



**IOPC**

Independent  
Office for  
Police Conduct

# Our impact on **people and policing** 2023/24

“I feel at last listened to and no longer a single voice in this matter. I am just **relieved that somebody impartial has looked into this matter**, and again I thank you for this...”

“Thank you - I have now read the result and it has restored my faith that someone **has finally listened to me** and taken my allegations seriously.”

“As a family we would like to acknowledge the support we have received during the investigation process... **Everyone we have spoken to ... have been nothing but kind and supportive to us** which has been much appreciated”.

“**You have been so professional, yet friendly** in all your dealings, and I have been impressed... I will always be thankful that I had such nice people to deal with.”

“I have just received and read your report and wish to **thank you for the thorough way you have undertaken your role.** I will re-read it as... [I] wish to take in every single one of your recommendations.”

Service user feedback following investigations and reviews

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## Welcome

Welcome to our Impact Report 2023/24, which shares real stories of the difference that we have made to individuals, communities, and policing across England and Wales. I took up the role of Director General of the IOPC earlier this year and have joined an organisation with much to be proud of.

The importance of our work can be seen by the impact it has on individuals, communities, policing, and public confidence. The following pages include feedback from people we have supported through the police complaints system and examples of how we have worked with communities and groups to raise awareness of the IOPC. There are cases where we have played a part in removing officers who do not meet the high standards expected of them and also where we have found that the police acted appropriately, in often challenging circumstances. Finally, you can read about some of the learning from our work that we have shared to help improve policing.

We know there is more to do. The Cabinet Office commissioned independent review of the IOPC, published in March 2024, recognised that we are an essential part of the complex

system holding the police to account. It also made recommendations for further improvements to how we operate and provide our services.

These recommendations have informed our transformation plans for the coming years, which will help us further improve how we carry out our unique role efficiently and effectively, in order to provide the best service possible to the police and the wider public alike.

I would like to thank all those who worked with us over the last year for their time and commitment to improving policing. I would also like to thank the families, complainants, members of the public and the police service who put their trust and confidence in the IOPC. I look forward to us continuing to play our role in ensuring the highest standards of policing in England and Wales.



**Rachel Watson**  
Director General





It has **restored**  
**my faith**  
that someone has  
**finally listened**  
**to me**

Feedback from service user



## Our impact – **individuals**

Our service users include members of the public and members of the police. Many of the people we come into contact with have already gone through traumatic or stressful events, and navigating the police complaints system can be an unfamiliar and unsettling experience. It can also be a very difficult time for those under investigation. We guide all of our service users through the police complaints process. We are very aware that it is not only the outcome of our cases, but also how we carry out our work, that has a significant impact on an individual's experience and their trust in the police complaints system.

## Supporting a man who was subjected to excessive force

We investigated a complaint from a man who was stopped and searched and subjected to excessive force by the police. The officers were in an unmarked police vehicle, weren't in their uniforms and didn't identify themselves clearly. The man was sitting in a parked car near his home when the incident occurred. The officers pulled the man from the car, forced him to the ground, handcuffed him, and sprayed incapacitant spray in his eyes. One officer claimed he could smell cannabis coming from the car, but none was found. A check on police systems showed the officers that the man was not known to the police.

The man resisted the officers' attempts to search him, and tried to get away when they began to use force. He told us that he feared for his life during the struggle as he thought he was being robbed. He was handcuffed for 45 minutes and arrested for obstructing the police. He was later de-arrested. The officers took the man to hospital because his body, face, and head were injured during the incident.

The man told us he was concerned about the consequences of making a complaint and had little confidence in the complaints system. His first language is not English,

so we provided interpreters to help him understand the investigation into his complaint. The man said:

*"I would like to thank you and your team for the great work you did. You informed me about everything on time, answered all my questions and were very nice and helpful to me. You approach your work very professionally... You were with me from the beginning to the end and I could always count on good treatment from you as well as approaching the matter humanely and with respect. I value your team very highly. Thank you for everything..."*

Following our investigation, one officer was dismissed from the force and has been barred from working in policing. A second officer received a written warning.

