



Commissioner says Devon & Cornwall Police complaints handling ‘unacceptable’



In a hard-hitting report, Police and Crime Commissioner Alison Hernandez has said she is ‘deeply disappointed’ at Devon & Cornwall Police’s handling of complaints from the public.

She says that, based on the scrutiny report by her office, it is clear the force has not provided an acceptable service, despite providing significant investment for improvements after an independent review into complaint handling in 2023 highlighted areas of concern.

Commissioner Hernandez says that previous leadership has ‘simply not been good enough’ and is pleased that Chief Constable James Vaughan recognises the scale of the issue and is taking robust action ‘at pace’ to address it.

The publication of the annual Specified Information Order (complaint handling) report is a statutory requirement as part of the Commissioner’s role in scrutinising Devon & Cornwall Police.

The report assesses the effectiveness and efficiency of Devon & Cornwall Police’s

complaint handling from the beginning of April 2023 to the end of March 2024. It considers information provided by the force alongside analysis by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC)'s Accountability and Standards team as well as complaints made to the OPCC about police complaint handling.

Complaints against the police must in the first instance be reported to the force's Professional Standards Department. If a member of the public is unhappy with the outcome, the OPCC can then review that complaint.

In the Commissioner's statement of assurance which forms part of the report, she says there is no evidence of the force putting consistent measures in place to learn from complaints received, nor from complaint reviews which were upheld by her office, and says she remains 'deeply disappointed at the service that has been provided', adding: "I am not assured that complaint handling during this time was either efficient or effective, and as a result I require the Chief Constable to make timely, substantial and enduring improvements, and to demonstrate to me that the force is learning, both from the complaints it receives and from the complaint reviews that my office upholds."

The Commissioner says that she anticipates that next year's report will show an improvement in the final quarter of 2024-25 reflecting the change in leadership following the appointment of Chief Constable Vaughan.

Commissioner Hernandez said: "The scrutiny function of my office is a vital tool in holding the Chief Constable to account for delivering a safe, effective and efficient police force, which I am required to do by law.

"I want the residents of Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly to know that I will never shy away from speaking out when I feel they are not receiving the service they expect and deserve from the police force they pay for.

"It is important that we are honest and transparent in letting the public know where service is falling short and what steps are being taken to address issues that directly affect them. I will be working closely with the Chief Constable to ensure lessons are learned and lasting change is made so we can all have a police force we can trust and be proud of."

The full Specified Information Order (complaint handling) report can be found here [Specified-Information-Order-2023-24-FINAL.pdf](#).

More information about the OPCC's complaint review process can be found at <https://devonandcornwall-pcc.gov.uk/complaints-and-compliments#complaints-1>