police Ombudsman FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Complaints made to the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland

Quarterly Statistical Bulletin
Quarter 3 2025/26

Published January 2026

NISRA
Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

Introduction

The Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland (the Office) provides an independent, impartial system for the assessment and investigation of complaints about the conduct of police officers in Northern Ireland.

A police complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by a member of the public about the service they have received.

This quarterly bulletin[1] presents statistics on the number of complaints received by the Office in the first three quarters of 2025/26.

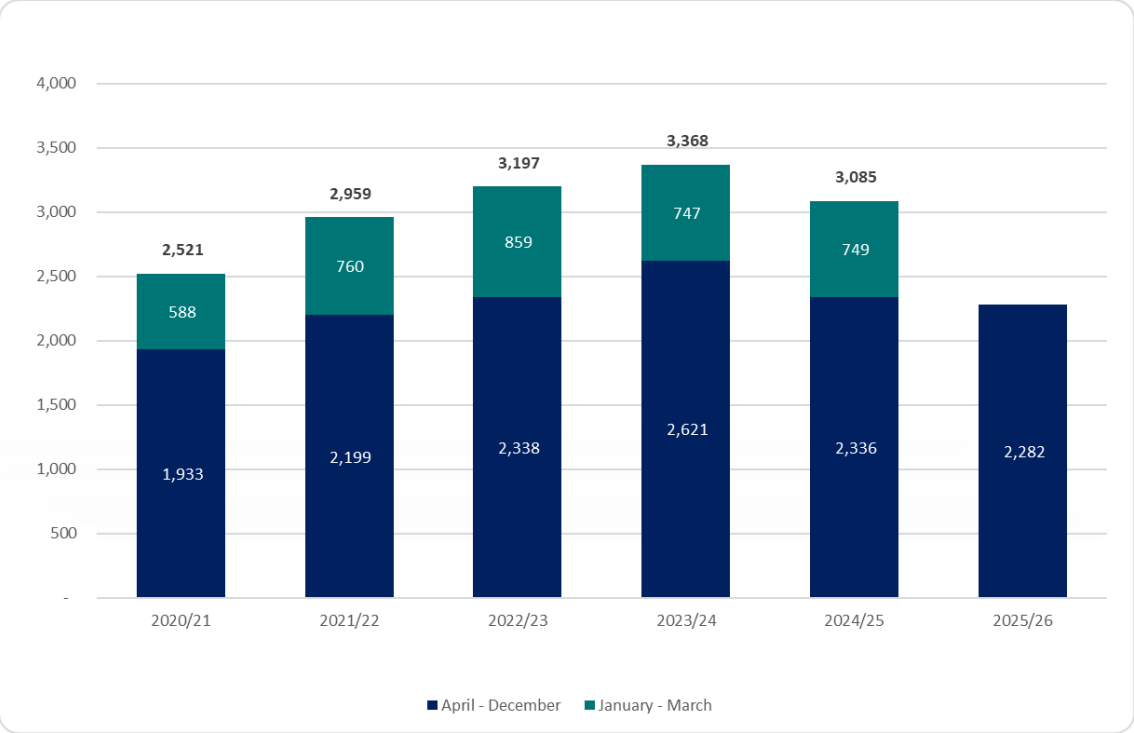
It also compares the level of complaints with previous years, helping to identify trends in the number and nature of the complaints received.

How many complaints did the Office receive?

Key Takeaways

- Between April 2025 and December 2025, the Office received 2,282 complaints.
- This was a decrease of 2% when compared with the same period in 2024/25.
- This was also the lowest number of complaints received in the first three quarters of the previous three years.

Figure 1: Number of complaints received by the Police Ombudsman's Office, 2020/21 to December 2025.



[1] The statistics for 2025/26 are based on information extracted from the Police Ombudsman's Case Handling system (CHS) on 6th January 2026. Information for 2020/21 to 2024/25 is based on the annual snapshot taken on 14th April 2025.

