

OVERSIGHT

newsletter

Welcome to our bi-monthly newsletter which provides updates about the work of the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC). The newsletter is for complaint handlers in forces and local policing bodies (LPBs).

Information for police

You can find lots of useful information for complaint handlers on our [website](#). This includes information and guidance for professional standards departments, complaint handlers and local policing body reviewers.

Topics include complaint handling guidance and a toolkit, IOPC discrimination guidelines, guidance on managing unreasonable and unacceptable complainant behaviour, an operational advice note on 12-month timeliness reports and more.

Commissioning further work with West Yorkshire

The IOPC has worked closely with complaint handlers at West Yorkshire Police (WYP) as part of an oversight project. One of the big successes has been the use of commissioning further work (CFW).

Lisa Thompson, Service Review Manager at WYP says: "When a complaint is resolved, we believe it has been handled in a reasonable and proportionate manner. Historically, where the IOPC disagreed, reviews were upheld for (re)investigation. This created additional work and removed the opportunity to discuss alternative, proportionate ways of addressing any concerns.

The introduction of the commissioning further work process is a significant improvement. It created opportunities for complaint handlers and the IOPC to better understand the rationale behind decisions and any areas of concern. This approach has strengthened working relationships, reduced unnecessary escalation, and helped ensure that any further work is both proportionate and focused. Ultimately, it has supported quicker outcomes and a better experience for complainants".

Commissioning further work refers to the process where the IOPC can request additional information from the appropriate authority (AA) at the review stage, through supplementary enquiry.

The new information is then assessed as part of the review by the IOPC to determine its impact and whether any further steps are required. It is a useful tool to proportionately address any small omissions that are identified. This can prevent the need to return the complaint for (re)investigation. This new approach can improve timeliness by avoiding unnecessary

(re)investigations, address gaps or areas of concern to the complainant, and reduce the demand on police resources.

Our new [commissioning further work leaflet](#) for complaint handlers and others within PSDs explains the process, what information the IOPC can ask for, and how the new material will be considered. We will share this leaflet with the complaint handler in any cases where we commission further work.

Complaints better suited to another process

We received several queries from PSDs about complaints that are linked, and sometimes better suited, to another process. These include complaints about the vetting process from job applicants and complaints around data protection breaches. Sometimes, complaints can contain issues that rightly fall within both the police complaints system and another statutory regime.

Complaints by job applicants

Complaints made by job applicants who failed the vetting process might include not being given an opportunity to explain their circumstances, not being provided with a reasonable adjustment, or being treated unfairly because of a personal connection with the force vetting manager.

The statutory arrangements for police complaints under the *Police Reform Act 2002* are intended to deal with concerns about police conduct or service that have adversely affected members of the public. The police complaints system is not intended to deal with internal employment issues. Complaints by applicants for policing roles are not expressly excluded, but the same policy consideration applies. Complaint handlers should consider whether the person's concern is really about the vetting outcome, or whether it raises a possible conduct issue.

The IOPC [Statutory Guidance](#), at paragraph 12.10, recognises that it may not be reasonable or proportionate to take further action on a complaint where the matter would be more appropriately handled through another process.

Where the complaint is about the refusal of vetting clearance, the vetting appeal process will usually be the more appropriate route. This is governed by the College of Policing's [Authorised Professional Practice](#) (APP), with the statutory grounds for appeal set out at paragraph 4G (3) of *The Police (Vetting) Regulations 2025*.

Complaints about reasonable adjustments during the application or vetting process are most appropriately dealt with through civil or employment law routes for a breach of the *Equality Act 2010*.

In these cases, the appropriate outcome under the police complaints process would be to record the complaint and advise that no further action will be taken, because the matter is better handled through the other, more appropriate process. The outcome letter should also explain what that process is.

A complaint must be investigated where there is sufficient information to indicate that someone serving with the police may have behaved in a way that could justify disciplinary proceedings. For example, the interviewer made discriminatory comments about the religious characteristics of the applicant being linked to terrorist sympathisers and so should not pass the vetting requirements.

