

Local Resolution of Police Complaints: The Views of Complainants

**A report to the Independent Police Complaints
Commission**

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Interviews from the Local Resolution Complainants Survey

This report presents findings from interviews into people's experiences of using the local resolution (LR) process. The aim was to gain an understanding of users' views about LR. The interviews conducted for the report explored interviewees' intentions, expectations and satisfaction levels when they first made a complaint, and in relation to the investigating officer (IO), the LR process, and the outcome.

Summary of main findings

- Interviewees were most likely to complain to express their views or anger, to stop a similar thing happening again, or because they wanted the officer(s) they had complained about to be disciplined.
- Around four in five interviewees were given the name and contact details for the person dealing with the complaint, and were asked at the outset what would represent a satisfactory outcome for them.
- Most (three in five) complainants met face-to-face with the IO. Six said no meeting was offered, three of whom felt it would have been beneficial.
- Interviewees were slightly more likely to say that the IO had not provided them with printed information on LR, nor confirmed procedures for updating them about the progress of the complaint.
- The majority of interviewees said that the IO explained how their complaint would be dealt with, and that the complaint was suitable for LR.
- Only eight interviewees (one third) said it was explained to them that no disciplinary procedures would be taken against the officer(s) about whom they had made the complaint, while 14 said this was not explained.
- The split between interviewees' ratings for satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the helpfulness of the IO was roughly equal. However, by far the largest single category was those "very dissatisfied".
- Interviewees were equally divided on whether the IO had listened to their concerns and taken their complaint seriously.
- Most (14) interviewees were not confident in the LR process, nor that their complaints would be addressed. Three offered positive views.
- Most interviewees (13) recalled that an LR form was completed with them, or actions put in writing, and 17 reported being given a chance to express how they wanted the complaint resolved.
- Only three interviewees were offered an opportunity to meet with the officer who was the subject of the complaint – none of whom felt this was successful.

- Half of those not offered a meeting with the officer they had complained about would have welcomed it, while half would not.
- Complainants were divided about whether they had been kept adequately informed throughout the process; 11 interviewees felt reasonably well informed, 12 thought this had not been the case.
- Nineteen complainants stated that they had received a final letter from the police informing them that their complaint had been finalised by way of LR. The remainder had either not received a letter or could not recall having received a letter.
- At the end of the process, ten interviewees stated that feedback to the officer complained against had been provided by the IO. However, seven interviewees said that they had not been informed of the outcome, nothing had happened or they were unaware of what had happened.
- Almost two-thirds of respondents stated that they were fairly or very dissatisfied with the final outcome of their complaint; one complainant stated that he was furious.
- Only five complainants felt that their expectations had been fully realised.
- Although few complainants thought their expectations and aims had been realised, seven thought that the process was fair and balanced and two had mixed views. A greater number, however (15), thought that the process was unfair and lacked impartiality.
- Almost two-thirds of respondents stated that they were fairly or very dissatisfied, or furious with the final outcome of their complaint.
- Only six respondents stated that they would not complain again if a similar situation arose in the future.

Background

Local Resolution of police complaints (LR) replaced Informal Resolution in 2004. As the IPCC website notes¹, LR entails dealing with complaints against the police at a local level. It is intended as a means of resolving low-level complaints. The process usually involves input from a police staff manager, the gathering of views from service users, and constructive engagement between them and the police.

LR can be a proportionate and effective way of resolving complaints against police staff. As noted in May et al's (2007) research on LR from the perspective of 64 complainants², oversight of the process was entrusted to the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC). This was to ensure appropriate arrangements exist to deal with complaints made against both police officers and civilian police staff.

¹ www.ipcc.gov.uk/en/Pages/locally-resolved-complaints.aspx

² May, T., Hough, M., Warburton, H. and Herrington, V. (2007) Local Resolution: The views of police officers and complainants. A Report for The Police Foundation and the Independent Police Complaints Commission.

Research conducted in 2007 by May and Hough³ found that several aspects of LR could be improved. Most complainants knew little about the process prior to lodging their complaint. For some, no other options were offered for resolving their complaint. Although they were satisfied with the investigating officer (IO), complainants were dissatisfied with the process itself, because they did not receive an apology. This was less marked, however, for those who had seen the LR information leaflet. May and Hough concluded that more information should be provided to complainants about the process and the options available, and that greater flexibility and sensitivity was needed when informing complainants of the final outcome.

The most recent complaint statistics⁴ suggest that some issues remain. These show that almost 14,000 allegations in 2011/12 were dealt with by LR – 27% of the total. While this is a lower proportion than in 2010/11, the statistics also note a decrease in the average number of days taken to deal with an LR allegation. However, LR appeals have also fallen, while the rate of upholding these appeals has remained stable. As the IPCC has noted, this suggests that some forces are still failing to engage properly with complainants.

