

Police, Fire and Crime Panel – 15 February 2024

Annual Update on Complaint Reviews

Report of the Staffordshire Commissioner

1. Purpose of Report

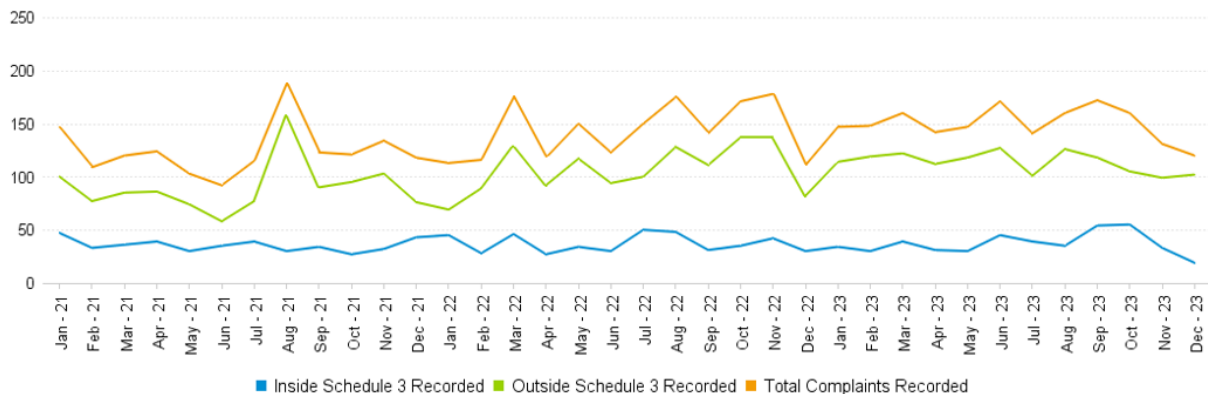
- 1.1 The report updates the panel on the Staffordshire Commissioner’s statutory function of reviews following the implementation in February 2020, of the police misconduct and complaint reforms.
- 1.2 A reminder to the panel that the specific role was introduced for Police and Crime Commissioners to increase and strengthen independence and improve complaints handling, ensuring the public can maintain confidence in the integrity of policing.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. That the panel note the contents and agree to receive annual updates for scrutiny at future panel meetings.

3. Complaints

3.1 The graph below shows that whilst there has been an increase in the number of complaints being received by Staffordshire Police for the second year running, those recorded under schedule 3 of the Police Reform Act 2002, where a right of review is given, continues to decrease. The increase in numbers are for those complaints that are dealt with outside of schedule 3 of the Police Reform Act 2002, which is defined as a logged complaint, where if the allegation was proven it wouldn’t justify misconduct proceedings and there is no right of review by either the Local Policing Body or the IOPC.



3.2 In 2023 Staffordshire Police's Professional Standards Department received a total of 1,811 complaints. This is a 4.5% increase compared to 1733 complaints received in 2022. For further comparison in 2021, 1505 complaints were received. These figures represent a continual upward trend in the levels of dissatisfaction being received by Staffordshire Police.

3.3 To further breakdown the figures in 3.2.

In 2023, of the 1811 complaints received 471 (26%) were dealt with under schedule 3 which, gives the complainant the option to exercise a right of review either by the Staffordshire Commissioner's Office or the Independent Office of Police Conduct (IOPC). With the remaining 1,340 complaints dealt with outside schedule 3 either by, the Professional Standards Department Triage Team or, a specialised department within the force.

Of the 471 complaints recorded under schedule 3 for 2023, the Staffordshire Commissioners Office was the review body for 349 (74%), with the IOPC being the review body for the remaining complaints.

Of the 446 complaints recorded under schedule 3 for 2022, the Staffordshire Commissioners Office was the review body for 353 (79%), with the IOPC being the review body for the remaining complaints.

Of the 425 complaints recorded under schedule 3 for 2021, the Staffordshire Commissioners Office was the review body for 365 (86%), with the IOPC being the review body for the remaining complaints.

3.4 All data is recorded and published by the Independent Office of Police Conduct (IOPC) and the links are documented below. It sets out performance against a number of measures and compares force results to their most similar force (MSF) group (where applicable) and with the overall result for all forces (national). This data is used by the IOPC to discuss performance on a quarterly basis with both Staffordshire Police's Professional Standards Department and the Staffordshire Commissioners Office. The purpose is to recognise good practice but, to also identify any areas of improvement, where Staffordshire is an outlier.

<https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/police-force/staffordshire-police>

*Avon & Somerset, Derbyshire, Hertfordshire, Essex, Cheshire, Hampshire, Nottinghamshire

3.5 As noted in the chart/graph outlined in 3.1, as expected there are peaks and troughs with demand, some of these can be attributed to a specific event/occurrence that has happened locally, regionally or nationally. For example, going into lockdown, coming out of lockdown, restrictions being lifted, protests. Policing is under more scrutiny now than ever before and members of the public are more likely to complain about the level of service they have received, by either an officer(s) or the force in general. National headlines for other forces will also drive an increase in complaints being reported in Staffordshire and all other forces throughout the UK. It is noted that there is currently a number of documentaries with police forces or police focused that will drive the number of complaints being received, which focuses on the areas in the programmes.