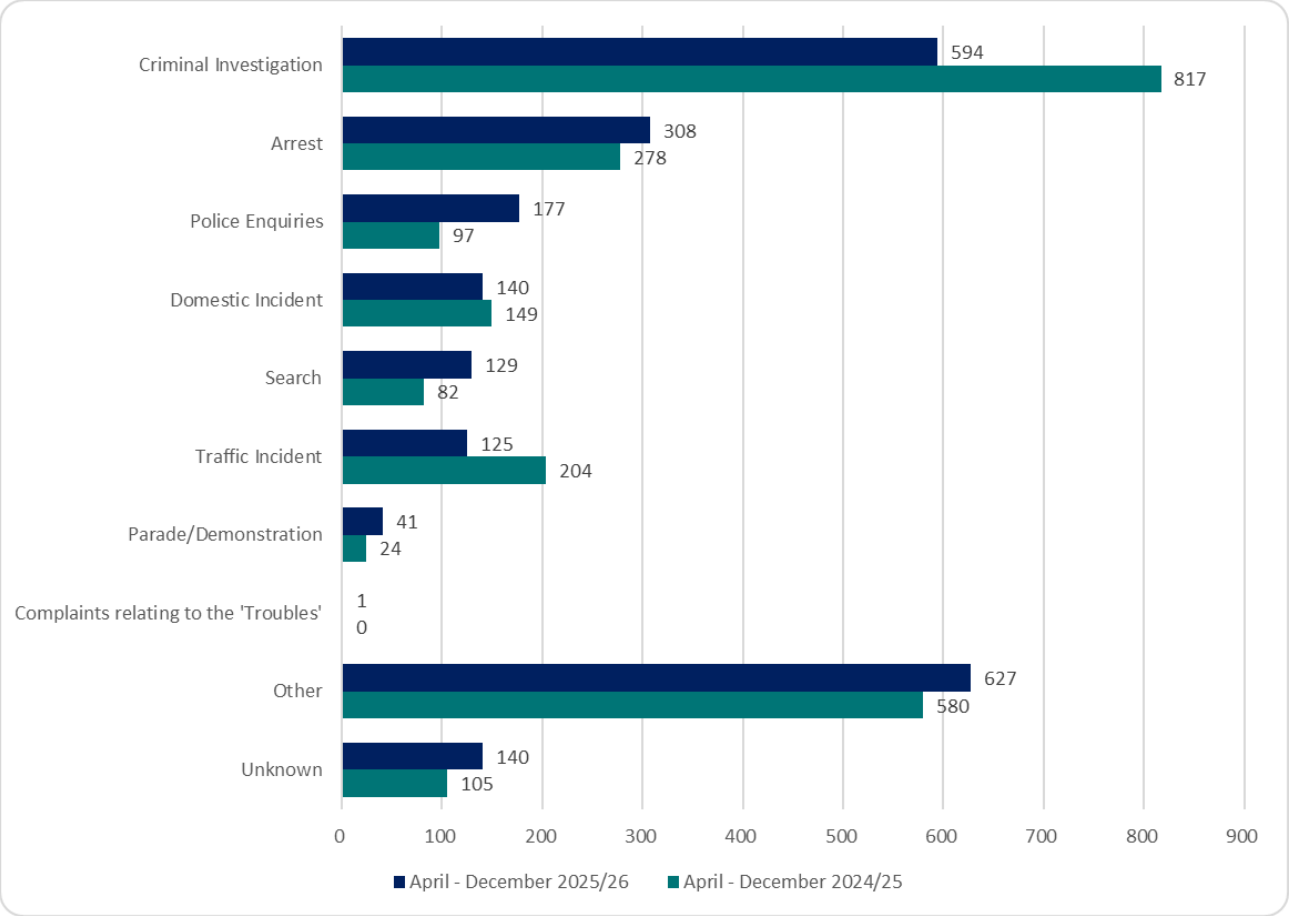
How did these complaints arise?

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 collects information on the background or context of the complaint.

Key Takeaways

- 'Criminal investigation' was the most common main factor[2] underlying complaints in the first three quarters of 2025/26. This accounted for just over a quarter of complaints received during this time.
- Complaints arising from a 'Traffic Incident' had the largest percentage decrease[3] (39%) in the first three quarters of 2025/26 when compared with the same period last year.

Figure 2: Comparison of the main factor behind complaints received between April and December 2024 and April and December 2025.



[2] The main complaint factor refers to the main situation giving rise to the complaint.
[3] Percentage difference is only calculated when the base number is greater than 50.

What were the complaints about?

