

**AGENDA ITEM NO: 8**

---

**NORTHUMBRIA'S TRIAGE OF COMPLAINTS**

**Background**

1. In 2011/12 Northumbria Police had the highest percentage of appeals upheld by the IPCC nationally (53% compared to an average of 38%). For the same year Wiltshire's figure was 31%.
2. The OPCC reviewed the 78 upheld appeals and found the following reasons people appealed the outcome of a complaint:
  - Complaints were not dealt with in a timely manner
  - Communication was frequently poor and, in general, letters were unclear and difficult to understand
  - Complainants had not agreed to the Local Resolutions which had been finalised
  - Complaints had been classified as direction and control, therefore were not recorded or were 'miscellaneous'
3. Additionally it was found that:
  - There was little organisational learning
  - The force tended to react defensively to complaints
4. The PCC wanted a system that would:
  - Ensure complaints were dealt with quickly and efficiently
  - Be simple for staff and complainants to understand and engage with
  - Provide an outcome and ensure lessons are learnt
  - Change the complainants' view of Northumbria police and restore confidence

**Structure**

5. Three members of police staff have been seconded to triage complaints. They have no prior experience of PSD and none of the old culture and habits. Internal appointments were made as the staff are known and trusted by the officers, and have the policing knowledge to explain to members of the public why decisions have been taken.
6. The staff are line managed by the force and the OPCC, though the force manage personnel matters and pay.
7. They are police staff under the direction and control of the Chief Constable and they only handle operational complaints.
8. The staff had extensive training in complaints processes and classification from PSD staff and a newly appointed PSD Inspector was with the team for the first 3 months.
9. A user friendly work flow system was developed by the IT team that record contact and actions. This feeds into Centurion, removing duplication. It incorporates an extensive search function for analysis of complaints. This was being rolled out force wide as part of mobile and remote working so was incorporated into triage.

## **Process**

10. All operational complaints received by the force are sent to triage. The triage team do not take incoming calls. Details of calls are taken by force call handlers or PSD and logged onto the workflow system for forwarding to triage.
11. Each complaint is assigned to a single point of contact.
12. Complainants are contacted within 24 hours (more frequently within 2-3 hours) with an aim of resolution within 48 hours.
13. The triage team clarify the exact details of the complaint (they have access to police logs of incidents), explain what can be done and establish exactly what outcome the complainant wants.
14. Most complaints dealt with by triage are those involving incivility, lack of updates or mishandling of property.
15. The subject of the complaint, or their supervisor, is contacted to seek a resolution and the complainant is updated. In many cases they are happy that the matter has been brought to the supervisor's attention. If they are not happy with the outcome, the complaint can be forwarded to PSD.
16. Complaints are passed to PSD if they cannot be solved by triage due to:
  - The severity of the complaint (there is a fast track to PSD assessment)
  - It is apparent that the complainant will not be satisfied by triage
  - It has not been possible to contact the complainant and the 10 day recording deadline is approaching
17. 36% of complaints (830 between January 8<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> July) received are now resolved through the triage process with 92% of complainants happy with the outcome.

## **Costs**

18. The main costs are staffing. 3 staff have been seconded from the force call handling team. The force continues to bear the cost.
19. Three additional computers with access to police systems (inc. Centurion, Niche etc.)
20. There are various hidden costs. The Work flow system was being implemented force wide but was accelerated for this project. Training was done in house, including a PSD Inspector spending 3 months with the team.

## **Risks / Issues**

21. IPCC have not commented on this yet. Nor have they been approached. Northumbria do not consider this a problem as all complaints are recorded on Centurion regardless.
22. The separation from PSD limits sharing of knowledge and experience. There is little, if any, experience of operational complaints within the OPCC which isolates the Triage team; however they are also insulated from the cultural issues in PSD.
23. There is potentially an illusion of independence from the force. When asked, the staff are honest and state that they are police staff that are currently sitting within the OPCC

but work for the Chief Constable. This could be confusing to the public and blur the lines between scrutiny and operational independence.

24. It should be noted that the Northumbria OPCC is located on an entirely separate site from the Constabulary.
25. The Home Office are currently undertaking a review of the entire police complaints system which may include comment on this system. The review is due to finish in the autumn.

### **Wiltshire**

26. PSD are currently the focus of a systems thinking review to address existing issues around 10 day recording. This has included a review of the complaint recording process, removing redundant steps and duplication. In particular, it was found that both administration team and investigators were researching complaints. Administrators are no longer doing this, freeing resource.
27. A new team leader is due to start shortly. He is an internal appointment, currently working as a call handling supervisor, who will bring in the customer service skills which are the key to triage.
28. It is hoped that this extra resource, as well as improved processes, will free up time to incorporate triage into the PSD admin team. This will require training and continued assessment but has the advantage of existing complaints knowledge and minimal additional resourcing.
29. One of the keys to the success of the project is the use of the work flow system. It provides continuity of recording and classification and reduces errors and duplication of work. Possible use of existing IT within force will need to be addressed.
30. This work is ongoing and is being continually assessed to establish the most efficient way to improve customer satisfaction.

**Kieran Kilgallen**  
**Chief Executive**