

# Your introduction to the new police complaints system

**new body  
new system  
new powers  
new rights**

Starts 1 April 2004

# Welcome to the IPCC and the new police complaints system

From 1 April 2004 there will be major changes to the way the police complaints system works in England and Wales. The new system is designed to raise standards, cut delays, increase public confidence and transform the way police forces handle complaints from the public.

## How will this be achieved?

- There will be a **new system** to ensure that people's complaints against the police are properly handled, in an open, efficient and fair way.
- This will be overseen by a **new body** which will be independent of government and the police - the **Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC)**.
- The IPCC will have **new powers** to run or supervise investigations into complaints or allegations of misconduct.
- People will have **new rights**, including the right to be kept fully informed of the progress of the investigation into their complaint and a right of appeal to the IPCC if, in specified circumstances, they feel their complaint has been inappropriately handled.

**new body** ➤

## How will the new system work?

- Under the old system, the Police Complaints Authority (PCA), by law, could only supervise police investigations into a complaint against police officers. The PCA could not run the investigation itself.
- Under the new system, the IPCC will have much stronger powers to initiate, carry out and oversee investigations. We will also have a wider responsibility to monitor the way that complaints are handled by local police forces - this is our guardianship or 'watchdog' role.
- We will also be responsible for making sure that the lessons learned from the work we do are fed back to forces so they can improve the way they deal with people's complaints.

## What will actually change for people making complaints?

- Most complaints will continue to be investigated by the local police as they have in the past. However, the local force will now be required to meet strict, new IPCC standards.
- A number of investigations into serious issues will be run by the IPCC's own investigators. These may include incidents such as death in custody or the shooting of a member of the public by a police officer.
- The IPCC investigators will, in certain circumstances, have full police powers and rights of access to premises, documents and other evidence when requested.

**new system** ➤

- For the first time, a person making a complaint will be able to appeal to the IPCC if they feel they have not been given sufficient information by the police or if they are unhappy with the outcome of an investigation by the police.
- People other than victims will be able to make a complaint. Anybody who has been 'adversely affected' by the incident - which could include a witness - can register a complaint.
- Also, for the first time, there will be a legal obligation to keep complainants informed of the progress of an investigation which may include giving complainants a copy of the investigating officer's report.

## What will the changes mean for police officers and police staff?

- Anyone working for the police service, not just police officers, will be covered by the new arrangements. This includes police staff, Special Constables, community support officers and contracted escort and detention officers.
- If it is decided that disciplinary action is necessary, the action taken will depend on the individual's terms and conditions.
- The IPCC will have the power, in certain circumstances, to present a case against a police officer at a disciplinary hearing.

**new powers** ➤

## About Us

- The IPCC consists of 18 independent Commissioners who, by law, cannot have worked for a police force.
- Their role will include: running and overseeing investigations; making recommendations about how to tackle the root causes of complaints; identifying areas where improvements can be made; sharing best practice to improve standards.
- They come from the legal, health and academic professions and the voluntary and community sector.
- The Commissioners and staff will be based in 4 regional offices, bringing us much closer to the communities we serve.
- Teams of investigators, caseworkers and support staff will carry out the day to day work of the Commission.

## What if I want to make a complaint now?

The IPCC cannot take complaints at the moment as the new system does not come into force until April 2004. Until then, you can make a complaint by:

- Writing to the PCA,  
10 Great George Street, London, SW1P 3AE
- Telephoning the PCA on 020 7273 6450
- Visiting any police station

For further information about making a complaint before 1 April 2004, please visit [www.pca.gov.uk](http://www.pca.gov.uk).

**new rights >**

*"We aim to use our new powers to make a real difference to the way the public's complaints against the police are handled."*

Nick Hardwick, Chair, IPCC

Independent Police Complaints Commission  
90 High Holborn  
London  
WC1V 6BH

Tel 08453 002002 (local rate)  
enquiries@ipcc.gsi.gov.uk

For further copies of this leaflet please contact  
the communications department at IPCC on the above number.

[www.ipcc.gov.uk](http://www.ipcc.gov.uk)