

Annual Report on  
Complainant Satisfaction  
with services provided by the  
Police Ombudsman's Office in  
Northern Ireland  
2016/17

# Contents

	Page
1. Main Findings	3
2. Introduction	4
3. Results	
Perception of Ombudsman staff	5
Satisfaction with aspects of the complaints process	7
Final decision	8
Dealing with complaints independently	8
Satisfaction with service received	9
Would use complaints system again	10
5. Appendix 1: Results Tables	11
6. Appendix 2: Additional Information	17
7. Appendix 3: Satisfaction Questionnaire	19

## Main Findings of 2016/17:

- The majority of complainants, who had spoken to a member of staff, felt staff treated them with respect, treated them fairly, were easy to understand and were knowledgeable.
- Complainants were most likely to be satisfied with the length of time taken to respond after the incident was reported to the Office, how clearly the process was explained to them and how easy the correspondence was to understand than for other aspects of the complaints process.
- Almost three fifths (59%) of respondents said they understood the reason we gave for reaching the final decision about their complaint, and of these, just under three quarters (74%) accepted this decision.
- Over half (55%) of respondents felt that the Office dealt with their complaint independently (i.e. free from influence of others).
- Respondents were just as likely to be satisfied or dissatisfied with the service they received from the Office.
- Over three fifths of respondents (65%) said they would contact the Office again if they had a new complaint.

## Introduction

This is an Official Statistics publication. Official Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They undergo regular validation checks to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference.

The Police Ombudsman's Office is required by law to provide an independent and impartial police complaints system which secures the confidence of both the public and the police.

This report presents the results of the complainant satisfaction survey which was carried out during 2016/17. It includes information from those complainants whose complaints were closed<sup>1</sup> during the reporting year. This year, 2,654 questionnaires were issued and 441 were returned representing a 17% response rate.

The Office aims to maintain or improve performances measured against the Office's Business Plan by surveying complainants and police officers subject of complaint and in particular develop and implement standards for the services we provide.

Due to the changes<sup>2</sup> made to the questionnaire in 2015/16, comparisons with previous years can only be made for certain questions. Within this report, trend data is provided for the last five years. For those questions that can be compared, additional trend data (from 2006/07) is provided in the accompanying excel spreadsheet. Up until September 2005 complainant satisfaction surveys were based on samples of complainants comprised of those who had their complaint closed during the last month of each quarter in a financial year. From September 2005 the Office began surveying all complainants who had a complaint closed. Therefore 2006/07 was the first full year that all complainants were surveyed and direct comparisons can be made with subsequent years.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 2: Additional Information

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 2: Additional Information

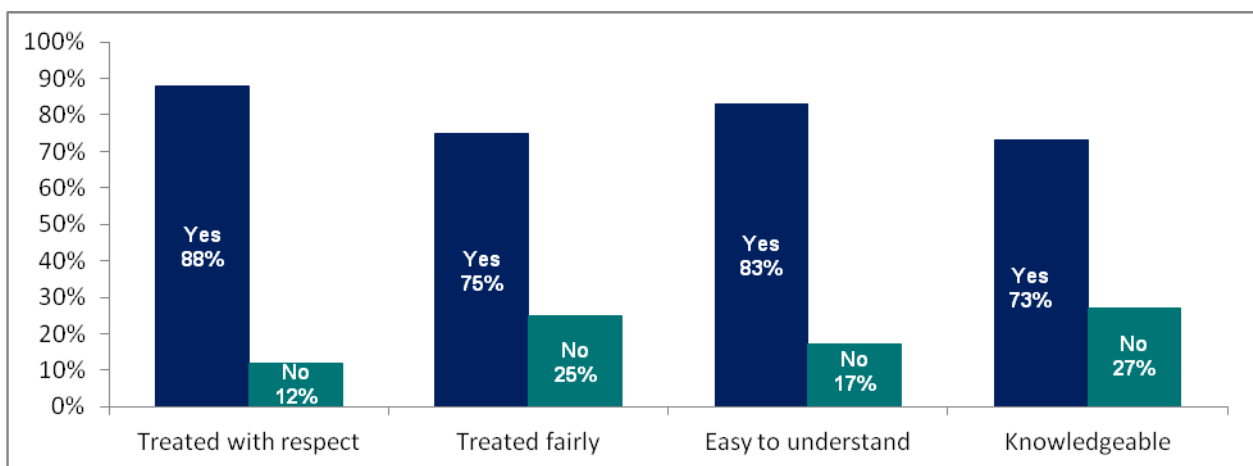
# Results

## Perception of Ombudsman staff

During 2016/17, 90% of complainants said that they had spoken to a member of staff from the Office. Of these:

- 88% felt they were treated with respect,
- 75% felt they were treated fairly,
- 83% felt staff were easy to understand and
- 73% felt staff were knowledgeable (Figure 1, Table 1).

