

Complaints and Standards Committee

Reporting Period: April 2025 – March 2026

1. Leadership Messages

Message from the Chair, Jonathan South: I am pleased to submit the first annual review for the Complaints and Standards Committee. Our first meeting took place in Kidlington in December 2024 with 5 members, and we have since grown to 12 members with each applicant having formal interviews. The last 12 months have seen us recruiting and onboarding new members and developing a training package that enables members to undertake scrutiny of complaint cases. Other behind the scenes work involved resolving issues around access to complaints, sampling and selection of cases to review, developing feedback mechanisms, and identifying where our work promotes change or good practice.



Message from OPCC Chief Executive, Gillian Ormston: I am pleased to contribute to this first annual review of the Complaints and Standards Committee, whose work has become an increasingly important part of our wider scrutiny and assurance framework. Over the past year, the Committee has established a strong foundation—growing its membership, developing a robust training offer, and creating clear mechanisms for scrutiny that are already driving meaningful learning for both the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and Thames Valley Police.



The commitment shown by committee members has been striking. Their diverse professional backgrounds, combined with their willingness to engage openly with sometimes complex and sensitive cases, has brought real independence and rigour to the oversight process. This is exactly what our communities expect and deserve from those scrutinising how complaints are handled.

The early themes emerging — particularly around communication, clarity, and consistency — are helpful in challenging us to be better. I am encouraged by the constructive dialogue taking place between the committee, the OPCC and the force’s Professional Standards Department, and by the practical improvements already implemented because of members’ feedback.

As we look ahead, the continued development of thematic scrutiny will help us understand not only how individual cases are managed, but also what wider organisational learning is needed. I am also keen to ensure that when recruiting members to the group from the community, we look to increase the overall diversity of the group to reflect our communities across Thames Valley. I want to thank all committee members for their dedication, and I look forward to seeing this work deepened over the coming year.

2. About the Group

The primary purpose of the group is to oversee the handling of complaints by both Thames Valley Police (TVP) and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC). In practice this means reviewing a sample of complaints made about officers or staff and whether we believe the investigations into that conduct have complied with policy, procedure, regulation and legislation.

Through their experience of governance, investigations and complaints systems, committee members often raise questions, suggest changes, or recognise good work carried out by staff handling complaints.

There is a wealth of experience within the committee membership coming from various areas including private enterprise, government bodies and education. Many members have or hold senior positions within their relevant fields and have experience of compliance and quality assurance processes. Thames Valley Police covers a very large geographical area - Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Milton Keynes with the committee members representing those areas. There is a 50/50 split in terms of sex of the members whilst younger members and those from diverse communities are, currently, underrepresented.

TVP’s overall approach to Governance and Scrutiny has been held up as promising practice by His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) including the way that complaints are scrutinised.

3. Meetings & Membership

6	Number of meetings held - mainly in person at Kidlington but members can also join online where required.
9	Average attendance of Independent Members
5	Average OPCC representation at meetings
5	Average TVP attendance - (higher when training or presentations given)

Diversity: Male: 6, Female: 6

White British: 12/12 (current membership)

Identified gaps: The group is underrepresented in terms of younger members and those from diverse community groups.

Recruitment aims: Discussions have been held on further rounds of recruitment addressing identified gaps.

4. What We Focused On

Across the reporting year, the committee scrutinised complaints spanning informal resolutions, failed informal resolutions and formally recorded complaints. Scrutiny covered a broad range of themes including service delivery, empathy and care, communication following 999 calls, policy and procedure, and handling of vulnerable individuals.

Between **April 2025 and March 2026**, the committee reviewed **in excess of 60 complaint cases** across multiple meetings, including deeper scrutiny of both successfully resolved complaints and cases where informal resolution had failed. This enabled members to identify **recurring organisational themes**, rather than viewing complaints in isolation.

Cases are selected at random within set criteria for each meeting. As such, the committee found and recorded **good practice in many areas**, which has been beneficial to understanding what effective complaint handling looks like and how it can be replicated more consistently.

Theme 1: Recruitment

In this first annual reporting period, much work has been undertaken to recruit committee members with relevant experience. The application process includes a formal expression of interest, interview and vetting processes. Most committee members have also visited police stations within the area and been on patrol with officers as well as attending custody.

Theme 2: Training

The training has been redeveloped at an appropriate level and split into the different areas of investigation. Training has been a blend of online asynchronous learning and in-person training. The OPCC alongside TVP’s Professional Standards Department (PSD) and the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) have all been involved in the training process.

