

# Independent Scrutiny of Police Complaints Panel

## Annual Report 2022

Panel Chair – Kim Smith

September 2023

## Foreword by Kim Smith, Chair of the Independent Scrutiny of Police Complaints Panel (ISPCP)



**Kim Smith, ISPCP chair**

In March 2022 I was proud to be elected chair of the Independent Residents Panel. Meeting online has proved to be successful, so we continue to meet this way. We also agreed to change our name to the 'Independent Scrutiny of Police Complaints Panel' (ISPCP) to more clearly reflect what we do.

The Panel retains its autonomy and full access to police complaints files. We dip sample complaints files and it is entirely up to us, as citizens and representatives of the public, to decide what we wish to focus upon. Once we have decided on a theme for a review, the files are selected on a random basis and no

information is off limits to us. This means that not only do we review all the official reports and documents on a file, but we also have access to internal correspondence and documents as well. That level of access means that we can truly scrutinise, on behalf of the public, how the complaints have been dealt with. It's important to remember that our role is that of a critical friend so, whilst we will always highlight areas where we consider that service has fallen short, we strive to do so in a constructive way which will bring about improvements for the public in future, and we also praise good practice.

We have reviewed how we give feedback on complaints to Avon and Somerset Constabulary's Professional Standards Department (PSD). We have adopted a new process, whereby PSD are provided with the panels feedback ahead of the meeting. This allows PSD time to provide responses to our comments and queries in advance of the meeting, therefore allowing more meaningful discussion during the meeting itself. This has proved very effective.

Sadly, 2 panel members have had to step down during 2022, we are very grateful to them for their energy and commitment to the work of the panel. This left fewer panel members than desirable; it is a credit to the remaining members that we have maintained the number of complaints reviewed during the year.

Staffing pressures in the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) meant that a major recruitment campaign for all the OPCC volunteer panels was delayed until late 2022. As always, our work has been ably supported by officers from the OPCC, whose energy and enthusiasm has clearly demonstrated the OPCC's commitment to working with volunteers.

# OVERVIEW OF 2022

The panel met 4 times and all meetings took place virtually.



**103 complaint files were reviewed and feedback forms were provided for each case to PSD**

As well as general feedback, complaints are assessed against specific criteria. Data analysis shows that:

- for complaint handling and investigations into officer or staff misconduct: there was no evidence of discrimination or bias within the complaint handling and file for most complainants.
- most complaints are handled in a timely manner.
- most complainants were kept appropriately informed about the progress of their case.
- appropriate support was offered to most complainants throughout the process.
- most complaints were handled in an open, fair and proportionate manner the correct final outcome was reached for most complaints.

Where the panel member had concerns regarding the handling of the case, the complaint was raised with Professional Standards for a response.

Panel meetings have been joined by the Police and Crime Commissioner, Mark Shelford, the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner Claire Hiscott, the OPCC Chief of Staff, Alice Ripley, and the OPCC Director of Performance and Accountability Sally Fox, whose team supports the PCC in holding the force to account for complaints. From Avon and Somerset Police we have been joined by the Head of Professional Standards Superintendent Jane Wigmore, and by various guest speakers.

At each meeting, regardless of the overall theme, the panel continues to review at least two complaints relating to discrimination at the request of Professional Standards.

The theme for the **March** meeting was **Cases reviewed by the Independent Office for Police Complaints (IOPC) or PCC** with presentations from IOPC Guest Speakers.

Complainants are entitled to request a review of the response to their complaint from one of these bodies, depending on the category of the complaint.

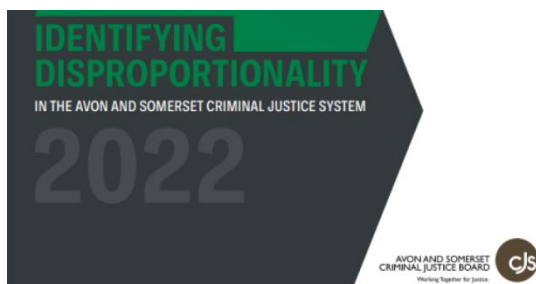
The panel was also briefed on the recently published report Identifying Disproportionality in the Avon & Somerset Criminal Justice System. Of particular relevance to the panel is Recommendation 9 which states:

***‘OPCC External Scrutiny of Police Powers Panel must review the scrutiny of stop and search complaints working with the Independent Residents Panel (IRP) to ensure all stop and search complaints are consistently scrutinised and lessons learnt.’***

**June** was the first meeting as the ‘Independent Scrutiny of Police Complaints Panel’ with the theme **Discreditable Conduct**, supported by a presentation delivered by Superintendent Jane Wigmore Head of Professional Standards.

The Professional Standards team deliver training which encourages active discussion regarding staff personal responsibilities and accountability and the identified risk areas. These include Sexual Misconduct and Abuse of Position, Gifts and Hospitality, Notifiable Associations and Social Networking. The training highlights the Code of Ethics and Standards of Professional Behaviour. Staff are advised how they can challenge and report improper behaviour.

The panel also discussed how we could help deliver Recommendation 9 from the Identifying Disproportionality in the Avon & Somerset Criminal Justice System report.



We decided regretfully that until there were more panel members it would not be feasible to routinely take on the additional scrutiny of complaints about use of police powers, as we needed to be able to deliver the ISPCP core

remit of dip sampling all complaints, without the capacity to do this being reduced.

This would not preclude taking a complaint for review if requested by Professional Standards or the Independent Scrutiny of Police Powers Panel (ISOPP), who review the use of stop and search.

In **September** the theme was **Complaints against Communications Centre Staff** with a presentation from the force Communications Centre Manager. We learnt that the award winning centre received over a million calls between April 2021 and March 2022, with nearly a third being 999 calls. A call is initially triaged and risk assessed, to give the best response. A lot of data is gathered though the Communications Centre which helps identify trends within the force area.



The **December** theme was Recently Closed complaints featuring Young Complainants. An unexpected finding in this complaint category was the number of complaints which involved the issue of property. The panel agreed that complaints involving property could be considered as a theme for a future meeting so that the concerns highlighted by members of the public in relation to this category could be explored further.



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

*“The work of the panel continues to be integral in supporting my oversight role over the police complaints regime and in holding the Chief Constable to account. Understanding dissatisfaction provides opportunities for learning and improvement and for me it is very important that we ensure complaints are dealt with appropriately in order to build trust in the police service.*

*I would like to thank Kim for taking on the role of Chair and for leading the panel so competently. Your commitment to ensuring a productive and well organised discussion during meetings greatly contributes to its success. Thank you to all the panel members for their unfaltering commitment and valuable contributions. I am eagerly anticipating the opportunity to recruit more panel members. The addition of new members will undoubtedly enhance our ability to provide thorough and impartial oversight over the police complaints regime.*