

SPA Complaints & Conduct Committee

2025/26 – Quarter 1

1 April – 30 June 2025

Executive Summary

Complaint Handling Reviews

PIRC received 74 applications for CHRs concerning Police Scotland in Q1 2025/26. This represents a 32% increase on the previous quarter, and a 57% increase on Q1 2024/25.

It is not yet clear whether this significant increase in CHR applications is linked to the substantial uplift in PSD staffing levels and the efforts made by Police Scotland to clear the backlog of unallocated relevant complaints.

Initial case papers continue to be provided timeously by Police Scotland, with 89% of initial papers being provided within the agreed 15 working day timescale.

PIRC concluded 33 CHRs in Q1 and concluded a further 32 CHR applications by Discretionary Decision letters.

The proportion of Heads of Complaint (HoCs) found to have been reasonably handled has declined for the third consecutive quarter, with only 43% of complaints being assessed to meet the required standard.

Recurring themes from Learning Points identified during the CHR process include: lack of engagement and communication with complainers; inappropriate use of Frontline Resolution; and insufficient complaint enquiries. Where appropriate, our Learning Points highlighted examples of good complaint handling practice.

Investigations

In Q1 2025/26, PIRC received 221 referrals concerning Police Scotland – a slight quarterly increase. 68% of these referrals originated from Police Scotland itself. For the same period last year, the proportion was 50.8%.

There were 36 Presentation of Firearms referrals in Q1. This is the highest quantity of this type referred to PIRC in a quarter, indicating an increased requirement for this tactic. Two cases involving the discharge of firearms were referred to PIRC.

Three full investigations that commenced in Q1 were from referrals received from Police Scotland. Two related to serious injury following police contact and one to a firearms incident.

Five recommendations made by PIRC to Police Scotland have been responded to within the agreed timescale. Five are still within the timescale and none are outstanding.

Comparatively few PIRC investigations stem from referrals received from policing bodies. Only 4.8% of new PIRC investigations in Q1 were referred by Police Scotland. C,

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Introduction

This is the first submission of the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner to the SPA Complaints and Conduct Committee for 2025/26.

PIRC aims to increase public confidence in policing through scrutiny of police actions and ensuring any lessons are learned to improve the standard of service provided by the police bodies operating in Scotland.

This report provides details in relation to the interaction between Police Scotland and PIRC to increase public confidence in policing by ensuring learning recommendations which have been identified, issued and are intended to result in positive change in police practice.

Our Role

The role of the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner (PIRC) was established in 2013 at the same time as the single Police Service of Scotland.

The Commissioner, who is appointed by Scottish Ministers, is independent of the police. Her role is to independently investigate incidents involving the police and independently review the way the police handle complaints from the public.

PIRC ensures that the SPA and the Chief Constable maintain a suitable system for handling complaints and issues statutory guidance where appropriate.



We can investigate:

- Incidents involving the police, referred by COPFS. These may include deaths in custody and allegations of criminality made about police officers or members of police staff.
- Serious incidents involving the police, at the request of the Chief Constable or SPA. Reasons for requests for investigations from the Chief Constable may include the serious injury of a person in police custody, the death or serious injury of a person following contact with the police or the use of firearms by police officers.
- Allegations of misconduct by senior police officers of the rank of Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) and above, if requested by the SPA.
- Other matters relating to the SPA or the Police Service where the Commissioner considers it in the public interest.
- At the conclusion of an investigation, the Commissioner can recommend learning and improvements to the way the police operate and deliver services to the public in Scotland.



We can review:

- How the police in Scotland handle complaints made to them by the public. The purpose of the Complaint Handling Review (CHR) process is to determine whether or not the complaint was handled to a reasonable standard by the police.
- At the conclusion of a CHR, the Commissioner can make recommendations, identify learning points, or direct the policing body to reconsider their response.



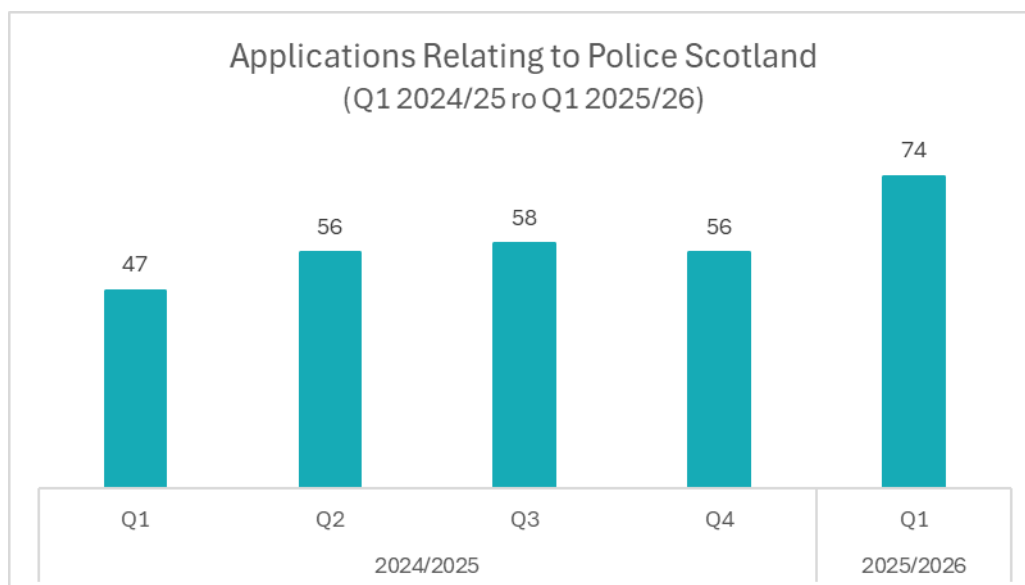
We cannot review:

- Complaints which have not been considered and adjudicated upon by the policing body.
- Complaints of criminality.
- Complaints made by individuals currently serving, or who formerly served, with the police about the terms and conditions of their service.



Complaint Handling Reviews

Applications



1. Source: PIRC Centurion System - Applications Report

The first quarter of 2025/26 saw 74 applications for Complaint Handling Reviews (CHRs) received by PIRC for cases involving Police Scotland. This is an increase of 18 applications (32%) on the previous quarter and an increase of 27 (57%) on the preceding year's Q1 applications.