**Figure 1: Complainant perception of Ombudsman staff, 2016/17**



Comparisons can only be made between the last two years for the results obtained for ‘treated with respect’ and ‘treated fairly’ as these were added to section two of the questionnaire in 2015/16.. Results obtained for ‘treated with respect’ and ‘treated fairly’ show that complainant’s perceptions of staff have remained similar over the last two years. Results for ‘easy to understand’ and ‘knowledgeable’ have also remained similar over the last five years however the proportion of complainants feeling staff were ‘easy to understand’ has decreased from 91% in 2012/13 to 83% in 2016/17 (Table 2).

One of the key aims of the Office is to '**develop and implement standards for the services we provide**'. Part of this involves working to ensure that when complainants are surveyed:

- at least 70% state that staff are knowledgeable
- at least 80% state staff are easy to understand
- at least 70% state that have been dealt with fairly.

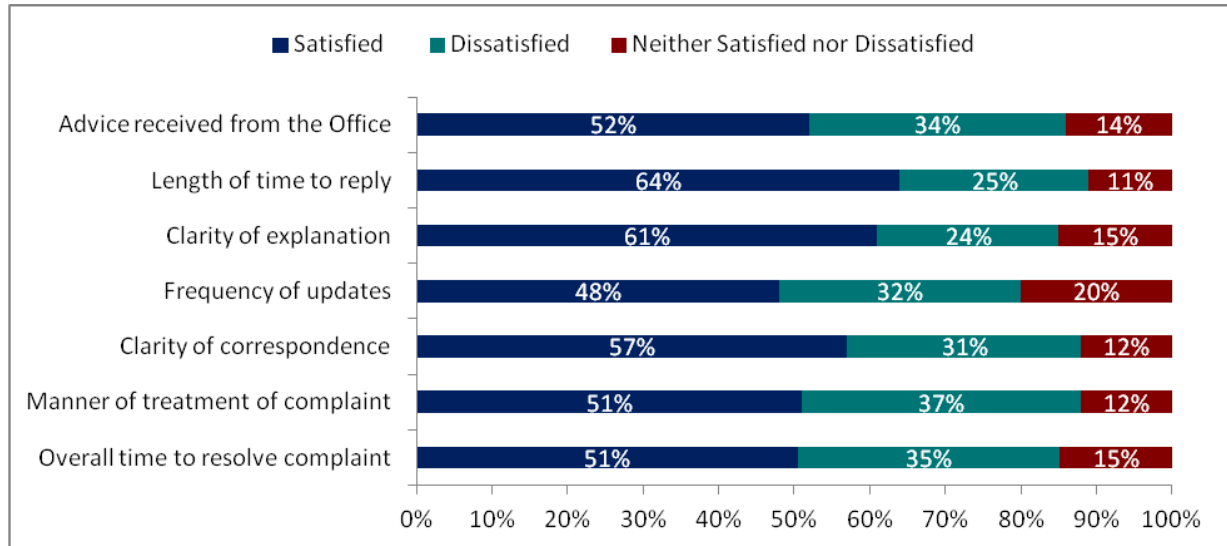
Results from this survey show that in 2016/17 the Office met and exceeded these targets as:

- 73% of complainants felt staff were knowledgeable
- 83% of complainants felt staff were easy to understand
- 75% of complainants felt they had been dealt with fairly.

## Level of satisfaction with aspects of the complaints process

In 2016/17, complainants were most likely to be satisfied with the length of time taken to respond after the incident was reported to the Office, how clearly the process was explained to them and the clarity of correspondence. Complainants were least likely to be satisfied with the frequency of progress updates (Figure 2, Table 3).

