

Independent Scrutiny of Police Complaints Panel

September 2022

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Purpose of the Independent Scrutiny of Police Complaints Panel

The Independent Scrutiny of Police Complaints Panel (ISPCP) consists of 7 independent panel members who are all volunteers representing the communities of Avon and Somerset. Their aim is:

‘To act as a ‘critical friend’ to the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and to Avon and Somerset Constabulary by providing feedback on completed complaint files to the office of the PCC and to the Constabulary’s Professional Standards Department (PSD). The Independent Scrutiny of Police Complaints Panel (ISPCP) will review complaints against the police from a local citizen’s viewpoint.’

Further information can be found [on our website](#).



STRUCTURE OF THE SESSION

All Panel members attended the virtual Independent Scrutiny of Police Complaints Panel meeting for the quarter.

The panel were joined by the Police & Crime Commissioner, Mark Shelford and the Office Chief of Staff, Alice Ripley.

The theme of the dip sampling session was police complaints against Avon and Somerset Constabulary’s communications staff.

The communications staff work in the Communications Centre Emergency Control Room and handle a wide range of calls from members of the public, police officers, police staff, partner agencies and external organisations.

The team deal with emergency and non-emergency incidents and crimes and dispatch officers to incidents, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

The Panel welcomed an incredibly insightful and informative presentation from Katie Hancock, Avon & Somerset Constabulary’s Communications Centre Manager who talked about the success and challenges of the team, who have consistently been top 3 nationally with their performance figures.

A total number of 32 completed complaint case files were reviewed in detail by the panel members prior to the meeting and discussed in depth verbally with the Head of the Constabulary’s Professional Standards Department (PSD) answering questions.

MEETING ATTENDANCE:

Attendees: KS, LC, DW, CH, AD, SB, TW

ACTIONS

No.	Action	Status
March 21	Inclusion & Diversity training for all panel members (BM)	C/fwd – ISPCP to be borne in mind once training has been rolled out to senior leaders & staff in 2022.
March 22	PSD request to consult with panel regarding ToR for review into former police staff member (JW)	C/fwd – JW to update in Dec meeting
Sept 2022	Supt Jane Wigmore to cascade reports as they are available following the PSD Learning Meetings & update on any recent complaint statistics of interest	Last meeting 14/09/22 once report complete Supt JW to forward to BM to disseminate

PSD UPDATE Temporary Superintendent Jane Wigmore

LEARNING MEETING UPDATE

The panel requested an update regarding this meeting; an initiative established nearly 12 months ago and chaired by Chief Inspector Sharon Baker. The quarterly meeting brings together different departments within ASC to try to focus on the top 3 themes identified each quarter in relation to complaint handling. PSD also introduce any recommendations from the IOPC and will bring back any themes identified from the ISPCP to cascade further.

Observations so far:

- Tracking and monitoring of complaints - PSD are very good at capturing organisational and/or individual learning and forwarding this to the various ASC departments to consider. However, the department are not so good at recording who it has been discharged with and then following it up, revisiting what has been done and subsequently monitoring complaints and any internal referrals received thereafter.
- PSD continue to deliver inputs to various departments within ASC at regular intervals through the year. Analysts have now been tasked to actively tracking the number of complaints still coming in to those departments to be able to manipulate the data and identify emerging themes. This is still very much a work in progress. One of the biggest challenges faced by PSD is the fact that there are so many allegations and subtypes available to select. The team need some real consistency in when they assess and record so that they are able to specify those allegations effectively enough to be able to monitor and track if there are any changes in those types of complaints being received.

Previous learning identified in the June meeting was discussed, Police action following contact is the biggest area of learning that is being recorded post complaint handling. PSD have requested the Performance and Insight Team undertake a review of a sample of complaints to identify themes to inform change. It is hoped that post analysis, PSD can brief the organisation on what the themes look like, what can be done to change culture, behaviour and working practices. The

main learning is captured for colleagues in Patrol and Neighbourhood. However, this is likely due to the larger population of staff, specifically public facing staff, in these directorates.

Supt Wigmore updated on organisational learning that had been identified in relation to incorrect practices regarding PAVA being self-issued by officer's as opposed to by an Inspector, ways to improve how PSD can improve the Reflective Practice Review Process (RPRP) by now copying in department heads into RPRP and ensuring RPRP is being recorded on staff performance portfolios which will be regularly sampled with HR. Lastly updated on C/Insp Baker's work with colleagues in other departments on defining a process on how PSD can monitor and record individual learning and track it effectively. The IOPC have asked to be included in this area.