***You were with me from the beginning to the end and I could always count on good treatment from you as well as approaching the matter humanely and with respect***

### Feedback from the mother of a boy who was stopped and searched

We investigated a complaint about the police stopping and searching a Black boy. We were keen to speak to the boy to get his account of what happened and make sure that we had all the evidence to investigate the matter. He was hesitant about attending an interview with us, so our investigators met with him beforehand to put him at ease. As a result, the boy agreed to be interviewed because he had already met our investigators and knew who he would be speaking with. His mother said:

*"Myself and [my son] would like to thank you for your empathy and patience. I appreciate how you all were so welcoming and kind towards myself and [my son]... [he] left saying mum they spoke to me so respectfully and kind...."*

### Supporting a young witness

A vulnerable teenage girl was arrested on suspicion of assault. She was taken to hospital by two police officers because she had told officers that she had taken an overdose. We investigated concerns about the officers' treatment of the girl while she was in their care. This included placing her in a spit hood (a sack-like hood placed over someone's head to stop them from spitting) and leg restraints. Following a meeting between the girl and our investigators, her social worker told us:

*"...I was so pleased with how XXX responded to you both and you really put her at ease... I think this is the first time she has ever really felt believed [and] that there are people who will stand up for her."*

### Police experiences of IOPC investigations

Being involved in an IOPC investigation can be a stressful experience for police officers and staff, and we recognise the importance of treating them with consideration and fairness. Members of the police have told us:

*"... many thanks for... the empathy shown to the circumstances in which the officer found himself. We are often critical of the IOPC and their investigations, so it's only right that when we get a service like this, that we make positive comment..."*

*"... Thank you again for conducting this whole investigation with such consideration, care and dignity towards me, that has really helped me..."*

*"... I have found this investigation and in particular your communications around it to be of the highest standard..."*



## Our impact – **communities**

We speak with groups and communities across England and Wales, including those that have low levels of confidence in the police. Meaningful engagement with these communities and groups matters. It builds awareness and understanding of the police complaints system, and ultimately helps work towards our objective of everyone being confident enough to use it. Sometimes we work with local communities in the aftermath of an incident involving the police, to listen to their concerns and look at ways that tensions can be addressed.

## Engage, educate, empower – youth event in London

A youth worker who attended a community event that we ran for young people in South London thanked us for “an amazing session” and told us that the young people “...were literally buzzing all the way back to Brixton”.

The event was part of our “3 Es” pilot project (engage, educate, empower), which aims to create a network of young advocates across London who can help their peers understand and access the police complaints system. We did this by giving the young people an overview of the complaints system, taking them through how an IOPC investigation works, and bringing them together with police officers to build mutual understanding. Attendees said:

*“...the young people had come bursting out with excitement as they had found out loads of things about their rights.”*

*“Thank you for yesterday’s session, it was brilliant... Great conversation and really wonderful to see the change in how they view the IOPC. Such a big turnaround ... [with] young people being excited about the career prospect of being an investigator for the IOPC.”*

*“Thank you so much for Tuesday evening - it was an amazing session and you and your team were fantastic. As a youth worker I can truly see when care and passion has been put into the design and delivery of a workshop.”*

We were later told that one of the young people who attended the session was stopped and searched by the police a short time after. He remembered the information that one of our investigators had given him about what the police are required to do in a stop and search and the rights of the person being stopped.

The young person said he reminded the officer of the requirements for carrying out a stop and search, at which point the officer’s attitude completely changed towards him. The officer carried out the stop and search properly and apologised before letting him and his friends go. He felt the situation could have been very different had he not been recently informed about his rights in relation to stop and search.

### Working with Sistah Space

Sistah Space is a charity that supports women of African and Caribbean heritage who are affected by domestic and sexual abuse. The IOPC and Sistah Space have each hosted sessions to get a better understanding of each other’s work.

Sistah Space told us that our meetings gave them an awareness of the police complaints system that they can relay to the women they support. The meetings have also been invaluable in giving us a greater understanding of the experiences of Black women in domestic abuse situations, and how these can differ significantly to those of other women. Sistah Space said:

*“[The IOPC] acted on their promise to ‘actively listen’ and consequently, there’s been mutual learning & positive discussion... we look forward to hosting more members of the IOPC ...to continue our difficult conversations, and helping to create positive change”.*

### Community outreach in Cardiff

Our stakeholder engagement team worked with the local community to help calm significant tensions after the tragic deaths of two young people in Cardiff.

We launched an independent investigation into the contact between the police and the teenagers before their deaths. When an incident has the potential to damage trust and confidence in policing, we know that it is important to act quickly to communicate with the community and wider public. The community was understandably alarmed about what had happened, so our stakeholder engagement team organised a meeting with local people to explain our role and the independent investigation that would take place.

As a result, we were able to provide key information to the community without delay. Community members told us it was important to them that we had come to meet them and answer their questions face-to-face. This was echoed by the Welsh government, which thanked us for our meaningful and transparent engagement, noting that this approach is important for generating confidence in the investigation among the community.



**Thank you**  
for such  
**speedy and**  
**professional**  
work

Feedback from service user





## Our impact – **accountability**

We provide independent scrutiny of police conduct in the most serious incidents and play a key role in officers being held to account through disciplinary and criminal systems. Through our investigations and reviews, we decide whether someone in the police service has a 'case to answer' for misconduct or gross misconduct and should face disciplinary proceedings. We also decide whether cases should be referred to the Crown Prosecution Service to consider criminal charges. In many of the cases that we see, we find evidence of dedicated officers acting with the utmost professionalism. However, holding officers who do wrong to account is a vital protection for the police and public alike.

