

Annual Statistical Bulletin
of the Police Ombudsman for
Northern Ireland,
2017/18

Published June 2018

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INTRODUCTION

This Statistical Bulletin presents information on complaints and allegations received by the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland in 2017/18, as well as showing trend information for the last five years.

It was produced independently by Statisticians from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) who are seconded to the Police Ombudsman's Office and work alongside Police Ombudsman personnel. It has been produced in accordance with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

Why publish statistics?

The information presented in this bulletin has been produced to meet the needs of a variety of individuals and organisations who have a particular interest in the issue of police complaints.

The Police Ombudsman's Office uses these statistics to monitor trends in complaints and allegations received and how they were dealt with. It also uses this information to monitor performance against key performance indicators.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) has an interest in knowing about the trends and patterns in complaints made against their officers and use this information to help identify and address particular problems.

The Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB) use this material in developing an understanding of what aspects of police conduct are attracting public concern and whether these concerns are of substance.

The Police and Community Partnerships (PCSPs) also use the data to monitor police performance in their areas and to identify any particular concerns.

The general public have a right to know how both their police service and their police complaints service are performing.

Understanding the information in this bulletin

We hope this report will provide readers with a clear understanding of the trends and patterns in complaints and allegations received by the Police Ombudsman's Office over the last five years.

We have provided information on what we believe would be the main questions asked by readers: how many complaints and allegations have we received, what were they about and how were they resolved, for example.

Commentary has been provided throughout, which aims to provide some context and explanation or interpretation of the emerging trends.

However, a concise document like this can only ever provide part of that context. Other factors may be at play which cannot be reflected in this bulletin. Readers may also want to consider issues as varied as the levels of the police budget and the service it can provide, as well as the level of awareness of the police complaints system itself.

Similarly, making comparisons across geographical areas may not always be straightforward. Areas have different levels of population. Even that distinction can have further categories. Whether people travel to an area during normal office hours for their work or move into it in the evening to socialise can have an effect on the number of complaints we receive.

It is also difficult to make valid comparisons between the number of complaints and allegations received across Northern Ireland, England and Wales, and Scotland as each area operates a different system.

Terminology

For those with less knowledge of the Police Ombudsman's Office, we have provided an explanation of the police complaints process in the appendices of this bulletin. We have tried to keep the terminology used in this bulletin 'jargon' free, but where this has not been possible we have provided a glossary with an explanation of those terms.

Could we improve this bulletin?

From the wealth of detailed information within the Police Ombudsman's Office, we have tried to produce a bulletin that focuses on the key issues, which we believe, would be of interest to the public and the police. We have also tried to make that information as clear and easily understood as possible. Have we succeeded? We would be keen to hear any views you have on this bulletin.

If you wish to provide any feedback or comments on this publication, please see our contact details on the back page or email us via info@policeombudsman.org.

Conventions

Percentages in the tables and text are rounded to the nearest whole number, and thus may not always add up to 100.

A SUMMARY OF THE KEY TRENDS IN COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE POLICE

- The number of complaints received by the Police Ombudsman's Office during 2017/18 decreased by 9% from the previous year to fewer than 2,600 complaints.
- Criminal Investigation was the most common situation which gave rise to complaints, as it was in four of the last five years.
- Complaints have decreased in 8 of the 11 police districts. The largest decrease was in Mid Ulster (F District) where they decreased by 26% from the previous year.
- The most frequent allegations received during the year were allegations of Failure in Duty, of Oppressive Behaviour, and of Incivility.
- One-third (33%) of complaints dealt with by the Police Ombudsman's Office were subject to a full investigation. In 24% of these complaints, the Office found evidence to substantiate all or part of the complaint, or identified another concern during the investigation.
- On 6 occasions during the year, the Police Ombudsman recommended that the Director of Public Prosecutions should prosecute an officer.
- The Police Ombudsman recommended on 197 occasions that a police officer should receive a discipline or a performance action.

COMPLAINTS

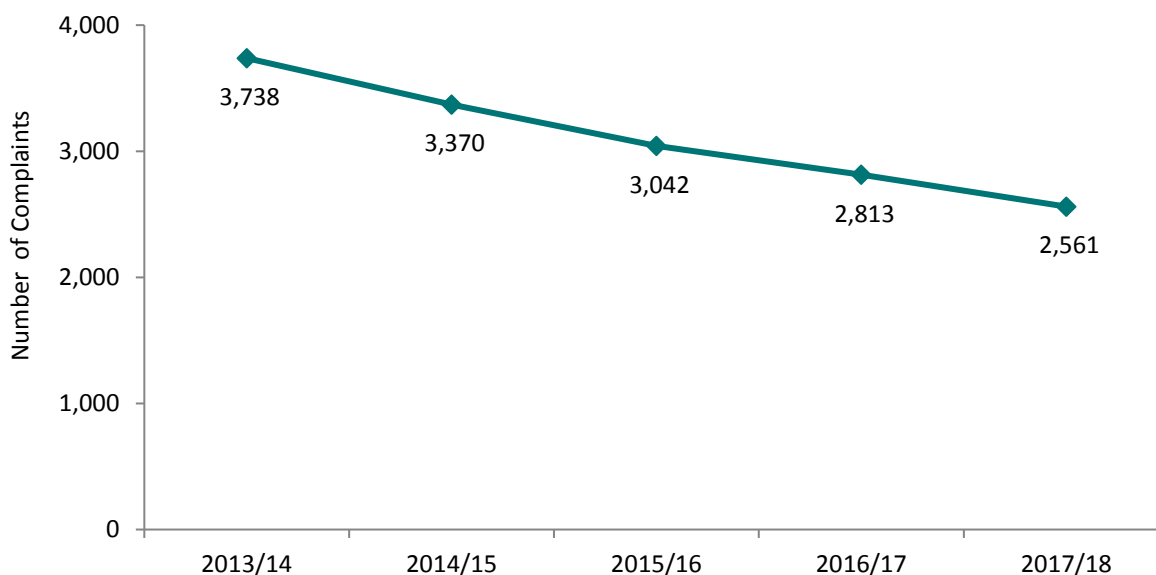
The volume of complaints and matters received

The number of complaints received and matters referred for independent investigations by the Police Ombudsman’s Office during 2017/18 was 2,561 (Figure 1, Table 5). This is the lowest number of complaints it has received in any financial year since it opened.

The number of complaints/matters received by the Office has decreased for four consecutive years since 2013/14 when it received the highest number of complaints during a financial year.

For the purpose of clarity of reporting, this statistical bulletin will refer to all its incoming work by the term ‘complaints’.

Figure 1: Number of complaints received, 2013/14 to 2017/18



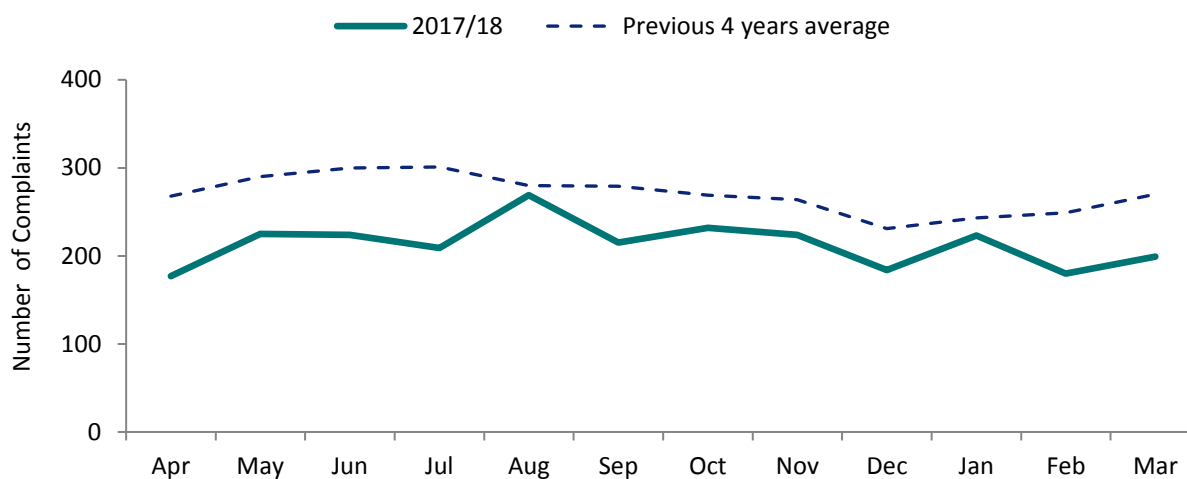
The vast majority of these complaints (97%) were from members of the public. A further 1% were matters referred to the Office from the PSNI or from another organisation¹ or matters in which the Police Ombudsman exercised his power to initiate investigations. Call-In/Call-Outs make up the remaining 2%: these are situations where the Office is notified of an incident and it determines at an early stage that there is no requirement for a further investigation (Table 6).

