



**STRATEGIC POLICING AND CRIME BOARD
6 October 2015**

Dip Sampling of Completed Complaints Files

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To report on the dip-sampling of completed complaints files undertaken by members of the Strategic Policing and Crime Board (SPCB) on Tuesday 7 July 2015.

BACKGROUND

2. Following a recommendation made by the Strategic Policing and Crime Board meeting on 4 February 2014 the previous Commissioner decided to introduce a new process for SPCB members to dip sample completed complaints files. PCCs do not have the power to investigate complaints against the police (other than a complaint against the Chief Constable) but do have a responsibility to ensure that the system for dealing with complaints against the police is effective and that it is well managed. The West Midlands Commissioner supported by the Strategic Policing and Crime Board undertake this duty by receiving regular performance reports on the work of the Professional Standards Department together with a regular programme of meetings with senior police officers to discuss complaints matters. The dip sampling process supports this and provides a further check on the system.
3. The category of complaints considered in this dip sampling exercise was complaints resolved by local resolution by the LPU (local policing unit). A random selection of completed complaints files from within this category was made available during the dip sampling session.
4. During the session SPCB members examined 14 completed complaints files. During dip sampling members restricted their examination of the files to three key issues:
 - Does the decision in the case appear reasonable? (this is different from looking for a decision that is legally correct)
 - Has the complaint been dealt with in a timely manner and were all communications polite and reasonable?
 - Does the way in which the complaint was investigated inspire confidence?

5. The approach is intended to allow SPCB members to concentrate on the overall flavour of the complaint and the level of customer service being delivered and also to provide an opportunity to increase their personal knowledge and understanding of the process. It should also allow SPCB members to sample the levels of customer service in response to complaints.
6. In almost all of the cases sampled, the SPCB members considered that the outcome seemed to be justified and reasonable, and the way in which the complaint was investigated did inspire confidence. There were a number of issues raised and these have been referred to the head of Professional Standards for further comment:
 - Timeliness was an issue in a number of cases, with some taking several months to resolve what appeared to be fairly straightforward matters
 - One complainant commented that had the officer been supplied with a body worn camera, the complaint would have been negated.
 - In one case, it appeared from the file that documents had been destroyed, but the file did not contain a clear audit trail to demonstrate proper approval for this destruction.
 - The style of communication with complainants was commented upon in several cases – letters were formal and not particularly ‘customer-friendly’.
 - File management could be tidier – in one case it was not immediately clear what date the complaint had been received and when it was finalised. These dates should be transparent.
 - In one case there appeared to be a misunderstanding about when and how the case was closed. More clarity would be of benefit.
 - In one case, it was commented that given the acceptance that damage to property had occurred, more could have been done to signpost the complainant towards compensation.
 - In one case the SPCB raised concerns about the way in which the investigation was undertaken and the overall outcome. This case has been referred to the Head of Professional Standards Department for further comment.
7. The next dip sampling session will take place during October 2015. In order to give SPCB members more time to examine files, the dip sample will take place over a two week period, with members invited to make an appointment to attend the office at their convenience to undertake their part of the dip sample.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8. There are no financial implications directly arising from this report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9. Section 15 of the Police Reform Act 2002 requires the Authority to ensure that it is kept informed about complaints made against police officers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

10. The Board is asked to note the outcomes of the dip sampling session and determine whether any further action is required as a result of the dip sampling.

Andrea Gabbitas, Head of Secretariat