

Police, Fire and Crime Panel – 2 February 2026

Police and Fire Complaints Update Annual Report

Report of the Staffordshire Commissioner

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. This report is to update the Police, Fire and Crime Panel on the Commissioner's statutory function relating to reviews conducted in accordance with the police misconduct and complaint reforms implemented in February 2020. The panel are reminded that the intention of these reforms was to increase and strengthen independence and improve complaints handling, ensuring the public can maintain confidence in the integrity of policing.
- 1.2. Given the Commissioner's governance of Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service, similar oversight and review arrangements are in place for misconduct and complaint matters relating to service staff and the opportunity is taken to update the panel accordingly.
- 1.3. All data relates to the calendar year to 31 December 2025.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. That the Panel note the contents and agree to receive annual updates for scrutiny at future meetings.

3. Background

- 3.1. The police complaints system is the mechanism for members of the public to raise their concerns about the service they receive from the police. The system was updated by the Policing and Crime Act 2017, and the Police (Complaints and Misconduct) Regulations 2020. The new complaints system brought a more streamlined, easier to access and more efficient complaints process. It introduced statutory responsibilities for PCCs for:
 - the local oversight of complaint handling;
 - acting as an independent Review Body for some complaints that have been made through the formal complaints system;
 - dealing with complaints made against the Chief Constable, a role known as the Appropriate Authority.
- 3.2. The legislation also offered PCCs the opportunity to play a wider role in the administration and handling of complaints against the police through three operating model options:
 - Model 1, the 'oversight and review' model, is the compulsory option, whereby PCCs form a formal part of the system for complaints against all officers and staff. This includes independent reviews where matters are not deemed serious enough under the legislation to



be referred to the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) for review.

- Model 2, the 'Customer Service Resolution and Recording' model, sees the PCC also becoming the first point of contact for people wishing to make a complaint about operational policing matters.
- Model 3, the 'Contact' model, goes a step further and sees the PCC also being responsible for keeping complainants updated and providing the final outcome.

3.3. In Staffordshire, Model 1 has been adopted since 2020. The force's Professional Standards Department remain the initial point of contact and are responsible for recording and handling the complaint, managing ongoing contact with complainants and informing them of the final outcome.

3.4. Where complainants are dissatisfied with the final outcome or the way in which the complaint has been handled, they can apply for a review. The Independent Review Manager assesses whether the force took reasonable and proportionate action to address the complaint but cannot reinvestigate complaints. They are also the decision maker and manage the process in accordance with the regulations. Following the completion of a review there is no further right of appeal. If the complainant remains dissatisfied the only remaining option open to them is to pursue civil proceedings or a judicial review application.

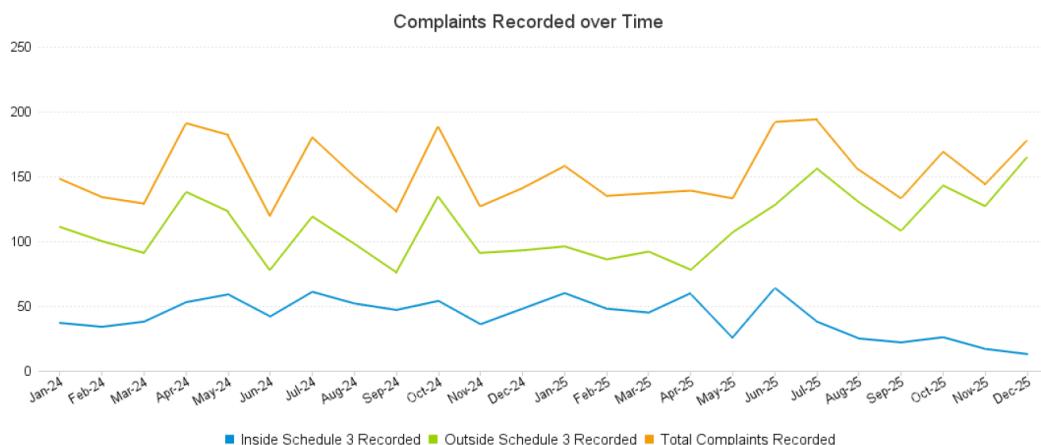
3.5. The Commissioner maintains oversight of professional standards in several ways. Summary complaints data form part of wider performance management frameworks and scrutinised through Strategic Governance Boards and Public Performance Meetings. Internal police and fire meetings are attended by the Commissioner's Office to ensure that trends and outcomes from conduct and complaint matters are properly incorporated into organisational learning. The performance of the service's Professional Standards functions form part of regular discussions between the Commissioner and Chief Executive and the service's Chief Officers.

