

# Building trust and confidence in policing

**IOPC Impact in 2022/23**



# Contents

A message from our Acting Director General	4
Who we are and what we do	6
Our impact at a glance	7
We listen and people feel heard	8
We improve policing and police complaints handling	12
We support service users and improve access to the complaints system	16
We focus on areas of public concern	20
We are independent and hold the police to account	24
Getting in touch	28

## A message from our Acting Director General

**This year has been difficult for policing with high-profile cases and incidents damaging public confidence.** This makes our role as the police complaints watchdog more important than ever and in the following pages you will read how our independent oversight is making an impact.

Despite increasing demand for our involvement, more complex cases, more visibility of incidents via social media, and shrinking resources, I am proud to report that we have completed 89% of our core investigations (which excludes those handled by our major investigations directorate) within 12 months and have made more than 150 recommendations. Our recommendations support policing to be better by identifying opportunities for them to learn and to improve everybody's experience of policing.

But statistics only tell part of the story. Our report looks behind the numbers, sharing specific examples of how we have made a real difference to real people, on issues that are of public concern. It shows how our involvement, experience and calls for change benefit both those who use our services and policing as a whole.

This report showcases examples from the first year of our new five-year strategy, 'Building trust and confidence in policing'. Our strategy outlines how we will deliver our mission to improve policing, hold the police to account, and ensure that learning from our work leads to change. You can read full details of our ambitious strategy on [our new website](#).

The stories that follow span police forces across England and Wales, and cover a range of our work. They only scratch the surface of the work we do - the most difficult part of producing this report was deciding what to leave out. I would like to thank all of my colleagues at the IOPC. Their dedication, passion and tenacity shine through this report.

I hope that you enjoy reading about just some of our impact this year. As we continue to deliver our strategy, I look forward to demonstrating the difference we make.

*Thomas Whiting*

**Tom Whiting**  
Acting Director General



Our report takes a look behind the numbers, sharing specific examples of how **we have made a real difference**

## Who we are and what we do

**We are the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC), the police complaints watchdog. We are not the police and are completely independent of them.**

We set the standards for the police complaints system, which saw more than 80,000 complaints in 2022/23. We make sure the police handle these complaints properly. We also investigate the most serious and sensitive incidents involving the police ourselves.

Through our work, we hold the police to account when things go wrong, recommend changes to prevent the same mistakes happening again and promote high standards of policing. We use our evidence to drive improvements in police practices and complaint handling for the benefit of the public and the police. This will help achieve our vision for everyone to be able to have trust and confidence in policing.

Because of the wide variety of cases that we see, we can identify common themes and specific problem areas in policing. Issues

may also emerge from conversations with our stakeholders. Where we identify an area of concern, we proactively look into it. Our current areas of focus are race discrimination and violence against women and girls.

Along with His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and the College of Policing, we also assess and respond to super-complaints. Super-complaints can be made by a range of organisations about broad or systemic issues that could affect public confidence in policing.

We also have powers over other organisations that are not police forces but have police-like powers, and we investigate criminal allegations against police and crime commissioners and their deputies.

You can read more about who we are and what we do on [our website](#).

## Our impact at a glance



A man with glasses and a goatee, wearing a dark suit jacket over a blue and white patterned shirt, stands in front of a dense green hedge. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a neutral expression.

The IOPC  
investigation team  
treated us with  
**outstanding  
courtesy  
and respect**

feedback from service user

## **We listen and people feel heard**

Given the nature of policing, people's experiences with the police are sometimes negative, damaging their confidence in policing. This can be made worse when they make a complaint and feel it is not taken seriously or fully understood. We help to rebuild their confidence by making them feel heard and getting them meaningful responses and remedies to their complaint.

## Helping people to have confidence in the police complaints system

**We investigated a complaint from a transgender man that a force had failed to investigate incidents he and his partner had reported to them as hate crimes, because he was transgender.**

He believed that this, and the lack of consideration and support offered to him, was because of discriminatory policies, practices or culture within the police force.