¹ Public Prosecution Service (PPS), Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB) or the Department of Justice (DOJ).

Complaints received each month

During 2017/18, the Office received between 175 and 270 complaints each month. The number of complaints received each month during 2017/18 was fewer than the monthly average for the previous four years. The seasonality trend that the Office typically receives more complaints in the summer months than in the winter months is evident this year again, although the difference between the two seasons has reduced (Figure 2, Table 7).

Figure 2: Number of complaints received by month, 2013/14 to 2017/18



Who people were complaining about

The Police Ombudsman's Office has the remit to investigate complaints about officials from a number of bodies. These include police officers and 'designated civilians' within the PSNI and police officers with the Northern Ireland Airport Constabulary and Belfast Harbour Police. More recently, the remit was extended, for serious incidents only, to include certain Home Office officials in 2014/15 and National Crime Agency Officials from 20th May 2015.

During 2017/18, the vast majority of complaints received (98%) continue to be about PSNI officers (Tables 1 and 8).

Table 1: Complaints received by organisation, 2017/18

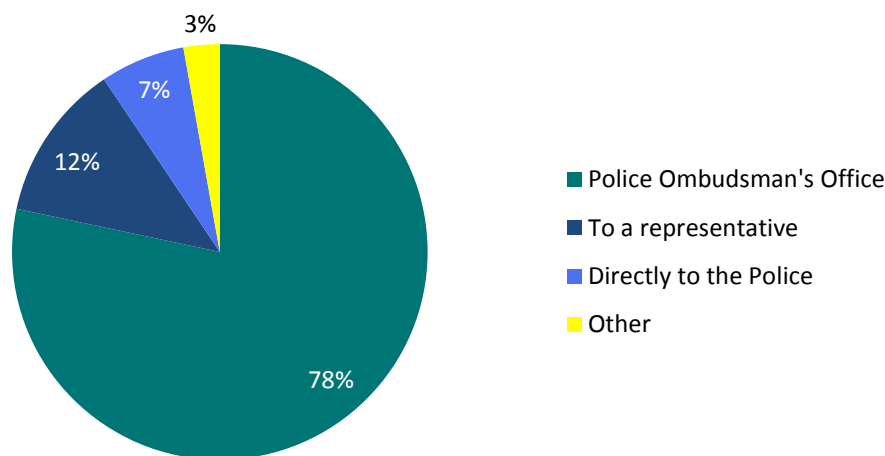
	No. of complaints received
PSNI	2,504
Designated Civilians	41
Harbour Police	2
NI Airport Constabulary	1
Certain Home Office officials	0
Ministry of Defence Police	1
National Crime Agency	1
Other / Unknown	11
Total	2,561

Where people initially made their complaints

Although the Police Ombudsman’s Office is the only body which can by law deal with complaints about the conduct of police officers, people do not always make their complaints directly to the Office. Sometimes their complaint is made in the first instance to the PSNI itself or to someone such as a solicitor or a political representative.

Most of the complaints received in 2017/18 were made directly to the Office without the use of an intermediary (Figure 3, Table 9).

Figure 3: Where people initially made their complaint, 2017/18



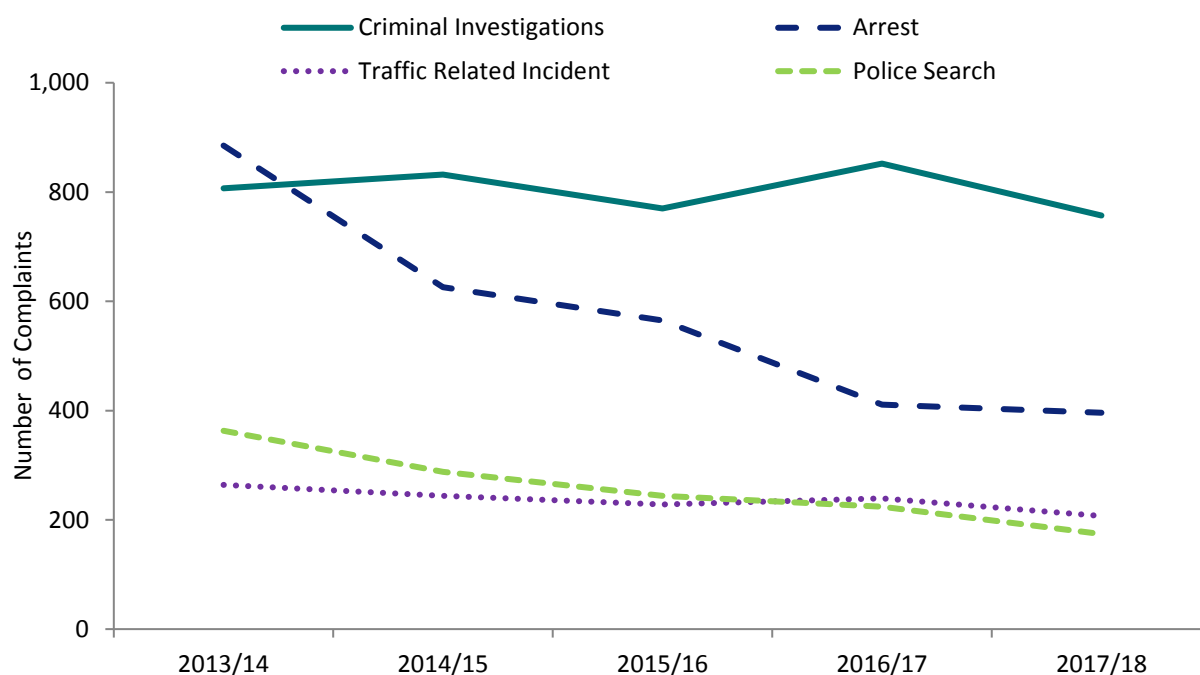
Over the last five years, the proportion of complaints made directly to the Office has increased each year. It has increased from 58% in 2013/14 to 78% in 2017/18.

Situations that gave rise to complaints

In order to try and get a better understanding of what sorts of interactions might give rise to complaints about the police or police conduct, the Police Ombudsman's Office collect information on the background or context to the complaint.

Criminal investigations were the most common situations giving rise to complaints during 2017/18, followed by arrests, traffic related incidents and police searches (Figure 4, Table 10).

Figure 4: Complaints arising from Criminal Investigations, Arrests, Traffic Related Incidents & Police Searches 2013/14 to 2017/18



During 2017/18, the Office received around 760 complaints arising from a criminal investigation. This accounts for 30% of all complaints received. The number of complaints made following a criminal investigation has remained fairly stable over the last five years.

Complaints arising from Arrests decreased this year to below 400 complaints. They have decreased for the fourth consecutive year and have more than halved in number since 2013/14.

Fewer than 210 complaints were made following a traffic related incident during 2017/18. In general, they have been decreasing in number over the last five years.

During 2017/18, more than 170 complaints were received following a police search. This is the fourth consecutive year that they have decreased and they have more than halved in number since 2013/14.

Around 140 complaints arising from domestic incidents (such as neighbourhood disputes) were received during 2017/18. They have in general been decreasing in number over the last five years.

Complaints following situations where police made enquires but no investigation took place have remained similar to last year, but have decreased by more than 50% over the last five years. Around 100 complaints were made following his type of contact with the police during 2017/18.

The number of complaints received that relate to the 'Troubles' to be investigated by the History Directorate in the Office has decreased for the second consecutive year. These complaints have decreased from a high of 97 during 2015/16 to 47 during 2017/18.

During 2017/18 there were around 40 complaints arising from how the police dealt with domestic violence incidents. This is around 10 fewer than last year.