3.6 Staffordshire Police's Professional Standards Department continues to ensure that members of the public are aware of how to make a complaint, and that the system is accessible for all. This is done through many mechanisms which includes posters, booklets and engagement with local communities through the neighbourhood policing team. Below is the information available online.

<https://www.staffordshire.police.uk/fo/feedback/complaints/complain-about-the-police/>

3.7 Staffordshire Police's Professional Standards Department implemented a dedicated triage which is now embedded within the department and working well. The team consists of three customer advisors who look to triage and resolve complaints within 5 working days, in most instances it is 24/48 hours. For 2023, the triage team with the support of the department dealt with 74% of all complaints received by Staffordshire Police. The continued benefit of the triage team is minimal complaints are sent out for resolution by the neighbourhood policing team which allows more time for proactive policing/working with the community. It also allows for a quicker resolution of the dissatisfaction raised and reduces repeat demand.

3.8 Work continues with the Prevent Officer who successfully engages with officers and staff to identify training with the view to ultimately improving the service provided to the communities of Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire. Communication campaigns are delivered throughout the force giving examples of what the top categories of complaints are. There has also been the successful implementation of a number of

team's channels where examples of good and bad policing are shared. This is done to different cohorts i.e. sergeants, new recruits which does promote healthy discussion and challenge. The Prevent Officer continues to do an input on day one of every new recruit about the standards of professional behaviour expected, this is followed up by either a half or full day input 3-6 months into their service that focuses on complaints that have been received by the service.

3.9 Work continues with the Commissioner's Office and Staffordshire Police's Professional Standards department around organisational learning. This includes:

- The PSD Bulletin supplemented real-time emerging trends and patterns, moving further towards the ethos of the 2020 regulations around being a learning organisation.
- Findings from reviews fed into the Prevent Officer
- Delivery of preventative briefings.
- Any individual learnings identified being disseminated real time.
- Identifying reoccurring themes & proactive action taken to resolve.
- Input with student officers by the Prevent Officer.
- Teams channels led by the Prevent Officer that raises issues within policing that are local, regional and national.
- Weekly & monthly feedback from the Independent Review Manager (SCO) on findings from reviews and any trends identified through complaints.
- Monthly meetings to analysis performance.
- Quarterly meetings with the Independent Office of Police Conduct (IOPC).

3.10 Staffordshire Police continue to develop and adapt their approach to the management of complaints in line with the new legislation and a trust driven policing model, where there is the focus on organisational and individual learning and development. The Commissioner is confident that these changes, together with the role of the Independent Review Manager meet the aspirations that have been set out by government in introducing national reforms.

4.0 Complaint Reviews

4.1 To remind the panel that the Staffordshire Commissioner adopted Model 1. This requires all PCC's to receive reviews from the public, where they are identified as the local policing body, and consider whether Staffordshire Police took reasonable and proportionate action to address the complaint. Once the review has been completed to then notify the complainant of the outcome.

4.2 In order to fulfil this statutory requirement, this is undertaken by the Independent Review Manager, who has delegated authority from the Staffordshire Commissioner to undertake this function.

- 4.3 For 2023 of the 349 reviews where the Staffordshire Commissioners Office was the review body, a total of 85 reviews have been received, this equates to 24%. It is noted that in comparison to 2022 and 2021, that whilst the number of complaints where the Staffordshire Commissioner’s Office was the review body has decreased the number requesting a review of their complainant has increased by 6%.
- 4.4 For 2022 of the 353 reviews where the Staffordshire Commissioners Office was the review body, a total of 62 reviews have been received, this equates to 18%.
- 4.5 For 2021 of the 365 reviews where the Staffordshire Commissioners Office was the review body, a total of 65 reviews have been received, this equates to 18%.
- 4.6 The following provides the number of reviews received in 2021, 2022 and 2023 and whether the review was upheld or not.

	2023	2022	2021
Number of Reviews	85	59	64
Still Live	5	N/A	N/A
Out of Time	2	3	1
Not Valid	1	0	0
Upheld	11 (14%)*	8 (14%)	6 (10%)
Not Upheld	61	48	58

* This figure may alter depending on the outcome of the outstanding 5 live complaints

- 4.7 Of the 77 reviews considered so far there have been recommendations for either individual or organisational learning on 16 (21%) of reviews received.

