IOPC Independent Office for Police Conduct



Corporate strategy 2026/28

Transforming the IOPC

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Foreword

Since I joined the IOPC, we set out a new vision and started the most radical transformation programme since the organisation's inception in 2018. This corporate strategy reflects my absolute commitment to deliver transformation, so we are "a high performing IOPC that is trusted by the public and policing".

We want to sharpen our focus, so that we direct our resources to do what only we can do and do it brilliantly. I want everyone who encounters our service – whether they be complainants, police officers or bereaved family members – to have confidence in the system and our work. These service users will be at the heart of what we do, and we will engage positively and constructively with the police and the communities we serve. I also want the IOPC to maximise its impact within the wider system so that we can share learning and drive change in policing.

We have already made great strides setting the foundations for our transformation. We have established a new organisational structure, switched to a new national delivery model, and reshaped how we will manage our independent investigations and reviews process more effectively.

Through our transformation programme we will continue to reduce the length of time taken for our investigations and reviews, but we recognise we are only one part of a wider, complex police complaint system. To build service-user trust and confidence in police accountability, we need to work together to improve the experience.

This is why we are working closely with organisations within the wider police accountability system to ensure we can collectively reduce delays, build confidence in both the accountability system itself and policing more broadly, to deliver a better service for everyone. We welcome the opportunity to work with system leaders to deliver the reforms proposed in the government's White Paper: 'From local to national: a new model for policing', particularly those that aim to improve timeliness of investigations.

I feel incredibly privileged to lead an organisation which is embracing change and would like to thank all my colleagues for their achievements so far. I look forward to working with everyone – policing, our partners across the system, and communities – as we transform the IOPC to realise our ambitions.



Rachel Watson
Director General



About us

Who we are

The Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) oversees the police complaints system in England and Wales and has a statutory duty to secure and maintain public confidence in it. We investigate the most serious matters, including deaths following police contact regardless of whether a complaint has been made. We also set the standards by which the police should handle complaints. We use learning from our work to influence changes in policing. We are independent and make our decisions entirely independently of the police and government. Under the legislation we operate within, our Director General can never have worked for the police in any capacity, which enshrines our independence.

What we do

The majority of complaints from the public are dealt with by police forces. However, the IOPC sets and monitors the standards by which they should handle complaints. We also consider certain types of reviews from people who are dissatisfied with the way their complaint was dealt with by the police.

Forces must refer certain serious incidents to the IOPC, whether or not someone has made a complaint. These include where someone has died or been seriously injured following contact with police, as well as allegations of serious corruption, serious assault and certain behaviour aggravated by discrimination. We may decide to investigate such cases independently or return them to police forces for local investigation.

We assess and respond to super-complaints along with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and the College of Policing (CoP). Super-complaints are complaints made by designated bodies, for example charities, about broad or systemic issues that could affect public confidence in policing.

We have powers in relation to a small number of specialist police forces and organisations that have police-like powers. These include:

- the National Crime Agency (NCA)
- Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC)
- certain specialist police forces (including the British Transport Police, Civil Nuclear Constabulary and Ministry of Defence Police)
- some activities of Home Office immigration and enforcement staff
- Fair Work Agency (FWA)
- Food Standards Agency (FSA)
- The Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICRIR)

We also investigate criminal allegations against police and crime commissioners (PCCs) and their deputies.

We expect to have remit over certain officers in the Public Sector Fraud Authority and the Department for Work and Pensions in 2027.

Our remit includes oversight of the whole complaints system, no matter which organisation is handling the matter. We use learning from our work to influence changes and improvements to policing practice, leadership and culture.

The IOPC cannot drive system-wide improvements on its own and we need to work with others. This includes working with the Government on laws and guidance that govern our work, and policing partners such as PCCs, the CoP and HMICFRS, as well as our service users, along with communities and civil society. With our partners, inside and outside the policing world, we make sure public complaints and investigations into misconduct and serious incidents are part of a cycle of learning which improves policing in England and Wales.

IOPC Corporate strategy 2026/28

One IOPC
A high performing organisation

Vision
A trusted complaints system that improves confidence in policing

Mission
A high performing IOPC that is trusted by the public and policing

Objectives

A brilliant service for users, partners, stakeholders and communities.

Our work adds value and has a positive impact.

Systems and processes that work for our service users and us.

People who are engaged, enabled and empowered.



Values

We seek the truth

We explore the facts to gain a deeper understanding

We are inclusive

We treat everyone with equity and value their perspective.