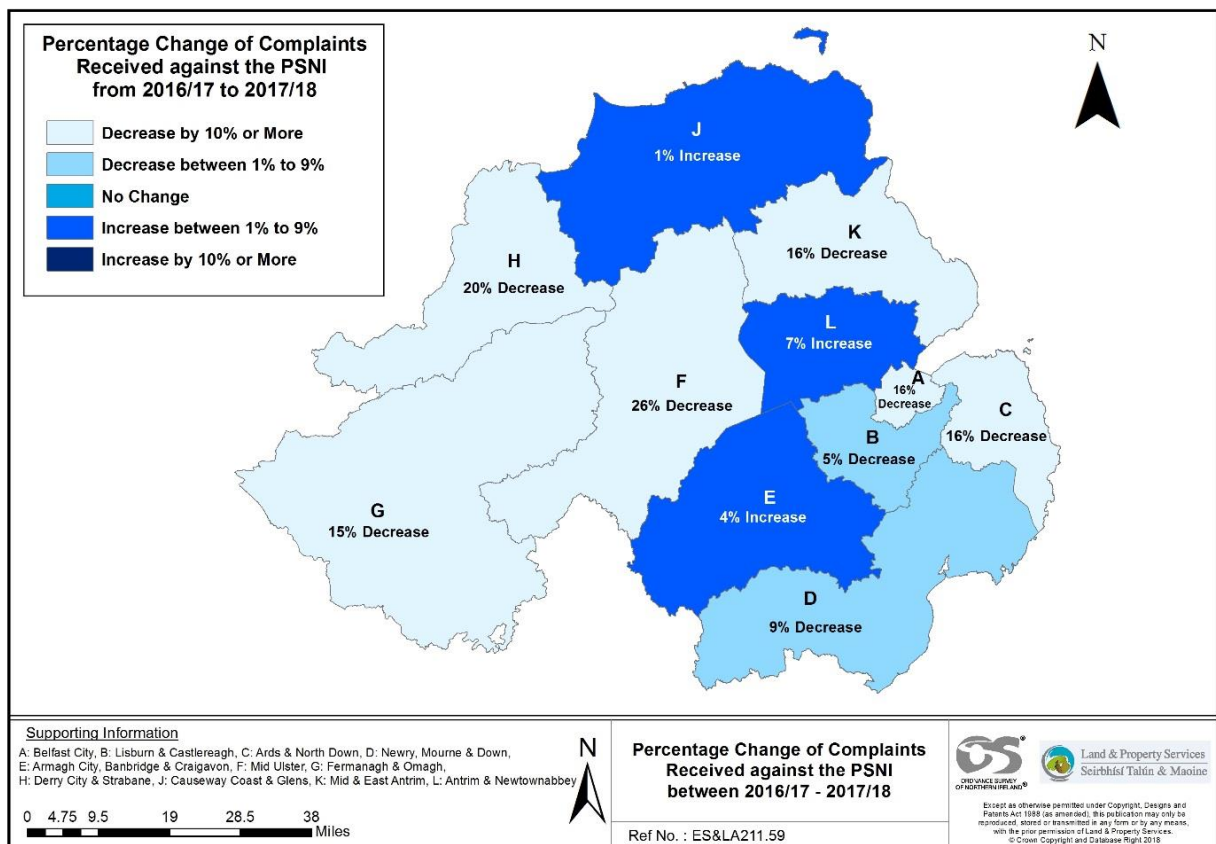
Complaints arising from parades or demonstrations fluctuate year on year. During 2017/18, there were 32 complaints arising from parades or demonstrations which is more than in the previous year (21 complaints in 2016/17).

Complaints received by police district^{2,3}

Most of the 11 policing districts in Northern Ireland had a decrease in complains during this year, when compared to 2016/17. In three districts, the numbers have increased from the previous year (Figure 5, Table 11).

Before providing more details about those changes, we would remind the reader that making comparisons between policing districts is something to be done with caution. Policing districts are not identical and differ on issues such as population numbers, policing numbers, the level of public interaction with police and even issues such as whether they have a vibrant night time economy.

Figure 5: Map showing the percentage change in complaints received by police district, 2017/18



The map on the previous page shows the percentage difference in complaints for each District, with the palest shade of blue showing the largest decreases and the darkest shade showing the

² This is only for complaints made against the PSNI and does not include any other organisations such as NCA, certain Home Office officials or designated civilians.

³ This is the location where the incident complained about occurred, and is not necessarily the Districts where the officers complained about are assigned to.

largest increases. The paragraphs below provide trend information for each police district, in alphabetical order.

Belfast City District (A District) received the largest number of complaints, around 630 during 2017/18. It accounts for nearly one quarter (24%) of all complaints received by the Office. Complaints from this district have decreased for four consecutive years and have more than halved since 2013/14.

Complaints in Lisburn & Castlereagh City (B District) have also decreased during each of the last four consecutive years. Since 2013/14, they have decreased by 34%, with 110 complaints received during 2017/18.

In Ards & North Down (C District) complaints have decreased by 25% over the last five years and during 2017/18 it received around 160 complaints.

Complaints from Newry, Mourne & Down (D District) have also decreased in each of the last four years. Since 2013/14, complaints have decreased by 37%. During 2017/18, it received 150 complaints.

Complaints from Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (E District) have remained fairly stable over the last three years. Although, they have decreased by nearly one quarter (24%) since 2013/14. During 2017/18, around 230 complaints were from this District.

In Mid Ulster (F District) complaints have generally been decreasing over the last five years, they have decreased by 40% over this period. Around 90 complaints were received this year.

Complaints from Fermanagh & Omagh (G District) have also decreased during each of the last four years. This district received around 120 complaints during 2017/18, which is a 34% decrease since 2013/14.

In Derry City & Strabane (H District) complaints have generally been decreasing over the last five years, decreasing by 33% over this period. Around 160 complaints were received this year.

Complaints from Causeway Coast & Glens (J District) have followed a different trend to the other police districts. In this police district, complaints have remained fairly stable over the five year period apart from in 2014/15 when they peaked. Around 240 complaints received in 2017/18 were from J District.

In Mid & East Antrim (K District) complaints in general have been decreasing over the last five years. During 2017/18, it received around 140 complaints, which is a 28% decrease from 2013/14.

Complaints for Antrim & Newtownabbey (L District) decreased from 2013/14 to 2016/17, and then increased in the most recent year. This year they received around 180 complaints, which is a 16% decrease from the level five years ago (in 2013/14).

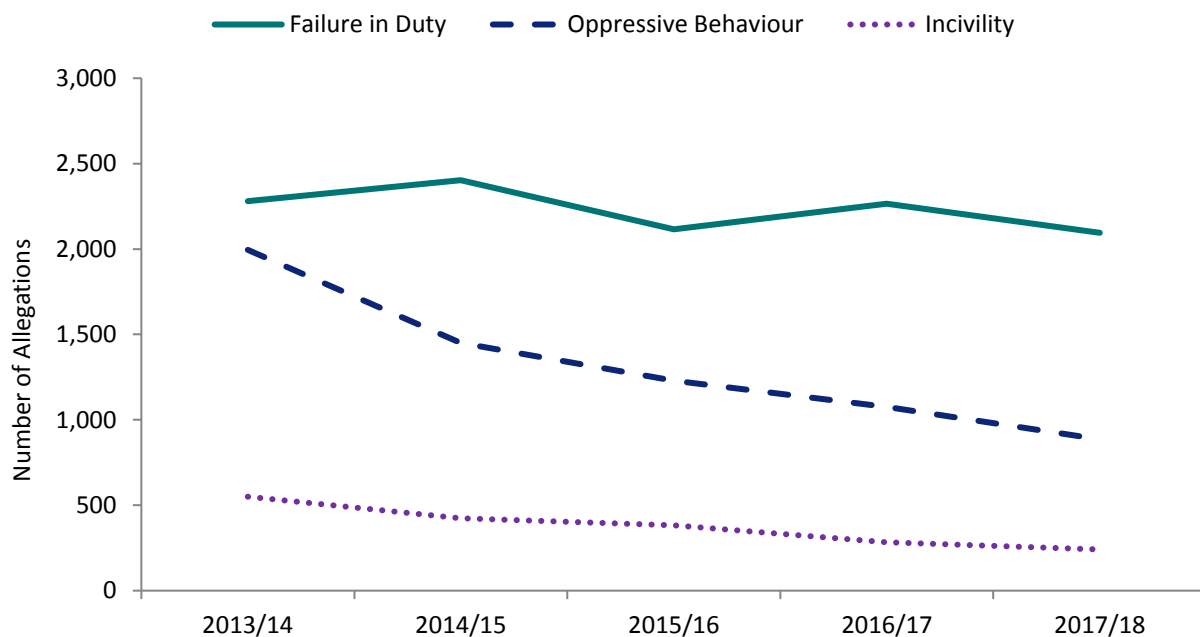
ALLEGATIONS

A person who makes a complaint may express a number of different concerns about the exchange they have had with a police officer. The Police Ombudsman’s Office will record this as one complaint broken down into a number of ‘allegations’.

