

Complaint files – Dip sample examined on 19th June 2019

A list of 155 open case files were provided from which a random sample of 15 were selected for closer examination. The files selected were in the main selected from around March – April 2019. Experience of the time taken to close complaints would suggest that these would be coming towards the final stages of investigation and closure. The choice of files chosen for scrutiny was not influenced by staff from PSD.

Of the 15 cases examined the breakdown was as follows:

Local handling (Less serious cases)	6
NSR Investigation (Cases that may result in criminal or misconduct cases)	5
Direction/Control (cases where the complaint is about policy rather than conduct)	2
Disapplication (cases reported too late and out of time limits)	2

Complaint case file quality Files were examined for statutory timescales, correct classification, quality and style of correspondence and the efficiency and effectiveness of inter-departmental administration when processing cases.

Summary of findings All files were formally recorded within timescales after receipt. Cases were generally classified correctly for an appropriate level of investigation. Correspondence between Police and complainant is generally very good. I had some difficulty accessing some documents where email narrative rather than attachments was used and I will address this with PSD for future samples.

Service Recovery Service recovery makes use of the 10 day period allowed for recording to make contact with the complainant and see if something can be done quickly and easily to resolve their dissatisfaction without utilising the full weight of a formal complaint.

The figures show that 71% of complaints have been resolved under the service recovery scheme in the last month. This is impressive, but higher than might normally be expected in that over the last year the average for Service Recovery is around 50%. Of the cases selected for examination, two of them had first been dealt with under service recovery, but had been escalated to a formal complaint because they were on closer enquiry, not deemed suitable for service recovery, or service recovery had been tried and failed. This has resulted in freed up resources within PSD and a better complainant experience.

Persistent complainers It was noted that although only 15 were selected from 155 made available, one complainant's name yet again appeared in the sample which has appeared many times before on previous dip samples. This demonstrates the demand placed on PSD by a small handful of persistent complainers.

Quality of correspondence In general the quality of correspondence with complainants remains very positive. In many cases the letters are individually tailored rather than simply using template letters. Template letters are used but I did not see any template letters that were inappropriate to the circumstances. There is still some jargon within letters but not excessively so. In many cases and where appropriate, the investigating officer's report into the complaint is copied to the complainant so that the investigation is totally transparent

Correct classification In the main, all cases were correctly classified as to the required level of investigation, be it local handling or a more in-depth investigation. In both these circumstances complaints are sent out to division, where a supervisory officer is appointed to investigate.

Efficiency of processing With two exceptions, cases were still under investigation. One had been provisionally finalised, but had been returned to division to correct the report which contained information which should not be disclosed under GDPR. One had been finalised and was just awaiting sign off from the divisional management team.

It was however very apparent that many files were subject of 'chasers' from PSD asking for updates from division. Cases are often passed around in division with responsibility for investigating them being transferred from officer to officer due to availability. Shift patterns can make managing complaints and seeing complainants a lengthy process.

The speed of investigation and the quality of investigation by divisional officers has long been problematic for PSD who spend a lot of time trying to find out where a case is up to and getting replies from officers. Overall the quality is reasonable, but the whole process is slow and quality can be inconsistent.

2 cases out of the 15 had been flagged up for appeal against the findings of the first investigation.

Future developments PSD are using the benefit of reduced demand on their time due to service recovery to restructure and create capacity to deal with Local Handling cases, which is a category previously dealt with by divisional officers, with all the inherent delays and inconsistency. The restructure has been quite unsettling and disruptive for PSD staff, but is now virtually complete and PSD have just begun to take the most recent cases of Local Handling and investigate them in-house.

Overall, assurance can be given in terms of the way complaints are handled.