

A guide to the police complaints system

ipcc
independent
police complaints
commission





Who deals with complaints about the police?

The Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) oversees the whole of the police complaints system and sets standards that the police should follow when they handle complaints.

The majority of complaints are dealt with locally by police forces, usually by a supervisor or manager or a person who works in the department within the force that deals with complaints.

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.

We expect police forces to take complaints seriously and resolve the issues that the person making a complaint has experienced. The police should make changes where necessary and learn from complaints to improve the way they do things and stop the same problem from happening again.

This leaflet tells you broadly how the police complaints system works. The IPCC also produces guidance for police forces about how we expect them to deal with complaints – this guidance is available on our website. This leaflet tells you which sections of the guidance to look at for further information.



How do I make a complaint?

The best way to make a complaint is to contact the police force involved. Police force websites include information about how to complain or you can visit any police station.

You can complain to any force by using the online form on the IPCC website. Forms are also available to download, complete and email or to print off, complete by hand and post to the relevant police force.

You can bring someone with you to make a complaint – for example, a friend or advocate. If you prefer, someone can make a complaint on your behalf, but you must give your permission in writing for them to do this.

When you make a complaint, you can expect the police force to listen to you, act in a fair and balanced way and seek to put things right.



What will happen when I have made a complaint?

If your complaint can be resolved by giving you some information or explaining what happened then the police should do this. If your complaint needs to be looked into, the police force should make a formal record of your complaint and let you know they have done this (see section three of the IPCC's guidance for police forces for more information about recording complaints). Recording a complaint means that it has formal status under the Police Reform Act 2002. It must then be dealt with according to certain rules and guidance. If the police do not record your complaint you can appeal to the IPCC.

The person dealing with your complaint should contact you to make sure they have all the details of what you are complaining about. They should ask you what you want to happen. For example, you might want an apology, a problem to be put right, or an officer to be held to account. They will be able to tell you what is likely to happen as a result of your complaint.

The person dealing with your complaint should also talk to you about what they will do to deal with your complaint. For example, they may provide you with information or an explanation; they may arrange a meeting with the person you are complaining about or there may need to be an investigation.

See section three of the IPCC's guidance for police forces for more information about complaints and how forces should handle them.

Local resolution

Local resolution is a way of dealing with complaints at a local level. It is appropriate for many complaints, but not for more serious matters, where an investigation must be carried out. The person dealing with your complaint might take some of the following actions to locally resolve your complaint:

- provide information and explanation
- give an apology on behalf of the force
- explain the circumstances of the case and any action taken
- arrange a meeting with the person complained about
- arrange for force policy or procedures to be changed
- take some investigative steps to find out more information.

The person dealing with your complaint will let you know the outcome when they have finished looking at it. They may do this in person or on the phone, but they should also write to you.

See section five of the IPCC's guidance for police forces for more information about local resolution.

Local investigation

Most complaints will be dealt with by local resolution. However, if a complaint is not suitable for local resolution, a local investigation should be carried out. Certain complaints must be dealt with by a local investigation.

The person dealing with your complaint (the investigating officer) may set terms of reference to explain what the investigation will look at. If there are terms of reference you should receive a copy.

Keeping you informed during an investigation

The investigating officer must keep you informed about the progress of the investigation. They should agree with you how you would like to be kept informed – this could be by phone, in person or by letter. The investigating officer must update you at least every 28 days.

When the investigation is complete, you will be told what it has found, and if your complaint has been upheld. You will also be told whether any action is going to be taken as a result of your complaint, what the action is and what the outcome of that action is. For example, an officer might have to attend a misconduct hearing and, as a result, receive a final written warning. You should receive enough information at the end of the investigation to understand what has happened during the investigation and what decisions have been reached. Sometimes this might happen by you being given a copy of the investigation report.

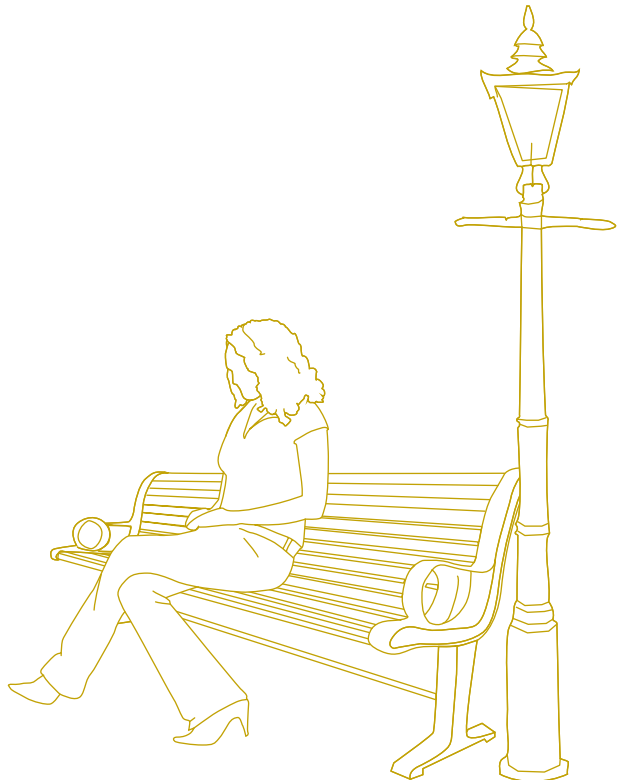
See section 12 of the IPCC's guidance for police forces for more information about what should happen after an investigation is complete.



How do I appeal about the way the police have dealt with my complaint?

If you are unhappy with the outcome of your complaint you can appeal in some circumstances – this could be either to the police force or to the IPCC depending on how the complaint has been dealt with. The letter telling you the outcome of your complaint should include information about how to appeal and the time limits involved.

See section 13 of the IPCC's guidance for police forces for more information about appeals.



How can I find out more?

All the information you need to make a complaint or appeal, and details of what to expect when you do, is available online. You can visit either your local police force website or the IPCC website – www.ipcc.gov.uk

You can also get information in person from any police station.



To obtain this leaflet in another language or format (Braille, audio, large print, Easy Read) please use the contact details below.

If you are deaf or hard of hearing, information is available on our website in BSL. You can also contact us using Text Relay. Please use the number below.

Tel:	0300 020 0096	Email:	enquiries@ipcc.gsi.gov.uk
Fax:	020 7404 0430	Website:	www.ipcc.gov.uk
Minicom:	020 7404 0431	Text Relay:	18001 0207 166 3000