During 2017/18, the Police Ombudsman’s Office received 4,241 allegations (Table 12).

The most frequent allegations received during the year were allegations of a Failure in Duty, of Oppressive Behaviour, and of Incivility (Figure 6, Table 13).

Figure 6: Types of allegations received, 2013/14 to 2017/18



Failure in Duty allegations

During 2017/18, nearly 2,100 allegations received by the Police Ombudsman’s Office alleged a Failure in Duty by a police officer. This was a decrease of 8% on the number of allegations received in the previous year, and they are at their lowest levels in the last five years.

More than half (54%) of the Failure in Duty allegations received in 2017/18 related to the conduct of police investigations or police response to incidents (Table 14). This is the same trend as in each of the last five years.

Within the Failure in Duty allegation category all types of allegations decreased in comparison with last year, the largest decrease was in allegations about officer's failing to act impartially (18% decrease).

Oppressive Behaviour allegations

There were 886 Oppressive Behaviour allegations received during 2017/18. This is an 18% decrease in the number received in 2016/17 and it is the first time they have dropped below 1,000 allegations in the last five years.

Almost half (46%) of the Oppressive Behaviour allegations received in 2017/18 alleged oppressive conduct by an officer/s not involving an assault. Allegations of serious or sexual assaults accounted for 5% of all the Oppressive Behaviour allegations received (Table 15). This is a similar trend to last year however, it is different to the trend between 2013/14 to 2015/16 when allegations of unjustified force or violence⁴ were the most frequently made Oppressive Behaviour allegations.

Allegations of unjustified force or violence (excluding serious or sexual assault) and of oppressive conduct had the largest decrease from 2016/17 (21% and 19% decrease, respectively). Within this decrease, however, there were two more allegations of sexual assault and three more allegations of a serious non-sexual assault from 2016/17.

Incivility allegations

During 2017/18, there were 241 Incivility allegations received. This was a 15% decrease from the previous year and is the lowest number received in the last five years.

More than one in five Incivility allegations was about an officer being uncivil whilst on the telephone (23%) or whilst being at a domestic residence (22%) (Table 16).

Other allegations⁵

In addition to Failure in Duty, Oppressive Behaviour and Incivility allegations decreasing to their lowest levels in the last five years, allegations relating to irregularities in searches, unlawful/unnecessary arrests/detentions, malpractice, police vehicles being driven

⁴ Referred to 'other assault' in Table 15.

⁵ A further breakdown of allegations are available on the Police Ombudsman's website in the accompanying Excel tables.

inappropriately, discriminatory and allegations relating to Section 55⁶ matters are also all at their lowest levels in the last five years (Table 13).

Allegations regarding the use of police equipment

Allegations about the use of police equipment accounted for 2% of all the allegations in 2017/18 (Table 17). This is similar to previous years, although it has decreased from 6% in 2013/14.

The most commonly received allegations about the use of police equipment during 2017/18 were about the use of handcuffs (58 allegations). This is the same trend as in previous years.

During 2017/18, allegations about the use of CS Spray were the second most commonly reported allegations about the use of police equipment. Again, this is the same trend as in 2016/17.

Allegations about an officer using their baton have nearly halved since 2016/17.

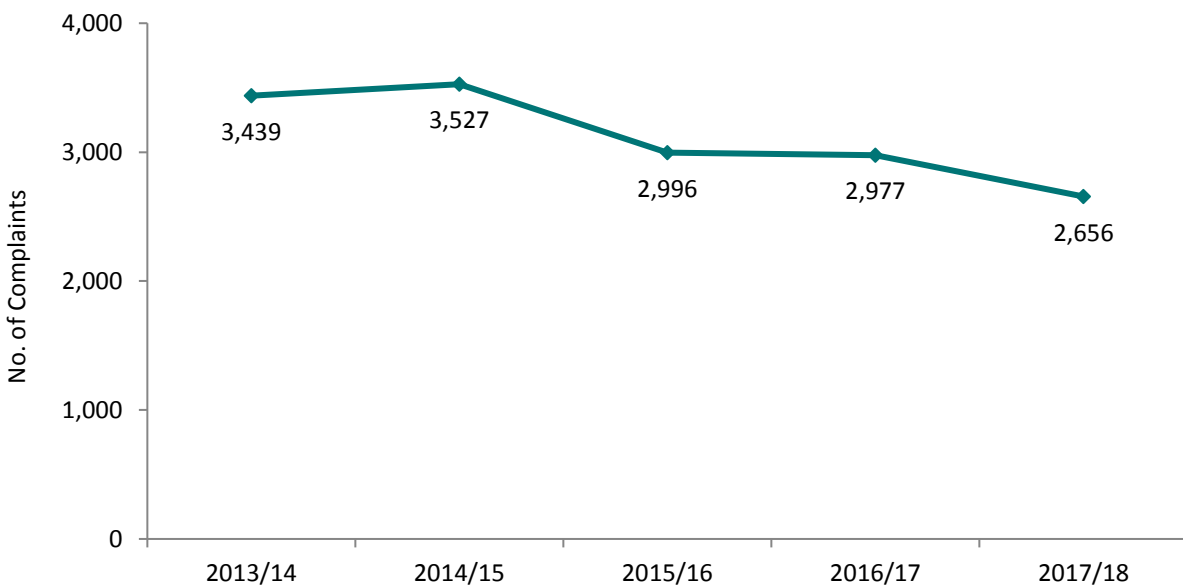
⁶ Allegations made via a referral from another organisation (e.g. PSNI, PPS, PBNI or DOJ) or an allegation which the Police Ombudsman has called himself into investigate as it is deemed to be in the public interest.

COMPLAINTS CLOSURES

The Police Ombudsman's Office closes complaints once it has reached a view on the matter involved, when the complainant and the police officer have reached a level of agreement on the contested matter or when the person who made the complaint no longer wishes to engage with the process.

The Police Ombudsman's Office closed more than 2,650 complaints during 2017/18 (Figure 7, Table 18).

Figure 7: Number of complaints closed by year, 2013/14 to 2017/18



This is the fewest number of complaints closed over the last five years. This reflects the decrease in number complaints received over the same time period.

Types of complaint closures

There are four main stages as to when complaints will be closed (Table 2).

Table 2: Complaint closures, 2017/18

Complaints Closed	2,656
Complaints closed following initial assessment	391
Complaint was not a matter for the Police Ombudsman	320
Call-in/Call-out – no further action	43
Other	28
Complaints closed following initial inquiries	1,207
Complainant did not fully engage with the police complaints system	728
Ill-founded	384
Withdrawn	81
Other	14
Complaints resolved informally	170
Informally Resolved	170
Complaints closed that relate to the ‘Troubles’	1
History Complaints	1
Complaints fully investigated	887
Complaint substantiated or an issue of concern identified	212
Complaint not substantiated or no issue of concern identified	675

More than one in ten (15%) complaints closed during 2017/18 were closed after the initial assessment. These complaints tend to be closed fairly quickly, and often involve issues which were not a matter for the Police Ombudsman’s Office.

A larger proportion of complaints (45%) were closed after initial inquiries. Initial inquiries involves getting more information from the complainant, looking for evidence regarding the matter complained about or making initial contact with the police officer(s) involved. Complaints closed at this stage are normally those where the complainant ceases to engage with the Office.

Complaints that were informally resolved accounted for 6% of all complaints closed. This is an alternative way to resolve less serious complaints such as complaints about rudeness or incivility.

One in three (33%) complaints closed were fully investigated. This is when a Police Ombudsman's Investigator looks into each allegation within the complaint and reaches a conclusion about it. The Office found evidence to substantiate all or part of the complaint, or identified another concern during the investigation in 24% of these fully investigated complaints during 2017/18.

Trends in the types of complaint closures

The proportion of complaints being closed within each of the four stages have remained fairly stable over the last five years with only a few notable changes (Table 18).

