



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

Annual Statistical Bulletin
2023/24

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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 2023/24, 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 (the 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 about 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.

Conventions

Percentages in the tables and text are rounded to the nearest whole number, and thus may not always add up to 100.

A SUMMARY OF THE KEY TRENDS IN COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE POLICE

- The number of complaints received by the Police Ombudsman's Office during 2023/24 increased by 5% from the previous year. This is the highest number of complaints received by the Office in the last five years.
- Criminal Investigation was the most common situation which gave rise to complaints, as it was in each of the last five years.
- Complaints have increased in six of the 11 police districts and have decreased in five of the 11 police districts. The largest proportional increase was in Ards & North Down (C District) where the number of complaints increased by 36%. While, the largest proportional decrease was in Lisburn & Castlereagh (B District) where complaints decreased by 7%.
- The most frequent allegations received during the year were allegations of Failure in Duty, of Oppressive Behaviour, and of Incivility.
- Just over two fifths (43%) of complaints dealt with by the Police Ombudsman's Office were subject to a full investigation. In 10% of these complaints, the Office found evidence to substantiate all or part of the complaint or identified another concern during the investigation.
- On 13 occasions during the year, the Police Ombudsman recommended that the Director of Public Prosecutions should prosecute an officer.
- The Police Ombudsman recommended on 208 occasions that a police officer should receive a discipline or a performance action.

COMPLAINTS

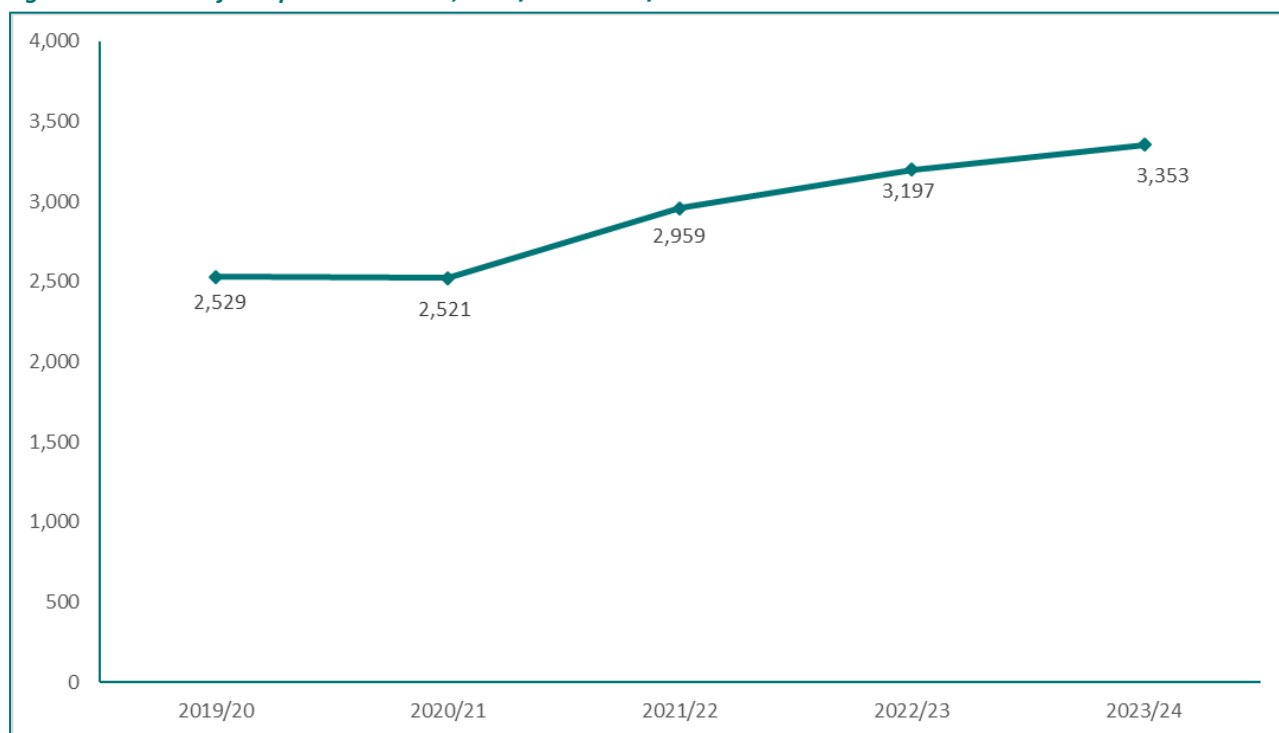
The volume of complaints and matters received

Key Takeaways

- The number of complaints received and matters referred for independent investigations by the Police Ombudsman’s Office during 2023/24 was 3,353 (Figure 1, Table 5).
- This is a 5% increase from the previous year, 2022/23.
- The number of complaints received in 2023/24 is the highest number of complaints since 2014/15, when 3,370 complaints were received that year - Please see accompanying spreadsheet for complaint counts since 2000/01.

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, 2019/20 to 2023/24



During 2023/24, the vast majority of complaints (96%) were from members of the public. In addition, less than 1% were matters referred to the Office for an independent investigation from the PSNI or from another organisation¹ or matters in which the Police Ombudsman has initiated an own motion investigation. A further 3% were classified as ‘Other’. These are