3.6. In respect of police complaints, the IOPC publish quarterly statistical bulletins and annual performance packs which provide useful benchmarking data. The Commissioner also holds quarterly meetings with the IOPC Director with responsibility for the region and there are quarterly detailed performance review meetings between the IOPC Liaison Officer and representatives of the force Professional Standards Department and Commissioner's Office.



4. Police Complaints

4.1. The chart below shows the number of complaints received by Staffordshire Police has remained stable. A total of 1,814 complaints were received in 2024 and 1,867 in 2025.



4.2. Complaints are managed by the Professional Standards Department either within or outside Schedule 3. Those dealt with outside Schedule 3 relate to less serious matters where informal resolution or service recovery is possible. The process aims to satisfy the complainant quickly but, if this is not possible, they retain the right for their complaint to be managed within Schedule 3. This accounted for 1,416 complaints in 2025 (76% of all complaints), compared with 1,273 in 2024 (70% of all complaints). The introduction of a Triage Team continues to have a positive impact in ensuring a higher proportion of complaints are resolved through this route with the added benefit that a minimal number of complaints are sent out to local policing teams for resolution, allowing more time to be spent on core policing work.

4.3. Schedule 3 is the formal process, mandatory for serious allegations or where referral to the IOPC is required. Formal investigation will be required and the complainant has the right to review if they are dissatisfied with the outcome. Depending on the allegation, the review body will either be the Staffordshire Commissioner's Office or the IOPC. 444 complaints were dealt with inside Schedule 3 in 2025 (24% of all complaints), compared with 542 in 2024 (30% of all complaints). Of the 444, the Commissioners Office was the review body for 322 (73%).

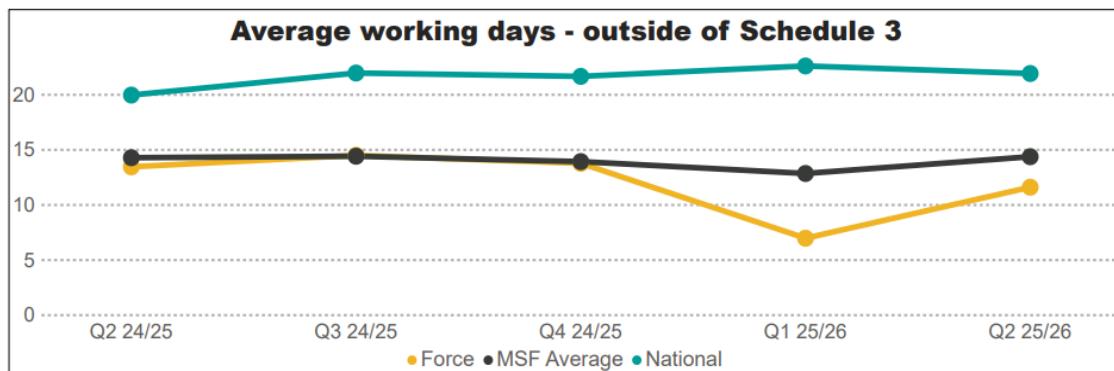
4.4. All data is recorded and published by IOPC and can be found at [Staffordshire Police | Independent Office for Police Conduct \(IOPC\)](#). The statistical bulletins set out Staffordshire's performance against a number of measures in comparison to their Most Similar Force (MSF) group where applicable and to all forces nationally. The MSF group is Avon & Somerset, Derbyshire, Hertfordshire, Essex, Cheshire, Hampshire and Nottinghamshire. The data is used by IOPC to discuss performance on a quarterly basis with the Professional Standards Department and the Commissioner's Office, to establish where Staffordshire is an outlier, identify areas for improvement and recognise good practice.