Over the last five years there has been an increase in the proportion of complaints being closed as ill-founded and a decrease in the proportion of complaints being fully-investigated.

Note: Following representation from key stakeholders and in order to make the reporting clearer, it has been decided to report our closures at complaint level. To do this, each of the closures within a complaint have been ranked, and the closure with the highest ranking used as the most representative of the overall complaint closure.

The highest ranking closure is also used to determine at which stage in the complaints process the complaint was closed: after initial assessment, initial inquiries, informal resolution, or following a full investigation. While this method will provide a clear and largely accurate picture in the majority of cases, there will be a few instances when this will not be the case. These discrepancies will only occur between initial assessment and initial inquiries stages.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO PPS AND POLICE

Public Prosecution Service (PPS)

Where the Police Ombudsman investigates a matter and identifies that a criminal offence may have been committed, legislation requires that the matter is reported to the PPS. A file will be sent to the PPS that sets out the information that has been established and makes a recommendation as to whether or not the police officer(s) should face a criminal charge. Irrespective of the Police Ombudsman's recommendation, it will be for the PPS to decide if an officer should be prosecuted.

During 2017/18, on 6 occasions the Police Ombudsman recommended that the Director of Public Prosecutions should prosecute an officer or staff member (Tables 3 & 19).

Table 3: Number of prosecution and no prosecution recommendations made by the Police Ombudsman for an officer/staff member to the PPS, 2017/18

	2017/18
Prosecution recommended for an officer/staff member	6
Prosecution not recommended for an officer/staff member	188

Over the last five years, the total number of recommendations made to the PPS has more than halved (decreased by 54%) (Table 19). Within that trend, the number of times the Office recommended that an officer be prosecuted has tended to vary, while the occasions when it has recommended that officers not be prosecuted has fallen.

Recommendations made to the Chief Constable or Chief Officer

Following the conclusion of any criminal proceedings or investigations that relate to misconduct matters, the Police Ombudsman may make a recommendation to the Chief Constable or the Chief Officer, who will consider whether action should be taken against the police officers who were the subject of the complaint.

During 2017/18, the Police Ombudsman's Office made 197 recommendations⁷ that an officer or staff member should receive either a discipline or a performance action (Table 4). Around

⁷ This is the number times a file was sent to the PSNI recommending either a discipline or a performance action for an officer/staff member. The methodology has changed since last year when it was reported at complaint level. The change in methodology reduces the level of double counting when multiple complaints are received about the same incident.

three in every five recommendations (58%) were for misconduct meetings and more than one quarter of the recommendations (27%) were for a performance action.

Table 4: Number of recommendations made by the Police Ombudsman for an officer/staff member to receive a discipline or performance action, 2017/18

Total Number of Recommendations for a Discipline or Performance Action	197
Regulations Prior to June 2016⁸	26
Modification of Designation ⁹	3
Management Discussion	4
Advice & Guidance	9
Superintendent's Written Warning	8
Formal Discipline Proceedings	2
Regulations Introduced in June 2016¹⁰ (Discipline or Performance Actions)	171
Performance	53
Misconduct Meeting	115
Misconduct Hearing	3

The number of recommendations for a discipline or performance action the Police Ombudsman has made for an officer/staff member has decreased for in each of the last three consecutive years (Table 20).

⁸ Disciplinary Regulations (pre 6th November 2000); a Code of Conduct (6th November 2000 to 13th March 2003); and a Code of Ethics (since 14th March 2003). The date of the misconduct dictates which discipline regime is applicable.

⁹ This sanction is under different Regulations to the other sanctions in this table, they are directed towards 'Designated Civilians' within the PSNI and not their police officers.

¹⁰ The Police (Performance and Attendance) Regulations (NI) 2016 and The Police (Conduct) Regulations (NI) 2016 came into force on 1 June 2016

Policy recommendations made to the PSNI

The Office made 40 policy recommendations to the PSNI during 2017/18 (Table 21). These recommendations cover a wide range of topics; 2 were strategic and 38 related to operational matters.

For the 12 policy recommendations where the outcome is known; the PSNI fully accepted 7, and partially accepted 1, which is an acceptance rate of 67%.

The Office is only informed that a recommendation has been accepted when it has been agreed and is being implemented by the PSNI and therefore there is a time-delay before the final outcome of the recommendation is known. For recommendations made during 2017/18 the Office is still to be notified of the PSNI's final response for 28 recommendations.

In addition to the 40 policy recommendations made during 2017/18, the Office also made 2 recommendations that were specific to individual cases. These matters are still outstanding.

INFORMAL RESOLUTION

Complaints made that are of a less serious nature, usually about incivility or certain types of failure in duties, may be considered for Informal Resolution. This involves an officer/staff member speaking to both the officer(s)/staff member(s) complained about and the complainant with a view of reaching a satisfactory resolution. Prior to proceeding with this process the consent of the complainant must be obtained.

During 2017/18, 16% of complaints received were considered for Informal Resolution and of these 55% of the persons making the complaint agreed for it to be dealt with through Informal Resolution (Table 22).

The proportion of complainants consenting for their complaint to be dealt with through Informal Resolution has remained fairly stable from 2013/14 to 2016/17. The figure for the most recent year is always lower, because it will be too early at the time of publication to know whether or not some complaints are suitable for Informal Resolution or if the person making the complaint will consent to this process or not.

During 2017/18, 165 complaints reached a successful conclusion through the Informal Resolution process (Table 23). This is a 7% decrease from the previous year when 177 complaints were successfully resolved through this process.

PSNI OFFICERS

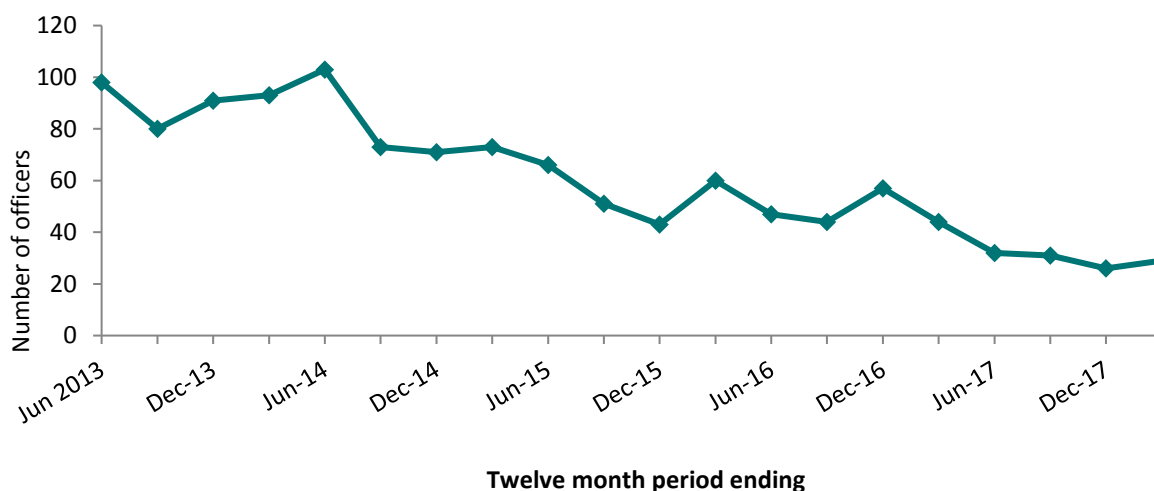
More than half (53%) of the complaints recorded by the Police Ombudsman's Office have an identified officer associated with them. The other complaints which do not identify an officer tend to be those which have been closed at an early stage, such as those which were not a matter for the Police Ombudsman to investigate and those where the complainant did not fully engage.

Most of the officers (85%) identified within complaints were constables, while fewer complaints were received about officers of higher ranks (Table 24). This is a similar profile to that of the composition of officers within the police service.

Information on officers identified within a complaint is shared with the Legacy & Justice Department within the PSNI. The PSNI initiate management intervention when an officer receives three or more complaints that were either formally investigated or dealt with by way of Informal or Local Resolution in the previous 12 months are subject of such intervention.

In general, the number of officers reaching this stage has been decreasing over the last four years (Figure 9, Table 24). This reflects the decrease in complaints received over this time period.