While we did not uphold his complaint, we made a learning recommendation about refresher training for all officers and control room staff in equality and diversity matters, including transgender (trans) hate crime.

We also recommended that call handlers ask people how they prefer to be addressed and

use gender-neutral language where appropriate.

The man told us: “The IOPC investigation team treated us with outstanding courtesy and respect. They listened to our complaint and investigated it fairly and above all else we felt safe.”

As a direct result, the couple asked to work with us to raise awareness of the police complaints system and the IOPC, particularly with trans people. Members of our staff worked with them, and a trans support network, to

develop and deliver a session to build knowledge and understanding of the IOPC and the complaints system within the trans community.

The man added: “Our experience of being respected and treated with value by the IOPC has given us the confidence to encourage others to report knowing they will receive a fair, non-discriminatory and unbiased response to their complaint.”

**Most complaints about the police are dealt with by police forces. When someone is unhappy with how a force handled their complaint, they have a right of review. Certain requests for review come to us. We consider whether more should be done to address the complaint and what can be done to resolve the issues. This helps to rebuild the public’s confidence in policing and the police complaints system.**

### Making a difference

A mother complained that her son, a 24 year-old Black man who has a mental health condition, was stopped and searched, and later strip searched, without sufficient grounds. She was unhappy with how the police handled her complaint, so asked us to review it. Our casework manager upheld the review for ten of the 11 allegations in her complaint. They recommended the force apologise and that the officers participate in the formal reflective process for dealing with conduct that falls short of what is expected, but is not serious enough to warrant disciplinary action. The force accepted all of our recommendations and apologised to the woman and her son. The force also improved the way in which it handles complaints. The woman thanked the casework manager for their “thorough and fair independent review” and said: “It has made a difference”.

### Restoring belief in fairness and honesty

A woman complained that a police officer had provided false information in an email that was then used in court against her and contributed to her losing the case. The force investigated her complaint and did not uphold it. Our casework manager did not think her complaint had been properly investigated and directed the force to reinvestigate it. The woman wrote to the casework manager to thank them for their “comprehensive, transparent and easily understood” outcome letter. She also said their decision had “restored my belief in fairness and honesty... My entire experience in dealing with the IOPC has been so positive. One of understanding and compassion, from your Admin department to you...”

[Your staff member] is the reason **I have gained my confidence back** in the system.

feedback from service user



Your  
**support and  
engagement**  
had been key  
to achieving  
our success

feedback from stakeholder

## **We improve policing and police complaints handling**

Our work helps identify opportunities for the police to learn and to improve everybody's experience of policing. Our learning recommendations help prevent the same things happening again. We share significant learning with all forces via learning reports and our Learning the Lessons magazines. We also provide advice to improve how police complaints are handled and intervene when needed. This all helps increase public confidence in the police.

## Bringing together communities and the police to share experiences and improve policing

**During community meetings, we heard how the death of a young British-Somali man had increased concerns about how the police use force and how police interactions with people of ethnic minority heritage, especially young men, can quickly escalate.**

Frances, one of our stakeholder engagement officers, used our unique position to bring together the community and the local police force. The session was to be the start of an ongoing conversation between the two groups to share their experiences. Among a range of subjects, people talked about the mutual distrust between young people and the police, how the police approach interactions with members of the public and the need for cultural awareness. There was acknowledgement that, although there were good examples of police engagement with communities, this was not always consistent.

The force accepted there had been shortcomings and feel they have made significant improvements following the session. These include:

- More stop searches being recorded by police officers on body worn video cameras. Nearly 98% are now recorded. This is regularly reviewed to make sure it is being used appropriately.
- A drop in the likelihood of people of ethnic minority heritage being stopped and searched when compared to White people, from six times more likely before the session to four times more likely after it.

- Speaking to more than 4,000 staff about race, ethnicity and policing to explore views and generate understanding and openness.

Plans to speak to 100,000 people to find out about their issues and concerns.

The force, along with their Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, has since run another two sessions themselves. We are keeping track of the force's progress to build on the improvements they have made.