Complaints about data protection breaches

Complaints made to the police about the handling of personal data may be recorded and handled under schedule 3 of the *Police Reform Act 2002* and/or dealt with under the forces data protection complaints procedures. The Information Commissioner's Office has [guidance](#) on the handling of data protection complaints for organisations.

The police complaints process cannot make a binding decision on whether data protection legislation has been breached, that decision is for the Information Commissioner's Office and/or the courts.

Complaint handlers should ask the complainant whether they want their complaint to be recorded under schedule 3 of the *Police Reform Act 2002*, or whether they would prefer it to be handled under the data protection complaints procedures. Including an explanation of the difference in the processes and their potential outcomes should allow complainants to make informed decisions. If the complainant asks for the matter to be recorded under schedule 3, it must be recorded.

The complaint must be investigated where there is sufficient information to indicate that someone serving with the police may have behaved in a way that could justify disciplinary proceedings. For example, by deliberately withholding information they know should be provided, deliberately recording inaccurate information, or deliberately accessing or obtaining information without a policing purpose. In any other case the outcome under the police complaints process is likely to be no further action, because the matter is better dealt with through the data protection complaints procedures, the Information Commissioner's Office and/or the courts. Should a complaint being handled under the data protection procedures highlight any conduct issues, there should be a process in place to pass these matters to PSDs.

Recent information

Update to the discrimination complaint handlers toolkit

In September we wrote to PSDs and OPCCs about a recent update to our [discrimination complaint handlers toolkit](#). [The resources and links document](#) now links to a new external resource for identifying and challenging bias in police responses to missing people who are Black or have Black mixed heritage. It was developed by charities, Missing People and Listen Up, in partnership with a group of professionals and advisors with lived experience. If you have any questions about this, please contact oversight@policeconduct.gov.uk.

? Common questions from forces and LPBs

Q: In special procedures investigations, what terminology should be used for the outcome? Should I make a service level determination, in addition to addressing whether there is a case to answer for misconduct or gross misconduct and confirming whether the complaint is upheld or not? Should I also be documenting any action to be taken?

A: For a local investigation subject to special procedures, [Chapter 14 of the IOPC Statutory Guidance](#) sets out that the investigation report must include the investigator's opinion on whether:

- any person has a case to answer for misconduct or gross misconduct, or no case to answer;
- any person's performance was unsatisfactory; and
- any matter should be referred to the Reflective Practice Review Process (RPRP).

Investigators should avoid making findings of fact that could determine whether misconduct occurred, making a service level determination or saying whether the complaint has been upheld or not upheld.

For local investigations that are not subject to special procedures or that are handled otherwise than by investigation, the investigator should not express an opinion on whether there is a case to answer for misconduct or gross misconduct. The investigator should highlight any areas of learning they identified and make a service level determination.

For more information on outcomes, dependant on how the complaint was handled, see [Chapter 17 of the IOPC Statutory Guidance](#) and the outcomes table in [Focus issue 19](#)

Q: We are seeing more complaints that are considered fanciful in nature. For example, the complainant believes the police are working with local supermarkets to specifically poison products the complainant usually buys from those stores. To avoid unnecessary work, we are considering handling them outside of Schedule 3, and telling the complainant, that no further action (NFA) will be taken. However, I've been told that to issue an NFA letter, the matter needs to be recorded. Is this correct?

A: Complaint handling outside Schedule 3 is designed to provide a quick service-recovery response to resolve dissatisfaction where the complaint doesn't meet the recording threshold, based on the substance of the complaint and not on merit.

NFA is not an outcome available for handling outside Schedule 3, as it is a formal determination under the statutory framework. It should only be used when there are no actions that can be taken to resolve a complaint. Where an appropriate authority intends to conclude a matter with a NFA outcome, the complaint will need to be recorded under Schedule 3 first, even if the allegations appear fanciful.

