

Report to Scrutiny Committee – Dip sampling of Police Complaints, 25th May 2018

On a quarterly basis, members of the Joint Audit and Ethics Committee undertake a dip sample of the complaints made against Police. The purpose of the sampling is to ensure that the complaints are dealt with according to regulations governing correct recording and timeliness. In addition the sampling exercise provides an opportunity to provide feedback to Professional Standards (PSD) regarding qualitative issues such as the style of communication adopted between organisation and complainant.

The terms of reference for examining complaints has in the past been somewhat rigid and formulaic, but recently a wider and looser approach has been adopted with greater discretion given to committee members to dip sample many and varied aspects of the whole process in advance of forthcoming changes to the regulations.

Service Recovery cases The number of complaints made against the Police and the manner in which they are dealt with are key issues for public confidence. Recently, The Constabulary has adopted a radically new approach in that rather than immediately recording dissatisfaction as a complaint, putting it into the formal system and investigating it with all the inherent delays, a new ‘service recovery’ process Has been adopted. The 10 days allowed between receipt to formally recording a complaint are now used to attempt a service recovery, to put right what has gone wrong. If this is achieved then no official complaint is recorded. As this process has the potential to reduce the number of complaints in comparison with previous years it is imperative that those cases dealt with outside of the formal process are categorised and dealt with appropriately.

All such cases are logged and available for scrutiny. 10 were selected at random.

2 cases could not be, or were not appropriate to be ‘service recovered’ and were referred into the formal complaints system and recorded in the normal way

2 were closed with no further action when complainants failed to provide further detail or respond to requests to contact PSD.

6 were dealt with by a variety of methods which achieved service recovery by providing explanations, contacting the officer in the case to prompt actions, reuniting complainants with their property, connecting complainants with an appropriate department better able to assist. In all these cases, the promises made to complainants were kept, extensive enquiries with other departments were made and it was clear that considerable efforts had been made to resolve the issues about which complainants had expressed dissatisfaction.

In stark contrast to the formal complaints process which typically takes in excess of 3 months to complete, those dealt with by service recovery were dealt with in a matter of a few days, many immediately. This benefits both the complainant and the organisation.

An analysis of the most recent week of incoming complaints showed a total of 30 received of which 16 (53%) were dealt with by service recovery. Clearly, numbers of official complaints will show large reductions in comparison with previous years. On the evidence of the dip sample, service recovery is being used appropriately and is improving the speed and quality with which complainants are being dealt with.

Formally recoded complaints 5 cases were examined to examine timeliness and thoroughness of investigation.

Case 1 The case was opened on 12.01.18 after an initial failure to deal with it by service recovery. The investigating officer's report was completed on 16.05.18. The letter to the complainant was well written and personalised.

Case 2 The case was opened on 15.03.18, allocated to Divisional staff to investigate with an excellent letter to the complainant explaining what would happen to investigate the complaint. However, the case was still awaiting closure on 25.05.18 when the dip sample took place.

Case 3 The case was opened on 08.01.18 and involved alleged improper disclosure of information. It was referred to information security department and had not been finalised on 25.05.18 when the dip sample took place.

Case 4 The case was opened on 25.02.18 and allocated to divisional staff to investigate. The case was still live on 25.02.18 at the time the dip sample took place

Case 5 The case was opened on 08.01.18 and allocated to division for investigation. The case was finalised on 20.04.18 with a well written personalised letter to the complainant.

In all cases, there was evidence on the case log that PSD regularly monitored cases and requested updates from staff appointed to investigate.

Timeliness Given that only 1 of the 5 cases above had been finalised, the first 10 cases formally recorded as complaints in 2018 were checked (CO/1-10/18) to determine how long investigations were taking to be completed

| | | | |
|------------|-----------------|-----------------|--|
| CO/0001/18 | Opened 04/01/18 | Closed 05/03/18 | Disapplication / abuse of process |
| CO/0002/18 | Opened 08/01/18 | Still open | Complicated case involving IPCC |
| CO/0003/18 | Opened 08/01/18 | Closed 20/04/18 | |
| CO/0004/18 | Opened 10/01/18 | Closed 11/04/18 | Withdrawn by complainant at Fracking protest after video evidence reviewed |
| CO/0005/18 | Opened 10/01/18 | Closed 03.04.18 | |

| | | | |
|------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| CO/0006/18 | Opened 11/01/18 | Still open | Unable to progress – sub judice |
| CO/0007/18 | Opened 11/01/18 | Closed 11/05/18 | Closed but appeal lodged |
| CO/0008/18 | Opened 11/01/18 | Closed 14/02/18 | Withdrawn |
| CO/0009/18 | Opened 11/01/18 | Closed 23/05/18 | |
| CO/0010/18 | Opened 12/01/18 | Closed 16/05/18 | Closed but appeal lodged |

Summary

The use of service recovery is likely to result in 40 – 50% of what would previously have been recorded as complaints no longer being formally recorded. There is good evidence that these cases are being properly assessed as suitable for service recovery and those that are not are properly referred for a full investigation. Dealing with these cases outside of the formal complaints process where appropriate is resulting in closure within days rather than months to the benefit of all concerned.

PSD have effective systems which allocate and track investigations. However, there are delays when divisional staff investigate complaints due to resources and availability of staff operating on 24 hour shift patterns.

The standard of correspondence to complainants is good and letters are usually personalised.