**Figure 2: Complainant satisfaction with aspects of the complaints process, 2016/17**



Results show (Tables 4 to 10):

- Respondents were less likely to be satisfied, and conversely more likely to be dissatisfied, with the advice they received from the Office in the last two years when compared to 2012/13 and 2013/14.
- Respondents were less likely to be satisfied, and more likely to be dissatisfied, with the length of time taken to reply after the incident was first reported in the last two years when compared to 2012/13.
- Similar levels of satisfaction have been recorded over the last five years for how clearly the complaints process was explained to complainants.
- Respondents were less likely to be satisfied and more likely to be dissatisfied with the frequency of updates in 2015/16 and 2016/17 when compared to previous years.
- Similar levels of satisfaction have been recorded over time for:
  - the clarity of our correspondence
  - the manner in which the complaint was treated and
  - the overall time to resolve the complaint.

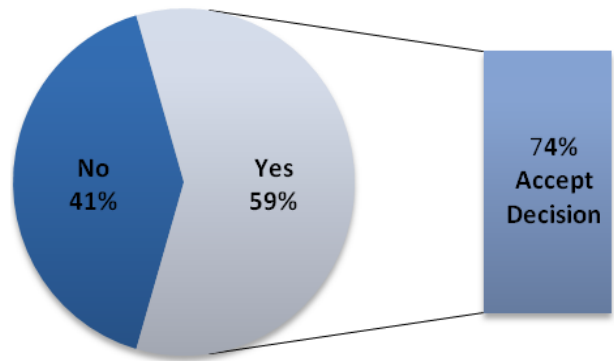
## Final decision

In 2016/17, almost three fifths of respondents understood the reason the Office gave for reaching the final decision about their complaint.

Of those respondents who did understand the reason, almost three quarters accepted why the Office had reached that decision (Figure 3, Table 11 & 12).

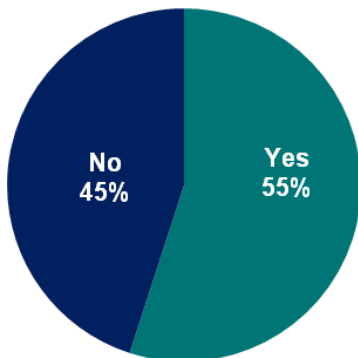
Results show that similar proportions of respondents accepted and understood the reason why we reached the decision about their complaint this year when compared to last year.

*Figure 3: Understanding and accepting the reasons for final decision*



## Dealing with complaints independently

**Figure 4: Dealing with complaints independently, 2016/17**



In 2016/17, over half (55%) answered yes to this question (Figure 4, Table 13).

In 2016/17The results of this survey show that respondents are just as likely to feel that the Office deals with complaints independently this year when compared to last year.



### Level of satisfaction with the service received

In 2016/17, 46% of respondents were satisfied with the service they received from the Office (Figure 5, Table 14).

Satisfaction levels have remained fairly similar over the last number of years however in 2015/16, satisfaction levels dipped to their lowest level since the survey began (Figure 6, Table 15). This may be attributable in part to the changes that were made with the survey form (see Appendix 2: Additional Information).

Figure 5: Overall satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the service received from the Office, 2016/17

