards & North Down (C District) complaints decreased by 8% to 155 complaints. As for District B they are at their lowest level in the last five years.

Complaints from Newry, Mourne & Down (D District) increased by 6% during 2019/20 to 151 complaints. Although, they have increased from last year they are lower than they were five years ago (a 16% decrease since 2015/16).

Complaints from Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (E District) are at their lowest level in five years. They have decreased by 11% over the last five years and by 8% from last year. During 2019/20 they had 202 complaints.

In Mid Ulster (F District) complaints have increased in both of the last two years. During 2019/20 they increased by 10% from the previous year to 119 complaints.

Complaints from Fermanagh & Omagh (G District) have increased by 15% from the previous year. While they are lower in number than in 2015/16 and 2016/17. During 2019/20 they had 128 complaints.

In Derry City & Strabane (H District) complaints have decreased by 4% this year and have decreased by 24% since 2015/16. Around 180 complaints were received during 2019/20.



Complaints from Causeway Coast & Glens (J District) have increased by 4% from last year. Although, they are still lower in number than in three of the previous four years. Around 210 complaints received in 2019/20 were from J District.

In Mid & East Antrim (K District) complaints have increased by 1% this year. Complaints from this police district have fluctuated over the last five years. During 2019/20, it received around 165 complaints.

Complaints for Antrim & Newtownabbey (L District) have increased by 14% from last year. Although, it is worth noting that that last year they had a particularly low number of complaints compared with other years since 2015/16. During 2019/20, it received 170 complaints.

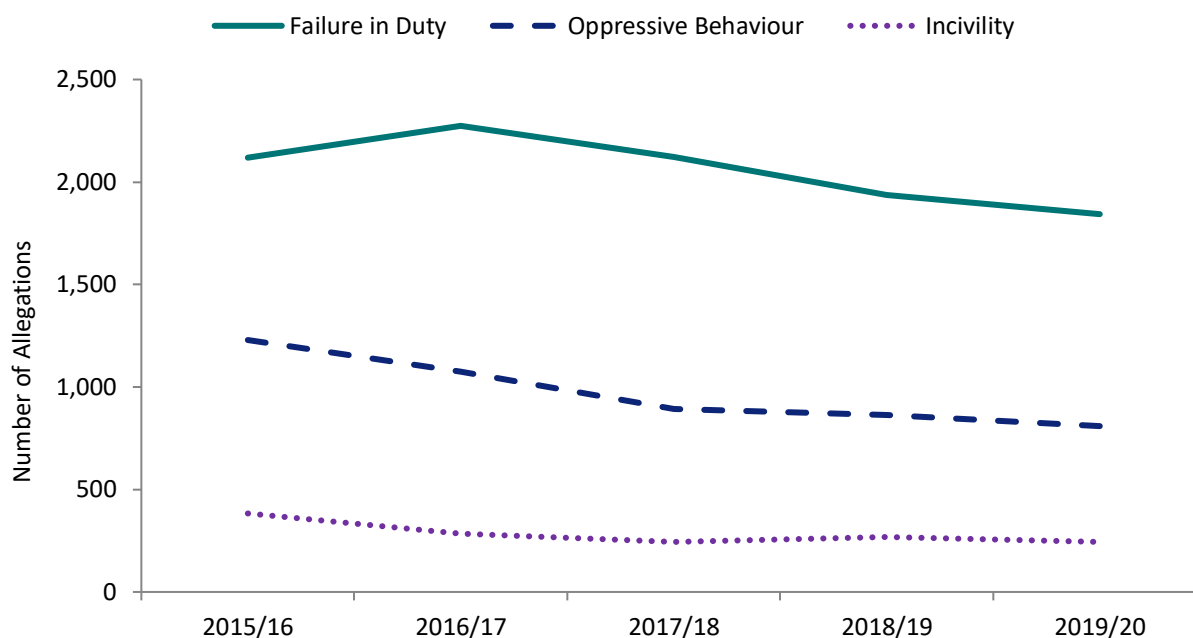
## ALLEGATIONS

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 2019/20, the Police Ombudsman’s Office received 3,900 allegations (Table 12).