The 74 applications received in Q1 is the highest number of applications received by PIRC in a single quarter over the last two years. It is not yet possible to assess whether this increase in CHR applications is directly linked to an increase in the number of complaint cases concluded by Police Scotland in Q1, as a result of actions taken under Operation Glade.

PIRC will continue to monitor this and will undertake further assessment when data from Police Scotland on complaint closure rates becomes available.

Key Performance Indicators

- 90% of CHR applications to undergo SRO assessment and decision to be taken within 5 working days of receipt of the relevant police case papers.
 - Q1 2025/26 - **100%**
- 80% of CHRs including discretionary decisions (minus major cases) to be completed within 90 working days, following receipt of the relevant police case papers.
 - Q1 2025/26 – **100%**

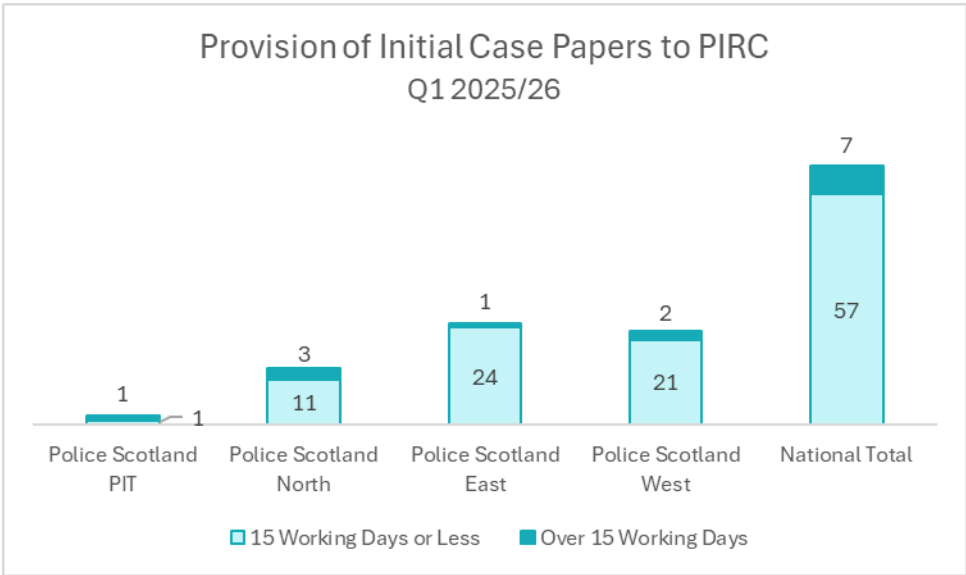


Timescales

Provision of Initial Case Papers

It has been agreed that Police Scotland will aim to provide all complaint case papers to PIRC within 15 working days of request. This approach standardises the process for the provision of case papers across the Reviews and Investigations functions within PIRC.

PSD and PIRC exchange information via the Egress file sharing system to ensure efficient and secure provision of police complaint files.



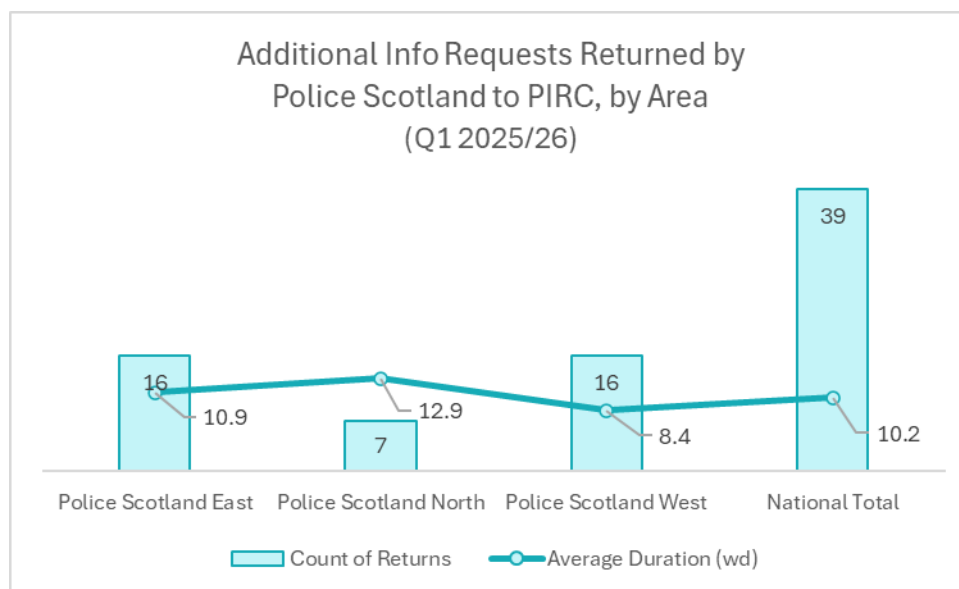
2. Source: PIRC Centurion System – Initial Papers Report

In Q1, there were 64 cases where papers requested by PIRC were received from Police Scotland. Requests were compiled within timescale in 57 of these cases (89%). The average time taken by Police Scotland as a whole to provide background papers was 7.2 working days.

Information Requests During Review

On receipt of background papers, the Reviews team will undertake a detailed assessment of the police complaint file and identify any information or documentation that was relied upon or referred to in the police complaint response but not included in the papers initially provided to PIRC.

In these circumstances, a further information request is made, with Police Scotland aiming to provide the further information requested within 15 working days.

