



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

**Quarterly Statistical Bulletin up to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023**

**Published April 2023**

## Statistical Update up to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023, published on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2023.

This quarterly bulletin presents the most recent statistics on the number of complaints and allegations received by the Office of the Police Ombudsman (the Office), up to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. The statistics are based on information extracted from the Police Ombudsman's Case Handling System (CHS) on the 7<sup>th</sup> April 2023.

### Complaints Received

**Figure 1: Number of complaints received by the Police Ombudsman's Office, 2018/19 to 2022/23.**

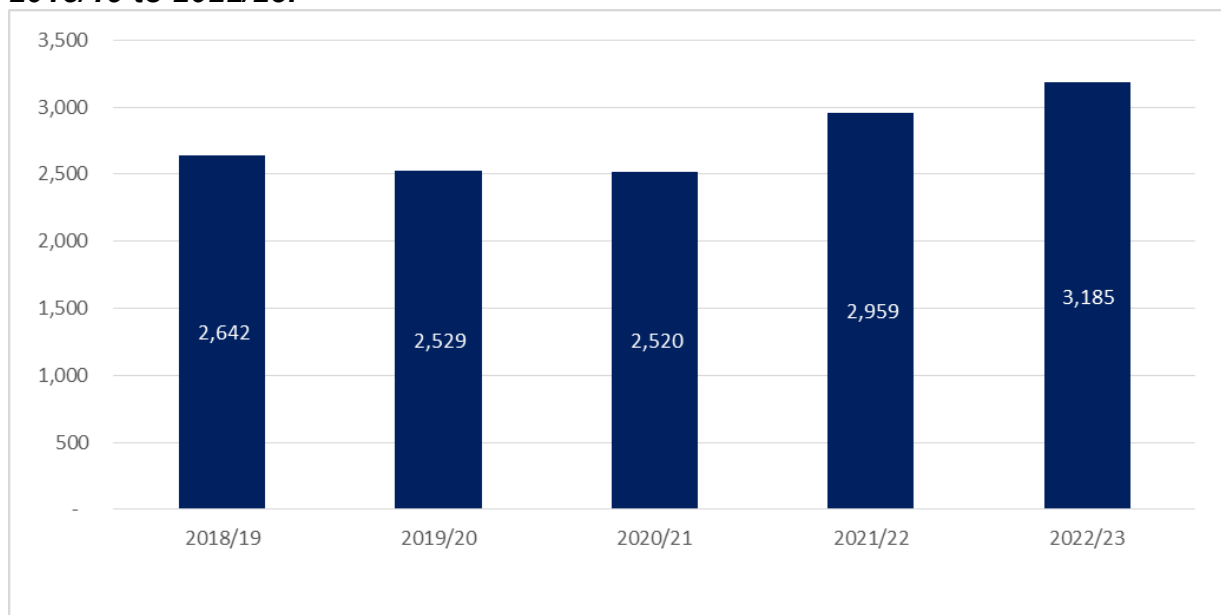


Figure 1 shows that the Office received 3,185 complaints in 2022/23. This is an 8% increase in the number of complaints received when compared with 2021/22. It is also the highest number of complaints received during the last five years.

## Main Complaint Factor

'Criminal investigation' was the most common main factor<sup>1</sup> underlying complaints during 2022/23. This accounted for 32% of complaints received during this time.

Complaints arising from 'Police enquiries' had the largest percentage decrease in 2022/23 when compared with the last year.

Complaints regarding 'Search' had the largest percentage increase during this time.

**Table 1: Comparison in the main factor of complaints received during 2021/22 and 2022/23.**

Main Complaint Factor	2021/22	2022/23	Difference	% Difference
Criminal Investigation	902	1,020	118	13%
Arrest	420	458	38	9%
Domestic Incident	259	258	-1	0%
Traffic Incident	236	254	18	8%
Search	161	203	42	26%
Police Enquiries	187	149	-38	-20%
Complaints relating to the 'troubles'	46	17	-29	-
Parade/Demonstration	20	12	-8	-
Police enforcing COVID-19 restrictions	37	3	-34	-
Other	615	682	67	11%
Unknown	76	129	53	70%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,959</b>	<b>3,185</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>8%</b>

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

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<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 2022/23 when compared with last year. District G – Fermanagh & Omagh had the largest percentage increase during this time (Table 2).

