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Glossary

Allegation

This describes what is being complained about. An allegation is made by someone defined as a complainant under the [*Police Reform Act 2002*](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/30/contents) (see ‘complainant’). An allegation may be made by one or more complainants about the service they received from a police force. It may, for example, be about force-wide crime initiatives, the organisation of policing resources or general policing standards. However, it can also be about the conduct of any person serving with the police.

A complaint case may involve more than one allegation. For example, a person may allege that an officer pushed them and was rude to them. This would be logged as two separate allegations forming one complaint case. Each allegation is logged against a specific category (a full list of the allegation categories and their definitions can be found in the IOPC’s [*Guidance on capturing data about police complaints*](https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/publications/guidance-capturing-data-about-police-complaints)*)*.

**Appropriate authority** ([Section 29, *Police Reform Act 2002*](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/30/contents))

The organisation that is responsible for assessing how to deal with a complaint. For example – whether it can be handled locally or reaches the criteria for referral to the IOPC. The appropriate authority may be the chief officer of the police force or the PCC for the force. If a complaint investigation finds that someone has a case to answer for misconduct, the appropriate authority is responsible for arranging any misconduct proceedings. If you make a complaint, the appropriate authority for your case will contact you.

Complainant

A person who makes a complaint about the conduct of someone serving with the police or about a police force. The law sets out the circumstances that need to exist for someone to make a complaint (see section 5.6 of the [IOPC Statutory guidance on the police complaints system](https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/publications/statutory-guidance-2020)).

Complaint

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction raised by or on behalf of a member of the public to a police force. A complaint does not have to be made in writing, and does not have to state explicitly that it is a complaint.

Complaint case

A complaint may involve more than one allegation. The allegation/s may be made by one or more complainants, against one or more persons  
serving with the police. ‘Complaint case’ refers to all the allegations and complainants connected with a complaint.

**Directed investigation**

An investigation conducted by the appropriate authority under the direction and control of the IOPC. The IOPC directs the investigation by appointing an investigator, and setting out its scope and investigative strategy. The IOPC controls the investigation by reviewing the policy books, confirming that the investigation has met the terms of reference and making the decisions at the end of the case.

**Independent investigation**

An investigation carried out by IOPC staff ([Paragraph 19, Schedule 3, *Police Reform Act 2002*](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/30/contents)*)*.

An independent investigation is often used for the most serious incidents and/or those with the greatest public interest. For example, incidents that cause the greatest level of public concern, have a high potential to impact on communities, or have serious implications for the reputation of the police service.

Local investigation

An investigation carried out by the appropriate authority on its own behalf ([Paragraph 16, Schedule 3, *Police Reform Act 2002*](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/30/contents)*).*

Local policing body

The body responsible for all of policing in their area.  It holds the chief constable and the force to account. This is a collective term for:

* police and crime commissioners
* the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime (for the Metropolitan Police Service district)
* the Common Council (for the City of London police area) ([Section 101, *Police Act 1996*](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/16/contents)*)*

Most similar force (MSF) average

The police complaints information bulletins show the results for each police force compared against a most similar force average and a national  
average. The most similar force average is calculated using the individual  
results of the forces in that most similar force group.

Decisions on which forces are the most similar to each other are based on  
information about each force’s geography and population make-up, and socio-economic information. The most similar force groups used in the police complaints information bulletins are the same groups used by the Home Office.

The exceptions to this are:

* the British Transport Police (because it is not a Home Office police force it does not have a most similar force group)
* City of London Police (because there is no force that is most similar)

A list of the most similar force groups can be found on the [IOPC website](https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk).

Referral

Appropriate authorities must refer to the IOPC complaints that:

* allege the conduct or other matter complained of has resulted in death or serious injury
* fall within the mandatory referral criteria (a full definition of the referral criteria can be found in Chapter 9 of the [IOPC’s *Statutory Guidance 2020*](https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/publications/statutory-guidance-2020))
* the IOPC notifies the appropriate authority that it must refer

If the IOPC decides that a matter must be investigated, it will decide whether the mode of investigation will be:

* a local investigation
* a directed investigation or
* an independent investigation

Reflective practice review process (RPRP)

This focuses on putting an issue right and preventing it from happening again by encouraging those involved to reflect on their actions and learn from them. It is not a disciplinary process or a disciplinary outcome.

Review

Where a complaint has been recorded under [Schedule 3 to the *Police Reform Act 2002*](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/30/contents)*,* the complainant has a right to apply for a review of the outcome of the complaint. The review will consider whether the outcome of the handling of the complaint is reasonable and proportionate. Where the relevant review body finds that the outcome of the complaint is not reasonable and proportionate, it will uphold the review. This applies whether the complaint has been investigated or handled in another way.

**Special procedures**

Special procedures only apply to investigations of complaints about a member of a police force or a special constable. In the case of any other person, the investigator must adhere to the relevant policies and procedures for investigating allegations of any form of misconduct.

Investigators must apply special procedures:

* in a complaint investigation, when there is an indication that a person being investigated may have committed a criminal offence or behaved in a manner that would justify disciplinary proceedings
* in all investigations into recordable conduct matters ([Paragraph 19A, Schedule 3, *Police Reform Act 2002*](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/30/contents)*)*

Suspension (of an investigation)

An appropriate authority may suspend an investigation or other procedure that in its opinion would, if it were to continue, prejudice any criminal investigation or proceedings.

**Unsatisfactory performance procedure (UPP)**

A series of steps used to improve someone’s performance. It is used when a person was unable or failed to perform their role to a satisfactory level, but did not breach the Standards of Professional Behaviour.

Withdrawn complaint

A complaint that is withdrawn following an indication or notification from the complainant ([Regulations 38 & 39, Police (Complaints and Misconduct) Regulations 2020](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/2/contents/made)).

XML

A document formatting language used to collect data from police forces.