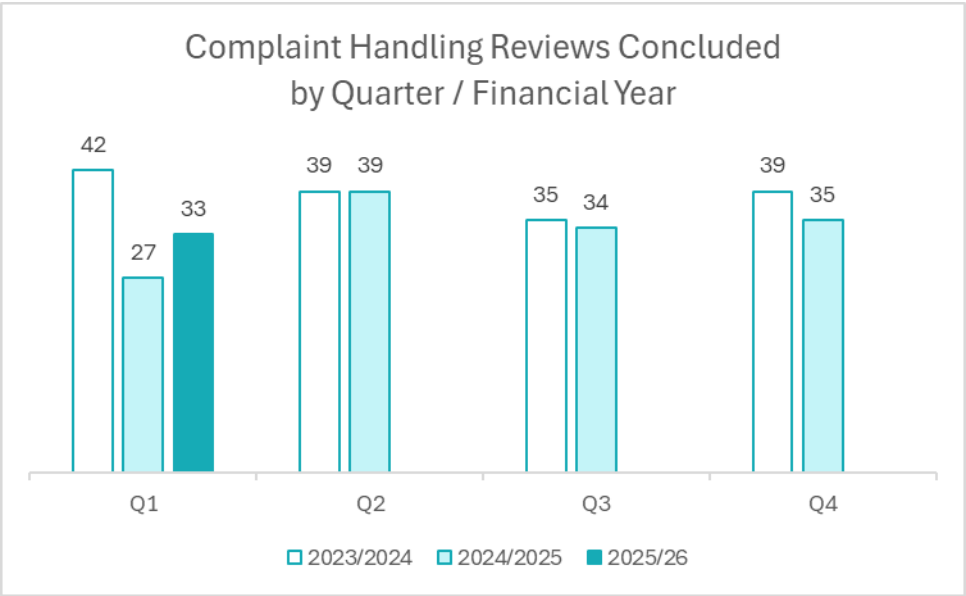


3. Source: PIRC Centurion System – Additional Info Report

Thirty-nine requests for further information were responded to in Q1, with the time taken to provide the information averaging at 10.2 working days. This is nine more than were received in Q4 2024/25 and taking six fewer working days – on average – to provide the additional information requested. Although 7 out of the 39 (18%) were returned later than 15 working days, all areas have averaged returns within agreed timescales.



Complaint Handling Review Reports Cases completed – National



4. Source: PIRC Centurion System – CHR Closures Report

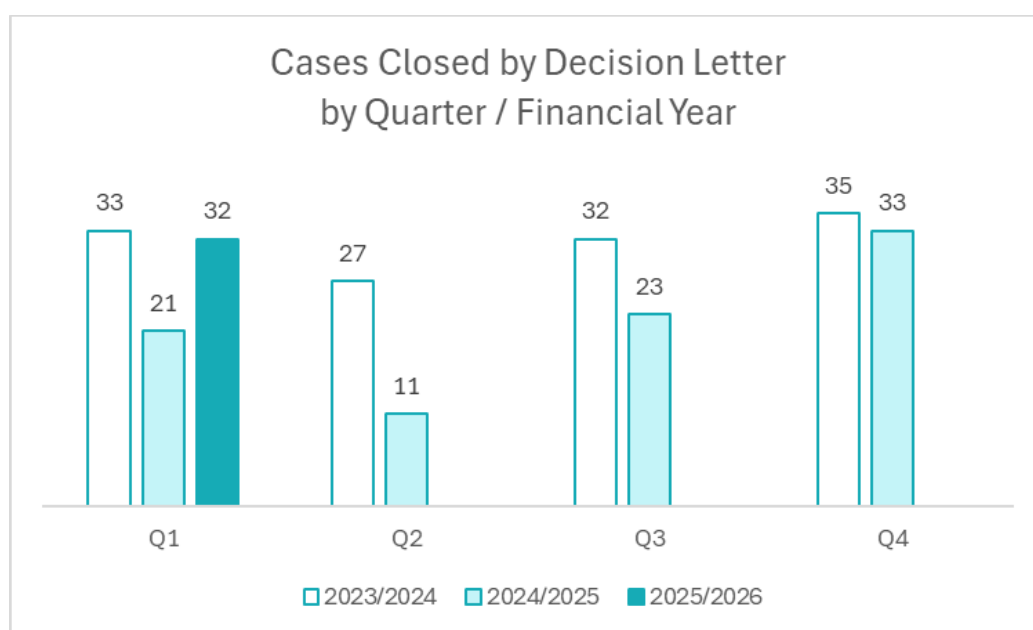
PIRC concluded 33 CHRs in Q1, representing two fewer than in Q4 but six more than the same period in 2024/25.

Cases closed – Decisions

PIRC records and reports the number of applications that were the subject of a discretionary decision. This includes applications where, following an assessment, PIRC is satisfied that Police Scotland has taken reasonable steps to address a complaint. Consequently, PIRC will not proceed with a review on the grounds of proportionality.

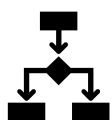
PIRC recognises that complaints that are not reviewed on proportionality grounds represent opportunities for PSD to identify good complaint handling practice. To assist in this regard, PIRC provides PSD with a detailed letter explaining why discretion was exercised, with the intention that good practice is shared with those involved in complaint handling.

It is important to highlight that applications and heads of complaint that did not progress on proportionality grounds would otherwise be complaints that were likely to be **reasonably handled**, had they been taken to review.



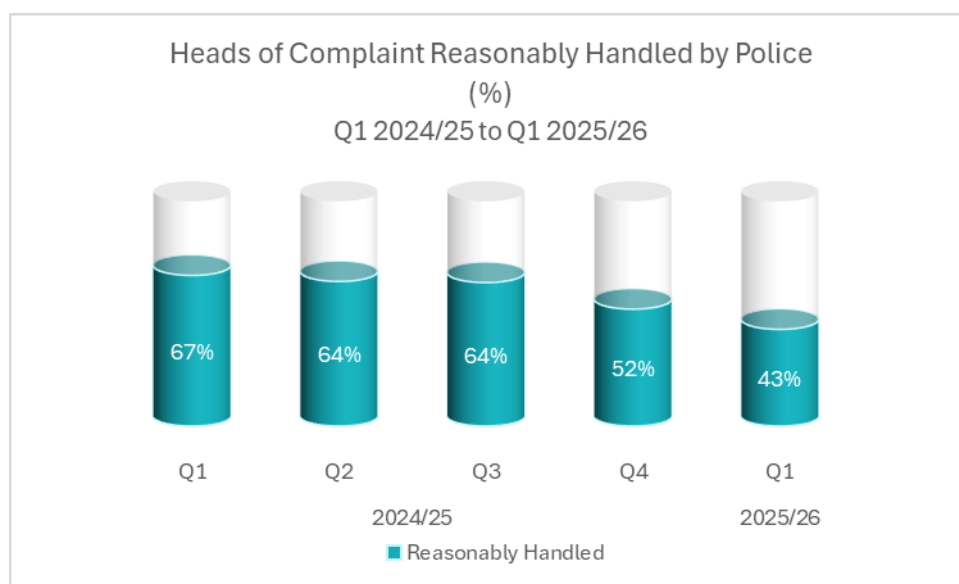
5. Source: PIRC Centurion System – Decision Letter Report

Cases closed as a result of discretionary decisions numbered 32, an increase of 11 (52%), relative to Q1 of 2024/25. This proportional increase is consistent with the 57% increase in applications, as shown in figure 1. Compared to the previous quarter, there has been one case fewer closed by discretionary decision.