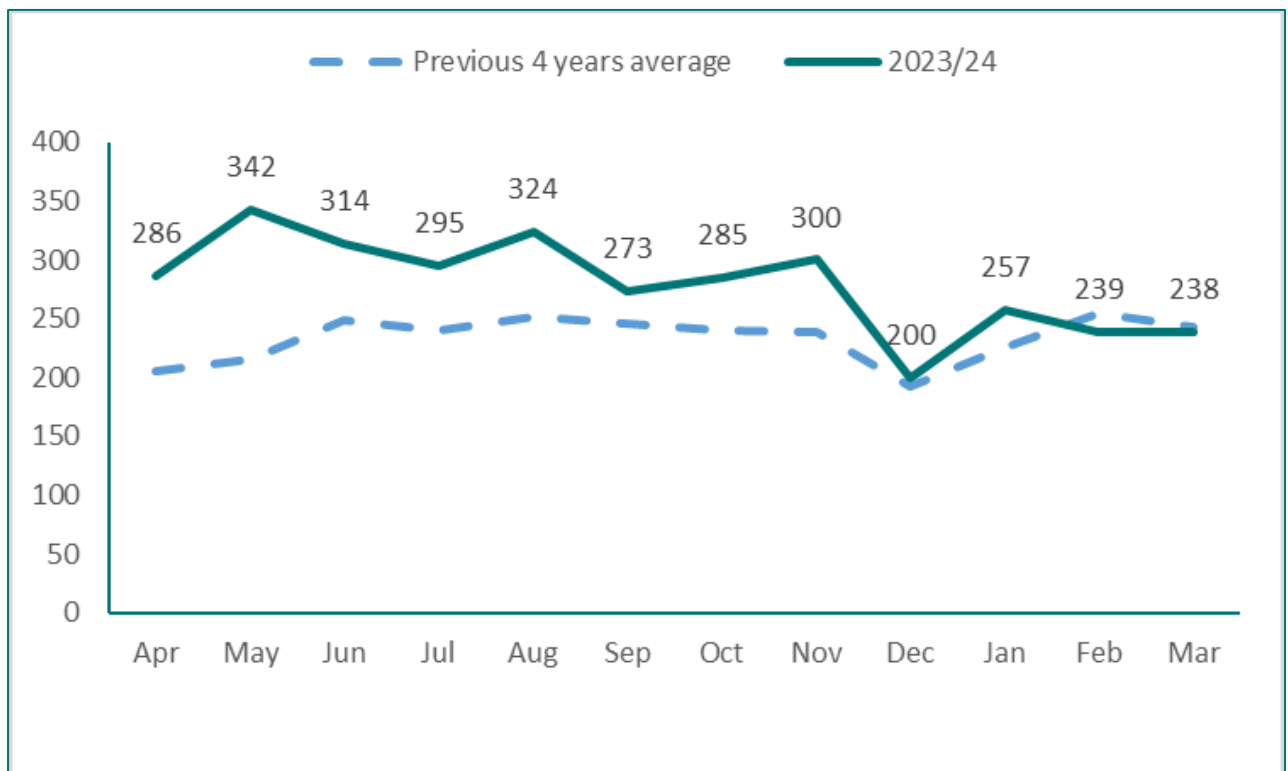
¹ Public Prosecution Service (PPS), Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB) or the Department of Justice (DOJ).

mostly comprised of notifications from police which did not result in an investigation (Table 6).

Complaints received each month

During 2023/24, the Office received between 200 and 342 complaints each month. For all months, except February 2024 and March 2024 the number of complaints received was higher 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 particularly evident this year with the Office receiving 237 more complaints over the summer period than the winter period (Figure 2, Table 7).

Figure 2: Number of complaints received by month, 2019/20 to 2023/24



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. The remit was extended, for serious incidents only, to include certain Home Office officials in 2014/15 and National Crime Agency Officials from 20th May 2015.

During 2023/24, the vast majority of complaints received (99%) were about the PSNI, this includes both police officers and ‘designated civilians’ within the Service (Tables 1 and 8).

Table 1: Complaints received by organisation, 2023/24

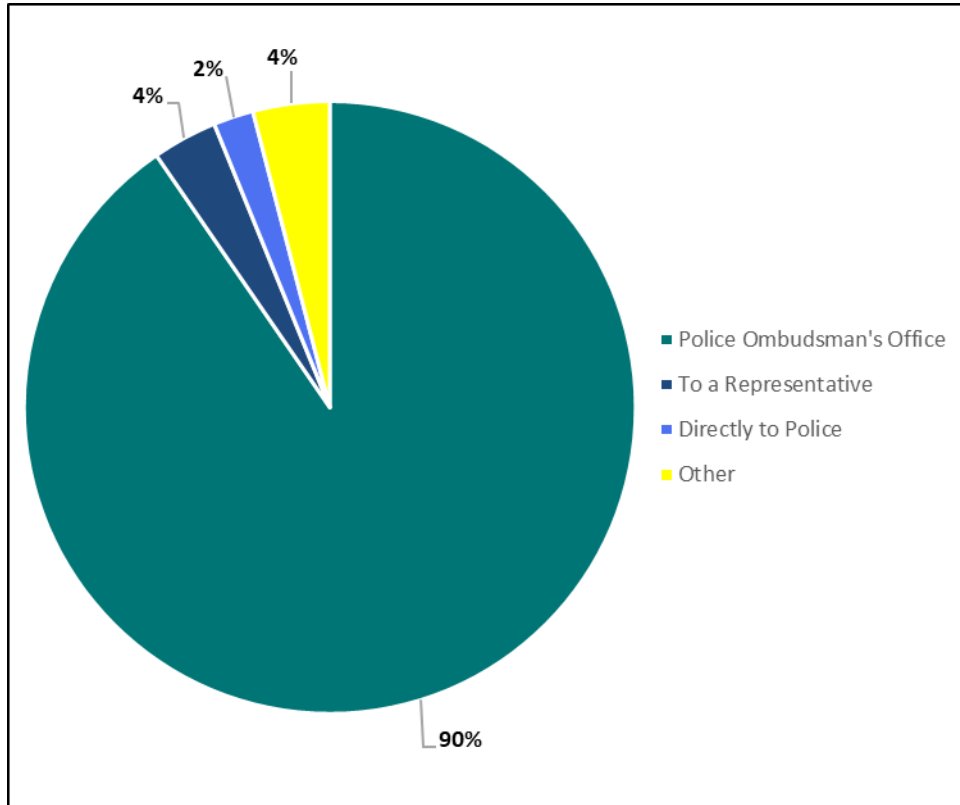
Organisation	No. of complaints received
PSNI	3,325
Harbour Police	2
National Crime Agency	1
NI Airport Constabulary	1
UK Border Force & Immigration Enforcement	1
Other / Unknown	23
Total	3,353

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.