4.5. The latest available IOPC bulletin (1 April to 30 September 2025) shows that Staffordshire's complaint levels are slightly lower than those for similar forces. The time taken to contact complainants has improved and is in line with similar forces and better than the national average. The time taken to log complaints is longer than the average for similar forces but better than the national average.

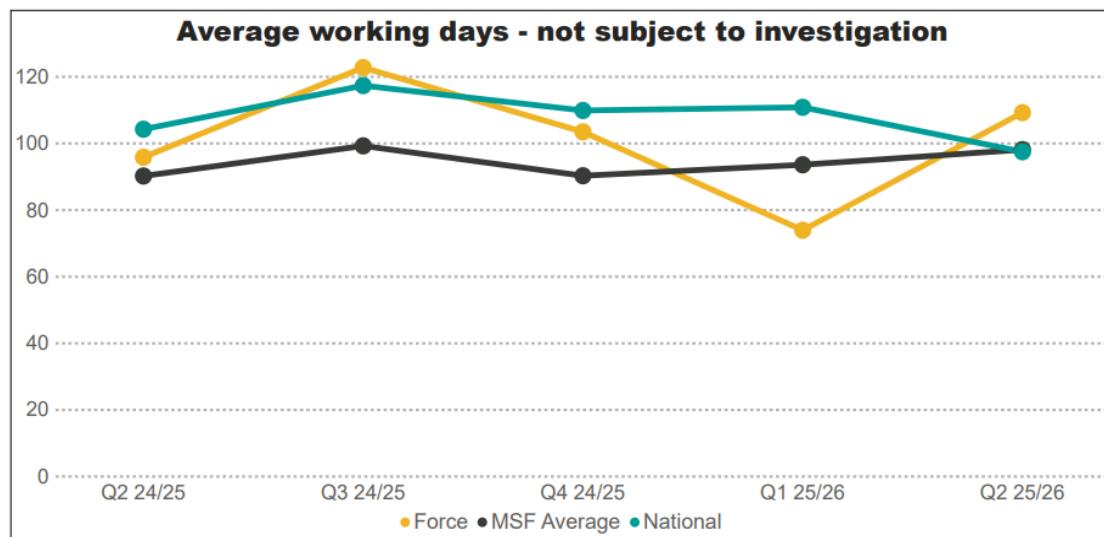
Year to Date	Complaints Logged	Per 1000 employees	Allegations Logged	Per 1000 employees	Average working days to contact complainants	Average working days to log complaints
Staffordshire	941	247	1,569	412	5	5
Same period last year	932	244	1,683	441	9	5
MSF Average	1,226	256	2,301	478	5	3
National Average	54,025	214	92,398	367	8	8

4.6. The time taken to resolve complaints outside of Schedule 3 remains in line with similar forces and significantly better than the national average. Timeliness is calculated from the date the allegation was received by the force to the day the complainant is informed of the allegation decision.



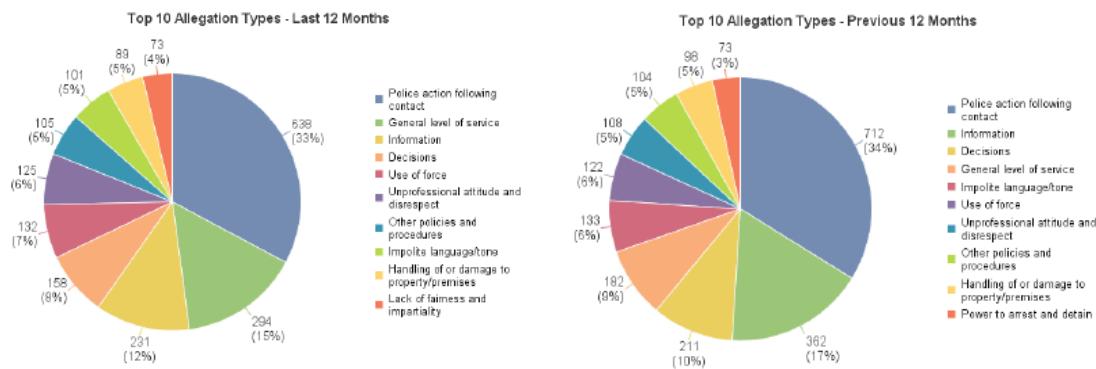


4.7. For complaints dealt with inside Schedule 3 and not subject to an investigation directed by the IOPC, case duration is longer but Staffordshire's performance remains broadly in line with MSF and national averages.