Outcome

Reasonable v Not Reasonable



6. Source: PIRC Reviews Quarterly Performance Reports

The proportion of Heads of Complaint (HoCs) found to have been reasonably handled has declined for the third consecutive quarter, with less than half of complaints being assessed to meet the required standard.

The current figures are of concern and are similar to the annual percentages recorded in 2014/15 (41%), which was the lowest proportion of reasonably handled complaints reviewed by the PIRC.

Since then, the quality of complaint handling and general adherence to the Statutory Guidance gradually improved, especially in 2022/23 when PIRC assessed that 74% of complaints reviewed were handled to a reasonable standard.

Regrettably this improvement was not sustained and the quality of complaint handling steadily dropped over the last two years, with 57% and 60% of complaints reaching the required standard in 2023/24 and 2024/25 respectively.

PIRC will monitor the situation and continue to provide support and guidance to PSD to ensure that the standards of complaint handling improve going forward.

CHR Disposal Outcomes

- **Recommendations** – these are made in the CHR reports where we identify deficiencies or shortcomings in the police complaint handling. Our recommendations may, for example, ask the policing body to undertake further enquiries, to re-assess the available information, to issue an apology, to re-visit a specific policy/procedure or issue the complainer with a further response.
- **Learning Points** – PIRC is committed to promoting a culture of learning and improvement. During our reviews, we seek to identify and capture organisational and individual learning opportunities.
- **Reconsideration Directions** – reconsideration directions are used in cases where significant complaint handling failings have been identified during a review. It requires someone previously unconnected with the complaint enquiry to reconsider the complaint. No Reconsideration Directions were issued by PIRC to Police Scotland in Q1 2025/26.
- **Discretionary Decisions** – Not every CHR application is progressed to a Complaint Handling Review. The Commissioner may carry out a CHR where it is deemed fair, reasonable, proportionate and in the public interest to do so.

In cases where applications are not taken forward, the Commissioner will issue a discretionary decision letter, having considered the application and found that it does not merit a CHR.

A total of 32 decision letters were issued by PIRC to Police Scotland in Q1 2025/26 (figure 7 refers).

In most cases, this means that PIRC has deemed Police Scotland to have carried out a proportionate enquiry into these complaints. Accordingly, as the police appeared to have already taken reasonable steps to respond and address the complaint, PIRC has determined there would be no added value to be gained from reviewing the handling of the complaints.

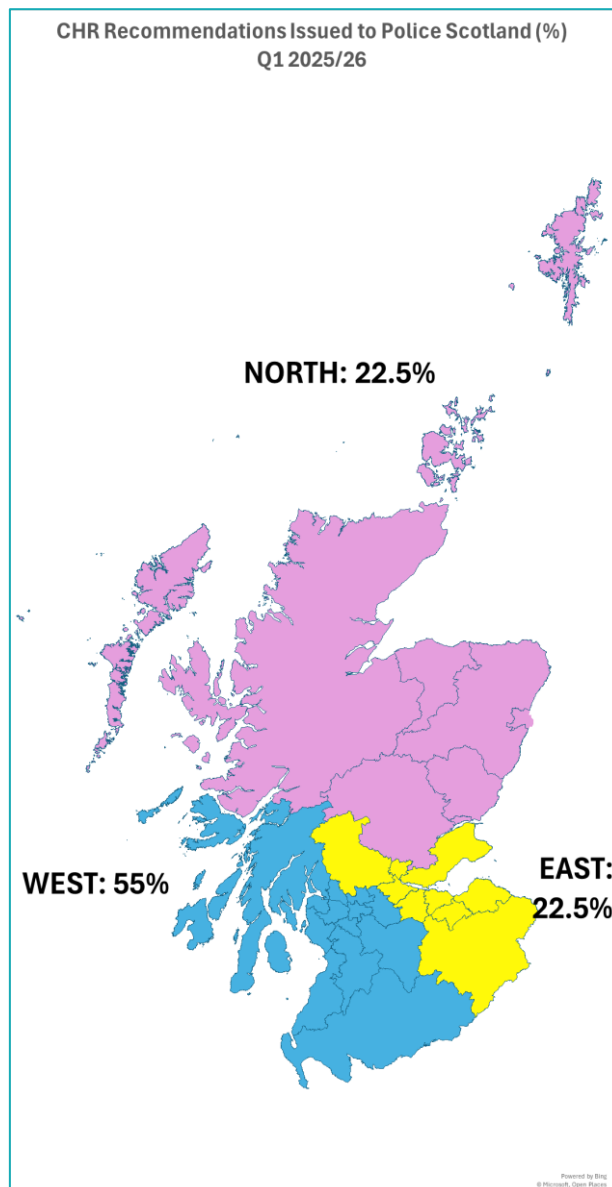
It can be reasonably assessed that – had these applications proceeded to a complaint handling review – a finding of ‘reasonably handled’ would follow.



Recommendations Made

Over the quarter, PIRC made 40 recommendations within 25 CHRs to Police Scotland. These are broken down by Recommendation Type and area below:

Recommendation Type	2025/26 Q1
Conduct further enquiry	26
Reassess and fresh response	10
Record as CAP	2
Other	2
Total	40



7. Data source: PIRC Centurion System
Map Source: Powered by Bing © Microsoft, Open Places



Learning Points Identified

PIRC identifies opportunities for organisational or individual learning and improvement as part of the CHR process. These learning opportunities are highlighted to the police as Learning Points within CHR reports. All our Learning Points are designed to enhance PSD compliance with our Statutory Guidance and Police Scotland's Complaints About Police Standard Operating Procedures.