Figure 8: Officers that received three or more complaints that were formally investigated or dealt with by way of Informal or Local Resolution, 2013/14 to 2017/18



Note: During the course of an investigation, officers associated with the complaint can vary; as evidence is gathered more officers can be linked to the complaint and some may be removed. For this reason, to allow direct comparison across time, the information that was reported at the end of each quarter is not updated.

APPENDIX 1: STATISTICAL TABLES

Table 5: Complaints received, 2013/14 to 2017/18

Year	Complaints
2013/14	3,738
2014/15	3,370
2015/16	3,042
2016/17	2,813
2017/18	2,561

Table 6: Complaints and matters, 2013/14 to 2017/18

Complaints/Other Matters	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Complaints from members of the public	3,669	3,290	2,951	2,758	2,489
Matters referred to the Office	39	48	54	25	14
Matters the Police Ombudsman has chosen to investigate	9	5	16	11	10
Other	21	27	21	19	48
Total	3,738	3,370	3,042	2,813	2,561

Table 7: Complaints received by month, 2013/14 to 2017/18

Month Complaint Received	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
April	282	332	210	247	177
May	309	333	258	259	225
June	316	323	296	265	224
July	356	311	299	236	209
August	362	279	254	223	269
September	302	272	279	264	215
October	317	282	256	219	232
November	315	255	259	226	224
December	284	254	202	182	184
January	298	254	225	194	223
February	273	248	258	215	180
March	324	227	246	283	199
Total	3,738	3,370	3,042	2,813	2,561

Table 8: Complaints received by organisation, 2013/14 to 2017/18

Organisation	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)	3,652	3,308	2,981	2,755	2,504
Designated Civilian	64	42	44	37	41
Harbour Police	1	3	2	2	2
Northern Ireland Airport Constabulary	1	1	3	2	1
Certain Home Office Officials	n/a	0	3	1	0
National Crime Agency	n/a	n/a	1	0	1
GB Officers (including G8)	3	0	0	0	0
Ministry of Defence Police	0	0	0	0	1
Other/Unknown	17	16	8	16	11
Total	3,738	3,370	3,042	2,813	2,561

Table 9: Complaints received by where the initial complaint was made, 2013/14 to 2017/18

Source of Complaints	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Directly with Police Ombudsman's Office	2,183	2,216	2,069	2,103	2,006
Via Representative	655	580	541	433	314
Directly with the Police	831	494	341	222	169
Other (includes referrals)	69	80	91	55	72
Total	3,738	3,370	3,042	2,813	2,561

Table 10: Main situations giving rise to complaints, 2013/14 to 2017/18

Main Situation	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Criminal Investigation	807	832	770	852	757
Arrest	885	626	565	411	396
Traffic incident	264	244	228	239	207
Search	363	288	244	224	174
Domestic Incident	222	213	152	156	136
Police Enquiries	235	199	92	105	102
Complaints relating to the 'Troubles'	69	91	97	75	47
Domestic Violence	14	26	27	54	42
Parade/Demonstrations	132	22	63	21	32
Other	650	685	674	521	520
Unknown	97	144	130	155	148
Total	3,738	3,370	3,042	2,813	2,561

Table 11: Complaints received by police district, 2013/14 to 2017/18

Police District	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
A: Belfast City	1,215	988	914	742	626
B: Lisburn & Castlereagh City	167	148	122	116	110
C: Ards & North Down	210	190	183	186	157
D: Newry, Mourne & Down	237	195	180	165	150
E: Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	297	282	227	217	226
F: Mid Ulster	147	124	105	119	88
G: Fermanagh & Omagh	175	163	140	137	116
H: Derry City & Strabane	244	233	235	205	163
J: Causeway Coast & Glens	243	298	227	240	243
K: Mid & East Antrim	199	164	146	171	143
L: Antrim & Newtownabbey	219	209	181	171	183
Other organisation / Unknown	385	376	382	344	356
Total	3,738	3,370	3,042	2,813	2,561

Table 12: Number of allegations received, 2013/14 to 2017/18

Year	Allegations
2013/14	6,176
2014/15	5,641
2015/16	4,963
2016/17	4,816
2017/18	4,241

Table 13: Types of allegations¹¹, 2013/14 to 2017/18

Types of Allegations	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Failure in Duty	2,280	2,403	2,116	2,266	2,095
Oppressive Behaviour	1,995	1,450	1,229	1,076	886
Incivility	550	423	383	283	241
Police Searches	312	309	246	241	213
Unlawful/Unnecessary Arrest/Detention	234	252	208	204	176
Mishandling of Property	156	127	133	99	106
Allegations relating to the 'Troubles'	1	20	74	77	40
Malpractice	145	109	56	76	49
Traffic	47	51	43	61	32
Discriminatory Behaviour	107	72	54	54	40
Section 55 Referral	48	54	72	34	25
Other	301	371	349	345	338
Total	6,176	5,641	4,963	4,816	4,241

¹¹ A full breakdown of allegations types are available in the accompanying Excel spreadsheet

Table 14: Failure in Duty allegations, 2013/14 to 2017/18

Failure in Duty Allegations	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Conduct of police investigations / incident response	1,165	1,275	1,138	1,232	1,140
Failure in contact	277	310	301	314	294
Failure in record management	230	222	139	175	164
Conduct in custody suite	180	128	118	123	119
Failure to act impartially	73	86	92	82	67
Failure in duty of care	86	77	42	45	43
Other failure in duty	269	305	286	295	268
Total	2,280	2,403	2,116	2,266	2,095

Table 15: Oppressive Behaviour allegations, 2013/14 to 2017/18

Oppressive Behaviour Allegations	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Oppressive Conduct (OC Not Involving Assault)	712	549	461	509	411
Other Assault	986	689	582	419	329
Harassment (Series of Like Incidents)	226	158	152	111	104
Sexual Assault	40	38	24	25	27
Serious non-sexual assault	31	16	10	12	15
Total	1,995	1,450	1,229	1,076	886

Table 16: Incivility allegations, 2013/14 to 2017/18

Incivility Allegations	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Incivility At Domestic Residence	124	108	93	87	53
Incivility By Officer On The Telephone	91	93	76	63	55
Incivility At Police Station	69	59	41	31	32
Incivility When Stopped For A Traffic Offence	57	39	35	28	20
Incivility To Person Under 18 Years	14	6	6	1	2
Other incivility	195	118	132	73	79
Total	550	423	383	283	241

Table 17: Allegations regarding the use of police equipment, 2013/14 to 2017/18

Police equipment	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Handcuffs	214	149	115	82	58
CS Spray	48	34	36	20	16
Baton	62	35	23	19	10
Taser	19	18	14	10	10
Misuse/Discharge Firearm	12	2	5	4	2
AEP/Baton Round/Riot Gun	14	2	6	0	0
Other	17	9	12	3	2
No weapon used	5,790	5,392	4,752	4,678	4,143
Total	6,176	5,641	4,963	4,816	4,241

Table 18: Complaint closures, 2013/14 to 2017/18

Complaint Closures	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Complaints Closed	3,439	3,527	2,996	2,977	2,656
Complaints closed following initial assessment	472	422	353	383	391
Not a matter for the Police Ombudsman	406	360	297	336	320
Call in/Call out - No Further action	26	25	19	17	43
Other (Initial Assessment)	40	37	37	30	28
Complaints closed following initial inquiries	1,702	1,559	1,308	1,203	1,207
Complainant did not fully engage	1,310	1,084	892	753	728
Ill-founded	221	307	283	338	384
Withdrawn	160	152	125	103	81
Other (Initial Inquiries)	11	16	8	9	14
Complaints resolved informally	211	219	192	182	170
Informally Resolved	179	191	184	182	170
Locally Resolved	32	28	8	0	0
Complaints closed that relate to the 'Troubles'	n/a	n/a	n/a	3	1
History Complaint ¹²	n/a	n/a	n/a	3	1
Complaints closed following a full investigation	1,054	1,327	1,143	1,206	887
Complaint substantiated or an issue of concern identified	213	368	281	268	212
Not substantiated and no issue of concern identified	841	959	862	938	675

¹² The closure type 'History Complaint' was introduced during 2016/17 and can only be used for complaints which were investigated or considered by the History Directorate within the Office.