**Table 2: Comparison in the number of complaints received in each police district during 2021/22 and 2022/23.**

District	2021/22	2022/23	Difference	% Difference
District A - Belfast City	835	916	81	10%
District B - Lisburn & Castlereagh	120	140	20	17%
District C - Ards & North Down	220	195	-25	-11%
District D - Newry Mourne & Down	164	198	34	21%
District E - Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	259	311	52	20%
District F - Mid Ulster	135	125	-10	-7%
District G - Fermanagh & Omagh	120	179	59	49%
District H - Derry City & Strabane	188	200	12	6%
District J - Causeway Coast & Glens	221	232	11	5%
District K - Mid & East Antrim	230	217	-13	-6%
District L - Antrim & Newtownabbey	230	203	-27	-12%
Unknown/ Other Organisation	237	269	32	14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,959</b>	<b>3,185</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>8%</b>

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

## Allegations Received

**Figure 2: Number of allegations received by the Police Ombudsman's Office, 2018/19 to 2022/23**

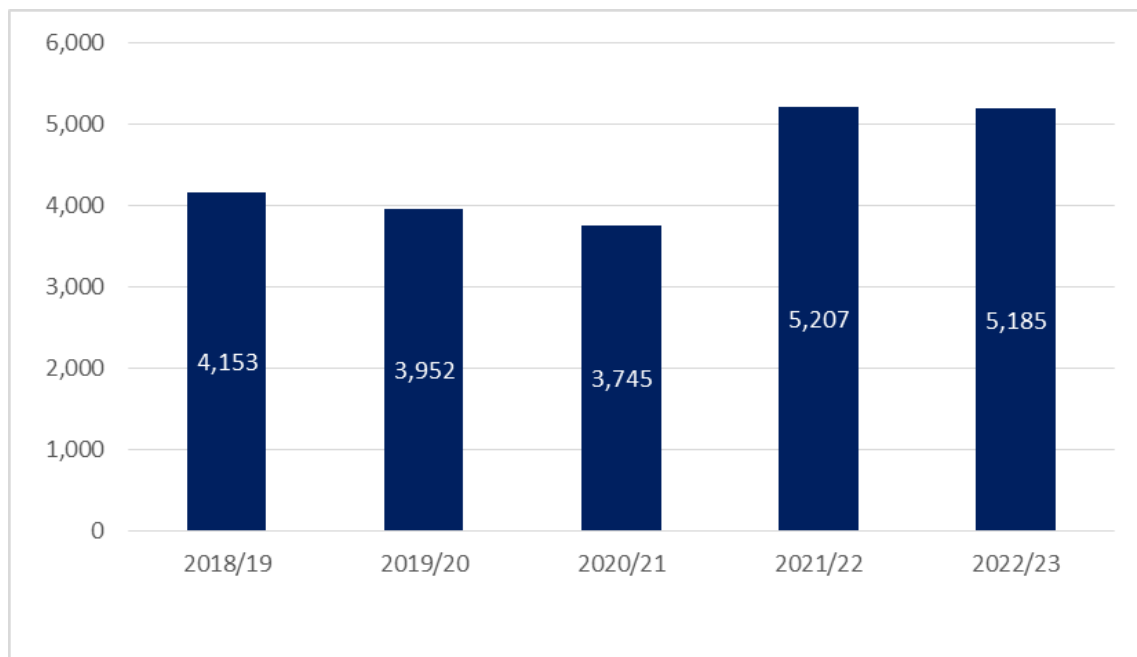


Figure two shows that the Office received 5,185 allegations in 2022/23. This is the second highest number of allegations received during this time period when compared with each of the previous five years.

## Allegation Type

'Failure in duty' was the most common allegation type received in 2022/23, accounting for almost half of all allegations received.

Allegations about 'Incivility' and 'Unlawful/Unnecessary Arrest/Detention' had the largest percentage increase during this time when compared to last year (Table 3).

**Table 3: Comparison in the types of allegations received during 2021/22 and 2022/23.**

Allegation Type	2021/22	2022/23	Difference	% Difference
Failure in Duty	2,516	2,527	11	0%
Oppressive Behaviour	1,244	1,166	-78	-6%
Incivility	286	324	38	13%
Unlawful/Unnecessary Arrest/Detention	207	234	27	13%
Search	194	193	-1	-1%
Mishandling Of Property	106	108	2	2%
Traffic	60	59	-1	-2%
Malpractice	46	43	-3	-
Discriminatory Behaviour	55	34	-21	-
Section 55 Referral	34	27	-7	-
Allegations related to the 'Troubles'	45	18	-27	-
Other	414	452	38	9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,207</b>	<b>5,185</b>	<b>-22</b>	<b>0%</b>

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

## Officers with multiple complaints

There were 18 PSNI officers who attracted three or more complaints that were formally investigated or dealt with by way of Informal Resolution between April 2022 and March 2023 (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 2022, September 2022, December 2022, March 2023.***

<b>Twelve month period ending</b>	<b>Number of officers with 3+ complaints formally investigated or dealt with by Informal Resolution</b>
June 2022	20
September 2022	20
December 2022	23
March 2023	18

## 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 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.

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

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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).



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 [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**

The Police Ombudsman's 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 first quarterly update of 2023/24 is due to be published on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> July 2023 and it will include statistics up to the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023.

### **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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