The Learning Points are also opportunities for PIRC to highlight examples of good complaint handling practices.

During Q1, we identified 40 Learning Points for Police Scotland arising from C HRs and Discretionary Decisions.

- **Police Scotland North:** 10 Learning Points

Themes included the inappropriate use of Frontline Resolution (FLR), the importance of effective communication with complainers, and the importance of identifying learning from complaints even if they are not upheld.

- **Police Scotland East:** 5 Learning Points

Themes included the importance of contact with the complainer, inappropriate use of FLR, and the structure of the complaint response. Good practice was also identified in relation to the importance of accurate and auditable record keeping and the impact this can have on public confidence in policing.

- **Police Scotland West:** 25 Learning Points

Themes included inappropriate use of FLR; the importance of contacting the complainer to establish and agree heads of complaint; and the need to clearly communicate the outcome of the complaint enquiry and determinations reached.

PIRC previously highlighted organisational Learning Points which included:

- amendment to the guidance on notification of next of kin residing in other parts of the UK;
- amendment to guidance to ensure that serving police officers who report domestic abuse or who are suspects in domestic abuse cases are not investigated by their colleagues
- amendment to the Suspension from Duty SOP to ensure that risk assessments are properly recorded in all cases, even where suspension is not deemed necessary
- review of current procedures to document members of the public attending local police stations.

These organisational Learning Points were issued to Police Scotland between May and July 2023, and currently remain outstanding. PIRC continues to liaise with Police Scotland in this regard, however there has been no substantive or notable updates on the implementation of these Learning Points since the last reporting period (Q3 2024/25).



Stakeholder Engagement

During Q1 2025/26, the Reviews Team continued to engage with the Professional Standards Department of Police Scotland.

Practitioners Forum

Following the PSD/PIRC Liaison Event, the PIRC Reviews team in collaboration with PSD established a series of Practitioners Forums to take place during 2024/25. These events are held quarterly, with separate forums organised for each PSD region. PIRC provides detailed feedback to PSD teams on the findings and themes arising from CHR reports originating from the designated PSD region. The events also provide an opportunity for PSD complaint handlers to raise any topical issues or to request additional guidance on complaint-related matters arising in their respective regions. These events were held in April, August, and November 2024. The Practitioner Forums scheduled for February 2025 were postponed until May 2025 to allow training for new PSD complaint investigators to take place.

On 27 & 28 May 2025, the last of the planned Practitioners Forums for 2024/25 took place. Each respective PSD region participated in carefully prepared workshops and inputs which were designed to address specific issues identified by PIRC through the CHR process or raised by PSD. Going forward, it is anticipated that future Practitioners Forums will focus on delivering inputs to PSD teams, rather than regions (ie NCARU, Proportionate Investigation Team, and Non-Criminal team).

PSD Induction Training

In October 2023, PSD started a new comprehensive induction training course for those recently appointed to work within PSD. Over the course of four days, both PIRC Reviews and Investigations teams are invited to deliver training inputs and presentations, covering complaint handling best practice, the CHR process, statutory referrals, and PIRC investigations.

This course now runs every 6 months. As part of the implementation of the NCARU audit recommendations, a much more comprehensive input has been developed by the NCARU staff to cover accurate recording and the initial assessment and categorisation of relevant complaints (Stages 1 & 2 of six-stage process).

PIRC engaged with Police Scotland to assist with delivering tailored induction training to a new cohort of PSD complaint handlers which took place at the end of February 2025.

The PIRC Reviews Team also organised and hosted a follow-up training event for new PSD complaint handlers, including interactive workshops, practical examples, scenarios and presentations, which took place on 30 April 2025.

National Complaint Handling Development Group (NCHDG)

The reformed NCHDG has resumed its work, with meetings held in December 2023, March 2024, June 2024, September 2024 and December 2024. The group was until recently chaired by Superintendent Kate Stephen, and consists of representatives from PSD involved in complaint handling, PIRC, and the SPA.

This group is focused primarily on practical complaint-handling trends/themes. The group is also used as the forum to discuss any recommendations arising from the PIRC/SPA NCARU Audit and PIRC 6-Stage Audit.

The Group met on 1 May 2025, when the Action Log and the standing agenda were reviewed.

PIRC Audit – 6-Stage Process

In line with recommendation 7 of the Lady Elish Angiolini report, PIRC has undertaken an audit of Police Scotland's 6-stage complaints process. The final report was published by the Commissioner on 10 July 2024. The report made 10 recommendations designed to improve and strengthen the existing Police Scotland's complaint handling procedures. PSD appointed a Chief Inspector to oversee and progress implementation of recommendations. In February 2025, the Commissioner accepted the implementation of four recommendations, which are now discharged:

Recommendation 1

Police Scotland should review the accessibility of the complaints system for members of the public whose first language is not English.

Recommendation 4

Police Scotland should enhance the existing six-stage form to prompt NCARU to secure perishable evidence at the earliest opportunity.

Recommendation 5

Police Scotland should consider separating the complainer contact and the enquiry log into two distinct logs that require to be updated by EOs.

Recommendation 10

Police Scotland should strengthen the current guidance on the Quality Assurance (QA) process and seek to ensure that all complaint files contain an auditable trail of QA by a senior officer.

Although it was anticipated that a further four recommendations could be implemented and discharged by the end of Q4 of 2024/25, due to staff changes within PSD, implementation of these recommendations did not progress.

In Q1 of this financial year, no further progress on implementation of recommendations has been achieved. PIRC will continue to engage with PSD to oversee successful implementation of all recommendations made within the PIRC audit report.



Investigations

In terms of Section 33A(c) of the Police, Public Order and Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2006 (as amended) and Regulation 3 of the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner (Investigations Procedure, Serious Incidents and Specified Weapons) Regulations 2013 (the 2013 Regulations), **the Chief Constable must request the Commissioner to investigate any serious incident¹ involving the police which is a circumstance involving, (a) a constable; or (b) a member of the police staff.**

On receipt of a referral from Police Scotland, PIRC undertake an assessment of the referral and decide whether to investigate or not. Assessments may include examining CCTV, Body Worn Video, other video, witness statements, command and control logs, telephone calls, Airwave radio transmissions, briefing papers or other material.

