

IPCC ACCESS STRATEGY

1. AIMS & PRINCIPLES

This strategy supports the IPCC's core purpose to increase **public confidence** in the police complaints system. It also supports the aims of increasing **awareness**, **accessibility** and **engagement** in the complaints system.

The strategy is underpinned by the IPCC's core values, in particular the values of **openness** and **valuing diversity**.

The overarching principles of this strategy are:

- The IPCC believes the best way for citizens to make complaints against the police is to their local police force and will work with forces to ensure there is effective local access to the complaints system
- The IPCC will provide appropriate and cost-effective ways for people to access its services, designed with the needs and preferences of customers in mind
- The IPCC will seek to encourage greater usage of the most effective contact methods
- The IPCC will not discriminate against any individual by limiting the choice of contact methods available

2. SCOPE

For the purposes of this strategy, 'access' is defined as the provision of channels through which citizens can gain information about and use the police complaints system as a whole. The IPCC is one route into the complaints system but the majority of citizens will access the system via police forces.

This strategy focuses on the following types of contacts:

- Transactions (making a complaint, appealing)
- Interactions (obtaining advice about the complaints or appeals process)
- Information provision (obtaining information about the complaints system)

The Access Strategy supports the IPCC's Communications and Oversight and Confidence Strategies. However, it, does not aim to cover in detail work that these strategies mention which also contributes to increasing access to and confidence in the complaints system overall.

3. DEFINITIONS

The access strategy uses terminology taken from the guidance issued by the Contact Council (see above). Definitions of key phrases are as follows:

Channel	Means by which a customer can receive information from and interact with a service provider.
Channel shift	The process by which organisations seek to encourage customers to access, or interact with, services via channels other than those they would normally choose. Deliberate channel shift is the design and marketing of effective and efficient channels because they are the most appropriate channels for the type of contact in question. Channel shift can lead to lower costs and a better service for customers.
Unnecessary contact	Contact between the customer and service provider which is of little or no value to either party and is both

	frustrating for the customer and inefficient for the provider.
Accessibility of contact	The ease or difficulty that a customer may experience when accessing services via particular channels – for example, as a result of a disability or language barrier.
Digital inclusion	Over 40% of the UK population do not use online channels. The government plans to increase access to and use of online channels as part of its Digital Inclusion Action Plan and the proposed Digital Switchover of Public Services, starting in 2012.
Transactions	Making a complaint, appeal etc.
Interactions	Obtaining advice about the complaints or appeals process.
Information provision	Obtaining information about the IPCC or the complaints system – for example, from leaflets.

4. RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

4.1 Changing the message about direct complaints

Since it came into operation in 2004, the IPCC's strategy has been to promote the new ability for citizens to make complaints direct to an independent body rather than to the police. As part of this, the IPCC asked forces to ensure information about the IPCC was available to complainants via force websites and other information materials. We also promoted the ability to make direct complaints via our website and information leaflets.

IPCC research shows that the majority of complainants would prefer to make a complaint directly to the police. However, many people complain to the IPCC because they are not able to do this successfully, or they lack confidence that their complaint will be dealt with effectively at the local level. Complainants are then passed between the IPCC and the force before being able to access the complaints process, which can be frustrating and causes delays.

The majority of complainants would receive a better service if they were able to complain directly to the force on the first attempt and have their complaint dealt with locally. The facility to complain via the IPCC should still be available as a safety net for people who have a valid concern about making a complaint direct to the police and for people who need additional support or guidance.

IPCC information material will state that the best route to make an initial complaint is directly to the force concerned where it can be dealt with quickly and effectively and greater emphasis will be given to the IPCC's appeals function.

4.2 Working with forces to improve access at a local level

As part of this, the IPCC will work with police forces to ensure that they are providing citizens with adequate access to the complaints system and that information being provided by forces emphasises the process for complaining direct to the force. This work will include improving the information that forces provide through their websites and other information materials, and improving the service that forces provide when citizens make complaints at the local level. Further work is underway to obtain data broken down by force to inform this work.

4.3 Access to the IPCC's services

The IPCC will continue to provide a range of ways to access information about the IPCC and the complaints system in general. It will also provide details about interacting with the IPCC in order to make complaints and appeals.

4.3.1 Core channels for providing information

The IPCC will continue to provide a range of information channels with details about its services and the police complaints system:

- A website (which meets relevant accessibility standards and is speech enabled)
- A suite of printed leaflets available in English and Welsh
- Online leaflets in ten other languages (as set out in the Translation and Interpretation Strategy)
- Leaflets in Easy Read, Braille, audio and large print formats and a British Sign Language DVD.
- Information in other languages and formats will be provided on request (as set out in the Translation and Interpretation Strategy)

4.3.2 Core channels for accessing IPCC services

The IPCC will continue to provide a range of channels for citizens who want to use its services:

- Telephone (including switchboard, Customer Contact Centre (CCC) and direct dial)
- Email (via general Enquiries email address or individual accounts)
- Online (including online forms)
- Letter
- Fax
- Paper complaint and appeals forms

4.3.3 Accessibility of contact

Customers seeking to use the IPCC's service may have special requirements – for example as a result of having English as a second language or being disabled. The IPCC is committed to ensuring that its services are accessible to all sections of society. By reducing the resources required to deal with the majority of customers, a better service can be provided for those who need additional support.