Table 19: Occasions Police Ombudsman recommended prosecution/no prosecution¹³ for an officer/staff, 2013/14 to 2017/18

Recommendations to PPS	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Criminal Charges	11	11	19	24	6
No Criminal Charges	405	355	253	203	188
Total	416	366	272	227	194

Table 20a: Occasions Police Ombudsman recommended a discipline or performance action¹⁴ for an officer/staff, 2013/14 to 2017/18

Prior to 2016 Regulations	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Modification of Designation ¹⁵	2	4	8	4	3
Training/Ops/Supervision	3	2	2	0	0
Management Discussion	31	62	36	27	4
Advice & Guidance	151	219	207	98	9
Superintendent's Written Warning	27	80	49	52	8
Formal discipline proceedings	5	4	11	7	2
Total	219	371	313	188	26

¹³ This is the number of times a file was sent to the PPS recommending that either an officer or staff member should be prosecuted or not prosecuted. If multiple complaints are received about the same incident the recommendation will only be counted once.

¹⁴ Disciplinary Regulations (pre 6th November 2000); a Code of Conduct (6th November 2000 to 13th March 2003); and a Code of Ethics (since 14th March 2003).

¹⁵ This sanction is under different Regulations to the other sanctions in this table, they are directed towards 'Designated Civilians' within the PSNI and not police officers.

Table 20b: Occasions Police Ombudsman recommended¹⁶ a discipline or performance action for an officer/staff, 2013/14 to 2017/18

Regulations Introduced June 2016	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Performance	0	0	0	7	53
Misconduct Meeting: Management Advice	0	0	0	45	91
Misconduct Meeting: Written Warning	0	0	0	12	23
Misconduct Meeting: Final Written Warning	0	0	0	0	1
Misconduct Meeting: Extension of Final Written Warning	0	0	0	0	0
Misconduct Meeting Subtotal	0	0	0	57	115
Misconduct Hearing	0	0	0	0	3
Total	0	0	0	64	171

Table 21¹⁷: Outcome of policy recommendations made, 2013/14 to 2017/18

Policy recommendations made to PSNI	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Fully accepted & being implemented	13	61	40	14	7
Partially accepted & being implemented	0	0	3	0	1
Not accepted	9	2	7	4	3
Already in place	0	2	2	2	1
No longer applicable	0	2	0	0	0
Still under consideration	0	0	5	27	28
Total	22	67	57	47	40

¹⁶ This is the number of times a discipline or performance recommendations was sent to the PSNI or another organisation for an officer or staff member. Where more than one complaint was received about the same incident the recommendation is only counted once.

¹⁷ The outcome of policy recommendations between 2013/14 and 2016/17 are correct as of 12th June 2017. While the 2017/18 figures are correct as on the 2nd May 2018.

Table 22: Complaints suitable for Informal Resolution (IR) with consent obtained, 2013/14 to 2017/18

IR Complaints Received	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Number of Complaints	3,738	3,370	3,042	2,813	2,561
Complaints Suitable for IR	480	486	471	449	405
Consent for IR obtained	293	292	281	281	224
Consent for IR not obtained	187	194	190	168	181

Table 23: Outcome of Informally Resolution process, 2016/17 to 2017/18¹⁸

IR Complaints Closed	2016/17	2017/18
Successful	177	165
Failed	84	62
Withdrawn	8	5
Total	269	232

Table 24: Rank of officer complained about, 2013/14 to 2017/18

Rank	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Constable	2,913	2,432	2,164	2,041	1,664
Sergeant	494	460	359	320	264
Inspector and Above	132	169	116	84	35

¹⁸ Previous year's data is undergoing a validation exercise and thus more trend information will be available when this exercise finishes.

Table 25: Number of officers with three or more complaints that were formally investigated or dealt with by way of Informal or Local Resolution, 2013/14 to 2017/18

Twelve month period ending	Number of officers
June 2013	98
September 2013	80
December 2013	91
March 2014	93
June 2014	103
September 2014	73
December 2014	71
March 2015	73
June 2015	66
September 2015	51
December 2015	43
March 2016	60
June 2016	47
September 2016	44
December 2016	57
March 2017	44
June 2017	32
September 2017	31
December 2017	26
March 2018	29

APPENDIX 2: UNDERSTANDING THE COMPLAINTS PROCESS

To help understand the information in this report, we have provided this short summary of the police complaints service in Northern Ireland and how it works.

What we do

The Police Ombudsman's Office provides for the independent and impartial investigation of complaints about the police in Northern Ireland. The Police Ombudsman is committed to providing a police complaints service in the way he thinks best suited to secure the confidence of the public and the police. He believes that for such confidence to be forthcoming, it is essential that people are informed about the nature of his work.

The Police Ombudsman has the remit to investigate the conduct of officers within the following organisations which operate in Northern Ireland:

- Police Service of Northern Ireland including Designated Civilians
- Belfast Harbour Police
- Belfast International Airport Police
- National Crime Agency (NCA) officers in Northern Ireland
- Certain Home Office staff using police functions in Northern Ireland
- Ministry of Defence Police in Northern Ireland

The Office deals primarily with complaints made by members of the public about the conduct of police officers. It also deals with matters referred to it by the PSNI Chief Constable. The following are incidents that the Chief Constable is required to refer to the Police Ombudsman:

- Any fatal road traffic collisions involving police officers
- Any death which may have occurred as a result of the actions of a police officer
- Any other serious allegation

It also deals with matters referred to it by the NIPB, the DoJ and the PPS.

The Police Ombudsman also has the power to initiate an investigation without a complaint having been made if it appears to him to be desirable and in the public interest.

In most circumstances the Police Ombudsman can only investigate incidents which have occurred in the previous 12 months. However, there is no time limit on the investigation of grave matters, or where exceptional circumstances exist. Many of the investigations the Office is undertaking into incidents which happened between 1968 and 1998 (the period known as the Troubles) are matters the Police Ombudsman viewed as grave or exceptional.

The Police Ombudsman does not investigate complaints against officers whose conduct has been the subject of disciplinary or criminal proceedings; or complaints about off-duty police officers, unless the fact that he or she is a police officer is relevant to the complaint. The Office also does not investigate matters relating to the direction and control of the police service by the Chief Constable.

How we deal with complaints

All complaints are recorded on our Case Handling System, even where they are later determined to be outside the remit of the Office.

A complaint from a member of the public will invariably include a number of allegations. For example, if a person alleges a police officer pushed them *and* was rude to them, it would be recorded as one complaint with two allegations on the system.

Once a complaint has been received, it will become subject of an initial assessment. This will involve logging it onto our system and making an assessment as to whether the matter is something the Police Ombudsman's Office can deal with and if so, how best to do so.

If the complaint is something we deal with, the Office will consider if the matter can be resolved informally rather than being sent straight for investigation. Before we decide to take the Informal Resolution approach, the person who made the complaint must agree. If this proves unsuccessful, the Police Ombudsman will refer the complaint for investigation.

When a matter is suitable for investigation, a complaints officer or an investigation officer will set about making the initial inquiries necessary before an investigation commences. This will involve getting more information from the complainant, such as an official statement of complaint.

When a formal investigation has been completed, if the evidence indicates that police officers may have committed a criminal offence or breached the police Code

of Ethics, the Police Ombudsman can recommend that they are prosecuted and/or disciplined.

Where the Police Ombudsman considers that a criminal offence may have been committed by a member of the police, he must send a copy of the investigation report to the PPS, making appropriate recommendations. The PPS then decides whether or not to prosecute the police officer under investigation.

If the Police Ombudsman decides that no criminal offence has been committed, he is required to consider whether it is appropriate to recommend disciplinary proceedings. If the Chief Constable is unwilling administer the recommended discipline, the Police Ombudsman may, direct him to do so.

APPENDIX 3: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

This glossary has been designed to assist users of our statistical information to understand the terms which we use to describe data contained in the statistical bulletin. The terms are listed in alphabetical order.

Advice and Guidance

This is an informal discipline sanction for officers.

Allegation

Each complaint can be broken down into one or more allegations. These are all the individual behaviours or issues being complained about. For example, if a person alleges a police officer pushed them *and* was rude to them, it would be recorded as one complaint with two allegations on the system.

Call in/Call out (no further action)

These are situations where the Police Ombudsman's Office is 'called in' to consider an incident but determines at an early stage that there is no requirement for any further investigation.

Conduct in custody suite

This is a Failure in Duty allegation category. It includes incidents where the complainant was denied access to legal advice or medical attention while they were detained in custody. In addition it covers instances where it is alleged the officer did not inform the detained person of their rights and entitlements, or the officer did not keep accurate custody records.