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, 2015/16 to 2019/20**



### Failure in Duty allegations

During 2019/20, nearly 1,850 allegations received by the Police Ombudsman’s Office alleged a Failure in Duty by a police officer. This was a decrease of 5% on the number of allegations received in the previous year, and it is the first year they have dropped below 1,900 allegations in the last five years.

More than half (54%) of the Failure in Duty allegations received in 2019/20 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 allegation are about failures in contact; such as failing to provide updates or failings to return telephone calls, reply to correspondence. These allegations account for 14% of all the failure in duty allegations and this trend is the same trend as in the last five years.

## **Oppressive Behaviour allegations**

There were 809 Oppressive Behaviour allegations received during 2019/20. This is a 6% decrease in the number received during 2018/19 and it is the third year that they have been below 1,000 allegations in the last five years.

More than half (53%) of the Oppressive Behaviour allegations received during 2019/20 alleged oppressive conduct by an officer/s not involving an assault. This is a larger proportion than in each of the previous four years.

Allegations of serious or sexual assaults accounted for 7% of all the Oppressive Behaviour allegations received (Table 15).

Within the oppressive behaviour allegations category allegations about unjustified force or violence<sup>4</sup> and allegations of harassment had the largest decreases compared with 2018/19 the last five years.

## **Incivility allegations**

During 2019/20, there were 244 Incivility allegations received. This was a 9% decrease from the previous year.

Around one in four Incivility allegations was about an officer being uncivil whilst on the telephone (27%) or whilst being at a domestic residence (26%) (Table 16).

## **Other allegations<sup>5</sup>**

In addition to Failure in Duty and Oppressive Behaviour allegations decreasing to their lowest levels in the last five years, allegations relating to irregularities in police searches, allegations

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<sup>4</sup> Referred to 'other assault' in Table 15.

<sup>5</sup> A further breakdown of allegations is available on the Police Ombudsman's website in the accompanying Excel tables.

about being unlawfully or unnecessary arrested or detained and allegations about discriminatory behaviour are also all at their lowest levels in the last five years (Table 13).

### **Allegations regarding the use of police equipment**

Allegations about the use of police equipment accounted for 2% of all the allegations received during 2019/20 (Table 17). This is similar to previous years.

The most commonly received allegations about the use of police equipment during 2019/20 were about the use of handcuffs (37 allegations). This is the same trend as in the previous four years.

During 2019/20, allegations about the use of TASERs followed by CS Spray were the second and third most commonly reported concern about the use of police equipment.

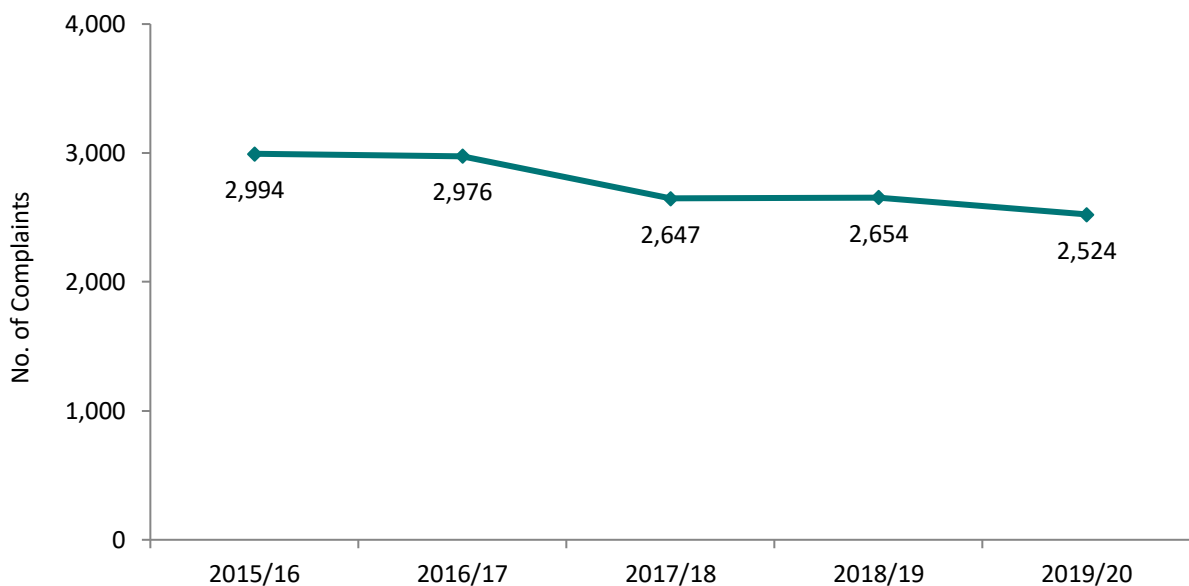
Allegations about the use of police equipment have decreased by 18% from 2018/19. Over the last five years these types of allegations more than halved (decreased by 54%).