### Identifying and sharing learning

Our [stop and search learning report](#) and our [Taser report](#) made national recommendations to improve the police use of these tactics. Most were accepted. Actions taken include:

- inclusion of our stop and search recommendations in the [Mayor's action plan for London](#) and the national policing [Race Action Plan](#)
- updates to national Taser training to emphasise the importance of assessing the environment and considering injury risk when deciding whether to use Taser

This year, we asked forces what they are doing following our stop and search recommendations and shared their responses with:

- the National Police Chiefs' Council to help them promote good practice and support forces
- the relevant Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) to support their role in scrutiny and holding chief officers to account

### Improving force policy and training

A man called the police saying he was cutting himself. Despite warning markers for the man, including for weapons, the police call handler only requested an ambulance. Paramedics attended, but then had to ask for urgent police help because of the man's threatening behaviour.

Our review recommended that policy and training for call handlers should be clearer about the police response to mental health calls. The force updated both. Mental health and welfare calls are now discussed in regular meetings with all emergency services to ensure a shared understanding of responsibilities.

**I will be sending out a call to action to PCC colleagues to use their force's feedback [to the IOPC survey] to better hold them to account and to drive improvements.**

### Improving the service for complainants

Through regular monitoring of a force's complaint handling and conversations with them, Kirsty, from our oversight team, identified opportunities to improve the quality and timeliness of how the force recorded complaints. Following her advice, the force re-evaluated their processes and staffing. This resulted in a 93% decrease in the time taken to record a complaint. Our work encouraged the force to take a holistic view of how they manage complaints. This led to improvements in their communication with complainants and, ultimately, improved complaint handling.



## We support service users and improve access to the police complaints system

Through our work, we have contact with vulnerable people and people who need help to access the police complaints system. We aim to give people the support they need to enable them to make and pursue complaints, which helps to increase their trust in the system.

A woman with short dark hair, wearing a dark blazer over a white shirt, is seated and looking towards a man. The man is wearing a white shirt and a patterned tie, and is partially visible on the left side of the frame. They appear to be in a professional setting, possibly an office or a meeting room, with a yellow chair visible behind them.

**Your level  
of empathy  
for me was  
outstanding**

feedback from service user

## Supporting vulnerable people

**Our survivor engagement managers provide specialist advice to ensure we provide the extra support that vulnerable people need. They also make sure that service users' rights, under the Victim's Code, are protected.**

This is especially important in cases where an officer has abused their position and the victim is vulnerable as they may not realise the seriousness of what has happened. Unfortunately, we investigate many cases where police officers and staff abuse their position.

We investigated an allegation that an officer had abused his position to form an inappropriate relationship with a woman he knew was vulnerable. He met the woman when taking her statement following her report of a sexual assault by her partner. Our investigation revealed they exchanged more than 2,000 messages, most of which had

nothing to do with the case. We found the officer had a case to answer for gross misconduct. The officer resigned before our investigation concluded, but a disciplinary hearing later decided that he would have been dismissed were he still serving. He was also placed on the barred list preventing future employment with the police.

One of our survivor engagement managers supported our investigation team in this case, engaging with the woman's support worker to arrange an initial meeting. They also gave advice about things to consider when engaging with the woman, which helped to make sure she felt empowered and

understood our role. As a result of their advice, we decided we had sufficient evidence without interviewing the woman, which saved her from reliving her trauma.

The woman told our investigator:

"I just want to thank you and your team for everything they have done for me.

Although I didn't quite understand everything at the time, you were patient and kind in explaining the process and what was expected through this case."

**Our customer contact centre is often the first point of contact for people getting in touch with the IOPC. This means they are often the first to know about issues people may have in accessing the complaints system. They work with others to help put this right.**

### Facilitating the handling of a complaint

Aimee, from our customer contact team, is the IOPC's contact for a man who told us he has a condition causing him to inadvertently shout or come across as aggressive. As he struggles with reading and writing, he prefers to communicate by phone. He had made a complaint to a force but their communication had broken down, with calls often terminated. He had experienced similar difficulties with a support organisation. Despite the difficulties, Aimee built rapport with the man and rebuilt his communication with the force, allowing his complaint to be reopened. This included making sure he received updates from the force and understood them. The man has thanked Aimee, saying we are the only organisation to continue to work with him, despite the difficulties. This has increased his trust in the complaints system and in the IOPC.