The most recent IPCC Statutory Guidance⁵, issued on 7 February 2013, placed what it describes as “increased emphasis” on LR. It stated that “when...carried out effectively and...used appropriately, local resolution of less serious matters has a key part to play in the complaints system and in ensuring public confidence”. Indicative of its intended focus, the guidance added that LR is “a flexible process that can be adapted to the needs of the complainant”. The LR factsheet on the IPCC website⁶ was updated on 19 August 2013, shortly before the interviews for this report were carried out. The factsheet notes the steps involved in the LR process. Applying to cases received on or after 22 November 2012, it also explains the reasons why some complaints are unsuitable for LR, and prepares complainants for what they should (and should not) expect LR to achieve.

³ May, T. and Hough, M. (2007) Findings Paper: Local Resolution of police complaints: The views of officers and complainants. London: Police Foundation and Independent Police Complaints Commission.

⁴ www.ipcc.gov.uk/en/Pages/stats.aspx

⁵ IPCC (2013) www.ipcc.gov.uk/Documents/statutoryguidance/2013_statutory_guidance_english.PDF

⁶ www.ipcc.gov.uk/page/information-police-locally-resolved-complaints.

See also www.ipcc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Documents/onlineforms/Local_Resolution_KeyFacts.pdf

Methodology

Interviews were conducted by telephone with 25 complainants⁷, from a possible total of 28 people⁸. All had complained about a police force, and subsequently had their complaint dealt with by LR. All had also indicated to the IPCC their willingness to be contacted by researchers for more in-depth views on their experiences. On average, interviews took around 20-to-30 minutes to complete.

Sample details

Most (21) of the sample were male, with the remaining four female. Respondents' complaints related to five separate forces: Cumbria (nine complaints), Wiltshire (five), Staffordshire (four), South Yorkshire (four) and North Yorkshire⁹ (three).

Interviewees were asked what they sought to achieve when making their complaint. Between them, they mentioned 39 desired outcomes. The three main types mentioned were: to express views/anger (on eight occasions); to stop a similar thing happening again (seven occasions); and for the officer(s) they had complained about to be disciplined (seven occasions). Between them, the following two quotes illustrate these aims:

An apology would have been nice but it wasn't an aim. The way I was spoken to was unacceptable. I wanted to stop it happening to me again and to stop it happening to anyone else. Interviewee 9

They needed to be reprimanded. Their behaviour was unbecoming of their office. Interviewee 18

Other aims mentioned at the outset were:

- an apology (four occasions);
- an explanation (three);
- to help the police learn lessons (two);
- a full investigation/pursuit of criminal proceedings (two);
- to know what was held against me in police records (one);
- compensation (one);
- the officer spoken to (one);
- the officer retrained (one);
- it proven I was telling the truth (one);
- the police to drop the charges against me (one); and

⁷ Methodological note: The research was conducted in September/October 2013. The IPCC supplied the report authors with an excel spreadsheet listing the names of 28 people. Attempts were made to interview all of these. In three cases, despite multiple attempts to do so, researchers were unable to contact the complainant.

⁸ All 28 were given an ID number before data collection began. The ID numbers given after the quotes cited in this report correspond with these.

⁹ These three complainants had previously answered a number of questions identical to this survey, as part of a separate exercise conducted by the West Yorkshire Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. In these cases, depending on the wishes of the interviewee, this study either made use of the earlier responses to the WYOPCC, or asked the relevant questions afresh, along with the new ones.

- clarification about policy, procedure, actions and outcomes (one).

Initial communication

Most interviewees (21) were given the name of the person dealing with their complaint, while four said they were not. Slightly fewer (20) recalled being provided with contact details for the person dealing with the complaint, while five did not. A similar proportion (20 out of 25) said that those they initially contacted about the complaint took steps to find out what would represent a satisfactory outcome for them.

Views about the investigating officer

Most complainants (14) met face-to-face with the IO. A further ten did not, while one could not recall. Of the ten who said such a meeting did not take place, only one could recall it being offered to them. Six said no meeting was offered, while three were unable to remember whether or not it was offered.

Of the six who said no meeting with the IO was offered, three felt it would have been beneficial to have one, while one thought it would possibly have been beneficial. One of those who did not think a meeting would have been beneficial held this view not because of negative opinions about whether the IO (or the force) would take the complaint seriously. Instead, this was based on practicalities, as the force in question was some distance from where the complainant lived.