## Officers jailed for forming inappropriate relationships with vulnerable women

Two officers, who abused their position by forming inappropriate relationships with vulnerable women they met while on duty, were jailed for a total of six and a half years. They were convicted of misconduct in public office following a series of IOPC investigations.

Officer A began an inappropriate sexual relationship with a woman after he responded to a domestic violence incident. He sent messages to the woman from his personal phone, and they had sex after he arrested her partner. During their relationship the woman told him she had previously been pressured into a sex act with another officer, Officer B, who had gone to her home to deal with a report of domestic abuse. She expected Officer A to act on what she had told him, but he didn't.

Our investigations into both officers began after the woman told other police officers several years later what had happened to her. These officers attended her home for an unrelated incident. By this time, Officer B had already been jailed for sexually assaulting two different women while on duty and had been dismissed from

the force following an investigation by our predecessor, the Independent Police Complaints Commission.

During our investigations, another woman came forward to say that she had been in a relationship with Officer A after he asked her out, having gone to her home in an attempt to arrest her son. She told us they had sex while he was on duty and that he persuaded her to lie to a superior officer about how they had met. A third woman told us that Officer B had initiated sex while attending a domestic abuse incident at her partner's home.

At the sentencing of the two men, the judge thanked us for an "exemplary investigation" and said that it "proves the overwhelming importance" of the IOPC. Officer A, who was still serving at the time of our investigation, was dismissed from the force following a misconduct hearing. He has been barred from working in policing.

***The judge thanked us for an 'exemplary investigation' and said that it 'proves the overwhelming importance' of the IOPC***

### **Force domestic violence lead barred from policing**

Following an IOPC investigation, a chief superintendent was barred from policing for attempting to influence the decision-making of police officers who arrested a man for suspected domestic abuse.

The officers attended an address where the chief superintendent, who was off duty, was also present. He did not formally identify himself or his rank but did tell the officers that he was a "cop". He attempted to intimidate the officers and insisted that no crime had been committed, despite later admitting he did not witness the incident. The chief superintendent was the force's strategic lead for domestic violence matters at the time. We commended the officers for their professionalism and integrity for refusing to let the more senior officer influence their decision-making.

### **Police officer jailed for dangerous driving**

We investigated the circumstances of a collision that left a teenage boy with life-changing injuries. The boy was crossing the road when he was struck by a police vehicle being driven on the wrong side of the road by an officer who was responding to an emergency

call. The officer, who had not done advanced driver training and was only permitted to drive in accordance with the Highway Code, was travelling at double the speed limit before the collision.

Our investigation found that the officer had a case to answer for gross misconduct, and she was dismissed from the force following a misconduct hearing. The officer was also jailed for causing serious injury by dangerous driving.

### **Officer dismissed from the force as a result of our review**

We reviewed a police investigation into a complaint that an officer used excessive force on a man. He alleged that he was being restrained by the police when an officer "stomped" on his head. The police investigation found that an officer had a case to answer for misconduct, meaning the most serious sanction he could face was a final written warning.

The man requested that we review the investigation. Our review found that the officer had a case to answer for the more serious act of gross misconduct. As a result, he appeared at a misconduct hearing and was dismissed from the force.

### **Officers acted appropriately during the detention of a man who later died**

We make an impact by providing independent scrutiny in cases where someone has died or been seriously injured following police contact. We often find that the police acted appropriately, but it is important that we establish what happened.

We investigated the circumstances in which a man died following contact with the police. He was arrested on suspicion of driving with excess alcohol after a road traffic collision. He collapsed later in the police station and sadly died in hospital.

A post-mortem concluded that the man died due to an internal injury sustained in a collision and alcohol intoxication. Our investigation found that officers could not have known that the man had suffered such an injury, and that after he collapsed, they responded appropriately, and in line with their training and guidance for medical emergencies. An inquest later found that the man died as a result of a road traffic accident.



## Our impact – **learning**

We maximise our impact by sharing learning and driving change, working collaboratively with policing bodies such as the College of Policing and the National Police Chiefs' Council. Through our investigations and reviews, we look for opportunities to identify learning to help improve policing at a local or national level, and to prevent the same things from happening again. We also share good practice with forces through publications, such as our 'Learning the Lessons' magazine, and by holding events and workshops with policing organisations.

## Strengthening safeguards for strip searches involving children

Strip searches, especially those involving the exposure of intimate parts (EIP searches), are among the most intrusive powers used by the police. It is critical to ensure that appropriate safeguarding is in place, particularly where these searches involve children.