Nine in every ten complaints (90%) received during 2023/24 were made directly to the Office without the use of an intermediary (Figure 3, Table 9).

Figure 3: Where people initially made their complaint, 2023/24



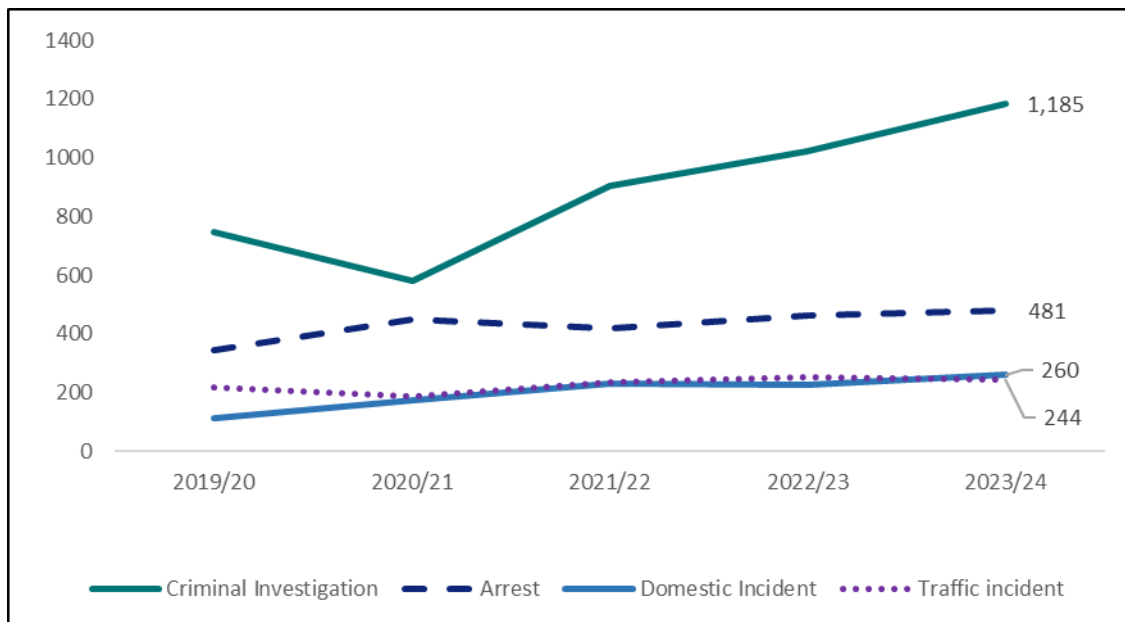
Over the last five years, the proportion of complaints made directly to the Office has increased, from 82% in 2019/20 to 90% in 2023/24. Whilst the proportion received via a representative and via the police decreased.

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 2023/24, followed by arrests, traffic related incidents and domestic incidents (Figure 4, Table 10).

Figure 4: Complaints arising, 2019/20 to 2023/24
Complaints Arising from Criminal Investigation, Arrest, Domestic Incident & Traffic Related Incidents



During 2023/24, the Office received 1,185 complaints arising from a criminal investigation. This accounts for 35% of all complaints received. The number of complaints made following a criminal investigation has increased by 16% this year.

There were 481 complaints arising from arrests during 2023/24. The number of complaints made following an arrest increased by 4% from 2022/23.

There were 260 complaints arising from domestic incidents (such as neighbourhood disputes) received during 2023/24. They have increased by 16% since the previous year.

There were 244 complaints made following a traffic related incident during 2023/24. The number of complaints made following a traffic related offence has decreased by 4% this year.

Police searches resulted in 172 complaints. This is a 15% decrease from the previous year.

There were 158 complaints arising from police enquiries. This is a 6% increase 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 this year from 20 during 2022/23 to 14 during 2023/24.

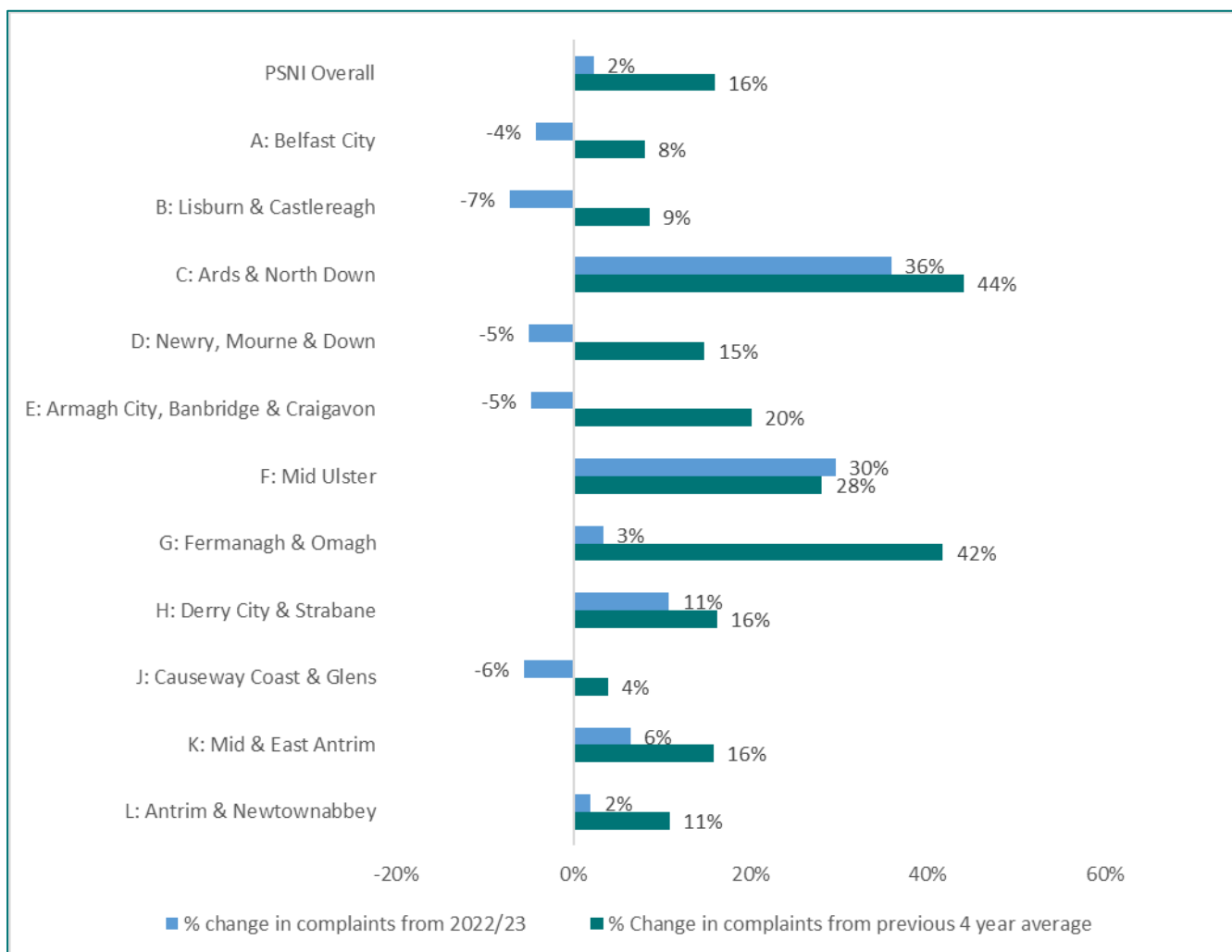
During 2023/24, there were 42 complaints arising from how the police dealt with domestic violence incidents. This is a 24% increase compared to the number of complaints in the previous year.

