

How should police officers and staff handle complaints?

Complaints can provide valuable feedback to help forces improve the service they provide. All police officers and police staff must respond to someone who wishes to make a complaint – even if the matter is then passed on to someone else to resolve.

Should the complaint be referred to the IPCC?

Police forces must refer certain complaints and incidents to the IPCC – for example, an allegation that an officer has seriously assaulted someone or committed a serious sexual offence, or if someone has died or been seriously injured following direct or indirect contact with the police. If you think that a complaint or incident should be referred, make sure your PSD is aware of it.

A step-by-step guide

→ Step 1 – what is the complaint about?

Establish exactly what the complaint is about and what the complainant would see as a satisfactory outcome.

→ Step 2 – recording the complaint

The vast majority of complaints will need to be recorded within ten working days. Liaise with your force's PSD to ensure that complaints are recorded.

→ Step 3 – can you resolve the complaint immediately?

If you can deal with a complaint there and then, to the satisfaction of the person making it, you should do so. For example, if someone complains that the police have closed a road, they may be satisfied with an explanation about why the road was closed. In such circumstances, you should keep a note of the complaint, but it does not need to be formally recorded.

→ Step 4 – local resolution/local investigation

Local resolution is a way of dealing with complaints at a local level. Local resolution is appropriate for many complaints, but not for more serious matters.

If a complaint is not suitable for local resolution, a local investigation should be carried out. Make sure you explain to the complainant what they can expect during the investigation process.

→ Step 5 – tell the complainant the outcome

Tell the complainant about the outcome of their complaint and that they have a right of appeal. You may tell them this verbally, but you should also send them written confirmation.

If you need advice about dealing with a complaint, contact your PSD.

Full Statutory Guidance for forces on dealing with complaints is available on our website at www.ipcc.gov.uk