## COMPLAINTS 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 more than 2,500 complaints during 2019/20 (Figure 7, Table 18). This is a 5% decrease from the previous year. Some of the decrease will be directly attributable to the partial closure of the Office in mid-March 2019 in response to the Government’s advice in reducing the spread of COVID-19.

**Figure 7: Number of complaints closed by year, 2015/16 to 2019/20**



The number of complaints being closed by the Office has decreased over the last five year. This reflects the decrease in number 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).

**Table 2: Complaint closures, 2019/20**

<b>Complaints Closed</b>	<b>2,524</b>
<b>Complaints closed following initial assessment</b>	<b>499</b>
Complaint was not a matter for the Police Ombudsman	309
Notifications from PSNI	148
Other	42
<b>Complaints closed following initial inquiries</b>	<b>775</b>
Complainant did not fully engage with the police complaints system	656
Ill-founded	19
Withdrawn	80
Other	20
<b>Complaints resolved informally</b>	<b>191</b>
Informally Resolved	191
<b>Complaints closed that relate to the 'Troubles'</b>	<b>9</b>
History Complaints	9
<b>Complaints fully investigated</b>	<b>1,050</b>
Complaint substantiated or an issue of concern identified	136
Complaint not substantiated or no issue of concern identified	914

Two in ten (20%) complaints closed during 2019/20 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 (31%) were closed after 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 8% of all complaints closed. This is an alternative way to resolve less serious complaints such as those alleging rudeness or incivility.

More than two in five (42%) 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 2019/20.

## 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 2017/18. 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)

*Note on data quality: due to the partial closure of the Office during the COVID-19 pandemic the data for this section has not been validated as thoroughly as in previous reports. Although, the data are still considered to be of sufficient quality to publish.*

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(s) 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 2019/20, the Office sent 211 recommendations to the PPS, the Police Ombudsman recommended that the Director of Public Prosecutions should prosecute an officer or staff member on 20 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, 2019/20**

	2019/20
Prosecution recommended for an officer/staff member	20
Prosecution not recommended for an officer/staff member	191

Over the last five years, the number of recommendations made to the PPS for prosecution has fluctuated, ranging from 6 recommendations in 2017/18 to 24 during 2016/17 (Table 19). The numbers made this year are more similar to 2015/16 and 2016/17.

The Office made fewer recommendations to the PPS for no prosecution during 2019/20 than in three of the four previous years. Although, since 2016/17 the number of recommendations have been fairly stable (around 200 each year).



## Recommendations made to the Chief Constable or Chief Officer

*Note on data quality: due to the partial closure of the Office during the COVID-19 pandemic the data for this section has not be validated as thoroughly as in previous reports. Although, the data are still considered to be of sufficient quality to publish.*

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 officers who were the subject of the complaint.