We are empowered

We trust our people and provide a supportive environment

We are tenacious

We overcome challenges to reach our goals.

We make a difference

We are passionate about improving policing and public confidence



Our strategic objectives

A brilliant service for users, partners, stakeholders and communities

Why we are changing

Since the IOPC's inception our funding has remained stable at around £70 million, at a time of rising inflation and wider economic uncertainty. Meanwhile, demand for our services has increased by 80 per cent, underlining how the role of the IOPC is more vital than ever before.

In addition to the budgetary and demand pressures, the IOPC has very limited discretion on its operational duties particularly on referrals, reviews of complaint handling, reviews of local DSI investigations and super-complaints – all received must be handled in line with legislative requirements.

Over the last twelve months, we saw:

- Nearly 25% more applications to review complaints dealt with by police forces' Professional Standards Departments in 2025/26 (3,050) than we did in 2024/25 (2,445). This has nearly tripled in volume since reforms to the review process were introduced in 2020/21 when we received 1000 reviews. Like police forces, we are seeing the impact of AI generate demand, which is unlikely to abate anytime soon.
- A 36% increase in complaints/ enquiries to our contact centre in 2025/26 (11,647) than in 24/25 (8,533).
- Referrals up by 2.6% (7,088) in 2025/26 from 6,907 in 2024/25 and an increase of 13.6% since 2022/23 when we received 6239 referrals.

At the same time that we saw an increase in demand, there was also a drop in confidence in the police. (Fifty-two percent of adults told a YouGov survey that they had no/not very much confidence in the police to tackle crime locally in February 2026, compared to 38% in October 2019). High-profile cases, where police officers broke the law or breached professional standards, have damaged public trust and increased public expectations for scrutiny and accountability through independent oversight.

One of the biggest concerns of our stakeholders is the timeliness of our work and our stakeholders are united in their desire to see us complete our work more quickly. Improving timeliness was cited by 56% of stakeholders as a top priority for the IOPC's leadership in the coming 12 months. We understand why that matters: a slow system is not good for complainants, police officers, families, or policing as a whole.

With our current processes and resources, we can only deliver around 300 independent investigations a year which is now lower than we, the public and the police would like. We want to maintain a focus on the cases that we are required to investigate by law, while expanding the amount of investigations that stakeholders and communities feel add value by recommending improvements to policing practice. We think carefully about how to use our limited capacity to focus on where independent investigations will add most value. However, we are making

difficult decisions every day, sending serious and sensitive cases back to police forces to investigate themselves, adding to the pressures already faced by those forces. We believe that as well as independently investigating the matters that stakeholders and communities agree add the most value, we should also take on more investigations that need to be delivered quicker.

For reviews, our transformation programme introduced several ways of working which sped up the time taken to complete a review – however, this is still not enough. We still have a backlog of cases to clear, and our progress to clear the backlog is largely hampered due to the increasing demand on this service. The recent uptick in reviews means that despite the early and sustained productivity gains made within casework, we still think complainants and officers are waiting longer than we would like, for us to consider their review. We want to build on the improvements we made, while also responding to the pressure created by rising demand in this area.

In this context, standing still and continuing our existing approach to our work is not an option: if we don't change the way we do things, we won't meet the increasing demand or expectations on faster completions.

This is why we started to transform the way we do our work. We took a systematic look at how we best organise ourselves and our resources to have the greatest possible impact for our service user. We already took steps to improve how we deliver our work through restructuring teams and introducing a new national model of delivery to enable us to target our resources where they are most needed. This enabled us to respond to emerging pressures and high-profile cases, and to support greater consistency in our approach. Also, to ensure we demonstrate the full service-user experience we changed our definition of investigation closure from completion of the final report, to passing the final report and supporting evidence to the appropriate authority (AA). The change in this definition has added further challenge to our investigation timeliness rates. Through a combination of transformation and a more acute focus on investigation supervision, we have, overall, improved the timeliness of our work, and over the last twelve months:

- We increased the number of investigations completed within 6 and 12 months. At the end of 2025/26, 73% were completed in 12 months and 32% were completed in 6 months.
- We completed more reviews than we received every month since January 2025 and reduced the time these take us from 155 working days in April 2025, down to 62 working days at the end of March 2026.

By continuing our transformation programme, we will focus on improving operational delivery and the service we provide to the public, police and our stakeholders. We will put the service user at the heart of our processes, and consider taking well informed risks to consider more innovative approaches that will meet the service user needs. We will be proportionate in what we do, by removing unnecessary bureaucracy and streamlining our processes to focus on what's needed to make a decision.