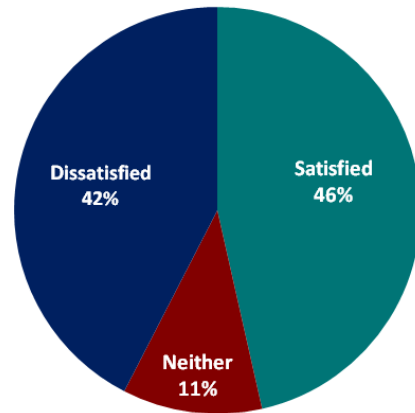
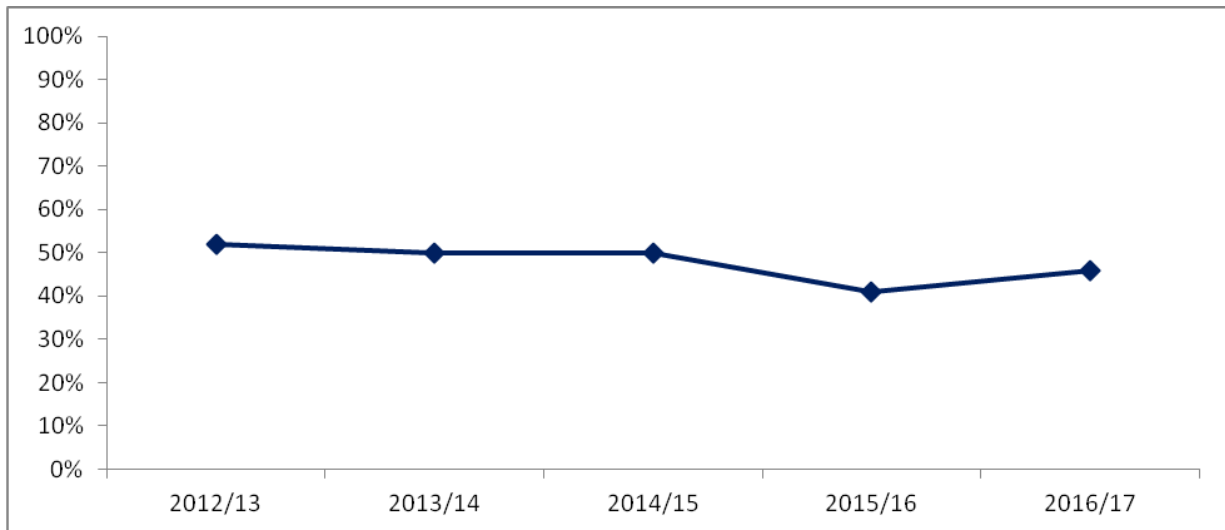


Figure 6: Overall satisfaction with the service provided, 2012/13 to 2016/17



The Office aims to ensure that when complainants are surveyed:

- at least 60% are satisfied/very satisfied with the service provided.

In 2016/17, the Office failed to meet this target as

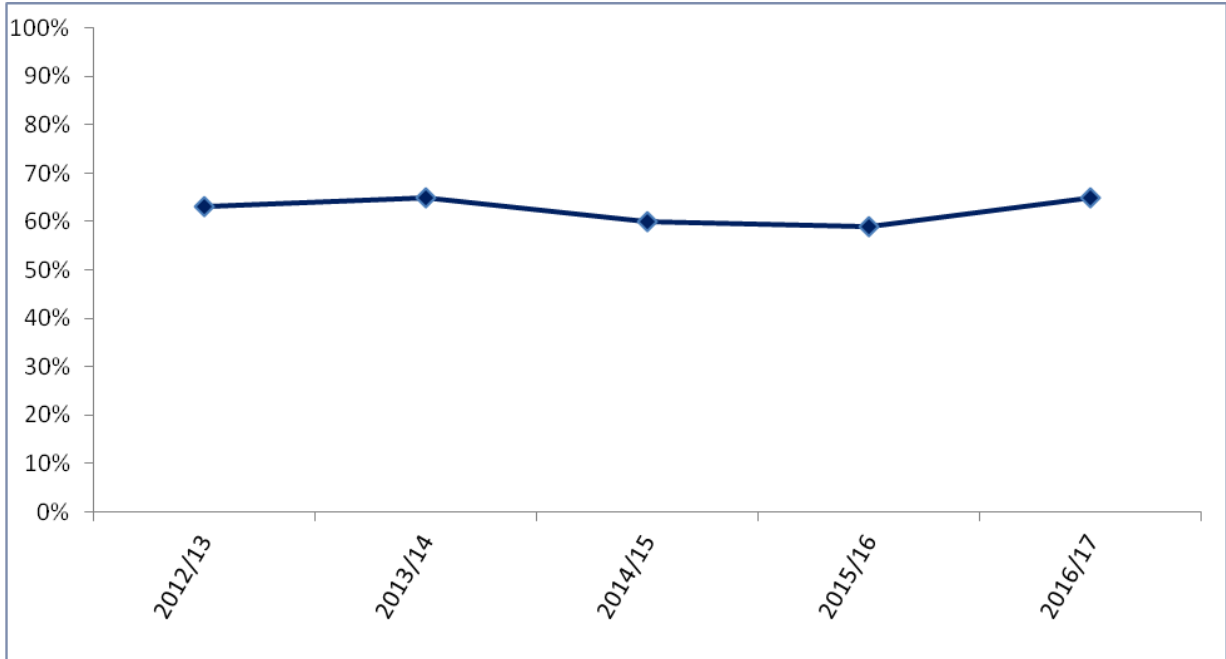
- 46% of complainants were satisfied/very satisfied with the service provided.