### Ensuring reasonable adjustments

Our customer contact team told our oversight team that they had received several calls about a force refusing to take complaints over the phone. Complainants were told they either had to email or complete an online form, even when they said they couldn't submit a complaint in writing. Kirsty, from our oversight team, spoke to the force and found out there were new staff in the

control room who were not aware of or did not understand the complaints process. The examples she shared with the force highlighted where training was required. This training has been put in place and the force now takes complaints over the phone.

**You were compassionate, respectful and understanding throughout. Your level of empathy for me was outstanding.**

feedback from service user



Young people were **empowered to hear about their rights** and to **have a say on policing**

Youth panel member

## **We focus on areas of public concern**

Our research tells us that young people lack confidence in the police and the complaints system. We also know that the public is concerned about race discrimination in policing. Over the last year, we continued to see the impact our ongoing focus in these areas has made.

## Working with young people to improve confidence in policing and the complaints system

**Our Youth Panel, which has around 40 members aged 16-25, helps us to better understand the policing issues affecting young people. They talk to other young people and police forces, identifying ways to improve trust and confidence in the police and the complaints system.**

A Youth Panel member describes their experience:

“I have had a mission to capture Liverpool and Merseyside within our IOPC Youth Panel work. The economic, social and political challenges Liverpool and its people have faced has left many local communities feeling abandoned by the state.

“Gun crime and gangs was a huge theme from our work with young people across Merseyside. For some, this was from a concern for their safety due to gangs. For others, from worries about being stereotyped as gang members themselves. Some young Muslims expressed fear of being ‘accused of being a terrorist’.

“Our discussions with Merseyside Police had an emphasis on the age of criminal responsibility. Many officers depicted the force’s approach to youth offending as taking a ‘holistic’ view of the individual, whilst assessing the referrals that should be made. Officers felt that raising the age of criminal responsibility would further delay young people’s access to the services they require.

“Upon reflection, young people were empowered to hear about their rights and to have a say on policing and complaints. Officers were energised by the open dialogue about public perceptions and confidence.

Merseyside Police commended our ‘well-constructed’ and ‘very insightful workshops’. Youth organisations seemed eager to be involved in further work with the IOPC. Both groups have been enthusiastic to get the most out of our engagement.

“It goes to show just how integral the visibility of the IOPC’s work with communities across the country can be.”

### Increasing young people’s awareness of the police complaints system

Initial engagement with a local community, following the fatal police shooting of a young Black man, highlighted more engagement with young people was needed. Uzma, our senior stakeholder engagement officer, hosted a workshop for young people from three schools, one police cadet unit and the London violence reduction unit youth panel. They discussed their views of policing and their awareness of the complaints system. Most didn’t know how to complain about an officer. The workshop explored what can be complained about and how, and who the IOPC is. At the end of the session, almost all the participants said they now understood how to complain about the police. We continue to run the workshops and have spoken to more than 700 young people so far. We are also running pilot projects to improve young people’s awareness and understanding of the complaints system and empower them to educate their peers and communities.

### Improving the handling of race discrimination complaints

Informed by our oversight work, we publish guidance on specific aspects of complaint handling in our ‘Focus’ magazines. Our December 2022 edition highlighted the handling of complaints involving race discrimination, discussing aspects forces struggle with the most. It also shared good practice by forces to improve their handling of these complaints and change their culture.

Stakeholder feedback was positive:

“Good strong emphasis on early engagement and getting the direction of travel of the complaint right first time. Pivotal information.”

“Very useful advice especially around open questions rather than closed and the importance of early and regular engagement.”

“Excellent explanation of cultural competence in that it is more than being respectful.”