Complaints arising from parades or demonstrations fluctuate year on year. During 2023/24, there were 20 complaints.

Where did the complaints happen?^{2,3}

Six of the 11 police districts in Northern Ireland had an increase in complaints during this year, when compared with 2022/23 (Figure 5, Table 11).

Figure 5: One-year and four-year average change in the number of complaints by police district



The above chart shows that complaints at police district level have increased against the four year average, however, five of the 11 police districts show a decrease in complaints when compared to last year. The data in the chart reflects the fact that 2023/24 had the highest number of complaints in the last five years. 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).

² This is only for complaints made about the PSNI and does not include any other organisations.

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

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, 879 during 2023/24. It accounts for more than one quarter (26%) of all complaints received by the Office. Complaints from this district decreased by 4% from last year and have increased by 8% from the four year average.

Complaints in Lisburn & Castlereagh City (B District) have decreased by 7% from last year to 130 complaints. This is still a 9% increase from the four year average.

In Ards & North Down (C District) complaints increased by the largest proportion of any district, 36%, to 265 complaints. This is a 44% increase from the four year average. This is the district with the largest percentage increase when compared to both last year and the four year average.

Complaints from Newry, Mourne & Down (D District) decreased by 5% during 2023/24 to 188 complaints. This is a 15% increase when compared to the four year average.

The number of complaints from Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (E District) decreased by 5% from 2022/23. They have increased by 20% when compared to the four year average.

In Mid Ulster (F District) complaints have increased by 30% compared to 2022/23, and have increased by 28% compared to the four year average.

Complaints from Fermanagh & Omagh (G District) have increased by 3% from the previous year. The 2023/24 figure of 186 complaints is an increase of 42% when compared to the four year average.

The 226 complaints received in Derry City & Strabane (H District) shows an increase of 11% this year and a 16% increase compared to the four year average.

Complaints from Causeway Coast & Glens (J District) have decreased by 6% from last year. This is a 4% increase compared to the four year average.

In Mid & East Antrim (K District) complaints have increased by 6% this year. Complaints from this police district have increased by 16% compared to the four year average.

Complaints for Antrim & Newtownabbey (L District) have increased by 2% from last year. This is equivalent to an 11% increase when compared to the four year average.

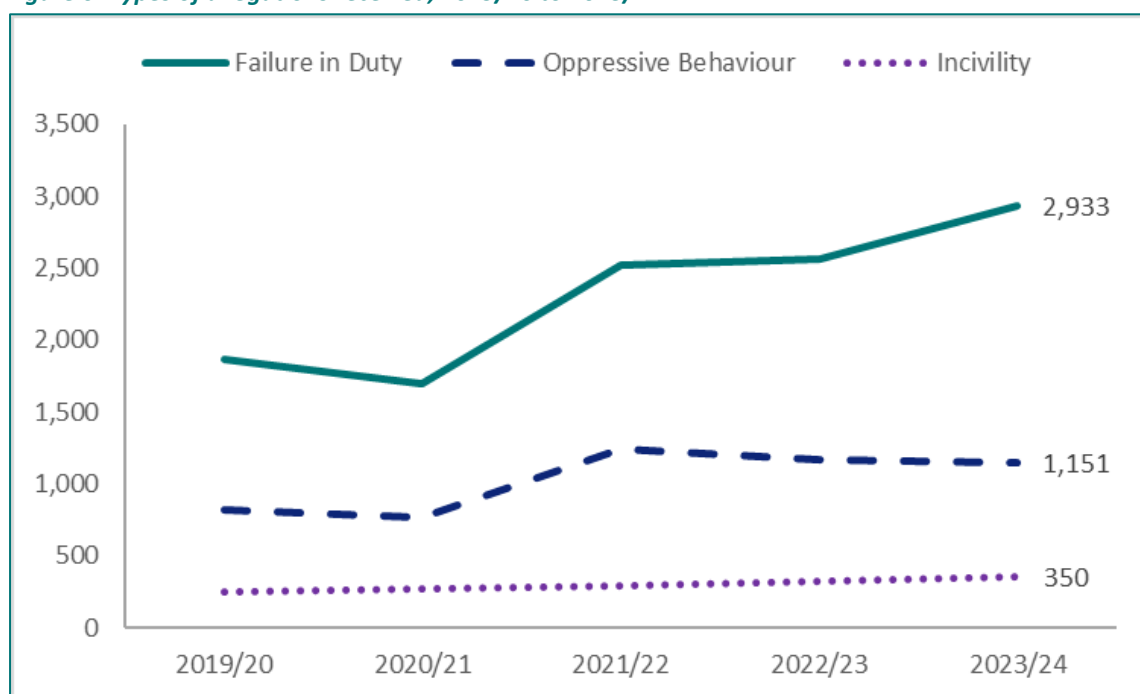
ALLEGATIONS

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’.