### Contact the Office again

In 2016/17, 65% of complainants said they would contact the Office again if they had a new complaint about the police (Figure 7, Table 16).

Results show that over the last five years similar proportions of respondents have said they would contact the Office again if they had a new complaint about the police.

**Figure 7: Complainants who would contact the Office again, 2012/13 to 2016/17**



## Appendix 1: Results Tables

**Table 1: Perception of Ombudsman staff, 2016/17**

	Yes	No
Treated with respect	88%	12%
Treated fairly	75%	25%
Easy to understand	83%	17%
Knowledgeable	73%	27%

**Table 2: Perception of Ombudsman staff, 2012/13 to 2016/17**

	Treated with respect	Treated fairly	Easy to Understand	Knowledgeable
2012/13	-	-	91%	80%
2013/14	-	-	88%	80%
2014/15	-	-	85%	77%
2015/16	85%	78%	83%	78%
2016/17	88%	75%	83%	73%

**Table 3: Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with aspects of the complaints process, 2016/17**

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
Advice received from the Office	52%	34%	14%
Length of time to reply	64%	25%	11%
Clarity of explanation	61%	24%	15%
Frequency of updates	48%	32%	20%
Clarity of correspondence	57%	31%	12%
Manner of treatment of complaint	51%	37%	12%
Overall time to resolve complaint	51%	35%	15%

**Table 4: Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with advice received from the Office, 2012/13 to 2016/17**

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
2012/13	59%	27%	14%
2013/14	60%	22%	18%
2014/15	57%	24%	19%
2015/16	50%	33%	17%
2016/17	52%	34%	14%

**Table 5: Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with length of time to reply after initially making complaint, 2012/13 to 2016/17**

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
2012/13	71%	17%	11%
2013/14	69%	19%	12%
2014/15	67%	21%	12%
2015/16	64%	25%	11%
2016/17	64%	25%	11%

**Table 6: Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with how clearly the process was explained, 2012/13 to 2016/17**

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
2012/13	66%	21%	14%
2013/14	60%	23%	17%
2014/15	62%	22%	16%
2015/16	60%	27%	13%
2016/17	61%	24%	15%

**Table 7: Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with frequency of progress updates, 2012/13 to 2016/17**

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
2012/13	58%	26%	16%
2013/14	54%	27%	19%
2014/15	59%	26%	15%
2015/16	47%	34%	19%
2016/17	48%	32%	20%

**Table 8: Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the clarity of correspondence, 2015/16 to 2016/17**

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
2015/16	57%	29%	14%
2016/17	57%	31%	12%

**Table 9: Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the manner of treatment of complaint, 2015/16 to 2016/17**

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
2015/16	51%	38%	11%
2016/17	51%	37%	12%

**Table 10: Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the overall time to resolve the complaint, 2012/13 to 2016/17**

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
2012/13	51%	31%	18%
2013/14	50%	34%	17%
2014/15	50%	35%	16%
2015/16	48%	35%	17%
2016/17	51%	35%	15%

**Table 11: Understand the final decision, 2015/16 and 2016/17**

	Yes	No
2015/16	57%	43%
2016/17	59%	41%

**Table 12: Accept the final decision, 2015/16 and 2016/17**

	Yes	No
2015/16	79%	21%
2016/17	74%	26%

Note: Of those who understood the final decision

**Table 13: Was the complaint dealt with independently, 2015/16 and 2016/17?**

	Yes	No
2015/16	53%	47%
2016/17	55%	45%

**Table 14: Overall satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the service received from the Office, 2016/17**

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
Overall satisfaction/dissatisfaction	46%	42%	11%

**Table 15: Satisfaction with the service provided, 2012/13 to 2016/17**

Year	% Satisfied
2012/13	52%
2013/14	50%
2014/15	50%
2015/16	41%
2016/17	46%

**Table 16: Would you contact us again if you had a new complaint, 2012/13 to 2016/17?**

Year	Yes	No
2012/13	63%	37%
2013/14	65%	35%
2014/15	60%	40%
2015/16	59%	41%
2016/17	65%	35%

## Appendix 2: Additional Information

### Data use:

The information that is collected from the survey is used to monitor and evaluate the service provided to people who have made a complaint to the Ombudsman's Office and identify any issues that arise in a timely manner. The data are also used by this Office to comply with the targets identified in the Office's business plan detailed in the 'Annual Report and Accounts Report, 2016/17', which is available on the Office's website ([www.policeombudsman.org](http://www.policeombudsman.org)). The data may also be used to answer enquiries from the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Department of Justice, Parliament and the public.

