



## Professional Standards Department

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AVON AND SOMERSET  
CONSTABULARY



## A guide for making complaints about the police

This leaflet explains what to do if you want to make a complaint about the police in Avon and Somerset and how your complaints are dealt with.





## The complaints process

Avon and Somerset Constabulary is committed to providing a high standard of service. However, there may be times when you feel dissatisfied with some aspects of the service and wish to make a complaint.

Our **Professional Standards Department (PSD)** records all complaints and misconduct allegations against Avon and Somerset Police and take all necessary steps to resolve or investigate to the satisfaction of the complainant.

The **Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC)** has the guardianship of the system for making complaints against the police and they supervise, manage or independently investigate those that raise more serious allegations.

**Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC)** Police and Crime Commissioner Sue Mountstevens has been elected to be your voice in policing within Avon and Somerset. It is the PCC's duty to hold the Chief Constable and Constabulary to account on behalf of local people. This includes monitoring complaints, appointing and training independent chairs for police misconduct hearings and appointing chairs to hear appeals against the findings of gross (serious) misconduct brought by police officers or special constables.





## What do I do if I am not satisfied with the way the police handled my complaint?

If you have made a complaint against Avon and Somerset Police and you are not happy with the way it has been handled, you can appeal against:

- an investigation into your complaint
- a local resolution
- a decision not to look into your complaint

### How do I appeal to Avon and Somerset Police?

Your complaint decision letter will tell you whether to appeal to the Chief Constable. If you have been asked to appeal to the Chief Constable, please go to the appeal form on the police website [www.avonandsomerset.police.uk](http://www.avonandsomerset.police.uk)

### How do I appeal to the IPCC?

Your complaint decision letter sent to you by Avon and Somerset police will tell you whether to appeal to the IPCC.

If you have been given the right to appeal to the IPCC, please go to the appeals section on the police website.

### Can I appeal using a paper form?

Appeal forms are available on the Avon and Somerset police website. Alternatively you can ask for a paper form by calling the PSD administration office on 01275 816029 or by e-mailing [ProfessionalStandardsDepartment@avonandsomerset.police.uk](mailto:ProfessionalStandardsDepartment@avonandsomerset.police.uk)

## Complaints about staff

If you think the conduct or behaviour of a police officer, police staff member or special constable was inappropriate or fell below your expectations, you should make a complaint.

The behaviour of police officers, police staff and special constables is set out in the Standards of Professional Behaviour. They must:

- Act with honesty and integrity, fairness and impartiality
- Treat members of the public and their colleagues with respect
- Not abuse powers and authority
- Act in a manner that does not discredit or undermine public confidence in the police service

The Code of Ethics produced by the College of Policing sets out and defines the exemplary standards of behaviour for everyone who works in policing.

### Code of Ethics

[www.college.police.uk/What-we-do/Ethics/Pages/Code-of-Ethics.aspx](http://www.college.police.uk/What-we-do/Ethics/Pages/Code-of-Ethics.aspx)



## Who can make a complaint?

You can make a complaint if:

- the conduct took place to you
- you have been adversely affected by the conduct, even if it didn't happen to you
- you are a member of the public who witnessed the conduct
- you have written permission to act on behalf of someone who falls into any of the 3 categories above

## What do I do if I have a complaint?

It is best to make a complaint as soon as possible. It is also best to complain directly to the police force that your issue relates to. Complaints about the conduct of people serving in the police can be sent to the IPCC. If you complain to the IPCC they are required by law to send it back to the relevant Constabulary for consideration.

If you would like the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) to have oversight of the handling of your complaint, to ensure that it follows the legislated process, please contact the PCC with the complaint reference number on email [PCC@avonandsomerset.pnn.police.uk](mailto:PCC@avonandsomerset.pnn.police.uk) or by telephone on 01275 816377.

## What happens if I want to withdraw my complaint?

Speak to the person appointed to deal with your complaint or notify the Professional Standards Department. Their contact details are on the back of this leaflet. You will be asked to confirm that you have withdrawn your complaint in writing.





## What are the possible actions following my complaint?

The Constabulary will always look to resolve your complaint as quickly as possible. This can often mean answering a question or putting measures in place there and then to address your specific concerns. These will always be formally recorded to ensure that the Constabulary can learn and improve policies and procedures as well as personal performance.