Those recommendations include:

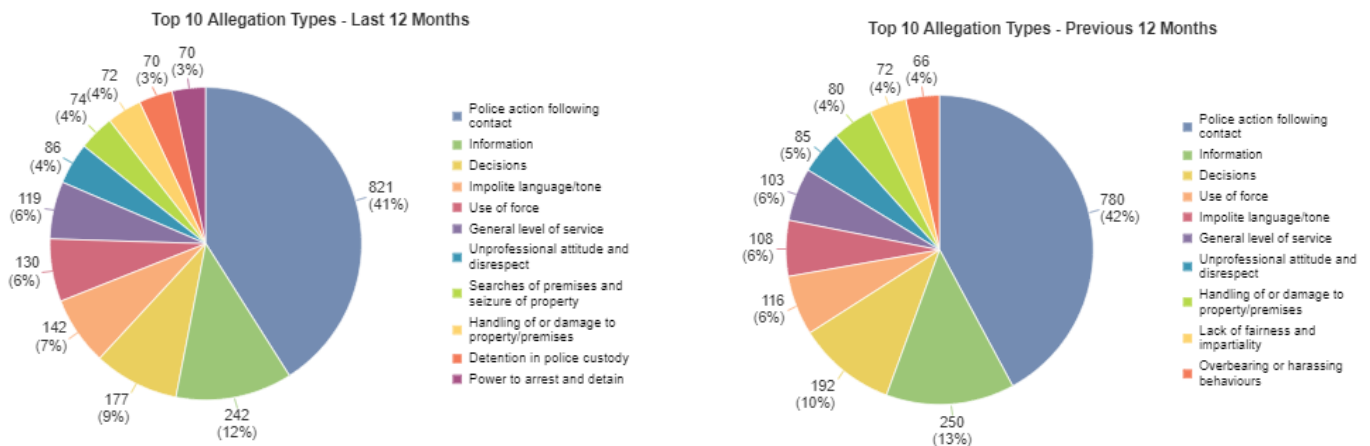
- Ensuring staff have sufficient training on systems to ensure there was no delays to the service
- Ensuring complainants receive regular updates and expectations are managed. This remains one of the reasons why members of the public express their dissatisfaction with the service.
- Engagement with the public and understanding what impacts public confidence.
- Information recorded accurately and in detail.
- Decision making.
- Ensuring reports/letters are plain English, jargon free and suitable explanations provided.
- Completion of Use of Force Forms and Pocket notebook entries

- Joined up approach where more than one department is involved in the complaint.
- Making complainants aware of any learnings that have been identified through the initial complaints process.
- Ensuring sufficient engagement with the complainant to ensure allegations are understood.
- Changes in policy
- Ensuring that the right outcome is attributed to complaints i.e. service level acceptable, unacceptable or undetermined

4.8 The top three allegations that are recorded based on the complainant’s dissatisfaction (categories are defined by the IOPC). Work is continually ongoing to address the issues raised with a view of reducing repeat complaints.

The charts below give the comparison between 2022 and 2023 and will show the same top 3 for both years.

- Police action following contact
- Information
- Decisions



4.9 The Commissioner’s office continues to offer members of the public varied options to make a review and also how that review outcome is delivered. This allows and shows a transparent and openness to the complaints process and demonstrates an independent approach, which is one of the fundamental reasons for PCCs undertaking this role.

4.10 To ensure oversight and scrutiny of the complaints system, on any cases of over 12 month’s duration, Staffordshire Police must write to the Commissioner and the IOPC to inform them of the reasons and actions being taken to progress the complaint.

Further communication is required every 6 months thereafter until the complaint is finalised.

- 4.11 For 2023 there have been 7 timeliness reports received by the Commissioner's office, with a copy to the IOPC. The main reasons for the reports are due to the complaint being sub judice as there are criminal proceedings ongoing.
- 4.12 Work continues on a quarterly basis with the Independent Office of Police Conduct (IOPC) where performance is scrutinised for both Staffordshire Police and the Commissioner's Office. The most recent quarterly data in relation to Staffordshire Police and the annual statistics report are published by the Independent Office for Police Conduct. These links are also contained with the Commissioner's website.

<https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/information-for-police/police-data>

5.0 What next?

- 5.1 Work continues on an annual basis where The Ethics and Transparency Audit Panel look at different aspects of the complaint process. Any thematic reports will be published on the Staffordshire Commissioners Website for transparency purposes.

The annual review by an independent, nationally recognised group is welcomed by both the Commissioner's Office and Professional Standards.

- 5.2 Both the Commissioner's office and Staffordshire Police's Professional Standards Department also continue to do an annual presentation to ETAP around complaints and reviews.
- 5.3 The Independent Review Manager will continue to work with Staffordshire Police's Professional Standards Department to ensure any reform/transformational work is in line with the implementation of the regulations.
- 5.4 The Staffordshire Commissioners Office is now part of the complaints process for Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service. Work is underway to develop a performance pack that will be presented within this report at the next panel meeting in 2025.
- 5.5 The Independent Review Manager now also completes weekly dip sampling of closed complaints which have been dealt with by the triage team. The findings from this data will be produced in this report from 2025.

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