The majority of interviewees (15) said that the IO explained how their complaint would be dealt with. Nine said the IO did not explain this. One could not recall whether or not this was explained. Slightly fewer (12) said that the IO had explained what action could be taken about the complaint. Again, nine interviewees said this was not explained to them. Four could not recall whether or not this was explained. Interviewees were less likely to say that it was explained to them that no disciplinary procedures would be taken against the officer(s) about whom they had complained. Only eight said this was explained, while 14 said it was not¹⁰. Three were unable to recall whether or not this was explained.

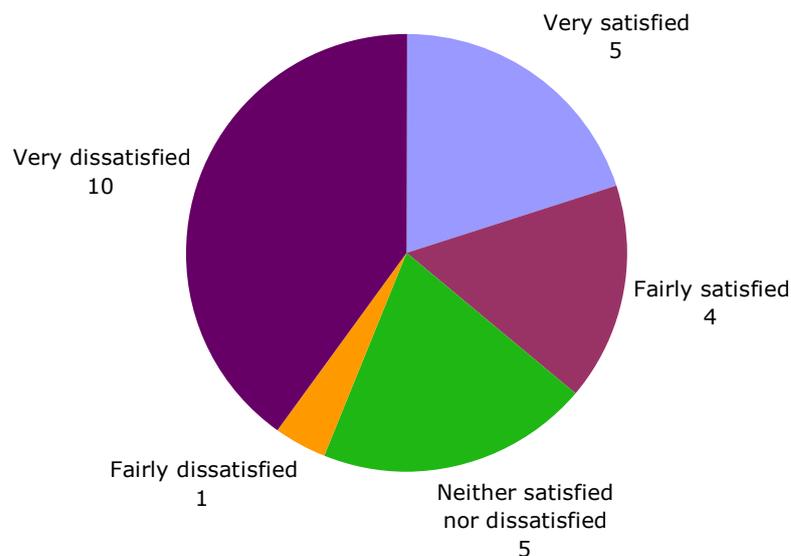
Interviewees were fairly evenly split on whether the IO had confirmed how often, and by which method, they would be updated (13 said they had not; 12 said they had). They were also marginally more likely to say that the IO had not provided them with printed information

¹⁰ One of these described this issue as “not relevant” to the case, and reported that, during the process, he had retracted his original complaint. The same respondent offered a similar response in relation to provision of updates and printed information on LR.

or leaflets on the LR process (14 said they had not; 11 said they had). However, interviewees were slightly more likely to say that the IO had explained to them why the complaint was suitable for LR (12 said they had, nine said they had not, and one said this was partly explained, while two could not recall).

Figure 1 shows interviewees' ratings for satisfaction with the helpfulness of the IO. Overall, the split between satisfaction (that is, "very" and "fairly" satisfied) and dissatisfaction ("very" and "fairly" dissatisfied) is roughly equal. Nine interviewees were satisfied, 11 were not, and five offered no view or mixed views. However, by far the largest single category was those "very dissatisfied". Accounting for ten interviewees, this suggested that where lack of satisfaction does exist, it is likely to be strongly felt.

Figure 1: Interviewees' satisfaction with the helpfulness of the investigating officer (n=25)



Interviewees were split exactly half-and-half on whether the IO had listened to their concerns and taken their complaint seriously. Ten said this was the case, ten said it was not, and the remaining five thought it partly true. Positive comments often drew on more than one aspect of the process the IO is expected to undertake, as shown in the following examples:

[The IO] listened to why I'd contacted the police in the first place. He was very sympathetic and agreed that some of the procedures that took place weren't to the standard that they should've been. Interviewee 23

[The IO] seemed very open and listened to me, saw where I was coming from, tried to explain it to me from the officers' point of view. He was fair and balanced.
Interviewee 28

Those who did not feel the IO had listened to them or taken them seriously did not believe that they had been fully involved in the process, or that the IO had taken the time to take account of their views. The following two comments illustrate this:

I wanted an investigation. I've been ignored. The first I knew of my complaint being dealt with by [LR] was when I complained to the IPCC that nothing had happened. They wrote to me stating that I had agreed to LR so they could do nothing with my complaint. Interviewee 19

I didn't meet with the investigating officer, but another officer came to visit me. They told me, "We can do this, we can do that; it'd be better if you do that". What they wanted us to do was drop the complaint – and I didn't want local resolution.
Interviewee 5