We made ten national learning recommendations to improve policing practice of EIP searches involving children. Our recommendations were made to the Home Office, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and the College of Policing.

Our evidence was drawn from several IOPC investigations relating to strip searches of children by the police. We found that children's wellbeing and safeguarding were not always prioritised, and that policing laws, training and guidance needed to be updated to better protect and safeguard them.

Our recommendations included calls for:

- the government to undertake a substantial review of policing powers relating to the strip searches of children to improve safeguarding

- the government to amend relevant laws, so that police forces are required to make mandatory safeguarding referrals for any child subject to an EIP or intimate search
- the College of Policing and NPCC to review and update all relevant police guidance and training products on EIP searches so that sufficient emphasis is placed on the child's safety and wellbeing

The recommendations were accepted. In response:

- the College of Policing will review guidance and training on strip searches involving children
- the NPCC and College of Policing will develop a training package for officers who have the power to authorise strip searches of children
- the NPCC will work with chief officers to ensure that police officers understand the legal requirement to have an appropriate adult present, to help safeguard the rights and welfare of a child when they are being strip searched

Our recommendations have also fed into a consultation by the Home Office on proposed changes to the law.

One organisation that works with young people described these recommendations as: "...a substantial stride in enhancing the protection of children during strip searches."

### Working with forces to improve handling complaints about race discrimination

Race discrimination is one of our key areas of focus. We held workshops with police complaint handlers to provide practical support on handling complaints that involve race discrimination. Attendees said:

*"The workshop gave me an understanding of phrases and terms I was unaware of and gave me some tools to help resolve complaints around race discrimination."*

*"It gave me greater understanding of areas I wasn't previously identifying, such as micro-aggression and adultification."*

Of those who provided feedback, the majority said that their understanding of handling complaints involving race discrimination has improved as a result of attending our workshops.

### Sharing learning with forces via our 'Learning the Lessons' magazine

Our 'Learning the Lessons' magazine aims to improve policing policy and practice. We recently published issues focused on custody and mental health. Police forces tell us they have used the magazines' content in their

training, team meeting discussions, and to improve policies and practices. One said:

*"Literature like this is really key for us to read and see what is happening with policing and at the IOPC, there is more information in here... than what I have heard or received from anywhere else"*

Of those who provided feedback, 96% agreed the magazines were useful tools to help drive change in police policy and practice.

### Ending victim blaming language

We published our guide, 'Ending victim blaming in the context of violence against women and girls: Why language, attitudes, and behaviours matter', to help members of the IOPC and the police to think critically about their own and others' language, attitudes, and behaviours.

Sam Millar, Strategic Programme Director at the National Police Chiefs' Council described the guide as: "...a valuable resource... for the whole system... I strongly support the use of the document by forces to improve the way in which victims and survivors are dealt with and improve outcomes for women and girls."

### Helping police complaint handlers to get it right first time

Making sure that the police get it right first time when handling complaints leads to better outcomes for complainants. We created a toolkit for police complaint handlers to ensure greater consistency and best practice when handling or investigating complaints. The toolkit covers the lifespan of a complaint, from early engagement with the complainant to providing a clear outcome at the end.

We rolled out the toolkit at workshops that we held with police complaint handlers. Feedback was positive, with one attendee describing it as "really informative input and provides some excellent guidance and examples of best practice for complaints".

# IOPC impact in 2023/24



Service user feedback following investigations and reviews

“Firstly, can I thank you for your extensive work on this investigation. It has been such a traumatic time for my son and to **finally have someone listening has been uplifting.**”

“I would like to express my gratitude to you for completing the review and for doing so promptly after speaking to me. Thank you for taking the time to speak to me to understand what my concerns were. **I felt you really listened and showed compassion** for what had happened...”

“I can’t thank you enough for all the effort you have put into reviewing my appeal. **To say I am pleased with your findings is an understatement...**”

“**Thank you for such speedy and professional work with a thread of care running through its entirety...** thank you for such great care and hope, that both you and the IOPC have provided, and again this thanks is from the absolute very bottom of my heart.”

“I have just read your review - **I cannot thank you enough.** I cried throughout because you understood completely.”



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our work or to request this report in  
an alternative format:**

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Email us at: **[enquiries@policeconduct.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@policeconduct.gov.uk)**

Call us on: **0300 020 0096**

Text relay: **18001 0207 166 3000**

Write to us at:

**Independent Office for Police Conduct**

**PO Box 473**

**Sale M33 0BW**

We welcome telephone calls in Welsh.

Rydym yn croesawu galwadau ôn yn y Gymraeg.

This document is also available in Welsh.

Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn y Gymraeg hefyd.

Give your feedback on this document at **[www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/ImpactReport2324](http://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/ImpactReport2324)**

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