Below are further examples where NFA can sometimes be applied incorrectly:

- **No service level assessment** - complaints that are initially handled outside of Schedule 3 and later recorded at the request of the complainant. However, no service level assessment is carried out, and the complainant is told that no further action will be taken because of the enquiries undertaken as part of service recovery. This approach is incorrect. Once

recorded, even if enquiries were carried out as part of service recovery, an assessment needs to be made as to whether the complaints were answered. The complainant must then be given a service level decision in writing, together with right of review.

- **Not repetitive** - complaints categorised as “repetitious” that either include new complaints, or the complaint wasn’t previously recorded and subject to a service level determination. NFA can only be considered if the complaint was previously recorded and sufficiently addressed, with no new complaints requiring a response. In these instances, there would be no need for a further service level determination as the complaint has not been reconsidered. However, you might wish to reiterate any previous service level determinations as part of a rationale for taking no further action on this occasion.
- **Seriousness of complaint not recognised** – the complaint is not recognised as being as serious as it is. Allegations such the misuse of police computers should be investigated, and in some cases referred to the IOPC. There are also instances, where the allegations are more serious than what is recorded, and more should have been done to address them.
- **Lack of contact/lack of exploring the complaint** – the decision of NFA is recorded because there is a lack of information to progress the complaint. However, there is no evidence to indicate the police have engaged with the complainant, when engagement would likely provide sufficient information to address the complaint. NFA is only appropriate where reasonable attempts to contact the complainant have failed and there remains insufficient information to address the complaint. The NFA decision should be confirmed in writing, with a right to review provided.

For more information on the use of NFA, see pages 80 and 81 of the [IOPC Statutory Guidance](#) and [Focus issue 14](#).

Q: Should the appropriate authority make determinations for complaints handled otherwise than by investigation?

A: No, as outlined in [Chapter 17 of the IOPC Statutory Guidance](#), for a complaint that was handled otherwise than by investigation, the final service level determination should be made by the complaint handler, not the appropriate authority.

Corporate news

Consultation draft of our statutory guidance

In August 2026, we wrote to various stakeholders to launch the [consultation on the IOPC’s statutory guidance](#).

We are making various revisions to the statutory guidance to reflect a few legislative changes that took place since 2024. We are inviting all those who handle complaints, conduct matters and

death and serious injury matters, to provide their views on whether the revised sections of the guidance help complaint handlers understand the legislation.

Responses do not have to address every revision. If you would like to provide your views, please email yourviews@policeconduct.gov.uk by **Tuesday 20 October 2026**.

Recommendation on updating Authorised Professional Practice domestic abuse risks and vulnerabilities

The IOPC recommends that the College of Policing review and, where appropriate, update the domestic abuse APP on risks and vulnerabilities and associated domestic abuse risk assessment learning materials, to strengthen guidance for officers on communicating risk to victims in domestic abuse cases. This should make clear that officers should use professional judgment when discussing the outcome of the risk assessment with the victim.

Officers should also clearly explain the nature and significance of identified risks and ensure communication is accurate, consistent and supports a victim's understanding and informed decision making about safety and safeguarding options. This should include examples of good practice for safeguarding medium-risk victims in the community, such as the structured neighbourhood policing follow-up approach identified by Dyfed-Powys. Read more on [our website](#).

Latest news

Keep up to date on our investigations and other work to increase public confidence in the police complaints system. You can find our [latest IOPC news](#) on our website.

[Update on investigations into non-recent reports of child sexual exploitation in Rotherham](#)

[Ex-South Wales Police officer charged with rape, non-fatal strangulation and misconduct in public office](#)

[Former Greater Manchester Police officer jailed for corruption, including giving information to member of organised crime](#)

[Nottinghamshire Police custody sergeant sacked over discriminatory language to detainee](#)

[Charing Cross: 15 officers committed gross misconduct, 15 more under investigation](#)

[IOPC investigation into shooting with Bedfordshire Police being treated as witnesses at this stage](#)

[Investigation launched into death in Cheshire Constabulary custody suite](#)

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If you have any questions, please get in touch with your Oversight Liaison or a member of the Oversight team.