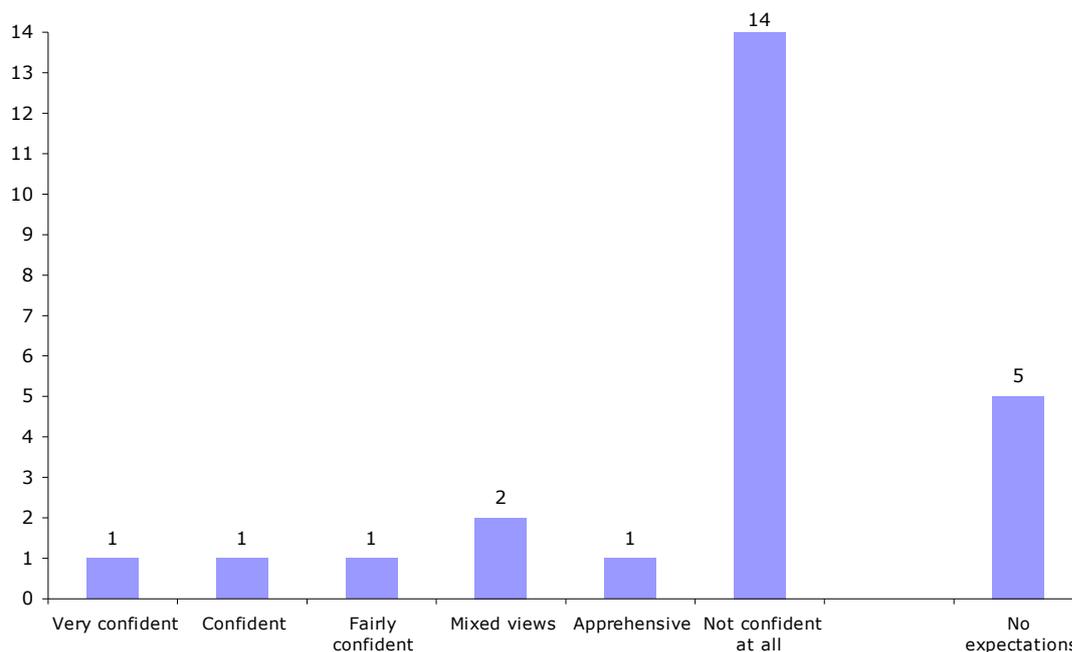
Those who described themselves as partly listened to, or taken part-seriously, praised some elements of the process. However, they criticized the process for being insufficiently thorough (see the quote below), or were sceptical that enquiries had been impartial:

[The IO] listened and took on board what I had said, but during the meeting I found they changed and my satisfaction levels dropped somewhat. They said they would review all the material they had, but they didn't. Interviewee 10

Views about the local resolution process

Interviewees were asked, before the LR process had begun, whether they felt confident in it, and whether they believed that their complaints would be addressed. Most (14 of the 25) were not at all confident about this. One further interviewee self-described as "apprehensive". Two had mixed views. Positive views were offered by three interviewees, one each saying they were "very confident", "confident" or "fairly confident". The remaining five interviewees had no expectations. Figure 2 illustrates the findings.

Figure 2: Interviewees' confidence in the local resolution process and feeling that the complaint would be addressed (n=25)



Often, lack of confidence stemmed from a realisation that LR would not be conducted in a manner they regarded as sufficiently independent, or that the intended outcome when making the complaint would not be achievable. The following three quotes highlight these concerns:

It's the police investigating the police, Even worse, it's [this force] investigating [itself]. The process lacks transparency. Interviewee 20

From the outset it was fundamentally flawed. I wasn't looking to have someone fired. I did want [the officer I complained about] chastised. I thought this process would do that. I signed the form and then realised we had no right to have the officer disciplined. Interviewee 18

[I was] not [confident] when I realised the officer in question was going to be investigated by his supervising officer, nor when I got the letter, which said my complaint was about something different from what I wanted to complain about. Interviewee 3

Most (13) interviewees recalled that an LR form was completed with them, or actions put in writing. Ten said this did not occur – one of whom was not concerned that it had not happened. The remaining two could not remember whether or not it had occurred. A majority (17) also reported that they had been given a chance to express how they wanted the complaint resolved, and which actions they wished to be taken. Of the rest, eight reported

not being given this opportunity, while one said it had been partly available (in that it only arose after the IO had explained what the police could and would do).

Only three of the 25 interviewees reported being offered an opportunity to meet with the officer who was the subject of the complaint, so that they could discuss their concerns and hear the response. The 22 who did not have this opportunity were equally split (11 each) between those who would have welcomed it and those who would not. A range of reasons for wishing to meet the officer were mentioned, including:

- lack of another opportunity to speak to anyone about the complaint;
- a desire to vent their feelings to the officer directly; and
- a belief that the officer should be made aware of the effect of their conduct.

Typical responses from interviewees who wanted to meet the officer they had complained about, but were not offered the opportunity to do so, included:

I wanted to meet with the team; I was told I wasn't allowed. Interviewee 10

As long as there had been an independent person there I would have taken up the opportunity. Interviewee 13

One interviewee reported being told that the officer to whom the complaint related had subsequently retired.