Theme 3: Thematic analysis

It was important for the committee to understand where the main areas of complaints were in the organisation and what members of the public were complaining about. By far the highest area of complaint is categorised as “general level of service”. Other areas attracting higher complaints include “policy/procedure issues”, “not a thorough investigation” and “lack of empathy”.

Theme 4: Feedback mechanisms

This year, a key focus of development has been understanding where scrutiny can best support change and reform.

One example of this is the language and terminology used when communicating with complainants and whether that language is jargon-free and written clearly for people with a non-legal background. Another example is reminders about officers complying with Service Level Agreements with partner agencies.

5. Issues Raised → Actions Taken → Impact

We raised (action)	What changed (impact)
Service Level Agreement reviewed with partner agency	Officers were reminded of existing agreements to ensure clearer evidence of partner handover and responsibilities being considered and recorded.
Language used when communicating with the public	Language should be jargon free and accessible to all.
Inconsistent use of flags and vulnerability markers	PSD communicated expectations force-wide via a newsletter, and later scrutiny showed improved consistency in recognising and documenting vulnerability.

Insufficient explanation provided when 999 calls were re-graded	Feedback was shared with Contact Management, resulting in clearer recorded rationales for grading decisions and improved expectation-setting with callers.
Some complaint responses were found to be overly procedural and lacked empathy or clarity	PSD reinforced expectations around plain-English communication to improve explanation of decisions and clearer acknowledgement of complainant concerns.
Lack of visibility of positive practice	The committee formally introduced positive scrutiny , highlighting good complaint handling and proportionate decision-making to reinforce effective practice, not just identification of failings.

6. Key Messages for the Community

- The Complaints and Standards Committee undertake force-wide reviews of complaints made by the public.
- The committee is made up of independent members of the community who have access to all levels of seniority within Thames Valley Police and the OPCC.
- The role of scrutiny is undertaken from an impartial and critical position. Whilst the committee does look at individual complaint handling processes, the remit limits scrutiny to process, procedures and adherence to policy.

7. Reflections on How the Panel is Working

The committee is conscious that independent scrutiny must demonstrate value beyond attendance at meetings or assurance activity. Members, therefore, approach their role from the perspective of public confidence, asking not only whether policy has been followed, but whether the process and outcome would feel reasonable, transparent and humane to the person who raised the complaint.

During the year, scrutiny has led to **cases being revisited**, explanations being strengthened, feedback being given directly to investigating officers, and wider reminders issued across the force. In several instances, the Professional Standards Department revisited practice following committee challenge, evidencing that scrutiny is not a passive or symbolic exercise.

Equally, the committee has identified and reinforced examples of **effective, proportionate and timely complaint handling**. In August 2025, positive practice was specifically recorded as a trial. Alongside

earlier and later meetings, this showed many cases where investigations were thorough, communication was clear, and complainants would reasonably feel listened to. Members repeatedly noted high confidence in PSD processes, balanced decision-making, and strong explanations supported by evidence such as Body Worn Video.

More recently the committee has decided that positive practice will be specifically recorded at each meeting alongside more critical commentary, resulting in a deliberate balance of challenge and recognition. This gives strong support to organisational learning, reinforces good practice, and provides a more credible and rounded form of independent scrutiny.

What worked well:

- The committee is now up to number but owing to the recruitment cycle and vetting times members have different levels of training. This should level out this coming year. The group communicate formally in meetings and via e-mail with TVP and the OPCC.
- **Updated forms and “guiding light” tools** received positive feedback, showing improvement in supporting members with consistent scrutiny.
- **Learning themes emerging** across cases, helping the committee focus on recurring issues.
- **Committee engagement was strong**, with members asking insightful questions and contributing effectively to scrutiny sessions.

What we want to improve:

- Access arrangements to complaint files to be simplified.
- More systematic identification of positive practice.

8. Areas of Future Focus: Increasing scrutiny capacity and depth

With the committee now at full strength and training largely embedded, the planned focus for 2026–27 is to **increase the number of complaints reviewed**, while maintaining sufficient depth to identify repeat learning themes. The committee will continue to balance higher-volume reviews with targeted deep dives, enabling both assurance and meaningful challenge over time. 2026 will also see a progression in the complexity and seriousness of matters scrutinised with the addition of conduct and misconduct cases.

Cycle	Proposed Areas of Focus
June 2026	Policy and Procedures issues
Sept 2026	Lack of Empathy and Care
Dec 2026	Review of top themes of complaints YTD
March 2027	Review of the top theme over the year

9. How to Get Involved

Over the coming years we will review the size of the committee. Inevitably members will leave or move to other areas of participation. Please do look for adverts regarding the application process.