- We will continue to provide information in other languages and the IPCC will communicate with customers about complaints and appeals in any language (as set out in the Translation and Interpretation Strategy)
- We will continue to provide information in formats including easy read, large print, audio, Braille and British Sign Language (BSL), and an enhanced service will be provided for those who have special access requirements (including face-to-face communication where required).
- IPCC websites will adhere to relevant accessibility standards
- We will provide our staff with guidance and training on how best to meet the needs of customers with special access requirements.

4.3.4 'Unnecessary contact'

Both the IPCC and its customers have limited resources and want contact to be as efficient as possible. By identifying customer contact which is 'unnecessary' the IPCC can redesign the way that services and information are provided so that customers do not need to get in touch unnecessarily. Contact which does not add value for the customer or the IPCC has been identified as:

- Direct complaints made to IPCC rather than to the force concerned due to lack of information about how best to make a complaint
- Direct complaints made to the IPCC where the complainant has tried to complain to the force but not been successful
- Direct complaints made to the IPCC where the complaint is not within the IPCC's remit
- Repeat contact from customers as a result of them not understanding the content of written correspondence
- Repeat contact from customers chasing the progress of a complaint or appeal

- Contact from customers requesting information which is readily available from leaflets or our website

It is important that the actions we take to reduce unnecessary contact with the IPCC, are carried out in conjunction with work with forces to improve access to the complaints system at a local level (see 4.2 above). This will ensure that access to the system overall is not adversely affected.

In addition to work with forces to improve access at a local level, the IPCC will:

- Ensure that IPCC information materials (website, leaflets etc) are presented in clear language and using a logical structure. We will also provide responses to frequently asked questions
- Adhere to the value of openness and proactively provide as much information as possible under the publications scheme on the IPCC website and through the use of new digital and social media channels
- Continue to improve the quality of casework, including the way that decisions are communicated, which will help to minimise comebacks
- Guidance and policy for staff to manage customer contact
- Improve the way that telephone enquiries are dealt with

4.3.5 Channel shift

Requests for information, complaints and appeals carried out online can be dealt with more efficiently by the IPCC leading to a quicker service for the customer.

A review carried out by the Department for Work and Pensions calculated the cost of different types of interactions:

Face to face interactions – approx £10 per contact

Phone interactions – approx £3 per contact

Online interactions – approx 8p per contact

The IPCC will use its website and information leaflets to explain the benefits to customers of making complaints and appeals to the IPCC online, rather than using paper-based form. Improvements currently being made to the accessibility of our online forms will also help to encourage greater use of this channel. We will continue to provide other access channels for people who not digitally included and do not have access to web-based materials (see below).

We will keep the take up of our channels under review to ensure our channels are efficient and effective for the customer and for the IPCC.

4.3.6 Digital inclusion

The IPCC will work to ensure that its online services are easy to use for the widest range of citizens. We will also ensure that alternative access methods are in place for people who are not able to access online channels. The Government is seeking to increase digital inclusion and this may help to increase the numbers of people able to access the IPCC's online services.

5. RISKS

The primary risk is that improving access leads to an increase in demand for the IPCC's services which cannot be met with existing resources. This risk is heightened if our resources are reduced as a result of Government spending cuts.

This strategy aims to mitigate this risk by:

- seeking to support police forces to provide a better initial service to customers who want to complain locally, therefore minimising the number of direct complaints being made to the IPCC

- utilising resources more effectively by making processes more efficient and reducing contact which does not add value to the customer or to the IPCC.

There is also a risk that promoting the benefits of complaining directly to police forces reduces access to and confidence in the complaints system among people who are concerned about the consequences of complaining and people who are prevented from complaining directly to forces. A key element of this strategy involves the IPCC working with forces to improve access at a local level, while maintaining the option of making a complaint direct to the IPCC for people who lack confidence in the process for making a complaint locally.

The strategy contains ambitious targets for increasing the proportion of complaints and appeals submitted to the IPCC online rather than via paper forms, letters etc. There is a risk that it is not possible to achieve these targets which would impact on the ability to handle complaints and appeals more efficiently and on financial benefits.

Finally, there is a risk that police forces are resistant to improving access and dealing with more direct complaints locally at a time when their budgets are being reduced. We will address this issue by working closely with ACPO and emphasising that dealing with complaints the first time they are raised is more efficient for forces.

6. RESOURCES

This strategy is written on the assumption that resources for dealing with direct complaints and appeals will remain the same or be reduced as a result of public spending cuts. Many of the actions outlined above are aimed at making processes more efficient and effective which will mean that resources are used more effectively. Resource is also required to provide information materials and access to the complaints system through the website, and to provide services such as translation.

7. EVALUATION

There are a number of measures in place which can be used to measure access to the complaints system and to the IPCC including the performance framework, public confidence survey, balanced scorecard, customer satisfaction surveys and monitoring of the volumes of contact received via various access channels.

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