4.8. For any cases of over 12 month's duration, Staffordshire Police must write to the Commissioner and the IOPC to inform them of the reasons and actions being taken to progress the complaint. Further communication is required every 6 months thereafter until the complaint is finalised.

4.9. The recording of allegations is based on categories defined by the IOPC. There may be multiple allegations relating to an individual complaint. 69% of all allegations in 2025 are categorised as relating to 'delivery of duties and service', sub-categories of which are police action following contact, decisions, information and general level of service. This is similar to 2024 when 70% of allegations related to delivery of duties and service, although there are minor variations between sub-categories.



4.10. Staffordshire Police's Professional Standards Department continues to ensure that members of the public are aware of how to make a complaint and that the system is accessible for all.



Mechanisms include posters, booklets and engagement with communities through local policing teams. Comprehensive information is also provided online at [Complaints | Staffordshire Police](https://www.staffordshire.police.uk/complaints) .

4.11. The Professional Standards Prevent Officer continues to identify learning opportunities arising from local, regional and national incidents and misconduct matters and engage with officers and staff to support organisational learning. This is carried out through communication campaigns focused on the top categories of complaints, engaging with officers who are subject to a high number of complaints to identify any underlying factors that need to be addressed. Teams channels are in place to share and discuss areas of good and bad policing practice and also used to brief officers. The Prevent Officer provides input on day one to every new recruit course on the standards of professional behaviour expected. Further input is provided 3-6 months into their service, focused on complaints received by the force.

5. Police Complaint Reviews

5.1. The Commissioner's office continues to offer members of the public varied options to make a review and how that review outcome is delivered. This demonstrates transparency, openness and independence, fundamental elements of PCCs' role in the process.

5.2. During 2025, of the 322 inside Schedule 3 complaints where the Commissioner's Office is the review body, a total of 83 review applications were received (26% of the total). This compares to 104 received in 2024, which represented 23% of 449 inside Schedule 3 complaints where the Commissioner's Office is the review body.

	2025	2024
Number of Reviews	83	104
Live Reviews	2	3
Reviews Not Valid	0	1
Upheld	16	13
Not Upheld	65	88
% Upheld	19.2%	12.5%

5.3. Of the 83 reviews considered so far there have been 11 'lessons learnt' recommendations:

- 4 Learning by reflection
- 4 Organisational learning
- 2 where feedback was given to officers
- 1 where other action was taken.

Themes include:

- Providing a response to a complainant's request that their case be considered to fit the mandatory referral criteria to the IOPC.
- Verifying with the complainant that all their areas of concern have been captured and



addressed.

- Continuous learning and professional development processes should be reviewed.
- Policy and guidance on the return of seized vehicles should be reviewed.
- When dealing with an unexpected death, officers should be considered in their actions and words. Where it is necessary to preserve the scene of death the reason must be clearly explained to the deceased's family or loved ones.
- Ensuring sufficient information is provided to detainees at the time of arrest.