Several reasons were offered by those who would not have wished to meet the officer they complained about:

- Their apprehension and disillusion about the fairness of the process, or the attitudes of officers involved, were by that point irredeemably negative.
- The officers' managers would be more able to effect change and produce a desired outcome.
- They believed that the officer was only doing their job, and that the issue underlying the complaint was not person specific but systemic.

The following quotes illustrate these points:

I wanted to deal with their superiors not them. Interviewee 9

He wasn't very pleasant first time round. I wasn't going to see him again. Interviewee 10

None of the three complainants who had met the officer they had complained about felt it had been successful. The two who elaborated on this explained that the meeting reinforced their pre-existing concerns – namely that, as the police appeared to them to be carrying out the enquiry themselves, nothing would be done about the complaint.

Keeping complainants up-to-date with the progress of their complaint

For many complainants, being kept informed about the progression of their complaint is important. Regular communication from the IO (by phone, letter, email or text) has multiple benefits. It can suggest to a complainant that their complaint has been taken seriously, and is being dealt with in an expeditious manner. It can also indicate a willingness on behalf of the force to try to amend any perceived wrongdoing, miscommunication or misunderstanding. Complainants were divided about whether they had been kept adequately informed; 11 interviewees felt reasonably well informed, 12 thought this had not been the case. One interviewee thought that the communication from the force concerned had been hit and miss.

The final interviewee was unaware that his complaint had been dealt with by his local force and claimed that he had never spoken to anyone at a local level about his complaint. This particular complainant stated that he only became aware that his complaint had been dealt with by LR after he wrote to the IPCC to complain that no action had been taken regarding his complaint. The IPCC examined the case and found that the complainant had agreed to LR and that his complaint had indeed been resolved at a local level. The complainant stated that he had never agreed to LR¹¹ and had never signed a form stating he was happy for his complaint to be dealt with in this way. This complainant was particularly unhappy about the level of communication between the force and himself.

The complaint outcome

For many complainants, satisfaction with the outcome tends to hinge upon whether the expectations and aims they have at the outset are realised. Achieving a satisfactory outcome is the most important element of the LR process for many complainants. While the

¹¹ Under previous legislation, complainants were not obliged to agree to their case, if it was deemed suitable, being dealt with through LR. Following the introduction of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, this has now changed. This could account for this complainant's lack of awareness that this method had been used to resolve their complainant. It could also explain why a number of complainants did not recall signing a form agreeing to LR.

professionalism of the IO, the speed with which the process reaches its conclusion and the clarity of the information provided are all important components, these tend to pale into insignificance if the outcome is not what the complainant expected or wanted to achieve. All 25 interviewees were asked what the outcome of their complaint had been¹². Ten interviewees stated that feedback to the officer complained against had been provided, seven said that they had not been informed of the outcome, nothing had happened or they were unaware of what had happened; two interviewees were provided with an explanation and/or information from the IO. One complainant stated that the complaint had resulted in the officer being retrained another was led to believe that a note had been placed on the officer's discipline file; three complainants were informed that there had either been a change to force policy as a result of their complaint or the force acknowledged that there had been points of learning. Finally, two complainants stated that there had been an acknowledgement in the concluding letter that they had been right about the incident and one stated that after he was provided with an explanation about the incident which had subsequently led him to believe that his complaint was in fact unjustified. The following quotes illustrate these points:

I can't remember [the final outcome] but [it was] not what I was hoping for. Interviewee 3

No apology, but a note on the officer's record that a complaint had been made against him – which I didn't want. Interviewee 8

I've no idea what happened. They've done nothing. Interviewee 16

I retracted [the complaint] following an accurate explanation of the situation which made me realise that what I originally thought to be the case was wrong. Interviewee 1

[There was] feedback to the officer complained against. The officers were told how upset I was and told to be more courteous - they are much better now. Interviewee 9

[There was] feedback to the officer complained against. I didn't think it was an adequate response. Interviewee 15

[There were] points of learning, they said. My complaint was partially upheld. They apologised for supplying inaccurate information but they did not examine the rest of the documents they had, that they said they would. Interviewee 10

¹² Interviewees were able to provide more than one answer.

Communicating the final outcome and organisational learning

Nineteen complainants stated that they had received a final letter from the police informing them that their complaint had been finalised by way of LR. Three complainants could not recall whether they had received a letter, and the final three stated that they had not received a letter. Of the complainants who stated they had not received a letter, none lived in the same force area. Of the 19 who had received a letter, only nine stated that they thought the letter was clear and informative *and* that it explained the right of appeal. Six complainants thought the letter either lacked clarity or information, and four stated that there had been no mention of a complainant's right of appeal.