Key Takeaways

- During 2023/24, the Police Ombudsman’s Office received 5,848 allegations (Table 12). This is an 11% increase on the number of allegations received in 2022/23.
- 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, 2019/20 to 2023/24



Failure in Duty allegations

During 2023/24, 2,933 allegations received by the Police Ombudsman’s Office alleged a Failure in Duty by a police officer. This equates to half of all allegations received in the year and is a 15% increase on the number received in 2022/23.

More than half (51%) of the Failure in Duty allegations received in 2023/24 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 allegations were about failures in contact; such as failing to provide updates, failing to return telephone calls and failing to

reply to correspondence. These allegations account for 14% of all the Failure in Duty allegations.

Oppressive Behaviour allegations

There were 1,151 Oppressive Behaviour allegations received during 2023/24. This is a 2% reduction in the number received during 2022/23.

More than half (58%) of the Oppressive Behaviour allegations received during 2023/24 alleged oppressive conduct by an officer/s not involving an assault.

Allegations of serious non-sexual assaults and sexual assaults accounted for 2% of all the Oppressive Behaviour allegations received (Table 15).

Incivility allegations

During 2023/24, there were 350 Incivility allegations received. This was an 8% increase from the previous year.

More than half of Incivility allegations were about an officer being uncivil whilst on the telephone (34%) or being uncivil at a domestic residence (26%) (Table 16).

Other allegations⁴

The number of allegations increased across all other allegation types in 2023/24 with the exception of Traffic related allegations, Section 55 referrals and Historical Investigations (Table 13).

⁴ A further breakdown of allegations is available on the Police Ombudsman's website in the accompanying Excel tables.

Allegations regarding the use of police equipment

Allegations about the use of police equipment accounted for 3% of all the allegations received during 2023/24 (Table 17). This was higher than in 2022/23 but lower than the previous two years. It should be noted that a contributing factor to the higher numbers in 2020/21 and 2021/22 was the number of automatic referrals around the use of Spit and Bite Guards. These were introduced in March 2020 and automatically referred by PSNI during parts of 2020/21 and 2021/22 as part of the Police Ombudsman's review around the implementation and usage of them.

During 2023/24, allegations about the use of Handcuffs accounted for 42% of all allegations concerning police equipment. The use of PAVA spray accounted for a further 24% of all allegations concerning the use of police equipment.

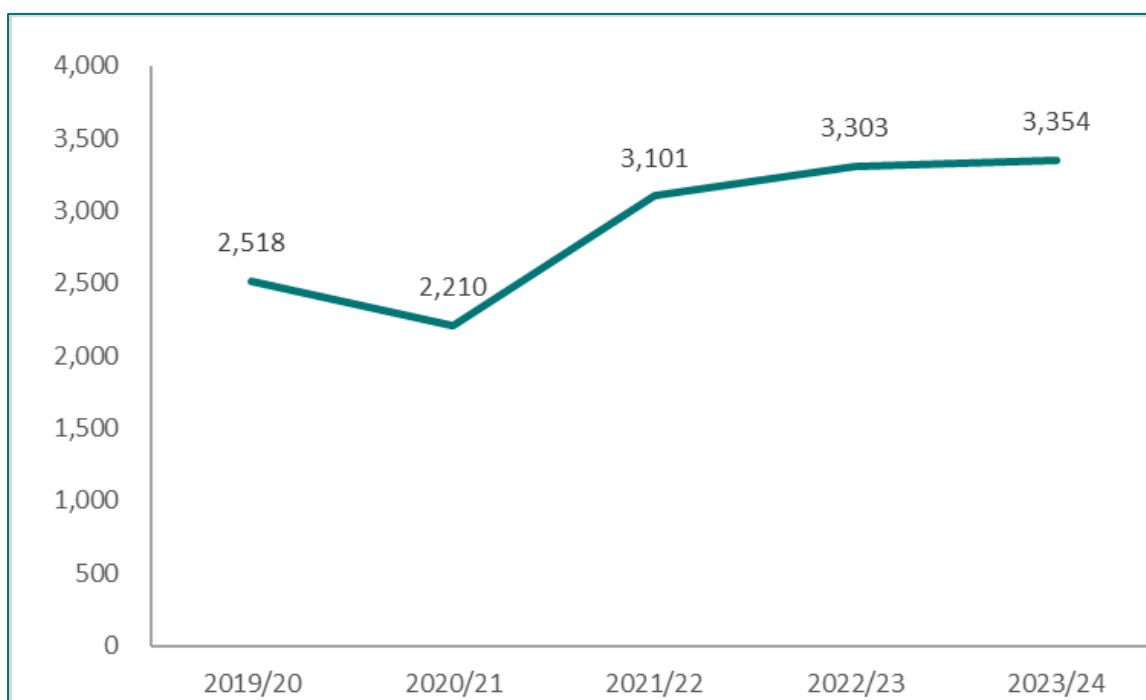
COMPLAINT CLOSURES

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.

Key Takeaways

- The Office closed 3,354 complaints during 2023/24 (Figure 7, Table 18).
- This is a 2% increase from the previous year.
- It is also the highest number of complaints closed by the Office in the last five years.

Figure 7: Number of complaints closed by year, 2019/20 to 2023/24



The number of complaints being closed by the Office has increased this year continuing the trend which started in 2021/22. This reflects the increase in the number of 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). These are complaints closed following initial assessment, following initial inquiries, resolved informally and following a full investigation. Complaints closed that relate to the 'Troubles' are totalled separately regardless of the stage that they were closed.