### Data quality:

The survey forms are issued by the Research and Statistics Team of the Office following closure of a complaint. Once the information from the forms has been transferred to an electronic file approximately 10% of the data entries are validated by a supervisor on a regular basis.

### Understanding the statistics:

Questionnaires are normally issued to all complainants when their complaint is closed. However, in some cases forms were not issued, for example when it is impossible to identify the complainant (i.e. the Complaints Officer has recorded the complainant as anonymous), because the complainant's address is not recorded or if only an email address is available. Forms were also not issued in the following circumstances:

- Case has been closed 'Duplicate or Repetitive',
- Complaints where it is known the complainant has died,
- Section 55 referrals or OPONI call ins (non complaint matters) and
- Complaints made by or on behalf of organisations.

In other cases the complainant contacts the Office to ask to be excluded from future surveys. Whilst Office staff aim to persuade the complainant by explaining the background to the survey in some cases the complainant still wishes to be excluded.



The questionnaire was amended at the start of 2015/16 in an effort to simplify the way in which the questions were asked and reduce the number of possible responses. This was also done to ensure that the questions were aligned with the Office's Service Charter. Along with the changes made to the questions that were asked another key change was the reduction of the Likert scale from five possible responses to three responses. It was felt however that this had had a negative impact on the some of the responses to the questions, in particular, to the level of satisfaction with the service provided. Therefore in June 2016 the Likert scale was changed back to the five possible responses.

Rather than having one individual question that measures overall satisfaction, the Office has agreed to measure satisfaction using aspects of the service charter, therefore, going forward the question on satisfaction has been removed from the questionnaire.

### **Conventions:**

Figures provided in the tables may not add up to 100% due to the effect of rounding. Figures may also be subject to minor revision and these will be notified in accordance with our revisions policy. The revisions policy can be accessed at [www.policeombudsman.org](http://www.policeombudsman.org).

Statistical significance tests have been carried out on the findings and differences are only reported where they have been found to be statistically significant at the 5% ( $p < 0.05$ ) level of probability (two tailed). This means that for any observed result that is found to be statistically significant one can be 95% confident that this has not happened by chance.

### **Further information:**

Additional information showing trends in responses from 2006/07 (where applicable) is available in the accompanying excel spreadsheet. Results from surveys carried out prior to 2006/07 can be found on the Office's website.

# Appendix 3: Questionnaire

## Complainant Satisfaction Form (V2)

### IN CONFIDENCE

Please take this opportunity to tell us about the service you received.

1. Did you speak to a member of staff?

Yes  (Please go to question 2)

No  (Please go to question 3)

2. If yes (i.e. you did speak to a member of staff), did you think they...

	Yes	No
treated you with respect	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
treated you fairly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
were easy to understand	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
were knowledgeable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. Were you satisfied or dissatisfied with each of the following aspects of service?

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied Nor Dissatisfied
the advice you received from the Office	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
the length of time we took to reply after you initially made your complaint	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
how clearly we explained the process to you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
how often you were told about the progress of your complaint	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
the clarity of our correspondence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
the manner in which we treated your complaint	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
the overall time taken to resolve your complaint	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

From June 2016 the Likert scale was amended to five possible responses ranging from Very Satisfied to Very Dissatisfied.

PLEASE TURN OVER

Thinking about the final closure letter you received...

4. Did you understand the reasons we gave for reaching our final decision about your complaint?

Yes

No

5. Did you accept why we reached this decision?

Yes

No

6. Do you think that we dealt with your complaint independently?  
(i.e. free from influence from others)

Yes

No

7. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the service you received?

Satisfied

Dissatisfied

Neither Satisfied  
nor Dissatisfied

From June 2016 the Likert scale was amended to five possible responses ranging from Very Satisfied to Very Dissatisfied.

8. Would you contact us again if you had a new complaint about the police?

Yes

No

9. If you have any further comments about the service you received please detail them below.

Thank you for completing this form



**Additional copies of this and other publications are available from:**

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These publications and other information about the work of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland are also available on the Internet at:

Website: <http://www.policeombudsman.org>