“Congrats to ASP for such an impressive response to 999 calls” Panel Member

Positive commentary from the Panel was amongst the highest seen for quite some time, comments included:

- “It was enormously helpful to be able to listen to the call itself, from which it is clear that C was trying to report something which was not a police matter (parental alienation of his child by their mother) and then became abusive when the call handler tried to explain this to him. The call handler remained commendably professional throughout and I agree that he was right to end the call. The final report was very thorough and went into a lot of detail about the nature and legal context of parental alienation, which, in my view, was above and beyond what was required. I thought the case was dealt with to a high standard”
- “It was positive to see Comms investigate and report back quickly, admitting a shortfall in service, and contacting the complainant directly to explain what should have been done to support them. Very proactive”
- “The matter was resolved quickly because the right phone call was made soon after the incident. This avoided the long bureaucratic process involved in a formal complaint. Consequently police manpower was not taken up to the same extent. The matter was concluded quickly and to everyone’s satisfaction”
- “Excellent resolution outcome – explaining why Comms gave the response they did, the restriction of GDPR, understanding the callers frustrations but explaining Comms did the right thing (...) and an apology!. I’m sure this level of engagement turned around a complaint into a very positive outcome for the complainant
- “Early intervention response to the complainant and excellent communication skills avoiding it becoming a formal complaint investigation. A nice apology and explanation which is what the complainant was originally requesting”

HIGHLIGHTS OF CONCERNS, QUESTIONS OR ISSUES RAISED BY THE PANEL

Panel Member Feedback	PSD Response
<p><i>If the call handler had explained that she was on her own in a car park in the dark how would the call handler have responded to her question?</i></p>	<p>Feedback from ASC Communications Department - Without knowing the details of the incident, I cannot comment on why this advice was given to stay with the car. If a car is insecure our advice would be for someone to stay with it to avoid further loss/damage but not unless the safety of the caller was assured and I would expect this question to be asked. This could mean some learning is required by our call handler who took that call.</p>
<p><i>What is the target for answering a 101 call?. Is a wait of 60 minutes acceptable?. What are ASP's performance statistics for 101 calls?</i></p>	<p>We acknowledge that our force 101 service level has decreased over the last year. The average answer time for a 101 call in August 2022 is 14 minutes but this is likely to be much longer during our busier periods such as the evenings and we would like to be even quicker than this. A wait time of 60 minutes is not acceptable but is currently a common occurrence during the afternoons/evenings following the increase in 999 calls that we have seen (up 30%) and we are doing all we can to address this (recruit into vacancies, redirect demand where appropriate such as online, scope for technology that we help us manage this in a better way, etc).</p>
<p><i>We have over more than 12 months ago raised the question of the principle of the complainant having access to BWV. Whilst impossible during Covid that is presumably no longer the case?.</i></p>	<p>Police were called to a gentleman with an eating disorder. BWV was used and its coverage is summarised in the final report. Service was considered acceptable. Based on what I have read I see no necessity for showing the complainant the BWV - it would not appear to be a proportionate action.</p>
<p><i>We have suggested that at the outset of the investigation a decision should be made whether to offer the complainant the opportunity to view. No doubt there is a cost benefit analysis to be undertaken but I suggest that the credibility of the complaint process and the potential for complainant satisfaction should be weighed in that assessment. It would also be an opportunity to check whether BWV has been used and if not to seek the explanation for not doing .</i></p>	<p><u>Further verbal feedback provided by Supt Jane Wigmore during the meeting:</u></p> <p>We do show BWV to complainants and sometimes to advocates and others when there is a lot of concern regarding a particular incident. The reality is, however, that there is such a vast number of complaints coming into the department the</p>

logistics of being able to organise a mutually convenient time, at a location, with a staff member, for the viewing the BWV alongside the logistics of downloading the BWV to view (which takes up a significant amount of file space) is challenging. The real issue is capacity for the department and our ability to offer the viewing of BWV for all complaints at this point in time is not currently feasible. If, however, the complainant specifically asks to see the BWV, this is when we should do our best to facilitate this for them.

Complaint that the call handler was passive aggressive and asked intrusive questions in connection with a rape case. C concerned that it might put off victims from coming forward.

I could not ascertain from the file how the call went. The complaint itself was referred to the call supervisor who stated they were happy with it. Was there any opportunities for learning on this important issue that needed to be captured?