Table 2: Complaint closures, 2023/24

Complaint Closures	2023/24
Total Complaints Closed	3,354
Complaints closed following initial assessment	761
Not a matter for the Police Ombudsman	516
Notification only	116
Other (Initial Assessment)	129
Complaints closed following initial inquiries	876
Complainant did not fully engage	714
Ill-founded	23
Withdrawn	107
Other (Initial Inquiries)	32
Complaints resolved informally	254
Complaints closed that relate to the 'Troubles'	14
Complaints closed following a full investigation	1,449
Complaint substantiated or an issue of concern	145
Not substantiated and no issue of concern identified	1,304

Just over two in ten (23%) complaints closed during 2023/24 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 (26%) were closed following 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.

Just over two fifths (43%) of 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 10% of these fully investigated complaints during 2023/24.

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).

Note: Following resrepresentation 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)

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/staff member 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.

Key Takeaways

- During 2023/24, the Office sent 193 recommendations to the PPS.
- The Police Ombudsman recommended that the Director of Public Prosecutions should prosecute an officer or staff member on 13 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, 2023/24

Prosecution for an officer/staff member	2023/24
Recommended	13
Not Recommended	180

Over the last five years, the number of recommendations made to the PPS for prosecution has fluctuated, ranging from five recommendations in 2020/21 to 28 during 2021/22 (Table 19). The numbers made this year are more similar to 2022/23.

Recommendations made to the Chief Constable or Chief Officer

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 officer/staff member who were the subject of the complaint.

Key Takeaways

- During 2023/24, the Police Ombudsman's Office made 208 recommendations that an officer or staff member should receive either a discipline or a performance action (Table 4).
- Over half (54%) of these recommendations were for a Misconduct Meeting.
- The Office recommended a larger number of Misconduct Meetings this year when compared to previous years. This is due to Misconduct Meetings being recommended for a large number of officers in connection to one complaint.

Table 4: Number of recommendations made by the Police Ombudsman for an officer/staff member to receive a discipline or performance action, 2023/24

Discipline or Performance Actions (Regulations Introduced in June 2016⁵)	208
Performance	92
Misconduct Meeting	112
Misconduct Hearing	4

The number of recommendations for a discipline or performance action the Police Ombudsman has made for an officer/staff member has in general fluctuated over the last five years (Table 20).

⁵ 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

Key Takeaways

- The Police Ombudsman's Office forwarded a total of 32 policy recommendations to Police during 2023/24.
- These were made up of six at a strategic level, 24 at an operational level and two areas for minor improvement

Eleven policy recommendations were accepted. Two of these were in respect of the use of social media, five were in relation to various aspects of record/information management, two related to investigations where the Investigating Officer is on long-term absence and two were in respect of officers giving evidence in court.

One recommendation was in relation to Armed Response Units using head mounted body worn video cameras, which was deemed by police to be in place already.

Responses are awaited in respect of 20 policy recommendations. These relate to matters which include the use of body worn video; record/information management; review of services instructions/policies; and driver training.

INFORMAL RESOLUTION

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 2023/24, 16% of complaints received were considered to be suitable for Informal Resolution and of these 66% of the persons making the complaint agreed for it to be dealt with through Informal Resolution (Table 22).

During 2023/24, 259 complaints reached a successful conclusion through the informal resolution process (Table 23) which is over two thirds (71%) of all complaints reaching a conclusion from this process.

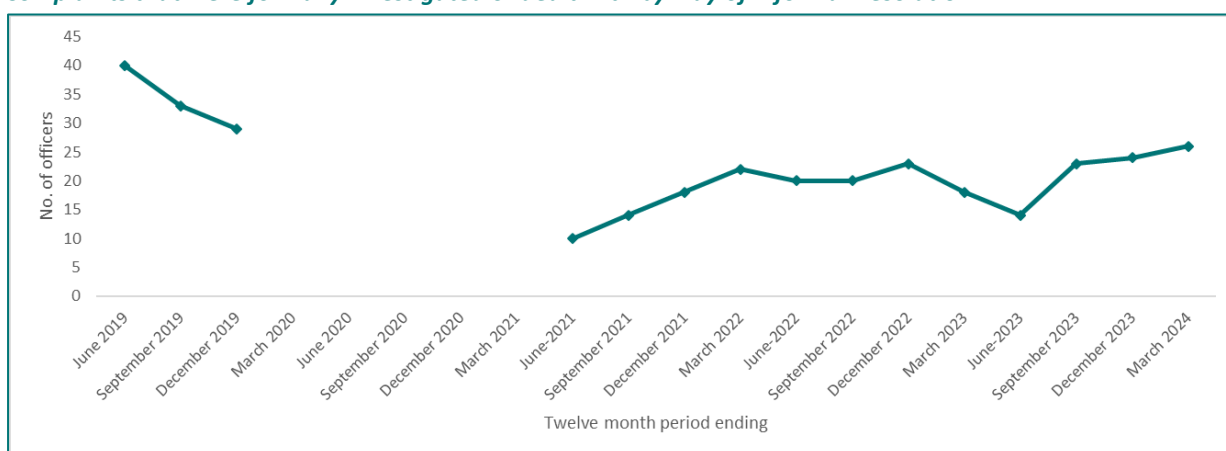
PSNI OFFICERS

The information on the number of officers with multiple complaints is produced from quarterly snapshots of the CHS system. During 2020/21 these quarterly snapshots were not produced as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result this information has not been updated between March 2020 and March 2021.

In 2023/24, 40% of the complaints recorded by the Police Ombudsman's Office had 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 (86%) identified within complaints in 2023/24 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.