Being more proportionate in our work will have two benefits. Firstly, we will increase our productivity so that we can do more high-quality, timely investigations and reviews and secondly, we will make service user improvements across the police complaints system.

To meet our strategic objective, we will:

- build our capability and develop our insight to identify issues of public confidence in policing and consider what work only we can do to add most value
- improve our operational performance to deliver more independent investigations and consider review cases, so that we complete our work quicker and to a higher quality
- engage service users to understand their needs and design our processes around them to drive improvements
- develop a new decision-making framework to improve the consistency/ proportionality of our decision making

Our strategic objectives

Systems and processes that work for us and our service users

Why we are changing

Over the last 12 months, we implemented our service user strategy, enabling us to gain insight into the needs of all those involved in our investigations and reviews. As well as improving the timeliness of our work, we know that our service users also want to see us improve the quality of our work. They told us we can improve the information we give them about the progress of our investigations and be clearer in our explanations of what we did and the reasons for our decisions.

We are committed to addressing both the timeliness and quality of our work. Too often in the past, our systems did not support our staff to deliver a high-quality service. We took steps to address the problems they face, for example, by improving our case tracking system and the way in which we store our data. In the face of rising demand, we need to use new technology, such as artificial intelligence, to enable our teams to work smarter and improve their productivity. We already identified opportunities to automate tasks or apply artificial intelligence within our work, enabling our staff to focus more on value-adding activities. We will consider opportunities to go beyond the opportunities we already identified throughout our transformation programme.

Our work with service users has the potential to provide more information about where and how we can address their needs. Our service user strategy is helping us embed a greater service-user focus for our work. We have already started to coproduce and codesign some of our work with service users, for example, as part of our recent work to update our policy on police witnesses. We are committed to listening to service user voices across a wider range of IOPC work to ensure we meet their needs more effectively.

At the heart of our approach is our goal to make better use of the data we collect. We are a data rich organisation and have a wealth of information from our investigations and reviews, the feedback we receive from the public and our service users, and the engagement work we do with stakeholders on a daily basis. Improving the quality of our work means we need to make better use of that information, turning it into insight, to enable us to identify what our service users want, how their views change and what we need to do in response. Our work over the coming 12 months to enhance our insight capabilities will allow us to be more evidence led in choosing which cases to investigate and how we allocate our resources in response.

To meet our strategic objective, we will:

- create proportionate and digitally enabled processes to support our work in being more efficient and effective
- be innovative and confident in our work so that we meet service user needs more effectively
- use our data more intelligently to provide insight on where and how the police complaints system can deliver more effective outcomes
- ensure our approach is evidence led and more consistent.
- instinctively collaborate with teams inside the IOPC and our external stakeholders



Our strategic objectives

People who are engaged, enabled and empowered

Why we are changing

We want to be an IOPC that is a great place to work, supported by technology that enables staff to perform to the best of their ability. We want to improve and enhance the employee experience to ensure we have high levels of engagement and performance among our people. This is important to support the delivery of changes we make through transformation and ensure they are embedded effectively.

We know we have staff who are values-driven, committed and motivated to deliver a brilliant service. We can only succeed in delivering transformation if our people support and deliver the changes. Our staff have already embraced change and have helped to identify new processes and ways of working. Staff across our organisation have been instrumental in delivering the changes we have already seen in our investigations and reviews work. However, we need to continue to respond to the pressure of increased demand and enable our staff to work smarter, rather than harder, to respond to that pressure.

To do this, we need better processes and systems to support our people. This work will be progressed through our other objectives. Also, we need to ensure our culture and leadership enables our people to perform at their best. We already have great staff commitment and we share values, beliefs and behaviours. This culture helps to support our staff deliver a brilliant service. This will enable us to deliver our work quicker and support delivery of the changes that are needed.

We also need to be a values-driven, empowered and an inclusive workforce, which reflects the communities we serve across England and Wales, especially in senior roles. This will enable us to embrace the richness of different identities, backgrounds, and lived experiences of all our staff, so we can enhance diverse perspectives within our organisation.

Finally, our managers and senior leaders will be equipped with the skills and knowledge to provide effective leadership and support colleagues to grow during this time of transformation.

