



**STRATEGIC POLICING AND CRIME BOARD
1 March 2016**

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 who are also members of the Joint Audit Committee on 3 December 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 to dip sample completed complaints files. This was previously undertaken by members of the Board, but in December, for the first time, it was undertaken by members of the Board who are also members of the Joint Audit Committee. 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 about incivility. A random selection of completed complaints files from within this category was made available during the dip sampling session.
4. During the session dip samplers examined 20 completed complaints files. During dip sampling they 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 dip samplers 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 dip samplers to consider the levels of customer service in response to complaints.
6. In most of the cases sampled, the dip samplers 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 consideration:
 - In two cases, dip samplers were unable to make a proper assessment because files did not include enough information to understand the full circumstances – care should be taken to ensure that files are complete.
 - Communications with the complainants were polite and reasonable in most cases
 - In one case written communications with the complainant were delayed or not sent, which may have made it more stressful.
 - In cases which involve external partners (in one case nightclub doormen were involved) feedback should be provided to the external partners in order to help them improve their performance.
 - In several cases, improved timeliness would help to provide better customer service
 - Files found to be in good order when looking at local resolutions dealt with by Dudley LPU.
 - In one case it was felt that a meeting with the complainant at an early stage could have saved a lot of work in the longer term.
 - File did not include a final letter to the complainant.
 - Need to take particular care if a complainant is known to have a mental health problem. In this case the complainant was dealt with sensitively and the report was very professional.
 - In one case the file did not inspire confidence in the dip-sampler. This was a complaint made by a number of people regarding the same matter. It was felt that a meeting at an early stage would have been a better way of handling this complaint. This complaint has been referred back to the Professional Standards Department to consider these comments.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8. 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

9. 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, Business Services Manager