Referrals

Following a Performance Data Review in October 2022, PIRC revised referral incident types that PIRC deals with, to streamline and standardise referral types.

Referrals from Police Scotland are categorised in the following terms:

- Death Following Police Contact
- Serious Injury Following Police Contact
- Serious Injury in Police Custody
- Firearms Discharged
- Firearms Presented
- Taser
- Incapacitant Spray²

¹ A “serious incident involving the police” which the Commissioner may investigate in pursuance of paragraph (c) of section 33A is a circumstance in or in consequence of which a person has died or has sustained serious injury where (i) the person, at or before the time of death or serious injury, had contact (directly or indirectly) with a person serving with the police acting in the execution of that person's duties; and (ii) there is an indication that the contact may have caused (directly or indirectly) or contributed to the death or serious injury; (b) any other circumstance in or in consequence of which (i) a person has otherwise sustained a serious injury at a time when the person was being detained or kept in custody by a person serving with the police; or (ii) a person serving with the police has used a firearm or any other weapon of such description as the Scottish Ministers may by regulations specify.

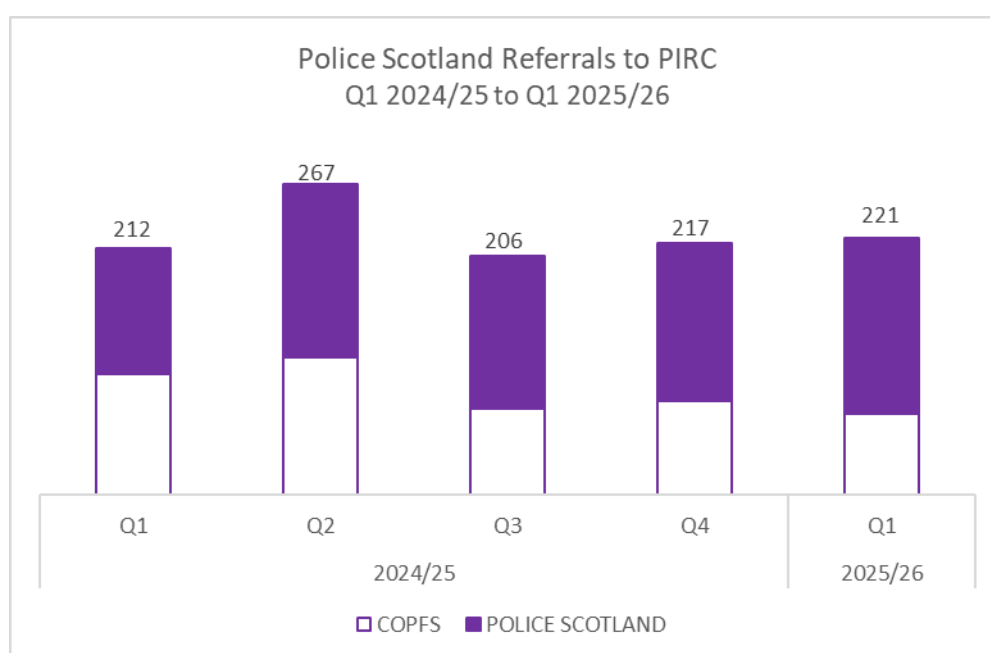
² The overall referral figures quoted by PIRC are not comparable to those reported by PSOS. This is due to the inclusion of referrals involving incapacitant spray (which are not managed by PSD, therefore not cited) as well as the PSOS inclusion of Crown Directed matters, which are excluded in PIRC figures.

In addition, under Section 33A(b) of the 2006 Act, COPFS may instruct PIRC to investigate:

- Death in Custody
- Death Following Police Contact
- Other Criminal Matters

COPFS investigation statistics are not included in this report, as they relate to live ongoing criminal investigations at the direction of COPFS.

(Note: Since 4 October 2021, COPFS has a standing instruction resulting from the Dame Elish Angiolini Independent Review of Complaints Handling, Investigations and Misconduct issues (Recommendation 47), which instructs that all on duty allegations of assault made against police officers and police staff are referred from Police Scotland to PIRC for assessment and where appropriate investigation.