Conduct of police investigations / incident response

This is a Failure in Duty allegation category and includes allegations where the complainant has alleged that the unsatisfactory conduct of either ongoing or completed police investigations, including the inappropriate disclosure of information. Also included would be allegations that the police failed to carry out any investigation into an incident, or were excessively slow to respond to an incident.

Complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by or on behalf of a member of the public about a member of the police service or an officer of another service over which the Office has jurisdiction.

For the purpose of clarity of reporting, the term complaints refers to complaints made by members of the public, matters referred to the Office from other organisation, and matters that the Police Ombudsman has decided to investigate.

Failure in contact

This is a Failure in Duty allegation. It includes incidents where the complainant has alleged a police officer; failed to keep arranged appointments, return telephone calls, or reply to correspondence. It also includes incidents when an officer failed to keep the complainant updated with progress of an investigation or police enquiries.

Failure in duty of care

This is a Failure in Duty allegation. Where it is alleged that the police officer failed to take appropriate action to ensure the safety or well-being of the complainant or third party for whom they have responsibility.

Failure in record management

This is a Failure in Duty allegation. It involves a failure of police to keep accurate, complete or up to date police records. It also includes the failure of officers to provide information or documentation relating to the complainant or a third party.

Failure to act impartially

This is a Failure in Duty allegation. The complainant alleges an officer failed to adopt an independent approach and/or failed to act in a fair and impartial manner.

Historical Investigation

This is an investigation (potentially criminal and /or misconduct) into the actions of police where the allegation(s) made are considered Grave or Exceptional, "Troubles" related (1969-1998) and predates the establishment of the Good Friday Agreement, 10 April 1998.

Ill-founded

This is a type of complaint closure. These are cases where it became clear during initial inquiries that an allegation was without bases or foundation.

Incivility

This is a category within allegations. It refers to allegations such as the police officer being rude, showing a lack of respect, being abrupt or displaying a general lack of sensitivity.

Informally resolved (Informal Resolution)

This is a process offered to complainants who have made less serious allegations, e.g. rudeness or incivility. It involves a senior police officer speaking to both the officer(s) involved and the complainant with a view to reaching a satisfactory resolution of the complaint. It requires that a record of the outcome has been obtained from police confirming that the matter has been resolved.

Malpractice

These allegations can include any allegation in relation to perjury, other allegations of falsehood, any allegation that evidence was obtained in an irregular manner or under duress and allegations of concealment or tampering with evidence.

Management Discussion:

Management Discussion is an informal discipline sanction. It involves a discussion between the officer concerned and a more senior officer regarding the allegation.

Misconduct Hearing

This is a discipline action under the Police (Conduct) Regulations (NI) 2016 and came into force on 1 June 2016. It is a meeting where the officer may be dealt with by a disciplinary action up to and including a final written warning.

Misconduct Meeting

This is a discipline action under the Police (Conduct) Regulations (NI) 2016 and came into force on 1 June 2016. It is a hearing where the officer may be dealt with by a disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

Mishandling of property

This allegation category includes any allegation involving theft or loss of property (including money), unreasonable retention of property, damage to property, failure to account for money or property and improper disposal of property.

Oppressive Behaviour

This is an allegation type and includes situations where the complainant alleged that the officer has behaved in an oppressive manner. They can include allegations of oppressive conduct, harassment, and assault, including sexual assault.

Performance

A recommendation to initiate unsatisfactory performance procedures for an officer.

Residual matters

A small number of residual matters are included in the number of allegations (usually 1-2% of allegations each year). A residual matter is one identified by the Office's Investigator, which has not been previously complained of by the complainant. Examples include failure to complete notebook records, anomalies in custody record, and failure to supervise situations adequately.

Section 55 referral

Not all matters the Police Ombudsman deals with come to us as complaints from members of the public. Certain public bodies, including the PSNI, the Policing Board, the Department of Justice and the Public prosecution Service can refer matters to us for consideration. This is done under section 55 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998.

Superintendent's Written Warning

This is a formal written warning from a police officer's Superintendent.

APPENDIX 4: DATA AVAILABILITY AND QUALITY

Statistical information on complaints and allegations is derived from the CHS, an integrated and comprehensive ICT system that covers all key aspects of receiving and processing a complaint. It captures data about the complainant, the complained against parties, the incident and allegations made. Data can be downloaded and exported to a number of commonly used software packages for analysis (Excel, Access, SPSS¹⁹). In addition the Office uses the DI Diver reporting tool and the CHS has a number of management reports run directly from a menu on the system.

The data used for this publication was extracted from the CHS on the 10th April 2018, and thus includes all information recorded on the system up to the 9th April 2018.

Data quality

CHS data quality is considered to be high. The system has been designed to limit the incidence of inaccurate data through the use of measures such as logical validation checks, drop down menus for data input and a minimum of free text input. The Police Ombudsman has a dedicated team who assure the quality of CHS content. All data input is completely auditable and allows for an effective quality control procedure to review and, where necessary, amend key data for the purposes of accurate reporting. When considered necessary, focused data cleansing exercises of key fields are also conducted. Additionally, complete audits of fields with small numbers associated are conducted.

As stated above, substantial validation and quality control procedures are in place to ensure that the data derived from CHS are of high quality. However, there is still the possibility of a small number of errors arising from data input, missing data, failure to update data and errors in communication. The Police Ombudsman estimates that the level of this error is so small that it has no impact on the quality of statistical reporting. However, where errors are identified, corrections are made to reports as soon as practicable. Further details are set out in the Police Ombudsman [statement of revision and errors strategy](#) .

Revisions

The statistics included in this bulletin are taken from a live system, and may be subject to future revisions. This means that total number of complaints and allegations may change slightly between those published in previous bulletins.

Revisions can be made for a number of reasons but are mainly due to more information coming to light during the natural course of the Office's work, and the

¹⁹ SPSS is a statistical software package developed for use by social scientists.

system being updated accordingly. This includes the identification of residual matters; allegations identified by the Investigator that were not previously complained about by the member of the public, such as, the failure of a police officer to complete their notebook, anomalies in custody records or failure to supervise adequately. They typically account for fewer than 2% of all allegations (approximately between 60 to 100 residual allegations annually).

The table below shows the scale of revisions made between statistics in this bulletin and those in the previous bulletin in June 2015. It demonstrates that the revisions have little impact on the overall trends presented in this bulletin.

Table 26: Revisions made to the number of complaints and allegations received between this publication and the previous publication in June 2017.

	Previously Published Figures (June 17)	Current Published Figures (June 18)	Scale of Revision (number)	Scale of Revision (%)
Total number of complaints				
2013/14	3,738	3,738	0	0.00%
2014/15	3,370	3,370	0	0.00%
2015/16	3,042	3,042	0	0.00%
2016/17	2,797	2,813	+16	+0.57%
Total number of allegations				
2013/14	6,176	6,176	0	0.00%
2014/15	5,642	5,641	- 1	-0.22%
2015/16	4,966	4,963	+3	+0.06%
2016/17	4,725	4,816	+91	+1.93%

The Office's full strategy for revisions and errors can be found within the publications section of the [Office's website](#).

Data limitations

Because of the nature of some of the highly sensitive material handled by the Police Ombudsman in the investigation of cases, a small proportion of cases will have only limited information available on the CHS. On balance, the Police Ombudsman considers that the assurance of the privacy of the information and individuals associated with this small number of sensitive cases outweighs the need for full access to the data. In practice, the number of cases is so small that the restriction has no impact on the quality of statistical reporting.

Publication

This is an annual statistical bulletin, and publishes information in accordance with the obligation for the Police Ombudsman's Office to report performance on a financial year basis.

As the statistics were taken from a 'live' case handling system, the figures in this bulletin supersede those previously published.

The next annual statistical report is due to be published in June 2019. The exact date will be announced on the website at least four weeks prior to publication.

In addition to the annual bulletin, quarterly updates are published throughout the year. They provide top level information on the number of complaints and allegations received, they are published on the 4th Thursday in the month following the end of the quarter.

Contact Details:

Information Directorate
Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland
New Cathedral Buildings
11 Church Street
Belfast
BT1 1PG

Telephone: 028 9082 8648

Textphone: 028 9082 8756

Witness Appeal Line: 0800 0327 880

Email: info@policeombudsman.org

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

Website: www.policeombudsman.org



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