



# **Complaints and Allegations Received by the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland**

**Quarterly Statistical Update to 30<sup>th</sup> September  
2019**

**Published October 2019**

# Complaints and Allegations Received by the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland:

**Statistical Update to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019, published on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2019**

This quarterly bulletin presents the most recent statistics on the number of complaints and allegations received by the Police Ombudsman, up to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019. The statistics are based on information extracted from the Police Ombudsman’s Case Handling System (CHS) on the 17<sup>th</sup> October 2019.

## Complaints Received

The Office received just over 1,260 complaints between April and September 2019. This is a 3% decrease in the number of complaints received when compared with the same time period last year. It is also the lowest number of complaints received during this time period, when compared with the previous five years (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Number of complaints received by the Police Ombudsman’s Office, 2014/15 to September 2019**



## Main Complaint Factor

During the first half of 2019/20, criminal investigation was the most common main factor<sup>1</sup> underlying complaints, accounting for just over a quarter of complaints received during this time. Arrest was the second most common factor underlying complaints. This continues to be the normal trend observed for complaint factors.

When comparing the first half of 2019/20 with the same time period last year, complaints relating to Domestic Incident had the largest percentage decrease, followed by complaints relating to Criminal investigation.

Complaints regarding 'Other' matters had the largest percentage increase during this time, followed by complaints relating to Police Enquiries (Table 1).

**Table 1: Comparison in the main factor of complaints received between April to September 2018 and April to September 2019**

	April to September 2018	April to September 2019	Difference	% Difference
Criminal Investigation	385	343	-42	-11%
Arrest	201	183	-18	-9%
Traffic Related Incident	117	116	-1	-1%
Search	86	82	-4	-5%
Police Enquiries (no investigation)	57	63	6	11%
Domestic Incident	71	59	-12	-17%
Parades/Demonstrations	12	29	17	-
Domestic Violence	18	27	9	-
Complaints relating to the 'Troubles'	16	12	-4	-
Other	251	292	41	16%
Unknown	86	57	-29	-34%
Total	1,300	1,263	-37	-3%

**Note: % Difference only reported when base numbers are greater than 50**

<sup>1</sup> The main complaint factor refers to the main situation giving rise to the complaint.

## Complaints Received by Police District

The number of complaints increased in 7 of the 11 known police districts during the first half of this year when compared with the same time period last year. District J had the largest percentage increase during this time, while District K had the largest percentage decrease (Table 2).

**Table 2: Comparison in the number of complaints received in each police district between April to September 2108 and April to September 2019**

	April to September 2018	April to September 2019	Difference	% Difference
District A - Belfast City	340	351	11	3%
District B - Lisburn & Castlereagh City	54	45	-9	-
District C - Ards & North Down	78	83	5	6%
District D – Newry, Mourne & Down	74	76	2	3%
District E - Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	109	97	-12	-11%
District F - Mid Ulster	53	59	6	11%
District G - Fermanagh & Omagh	52	57	5	10%
District H - Derry City & Strabane	92	104	12	13%
District J - Causeway Coast & Glens	95	110	15	16%
District K - Mid & East Antrim	91	73	-18	-20%
District L - Antrim & Newtownabbey	89	86	-3	-3%
Unknown / Other Organisation	173	122	-51	-29%
Northern Ireland	1,300	1,263	-37	-3%

**Note: % Difference only reported when base numbers are greater than 50**

## Allegations Received

The Office received just under 1,950 allegations during the first half of 2019/20. This is the lowest number of allegations received during this time when compared with each of the previous five years (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Number of allegations received by the Police Ombudsman's Office, 2014/15 to September 2019



## Allegation Type

During the first half of 2019/20, Failure in Duty was the most common allegation accounting for almost half of all allegations received.

Allegations about Searches had the largest percentage decrease during this time when compared to the same time period last year. Allegations relating to 'Other' matters had the largest percentage increase during this time (Table 3).

Table 3: Comparison in the Types of Allegations received between April to September 2018 and April to September 2019

	April to September 2018	April to September 2019	Difference	% Difference
Failure in Duty	975	893	-82	-8%
Oppressive Behaviour	397	419	22	6%
Incivility	125	113	-12	-10%
Unlawful/Unnecessary Arrest/Detention	99	85	-14	-14%
Search	104	79	-25	-24%
Mishandling of Property	41	52	11	-
Traffic	25	20	-5	-
Malpractice	18	25	7	-
Discriminatory Behaviour	19	20	1	-
Allegations related to the 'Troubles'	15	11	-4	-
Section 55 Referral	11	7	-4	-
Other	176	221	45	26%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,005</b>	<b>1,945</b>	<b>-60</b>	<b>-3%</b>

Note: % Difference only reported when base numbers are greater than 50

## Officers with multiple complaints

There were 33 PSNI officers who attracted three or more complaints that were formally investigated or dealt with by way of Informal Resolution between October 2018 and September 2019 (Table 4).

**Table 4: Officers with three or more complaints that were formally investigated or dealt with by Informal Resolution, twelve month period ending June 2019 & September 2019.**

Twelve month period ending	Number of officers with three or more complaints that were formally investigated or dealt with Informal Resolution
June 2019	40
September	33

## Additional Information

### Data Use

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

### Understanding the Statistics

The number of complaints received by the Police Ombudsman's Office includes complaints made by members of the public relating to the conduct of PSNI officers or those employed by other organisations under the Office's remit<sup>2</sup>. The number of complaints also includes those matters that have been referred to the Police Ombudsman's Office from other organisations<sup>3</sup>, and any matter that the Police Ombudsman has decided is in the public interest for him to investigate.

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

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

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

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<sup>2</sup> The Office's remit extends to: Police Service of Northern Ireland including Designated Civilians, the Belfast Harbour Police, The Belfast International Airport Police, the Ministry of Defence Police, the National Crime Agency, 'serious' complaints regarding mutual aid police officers from Great Britain and 'serious' complaints regarding certain Home Office employees (immigration officers, designated customs officials and custom revenue officials).

<sup>3</sup> The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), Public Prosecution Service (PPS), Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB) and the Department of Justice (DOJ).

Care should be taken when comparing the number of complaints or allegations received at police district level as some of the differences between districts may reflect variations in their composition, such as the degree of urbanization, level of deprivation and the balance between the resident population, day-time population and the night-time economy.

It is also important to note that the system is live and data may therefore be subject to future revisions.

### **Further information**

A [user guide](#) has been published to give users of these statistics more knowledge about the complaints process, more information regarding the quality of the data and also a glossary of terms used. It is recommended that all users of these statistics should consult the user guide to aid their understanding of the statistics and ensure that they are using them appropriately. Further information regarding the number of complaints and allegations received in 2018/19 is available in the [accompanying excel spreadsheet](#). This spreadsheet also includes the data for the figures and tables in this bulletin.

A more detailed break-down of the types of complaints and allegations received by the Police Ombudsman's Office over the last five years, as well as presenting information on the outcomes of complaints, is presented in the 'Annual Statistical Bulletin of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, 2018/19'. This is available on the Office's [website](#).

An additional geographic breakdown of the types of complaints and allegations received by the Police Ombudsman in previous years is available on the [Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service \(NINIS\)](#).

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

### **Publication**

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

The next quarterly update of 2019/20 is due to be published on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2020 and it will include statistics up to the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019.

### **User Feedback**

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

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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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