Some complaints will require formal investigation. The appointed investigator will update you at least once every 28 days until their investigation is complete.

After the complaint has been investigated, a report is provided to outline the investigation and its conclusion. Where the complaint is valid, in most cases there will be some form of action to address the shortcomings, such as training. We also consider what we have learned from each complaint when we review the way we work, e.g. our policies and procedures. Any breach of these standards of behaviour may result in disciplinary action.

Very serious matters will be referred to the IPCC and their own non-police investigators.

We publish all gross misconduct outcomes on the Avon and Somerset Police website to improve confidence and transparency.

## What information to include in a complaint

When making your complaint, please include as much detail as possible about what happened:

- What was said or done and by whom?
- Were there witnesses or evidence such as documents or photographs?
- The names of any staff involved, if you know them
- What you would like us to do to

Please provide your address and a telephone number so that we can contact you. Without these details we can't progress enquiries into the issues.





## Ways to make a complaint

Please make your complaint in **one** of these ways:

### Online

Fill in the 'Make a Complaint' form on the our website  
[www.avonandsomerset.police.uk](http://www.avonandsomerset.police.uk)

### In person

Please visit a police station if you want to make your complaint in person. To find your local police station, go to our Police Stations page on our website.

### By email

[ProfessionalStandardsDepartment@avonandsomerset.police.uk](mailto:ProfessionalStandardsDepartment@avonandsomerset.police.uk)

Please ensure that you provide your address and a telephone number so that we can contact you.

### By letter

Please include all the relevant information and send it to:

Professional Standards Department  
Avon and Somerset Constabulary  
PO Box 37  
Valley Road  
Portishead, BS20 8QJ

### By phone

To make a complaint by phone, please call 101.

## Resolving more complex complaints

### Local Investigation

A local investigation aims to establish the details around the complaint and whether it amounts to an allegation of serious misconduct.

An investigation might range from telephone enquiries that may take a few hours to a more extensive process that takes several months.

The Professional Standards Department will write to you to acknowledge your complaint, with contact details of the person who is overseeing it. Your complaint will be dealt with as quickly as possible and you will be kept informed of the progress at least every 28 days.







## What happens next?

All complaints are received by the Professional Standards Department of Avon and Somerset Police who are responsible for recording and assessing complaints made about the conduct of the Constabulary's officers, staff and specials.

Once your complaint is recorded it can be dealt with in one of two ways:

### Resolving straightforward complaints

#### *Informal Resolution*

A number of complaints may be resolved locally using a process called Informal Resolution. This is a way of informally resolving complaints that will not lead to disciplinary action.

An investigating officer will contact you and try to address your concerns. They will seek your views and opinions and come up with an action plan to resolve your complaint. This may include explaining police procedures, apologising on behalf of the Constabulary or seeking an explanation from the officer or police staff member about their actions.

If you are not happy with the outcome of the informal resolution, you have a right of appeal.

Avon and Somerset Constabulary is committed to maintaining public trust and confidence. Handling complaints in this way allows lessons to be learned and improvements to be made.





## Making a complaint through other agencies

Alongside direct contact with Avon and Somerset Constabulary, you can use the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) online complaint form. This will be forwarded automatically to Avon and Somerset Constabulary's Professional Standards Department.

You can also make a complaint by contacting your solicitor, your local MP, the Citizens Advice Bureau or support agency such as Stand Against Racism & Inequality (SARI).

### Independent Police Complaints Commission

The Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) oversees the police complaints system in England and Wales and sets the standards for police handling of complaints.

IPCC decisions are entirely independent of the police and government.

### What is the role of the IPCC?

The IPCC investigates the most serious complaints and allegations of misconduct against the police in England and Wales. These complaints are referred to the IPCC by police forces.

The IPCC may decide to investigate an incident using its own investigators (referred to as an independent investigation), or it can manage or supervise a police investigation by the Constabulary involved.

The IPCC will only conduct an independent investigation into incidents that cause the greatest level of public concern – for example, deaths in or following police contact.

### Can I complain directly to the IPCC?

Complaints about the conduct of people serving with the police can be sent to the IPCC, but the IPCC does not have the power to record these.

If you complain to the IPCC, they are required by law to send it back to the relevant Constabulary for consideration.