During 2019/20, the Police Ombudsman’s Office made 152 recommendations that an officer or staff member should receive either a discipline or a performance action (Table 4). Nearly, three fifths (58%) were for a misconduct meeting and around one third (37%) 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, 2019/20**

Regulations Introduced in June 2016 <sup>6</sup> (Discipline or Performance Actions)	152
Performance	56
Misconduct Meeting	88
Misconduct Hearing	8

The number of recommendations for a discipline or performance action the Police Ombudsman has made for an officer/staff member has in general decreased over the last five years (Table 20). The has decreased from a high of 306 in 2015/16 to 152 in 2019/20. Although, the number made this year is higher than for 2018/19.

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. Although, the trends in discipline and performance action are similar with 2018/19.

<sup>6</sup> 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

*This section of the report has not been updated, the data in the paragraphs below and the corresponding table refer to last year. This section of the report will be revised once the data are available.*

During 2018/19, the Police Ombudsman's Office made 11 policy recommendations to police for operational changes arising from issues which have been identified during the course of investigations.

Three of these recommendations, which relate to such matters as the recording and audit trails associated with the return of property to detained persons and the procedures associated with the preparation of files sent to the Public Prosecution Service, were not implemented as adequate procedures were deemed by police to be in place already.

A response is awaited in respect of eight of the recommendations, which relate to such matters as consistency in procedures at different Custody Suites<sup>7</sup>; current procedures and training in respect of dealing with traffic incidents on motorways; the recommendation to review and update a Service Procedure relating to police response to stalking and harassment; the recommendation to review the processes associated with the completion and updating of search records and the recommendation to provide training and arrange for any necessary process/guidance amendment in respect of a particular police process.

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<sup>7</sup> The investigation of the associated complaint also gave rise to a case-specific recommendation, a response to which is also awaited.

## INFORMAL RESOLUTION

*Note on data quality: due to the partial closure of the Office during the COVID-19 pandemic the data for this section has not be validated as thoroughly as in previous reports. Although, the data are still considered to be of sufficient quality to publish.*

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 2019/20, 15% of complaints received were considered for Informal Resolution and of these 68% of the persons making the complaint agreed for it to be dealt with through Informal Resolution (Table 22).

The proportion of complainants consenting for their complaint to be dealt with through Informal Resolution has increased over the last five years from 62% during 2014/15 to 68% during 2019/20.

During 2019/20, 177 complaints reached a successful conclusion through the Informal Resolution process (Table 23) which is almost three quarters (73%) of all complaints reaching a conclusion from this process. This is the highest success rate for the informal resolution process in the last five years.

## PSNI OFFICERS

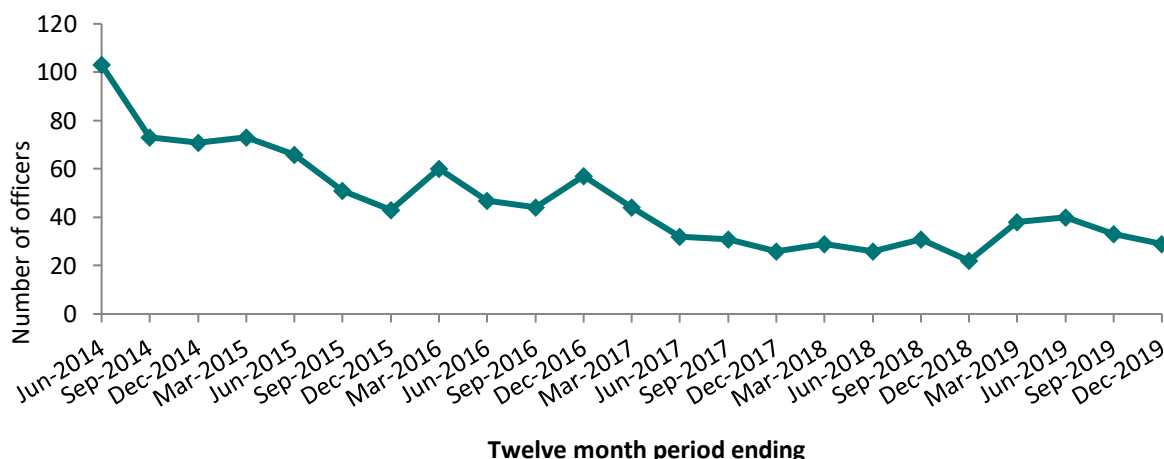
More than half (53%) of the complaints recorded by the Police Ombudsman’s Office have an identified officer associated with them. The other complaints which do not identify an officer tend to be those which have been closed at an early stage, such as those which were not a matter for the Police Ombudsman to investigate and those where the complainant did not fully engage.