Please would PSD review this case as I could not discern from the file how the final conclusion has been reached and the reasons for it. In particular, it seems to me that, given this concerned a rape case, it was important that the investigators listened to the call.

This case was further discussed in the meeting as it was acknowledged by Supt Wigmore that a technical response had been provided.

The complaint was handled through non schedule 3 procedures, allegations raised concerns about how call handler spoke with the complainant. The complaint handler asked that the supervisors of the call handler reviewed the call log, this was done and the supervisor was satisfied that that call handler was appropriate in their responses during the telephone call. A final email was sent to the complainant, explaining that the supervisor in Comms had tried to speak with them about their complaint, but was unsuccessful and the complainant didn't return their calls. The complaint handler explained in the email that the call had been reviewed by the supervisor and there were no concerns. The complaint was finalised, with no further contact from the complainant.

Further verbal feedback provided by Supt Jane Wigmore during the meeting: Avon and Somerset Constabulary's Operation Bluestone looks at how we can improve our response to serious sexual offences. A lot of work is being put into improving victim focus at every level, from investigators as well as staff at first point of contact. With regards to language that was used and the engagement with the individual in this case it is a good example that can be shared with Senior Responsible Officer Ed Yaxley in charge of Operation Bluestone to see how he can drive some training with our colleagues in comms around those serious offences. Thank you I will take this away for action.

Whilst quite understandable that 999 calls need priority what is the plan to reduce 101 call waiting times to an acceptable level and what is that level. How does ASP 101 waiting times compare with other forces?. No doubt 101 callers are told of the opportunity to report on

Feedback from ASC Communications Department - it is not a common occurrence for calls to drop from our system and when we are alerted to this, we pass all cases to our telephony team to investigate. Whilst the caller is quite rightly frustrated, our switchboard team will have assessed this

line. Is there any opportunity to publicise that option?

call and placed in the 101 queue according to the level of threat, harm and risk. Without details of the call, I am unable to see if the caller was offered the call back function to avoid waiting on the phone.

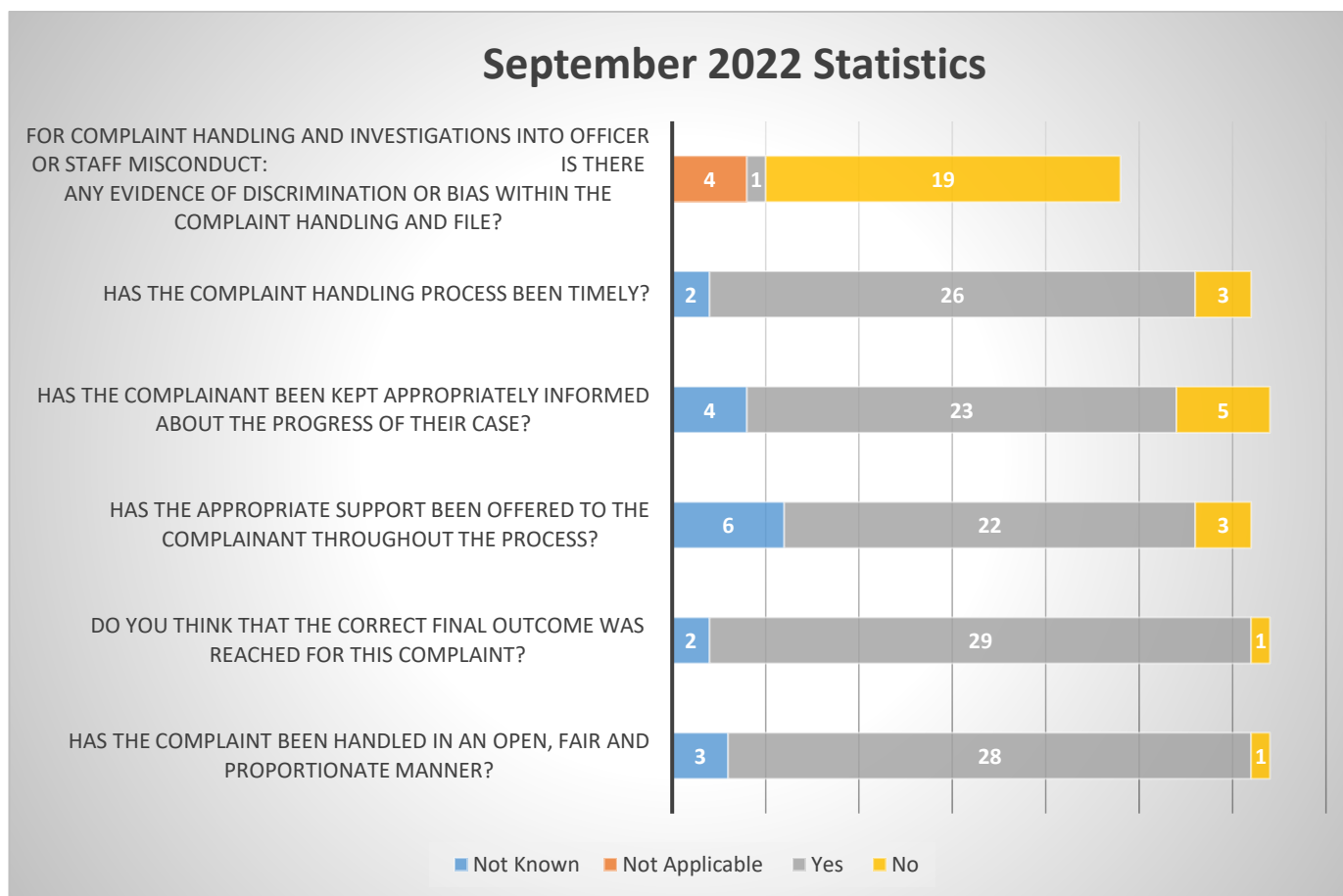
We are doing all we can to understand the recent rise in 999 demand in order to improve our 101 service with the support of data insight and our colleagues in the force improvement team. We have seen an increased number of vacancies this year due to post-pandemic career changes, financial crisis, internal opportunities, etc and we are mass recruiting as we speak to fill these but it does take time to ensure we get the right people, police vetted, properly trained and supported before they can take calls on their own – many months. There are no national league tables as yet for 101 and it is difficult to compare forces figures as we all do it differently, the best example would be our switchboard team who effectively triage the calls initially. A lot of force do not have this option and callers are left waiting to be answered without that first risk assessment/management of expectations. We continually work with our switchboard team to detect themes/trends and they do direct people to our online services. This message is often reiterated by our corporate comms team when they are promoting externally

