

## Introduction

Police forces should be committed to handling complaints effectively. This means having processes in place that reflect the needs, expectations and rights of complainants. Police forces should ensure that members of the public know how to complain about the service or treatment they receive from police officers/staff.

Complaints are an important source of information. Providing information and guidance about how to complain allows members of the public to be heard. Complaints can also lead to better services, which benefits local communities.

This leaflet provides a practical guide for police forces. It seeks to ensure that all police forces provide consistent information to their local community about accessing the police complaints system. It also aims to ensure that the process for making a complaint is simple and straightforward, and does not deter complaints and complainants.

The principles set out in this leaflet also reflect the importance of forces engaging with local communities. Such engagement is vital to securing public confidence in the police complaints system.

## → The complaints system should be visible

1. Ensure that information about how to complain, including contact details for your Professional Standards Department, is displayed in police stations and custody suites. Provide this information to citizens advice bureaux, community centres and other local groups in your community.
2. You should work with stakeholder, advisory and advocacy groups to assess what support different sections of your community may need to access the complaints system.
3. Consider using social media to provide information about the complaints system, and how to make a complaint.
4. Police force websites should include:
  - a prominent link on the homepage for 'Making a complaint'
  - a prominent link on the homepage for 'Making an appeal'
5. You should publish information about any learning from complaints and any improvements you have made as a result of complaints.
6. Police force websites should not direct complainants to the IPCC to make their complaint.

## → Access to the complaints system should be easy

7. You should accept complaints via at least these four channels:
  - by telephone
  - in writing via letter
  - in writing online (via email or a website form)
  - in person
8. Police force websites should include complaint and appeal forms.
9. Police force websites should include relevant contact details.
10. You should provide proactive advice to people with disabilities or special needs about the support available for them to make a complaint.
11. You should provide support for people who need adjustments to help them make a complaint. For example:
  - advocacy
  - interpreters
  - language translation services
  - services to support communication for people with hearing and speech difficulties (such as NGT Relay).



**Access to the complaints system should be supported**

12. Police force websites should include Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) to answer common complaints and issues.
13. Police force websites should tell complainants that the Professional Standards Department is a specific department within a police force, and is independent of the person being complained about. They should also make it clear that the Professional Standards Department records when a complaint is made.
14. All police officers and staff who have contact with the public should understand the complaints system. They should be able to explain it, including how long it is likely to take to deal with a complaint.

Further information about the complaints system is available on our [website](#).



**Information about the complaints system should be accurate**

15. Police force websites should include clear, accurate and up-to-date information about complaint procedures. This should reflect current legislation. It should cover:
  - what can and cannot be complained about
  - how 'direction and control' complaints can be made and how they are handled
  - how 'conduct' complaints can be made and how they will be handled
  - how and in what circumstances police forces will resolve complaints locally
  - how and in what circumstances complaints will be investigated
  - all the appeal rights:
    - non-recording
    - disapplying the legislation
    - local resolution
    - investigation
    - discontinuance
    - 'other outcome'
  - the relevant appeal body
  - the role of the IPCC in handling complaints and appeals

# Access to the police complaints system: key principles for police forces