

Complaint dip sampling

The purpose of the dip sampling process is not to re-investigate and provide an alternative view to the investigating officer's conclusions on the merits or otherwise of a complaint.

The sampling is designed to comment on the extent to which the complaints process has been followed in order to meet timescales, comply with policy, and the extent to which complainants concerns have been addressed in a fair and transparent manner with clear communication.

A total of 19 cases were examined of which:

5 had been dealt with via Local Resolution,

4 had been dealt with by other means, including a more detailed investigation

4 had been classified as Direction and Control issues where the complaint has more to do with dissatisfaction with Police policy and procedure than with individual conduct

4 had been appealed

And 2 were 'cases of interest'

The cases were selected at random by the Committee members.

Resources

The demands on the Professional Standards department are considerable in that they have lost staff due to the budget pressures of the last few years, but have continued to maintain performance in the face of increasing demand.

As an example, PSD have 17 complainants classed as vexatious/repetitious of which 10 are actively pursuing complaints at the time of reporting.

These complainants are difficult to manage and a recent approach to the IPCC to request a dispensation not to investigate a vexatious complaint was met by a direction from the IPCC to instruct Cumbria Constabulary to re-investigate the complaints to provide some independence.

PSD state that a full time member of staff is employed dealing solely with vexatious and repetitive complaints due to the difficulties in gaining the necessary authority to discontinue them.

10 resource intensive public misconduct hearings have been held this year and there are a further 6 scheduled. This is a new demand following Hone Office direction.

Dip sampling issues

There were very few issues arising. The view of the Committee members examining the cases is that the Professional Standards Department is providing an excellent service to complainants. The findings of investigations are regularly fair and transparent in that where there is fault in the performance of either an officer or an organisational failing, there is a willingness to apologise and admit the error. The findings of investigating officers including the actions they have taken and the responses given are shared with complainants when their complaints are finalised.

On this dip sample there was an apparent greater use of personalised letters to complainants and less reliance on standard letters. There was less jargon used in reports shared with complainants than in previous dip samples.

It was noticeable that in cases where matters had been dealt with speedily and directly, there appeared to be a high degree of satisfaction. One of the cases of interest was a locally resolved case where an email from the complainant had been received congratulating the Constabulary on the way in which the complaint had been handled. Particular attention was drawn to both speed of dealing and the personal demeanour of the investigating officer.

Unfortunately the regulations and prescribed procedures often elongate the process which can be a barrier to speedy resolution of complaints. It is not uncommon to see complaints taking 6 months to resolve, even when the matters are relatively minor and straightforward.

One complaint involved a poorly executed search warrant and poor attitude/actions of officers. The complaint was largely upheld and officers were subject of managerial action. The resultant feedback to the complainant was totally transparent with a personalised letter which fully acknowledged that the complainant had cause for complaint and that it had been dealt with accordingly.

Two complaints were not investigated and the reasons for not doing so were within the policy guidelines and the decision not to investigate was upheld after appeal.

One complaint was resolved satisfactorily, although it was hampered by a failure to log vehicle usage by officers.

Although personalised letters were very much in evidence in this sample, the hazards of using standard letters were seen in one case examined. A standard letter informed the complainant that a detailed and thorough investigation of her complaint had taken place and it had not been upheld. Unfortunately, the accompanying officer's report of that investigation was forwarded along with it. The investigation appeared to have comprised a single question and a denial which was accepted at face value, despite there being a host of unanswered questions within the complaint.

Summary

In overall terms and with some small exceptions as outlined above, the dip sampling exercise has revealed an extremely satisfactory picture in which the policy for handling complaints is followed and complainants are dealt with openly and transparently.

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