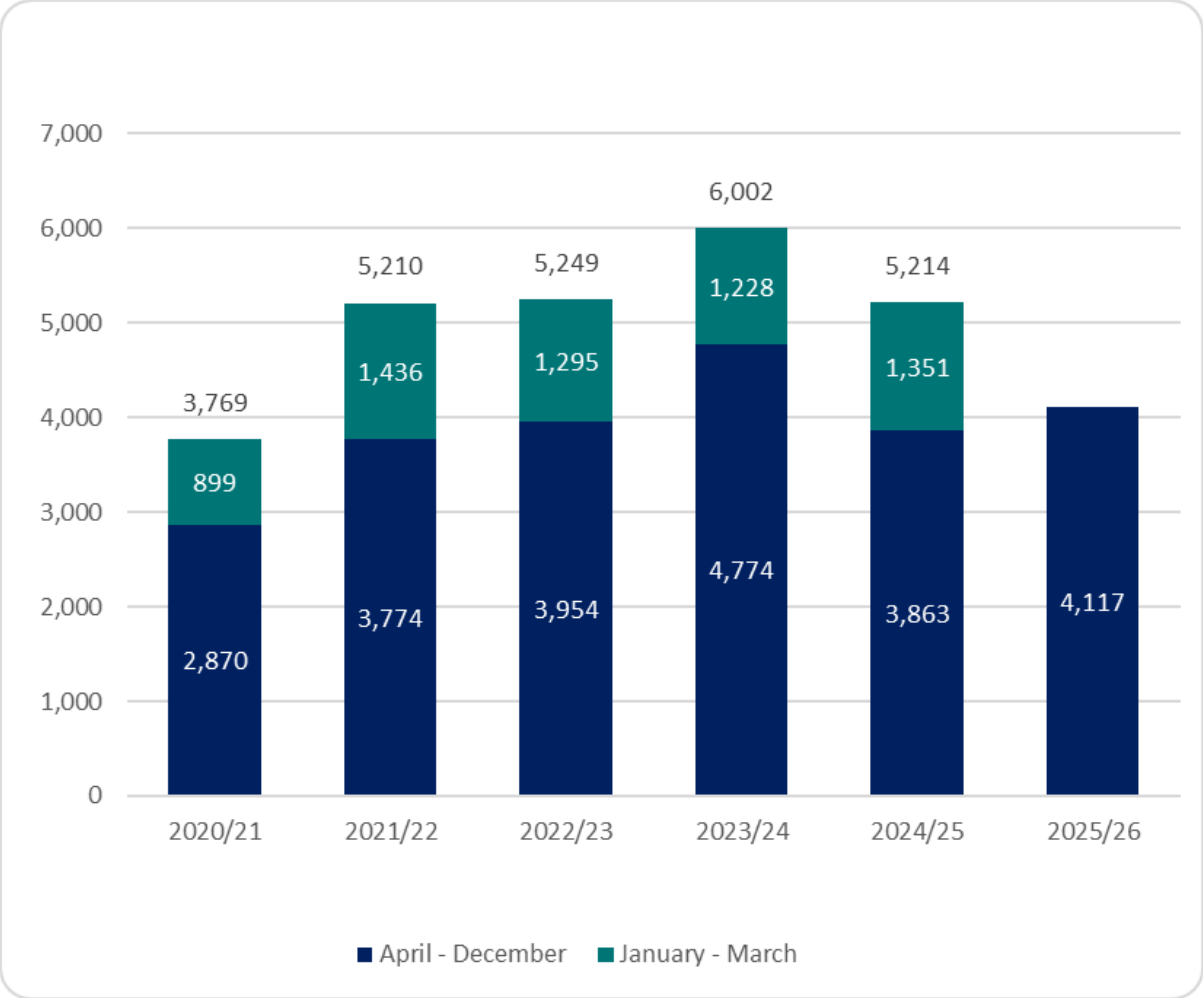
A person who makes a complaint may be dissatisfied with different aspects of their interaction with the police. In such cases, we break the complaint down into 'allegations'. This helps to capture more detailed information about the complaint and often explains the root cause of the person's concerns.

How many allegations did the Office receive?

Key Takeaways

- Between April 2025 and December 2025, the Office received 4,117 allegations.
- This was an increase of 7% when compared with the same period in 2024/25.
- This was the second highest number of allegations received in the first three quarters in each of the last six years.

Figure 3: Number of allegations received by the Police Ombudsman's Office, 2020/21 to December 2025.