It is important for officers to learn from the LR process. It is equally important that Professional Standards Departments (PSDs) monitor complainant feedback, analyse complainant satisfaction (process and outcome), and learn and act upon emerging trends to improve the delivery of local policing strategies. The 2013 Statutory Guidance, issued by the IPCC states that:

...it is important that appropriate authorities demonstrate to complainants and communities their willingness to learn from the complaints made against them and demonstrate that the complaints process does lead to improved police practice.
(IPCC Statutory Guidance 2013, para 5.7)

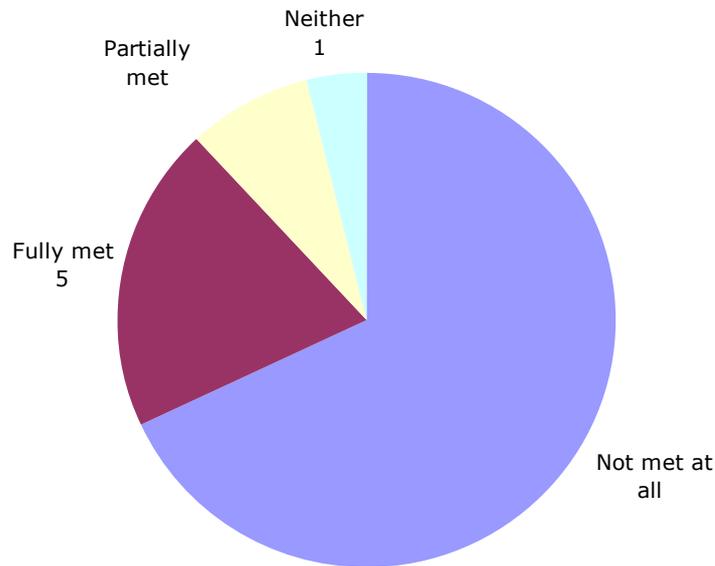
Eight complainants stated that upon completion of the LR process they were advised that the (police) organisation had learnt from their complaint. Seventeen complainants, however, stated that they had not been informed of any learning as a result of their complaint.

Just over half the respondents (13) stated that they were satisfied with the length of time taken to resolve their complaint; the remainder (12) were not.

Were expectations met?

Prior to LR, complaints that were resolved at a local level were informally resolved. Informal resolution was unpopular, both with complainants and officers (May et al, 2004; 2007). Both officers and complainants tended to be satisfied with the IO but dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint, and dissatisfied that their expectations of the process had not been met. Unfortunately, little has changed from the perspective of complainants. Figure 3 illustrates the degree to which complainants felt their expectations of the process had been met.

Figure 3: The degree to which complainant expectations were met (n=25)



Four complainants stated that they were very satisfied with the process. Interestingly, when asked why this was the case, two of the four stated that it was because there was an acknowledgement that they were right, as the following quotes illustrate:

[The] court appearance was quashed. There was an acknowledgement I was right. Interviewee 7

I was told I was in the right. Interviewee 2

One complainant, who was undecided about whether his expectations had been met, explained why he had come to this conclusion:

My expectations were never going to be met. What I wanted was the officers to be punished. I wanted them to lose their job and be prosecuted, but that was never going to happen as they're officers. Interviewee 13

For the 17 who stated that the LR process had failed to meet their expectations, the following quotes illustrate why this was the case:

It was a whitewash....they just wrote it down and moved on, red line. Interviewee 14

I was let down, not listened to; I feel I was abused by the process. Interviewee 15

The officer wasn't disciplined, nothing was found against the officer. It's a useless process. The investigating officer said he would expect the officer to apologise. At the end of the process we got nothing. Interviewee 18

The officer wasn't disciplined or retrained. I have no proof that anything happened. Interviewee 20