Most of the officers (83%) identified within complaints 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.

In general, the number of officers reaching this stage has been decreasing over the last five years (Figure 9, Table 24). This reflects the decrease in complaints received over this time period. *The data for the final quarter of 2019/20 are not yet available.*

**Figure 8: Officers that received three or more complaints that were formally investigated or dealt with by way of Informal Resolution, 2014/15 to 2019/20**



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, 2015/16 to 2019/2020**

Year	Complaints
2015/16	3,042
2016/17	2,814
2017/18	2,579
2018/19	2,641
2019/20	2,522

**Table 6: Complaints and matters, 2015/16 to 2019/20**

Complaints/Other Matters	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Complaints from members of the public	2,951	2,758	2,499	2,506	2,372
Matters referred to the Office	54	25	14	14	2
Matters the Police Ombudsman has chosen to investigate	16	12	10	7	10
Other	21	19	56	114	138
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,042</b>	<b>2,814</b>	<b>2,579</b>	<b>2,641</b>	<b>2,522</b>

**Table 7: Complaints received by month, 2015/16 to 2019/20**

Month Complaint Received	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
April	210	247	177	205	215
May	258	259	226	213	195
June	296	266	225	226	175
July	299	236	210	243	236
August	254	223	269	226	252
September	279	264	215	187	193
October	256	219	233	252	232
November	259	226	225	230	185
December	202	182	185	169	163
January	225	194	223	243	230
February	258	215	183	208	258
March	246	283	208	239	188
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,042</b>	<b>2,814</b>	<b>2,579</b>	<b>2,641</b>	<b>2,522</b>

**Table 8: Complaints received by organisation, 2015/16 to 2019/20**

Organisation	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)	2,981	2,755	2,524	2,612	2,490
Designated Civilian	44	37	39	0	0
Harbour Police	2	2	2	6	0
Northern Ireland Airport Constabulary	3	2	1	0	2
Certain Home Office Officials	3	1	0	1	0
National Crime Agency	1	0	1	3	1
Ministry of Defence Police	0	0	1	0	0
Other/Unknown	8	17	11	19	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,042</b>	<b>2,814</b>	<b>2,579</b>	<b>2,641</b>	<b>2,522</b>

**Table 9: Complaints received by where the initial complaint was made, 2015/16 to 2019/20**

Source of Complaints	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Directly with Police Ombudsman's Office	2,069	2,103	2,014	2,042	2,085
Via Representative	541	433	315	313	183
Directly with the Police	341	222	170	151	104
Other (includes referrals)	91	56	80	135	150
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,042</b>	<b>2,814</b>	<b>2,579</b>	<b>2,641</b>	<b>2,522</b>

**Table 10: Main situations giving rise to complaints, 2015/16 to 2019/20**

Main Situation	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Criminal Investigation	769	853	762	756	743
Arrest	565	411	400	422	336
Traffic incident	228	239	210	239	215
Search	244	224	174	191	145
Domestic Incident	152	156	136	125	112
Police Enquiries	92	105	102	151	159
Complaints relating to the 'Troubles'	98	76	48	26	23
Domestic Violence	27	54	42	32	39
Parade/Demonstrations	63	21	32	13	31
Other	674	521	526	549	586
Unknown	130	154	147	137	133
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,042</b>	<b>2,814</b>	<b>2,579</b>	<b>2,641</b>	<b>2,522</b>

