



Complaints and Allegations Received by the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland

**Quarterly Statistical Update to 31st December
2019**

Published January 2020

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

Statistical Update to 31th December 2019, published on 23rd January 2020

This quarterly bulletin presents the most recent statistics on the number of complaints and allegations received by the Police Ombudsman, up to 31st December 2019. The statistics are based on information extracted from the Police Ombudsman's Case Handling System (CHS) on the 16th January 2020.

Complaints Received

The Office received just over 1,840 complaints between April and December 2019. This is a 5% 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 December 2019



Main Complaint Factor

'Criminal investigation' was the most common main factor¹ underlying complaints between April and December 2019. This accounted for over a quarter of complaints received during this time. Arrest was the second most common factor underlying complaints during this time.

Complaints arising from 'Arrests', 'Police Searches' and 'Domestic Incidents' had the largest percentage decrease between April and December 2019 when compared with the same time period last year.

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

Although the numbers are still small at this time of the year, complaints relating to 'Parades/Demonstrations' more than doubled between April and December 2019 when compared with last year (Table 1).

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

	April to December 2018	April to December 2019	Difference	% Difference
Criminal Investigation	569	532	-37	-7%
Arrest	309	263	-46	-15%
Traffic Related Incident	178	169	-9	-5%
Search	136	115	-21	-15%
Police Enquiries (no investigation)	100	105	5	5%
Domestic Incident	104	88	-16	-15%
Parades/Demonstrations	13	30	17	-
Domestic Violence	23	29	6	-
Complaints relating to the 'Troubles'	20	16	-4	-
Other	392	418	26	7%
Unknown	107	79	-28	-26%
Total	1,951	1,844	-107	-5%

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

¹ The main complaint factor refers to the main situation giving rise to the complaint.

Complaints Received by Police District

The number of complaints decreased in 6 of the 11 known police districts between April and December 2019 when compared with the same time period last year. District B had the largest percentage decrease during this time, while District F had the largest percentage increase (Table 2).

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

	April to December 2018	April to December 2019	Difference	% Difference
District A - Belfast City	531	519	-12	-2%
District B - Lisburn & Castlereagh City	88	73	-15	-17%
District C - Ards & North Down	122	119	-3	-2%
District D – Newry, Mourne & Down	106	109	3	3%
District E - Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	160	144	-16	-10%
District F - Mid Ulster	77	91	14	18%
District G - Fermanagh & Omagh	86	88	2	2%
District H - Derry City & Strabane	138	141	3	2%
District J - Causeway Coast & Glens	147	164	17	12%
District K - Mid & East Antrim	124	115	-9	-7%
District L - Antrim & Newtownabbey	119	117	-2	-2%
Unknown / Other Organisation	253	164	-89	-35%
Northern Ireland	1,951	1,844	-107	-5%

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

Allegations Received

The Office received just over 2,880 allegations between April and December 2019. 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 December 2019



Allegation Type

'Failure in Duty' was the most common allegation type received between April and December 2019, accounting for almost half of all allegations received.

Allegations about 'Unlawful/unnecessary arrest/detention' 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 December 2018 and April to December 2019

	April to December 2018/19	April to December 2019/20	Difference	% Difference
Failure in Duty	1,435	1,347	-88	-6%
Oppressive Behaviour	639	616	-23	-4%
Incivility	192	167	-25	-13%
Search	152	124	-28	-18%
Unlawful/Unnecessary Arrest/Detention	152	115	-37	-24%
Mishandling of Property	64	81	17	-
Malpractice	29	38	9	-
Traffic	39	29	-10	-
Discriminatory Behaviour	34	27	-7	-
Allegations related to the 'Troubles'	19	15	-4	-
Section 55 Referral	19	11	-8	-
Other	255	314	59	23%
Total	3,029	2,884	-145	-5%

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

Officers with multiple complaints

There were 29 PSNI officers who attracted three or more complaints that were formally investigated or dealt with by way of Informal Resolution between January 2019 and December 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 & December 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 2019	33
December 2019	29

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 remit². The number of complaints also includes those matters that have been referred to the Police Ombudsman's Office from other organisations³, 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.

² 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).

³ 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 final quarterly update of 2019/20 is due to be published on Thursday 23rd April 2020 and it will include statistics up to the 31st March 2020.

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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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



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