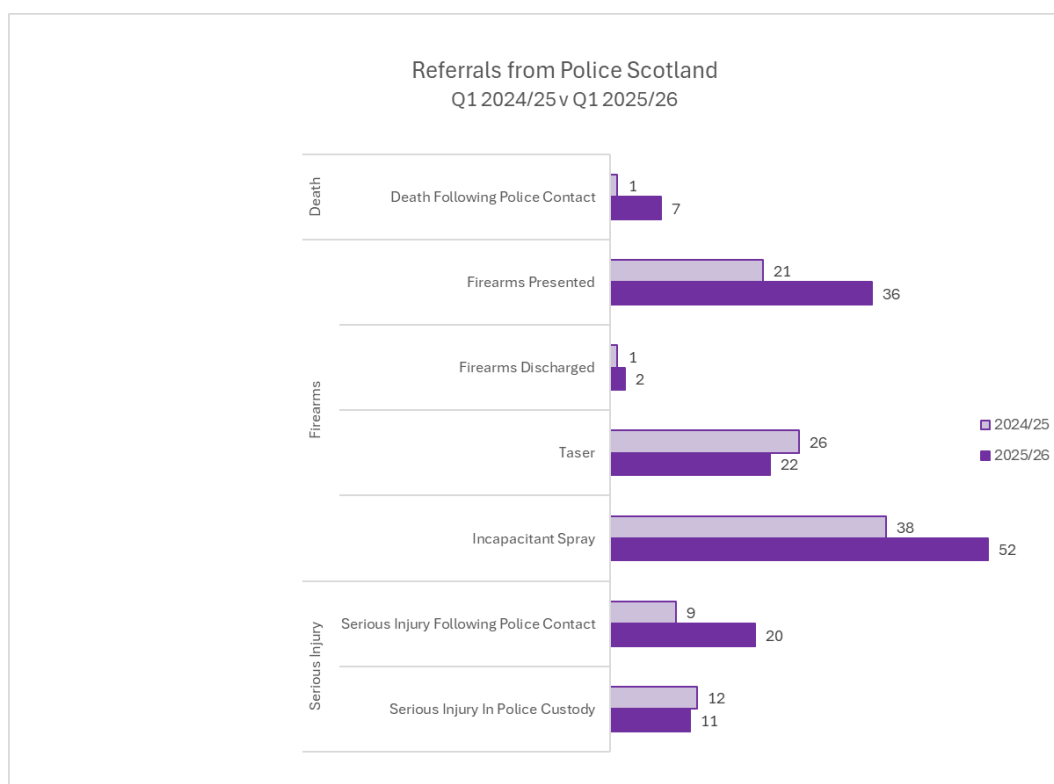


8. Source: PIRC Clue System

The first quarter of 2025/26 saw a small quarterly increase (n=4) in the number of referrals made to PIRC involving Police Scotland. Whilst this is the second consecutive quarterly increase, the majority (n=150; 68%) of these were self-referred by Police Scotland.

The increase compared to the same period in 2024/25 is slightly larger, recording nine more in 2025/26. Whilst around half of referrals originated from COPFS in Q1 last year, this year COPFS referrals only account for around a third.

Referrals by Type



9. Source: PIRC Clue System³

Seven Death Following Police Contact referrals were made to PIRC in Q1 – the same as was referred by Police Scotland in the previous quarter. Six of these Q1 referrals were superseded by Crown referrals which progressed to investigation. The other referral was not found to have warranted further action by PIRC.

There were 36 Presentation of Firearms referrals in Q1. This is the highest quantity of this type referred to PIRC in a quarter, indicating an increased requirement for this tactic. Two cases involving the discharge of firearms were referred to PIRC.

In terms of the change between Q1 2024/25 and this quarter, increases were highest in firearm presentation (n=36; up 71%), the use of incapacitant spray (n=52; up 37%) and serious injuries following police contact (n=20; up 122%).

³ Discrepancies between figures submitted by PIRC and Police Scotland can arise from different categorisation requirements for each organisation's workload management.

For example, if an Authorised Firearms Officer discharges a taser in the course of their duties – one of a suite of options available to AFOs – Police Scotland will refer this as an Armed Policing incident. If the officer involved was a Specially Trained Officer, the referral would be counted as a 'STO – Taser' referral by Police Scotland.

For its part, the PIRC's interest in the same incident would be primarily concerned with the fact that a taser was discharged at all - but it would not make the distinction between the type of officer involved. PIRC would therefore always record this type of incident as a 'Taser' event.

If, however, firearms were also presented by AFOs at the same incident, PIRC would have an obligation to examine each element of the incident (i.e. both taser discharge and firearms) so would record a second referral for 'Firearms Presented'.



Investigation Categories

To ensure adequate resourcing and prioritisation, all PIRC investigations are categorised using criteria detailed in the PIRC Operations Directorate Business Counting Rules.

Prioritisation is given to death and other high-profile investigations. Each investigation is categorised either A+, A, B or C depending on the complexity or seriousness of the investigation.

Major Cases – Category A+

In exceptional circumstances, the Head of Investigations or the Head of Reviews and Policy (or their nominated representative) can request the Director of Operations or, in their absence, the Commissioner, to designate an investigation with major case status. This only applies to a very small number of complex or protracted investigations, including those where the timescales are being directed by another authority such as COPFS. In such cases it will be clear from the outset that the case is going to take a prolonged period to reach a conclusion, and there is no reasonable prospect of KPI timescales for the completion of the case being met.

An extended timescale will be provided for major cases with the Commissioner and Director of Operations given regular situational updates. PIRC will also maintain contact with affected family members or next of kin and ensure that timeous progress updates are provided on the status of the investigation.

Category A

Investigations into deaths in police custody or following police contact; or a major investigation with complex lines of enquiry where the securing of evidence requires significant resource allocation over a protracted period or an investigation which generates high levels of public/political interest placing additional demands on the organisation in relation to completion times.

Category B

An investigation where the lines of enquiry are apparent from the outset but where the securing of evidence can only be achieved through prolonged investigation.

Category C

A routine investigation where the lines of enquiry are apparent from the outset and the gathering of all relevant evidence can be achieved without placing great demands on the investigations team.

Three full investigations that commenced in Q1 were from referrals received from Police Scotland. Two related to serious injury following police contact and one to a firearms incident.

Key Performance Indicators

OFFICIAL

PIRC's performance in managing investigations is measured against the following key performance indicators (KPIs):

- 90% of all cases referred to PIRC will be assessed, and a decision provided of whether an investigation will proceed, within 5 working days following receipt of background case papers police.
 - Q1 2025/26 – **62%**
- 80% of Category A investigations (minus major cases) completed and reports submitted within 90 working days, following receipt of background case papers.
 - Q1 2025/26 – **100%**
- 80% of Category B & C investigations (minus major cases) completed and reports submitted within 120 working days, following receipt of background case papers.
 - Q1 2025/26 – **96%**

PIRC advised in its previous submission to the Complaints and Conduct Committee that the Lord Advocate's references around the law of corroboration would significantly increase the number of criminal investigations required to be undertaken by our Investigations Team.

This has significance for PSD, as our increased workload will require significantly higher volumes of requests for case papers.

Comparatively few PIRC investigations stem from referrals received from policing bodies. Only 4.8% of new PIRC investigations in Q1 were referred by Police Scotland..



Recommendations

PIRC reports to Police Scotland may include findings and recommendations and are intended to assist organisational learning and development or to address any systemic issues discovered. **Police Scotland does not have a legal requirement to implement any recommendations**, however, in the main these are implemented.

To assist PSD implement best practice, a PIRC Senior Investigator has been assigned responsibility for the progression of recommendations, through improved communication channels and scheduled meetings taking place to provide clarification and suggest implementation strategies, if required.