**Table 11: Complaints received by police district, 2015/16 to 2019/20**

Police District	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
A: Belfast City	914	742	634	737	716
B: Lisburn & Castlereagh City	122	116	111	119	102
C: Ards & North Down	183	186	157	169	155
D: Newry, Mourne & Down	180	165	151	142	151
E: Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	227	217	229	219	202
F: Mid Ulster	105	119	89	108	119
G: Fermanagh & Omagh	140	137	120	112	128
H: Derry City & Strabane	235	205	165	186	178
J: Causeway Coast & Glens	227	240	244	201	210
K: Mid & East Antrim	146	171	143	165	166
L: Antrim & Newtownabbey	181	171	183	149	170
Other organisation / Unknown	382	345	353	334	225
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,042</b>	<b>2,814</b>	<b>2,579</b>	<b>2,641</b>	<b>2,522</b>

**Table 12: Number of allegations received, 2015/16 to 2019/20**

Year	Allegations
2015/16	4,969
2016/17	4,825
2017/18	4,288
2018/19	4,147
2019/20	3,900

**Table 13: Types of allegations<sup>8</sup>, 2015/16 to 2019/20**

Types of Allegations	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Failure in Duty	2,120	2,274	2,122	1,935	1,843
Oppressive Behaviour	1,229	1,076	892	862	809
Incivility	383	283	244	267	244
Police Searches	246	241	212	207	156
Unlawful/Unnecessary Arrest/Detention	208	204	175	208	156
Mishandling of Property	133	99	106	97	97
Allegations relating to the 'Troubles'	74	77	41	25	22
Malpractice	58	76	55	41	41
Traffic	43	61	31	49	39
Discriminatory Behaviour	54	54	40	46	36
Section 55 Referral	72	35	26	23	12
Other	349	345	344	387	445
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,969</b>	<b>4,825</b>	<b>4,288</b>	<b>4,147</b>	<b>3,900</b>

<sup>8</sup> A full breakdown of allegations types is available in the accompanying Excel spreadsheet



**Table 14: Failure in Duty allegations, 2015/16 to 2019/20**

Failure in Duty Allegations	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Conduct of police investigations / incident response	1,141	1,240	1,160	1,072	992
Failure in contact	302	314	297	272	261
Failure in record management	139	175	167	146	169
Conduct in custody suite	118	123	119	101	95
Failure to act impartially	92	82	67	57	66
Failure in duty of care	42	45	43	57	90
Other failure in duty	286	295	269	230	170
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,120</b>	<b>2,274</b>	<b>2,122</b>	<b>1,935</b>	<b>1,843</b>

**Table 15: Oppressive Behaviour allegations, 2015/16 to 2019/20**

Oppressive Behaviour Allegations	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Oppressive Conduct (OC Not Involving Assault)	461	509	414	386	426
Other Assault	582	419	332	328	252
Harassment (Series of Like Incidents)	152	111	104	102	77
Sexual Assault	24	25	27	29	29
Serious non-sexual assault	10	12	15	17	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,229</b>	<b>1,076</b>	<b>892</b>	<b>862</b>	<b>809</b>

**Table 16: Incivility allegations, 2015/16 to 2019/20**

Incivility Allegations	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Incivility at Domestic Residence	93	87	53	67	64
Incivility by Officer on The Telephone	76	63	55	65	66
Incivility at Police Station	41	31	33	26	25
Incivility When Stopped for A Traffic Offence	35	28	21	28	25
Incivility to Person Under 18 Years	6	1	2	5	3
Other incivility	132	73	80	76	61
<b>Total</b>	<b>383</b>	<b>283</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>244</b>