I could not find a final letter to the complainant with the apology and the reassurance of help if needed in the future.

The investigating officer wrote to the complainant stating if she ever rings 101 again and not received the service to make a further complaint. Should that not be to ring 999 for an immediate response and I am not sure this would be very reassuring to someone who has been a victim of very serious assault and been let down on more than one occasion?

As you can see on the assessment sheet, this wasn't recorded as a schedule 3 complaint. Therefore, it was handled in a reasonable and proportionate manner. A final letter wasn't required as it was dealt with by one of the PSD assessors. I'm sure it was just a typo that the assessor referenced 101 and not 999 in their response to the complainant as the complaint was about calling 999. In July we received a total of 223 complaints and 197 in August. These are all triaged, assessed by a team of 4.5 assessors. They also deal with all of the non-schedule 3 which is incredible- 100 in July and 89 in August. Often at least 1 assessor is on leave at any given point so we are regularly running between 3-4 assessors each week assessing over a total of 190 complaints and dealing with all non-schedule.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS



This chart related to the six questions in the feedback form. Panel members record 'not known' when the case file does not give

Comments from Head of Professional Standards Detective Superintendent Jane Wigmore:

I want to thank the Independent Resident Panel again for their time and feedback. Their learning has been shared directly at the PSD learning meeting with internal stakeholders. We are also developing a Pocketbook page with a Learning tab to include the outcomes from this scrutiny panel to allow officers to self-serve.

Previous feedback from the panel about our use of Box led to assurance work to ascertain how many complainants were struggling with the process. That work has led to a new process so an alternative contact mechanism can be used if a complainant has any initial issues with Box.

Comments from Avon & Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner Mark Shelford:

I had the pleasure of attending this meeting and I was impressed by the excellent round table feedback and the very pertinent questions raised by the panel for Avon and Somerset Constabulary's Professional Standards Department to respond to. Thank you as always to our committed members who continue to scrutinise each complaint case incredibly thoroughly, drawing out both positive practice but also areas where there could be room for improvement. I am very proud of the work and professionalism shown by the panel.

Despite the current pressures that Avon and Somerset Constabulary's Communications staff face, it is very encouraging to hear that performance is still good and morale amongst the team is high. This is a credit to managers like Katie, who helps to ensure effective pastoral care is provided to the team.