Figure 8: Officers that received three or more complaints, June 2019 to March 2024
Complaints that were formally investigated or dealt with by way of Informal Resolution



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, 2019/20 to 2023/24

Year	Complaints
2019/20	2,529
2020/21	2,521
2021/22	2,959
2022/23	3,197
2023/24	3,353

Table 6: Complaints and matters, 2019/20 to 2023/24

Complaints/Other Matters	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Complaints from members of the public	2,373	2,281	2,794	3,057	3,217
Matters referred to the Office	2	5	21	13	10
Matters the Police Ombudsman has chosen to investigate	11	9	13	15	11
Other	143	226	131	112	115
Total	2,529	2,521	2,959	3,197	3,353

Table 7: Complaints received by month, 2019/20 to 2023/24

Month Complaint Received	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
April	215	135	211	264	286
May	195	186	237	245	342
June	176	222	287	310	314
July	236	207	258	257	295
August	252	229	248	280	324
September	192	290	251	250	273
October	234	232	270	224	285
November	185	221	249	302	300
December	163	211	188	206	200
January	230	151	268	254	257
February	259	207	248	300	239
March	192	230	244	305	238
Total	2,529	2,521	2,959	3,197	3,353

Table 8: Complaints received by organisation, 2019/20 to 2023/24

Organisation	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)	2,496	2,490	2,898	3,155	3,325
Northern Ireland Airport Constabulary	2	1	1	4	1
UK Border Force & Immigration Enforcement	0	0	0	2	1
Ministry of Defence Police	0	0	4	1	0
Designated Civilian ¹	0	0	0	0	0
Harbour Police	0	1	6	0	2
National Crime Agency	1	3	1	0	1
Other / Unknown	30	26	49	35	23
Total	2,529	2,521	2,959	3,197	3,353

Table 9: Complaints received by where the initial complaint was made, 2019/20 to 2023/24

Source of complaints	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Directly with Police Ombudsman's Office	2,086	2,079	2,485	2,851	3,031
Via Representative	183	124	197	110	115
Directly with the Police	104	78	112	96	71
Other (includes referrals)	156	240	165	140	136
Total	2,529	2,521	2,959	3,197	3,353

Table 10: Main situations giving rise to complaints, 2019/20 to 2023/24

Main Situation	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Criminal Investigation	746	582	902	1,022	1,185
Arrest	342	451	420	462	481
Domestic Incident	113	173	230	225	260
Traffic incident	216	188	236	254	244
Search	146	184	161	203	172
Police Enquiries	160	144	187	149	158
Domestic Violence	39	28	29	34	42
Parade/Demonstrations	31	40	20	12	20
Complaints relating to the 'Troubles'	22	21	46	20	14
Police enforcing COVID19 restrictions	1	53	37	3	1
Other	588	579	615	685	609
Unknown	125	78	76	128	167
Total	2,529	2,521	2,959	3,197	3,353

Table 11: Complaints received by police district, 2019/20 to 2023/24

Police District	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
A: Belfast City	718	784	835	918	879
B: Lisburn & Castlereagh	103	116	120	140	130
C: Ards & North Down	154	167	220	195	265
D: Newry, Mourne & Down	150	143	164	198	188
E: Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	203	215	259	312	297
F: Mid Ulster	119	127	135	125	162
G: Fermanagh & Omagh	129	96	120	180	186
H: Derry City & Strabane	179	207	188	204	226
J: Causeway Coast & Glens	210	180	221	232	219
K: Mid & East Antrim	166	185	230	217	231
L: Antrim & Newtownabbey	173	146	230	205	209
Other organisation/ Unknown	225	155	237	271	361
Total	2,529	2,521	2,959	3,197	3,353

Table 12: Number of allegations received, 2019/20 to 2023/24

Year	Allegations
2019/20	3,952
2020/21	3,747
2021/22	5,209
2022/23	5,250
2023/24	5,848

Table 13: Types of allegations⁶, 2019/20 to 2023/24

Types of Allegations	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Failure in Duty	1,869	1,694	2,517	2,561	2,933
Oppressive Behaviour	819	764	1,244	1,173	1,151
Incivility	246	267	286	325	350
Unlawful/Unnecessary Arrest/Detention	159	106	207	239	269
Police Searches	160	171	194	195	222
Mishandling of Property	99	82	106	110	143
Malpractice	41	57	46	47	75
Discriminatory Behaviour	37	33	55	34	67
Traffic	39	30	60	60	55
Section 55 Referral	13	13	34	29	21
Allegations relating to the 'Troubles'	21	19	45	19	8
Other	449	511	415	458	554
Total	3,952	3,747	5,209	5,250	5,848

⁶ A full breakdown of allegation sub types is available in the accompanying Excel spreadsheet

Table 14: Failure in Duty allegations, 2019/20 to 2023/24

Failure in Duty Allegations	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Conduct of police investigations / incident response	1,004	871	1,280	1,340	1,501
Failure in contact	264	177	336	296	412
Failure in record management	171	132	263	270	323
Other failure in duty	174	198	259	257	285
Conduct in custody suite	97	128	124	141	168
Failure in duty of care	92	126	141	148	144
Failure to act impartially	67	62	114	109	100
Total	1,869	1,694	2,517	2,561	2,933

Table 15: Oppressive Behaviour allegations, 2019/20 to 2023/24

Oppressive Behaviour Allegations	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Oppressive Conduct (OC Not Involving Assault)	436	365	706	658	666
Other Assault	254	244	348	337	335
Harassment (Series of Like Incidents)	76	124	139	131	123
Sexual Assault	29	19	40	36	15
Serious non-sexual assault	24	12	11	11	12
Total	819	764	1,244	1,173	1,151

Table 16: Incivility allegations, 2019/20 to 2023/24

Incivility Allegations	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Incivility By Officer On The Telephone	67	67	90	98	118
Incivility At Domestic Residence	65	68	71	73	92
Other incivility	61	70	72	92	85
Incivility At Police Station	24	24	24	32	37
Incivility When Stopped For A Traffic Offence	25	34	24	29	17
Incivility To Person Under 18 Years	4	4	5	1	1
Total	246	267	286	325	350

Table 17: Allegations regarding the use of police equipment, 2019/20 to 2023/24

Police equipment	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Handcuffs	37	10	61	58	66
CS / PAVA spray	17	17	20	30	37
Taser	24	24	22	11	21
Baton	5	9	8	7	12
Spit and bite guards	N/A	97	47	7	10
AEP/Baton Round/Riot Gun	5	6	9	6	6
Misuse/Discharge Firearm	6	4	5	7	3
Other	1	4	2	7	1
Total	95	171	174	133	156