**Table 17: Allegations regarding the use of police equipment, 2015/16 to 2019/20**

Police equipment	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Handcuffs	115	82	58	57	37
CS Spray	36	20	16	22	17
Baton	23	19	10	14	5
Taser	14	10	11	15	24
Misuse/Discharge Firearm	5	4	2	5	6
AEP/Baton Round/Riot Gun	6	0	0	2	4
Other	12	3	2	1	2
No weapon used	4,758	4,687	4,189	4,031	3,805
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,969</b>	<b>4,825</b>	<b>4,288</b>	<b>4,147</b>	<b>3,900</b>

**Table 18: Complaint closures, 2015/16 to 2019/20**

Complaint Closures	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Complaints Closed	2,994	2,976	2,647	2,654	2,524
Complaints closed following initial assessment	352	382	389	423	499
Not a matter for the Police Ombudsman	296	335	318	282	309
Call in/Call out - No Further action or Notification only	19	17	43	108	148
Other (Initial Assessment)	37	30	28	33	42
Complaints closed following initial inquiries	1,308	1,203	1,203	988	775
Complainant did not fully engage	892	753	726	667	656
Ill-founded	283	338	382	217	19
Withdrawn	125	103	81	92	80
Other (Initial Inquiries)	8	9	14	12	20
Complaints resolved informally	192	182	170	214	191
Informally Resolved	184	182	170	214	191
Locally Resolved	8	0	0	0	0
Complaints closed that relate to the 'Troubles'	n/a	3	1	26	9
History Complaint	n/a	3	1	26	9
Complaints closed following a full investigation	1,142	1,206	884	1,003	1,050
Complaint substantiated or an issue of concern	281	268	211	211	136
Not substantiated and no issue of concern identified	861	938	673	792	914

**Table 19: Occasions Police Ombudsman recommended prosecution/no prosecution<sup>9</sup> for an officer/staff, 2015/16 to 2019/20**

Recommendations to PPS	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Criminal Charges	19	24	6	8	20
No Criminal Charges	253	203	189	202	191
<b>Total</b>	<b>272</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>211</b>

**Table 20a: Occasions Police Ombudsman recommended a discipline or performance action<sup>10</sup> for an officer/staff, 2015/16 to 2019/20**

Discipline Sanctions (Prior to 2016 Regulations)	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Management Discussion	36	27	4	0	0
Advice & Guidance	204	98	9	1	0
Superintendent's Written Warning	55	52	8	3	0
Formal discipline proceedings	11	8	2	4	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>

**Table 20b: Occasions Police Ombudsman recommended<sup>11</sup> a discipline or performance action for an officer/staff, 2015/16 to 2019/20**

Regulations Introduced June 2016)	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Performance	0	7	54	55	56
Misconduct Meeting	0	57	115	70	88
Misconduct Hearing	0	0	3	1	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>152</b>

*The data in the above three tables has not been validated as thoroughly as in previous reports due to the current partial closure of the Office. Therefore, the data may be of lower quality than in previous reports but it is of sufficient quality to publish. It was noted during a review in November 2020 that the figure in Table 20b for "Misconduct Hearing" in 2019/20, was incorrectly recorded as a '0'. This has been amended in the table above.*

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> Disciplinary Regulations (pre 6<sup>th</sup> November 2000); a Code of Conduct (6<sup>th</sup> November 2000 to 13<sup>th</sup> March 2003); and a Code of Ethics (since 14<sup>th</sup> March 2003).

<sup>11</sup> 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<sup>12</sup>: Outcome of policy recommendations made, 2015/16 to 2019/20

Policy recommendations made to PSNI	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Fully accepted & being implemented	61	40	14	7	0
Partially accepted & being implemented	0	3	0	1	0
Not accepted	2	7	4	3	3
Already in place	2	2	2	1	0
No longer applicable	2	0	0	0	0
Still under consideration	0	5	27	28	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>11</b>

*This table has not been updated since the 2018/19 report. When the 2019/20 data is available it will be published.*

<sup>12</sup> Only the information in the most recent year is updated in this table. The previous year's information is accurate at the time of the publication for that year.