We continue to support forces and local policing bodies to overcome the challenges they face so they are in the best position to handle complaints involving race discrimination correctly from the outset.

Thank you for your time and energy. **The young people’s knowledge has increased so much.**

feedback from stakeholder



**I can't thank  
you enough.**  
I am glad that he  
will not be able to  
abuse a position in  
the police again

feedback from service user

## **We are independent and hold the police to account**

Holding the police to account when things go wrong is an important part of how we increase public confidence in the police and the police complaints system. This includes identifying when someone is at fault and supporting the proceedings that may follow to examine their actions. These proceedings could result in a decision that a person should no longer serve with the police.

## Holding the police to account through our investigations and reviews

**In our investigations and reviews work, we decide whether someone has a ‘case to answer’ for misconduct or gross misconduct. We also decide if a case should be referred to the Crown Prosecution Service.**

We produce a report analysing the evidence we looked at to reach our decisions. Our report is then used in any disciplinary, criminal or inquest proceedings that may follow.

If we find a person has a case to answer for misconduct or gross misconduct, we inform the police force who will hold disciplinary proceedings. For gross misconduct cases, these proceedings are usually open to the public to attend. During disciplinary proceedings, our report and supporting evidence is examined. The person with a case to answer is asked about the decisions they made and the actions they took. If a case to answer is proven, it could result

in that person being disciplined or dismissed and barred from working for the police.

If we refer a case to the Crown Prosecution Service, they consider the evidence we looked at to decide whether to press criminal charges and hold a trial. During a trial, the evidence is examined by the judge and/or jury. This includes looking at our report and supporting evidence, and asking questions of the person charged. If a person is found guilty, the courts decide their sentence.

In certain cases involving a death in police custody or following contact with the

police, an inquest will be held to find out how the person died. This includes considering whether police actions may have contributed to the death. Our investigation reports provide vital evidence to support that process.

On the next page are examples of our investigations that led to disciplinary and criminal proceedings, which resulted in the most serious sanctions. More information about our role in the disciplinary and criminal systems, and the outcomes of our investigations is available in our annual publication [‘Outcomes following IOPC independent investigations’](#).

### Officer assaulted a handcuffed man

We investigated the force used by an officer on a man who had been arrested and handcuffed by other officers. The officer attended to assist his colleagues. He pushed the handcuffed man twice and hit him with his elbow. As a result, the officer faced a criminal trial and received a suspended prison sentence. He was also ordered to do 100 hours unpaid work.

Our investigation found the officer had a case to answer for gross misconduct and a disciplinary hearing was held. The officer resigned before the hearing, but it was decided that he would have been dismissed were he still serving. He was also barred from working for the police.

### Officers exchanged offensive WhatsApp messages

We investigated allegations of inappropriate and discriminatory comments made by police officers within a WhatsApp group chat. We also looked at whether the officers involved had failed to challenge or report the inappropriate comments made by others. As a result, two former officers were convicted of offences under the *Communications Act 2003* and jailed.

Our investigation found they and four others had a case to answer for gross misconduct and a disciplinary hearing was held. Two who were still serving officers were dismissed and the other four would have been dismissed had they still been serving. All six were barred from working for the police.

### Officers failed to properly deal with domestic abuse

We investigated allegations that officers failed to safeguard a victim of domestic abuse and her children when they attended a domestic incident involving her ex-partner. We also looked at whether they failed to properly investigate the crimes she told them her ex-partner had committed, which were supported by other evidence. The officers decided not to arrest her ex-partner and allowed two of their children to stay with him overnight.

Our investigation found that two officers had a case to answer for gross misconduct and a disciplinary hearing was held. The officers each received a final written warning, to be in place for four years.

**You have restored my faith in the system** of checks and balances that we have in our country **to ensure accountability** of people in positions of power and authority.



Contact us to find out more about our work or to request this report in an alternative format:

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Call us on: **0300 020 0096**

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We welcome telephone calls in Welsh.

Rydym yn croesawu galwadau ôn yn y Gymraeg.

This document is also available in Welsh.

Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn y Gymraeg hefyd.

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