5.4. IOPC performance data shows that the average time taken for the Staffordshire Commissioner's Office to complete a review is far below the national and similar force averages:

Number of days to complete local policing body reviews	
Staffordshire	36
Same period last year	35
MSF Average	68
National Average	46

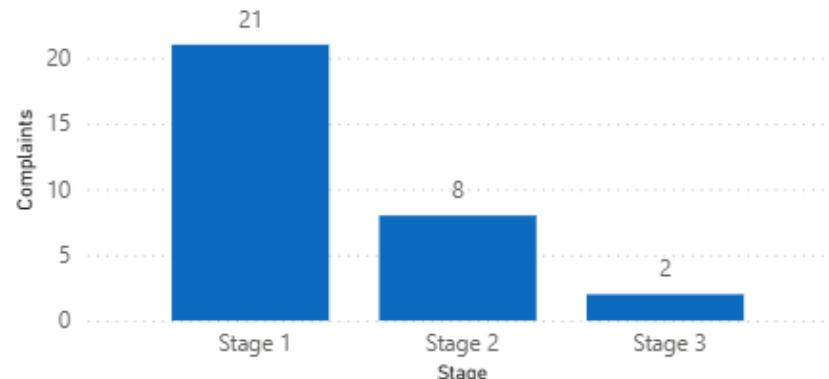
6. Fire & Rescue Complaints

6.1. The Commissioner's Office is the review body for complaints against Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service where the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome. To ensure consistency the Commissioner's Office has adopted the same approach for fire reviews as it has with force complaints. The process is documented on Staffordshire Fire and Rescue's website alongside relevant policy documents.

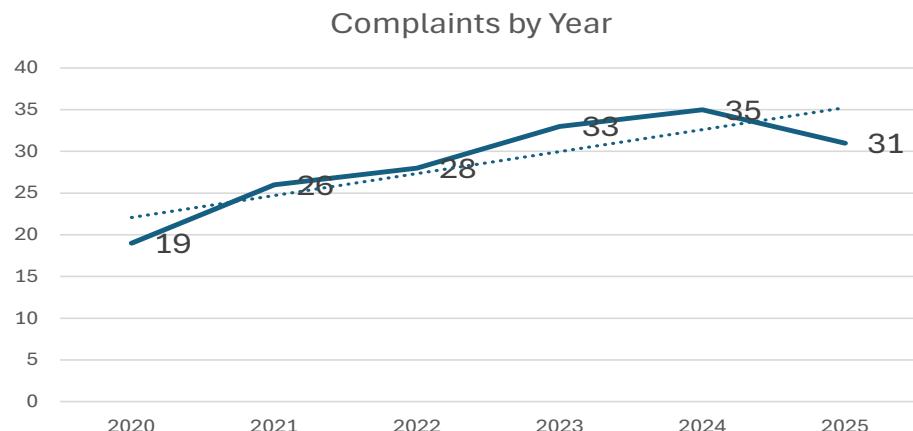
<https://www.staffordshirefire.gov.uk/contact-us/complaints/>

6.2. During 2025 the service recorded a total of 31 complaints, reflecting ongoing engagement with stakeholders and the importance of maintaining high service standards. These complaints were distributed across various stages, with the majority resolved at Stage 1, indicating that most issues were addressed promptly without escalation.

Complaint by Stage

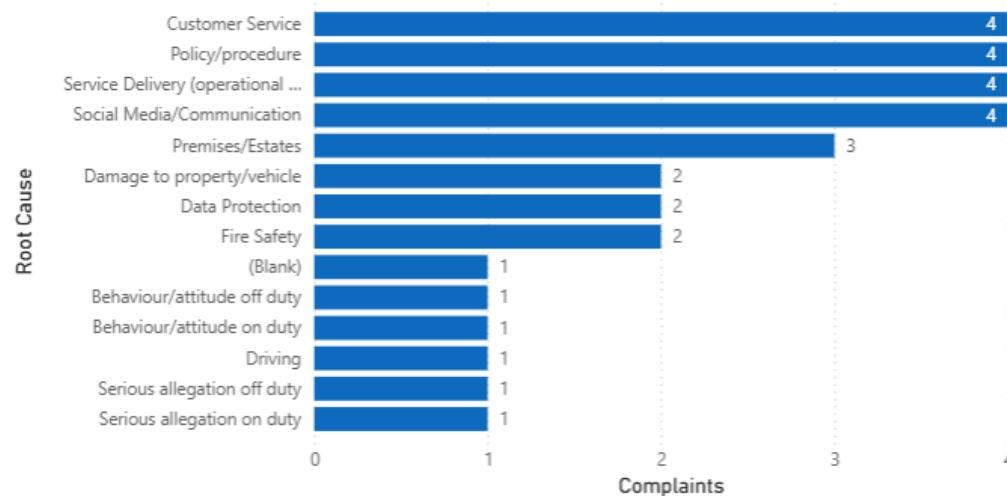


6.3. From 2020 to 2025, complaint volumes have shown a gradual upward trend. Average resolution times have reduced from 18.7 days in 2021 to 9.5 days in 2025, demonstrating enhanced efficiency in complaint handling.



