

Report of the Chair of the Professional Standards Committee

Summary

This report provides an update for Members on work within the Force Professional Standards Department and on the meeting of the Professional Standards Committee held on 5 November 2009.

Recommendation

That Members note the report.

1. Chair's Comments

(1) Professional Standards Committee

The Professional Standards Committee met on 5 November 2009.

It was noted that complaints against Warwickshire Police increased slightly by 2% in 2008/09 compared to a rise of 8% nationally. However, over the last five years, in line with the national trend, there has been a considerable rise.

Mick Hayward confirmed that nearly a third of complaints fall under the heading "Neglect / incivility" but that complaints classified as "other assaults" have fallen quite substantially.

(2) Taser Training

In November I attended day 2 of the 3 day Force Taser course at Leek Wootton. My purpose in attending was to familiarise myself with the training methods and standards of use for this useful but powerful addition to the front line policing. Although the threat of the weapon will, in most cases deter the offender, it will be used and may give rise to complaints against the user. As Chair of the Professional Standards Committee I wanted to feel confident that the Tasers would be used competently and only when absolutely necessary.

Around 70 officers have been selected to carry a Taser and these officers are among the most experienced we have. There were 11 on the course and most were sergeants or above. Two officers conducted the course and the instruction was measured, professional and efficient. The officers trained were mainly traffic officers who will be called to assist when a situation demands extra control measures

It is a simple weapon to use and the effect on the target is immediate and does not cause the amount of harm often caused by a baton. The two "needles" travel at 180 metres per second and will pierce all but the heaviest clothing materials. The needles trail wires which remain attached to the weapon and a 5 second burst of the 50,000-volt power will disable the offender allowing them to be cuffed and arrested. The effect of the electric shock usually wears off in a very short time and has no lasting effect on the person Tasered. Care has to be taken to avoid hits on the head which will cause more pain and damage.

I was also impressed by the fact that although budgets are tight and care must be taken to keep all costs to the minimum, the training officers have shown initiative and obtained their own target dummy from M&S and equipped it themselves!

An area of concern is that it seems unlikely that the Tasers will be fired that often and the next "refresher" training course is a 6 hour course in 12 months time, in my opinion this does not allow officers to practise and remain proficient.

2. Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC)

(1) Police Complaints Statistics

The IPCC has published Police Complaints: Statistics for England & Wales 2008/09. The document outlines complaints from the public and is available on the IPCC website: http://www.ipcc.gov.uk/complaints_statistics_2008_09-3.pdf

(2) IPCC Consultation

The IPCC is currently consulting on changes to its 'Statutory Guidance' – the rules about how the complaint system should operate. The aim of which will be to create a simpler and less bureaucratic system.

3. Professional Standards Department – Performance

(1) Year to Date Performance Figures 1 April to 30 September 2009

The table below shows the year to date performance levels, with regard to formal complaints made by members of the public for the period, 1 April to the 30 September 2009.

Number/Percentage (where applicable)	2009/10	2008/09
Cases/allegations recorded		
Cases	109 (+1.9%)	107
<i>Showing variation over previous year</i>		
Allegations	214 (+7.5%)	199
Cases/allegations closed		
Cases	134 (-2.2%)	137
<i>Showing variation over previous year</i>		
Allegations	282 (-2.7%)	290
Full/limited Investigations		
<i>Showing variation over previous year</i>	47 (+7%)	44
Taking 120 days or less	38 (81%)	39 (89%)
Taking more than 120 days	9 (19%)	5 (11%)
Allegations locally resolved	87 (31%)	84 (36%)
Allegations substantiated	11 (3.9%)	14 (8%)

The Committee were updated on the work being carried out by the Force with regard to lessons learnt arising from complaints, both internally and nationally through the work of the IPCC. They were also briefed on those cases that are the subject of investigation by the IPCC.

(2) Complaint Cases in Relation to Incidents Recorded and Arrests

Members would be interested to note that during the period July to September 2009, the ratio of complaint cases recorded to calls received was 1:634 (0.16%), with 37,849 incidents

of all types being recorded on the STORM command and control system. The ratio of arrest-linked complaints is 1:391 (0.26%).

(3) Main Categories of Allegations

Of the 96 allegations recorded during the quarter for 1 July to 30 September 2009, 34% (33) were of Other Neglect of Duty, 19% (18) were of Incivility and 13% (12) were of Assault.

MIKE EDWARDS
Chair of Professional Standards Committee