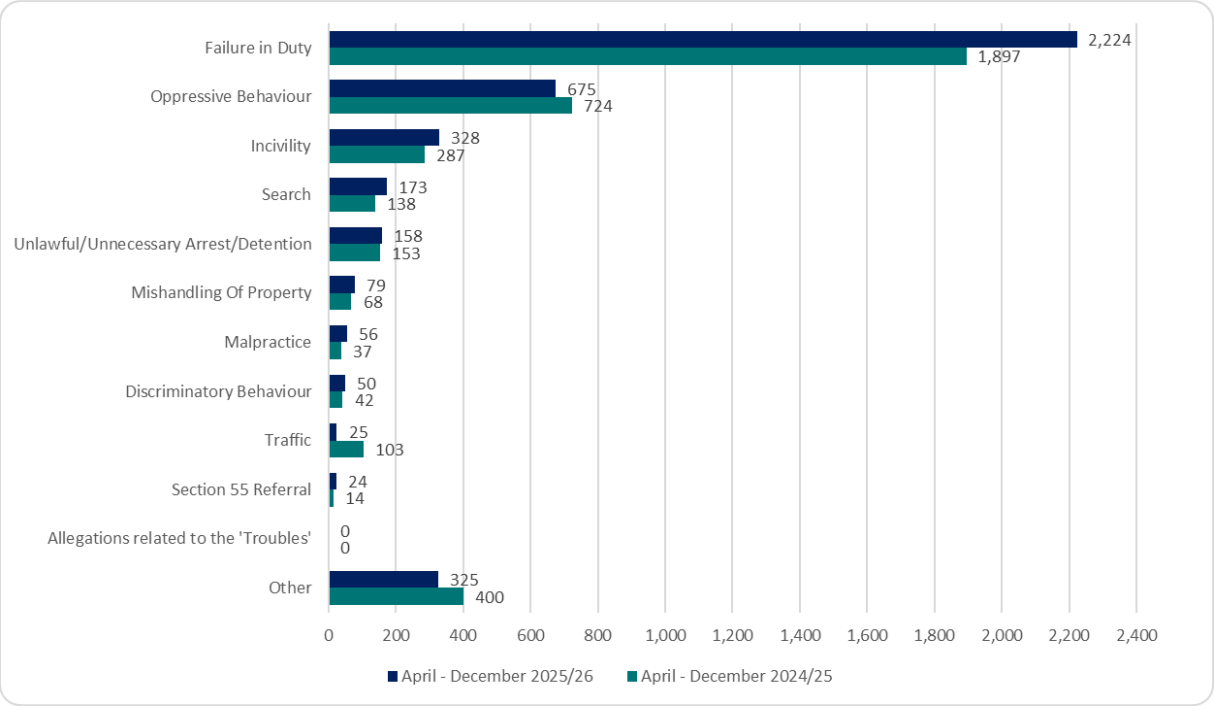


What were the allegations?

Key Takeaways

- The most common allegation received between April and December 2025 was 'Failure in Duty', accounting for 54% of all allegations received.
- Allegations related to 'Traffic' had the largest percentage decrease[4] (76%) when compared with last year.
- The top 5 allegations were:
  - Failure in duty: 2,224 allegations (54%)
  - Oppressive behaviour: 675 allegations (16%)
  - Incivility: 328 allegations (8%)
  - Search: 173 allegations (4%)
  - Unlawful/Unnecessary Arrest/Detention: 158 allegations (4%)

Figure 4: Comparison of the allegations received between April and December 2024 and April and December 2025.



[4] Percentage difference is only calculated when the base number is greater than 50