To meet our strategic objective, we will:

- be clearer about what we and the public expect of our staff and strive to meet those high standards
- increase the diversity of our workforce to ensure we are representative of the communities we serve and foster an inclusive environment
- ensure we have great leaders and managers who inspire and motivate staff to deliver for our service users
- develop our staff so they are equipped with the skills and knowledge to deliver for our service users
- hold ourselves and each other to account for the work we do and the delivery of the services we provide to our users

Our strategic objectives

Our work adds value and has a positive impact

Why we are changing

An effective complaints system can improve trust and confidence in policing. As the police complaints watchdog that oversees the police complaints system in England and Wales, we need to make sure the system is accessible so everyone can use it when they have concerns. Also, when the public do use it, that system needs to deliver fair, timely outcomes for everyone. We want the police service to see the complaints system as an opportunity to better understand the communities they serve and to listen, learn and improve.

The IOPC collect complaints statistics from police forces and the statistics from 2024/25 showed the following:

- The number of police complaints logged in England and Wales rose to 94,940 – an 11% increase on the total number logged in the previous year.
- Complaint numbers increased year-on-year since the definition of a complaint broadened in 2020, consistently rising from the 67,732 cases reported in 2020/21.
- Through our oversight function, we identified that this increase is partly due to some police forces using a broader recording and handling practice. This resulted in a higher number of cases being formally recorded and therefore brought into the complaints system.
- We are aware that in some forces, recorded complaint numbers have reduced. Through our ongoing work with forces, we seek to understand the variations and fluctuations in the volume of complaints recorded and their handling.
- Only 41% of complaints recorded were made by women, 14% were made by individuals from a Black, Asian and ethnic minority background and only 2% were made by those 17 and under.

From the statistics collected we know the number of complaints has increased, but we also know there are groups of people that aren't using it, such as young people and women.

We also know from our Public Perception Tracker that half of the public say they feel positive towards the police (49%) and this sentiment has remained stable over the last three years. Some people recall recently seeing news stories about the policing of protests, riot and public demonstrations. However, stories about police abuse of power for sexual purposes are associated with the most negative shift in public sentiment. Of those who followed these stories, 72% reported feeling much more or somewhat more negative towards the police as a result.

The public continue to be more likely to lack confidence in the police to deal fairly with complaints against officers and staff (48% not confident vs 42% confident). The majority of the public say that they would complain if they were unhappy about an officer's behaviour towards them (62% very or fairly likely).

We know that those with less confidence in policing are less likely to make complaints, and we can see that young people and women's confidence has not recovered since it dipped in 2021/22.

We focus our oversight of the complaints system in supporting forces to improve the way they handle complaints and ensuring that complainants get a consistent service across all forces. This will mean that more complainants are satisfied with the service they've received, as forces 'get it right first time'. Our oversight team has already provided forces with a toolkit, practical guidance and advice to help with consistency and promote good complaints handling by all police forces.

The IOPC is also in a unique position to be a leading voice in improving the complaints system, promoting high standards of policing and driving best practice. The information we gather through our investigations and reviews can highlight not only individual behaviour, but systemic issues where improvements can be made to policy, training, practice, leadership and culture. Our evidence base enables us to identify learning opportunities to improve policing, both locally and nationally. Our role is to lead the debate about where and how those changes can be made to help improve the quality of policing – and demonstrate the effectiveness of the police complaints system in driving improvements.

However, we cannot improve policing practice and public confidence alone – improvements will need action across the system. We will work closely with policing partners to continue the drive for change and with the Government on reforms to the police accountability system,following the recent publication of its White Paper. We want to ensure the balance is right between scrutiny and accountability and ensuring that the police have the confidence to use their powers to keep the public safe.

To meet this objective we will:

- promote consistency in complaints handling with police forces so they 'get it right, first time' to improve the public's experience of the complaints system
- be a powerful, trusted independent advocate for improvements to the police complaints system and wider policing
- raise the confidence of those with the least confidence in the police complaints system



Independent Office for Police Conduct

More information

To find out more about our work or to request this strategy in an alternative format, you can contact us in a number of ways:

www.policeconduct.gov.uk

Follow us on X: **@policeconduct**

Email us at: **enquiries@policeconduct.gov.uk**

Call us on: **0300 020 0096**

Text relay: **18001 0207 166 3000**

Write to us at:
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We welcome correspondence in Welsh and English. We will respond to you in Welsh and this will not lead to delay.

Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymr aeg. Byddwn yn ymateb i chi yn Gymraeg ac na fydd hyn yn arwain at oedi.

July 2026

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