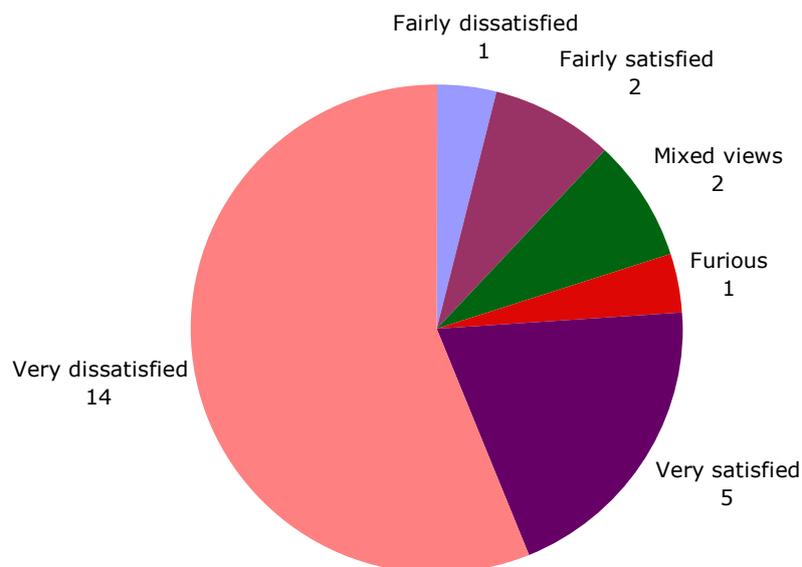
I wanted to be taken seriously and have an apology from the officer. Interviewee 28

Interestingly, of the 17 who felt that their expectations had 'not been met at all', seven had started the process with unrealistic expectations. One of the seven had wanted a full investigation. Others had wanted to see the officer disciplined. Another had wanted financial compensation, and another had wanted LR to lead to criminal charges being made against others not involved in the LR process. This perhaps illustrates the importance of managing complainant expectations from the very start of the process.

The final outcome

Almost two-thirds of respondents stated that they were fairly (1) or very (14) dissatisfied, or furious (1) with the final outcome of their complaint. Conversely, seven complainants were either very (5) or fairly (2) satisfied. The final two complainants had mixed feelings about whether they were satisfied or not, as illustrated by Figure 4.

Figure 4: Complainant outcome satisfaction (n=25)



Towards the end of the interview we asked complainants if they thought the LR process was fair and balanced. Interestingly, although few complainants thought that their expectations and aims had been realised, seven thought that the process was fair and balanced, while two had mixed views about the process. Unfortunately, a greater number (15) thought that the process was unfair and lacked impartiality. The final complainant felt unable to comment. The following quotes illustrate the views of complainants regarding the process:

I got to talk to somebody in charge who was actually going to listen and deal with the issues I had, and who said if I had any further issues there was somebody I could go back to, to say 'You're making the same mistakes'. Interviewee 23

When I complained it was taken seriously. The officer I had complained about told the truth – that was all I wanted. Interviewee 21

It doesn't get to the truth. If there's an element of doubt [police] forces sidestep it. You're never going to beat the system. Interviewee 10

It is a fundamentally flawed system when officers investigate each other. This process has damaged irreparably my view of and respect for the police. Interviewee 18

It seems like it's mates telling mates off. The police don't seem to take it seriously. Interviewee 28

Finally, we asked interviewees if they would complain again if a similar situation arose in the future. Almost two-thirds of the sample (16) said that they would, whereas only six were adamant that they would not. The remaining three were unsure.

Conclusions and recommendations

This report has gathered the views of a sample of interviewees about various aspects of the complaints process. Some recurrent themes have emerged. Most interviewees were positive about the volume of information initially provided, about the person dealing with their complaint, and about the opportunity to meet face-to-face with the IO. They were also likely to be asked what would represent a satisfactory outcome for them, to be told how the complaint would be dealt with, and to be informed that the complaint was suitable for LR. Most complainants were also satisfied with the time it took to resolve their complaint.

Complainants in this sample were critical, however, of several aspects of the process. Only eight said it was explained to them that no disciplinary procedures would be taken against the officer(s) about whom they had made the complaint. Asked to assess the helpfulness of

the IO, by far the largest single rating was “very dissatisfied”. Only three interviewees were at all confident in the LR process, or that their complaints would be addressed. As the process progressed, complainant satisfaction tended to gravitate towards the dissatisfied rather than satisfied. Complainants were either fairly or very dissatisfied with the outcome, few felt that their expectations had been met, and few regarded the process as either fair or balanced.

These findings have repercussions beyond the individual officers involved. They reveal areas for improvement in the way local police forces handle LR cases. They also reveal points to be addressed by the IPCC. Recommendations in relation to various aspects of the process are offered below.

Information provision

When a person makes a complaint about a police force, they may have certain expectations about how this will be handled. Revisions to the legislation mean that complaints which could potentially lead to disciplinary or criminal proceedings should be investigated. Those which do not fall into this category should be locally resolved.

These findings suggest that that this distinction is not sufficiently clear to complainants. Simple provision of leaflets may not be as effective a means of awareness-raising as actively directing them towards key points contained in the literature. Of particular importance is an appreciation of what constitutes a disciplinary measure, as well as the knowledge that no disciplinary procedures would be taken against officers subject to a complaint. Ensuring that complainants fully understand what the process entails, and that they are content with its limitations, is crucial to its credibility.