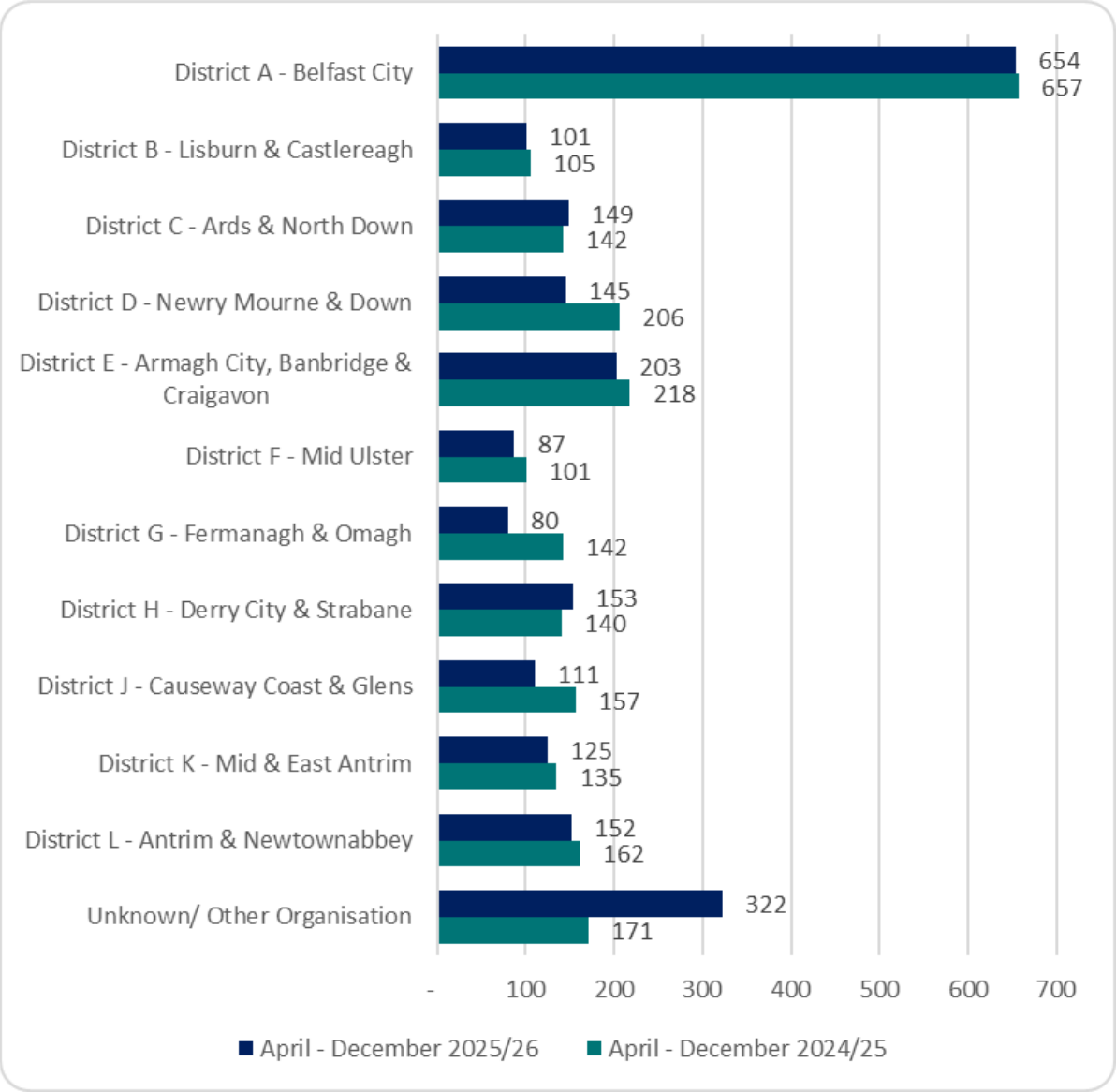
Where did the complaints happen?

When a complaint is received we use the location of the incident that led to the complaint to allocate it to a specific policing district.

Key Takeaways

- Between April and December 2025, the number of complaints increased across two of the 11 policing districts, when compared with the same time period last year.
- Similarly, the number of complaints decreased across nine of the 11 police districts.
- 29% of the complaints received were linked to District A – Belfast City.

Figure 5: Comparison of the complaints received in each police district between April and December 2024 and April and December 2025.



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 Ombudsman, the Office or PONI). The main users of this quarterly bulletin are the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland 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, and provides them with access to information which they can use to form discussions at their regular meetings.

Prior to the 2024/25 year this report contained an additional table detailing information on Officers who had been complained about multiple times in the last year. After a review of the information we produce for PSNI this data is no longer produced and as a result has been removed from the report.

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[5]. The number of complaints also includes those matters that have been referred to the Police Ombudsman's Office from other organisations[6], and any matter that the Police Ombudsman has decided is in the public interest to investigate.

There are a number of factors that may influence whether or not a person makes a complaint to the Police Ombudsman's Office. 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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[5] 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).

[6] 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 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'. 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 NISRA Data Portal.

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

The Police Ombudsman's Office will publish information throughout the 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 final quarterly update of 2025/26 is due to be published on Thursday 23rd April 2026 and it will include statistics up to the 31st March 2026.

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 further contact details are available on the back page of this bulletin.

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

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