**Table 22: Complaints suitable for Informal Resolution (IR) with consent obtained, 2015/16 to 2019/20**

IR Complaints Received	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Number of Complaints	3,042	2,814	2,579	2,641	2,522
Complaints Suitable for IR	460	447	414	469	383
Consent for IR obtained	281	284	266	320	260
Consent for IR not obtained	179	163	148	149	123

**Table 23: Outcome of Informally Resolution process, 2015/16 to 2019/20**

IR Resolved	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Successful	184	178	172	212	177
Failed	80	94	76	92	65
Withdrawn	6	8	4	8	2
Total	270	280	252	312	244

**Table 24: Rank of officer in the PSNI complained about, 2015/16 to 2019/20**

Rank	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18 <sup>13</sup>	2018/19	2019/20
Designated Civilian	n/a	n/a	14	79	40
Constable	2,188	2,056	1,747	1,761	1,410
Sergeant	362	325	281	233	207
Inspector and Above	120	86	48	52	403

*The data in the above three tables has not been validated as thoroughly as in previous reports due to the current partial closure of the Office. Although, the data are still considered to be of sufficient quality to publish.*

<sup>13</sup> During September 2017 a processing change was made as to how complaints against designated civilians within the PSNI were recorded on the CHS. Therefore, since this date the number of designated civilians subject of a complaint are recorded under the rank of the PSNI officer in this table.

**Table 25: Number of officers with three or more complaints that were formally investigated or dealt with by way of Informal Resolution, 2015/16 to 2019/20<sup>14</sup>**

Twelve-month period ending	Number of officers
June 2015	66
September 2015	51
December 2015	43
March 2016	60
June 2016	47
September 2016	44
December 2016	57
March 2017	44
June 2017	32
September 2017	31
December 2017	26
March 2018	29
June 2018	26
September 2018	31
December 2018	22
March 2019	38
June 2019	40
September 2019	33
December 2019	29

<sup>14</sup> The information for the March 2020 is not available. This is due to the Office partially closing 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 he thinks best suited to secure the confidence of the public and the police. He believes that for such confidence to be forthcoming, it is essential that people are informed about the nature of his work.

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 him 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 against officers whose conduct has been the subject of disciplinary or criminal proceedings; or complaints about off-duty police officers, unless the fact that he or she is 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, he 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, he is required to consider whether it is appropriate to recommend disciplinary proceedings. If the Chief Constable is unwilling administer the recommended discipline, the Police Ombudsman may, direct him 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, SPSS<sup>15</sup>). 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 28<sup>th</sup> April 2020, and thus includes all information recorded on the system up to the 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020.

### 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, 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.

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<sup>15</sup> SPSS is a statistical software package developed for use by social scientists.

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 table below shows the scale of revisions made between statistics in this bulletin and those in the previous bulletin in June 2019. 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 and allegations received between this publication and the previous publication in June 2019.**

	Previously Published Figures (June 19)	Current Published Figures (June 20)	Scale of Revision (number)	Scale of Revision (%)
<b>Total number of complaints received</b>				
2015/16	3,042	3,042	0	0%
2016/17	2,814	2,814	0	0%
2017/18	2,578	2,579	+1	<0.05%
2018/19	2,627	2,641	+14	0.53%
<b>Total number of allegations received</b>				
2015/16	4,969	4,969	0	0%
2016/17	4,816	4,825	+9	0.2%
2017/18	4,286	4,288	+2	<0.05%
2018/19	4,072	4,147	+75	1.84%

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 2021. 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 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday in the month following the end of the quarter.

*There may be some disruption to the current publication schedule detailed above due to the current partial closure of the Office and also as the response/advice to the pandemic continues.*

**Contact Details:**

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

**Telephone:** 028 9082 8648

**Textphone:** 028 9082 8756

**Witness Appeal Line:** 0800 0327 880

**Email:** [info@policeombudsman.org](mailto:info@policeombudsman.org)

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

Website: [www.policeombudsman.org](http://www.policeombudsman.org)



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