Recommendation 1: At the earliest opportunity, police forces should ensure that prospective candidates for local resolution accept this option with full knowledge of what it is and is not designed to achieve.

Timely guidance on available options

This sample contains a number of complainants whose expectations were not met, and whose satisfaction with the outcome of the LR process was very low. Often, this stemmed from their belief that relationships with the force, or individuals within it, were irreparably damaged. This, in turn, was partly the result of a belief that LR suited the police, but was not appropriate for the complainant themselves. One consequence is that can complainants can

feel that they have been shepherded into a process which they then find uncomfortable, superficial and of limited use.

In relation to this, the IPCC's Statutory Guidance notes that:

...there may be occasions...where there is no possibility of engaging in a two-way resolution process. Additionally, it is unlikely to satisfy a complainant if he or she feels that local resolution has been imposed against his or her express wishes. In these instances a local investigation may be the most practical and satisfactory means of dealing with the complaint. (Statutory Guidance, para. 5.23)

There is, therefore, recourse to an alternative means of dealing with such complaints. However, there was little evidence from this sample that this process was widely understood, or actively encouraged either by the police force or the IPCC. More vigorous attempts to do so will be likely to strengthen confidence among complainants that their views are being acted upon. They will also increase the perception that the police and the IPCC are contributing to a responsive complaints system which seeks to understand and accommodate the aims of complainants.

Recommendation 2: The IPCC should require police forces to introduce formalised measures during the local resolution process, to ensure that complainants feel their views are taken account of, and that the process is proving constructive.

The role of the investigating officer

In its Statutory Guidance to the police service on the handling of complaints, the IPCC has this to say on user satisfaction:

Complaints stand the best chance of being resolved to the complainant's satisfaction if he or she is taken seriously, and if the person handling the complaint works with the complainant to understand the reason for his or her dissatisfaction and what he or she would consider an appropriate outcome. (Statutory Guidance, para. 1.23)

Findings from this study show widespread, strong dissatisfaction with IOs' helpfulness. Often, they were perceived as treating complainants' concerns too lightly. This outweighed any positives that might be taken from initial consultation with complainants about what a desired outcome would be. Mechanisms to address this include Regulation 6 of the Police (Complaints and Misconduct) Regulations 2012: *"the complainant...must be given the opportunity, as soon as practicable, to make comments about the complaint"*. (Statutory Guidance, para. 5.18)

Recommendation 3: If local resolution is to enjoy the confidence of its users, those handling these cases must be familiar with, and committed to enacting existing guidance on their responsibilities to complainants.

Publicising independence

Since its inception through the Police Reform Act 2002, the IPCC has faced the challenge of convincing members of the public that it is independent of individual police forces. The importance of this is unequivocal. The importance of individual police forces achieving similar status when conducting LR is equally clear. Arguably, however, it is less easy to secure as, in literal terms, the police (in the form of the individual police service) truly are “investigating themselves”. Instances cited by interviewees in this sample, of IOs carrying out LR in relation to those they supervise, do little to dispel these beliefs.

The IPCC and individual forces both have a role to play in allaying concerns about impartiality during LR. Appointees to the IO role should be drawn from geographic and functional areas unconnected to those of the officer subject to the complaint. Scrutiny of this should be conducted by the IPCC. This will help to reassure complainants that the IO is dispassionate and unaffected by personal affiliations.

Recommendation 4: To strengthen perceptions of independence, police forces and the IPCC should ensure that those carrying out the Investigating Officer role are at a distance from the officer subject to the complaint.

Mediation meetings

Improving complainant and officer confidence in and satisfaction with LR is important. Mediation meetings are rarely used for LR. However, they have the potential (if managed by an experienced officer) to improve the process for both complainants and officers. They can increase transparency and awareness, and provide an atmosphere conducive to learning. Complaints suitable for LR have a tendency to be about perception; often the complainant’s assessment is that an officer has been rude, abrasive, lacked empathy, acted unprofessionally or done something wrong. The view of the officer is almost always diametrically opposed to that of the complainant.

Given these circumstances, it is unlikely that an IO will conclude the LR process having garnered the satisfaction of both complainant and officer. The most frequently expressed aim, from this sample of complainants, was the desire to be able to express their views and

anger. It may therefore be that a mediation meeting might produce the most fruitful results. Providing both parties with the opportunity to express their views and explain their actions is likely to result in greater satisfaction for both parties, thus improving the image and transparency of the process.

Recommendation 5: To improve complainant and officer satisfaction with the LR process, forces should seek ways to improve their take-up of mediation meetings. The IPCC should encourage PSDs to train Inspectors, Chief Inspectors and appropriate civilian staff to manage mediation meetings.