Responses Received

PIRC has received five responses to thematic recommendations submitted to Police Scotland in Q1:

PIRC Recommendation
Police Scotland should consider issuing guidance to all Initial Tactical Firearms Commanders reminding them of the requirement in response to firearms incidents to consult with a Firearms Tactical Advisor as soon as practicable, as outlined within the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice for Armed Policing Command.
Police Response
<p><i>All TFCs, iTFCs, FTAs and OFCs were issued with advice and guidance via email addressing the recommendations highlighted, reminding the iTFCs/TFCs of their requirement in response to firearms incidents to consult with a Firearms Tactical Advisor and for all OFCs, in response to ongoing firearms incidents, to be located where they are able to maintain effective command of their area of responsibility, provide guidance and support and be available to those under their command.</i></p> <p><i>Additionally, all Firearms Commanders are required to maintain an audit of occupational competence through annual refresher training, delivered as local STRA-training and the National Command refresher package. Armed Policing Training deliver this mandatory training which focusses on relevant subjects including updates to 'authorised professional practice' for Armed Policing, the National Police Chiefs' Council learning opportunities and discussion of 'national tactical' options, to ensure that all commanders and advisors are appropriately briefed and prepared.</i></p> <p><i>The basis of the recommendations already form part of that STRA Command refresher but considering the PIRC observations the Deputy Chief Firearms Instructor (DCFI) has advised that the topics will be laboured upon within the body of the course, reinforcing the importance and requirement to comply with the APP guidance. Armed Policing Training will also cover the recommendations again within the context of a firearms incident and are planning to deliver this at the next STRA in the first half of the training year.</i></p>

PIRC Recommendation
Police Scotland should consider issuing guidance to all Operational Firearms Commanders to remind them that in response to ongoing firearms incidents they should be located where they are able to maintain effective command of their area of responsibility, provide guidance and support and be available to those under their command, as outlined within the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice for Armed Policing Command.
Police Response
As above.

PIRC Recommendation
Police Scotland should consider drafting a protocol that establishes procedures for contacting a veterinary surgeon or other appropriate authority to attend such incidents and provide viable options for the safe management of injured or dangerous animals.
Police Response
<p><i>C3 are currently following the process as outlined in the Humane Animals Despatch SOP, a SOP which was withdrawn on 23/07/2018. This document was archived during the SOP review and the reason for the archival was noted as</i></p> <p><i>“The document is legislation or covered by armed policing APP/firearms post incident SOP if escalated beyond requirement to callout a Vet/HAD (Humane Animal Dispatcher)”.</i></p> <p><i>There is nothing to indicate any plans to reinstate this document.</i></p> <p><i>In line with the original guidance, C3 utilise a “fit and competent” register of Humane Dispatchers. However, there have previously been issues raised regarding Police Scotland using the information from the “fit and competent” register.</i></p> <p><i>In summary, although Police Scotland hold the data in systems, no persons with “fit and competent” status have ever consented to being contacted, either within or out with business hours.</i></p> <p><i>As part of ongoing work within C3, discussions have been held with the Senior Leadership Team who recognise the need to review and establish an appropriate escalation process from Humane dispatcher to Vet to Armed Policing (TRO) and finally Armed Policing (ARV).</i></p> <p><i>To progress this recommendation and produce an approved process, this recommendation has been added as a topic to the agenda at the firearms deployment oversight group, as it will require to be progressed collaboratively between armed policing and C3 Division.</i></p>

PIRC Recommendation
Police Scotland should consider reminding all officers of the guidance as to the specific functions and tactics that can be carried out during vehicle pursuits in line with their level of driver training.
Police Response
<i>Road Policing and Driver Training, Scottish Police College, Tulliallan was contacted by PSD and following consultation and discussion at the Pursuit Review Group, all local policing officers nationally were issued with an email circulation reminding them of their responsibilities and the parameters of their driving authorisations when involved in a pursuit.</i>

Recommendations Outstanding

No recommendations issued by PIRC to Police Scotland remained outstanding at the end of Q1 2025/26.

Recommendations Issued

In addition to the recommendations that have been responded to above, the following recommendations were issued by PIRC to Police Scotland in Q1 2025/26.

PIRC Recommendation
Police Scotland should ensure ACR Supervisors consistently review any 'PROMPT' incidents which have breached the resourcing timer and the outcome of this review, including recontacting the reporter, is recorded on STORM.
Police Response
<i>None received – still within agreed response timescale.</i>

PIRC Recommendation
Police Scotland should remind staff of the importance of re-contacting the person reporting an incident to establish the full circumstances and any additional information which may assist in assessing the incident and providing an appropriate police response.
Police Response
<i>None received – still within agreed response timescale.</i>

PIRC Recommendation
Police Scotland should remind officers of the importance of completing all relevant persons checks when dealing with incidents or reports which potentially have a 'domestic' element, including checks of the UNIFI crime recording system.
Police Response
<i>None received – still within agreed response timescale.</i>

PIRC Recommendation
Police Scotland should remind officers that; 'Apprehension Warrants are to be executed as soon as practicable and without undue delay', however where there are genuine concerns regarding the wanted persons health/wellbeing this should, in the first instance, be discussed with staff from Police Scotland's Criminal Justice Services Division (CJSD), to ensure appropriate care can be provided while in police custody.
Police Response
<i>None received – still within agreed response timescale.</i>

PIRC Recommendation
Police Scotland should consider providing detailed guidance to STOs in relation to identified risk factors when deploying TASER devices upon persons within vehicles.
Police Response
<i>None received – still within agreed response timescale.</i>



Stakeholder Engagement

Revision to Law for Corroboration

On 1 January 2025, as a consequence of the Lord Advocate's References around the law of corroboration, PIRC was required to implement a revised investigative approach. PIRC now undertakes significantly more criminal investigations.

It is recognised that the increase in demand around criminal matters also impacts on PSD through the application of the legal change and consequently a significantly higher volume of PIRC requests for case related information. PIRC / PSD practitioner forums have been established to develop best practice and ensure efficient and effective management around information sharing and associated processes.

Body Worn Video (BWV)

Police Scotland has corresponded with PIRC to advise that the feedback provided has been incorporated into the next Review of the BWV SOP due to be published in November 2025.

Training

PIRC staff continue to support Police Scotland training across a variety of training courses at the SPC as well as PSD Induction Training.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

The Commissioner has signed the draft MOU which was shared with PSOS. It remains under consideration by PSOS Legal and the SPA.

END OF REPORT