6.4. Root cause analysis highlights recurring issues in customer service and staff behaviour, both on and off duty. Complaints related to damage to property or vehicles also feature prominently. These areas require targeted interventions to improve service delivery and maintain public trust.

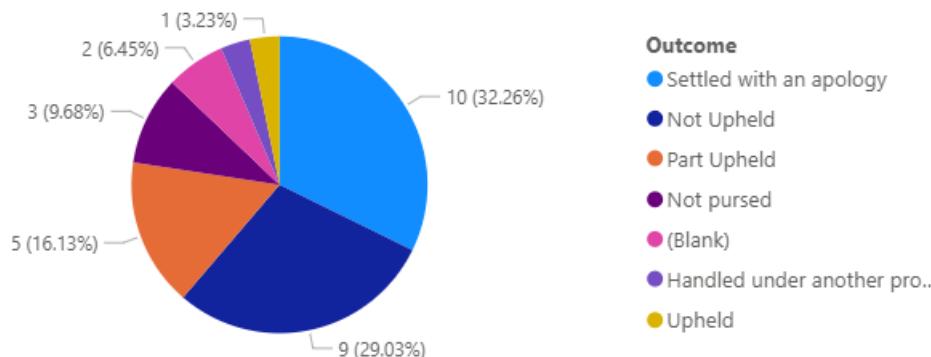
Root Cause



6.5. Certain complaints, particularly those involving conduct issues, are addressed through alternative processes and are referred to HR for investigation. Two cases were referred under this process during 2025. One is under investigation, and the other has been concluded with no action taken. Performance in these areas remains steady, ensuring that such cases are appropriately managed without impacting the core complaint resolution workflow.

6.6. Analysis of complaint outcomes indicates that most cases were resolved satisfactorily, with complainant satisfaction recorded in several instances where feedback was explicitly provided. While some outcomes remain marked as “unknown” due to incomplete feedback, the trend suggests that most complaints are addressed effectively at early stages, minimising escalation. This reflects a commitment to timely and fair resolution, though continued efforts are needed to improve feedback capture and ensure transparency in outcome reporting.

Outcome

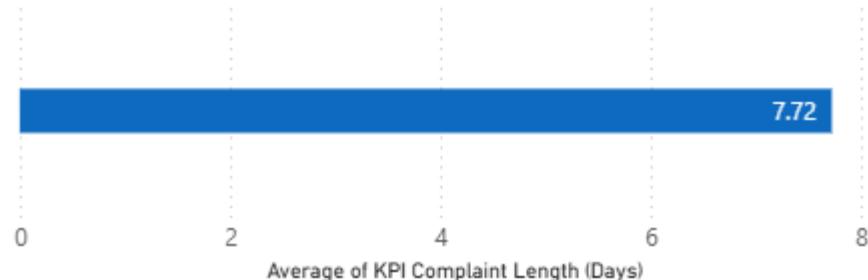


6.7. The service continues to monitor resolution times against policy targets: Stage 1 complaints aim for resolution within 7 working days, while Stage 2 and 3 complaints target 28 working days.



Current performance indicates that most complaints are resolved well within these timescales, with recent averages falling below 10 days, reflecting strong adherence to service standards.

Average of KPI Complaint Length (Days)



6.8. To strengthen continuous improvement, a Recommendations and Learning Log has been introduced. This tool tracks progress, identifies process gaps, and enhances complaint learning. At present, there are three open items, including two related to the publication of internal/external documents and procedures and one concerning the updating of contact details on the internet. These actions aim to improve transparency and accessibility for stakeholders.

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