Table 18: Complaint closures, 2019/20 to 2023/24

Complaint Closures	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Total Complaints Closed	2,518	2,210	3,101	3,303	3,354
Complaints closed following initial assessment	496	481	583	644	761
Not a matter for the Police Ombudsman	307	205	353	422	516
Call in/Call out - No Further action or Notification only	147	221	142	102	116
Other (Initial Assessment)	42	55	88	120	129
Complaints closed following initial inquiries	773	685	918	854	876
Complainant did not fully engage	654	536	772	678	714
Ill-founded	19	7	21	25	23
Withdrawn	80	115	101	114	107
Other (Initial Inquiries)	20	27	24	37	32
Complaints resolved informally	191	127	279	233	254
Informally Resolved	191	127	279	233	254
Complaints closed that relate to the 'Troubles'	9	3	49	31	14
History Complaint	9	3	49	31	14
Complaints closed following a full investigation	1,049	914	1,272	1,541	1,449
Complaint substantiated or an issue of concern	135	106	143	203	145
Not substantiated and no issue of concern identified	914	808	1,129	1,338	1,304

Table 19: Occasions Police Ombudsman recommended prosecution/no prosecution⁷ for an officer/staff member, 2019/20 to 2023/24

Recommendations to PPS	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Criminal Charges	21	5	28	10	13
No Criminal Charges	194	73	134	167	180
Total	215	78	162	177	193

Table 20: Occasions Police Ombudsman recommended⁸ a discipline or performance action for an officer/staff member, 2019/20 to 2023/24

Regulations Introduced June 2016)	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Performance	57	36	108	119	92
Misconduct Meeting	87	26	51	50	112
Misconduct Hearing	9	6	13	18	4
Total	153	68	172	187	208

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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: Outcome of policy recommendations made, 2019/20 to 2023/24

Policy recommendations made to PSNI	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Accepted (Full/Partial)	15	0	38	29	11
Already in Place	2	1	5	10	1
Alternative solution	4	1	3	0	0
No Longer Applicable	0	0	0	0	0
Not Accepted (Rejected)	1	1	1	3	0
Duplicate	0	0	0	1	0
Still under consideration	2	4	3	6	20
Total	24	7	50	49	32

Table 22: Complaints suitable for Informal Resolution (IR) with consent obtained, 2019/20 to 2023/24

IR Complaints Received	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of Complaints	2,529	2,521	2,959	3,197	3,353
Complaints suitable for IR	386	320	601	505	522
Consent for IR obtained	268	213	397	362	347
Consent for IR not obtained	118	107	204	143	175

Table 23: Outcome of Informal Resolution process, 2019/20 to 2023/24

IR Resolved	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Successful	178	120	277	230	259
Failed	66	50	97	109	97
Withdrawn	6	5	3	5	7
Total	250	175	377	344	363

Table 24: Rank of officer in the PSNI complained about, 2019/20 to 2023/24

Rank	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Constable	1,460	1,241	1,732	1,794	1,713
Sergeant	226	159	208	245	235
Inspector and Above	49	48	52	63	45
Designated Civilian	40	20	35	28	9

Table 25: Number of officers with three or more complaints that were formally investigated or dealt with by way of Informal Resolution, 2019/20 to 2023/24⁹

Twelve-month period ending	Number of officers
June 2019	40
September 2019	33
December 2019	29
June 2021	10
September 2021	14
December 2021	18
March 2022	22
June 2022	20
September 2022	20
December 2022	23
March 2023	18
June 2023	14
September 2023	23
December 2023	24
March 2024	26

⁹ The information from March 2020 to March 2021 is not available. This is due to the Office partially closing on three separate occasions 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 they think is best suited to secure the confidence of the public and the police. The Police Ombudsman believes that for such confidence to be forthcoming, it is essential that people are informed about the nature of the work the Office carries out.

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 them 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 about officers whose conduct has been the subject of disciplinary or criminal proceedings; or complaints about off-duty police officers, unless the fact that they are 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 investigations 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, they 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, they are required to consider whether it is appropriate to recommend disciplinary proceedings. If the Chief Constable is unwilling to administer the recommended discipline, the Police Ombudsman may, direct them 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Notification only

These are situations where the Police Ombudsman’s Office is notified of an incident but determines at an early stage that there is no requirement for any further investigation.

Performance

A recommendation to initiate unsatisfactory performance procedures for an officer.

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.

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 about parties, the incident and allegations made. Data can be downloaded and exported to a number of commonly used software packages for analysis (Excel, Access, SPSS¹⁰). 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 12th April 2024, and thus includes all information recorded on the system up to the 11th April 2024.

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.

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

¹⁰ SPSS is a statistical software package developed for use by social scientists.

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 tables below shows the scale of revisions made between statistics in this bulletin and those in the previous bulletin in June 2023. 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 received between this publication and the previous publication in June 2023.

Financial Year	Previously Published Figures (June 23)	Current Published Figures (June 24)	Scale of Revision (number)	Scale of Revision
2019/20	2,529	2,529	0	0.00%
2020/21	2,520	2,521	1	0.04%
2021/22	2,959	2,959	0	0.00%
2022/23	3,185	3,197	12	0.38%

Table 27: Revisions made to the number of allegations received between this publication and the previous publication in June 2023.

Financial Year	Previously Published Figures (June 23)	Current Published Figures (June 24)	Scale of Revision (number)	Scale of Revision
2019/20	3,952	3,952	0	0.00%
2020/21	3,745	3,747	2	0.05%
2021/22	5,207	5,209	2	0.04%
2022/23	5,185	5,250	65	1.25%

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 2025. 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 4th Thursday in the month following the end of the quarter.

Additional copies of this and other publications are available from:

**Information and Communications Unit
Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland
New Cathedral Buildings
11 Church Street
Belfast
BT1 1PG**

**Telephone: 028 9082 8634
Witness Appeal Line: 0800 0327 880
Email: info@policeombudsman.org**

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

Website: www.policeombudsman.org